

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



Senegal's spring of discontent

Inside the protests that rocked the nation

Photo: John Wessels/AFP

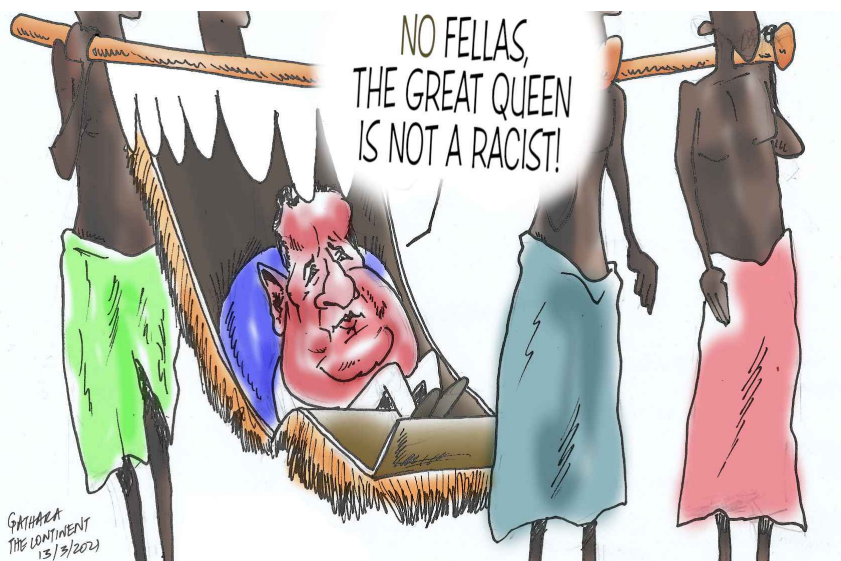
COVER STORY: Understanding Senegal's recent unrest

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Meghan, Harry and the delusion of Empire: One of the biggest news stories in the world this week was *that* interview with Oprah Winfrey, and the apoplectic reaction from some of Britain's ruling elite. On p10, Patrick Gathara explains exactly why the likes of Piers Morgan can't handle a few uncomfortable truths – especially when they are delivered by a black woman.

The Week in Numbers

8,000

The number of students at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, who are facing possible exclusion from the academic year over a lack of financial aid. Students at the university took to the streets to protest this week. Their demonstration turned deadly on Wednesday however, when a 35-year-old man was killed by police.

1 in 4

One in four women and girls around the world have been physically or sexually assaulted by a husband or male partner, according to a World Health Organisation study on the prevalence of violence against women. The report found that domestic violence often started young, with a quarter of 15- to 19-year-olds abused at least once in their lives.

\$170-million

The amount raised by Flutterwave, a Nigerian payments processing company available in 33 African countries, in its Series C funding round this week. The company is now valued at \$1-billion, making it one of the few African startups to reach the milestone valuation.

131,000

The number of people displaced by the civil war in Ethiopia's Tigray region according to the UN's International Organisation for Migration. The war began in November when the government launched a heavy-handed assault on the region.



\$360

The price of Africa's most expensive pizza, served in an Italian restaurant in Tunis. The pizza crust is topped with white and black truffles, smoked duck breast and a whole lot of gold leaf.

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Tanzania

Where in the world is Covid's denier-in-chief, John Magufuli?

The president has not been seen in public for weeks

President John Magufuli, who spent months denying the existence of Covid-19 in Tanzania, is allegedly in hospital after contracting the disease. That is the sensational claim made by opposition leader Tundu Lissu this week.

On Twitter, Lissu said that the president is seriously ill, and has been secretly flown out of the country to receive treatment first in Kenya and then in India.

These claims have not been independently verified, and the state communications department has refused to comment. What we can confirm is that the president has not been seen in public for nearly two weeks.

Adding fuel to the rumours was a story that appeared in Kenya's *Daily Nation* newspaper, which claimed that an African leader was being treated for Covid-19 on a ventilator at Nairobi Hospital. The article

did not name the leader. Although the unnamed leader in question was widely assumed to be a reference to Magufuli, it should be noted that former Somali president Ali Mahdi Muhammad died in Nairobi Hospital on Wednesday; and Kenyan Vice-President Raila Odinga is receiving treatment at the same location.

In the event that Magufuli dies or is incapacitated, Vice-President Samia Hassan Suluhu would assume power. She would be Tanzania's first woman president.

This is not the first time that a lack of transparency about the health of an African leader has caused panic and confusion. In the last years of his rule, reports of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe's death were greatly exaggerated on more than one occasion; while Nigerians will remember the uncertainty that surrounded Muhammadu Buhari's extended medical leave in London.

The most infamous example of all, of course, is when a faction within Malawi's government tried to keep the death in office of Bingu wa Mutharika a secret. They even flew his corpse to South Africa for "medical treatment".

It turns out, however, that it is really rather difficult to hide a president who has departed this world – a lesson we hope Tanzanian authorities don't find themselves learning too late. ■

Switzerland

Burqa ban rides in on EU wave of far-right hate

Voters in Switzerland have narrowly voted in favour of a ban on all face coverings in public in a referendum that sparked accusations of Islamophobia and raised concerns about women's rights and further marginalisation of Muslims in the country.

More than 51% of voters voted yes on the move to ban people from covering their faces in shops, restaurants and on the streets, with 48% voting against the measure in last Sunday's poll. The ban also affects football hooligans and street protesters. Full veils will still be allowed in places of prayer, and masks worn to prevent the spread of the coronavirus are also exempted.

Supporters of the ban are closely aligned with the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) which put forward the proposal, which was opposed by the national government. The vote went ahead because Switzerland has a direct democracy where citizens vote on important issues.

Although the referendum does not explicitly mention "Islam" or associated terms like "niqab" and "burqa", supporters



Photo: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP via Getty

campaigned with incendiary messages, including a poster of a woman in a black niqab with the words "Stop extremism" written on it.

