

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Illustrations: Nzilani Simu



We did it.

We survived. That in itself is enough for what has been an absurd year. A year that has somehow felt even worse than the shitshow that was 2020. Friends, family, colleagues and strangers died from Covid-19. Even more people are living with long Covid and the constant toll that it takes. Surviving lockdowns, economic insecurity and constantly worrying about the pandemic has left all of us exhausted. It's perfectly fine to be totally overwhelmed by this. We are.

As Africans, we had the extra spice of watching our expectations play out as Western countries finally sent us some of their hoarded vaccines (just before they expired – and then only as donations). The northern hemisphere is already talking about booster shots while fewer than 10% of Africans have had any sort of jab. In public climate negotiations, the same countries spoke of a fairer and more just world while behind closed doors telling African countries to shut up and accept the status quo. And as we sacrificed to slow the spread of the

coronavirus, the seemingly endless pandemic of men's violence against women continued.

Taking time to breathe and look back on 2021, we're sharing with you our second annual Africans of the Year edition. We remember Agnes Tirop, her life as an excellent athlete cut short by the violence of a man. We also celebrate people doing extraordinary things, from Timnit Gebru tackling internet giants to climate activist Vanessa Nakate demanding more from rich polluters, and the mesmerising footballing talent of Mo Salah. It is both an overwhelming time to be alive, and a hopeful one.

Thank you for reading and sharing our journalism this year. We started *The Continent* in the same month community transmission of Covid-19 started in Africa. This is our 70th edition and there are now 16,500 subscribers getting this newspaper each week. If you can, join our end-of-year fundraiser (details on page 22). We'll be back next year with more journalism. ■

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Editors' picks: 2021 in Review

We asked our editorial team what they thought were the biggest stories of the year, both in Africa and internationally.

Kiri Rupiah, Lydia Namubiru, Siphos Kings and Simon Allison

What was the biggest African story of the year?

LN: The discontent of Africa's young people and the political organising or unrest that has come from that, whether it was from young Ugandans voting for Bobi Wine in an effort to #RemoveADictator, pro-democracy protests in Eswatini, the #FixTheCountryMovement in Ghana, or the violence we saw on the streets of Dakar in March.

SA: Ethiopia. Africa's second-most populous country is imploding. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's "law enforcement operation" has turned into a full-on civil war, with rebels encircling the capital Addis Ababa. The human toll has been horrific, with thousands dead and millions displaced, and the risk of genocide is high – if it isn't happening already. Obtaining and verifying information about the conflict is incredibly difficult, as the government has effectively outlawed independent journalism and repeatedly blocked humanitarian access to affected regions, but the little that we do know

should have already shocked the world into action.

SK: The rich destroying the future. African negotiators went to COP26 asking big polluters to give their citizens a greater chance of survival. They were ignored. The Glasgow negotiations locked in more of what we're already seeing, from droughts in Kenya to tropical cyclones in Mozambique and desertification across the Sahel. When African countries asked to be compensated for this, the United States and European Union went behind closed doors and refused. The former is responsible for 20% of all the carbon pollution in history but offered a "moral" promise to African countries that it would do something. The 54 countries responsible for 3% of emissions face collapse this century because of the pollution of others.

KR: The ousting of Timnit Gebru from Google was a symptom of a larger problem in Big Tech. Gebru was a star engineer who warned AI can spread racism. Google brought her in to investigate the issue. When she reported on her findings, Google forced her out. All

the isms and phobias are being replicated in Web 3.0. And like we reported this year, it will always be profits over people.

SA: Ethiopia. Africa's second most-populous country is imploding. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's "law enforcement operation" has turned into a full-on civil war with rebels encircling the capital.

The Continent was the first African publication to get access to thousands of documents leaked by Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen. They reveal the company knew its platform was being used to proliferate hate speech in Ethiopia – yet Facebook did not take steps to protect users living “outside the English-speaking Western world”.

What gave you hope for next year?

KR: While our colleagues in the West attempt to claw back their dignity and democracy after years of disastrous reporting rooted in nonsense both-sideism, and relying on punditry and not facts, there's a sense that Africans, young people especially, are a lot more discerning about their news consumption and are actively holding local and international media accountable. While the gig economy has proven to be exploitative, their interest and ability to create content is upending who gets to tell their stories and how it's done. If only

we could get our parents to stop talking to strangers on these digital streets.

SA: The pandemic has ruthlessly and relentlessly exposed global faultlines. Whether it's vaccine access, climate change, racist travel bans, hate speech on Facebook, or illicit financial flows, one thing has been made repeatedly clear: no one is coming to Africa's rescue. This may sound counterintuitive, but I believe that this gives us clarity. We know we cannot rely on the benevolence or the moral obligations of others when it comes to surviving the even bigger threats that are coming. To survive, we have no choice but to take control of our own destiny. In this knowledge is power. We've been warned.

SK: Africa's startup story has tended to be one of great ideas, promising starts and then better-funded global competitors swooping in (or the Nigerian governance conundrum where regulators destroy new ideas out of a desire to exert control). Things might be changing. There are now seven privately owned startups valued at over \$1-billion, up from just one three years ago. That's how this continent will build its own future.

LN: At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the continent hardly had any vaccine production capacity and we are paying the price for that, as we kneel before, coax and cajole other regions of the world to share vaccines with us. But, at the vaccines production conference convened by Africa CDC a few weeks ago, we learnt that Egypt is now producing

China's Sinovac vaccine and will start making its own; Senegal is building its own vaccine production factory and both South Africa and Rwanda secured technology-sharing agreements with global pharma giants and so will start to make Covid vaccines. Whether that makes a big difference to the Covid-19 fight itself or not, the capacity being invested in today puts us in a better place to respond to future epidemics.

What was the biggest international story of the year?

KR: The toothless, limp-wristed leadership Africans have long been told is exclusive to the continent was exposed in a number of so-called progressive and enlightened nations. From elites living by different financial and health rules to jumping the vaccine queue, 2021 laid bare the faultlines of inequality and showed that in a crisis, the truth will eventually float to the top.

SA: It's hard to know where to begin, but America's hasty, humiliating exit from Afghanistan is the image that has stayed with me most vividly. When the history of the American Empire is written, will this moment mark the beginning of the fall?

SK: As a symbol of how fast the world is changing, little beats Tesla remaining the world's most valuable car company. Electric vehicles used to be niche. Now the future hurtles towards us. The impacts are myriad, like the mass investment car companies are doing in battery tech, a key part of any mixed renewable energy grid.

LN: The continued global mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic. Global leaders seem to learn one thing about how to manage the pandemic, and forget three in the same breath. Last year was the year of denialism, myths and pandemic cronyism. This was the year of vaccine hoarding, doubling down on intellectual property protection, inevitable virus mutations, ineffective travel bans and so on. It takes a pandemic to realise that the entire globe is run on petty nationalism and kneejerk reactions.

LN: The global mismanagement of Covid-19. Leaders seem to learn one thing and forget three in the same breath.

