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Freed Canadian woman home from West Africa says her heart is with victims of Covid-19



Edith Blais, a Quebecer from Sherbrooke, who recently gained her freedom in the West African nation of Burkina Faso after being abducted, says despite her ordeal her heart is with victims of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"We are all in this together," she said, noting that "life is full of battles...I just left one battle and I can only say my sympathies are with families losing their loved ones because of this pandemic."

Blais was abducted along with her Italian boyfriend Luca Taccheto and taken to Mali, according to Human Rights Watch.

Areas between Burkina Faso and Mali are rife with Islamists abducting Westerners and their fellow countrymen and women accused of not adhering to the strict tenets of Islam. In Mali, for example, African and French troops have been battling for years to keep the ISIS-and-Al Qaeda-backed fundamentalists at bay as they ravage villages and disrupting lives, especially those of local musicians who have been banned from playing African native music.



Femi Kuti: No longer performing this year in Toronto

The much-anticipated performance of Femi Kuti, the eldest son of the legendary Fela Kuti of Nigeria, will no longer take place in Toronto due to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Billed for Opera House June 23, 2020, the Femi Kuti organisation said his Toronto cancellation is part of his worldwide suspension of tour dates around the world for the rest of the entire year. He told BBC Pidgin Service in Lagos, Nigeria, where he resides, "it's also an opportunity for us all to take a break and be with our families. Sometimes some of these unforeseen circumstances are a blessing in disguise", he said, stressing the importance of family in our lives cannot be overemphasised. "This might be a good time to regroup and relearn life."

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African grocery stores staying open across Canada during pandemic, owners say native food more vital now than ever before current crisis



Sani Bello and wife, owners of Ghanacan African Market in Montreal

African supermarkets, like their essential service provider-counterparts across Canada, are staying open during the ongoing Covid-19 emergency retrictions.

But for thousands of the teeming African-born immigrants and their children in many cities and towns in the country, some grocers say they cannot emphasise a more auspicious time to make do with their native cuisines than now.

"This is a great time to leave the commercialised lunches and dinners alone and just opt for your typical African cuisine in Canada," says Sani Piameng Bello.

Owner of the Ghanacan Market grocery store in Montreal, Quebec, Bello told the African World News that the current shutdown of non-essential services due to the pandemic is indeed a "revelation



Doris Attakora

of sorts for me", noting that news of the link between one's previous health condition and the way the virus affects the body "should present some kind of warning to us that we must take care of ourselves with healthy meals at all times.

"I say that because African foods are usually organic foods and they're healthy for you at all times.

Ebenezer Afare, owner of the Afro Caribbean Foodstore in North York could not agree more.

"Our African organic foods should by themselves be major attractions for these times. That's something special we have. We are the only stores that can boast more than 90 percent organic volume in inventory, and these are items we need especially at this time to boost our immunity. You're what you eat, you know," he said.

Ngozi Ezeasor, owner of Noi African Supermarket in Toronto, also agrees.

"In times like this when you're hunkering down in your home and with nothing much to do during the day, I think eating light foods such as prppered soups is the way to go.

"I am so happy my supermarket could be of use to the community at this time. I feel useful to people, I feel grocers are helping people stay alive and not feel the pain of

isolation because they can at least get out of their houses for a purpose, and when they get home they also have a purpose: cooking. When you're cooking your meals for yourself and your family, everybody gets busy and have something to do at home. It takes away some of that boredom," she explains.

Bello stressed he is happy to be part of a relief to many in these troubling times, adding that those in industry considered essential service providers are actually working harding than before.

"Firstly, we have to abide by the stringent guidelines necessary for this peiod to flatten the curve, keep a watchful eye on compliance and do so many things we've never had to do before. These are challenging times for sure," he said, "but we are up to the task and I am happy to be part of putting food on the table for many families in the African community in Montreal."

"We are here to assist our African brothers and sisters always," says Doris Kodua Attakora in Ottawa, owner of the African Queen store in Cana-



African yams inside Noi African Supermarket, Toronto

d's capital city. "I derive a lot of pleasure from serving my people especially now that things are difficult for everyone. I can see in my customers' eyes a lot of anxiety but we Africans deliver therapies to each other by the

"This is a great time to leave the commercialised lunches and dinners alone and just opt for your typical African cuisine in Canada,"

— Sani Piameng Bello.

way we speak to one another. It's our culture and a part of doing this business is helping each other through proverbs in our African languages," Attakora explains. "These wise words we give each other as gifts are even more relevant now," she said.

Three Toronto men to be sentenced next week in death of Nigerian –born Ogba

Three Toronto men whose adult lives have been spent in gangs will be sentenced next week for the killing of Nigerian-born immigrant Nnamdi Ogba.

Ogba was minding his business walking to his car when three men waylaid him and shot him in his back. That was in 2018.