According to research by the University of Lucerne, burqas are extremely rare in Switzerland and only about 30 women wear niqabs. There are an estimated 390,000 Muslims in the country of 8.6-million people, most of of Bosnian, Turkish and Kosovan descent.

Switzerland becomes the latest European nation to outlaw full or partial face coverings in public. Others are France, which instituted a full ban in 2011, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Netherlands. ■

Deadly explosions blast open Equatorial Guinea's dysfunctional governance

Aanu Adeoye

When news began filtering out on Sunday that explosions had rocked the coastal city of Bata in Equatorial Guinea, there were fears it could be a coup attempt, given the number of failed attempts to overthrow the country's government in recent years. But the cause of the explosions was more prosaic – and more deadly than any previous attempt to seize power.

The blasts were a result of poorly stored explosives at a military base in the city, President Teodoro Obiang said in a statement on Sunday night.

Almost 120 people were killed and about 615 were injured, according to the Health Ministry. Dozens of buildings were destroyed, and an eyewitness said it felt like an atomic bomb had gone off.

In his statement, President Obiang accused the military of “negligence” – even though he is the commander-in-chief. This paradox is just one of many that have come to define Equatorial Guinea.

The small Central African nation of 1.4-million is rich in oil and timber, and sandwiched between Cameroon and Gabon on Africa's Atlantic coast. It is split

in two: an island, on which the capital city Malabo is found; and the mainland, where Bata lies – the nation's largest city.

It is perhaps not as prominent on the world or even continental stage as some of its neighbours, and even ardent Pan-Africanists might be forgiven for not knowing that Equatorial Guinea is ruled by the world's longest-serving president.

Obiang, 78, has been in power since 1979, when he deposed his own uncle in a military coup. He won the last presidential election in 2016 with 99% of the vote, and has never received less than 97%.

President Obiang accused the military of negligence – even though he is the commander-in-chief

The nation's vast oil reserves should ideally make for a country where people live in comfort. But that is not the case here, where more than half the population live in extreme poverty and lack access to clean water and healthcare.

Instead, the boom sparked by the discovery of oil by US companies in the 1990s has been enjoyed primarily – and

ostentatiously – by Obiang, his family and their networks of patronage.

His son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue (better known as “Teodorin”), who is also the vice-president, is infamous as much for his excess as for his apparently complete inability to cover his tracks.

In 2014, he reached a settlement with the US government worth \$30-million, following allegations of money laundering that involved Michael Jackson memorabilia bought using money stolen from state coffers. Two years later, Swiss authorities seized a collection of luxury cars worth \$13-million in an unrelated money laundering case. In 2018, Brazil confiscated more than \$16-million in cash and watches from the vice-president and his entourage. And in France, he was handed a three-year suspended jail sentence for corruption in 2017, and then last year fined 30-million euros on similar charges.

Even Equatorial Guinea’s “legitimate” spending is excessive: the government spends lavishly on white elephant projects and events, including two Africa Cup of Nations football tournaments, in 2012 and 2015. And in 2011, a gargantuan Roman Catholic basilica was built in the president’s home town of Mongomo.

Dissent is not tolerated. Human Rights Watch reports that the few private news outlets in the country are owned by the regime’s cronies. Many of the regime’s opponents are in exile. Among analysts familiar with political powder-kegs, Equatorial Guinea has long been seen as a bomb that could explode at any time.

Until now, this was meant figuratively.



2 Fast 2 Spurious: Teodorin Obiang was appointed as his father’s vice-president, despite his involvement in multiple million-dollar corruption scandals. (Photo: Jerome Leroy/AFP)

Tutu Alicante, a Washington DC-based human rights lawyer and the director of EG Justice, told *The Continent* the explosions constituted “gross and criminal negligence” by authorities. “It is incomprehensible to me that responsible military officials would keep explosives where hundreds of civilians live,” he said.

With Covid-fuelled unemployment already a problem, the blasts exacerbate an already precarious situation. They may also fuel resistance to the regime.

“We [Equatoguineans in the diaspora] want to mobilise citizens in non-violent struggle, legal strategies and civil disobedience,” Alicante said.

He called on the AU and UN to take the people’s plight seriously. “We shouldn’t just leave it to Equatoguineans, who do not have access to independent media and resources, to stage the types of movements we’ve seen in Tunisia or in Sudan.” ■

Aanu Adeoye is *The Continent*’s news editor.

King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu

14 July 1948 – 12 March 2021

Eunice Stoltz

King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu of the Zulu nation died on Friday, in a hospital in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa where he was being treated for diabetes-related complications. He was 72.

“It is with the utmost grief that I inform the nation of the passing of His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, King of the Zulu Nation,” said a spokesperson for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which is closely involved with Zulu traditional affairs. “Tragically, while still in hospital, His Majesty’s health took a turn for the worse and he subsequently passed away in the early hours of this morning.”

King Goodwill ascended to the throne aged 20 in 1968, after the death of his father, King Cyprian Bhekuzulu kaSolomon. He reigned under the traditional leadership subsection of South Africa’s constitution as king of the Zulu nation, South Africa’s largest ethnic group. He was an influential traditional ruler, even though his role was largely



ceremonial.

Zulus make up about 18% of South Africa’s population, an estimated 11-million living mostly in KwaZulu-Natal, though isiZulu is spoken across the country.

Rumours of the king’s death circulated in February, days after he was admitted to the hospital because of high glucose levels. But the speculation was quickly dismissed by the royal family. “I wish to allay the concerns of the nation regarding these fables,” a spokesperson said at the time. “His Majesty ... was not, and is still not, frail in any way.” ■

Meghan and Harry lay bare the delusions of Empire

Britain's ruling elite have spent centuries erasing the racism inherent in the country's colonial past. In a single two-hour interview, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have made it impossible for anyone to forget.