What was the story that should have got more attention?

KR: Shell, well known for its dubious dealings in Nigeria, is also trying to infiltrate South Africa's Wild Coast. The petroleum giant claims its contentious plans for an oil and gas seismic survey in the waters of the Wild Coast will be carried out in accordance with environmental laws with minimal impact on marine life and nearby fishing communities. I wonder what Ken Saro-Wiwa would have thought about that.

SA: What the Facebook Papers revealed about Meta's approach to hate speech in Ethiopia was shocking. Perhaps even more shocking, however, was the absence of almost any other African country from

the internal discussions of Facebook's integrity team. How is Facebook changing politics in Nigeria? Burundi? South Africa? Everywhere else on the continent? Given what we know about the platform's massively polarising effect, we should be very, very worried.

SK: Nigeria taking on Twitter (for all the wrong reasons) and not getting much back for its efforts. The dominant social media companies whose platforms are used throughout the world are based in the United States (with an honourable mention for WeChat from China) and they take the US's brand of Western values wherever they go, without considering the nuances of the societies where they establish new footholds. We've seen how dangerous this can be with Facebook in Ethiopia. On their own, countries in the Global South have very little they can do about this.

LN: What is happening in Ghana, with the anti-LGBTQI law, should have got more critical attention and not just the events-driven news coverage it got. I think it's an interesting African pilot project for western-style cultural warriors. And their choice of Ghana, one of the continent's more stable democracies, should have us all on the edge of our seats. It's not hard to deeply fracture stable democracies by seeding single issue politics. Ask the US. Emotive topics like abortion, gay rights, etc, have proven effective for creating captive and polarised voting blocs that gloss over actual governance issues for "cultural" ones.

What was the funniest story of the year?

KR: "I am a victim of information distortion, voice cloning and sponsored spooking and political sabotage. Digital media, in their hybridity, have been used by my enemies to blackmail me, but my spirit will never die..." Thus read former Zimbabwean vice-president Kembo Mohadi's statement in response to being caught conducting not one, but two extramarital affairs while in office.

SA: When Zimbabwe's government spokesperson Nick Mangwana tweeted "We are just about to retire", above a photo of his president. He hastily deleted the tweet, and replaced it with a new caption: "We are just about to retire to bed. But we give you the Great Man of your Dreams". Freudian slip much?

SK: The Kenyatta family featured prominently in the Pandora Papers, the mega leak and investigation into global tax avoidance. Bizarrely, Uhuru Kenyatta praised the report and promised a thorough investigation – while on an official visit to Barbados, a tax haven. The leaks, and the Kenyattas' role, received little critical coverage in Kenyan press.

LN: In the end it was a tragedy but the couple of weeks during which journalists tried in vain to establish the whereabouts of Tanzania's late president John Magufuli were hilarious. I want a *Scandal* revival episode in which Olivia Pope is flown into Dar es Salaam to manage public access to whatever was going on then. ■

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THE COUNTDOWN

The news this year wasn't always the most uplifting. We needed distractions, and 2021 delivered. This was a vintage year for entertainment, and our writers have chosen the pick of the bunch.



MUSIC by Sabelo Mkhabela, Johannesburg-based music writer.



MOVIES by Wilfred Okiche, Lagos-based film critic and culture writer.



BOOKS by Jacqueline Nyathi, Harare-based writer, reviewer and editor



PHOTOS by Paul Botes, the *Mail & Guardian's* photo editor and winner of the Contemporary African Photography Prize in 2018

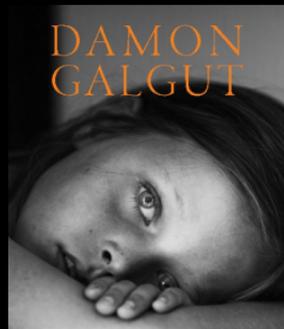
05



Ex by Nikita Kering

The lead single

on Nikita Kering's debut EP *A Side of Me, Ex*, cements the Kenyan singer's place among Africa's R&B vanguard. The groovy ballad combines the soul of 90s R&B with the suaveness of contemporary styles as Nikita expresses her unreadiness to be her bae's ex-lover. We are pretty sure after this song, he stayed.



The Promise by Damon Galgut

Winner of the

2021 Booker Prize, this story of a white South African family opens with the death of the matriarch, and then follows the lives of the children as the family disintegrates. At the heart of the story is the promise made to the family's black domestic helper, Salome.



The Man Who Sold His Skin

Tunisia scored

a first Oscar nomination in the Best International Feature category with director Kaouther Ben Hania's audacious caper. A Syrian refugee in Lebanon submits his back as a canvas for a famous European artist to tattoo a Schengen visa that will allow him to travel the world as a work of art. Ben Hania's outrageous second feature is inspired by a true story.



Violence in Soweto

A suspected looter pleads with unseen South African National Defence Force soldiers, asking for help for a man shot with rubber bullets by security personnel at Jabulani Mall in Soweto. The army deployed troops in South Africa's Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces to help police tackle deadly violence and looting amid protests sparked by the jailing of former president Jacob Zuma. Photo: Luca Sola / AFP

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

TEMS AND WIZKID

TEMS AND WIZKID

Dancing to their own beat

Afrobeats is conquering the world, with Tems and WizKid at the vanguard

Refiloe Seiboko

Listening to Tems is like tasting a spoonful of honey. It's warm and soothing, and comparable to nothing else. She floats even on her downtempo melodies, drawing you in with her incredibly evocative voice. Lyrically, she explores her thoughts, tries to be mindful of her emotions, observes her surroundings, grapples with love and generally shares her existential insights.

In *Interference*, the opening track of her critically acclaimed album *For Broken Ears*, she sang:

*This is a place with no shame
This is a mind with no frame
This is the light with no dark
This is the truth with no faults
This is a place with no shame
This is a mind with no frame
This is the light with no pain
This is a place with no shame*

She sounds deliciously and distinctly African and she has this effortless Lagos coolness that just can't be manufactured anywhere else.

If it sounds like I'm more than a little bit enthralled by her – yes. And I'm not the only one.

Her appeal piqued the interest of Drake, who featured her on a standout track on his record-breaking album this year. She is also the transfixing voice on *Essence*, featured by her countryman Wizkid, which became the first Nigerian song to chart on Billboard's Hot 100 and went platinum in the United States.

It would be redundant to say “watch out for her”. She's already here. But, really, keep watching out for her because she's absolutely right — when it comes to Tems, we really don't need no other body.

Aanu Adeoye

Wizkid and Tems have set the world alight with their work this year. Their catchy tune *Essence*, first released in 2020, went global, capturing the hearts and minds of established Afrobeats fans and converting many unbelievers. It has been a regular feature on Billboard's Hot 100, the bible of global music charts. A remix featuring pop star Justin Bieber has only further broadened the song's popularity.