On the night of Ogba’s death, Trevaughan Mil-

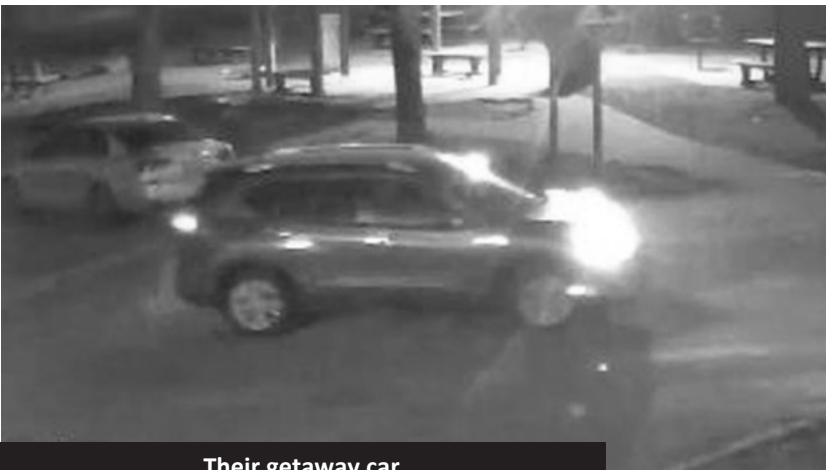
lslow were driving around the Scarlettwood Court area of Etobicoke “looking for someone to kill as part of an ongoing rivalry,” police revealed, according to court documents. All three men belonged



Footage from surveillance cameras caught the three men



26 year old Ogba



Their getaway car

ler, Abdullahi Mohamed and Abdirahman

to a Toronto street gang, which was in conflict with another gang operating in the Scarlettwood Road area.

The three men spotted Ogba before Miller and Mohamed both pulled out a handgun and fired shots at him from behind at around 11 p.m.

Ogba, who was walking to his parked car after visiting with a teammate from his recreational soccer team, was struck by “several bullets” in the back and

died at the scene, police said.

The two men then got back into the awaiting getaway vehicle, being driven by Islow, and fled the scene.

Police said the men showed no remorse for their actions in the aftermath of the deadly shooting as they “celebrated the killing” and checked news stories about it.



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Analysis

From The Conversation

By Francis Nyamnjoh



Emmanuel N'Djoké Dibango - Manu Dibango - will live forever thanks to his Afropolitan sounds, and to the fact that many artists in Africa and beyond are deeply indebted to him.

He was a man of legendary generosity of spirit and talent, with an accommodating heart that sought to bridge the local and the global with creativity and innovation in song and music. His album *Soul Makossa* was of such artistic genius that even a global superstar like Michael Jackson couldn't resist sampling from it to enrich his own album, *Thriller*.

In his 1994 biography, Dibango describes himself as "Négropolitain". It's a term that would later be adopted and popularised as "Afropolitanism" by others enthralled by his idea of grounded cosmopolitanism. He coined the term to capture his identity as Afro-European or

African and European at one and the same time.

He saw himself - and insisted on being seen - as "a man between two cultures, two environments". His music could not be confined to either, without losing its complexity and richness. It was the fruit of his diverse influences. His nimble fingers, voice and intellect were averse to any artificial barriers or attempts to contain the flow of the river of musical humanity.

Born on December 12 in 1933 in Douala, Cameroon, Dibango was sent by his parents to study in France when he was only 15 years old. He arrived in France bearing a gift of three kilograms of coffee from his parents, for his host.

In France he met Francis Bebey, another musician from his native Douala, with whom he formed a

band and began to experiment with different modern instruments, such as the piano and the saxophone. He later relocated to Brussels where he met his wife to be, Marie-Josée (whom he would fondly call Coco). It was also in Brussels that his music career began to blossom through fruitful contacts. Two in particular stand out: Joseph Kabasélé and African Jazz, who introduced him to "the cha-cha and the rumba, the two breasts nourishing Zairean music", and who, in 1961, also invited him to Zaïre (today's Democratic Republic of Congo). The result was his first record, *African Soul*, "a mixture of jazz, popular music, and rumba".

Dibango's life was exemplary in its resilience, combativeness and ingenuity in mobilising his creativity to contain or at least confront political and cultural repression. His music brought him worldwide fame. But he did not feel particularly fulfilled in the land of his birth.

He spent the best part of his life in a determined struggle to win recognition for music as art and musicians as artists in his motherland and elsewhere in Africa. These were contexts of strongman politics, personality cults and repeated frustrations by politicians, sometimes in cassock. Notwithstanding censorship, jealousy, penury, and repeated frustration and disappointment as an artist, Dibango refused to be deterred.

He returned to Cameroon from Zaïre in 1963, issuing the album *Nasengina*. This was his only piece constructed purely from the indigenous Cameroonian *makossa*.

Dibango was appreciated by ordinary Cameroonians. But he hated the fact that politicians kept

his artistic creativity under close surveillance. He was disenchanted with authorities that did not allow people "to fantasise" and "to dream", and who forced everyone to talk "in cautious whispers" and to be "wary of everyone else".