Patrick Gathara

On Sunday evening, in that now (in)famous interview with Oprah Winfrey, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex – Prince Harry and Meghan – made a series of damaging and sensational revelations about royals behaving badly. These included allegations that “the firm”, as the couple called the royal family, brushed off Meghan’s mental health issues and suicidal thoughts; and raised concerns about “how dark” their baby would be.

This upset some members of the British establishment, most notably the celebrity TV presenter Piers Morgan, who said that Meghan had invented the allegations. He went off on a two-day on-air rant and penned an article which described the interview as a “nauseating two-hour Oprah whine-athon ... a disgraceful diatribe of cynical race-baiting propaganda designed to damage the queen as her husband lies in hospital – and destroy the monarchy.” Called out by his colleagues on live TV, Morgan

stormed off the live set and promptly resigned.

In a nation where the misdeeds of royals are regularly plastered across tabloid front pages, it may seem strange that these particular allegations put Morgan’s nose so out of joint. And it wasn’t him alone. A poll conducted after the interview aired across the UK found that nearly half the respondents were demanding the Sussexes be stripped of their titles.

Perhaps it was the fact that these allegations were made by a black person that struck such a nerve. “The queen is not a racist and has never been a racist. To even suggest that she might be is disgusting,” declared Morgan in his article. Nigel Farage, the former leader of the Brexit Party, suggested in a television interview this week that “nobody in the world, in history, has done more for people of colour than the British royal family”.

For some in the United Kingdom – a nation that has yet to come to terms with how its fondly-remembered Empire was

actually experienced by those across the world who were its subjects – it was unbearable that a black woman had intruded into the Empire's inner sanctum and dared to sully it with her truth.

Truth, and memory, has always been tightly controlled by the British Empire.

At the close of the colonial period, for example, British officials embarked on a remarkable makeover. Across their crumbling Empire, the Colonial Office executed something called “Operation Legacy”, which involved both the destruction of documents and the forging of new documents in an attempt to rewrite the colonial record. Anything that was likely to paint the queen or her officials in a bad light was hidden from the incoming independent governments; and, where necessary, fake documents were generated to cover up any gaps.

This delicate task was entrusted only to “British subjects of European descent”, and huge caches of documents recording the sorry history of colonial brutality were burnt, dumped at sea or shipped to the UK where they were hidden away.

The purge was thorough. Secret research conducted by the Foreign Office in 1979, and only recently declassified, show that among 37 former colonies only Kenya and Malta even know that their records had been tampered with.

In the UK itself, the erasure of colonial brutality created the modern perception that colonialism was a gentlemanly undertaking; that the subjugation of hundreds of millions of people around the world should be a source of pride, not shame.

For a country whose role in the world continues to diminish, the memory of Empire, dutifully scrubbed of all inconvenient truths, is all the more precious. And the royal family is the most potent symbol of this former greatness – a physical link to past imperial glories. The accusations of racism within its halls therefore threatens the entire edifice of false memory on which modern Britain is built.

This was the great sin of the Sussexes. When the likes of Piers Morgan declare that the queen could not possibly be racist – despite the many racist atrocities committed in her name, the evidence of which is in the documents her government tried so hard to hide – he is participating in a very modern ritual.

It is a ritual in which segments of the British press have enthusiastically taken part. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in *Empire*, the BBC's 2012 history, in which Jeremy Paxman – usually renowned for his hard-hitting questions – desperately seeks to justify colonial oppression. “Surely it can't be all bad?” he asks an incredulous former colonial subject.

The transformation of the British – from the savage, racist, murderous thieves with which the colonies were all-too familiar, into the genteel nation of inventive, funny, slightly awkward but scrupulously fair umbrella-carrying gentlemen – is one of the marvels of modern media.

Small wonder then that many Britons reacted with trauma when Meghan and Harry pulled the curtain back. ■



Zamunda forever? *Coming 2 America* is just 2 late

Wilfred Okiche

Before there was Wakanda there was Zamunda. The fictional African country introduced in the 1988 classic Eddie Murphy comedy *Coming to America* was far from a progressive ideal, though.

Directed by John Landis, *Coming to America* often played into obvious (often disturbing) stereotypes that presented Zamunda as a kingdom where elephants roam casually in the background and men and women are far from equal. A running gag in both *Coming to America* films has a woman barking like a dog at the command of her male suitor.

In a slight departure from Hollywood tropes, the luxury and privilege of Zamunda is contrasted with the socioeconomic disrepair of Queens, the borough of New York City where Murphy's Prince Akeem and his trusted ally Semmi (Arsenio Hall) journey to in search of a wife that can stimulate Hakeem's interest.

Thirty-three years later and Zamunda appears to have regressed even further. Physically, the production design team of the sequel, *Coming 2 America* cannot quite match the grandeur of the Landis original, and Ruth Carter's magnificent but rather imprecise costuming which bites from everywhere she can dream of



**Murphy's lore:
As Akeem, Eddie
Murphy revisits
familiar tropes.**

is forced to carry the bulk of the visual work.

Coming to America often played into obvious (sometimes disturbing) stereotypes. A running gag in both films has a woman barking like a dog at the command of her male suitor

Zamunda custom dictates that only a male heir can lay claim to the throne, thereby cancelling out Akeem's three daughters. Conveniently, Akeem, now a conservative monarch, learns that he sired a son back in America, setting the stage for a return to old

stomping grounds where he and Semmi meet up with characters old and new. Favorite characters from the original are brought back to share space with newcomers Leslie Jones, Wesley Snipes, Morgan Freeman and Kiki Layne. Most of these newbies are wasted in roles that go nowhere.

If there is one thing this sequel does better, though, it is connecting (African) American culture to the dominant pop culture forces on the continent. South African sweetheart Nomzamo Mbatha has a pivotal role while Nigerian popstar Davido lands a musical appearance.