For their success, Tems and Wizkid are maintaining punishing schedules, filling out venues around the world. Tickets for a show at London's O2 Arena sold out in 12 minutes. Two more nights were added



to the roster. More than 20,000 people trooped out each night during this three-night run. This is familiar territory for Wizkid, of course, but 2021 has certified him as a truly global superstar, just as capable of selling out arenas in Lagos as he is in London. It's been an even bigger jump for Tems, who until recently was largely unknown outside of her home country.

Wizkid is now undoubtedly the poster boy for the explosion of Afrobeats – the eclectic fusion of sounds ranging from west African highlife, R&B to Jamaican-inspired reggae and several points in between.

The album that precipitated all this, *Made in Lagos*, has now been streamed over a billion times. Wizkid's music is celebratory and joyous, promising you a

good time away from the chaos. Fun and good vibes are always needed; in two years plagued by a pandemic and other social ills, they become essential.

It's not an overstatement to suggest that Wizkid is perhaps Nigeria's greatest export at present, a national symbol of positivity that his compatriots can be unabashedly proud of.

Wizkid and Tems symbolise the enduring power of music and its ability to spread. And for that, they are rays of sunlight in an otherwise bleak year. ■

Refiloe Seiboko is The Continent's production editor. Aanu Adeoye is a Mo Ibrahim Foundation Academy Fellow at Chatham House, and a former news editor of The Continent.

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Illustration: Nzilani Simu



TIMNIT GEBRU

TIMNIT GEBRU

Rage against the machine

If we are not careful, artificial intelligence will replicate the racism inherent in today's world.

Timnit Gebru will not let that happen.

Nanjala Nyabola

At the end of a tumultuous year for her professional life and for her country of ancestry, Dr Timnit Gebru announced that she was going to do more than complain about the impact that technology was having on political discourse and establish an institute specifically to address the harms that Artificial Intelligence causes on marginalised groups.

Not everyone would have the courage to take on a company so large that its name is a verb – over both its human resources record and on its policies – but in a year in which the choices of tech companies have dominated politics discourse, it is one of the more urgent questions of our time, and Gebru is on it.

Through her public criticism of Google, Gebru has highlighted an important and developing debate in tech policy research. Her public confrontations online with senior management at Google underscore the ways in which tech platforms claiming to encourage research on their own systems end up producing hackneyed and partial accounts because they are unwilling to allow their work to stand up to true, rigorous, academic scrutiny.

This is the challenge faced by

researchers trying to understand the impact that algorithms are having on the way we receive, consume and respond to political information curated by proprietary artificial intelligence models: How can we truly understand the impact that technology is having on our public sphere if the tech companies won't let anyone see what's under the bonnet?

Her confrontations with Google underscore how tech platforms – claiming to encourage research on their own systems – end up producing hackneyed and partial accounts, because they are unwilling to expose their work to academic scrutiny.

Gebru could have easily chosen to focus her complaints on her own experience with their terrible human resources responses. Instead, she has remained steadfast in defence of her research (in partnership with Emily Bender) and in keeping Big Tech accountable to marginalised populations. The Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute



has received financial backing from some of the largest philanthropic organisations in the world and promises to shake up the practice of throwing Artificial Intelligence at all of the world's problems even where there is no clear evidence that it works.

But Gebru is also challenging her constructive dismissal at Google, where she says she was forced out for showing that facial recognition AI in the company was loaded with racial biases that were harming people of colour broadly but black people specifically. Google didn't just dispute her research, they punished her for it, pushing her out of the company because she stood by her research and its implications. And this is part of another conversation about how technology companies in the West can be a hostile environment for women and people of colour.

Gebru has also come out as a vocal critic

of the war in Ethiopia, particularly because the technologies that she criticises are at the centre of the accusations of malpractice levelled against social media companies for their inability to rein in hate speech. For these comments, she has received a barrage of attack from both supporters and defenders of the various parties of the conflict, once again highlighting how choices that may seem abstract within the tech companies – to allow certain kinds of speech to go unmonitored, to underinvest in the systems that keep online users safe – can have real-world effects halfway around the world.

One hopes that with her new institute, Gebru's voice will only grow louder and clearer in defence of the voices that technology routinely ignores. ■

Nanjala Nyabola is a writer and political analyst



Fear and molten fury

Residents flee Goma as the Nyiragongo volcano in the DRC wakes on May 22. Strong emanations of glowing light were visible from the city, on the shores of Lake Kivu at the southern foot of the volcano. Noxious sulfur fumes were perceptible throughout Goma, even beyond the molten lava flows that tore a path downhill before finally subsiding at the outskirts of the city. Some 32 people died and 1,000 homes were destroyed in the eruption. Photo: Guerchom Ndebo / AFP



Bloody Samaritans by Ayra Starr

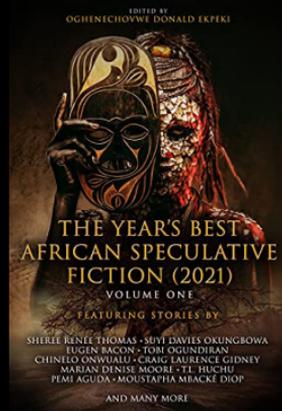
This is a tongue-in-cheek jab at two-faced and pretentious haters, "vibe killers". But this combative statement is delivered with utter flair – richly instrumental, tropical yet layered, and with a higher tempo than Ayra Starr's usual vibe. *Bloody Samaritans* is as oxymoronic as its title: perfect for both the dance floor and a chill-out session.



Night of the Kings

Set in Côte

d'Ivoire's notorious prison La Maca, *Night of the Kings*, directed by Philippe Lacôte, is an enthralling and shapeshifting ode to the role of the griot in African storytelling. A fresh inmate (Bakary Koné) fights for his life when he is promptly anointed the Roman (storyteller), mandated to tell a story that will keep the inmates up all night and stave off violence.



The Year's Best African Speculative

Fiction, edited by Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki

The first-ever African speculative fiction anthology is a collection of stories from known and new writers. Included are writers such as Tlotlo Tsamaase, a bright new light of African SF; Suyi Davies Okungbowa, author of *David Mogo, Godhunter*; and Sheree Reneé Thomas, the notable American SF writer.

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AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Illustration: Nzilani Simu



VANESSA NAKATE

VANESSA NAKATE

The activist who forced her way onto front pages

Initially cropped out and sidelined, the Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate has now become an essential voice for Africa on the world stage

Sipho Kings

When yet another oil spill off the Nigerian coast threatened lives and livelihoods, a member of the local community tagged Vanessa Nakate in their tweet about the situation. In days past, such a tweet might have had an NGO or a western climate activist tagged. But here Nakate was chosen.

The Ugandan climate activist has become a forceful voice from the Global South. Like her peers – who are inheriting a world that alternates between fire, drought and flood – she is blunt in her analysis of what is wrong, who is to blame and what must be done.

Writing in *The Guardian* earlier this year, she said: “We know who did this – but they don’t want to pay the bill.”

Getting to this point has required



overcoming a system that doesn’t care about Africans unless they are an object that white Westerners can save.

In 2020, Nakate attended the World Economic Forum at Davos in Switzerland. She spoke but was not widely listened to.

At this point Swede Greta Thunberg was the star of the media, and got speaking gigs at the forum.

Nakate stood with four other climate activists for a photo taken by Associated Press, who subsequently cropped her out – the only black activist.

The experience is summed up in her new book, *A Bigger Picture: My fight to*

Bring New African Voices to the Climate Crisis. Published in October, it comes with an endorsement from Malala Yousafzai on the cover.

Inside, Nakate writes: “We are on the front line, but we are not on the front page.”

That front line is Kampala, the capital of Uganda and the 25-year-old’s home. Her country has been hit hard by extreme weather events, made more frequent and damaging by carbon emissions from rich countries. People have died in floods and as a result of droughts, while locusts have wiped out the crops of subsistence farmers.

A large part of the blame lies with the governance of President Yoweri Museveni, with his ongoing failure to realise the potential of the country and meaningfully improve the lives of its people.

Poor governance means that people are already struggling, even before their crops and savings are wiped out by the climate crisis. But, even if Museveni didn’t rig elections, people would still struggle in a world rigged by the pollution of rich countries.

At home, Nakate has done practical things to help communities. Her Green Schools Project is bringing electricity, in the form of solar panels, to schools.

Abroad, she has been forthright and consistent in her task. From speaking to political leaders to gracing the cover of *Time* magazine, she has pointed to the promise made by wealthy countries at climate negotiations in 2009 to give \$100-billion a year to the victims of their

pollution.

The same countries spent trillions responding to the 2008 financial crash. And to Covid-19. But they have failed to pay up for the environmental and climate havoc they have wrought with their pollution. They admitted as much at this year’s climate negotiations in Glasgow.

From speaking to leaders to gracing the cover of *Time* magazine, she has pointed to the promise made by wealthy countries at climate negotiations in 2009 to give \$100-billion a year to the victims of their pollution.

Nakate was there, at COP26, calling them out. *Again*, someone cropped her out of a photograph. But this time more people were listening to her. She wasn’t a plus-one for other, white activists. She took centre stage. Her face went around the world, and her words gave this continent a fighting chance at a fairer future.

That’s why people in Nigeria, three thousand kilometres away, tagged her in the hope that this would bring more attention to their fight against indiscriminate oil pollution. They were right – such is Nakate’s influence. ■

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Illustration: Nzilani Simu



MO SALAH

MO SALAH

Pitch perfect

Mo Salah believes he is the best player in the world. Who are we to contradict him?

Khadija Patel

You don't need to be Egyptian, or a Liverpool fan, to admit that Mohamed Salah is extraordinary. The 29-year-old striker is breaking records for African footballers playing in the English Premier League with a cheeky smile and disarming confidence. He plays, he says, with the understanding that he is the best player in the world. And his recent run of form, scoring 20 goals in a season that's not yet reached its halfway mark, may well back him up.

But the personal accolades haven't always been in step with his self-belief.

When he was placed seventh in the announcement of the winner of the 2021 Ballon d'Or, he laughed it off. The Egyptian king, you see, is as deft with his public utterances as he is with a football in front of the goal. He's been able to cultivate a brand that is principally about football. While stories about his charitable endeavours in Egypt are legion – and many of them just legend – he's never made political statements. He's almost never said anything publicly that is not about the game he's so darned good at.

His agents and the management of Liverpool Football Club are haggling over the terms of a new deal to keep him at the English club, perhaps for the rest of his career. In Egypt there is no need for negotiation. Salah has become a symbol of success, an icon of hard work and determination, an example of one way out of what is a hellish life for many Egyptians.

But it nearly didn't turn out this way. In 2011, Mamdouh Abbas, a wealthy businessman who was chairman of Zamalek – one of Egypt's leading teams – declined to sign Salah. He said, "Salah needs much more work."

That Salah has been able to build such a career despite being written off in Egypt, is remarkable. He did it his way.

What's unclear however, is how many others in Egypt, and elsewhere on the continent, may be left to never quite realise their potential as the world's best. Not because billionaire owners may sometimes miss a chance to spot an obvious talent, but because the systems that are meant to nurture that talent simply do not exist.

To make it on the world stage, Salah's talent was not enough – he also had to overcome the structural barriers that stood in the way of him and others like him. And that's what makes him truly extraordinary. ■

Khadija Patel is the Director of Programming for the International Fund for Public Interest Media and a former editor-in-chief of the *Mail & Guardian*.



 **Jack by Nasty C**
Nasty C didn't release any full-length project this year, just guest features and a few singles on which the South African rapper proved himself sharp. On *Jack*, the Durban-born lyricist took control of a lively instrumental and looked back at his humble beginnings. "I used to have jack in the fridge and the bank," he raps on the hook and, after, continues to dance over the bouncy beat and devour those flamenco strings with the ease of a virtuoso.

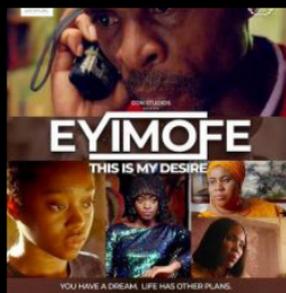
03



 **Taken**
Humaira Mustapha, whose two daughters were kidnapped by gunmen, is seen weeping at her home the day after their abduction from the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe in the northwestern Nigerian state of Zamfara. More than 300 schoolgirls were snatched from dormitories by gunmen in the middle of the night. Photo: Kola Sulaimon / AFP



 **Open Water by Caleb Azumah Nelson**
Beautiful and lyrical, this short read is a love letter to Blackness. Do not expect much of a plot: we follow the love story of two young artists, a dancer, and a photographer, and much of the narrative is like a long poem about feelings.



 **Eyimofe (This is my Desire)**
In this deeply affecting debut by twin brothers Chuko and Arie Esiri, dreams of life across the Mediterranean are the motivations that keep the protagonists going as they navigate the daily traumas of living in Lagos. Will starting over in Europe present them with some respite? And how long can this aspiration fate remain out of reach?

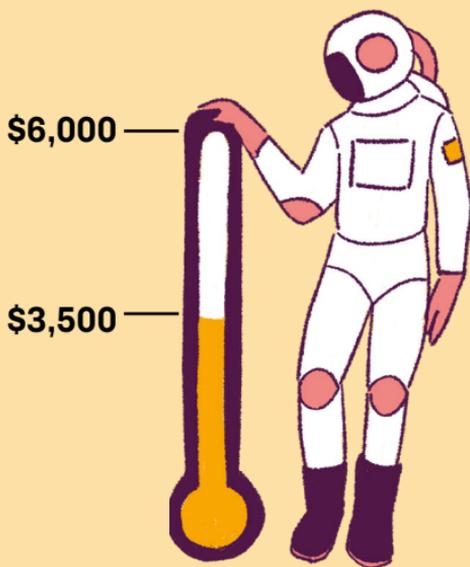
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The response to our end-of-year fundraiser has blown us away. In two weeks, we have raised over half of our \$6,000 target. To help us keep producing independent journalism, and to keep *The Continent* free to all, please consider supporting us – and we'll send you a free digital print to say thank you.

fundraiser.thecontinent.org

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Illustration: Nzilani Simu

AGNES TIROP

AGNES TIROP

She was not your property

Agnes Tirop was on track for global superstardom, before her race was brutally cut short.