Directed by Craig Brewer (*Dolemite is my Name*), this 33-years-too-late sequel is a nostalgic easter egg hunting exercise that offers little beside a few mild chuckles here and there. ■



Photo: John Wessels/AFP

Senegal's season of protest

Angry nationwide demonstrations. A deadly police response. TV stations taken off the air, schools shut, opposition figures and activists arrested. It has been a tumultuous 10 days in Senegal. And yet in recent years, the country has been famed for its stability. To understand exactly what has changed, The Continent reports this week from a protest in the heart of Dakar; and travels to Casamance to understand how the unrest is affecting the country's most politically-sensitive region.



High alert: Police vehicles on patrol in the wake of Senegal's protests.

(Photo: Ricci Shryock/The Continent)

Ousmane Sonko's support highlights waning separatist sentiment in Casamance

REPORT

James Courtright in Ziguinchor

Instead of preparing for another Monday as a school administrator, 36-year-old Hatousouaré Bodian began her week at the front of a crowd of hundreds of people, drumming on a calabash, facing off with armed soldiers.

In the distance, black smoke billowed through the tall palms that frame the governor's office in Ziguinchor, the capital of the Casamance region of southern Senegal. Bodian, along with a group of women, led the crowd in a call-and-response chant: "Rise up Casamance, rise up for Sonko!"

The recent protests in Senegal, and the government's response, have shaken the image of the country – which is already dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated economic impact – as a beacon of democracy and human rights in the region.

However, in the Casamance, which has long had a complicated relationship with the government in Dakar, the protests show the abandonment of the separatist struggle and the degree to which the region has integrated into the rest of the country.

The Casamance, separated from the rest of Senegal by The Gambia, has a unique regional identity based on a



On edge: A family in Ziguinchor watches opposition leader Ousmane Sonko address the nation after his release from custody. (Ricci Shryock/*The Continent*)

romanticised vision of rural farmers and fishermen connected to their ancestors through sacred forests.

A separatist movement that played on these sentiments and feelings of neglect emerged in the 1980s and was met with a brutal crackdown, including extrajudicial killings and torture. While the rebellion waxes and wanes, fragmented groups of fighters still use forest hideouts to grow cannabis and engage in illegal timber harvesting, as evidenced by the government's recent seizure of bases earlier this year.

Until recently, many Casamancaise complained that Senegal would never accept a national political leader from the region – and this complaint fuelled the separatist sentiment. The most recent campaign for the presidency by a politician from the region was led by

Robert Sagna in 2007, and fell flat when he received a paltry 2.5% of the national vote.

Enter Ousmane Sonko.

He was raised in the Casamance by his parents, who were from the region, but he and his supporters are quick to point out he was born in the centre of the country and his maternal grandmother is from northern Senegal. Like President Macky Sall, Sonko and his supporters use his multiregional background to claim a non-ethnic Senegalese identity.

While Sonko has amassed a national following, his support is strongest at home in the Casamance. In the 2019 presidential election he won around 60% of the votes in the region. Even today, walking through Ziguinchor's cobblestone streets, roadside shops are still covered in campaign posters. "Many people, young people especially, have become interested in politics because of Sonko," says Bodian, the school-administrator-turned-calabash-drummer.

"In the past, many Senegalese in the north did not trust people from the Casamance," says Abdoulaye Dabo, a professor and organiser for Sonko's Pastef party in Ziguinchor. "But now people understand you can be from Casamance and be a president of all Senegalese."

After Sonko was arrested for "disturbing the peace" on his way to court last week – where he was meant to answer to rape charges he describes as politically motivated – frustration over his treatment turned to anger, and not just among Sonko supporters.

In Bignona, a sleepy town 40 minutes' drive north of Ziguinchor, near Sonko's

**Peaceful protest:
Women community
leaders march down
Ziguinchor's streets,
singing songs of protest
that encourage a
non-violent resolution
to the current unrest.**

(Photo: Ricci Shryock/
The Continent)



father's birthplace, protesters barred the road with burning tires and set fire to the Total service station. Security services fired on the crowd, killing three people and injuring about a dozen.

"He did not have a voting card and was not a member of Pastef," says Abdou Coly of his nephew Cheikh Coly, the first person to die in the recent unrest. "He was protesting because of the injustice of the arrest." The family is now demanding an inquiry and justice for Coly's death.

Like Coly, many of those protesting are not necessarily Sonko supporters. Last Friday hundreds of people, led by women draped in Senegalese flags, marched down the main road in Ziguinchor. While most protests were peaceful, small groups targeted the Orange/Sonatel store and the Total petrol station.

An image that spread widely on social media shows a young man on top of the peace monument at the centre of town, stabilising himself by holding the dove on top with one hand and waving a Senegalese flag with the other.

"It's a very beautiful image," says Ndeye Marie Diédhiou Thiam, the Director

of the Platform of Women for Peace in Casamance. "This was a moment when people could show their support for the rebels, but no one has done that. They want change, but no one has expressed their support for separation. Instead they were singing the national anthem."

Following Sonko's release on Monday, life returned to normal in Ziguinchor. By that afternoon people were sweeping detritus of burned tires from the streets and picking up broken glass outside the Orange store.

However, for women like Bodian, the protest was not yet over. Along with around two dozen other women, she spent Tuesday afternoon marching from government building to government building singing protest songs and invoking the sacred forest to secure the release of protesters who had been arrested over the last week.

"We are Casamancaise and Senegalese, I carry this flag with pride," says Bodian, running the green, red and yellow fabric through her fingers. "We've no interest in independence, we just want human rights and democracy, like every Senegalese." ■



Unturned: Sonko's supporters in Dakar react to his release from detention on Monday. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

A day at the 'stone factory'

The Continent observes the demonstrations outside Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University

REPORT

Azil Momar Lo in Dakar

In the middle of a Dakar roundabout, in front of the university named after him, stands a statue of the great Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop.