Kiri Rupiah

It will not be for her prowess on the track that she will be remembered, but for being one of the many women who succumbed to the actions of a man during the pandemic within the pandemic.

Agnes Jebet Tirop was undoubtedly one to watch on the athletics scene. The Kenyan long-distance runner and Olympian competed in the 1,500m, 5,000m, 10,000m and cross-country events and was headed for stardom. She had a meteoric rise to the top of road running, and in September she set a new world record in a women-only 10km race in Germany.

An immense talent, Tirop enjoyed success as both a junior and senior athlete. She bagged a bronze medal in the 5,000m at the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) World Junior Championships in Athletics in 2012 and 2014. A year later, at the age of 19, she became the second youngest gold medallist in the history of the women's race at the IAAF World Cross Country Championships, after South Africa's Zola Budd.

But hers was a promising career that will forever remain in the realm of potential: Tirop met a violent and all too

common end on October 13, allegedly at the hands of her husband Ibrahim Rotich. A day after her body was discovered, Rotich was arrested in the coastal town of Mombasa as he allegedly tried to flee the country. His family told the police he had telephoned them in tears, begging God's forgiveness for something he had done.

Her funeral was held on the day she would have turned 26.

Stay-at-home orders, intended to protect the public by slowing the spread of the coronavirus, left many people who bear the brunt of intimate partner violence trapped with their abusers. Tirop was allegedly planning to leave Rotich, whom neighbours described as violent. The abusive nature of her marriage was hardly a secret and those close to the pair say she was desperate to get out of the union.

Hers was a promising career that will forever remain in the realm of potential: Tirop met a violent end, allegedly at the hands of her husband.

According to UN Women, even before the pandemic, one in three women worldwide experience physical

or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. Before the pandemic 243-million women and girls aged between 15 and 49 experienced sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in 2019.

Since the pandemic hit, violence against women – especially domestic violence – has intensified.

Pandemics tend to be dangerous for women. Recent outbreaks of Ebola, Cholera, Zika, and Nipah have also led to an increase in the cases of domestic violence. During the Ebola virus outbreak, women and girls were especially vulnerable to violence because of the inability to escape their abuser. To compound the issue, some were also at the mercy of healthcare workers deployed to treat them.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, data has shown that violence has intensified against women and girls. Domestic violence shelters and helplines have reached capacity, leaving many locked in with their abusers.

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, data has shown that all types of violence, exacerbated in part by health and job insecurity, has intensified against women and girls. As cases continue to strain health and other essential social services, domestic violence shelters and helplines have reached capacity, leaving many locked in with their abusers.

And it's not just an African issue. In

Australia, Hannah Clarke and her three children were ambushed by her estranged partner during a morning school run, when he doused her car and its helpless occupants with fuel and set them alight.

Covid has also created opportunities for violence against women from those traditionally perceived to be trustworthy. In the United Kingdom, Wayne Couzens, a police officer, was sentenced to a whole-life tariff for the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard. Couzens had abused his position of authority to snatch Everard from a London street in March under the premise of detaining her for breaking lockdown rules.

We acknowledge and stand in solidarity with every person who has found that home can be a prison without bars. There is no shortage of causes for concern when looking at the conditions under which our continent is dealing with the pandemic. With so many harrowing stories it is easy to forget the many passionate survivors, advocates and campaigners working to ensure the health and safety of those denied the freedom to live in peace.

After Tirop's killing, Mary Ngugi – a fellow Kenyan long-distance road runner and the founder of the Women's Athletic Alliance – began #NotYourProperty, a social-media based campaign to highlight intimate partner violence in Kenya.

Sadly, like the unwrapped athletics trophy found at the scene of the crime, Tirop's promise remains unfulfilled. ■

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

ALEX DONKOR

ALEX DONKOR

Standing against intolerance

Alex Donkor is leading the fight against homophobia in Ghana – despite the threat to his own life

Lydia Namubiru

In many unfortunate ways, 2021 has been an incredibly eventful year for Alex Donkor, an openly gay human rights activist in Ghana. Standing in the eye of the anti-gay storm that has raged there all year, Donkor has been the subject of sermons in churches, talk shows on radio, a police raid, and even death threats.

But he remains steadfast and seemingly fearless in standing up for the country's LGBTQIA+ community.

It all started in late January when LGBT+ Rights Ghana, the non-profit he leads, opened a community centre in Accra, where they planned to offer the country's LGBTQIA+ people medical services and paralegal and psychosocial support when dealing with discrimination.

Instead, all hell broke loose.

Outraged church groups, politicians and anti-gay organisations demanded that the government close the centre down.

Three weeks into the uproar, Ghanaian police raided and closed it down.

But the anti-gay movement was just getting started.

On May 20, Ghanaian police in Ho, in the Volta region, arrested 21 people for attending training on documenting human rights violations against LGBTQIA+ people. State prosecutors successfully argued for them to remain in detention for 22 days before they were released on bail. The case was later dismissed for lacking merit.

In July, Moses Foh-Amoaning, an anti-gay campaigner who is connected to international ultraconservatives through the World Congress of Families, got eight members of parliament to introduce an anti-gay bill named after his organisation: Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights. Ghana's parliament is debating the bill. Human rights activists fear it will sail through parliament because it has populist currency, but hope that Ghana's president, formerly a human rights lawyer, won't assent to make it law.

Through all these upheavals Donkor, who told journalists that he started receiving death threats around the time the community centre was raided, has remained vocal, visible and active.

He "has put his life on the line over and over again for the community," says Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed, a Ghanaian feminist activist. ■

Lydia Namubiru is The Continent's news editor.



By Your Side by CKay (featuring Blxckie)

In 2021, amapiano showed its malleability. The South African genre has been incorporated into hip-hop, Afropop, Afrofusion (Afrobeat) and more. Nigeria's CKay and South Africa's Blxckie float over an Afrofusion-infused strain of 'piano on the Nigerian star's hit *By Your Side*. A mellow blend of amapiano's lush pads and log drum with keys and violins prove conducive for smoothly sung declarations.



Lingui, the Sacred Bonds Chadian

auteur Mahamat-Saleh Haroun is in terrific form with this Cannes debuting drama that shines with compassion and empathy. Slender but fully realised, *Lingui, The Sacred Bonds* is a timely (and timeless) acknowledgement of the support systems that women adopt in order to survive punishing patriarchal systems.

02



The Actual True Story of Ahmed and Zarga by Mohamedou Ould Slahi

Ahmed, a Bedouin man, loses his young blue camel, Zarga. Zarga is special to Ahmed's son, so Ahmed sets out on an epic quest to find Zarga, encountering demons, cannibals, other nomads, and various trials. Mohamedou Ould Slahi's previous book was the diary of his imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay.



The incivility of war

Tigrayans celebrate as captive Ethiopian soldiers approach the Mekele Rehabilitation Centre in the Tigrayan capital on July 2, 2021. According to Tigray People's Liberation Front fighters, more than 7,000 captives were marched from Abdi Eshir, 75km southwest of Mekele, for four days. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba / AFP

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

MUNYA CHAWAWA

MUNYA CHAWAWA

The comedian skewering Britain's ruling elite

The world today is so crazy that it sometimes seems as if it's beyond satire – unless, of course, you're Zimbabwean-born comic Munya Chawawa



Zoe Flood

When the United Kingdom's adulterous health secretary was caught red-handed in June 2021 – enthusiastically breaking social distancing rules with a married aide – it was Munya Chawawa's viral video that captivated the country.

The parody *Matt Hancock – It Was Me* is a classic example of the satirist's searing wit and lightning-fast creativity. A naughty confessional to the tune of Shaggy's naysaying original, the slickly edited video was released only hours after the story first broke.

But it was just one of many released by Chawawa over the past 18 months that

have placed the 28-year-old firmly in the public consciousness.

The 62-second *It Was Me* video has been viewed 2.5-million times on Twitter alone; the total views of his prodigious social media output – each one a genre-defying piece of performance art – are in the many, many millions.

While he takes on subjects from cult series *Squid Game* to Salt Bae's London restaurant, a talent of note is Chawawa's skewering – with laugh-out-loud and often painful precision – of conceits and injustices around politics, class and race.

He continually delivers cultural appropriation-tackling characters such as Burberry-clad drill rapper Unknown P, and serves up a stream of winking asides, impressively lithe hip manoeuvres and canine-sharp writing. As fans frequently observe: "Munya never misses."

Bearing a "Zimbabwean Passport Or British... depends who's asking", according to his Instagram bio, Chawawa was born in the UK and then spent his early years in Zimbabwe's capital Harare. By all accounts, relocating with his family to a small village in Norfolk at the age of 11 was something of a shock to the system.

He speaks of his deep appreciation of Zimbabwe, telling a Dutch streetwear blog last year: "A place can feel like your spirit animal... Growing up in Zimbabwe, people are so positive and so happy you really do believe you can do anything."

And that is what he has done. After owning the lockdown internet, Chawawa has since hit prime time.

One of his latest projects, a four-part series called *Race Around Britain* that

examines the Black experience in the UK and features "Britain's first-ever game of Microaggression Bingo", has recently landed on YouTube to immediate acclaim.

From hosting the prestigious Mobo Awards and *Complaints Welcome* on Channel 4 (Zimbabwe flag mug in pride of place on his host's desk) to profiles in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, Chawawa's voice is clearly – and thankfully – becoming a permanent fixture.

The 62-second *It Was Me* video has been viewed 2.5-million times on Twitter alone.

Who better than a warm-hearted, sardonic and incredibly smart Zimbabwean to help us all find the humour in the ever-deepening scandal-storm that is British politics, or the honesty in our society's reckoning with its own racism?

Chawawa's wit is unique, but also recalls others who have turned to comedy to find light in the dark. Far from being any kind of gallows humour, his much-needed talent rather has the power to defang those who cause real suffering, while never letting them off the hook.

Who else can't wait to see what he turns his laser-like wit to next? ■

Zoe Flood is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. She also co-produced the romantic comedy Cook Off, Zimbabwe's first film to be acquired by Netflix.

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

NAVY MALELA & GRADI KOKO

NAVY MALELA & GRADI KOKO

The bravest bankers

Navy Malela and Gradi Koko refused to stay silent in the face of injustice – even when speaking out carried grave risks for them and their families

Simon Allison

The world of international high finance is shrouded in secrecy – deliberately so. If we don't know how money flows between companies and across borders, we can't ask too many awkward questions.

But occasionally someone opens a window into this shadowy world. Invariably, this gives us a glimpse into corruption on a grand scale. Earlier this year, at great cost to themselves and their families, Congolese bankers Gradi Koko and Navy Malela opened such a window.

They leaked thousands of internal bank documents – seen by *The Continent* – which revealed the dodgy dealings of the Kinshasa-based Afriland Bank.

The bank appeared to be helping the Israeli billionaire Dan Gertler to evade US sanctions (an allegation denied by Gertler). The bank was also allegedly facilitating a money-laundering network linked to Hezbollah, and providing

banking services to a company linked to North Korea's authoritarian regime.

For their efforts, Koko and Malela received death threats and were forced into exile in Europe. With the support of the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa, they and their families are now in a new, strange city, trying to rebuild their lives. The cost of staying true to their principles has been to leave behind everything they knew and loved.

“Thanks to the silent revolution of whistleblowers like Gradi [Koko] and Navy [Malela] on the African continent, no crime will remain a secret forever, and the change we desire will eventually make itself felt,” said Jean-Jacques Lumumba, grand-nephew of Patrice Lumumba and himself a banker turned whistleblower.

That silent revolution is gathering pace. The evidence presented last month by the Congo Hold-Up investigation – the largest ever document leak on the African continent – was even more damning, showing how the inner circle of former Congolese president Joseph Kabila looted tens of millions of dollars from state coffers; while the Pandora Papers investigation implicated dozens of African politicians in the shady, unaccountable web of offshore tax havens.

The job of journalism is to shine a light in dark places. That would not be possible without the conviction and the courage of whistleblowers like Koko and Malela. ■

Simon Allison is The Continent's Editor-in-Chief.

01



Coming by Naira Marley (featuring

Busiswa)

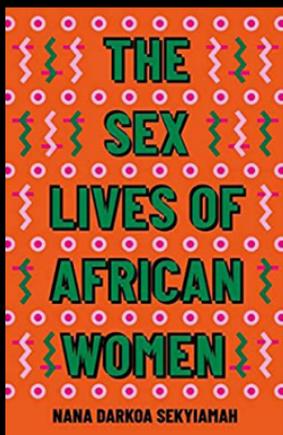
Two of the most free-spirited musicians on the continent, Naira Marley and Busiswa, connected for the sinfully catchy banger *Coming*. The xxx-rated song straddles both the Afrofusion and amapiano genres, and its hurried rhythm may lead to sweaty bodies... on the dance floor of course.



The Last Shelter

Ousmane
Samassékou's

documentary is a revelatory look at the mental states of migrants at a halfway house in the desert city of Gao, Mali. Intimately observed through a graceful lens, *The Last Shelter* is a chronicle of home, exile – and the darker territories in between.



The Sex Lives of African Women by

Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah

An astonishing, full-colour, beautifully curated, taboo-busting and boundary-breaking collection of stories about the sex lives of women of African descent, this is also a collection about these women's lives, struggles, and dreams. Sekyiamah allows the women to tell their own stories, in their own voices.