The statue is new, unveiled in June last year. Its location was carefully considered. As a university official said at the time: "Between students and law enforcement, every time there was a stir, it was linked to the roundabout... We thought to put the

statue of Cheikh Anta there to dissuade everyone from throwing stones."

They were not dissuaded.

Late on Sunday evening, thousands of students clashed with police as they tried to seize control of the roundabout. The students were armed with stones; the police responded with batons and tear gas.

"Every time we protest, taking over the place around the statue is essential. That enables us to block traffic and show our anger," said Babacar Niang, the secretary-



Crackdown: Outside the Justice Palace in Dakar, like elsewhere in the country, protests were met by a heavy police presence. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

general of the Pastef Party's university chapter.

After midnight, at exactly 12.33am, the police lines broke and the students surged into the roundabout.

"All students are protesting because our leader Sonko has been arrested arbitrarily. One can easily notice this is an outrageous plot by [President] Macky Sall," Niang told *The Continent*. "This is why we have been fighting for days for his immediate release."

Disturbing public order

Ousmane Sonko first rose to prominence as Senegal's chief tax inspector. Then he turned whistleblower, exposing how Senegal's elite were exploiting offshore havens to avoid paying tens of millions of dollars in tax.

He lost his job as a result, and pursued

an alternative career in electoral politics instead, as founding president of the Pastef Party.

At just 44 years of age, he was the youngest person on the ballot in the 2019 presidential election, which was won by the incumbent, Macky Sall. Sonko came third, and is considered one of the most serious challengers to the ruling party in the 2024 vote.

In early February, an employee at a beauty salon in Dakar accused Sonko of rape, and prosecutors charged him with the crime. He denies the allegations, and claims they are politically motivated.

Last week, while he was on his way to court for a bail hearing, his supporters clashed with police in the streets of central Dakar.

Sonko was arrested, and charged with a different crime: "Disturbing public order

and participating in an unauthorised demonstration.”

But public order was about to get a lot more disturbed. Sonko's arrest sparked a wave of protests in all of Senegal's 14 regions. These were met by a strong police response – by Monday, at least eight people had been killed in the unrest, according to Amnesty International. Dozens more have been arrested.

Tanks were deployed to discourage further protests in Dakar, and regulatory authorities suspended two television channels after accusing them of focusing too much on the protests. Schools were closed nationwide for two weeks.

Sonko was released on bail on Monday. He walked home from the courthouse, and when he got there he gave a press conference again denouncing the rape charges as a political conspiracy.

That evening, President Sall – already under pressure due to widespread dissatisfaction with the heavy economic impact of Covid-19 restrictions – addressed the nation for the first time since the unrest began. He asked them to “avoid the logic of confrontation”, calling for “calm and serenity”.

Enough is enough

The student protesters at Cheikh Anta Diop University are feeling neither calm nor serene. Drenched in sweat, exhausted, Babacar Ndao stands next to what he calls the ‘stone factory’ – a pile of rocks, taken from nearby construction sites, ready to be thrown at the police. He is filling a wheelbarrow to take to his comrades at the other end of the campus.



Tense: A woman in Dakar walks past a protest against Ousmane Sonko's arrest. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

“This is just another coup by Macky Sall, who tries to eliminate Sonko for 2024,” says Ndao. This is President Sall's second term in office, which means he is technically not eligible to run again. But his critics fear that he will try; and to do so he needs to keep serious challengers like Sonko out of the political life.

Still bracing for the clash with policemen, student Cesar Manga is dragging a huge block of stone across a secondary road outside of the university.

Salimata, a young female student, has just dropped a few drops of vinegar on his face mask – this is, she explains, to help ease the pain of tear gas.

“Enough is enough!” shouts Manga. “We are in the streets to firmly condemn the way he [President Sall] is doing things. For years they have been doing whatever they want in this country without anybody opposing that. Now it's over. We want justice.” ■

Senegal's protests are about corruption and unemployment – and French neo-imperialism

ANALYSIS

Mbulle-Nziege Leonard

Senegal, often seen as one of Africa's most democratic and politically stable countries, has experienced its worst spate of violent protests in a decade.

According to Amnesty International, at least eight people died in the clashes. The main catalyst was the arrest on 3 March of opposition leader and MP Ousmane Sonko. But the protests that followed have been about much more than his treatment by the government.

The news of Sonko's arrest triggered protests in Dakar, St Louis and the localities of Bignoa and Ziguinchor in Sonko's home region of Casamance. Since then, the protests have grown to take in a much broader set of issues, fuelled by widespread frustration with certain aspects of Sall's government.

Corruption has been a major theme, bringing demonstrators to the streets. Sonko is especially popular amongst Senegalese youth for his anti-corruption stance and calls for greater transparency in the management of natural resources. Most notably, in 2016 Sonko accused



Aliou Sall, the younger brother of President Macky Sall, of violating the petroleum code to facilitate the award of oil and gas concessions to foreign firms. These allegations were echoed in a BBC documentary in June 2019.

Another grievance that emerged in the wake of the protests is the issue of youth unemployment. President Sall has acknowledged that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on livelihoods with

poverty rising from 38% in 2019 to 40% in 2020, while 85% of households suffered a loss of income as a result of the pandemic.

But even before Covid-19 most Senegalese did not feel like they were receiving the benefit of the 5% economic growth the country has averaged since 2015. A direct consequence of the unemployment scourge is an exponential increase in clandestine migration to Europe via the Spanish Canary Islands. In October, it is estimated that 140 people died after a vessel sank off the coast of Senegal. President Sall was criticised for an apparent lack of concern regarding clandestine migration after this incident.

French business interests have also come under attack, in part because Sonko has been vocal about perceived “economic imperialism” within the foreign private sector, questioning their business practices.