Out of the ashes

A ranger from the Virunga National Park climbs the slopes of the Nyiragongo volcano, north of Goma on Lake Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, on June 11, three weeks after the eruption of the volcano in May, which caused the death of about 30 people and the evacuation of nearly half a million residents of Goma. Photo: Alexis Huguet / AFP

THE QUIZ

0-7

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

8-14

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

15-20

"If that picture were to be taken today, I'd be in it for sure."



- 1_ Zambia's first president died this year. Who was he?
- 2_ Name all the people in the photo. Give yourself a point for each one.
- 3_ Dominic Ongwen is a former warlord from which country?
- 4_ Paul Rusesabagina had his life portrayed in which 2004 Hollywood film?
- 5_ Which country rolled out Covid-19 vaccines first on the continent: A) Egypt, B) Seychelles, or C) both.
- 6_ Which country banned Twitter earlier this year?
- 7_ Which head of state did we nickname "Covid's denier-in-chief"?
- 8_ Name the artist who won the Grammy Award for best global music album. (Hint: the album is *Twice as Tall*.)
- 9_ Which sport confederation did Patrice Motsepe become the president of?
- 10_ *The Ever Given* containment ship got stuck in which Egyptian waterway?
- 11_ Mount Nyiragongo erupted this year. In which country is it located?
- 12_ What is the name of the actress who was formerly called Thandie Newton?
- 13_ What is the northernmost regional state of Ethiopia?
- 14_ The trial for the murder of which former leader of Burkina Faso began this year?
- 15_ The Twitter hashtag #AlphaCondeChallenge was spurred on by the overthrow of which Guinean president?
- 16_ What is the continent's oldest liberation party?
- 17_ Which acclaimed Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet and essayist released his first novel in almost 50 years this year?
- 18_ Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue are the heads of state of Equatorial Guinea. Who is the father and who is the son?
- 19_ Did Damon Galgut or Abdulrazak Gurnah win this year's Nobel Prize for Literature?
- 20_ True or false: former president Jacob Zuma was sentenced to jail this year.

HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Will things get better?

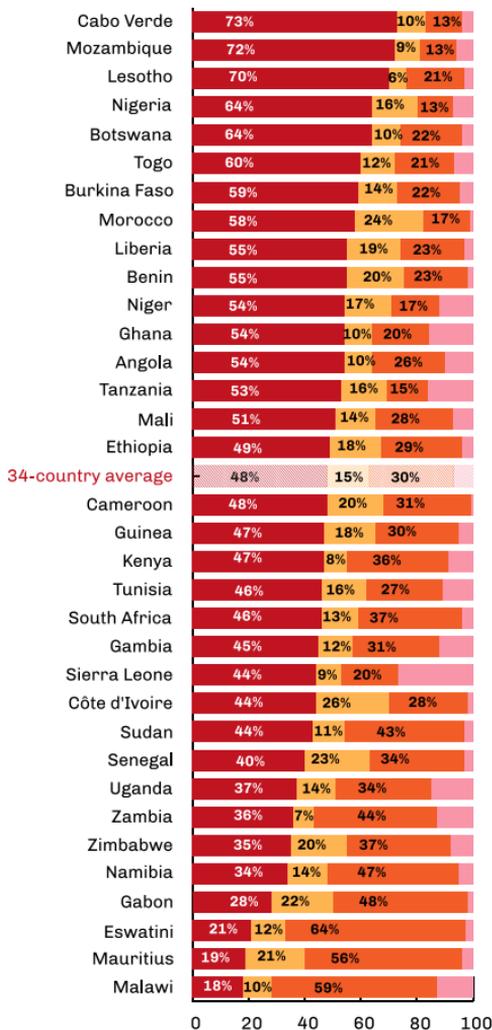
The year 2021 has not been the easiest ever, with the Covid-19 pandemic adding to the perennial challenges of getting your work done and getting the kids to school (if there's not a lockdown) and putting food on the table (even if there is). Will 2022 be better?

Africans may pride themselves on their optimism, but according to Afrobarometer surveys in 34 countries between late 2019 and mid-2021, fewer than half (48%) think economic conditions in their country will be “better” or “much better” in 12 months’ time. That’s a larger proportion than those who expect things to get worse (30%) or to stay the same (15%) – but it’s hardly a rosy outlook.

The wealthy are more optimistic than the poorest (53% vs 40%), as are the youth on the continent (52%), compared to their elders (44%-47%).

Of course, it’s all relative. If people are hopeful, is that because things aren’t looking too bad? Or is it because they’re at rock bottom and can’t get any worse?

Economic conditions will be:



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- 2 to 3 percentage points.

The A-Z of 2021



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Alpha Condé: One day you're hanging out with your friends at the African Union exchanging stories about changing constitutions. The next day you're removed from power in the least sexy way: a coup, carried out by a dashing military officer whose marital status you revealed on TV. The former president of Guinea remains under house arrest.

Big numbers: Are our leaders secretly competing to see who can win by the biggest margin? This year saw the Republic of Congo's Denis Sassou-Nguesso claim 88.4% of the vote, Djibouti's Ismail Guelleh received 97%, and in Benin Patrice Talon secured a second term with 86%.

Coups, and coups within coups: In addition to Alpha Condé's removal in Guinea, there was Mali's Colonel Assimi Goïta who, after removing Ibrahim Keita in 2020, announced he had fired the new transitional president and prime minister and was soon sworn in as interim president himself. Sudan's transitional prime minister Abdalla Hamdok, who came into office following the removal

of Omar al-Bashir, was subsequently removed from power by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in October – and then reinstated a month later. Failed coups were also reported in Sudan and Niger.

Daring journalism: Another year of brilliant work by fearless journalists from across the continent, from Kenya's John Allan-Namu to Niger's Samira Sabou to Uganda's Patience Atuhaire, to our very own contributors. African journalists brought us necessary stories during another difficult year.

Essence: Our favourite song of the year by Nigerian stars Wizkid and Tems (and yes okay there is a Justin Bieber version), has taken the world by storm. Meanwhile Burna Boy won his first Grammy, we fell in love with South Africa's DJ Uncle Waffles, and Angélique Kidjo, Black Coffee and Tiwa Savage brought us some incredible tracks!

Field Marshal Idriss Déby Itno: He was declared winner of a sixth term, and then hours later, authorities announced that President Déby of Chad had been killed "on the front line." Enter his son Mahamat Déby, who took over as president in a move critics branded a "constitutional coup". Déby Junior has also been upgraded to army general, meaning his uniform will now have five stars instead

of four! Meanwhile let's hope the people of Chad won't be left seeing stars instead of the elections he has promised!

Gender-Based Violence: It's been described as the shadow pandemic with the United Nations saying violence against women and girls has intensified since the outbreak of Covid-19. The hashtags, the days of activism and the speeches are not enough. Governments need to implement policies that not only protect women but also enable them to access adequately funded services for support. Enough is enough.

Heroes: Healthworkers, activists, whistle-blowers, teachers, those keeping cities, towns and villages running. You, dear reader, and your own personal heroes. The list is long, so be assured they exist among us. Often taken for granted, often putting their own lives at risk, often making sacrifices. They are heroes! But first and foremost they are human.

Internet disruptions: Ethiopia, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Uganda, Eswatini, South Sudan, the Republic of Congo and Senegal have all experienced internet disruptions this year. There is no justification for this, particularly during a pandemic when people are trying to stay in touch with loved ones, work from home and run internet-dependent businesses.

John Magufuli: The president of Tanzania died earlier this year, leaving a nation in shock. On one hand "the bulldozer" was known for his no-

nonsense approach; on the other his scepticism around Covid-19 and support of laws such as the banning of pregnant girls from school received much criticism. In his successor Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania got its first woman president. Her own response to Covid-19 has been a step in the right direction, but opposition and civil society groups say oppressive policies remain in place.

Keeping other people's stuff: France returned 26 stolen treasures to Benin. The University of Aberdeen returned a Benin Bronze to Nigeria. Ethiopia received artefacts that were looted at the Battle of Maqḍala in 1868. Germany said it will return looted Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. The British Museum meanwhile continues to be as silent as the stolen statues it has on display.

Literary victories: Abdulrazak Gurnah received the Nobel prize for literature and Damon Galgut won the Booker. Mohamed Mbougar Sarr won the Prix Goncourt, while fellow Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop received the Neustadt International Prize. Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi won the Jhalak prize and Zimbabwe's Tsitsi Dangarembga won the PEN Pinter prize and the 2021 peace prize of the German Book Trade.

More years in power: Denis Sassou-Nguesso extended his 36-year rule in the Republic of Congo with another election victory, Ismail Omar Guelleh began his fifth term in Djibouti while President Museveni got his sixth!

Netflix, Cannes et al: African films, documentaries and TV shows garnered much praise this year! *The Gravediggers Wife* by Finnish-Somali filmmaker Khadar Ayderus Ahmed premiered at Cannes Critics Week and is Somalia's first Oscar Entry. Kenyan documentary *I am Samuel* garnered much praise as did *Lingui* by Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun.

Opposition: Alas, many opposition members and leaders faced hardship this year: Tanzanian opposition party Chadema's chairman Freeman Mbowe was arrested on terrorism charges. Bobi Wine reported that his house was surrounded by security during the elections, while a court in Benin sentenced opposition leader Reckya Madougou to 20 years in jail for "financing terrorism".

Pandora Papers: Among those featured in the document leak was President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, whose family has allegedly been "accumulating a fortune behind offshore corporate veils". The papers also revealed that Congo's President Sassou-Nguesso low-key owns a company controlling diamond mines. Neither has addressed the report, despite Kenyatta promising to do so. Can't blame them really, they're probably very distracted. Imagine opening the report and then... "ohhhh shiny diamond!"

Quick-acting officials: Aside from Covid-19, this year saw Ebola outbreaks in DRC and Guinea. In both cases health officials across the continent

jumped into action to manage the outbreak. The folks at Africa Centres for Disease Control have also continued to do a sterling job amid this pandemic.

Regional blocs: Ecowas has been busy demanding Mali and Guinea return to civilian rule following their respective coups. SADC leaders seem to enjoy summits as they held a fair few before finally deploying troops to Mozambique. They did however call for lifting of sanctions on Zimbabwe and sent a delegation to Eswatini. The African Union suspended Sudan and Guinea, frequently "called" for things in various countries and somehow granted Israel observer status.

Sporting prowess: At the Olympics, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge won gold in the men's marathon while Faith Kipyegon grabbed gold in the 1,500m. Namibia's Christine Mboma secured silver in the women's 200m, Uganda's Peruth Chemutai came first in the women's 300m steeplechase and Joshua Cheptegei got his gold in the men's 5,000m. Nigeria's Latifat Tijani, Bose Omolayo and Folashade Oluwafemiayo won gold medals in powerlifting at the Paralympics while 19-year-old Ntando Mahlangu returned to South Africa with two gold medals!

Transfer of power: Zambia's opposition candidate Hakainde Hichilema was elected president, bringing an end to Edgar Lungu's reign. Sure old Ed has left behind a little (lot) of debt, but the main thing is, he left. In Niger, Mohamed

Bazoum was sworn in as president, succeeding Mahamadou Issoufou, who stepped down after serving two terms. Opposition candidate José Maria Neves won Cape Verde's presidential election after Jorge Carlos Fonseca completed his two terms in office.

Unhappy neighbours: Strained relations between Kenya and Somalia, who finally restored diplomatic relations earlier this year, and tensions between Algeria and Morocco are at an all time high with the severing of diplomatic ties. And of course no resolution has been reached over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which has Egypt and Ethiopia at each others' throats.

Vaccine apartheid: In March 2021 Africa CDC Director told *The Continent* "Europe is trying to vaccinate 80%. The US is trying to vaccinate everybody. They will finish vaccinating, impose travel restrictions and then Africa becomes 'the continent of Covid.'" Boy, was he right. Western countries hoarded vaccines, leaving little behind for everyone else. Then they "donated" some of the jabs to African countries. When some of these countries had to destroy doses that were close to expiry when they were donated, western media blamed it on vaccine hesitancy. Amid all this came the omicron variant, which was shown to be present in many countries, yet Britain, Europe and the US promptly banned travellers from a range of African nations. Perhaps this actually belongs under T for trash.

Worrying situations: Conflict, insecurity and violence leading to displacement, suffering and crisis in the Sahel, Mozambique, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Mozambique, Darfur and parts of Ethiopia and the DRC. Famine in Madagascar, drought in some parts of the Horn of Africa. The list goes on. Action to defuse, stabilise and save lives is needed, and quickly.

Xtra judicial killings: Another year in which we've seen protesters killed in countries like Sudan and Eswatini. And six police officers in Kenya are accused of killing Benson Njiru and Emmanuel Mutura, two young men who were arrested for allegedly being out after curfew.

Young people: The future of the continent! We saw the likes of climate activists Vanessa Nakate and Oladosu Adenike shine at COP26. Senegalese born TikTok star Khaby Lame has gone from success to success, as has Elsa Majimbo. Young Africans are bringing their creativity, talent and skills to all sectors and, for that reason alone, this is a continent to watch.

Zzzing leaders: What other explanation can be given for those not listening to their populace, than that they are asleep? For almost two months the people of Sudan have been holding protests demanding a return to civilian rule. Meanwhile pro-democracy protests have been taking place in Eswatini. Both countries have seen protesters killed, tear gassed and injured. It's time to wake up. ■

THE BIG PICTURE

Red-letter day: Sahrawi women dance in a parade marking the 45th anniversary of the declaration of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, at a camp outside Tindouf in Algeria. The republic is not formally recognised by the United Nations, but it is a full member of the African Union. Over 75% of its claimed Western Sahara territories are held by Morocco. Photo: Ryad Kramdi/AFP



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