Corruption has been a major theme bringing demonstrators to the streets

In particular, foreign companies have been accused of not paying taxes and pushing out local smallscale operators. An estimated 250 French firms operate in Senegal, but retail chain Auchan, telecoms giant Orange and petroleum firm Total have been singled out during the protests.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, 21 Auchan shops were vandalised, along with 12 Total service stations and several Orange kiosks.

The African Union and the Economic



Community of West African States have condemned the violence which has accompanied the demonstrations, while Amnesty International called for an independent investigation. For the government's part, Interior Minister Antoine Felix Diome has stated law and order will prevail, while Sall has called for calm and for dialogue.

But unless the deeper economic and political grievances of citizens are addressed, Sonko's demand for further acts of resistance against the regime is likely to be the message that resonates most powerfully among the youth and the poor. ■

Mbulle-Nziege Leonard is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Town and a research analyst at Africa Risk Consulting. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"Ours is the hand that rocks the cradle of humankind"

SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how much you really know about our continent

1. Who is the president of Senegal?
2. What does SADC stand for?
3. True or false: Gabon is part of the Economic Community of West African States.
4. Unguja is also known as what East African island?
5. What is Somalia's most populous city?
6. The president of which country received the Mo Ibrahim prize for leadership this week?
7. What is the continent's largest canyon? Bonus point: In which country is it located?
8. Who is widely regarded as the richest person in Africa?
9. Moundou and N'Djamena are cities in which country?
10. Paul Biya is the president of which country?
11. Which desert is the largest hot desert in the world?
12. Apes are native to Southeast Asia and which other continent?

It's all just fun and games, until it isn't

Samira Sawlani

Living through a pandemic has taught many of us to appreciate the value of distraction. For some, baking or reading has done the trick. For others, TV has reigned supreme. But let us not forget the almost limitless distractibility of a good game of... well, you name it.

A crossword, perhaps? Or Sudoku for the mathematically adept. But for the keen-eyed among us, might we suggest a foray into the new Tanzanian edition of the *Where's Wally* franchise, *Where is President John Magufuli*? Is he in Kenya? Perhaps he's in India! Has anyone looked down the back of the couch? Nope, not there, but hey here's some loose change!

President Magufuli's whereabouts are still unknown

This of course is the latest update to a game the people of Cameroon and Gabon are already quite good at, after playing it with their own leaders. And Burundians, too: Pierre Nkurunziza outdid himself during his 2015 disappearance, no?

In Tanzania, the opposition are demanding answers regarding Magufuli's whereabouts. But the government were awfully quiet at first, prompting us to put

on our Oprah hats and wonder: "Were you silent, or were you silenced?"

Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa eventually spoke out to deny the rumours, but there's been no sign of the main man.

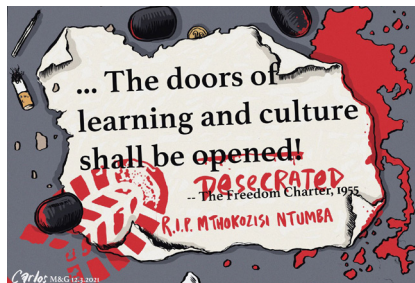
Pressing all the wrong buttons

Puzzles not your thing? All right, let's boot up the console. How about a fighting game? Popular choice among the security forces on the continent, even though they just seem to care more about body count, and less about who the bad guys even are. Is it them? Are they the baddies? Who cares, this is fighting, not philosophy.

Some philosophising instead of fighting would be welcome in Senegal, frankly. This week saw protests continue, sparked by the arrest of opposition figure Ousmane Sonko but fuelled by frustration over corruption and the faltering economy.

At least five people have been killed and while President Macky Sall has declared a day of mourning, opposition movements have called for more protests.

In another example of excessive force being used by police, this week saw a man in South Africa killed when police shot rubber bullets at university students who were protesting over a decision to block



Unequal education: Thousands of students face exclusion from university after South Africa abruptly changed its rules on financial aid

those that had outstanding debts from re-registering. Security forces need to learn that protests are not a game. Lost lives do not miraculously regenerate. Guns are not toys. Rubber bullets are still bullets.

Game over

So maybe we skip the fighting games? Maybe FIFA, then. Or a sports game where you get to win an actual medal or trophy, instead of having to take satisfaction from completing a puzzle or finding a president hiding under a cushion.

Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou scored a big win this week, taking home no less a trophy than the Mo Ibrahim prize for African Leadership. He was awarded the prize for demonstrating "exceptional leadership" by stepping down as president after his two terms were up, demonstrating respect for unusual concepts such as "the law" and "the constitution".

We're not even rolling our eyes at this: it's clearly a rare enough occurrence that the prize hasn't been awarded since 2017, anyway.

The prize itself is \$5-million, which you have to admit is probably more than you've found looking down the back of the couch. What do you suppose he'll do with it? Perhaps he'll be willing to lend some to journalist Samira Sabou, who was this week given a two-month suspended sentence and a \$3,570 fine after she was sued for defamation by Sani Mahamadou Issoufou, the son of a certain prize-winning soon-to-be-former president.

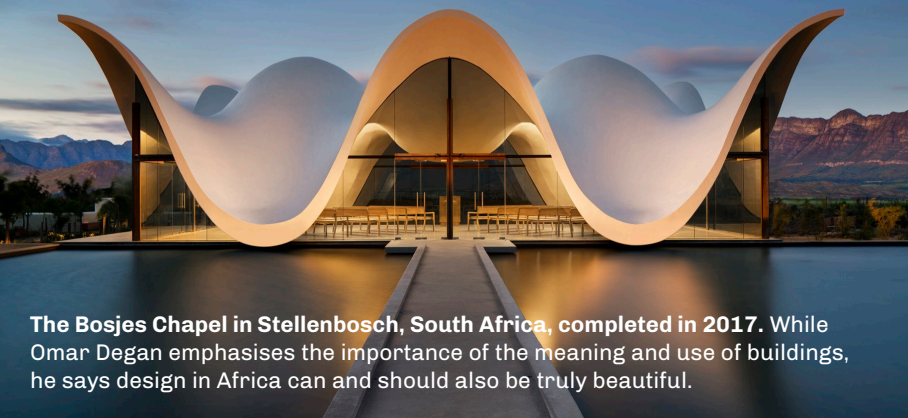
In June last year Sabou shared a post on Facebook regarding a military audit scandal, under which someone mentioned the name of Issoufou Junior. Sabou was then promptly detained for five weeks. Because of someone else's comment!

We encourage Issoufou to step in, not just because it's the right thing to do, but also because he really shouldn't fall into the post-prize trap of letting himself go. Just look at Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia: one moment you're a Nobel Peace Prize winner, the next you're up to your neck in a civil war that, let's be honest, people are kind of saying you started.

Word games no match for real life

On a final note, this week was Women's Day, and while we would like to celebrate all the incredible women across the continent, this is also a reminder that words are just that, words.

Equal rights, equal pay, access to opportunities, safety, reproductive rights, autonomy over their own bodies, freedom and creating systems within which women can flourish are ultimately the way in which to honour them – not just this week, but 365 days a year. ■



The Bosjes Chapel in Stellenbosch, South Africa, completed in 2017. While Omar Degan emphasises the importance of the meaning and use of buildings, he says design in Africa can and should also be truly beautiful.

There is no such thing as 'African architecture'

**Architect Omar Degan is breaking down stereotypes
one building at a time**

Elna Schütz

"African design doesn't exist," says Omar Degan Sharif, the Somali architect and principal of Mogadishu-based DO Architecture. "In Africa, there are 54 nations, 55 nations, and each one of them, they have different cultural identity, language, ethnicity, even within the regions of design. So, describing that as an 'African' design, it's the biggest mistake that someone can do."

Degan wants people to understand

the diversity of African countries better and to break down stereotypes of the continent by looking at brick and mortar. "Around the world, no matter where you are, architecture dictates a bit, and is like a monolith of the history of the past and the present."

Recently, he has been doing this through an enormously popular Twitter thread highlighting buildings from a different nation every day.

He started with the sand-coloured arches of an 18th-century Moroccan



The Mosque of the Seven Sleepers, Chenini, Tataouine, Tunisia, completed in the 12th century. The ancient architecture of Tataouine is a stunning example of vernacular Tunisian design, and was used as the backdrop in the original *Star Wars* movies.

house and has been making his way around the continent.

He purposefully chose a wide range of spaces, not only well-known landmarks. Degan wanted to break through a stereotypical focus on colonial design or celebrated architects and show the continent's diversity in its depths.

"The idea was to pick buildings that had a meaning and were telling a story,"

he told *The Continent*.

Degan explains that while a lot of prominent buildings on the continent were not designed by Africans, he is fascinated by how locals use a space, whether it is a community centre or hotel.

"The building itself has zero meaning but the community around it, they create the meaning to the building...Africans should start to take ownership of African

The Kaylasson Temple in Port Louis, Mauritius, completed in the 19th century. 'For me, it was a huge surprise,' says Degan, on discovering the prevalence of these ornate Tamil temples in Mauritius.



spaces.” He describes architecture as a discipline, longing for more local designers, academic training and even architectural magazine presence.

His thread highlights not just the beauty of these local sensibilities but their unique strength. “I think Africans, we have a very strong connection with the land, we have a very strong connection with the climate, with the issues that are related to certain things, despite the fact that we abuse it a lot.”

Degan points out for instance, how

vernacular design like grass and mud structures take sustainability into account. “It’s always a design made to solve problems not create new ones.”

This is what he hopes architects from African countries will amplify in coming decades, learning from the mistakes of their Western counterparts in this regard.

“Africa is the future. It’s where the things will happen in the next 100 years. So, the biggest excitement is to figure out how cities will react to the incredible urban development that will happen.” ■



The Framed Escape Library in Abetini, Ashanti, Ghana, completed in 2017. This library, built for a total cost of about \$10,000, represents how architecture should serve and support its community, says Degan.



The Salsabiil Restaurant in Mogadishu, Somalia, completed in 2019. This restaurant in the centre of Mogadishu is Degan's own design. ‘Within a very distressed area of the city, it became a place of peace.’

For the first time in four years, the Ibrahim Prize finds a winner

Unlike so many of his predecessors and continental counterparts, Niger's president resisted the temptation to remain in office.



**Abdoul-kader Amadou Naïno
in Niamey**

On Monday, Nigerien president Mahamadou Issoufou was awarded the Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Governance. This is the first time in four years that the Mo Ibrahim Foundation has found a president worthy of its prize (it was last awarded in 2017 to Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf). Since its inception in 2007, the prize – which

is given to former African presidents who were democratically elected, obeyed constitutional term limits and displayed exceptional leadership while in office – has only been awarded six times.

This year's award is momentous. President Issoufou is the first laureate from a francophone African country. He is also the first from the Sahel region. It is remarkable that this strip of dry Sahelian land, so arid and poor and where the erratic rhythm of political instability has

punctuated the lives of its citizens for half a century, can produce a leader who is recognised on the world stage.

“In the face of the most severe political and economic issues, including violent extremism and increasing desertification, President Mahamadou Issoufou has led his people on a path of progress,” explained Festus Mogae, the former president of Botswana and himself an Ibrahim Prize laureate, who now chairs the prize committee. “Today, the number of Nigeriens living below the poverty line has fallen to 40%, from 48% a decade ago. While challenges remain, Issoufou has kept his promises to the Nigerien people and paved the way for a better future.”

Above all, the prize recognises the fact that President Issoufou will, on April 2, officially hand over power to his elected successor Mohamed Bazoum after completing his two constitutionally-limited terms in office.

Niger, with its interlocking crises of poverty, insecurity and climate change, is a complex country to govern. It is not a rich country. In fact, it was the very last country on the Human Development Index from 2011 to 2019.

Nor is geography in its favour: its territory is vast and dry – two thirds of its area of 1.26-million square kilometres is desert. It is landlocked and bordered by seven other countries. And its overwhelmingly young population of 23-million is predicted to double by the middle of this century.

In this context, the country's wealth is not measured in dollars but rather in the essential values which bind it together:

specifically, the pluralist democracy which has been practised here, in theory at least, for three decades. The most important aspect of which is the commitment, enshrined in the constitution, that presidents will serve no more than two five-year terms in office.

Previous presidents have failed to live up to this commitment. Most recently, President Mamadou Tandja wanted to change the constitution to give himself a third term, before being overthrown in a military coup in 2010. The desire of presidents to remain in office is not, of course, just a Nigerien problem; but is a pronounced trend across the region and the continent as a whole.

President Issoufou, therefore, is being recognised not so much for what he did while in office, but rather for what he did *not* do. There should be nothing extraordinary about simply respecting the constitution. And yet, how can we fail to recognise that, in this particular country where leaders seem to be seduced so often by the allure of power, there is a certain elegance in rowing against the tide.

By refusing to violate Niger's most fundamental law – and notwithstanding the various concerns over his leadership raised during the recent presidential election – President Issoufou has undoubtedly provided a lesson in mature leadership which can only be a source of inspiration for other leaders on the African continent. ■

Abdoul-kader Amadou Naïno is a lecturer in geopolitics and international relations, and a consultant in strategic studies and crisis communication

Wealthy nations say no and no again to vaccines for all. Unacceptable.

The usual suspects – including Brazil, Canada, the EU, Japan, the UK and US – have once again stalled the bid to waive intellectual property on Covid-19 medications

Kate Stegeman

Without measures to boost the supply of Covid-19 diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, people living in developing countries, including in Africa, will continue to face inequitable access.

One such measure is the landmark proposal at the World Trade Organisation to temporarily waive certain intellectual property (IP) on Covid-19 health technologies.

The temporary waiver would remove legal barriers and set aside monopolies on Covid-19 medical tools during the pandemic. It was led in October 2020 by India and South Africa – no strangers to fighting for access to lifesaving medications, such as those for HIV, and eSwatini, Kenya and Mozambique joined as co-sponsors early on. The African Union expressed their support, and the Africa and Least Developed Countries groups at the WTO subsequently joined the official sponsorship.

This sent a strong political signal to the handful of countries blocking the

waiver that the continent is taking bold steps against wealthy nation's indefensible vaccine nationalism. Waiver opponents include Brazil, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and others.

A gloomy forecast by the Economist Intelligence Unit estimates that more than 85 low- and middle-income countries, including many in Africa, will likely not achieve mass Covid-19 immunisation before 2023. Meanwhile, countries like EU member states, the UK and the US expect to achieve widespread coverage in 2021.

An important step towards plugging concerning supply gaps on the continent is the recent launch of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform. The single-source platform aims to facilitate more equitable access and fairer allocation by procuring vaccine doses for all AU members.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) continues to stress the importance of removing monopolies on patents, data and know-how of Covid-19 health technologies. This can make it easier for governments and local companies

to combat Covid-19 on a continent with an already stretched public health infrastructure.

On Wednesday, negotiations stalled once again at the WTO, due to delay tactics by the usual suspects. It is unacceptable that a year into the pandemic and five months since the temporary waiver was proposed, they have yet to transition to the text-based negotiations that would enable agreement on the proposal's phrasing and scope. The next formal meeting on this is only scheduled for June.

Countries opposing the waiver argue that even if intellectual property was not enforced, low- and middle-income countries don't have the manufacturing capacity to produce generic medicines and other technology.

But South Africa's Aspen Pharmacare and Biovac (a public-private partnership) offer two examples to the contrary. Both have intimated that they have existing capacity for some stages of production, notably finish and fill, and have alluded to having potential capacity for formulation. This comes with some caveats that account for the complexity of vaccine production.

Biovac claims it can produce up to 30-million doses of a Covid-19 vaccine. A recent Associated Press story reported that Biovac has been negotiating with an unnamed manufacturer, but no contract has materialised. Aspen says it can produce more than 300-million doses of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine annually.

Vaccines are not the only tools covered by the waiver proposal. Setting aside the stranglehold of monopolies is also crucial to ensuring better access to

much needed diagnostics for Covid-19 testing. For example, UK-based diagnostic manufacturer Mologic has a longstanding partnership with the Dakar-based Pasteur Institute to scale up production in Senegal. Within this partnership, Mologic's ambition includes a Covid-19 rapid-test technology production transfer to the Senegalese manufacturing facility DiaTropix.

According to an article in *DevEx*, the developers plan to sell this Covid-19 rapid test at cost – below \$1.50 per test. Manufacturing diagnostics in Senegal may speed up supply to the continent and trigger similar initiatives for accelerating production elsewhere in Africa.

Another argument from the anti-waiver camp points to initiatives like the WHO's Covid-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP). However, the pharmaceutical sector and some countries opposing the waiver, such as Canada, EU member states, the UK and the US, have not shown support for such initiatives.

The good faith opt-in requests to pharmaceutical corporations have so far neither adequately nor timeously led to securing enough access to Covid-19 medical tools and vaccine know-how for people who need them.

This reinforces the argument that systemic change is drastically overdue.

The waiver is an essential part of the solution, insufficient on its own, but still an urgent remedy.

Lives are literally on the line. ■

Kate Stegeman is the Access Campaign Advocacy Coordinator for Doctors without Borders South Africa



The Big Picture

Mopping up: In Fnideq, a town in northern Morocco, a young man tries to unblock a gutter on a flooded street during stormy weather. The country has been hit by heavy rains and even some snow, which has caused severe flooding in some areas. (Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP)

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