In 1964, disappointed in "this harmful atmosphere", Dibango closed down his club and abandoned all dreams of opening a musical conservatory or arts institute. He left Cameroon for France after barely 16 months back home.

Still, he could not bring himself to give up on Cameroon entirely. He would pay brief return visits from the early 1980s onwards. His desire "to forge a unified image of Cameroon, representing all the musical currents in the country" received rare facilitation from the Minister of Culture who happened to be his friend, and resulted in a three-record set, *Fleurs Musicales du Cameroun*.

But his desire to project himself as "this famous Cameroonian musician heard everywhere but in Cameroon" would be met with the same contradictions, making the air "unbreathable" in what he described as his "last African adventure".

He felt cursed that he "couldn't create something here in Cameroon". He found it ironic that Côte d'Ivoire, with the blessing of then President Houphouët-Boigny, could entrust him with the task of heading the *Orchestre de la Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne*, while Cameroon could not even take seriously his expertise as a professional musician of world renown.

Together with other expatriate African musical talents in France, Dibango released *Tam-Tam pour l'Ethiopie*, to raise funds for famine-stricken Ethiopia between 1983 and 1985. The initiative served as "proof that Africans too could take concrete action" vis-à-vis their own predicaments. And he personally took the proceeds from the album to refugee camps in Ethiopia to ensure that

'For once, the money wouldn't be misused by the government in power'.

Although the situation has improved significantly since publication of his biography in 1994, Dibango's music is still much more appreciated abroad - as "world music" - than in Cameroon.

Despite the government's attempts to impose creative inertia upon him in the early 1960s, Dibango was given the honour of composing the theme song of the 1972 Africa Cup of Nations football finals hosted by Cameroon. In 1988, he received a decoration as a Knight of Order and of Valour. However, as Dibango observed, "the authorities could decorate me with all the medals they liked" without doing much to stop "the descent into hell" for artistic creativity in a country where it is not uncommon to mobilise the military to raid clubs. Or to impose entertainment taxes with the intention of crippling artists who are perceived to be critical or unpalatable.

Manu Dibango died after contracting COVID-19 at the age of 86 in Paris, where he felt "condemned to be an expatriate".

Quibble as they may in Cameroon, Dibango leaves behind a towering record of Afropolitan musical genius of truly global magnitude, to feed and inspire many a generation to come. Manu Dibango does not have to be in Cameroon, in Africa or physically in the world to continue to do things of relevance.

Francis Nyamnjoh, Professor, Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town

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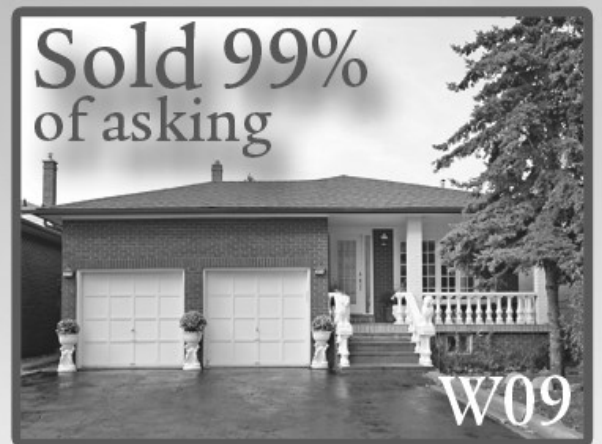
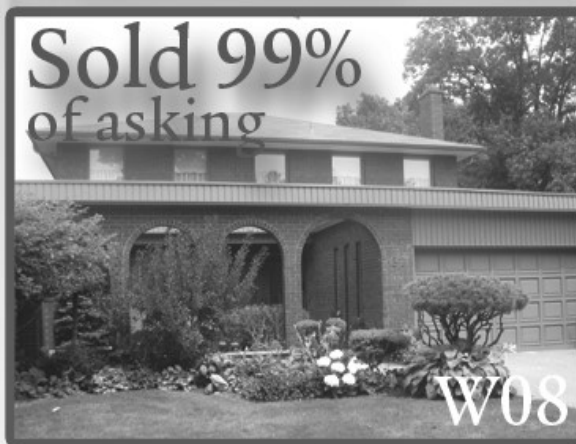
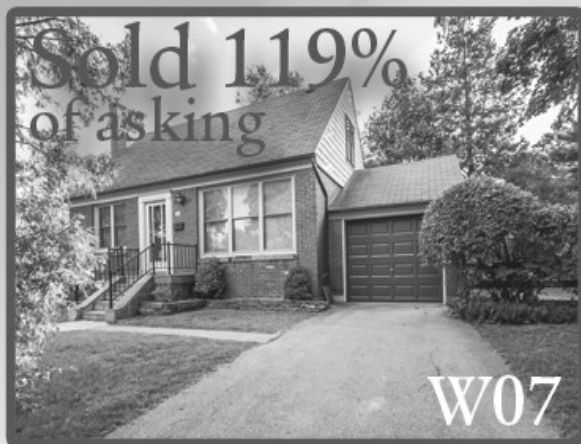
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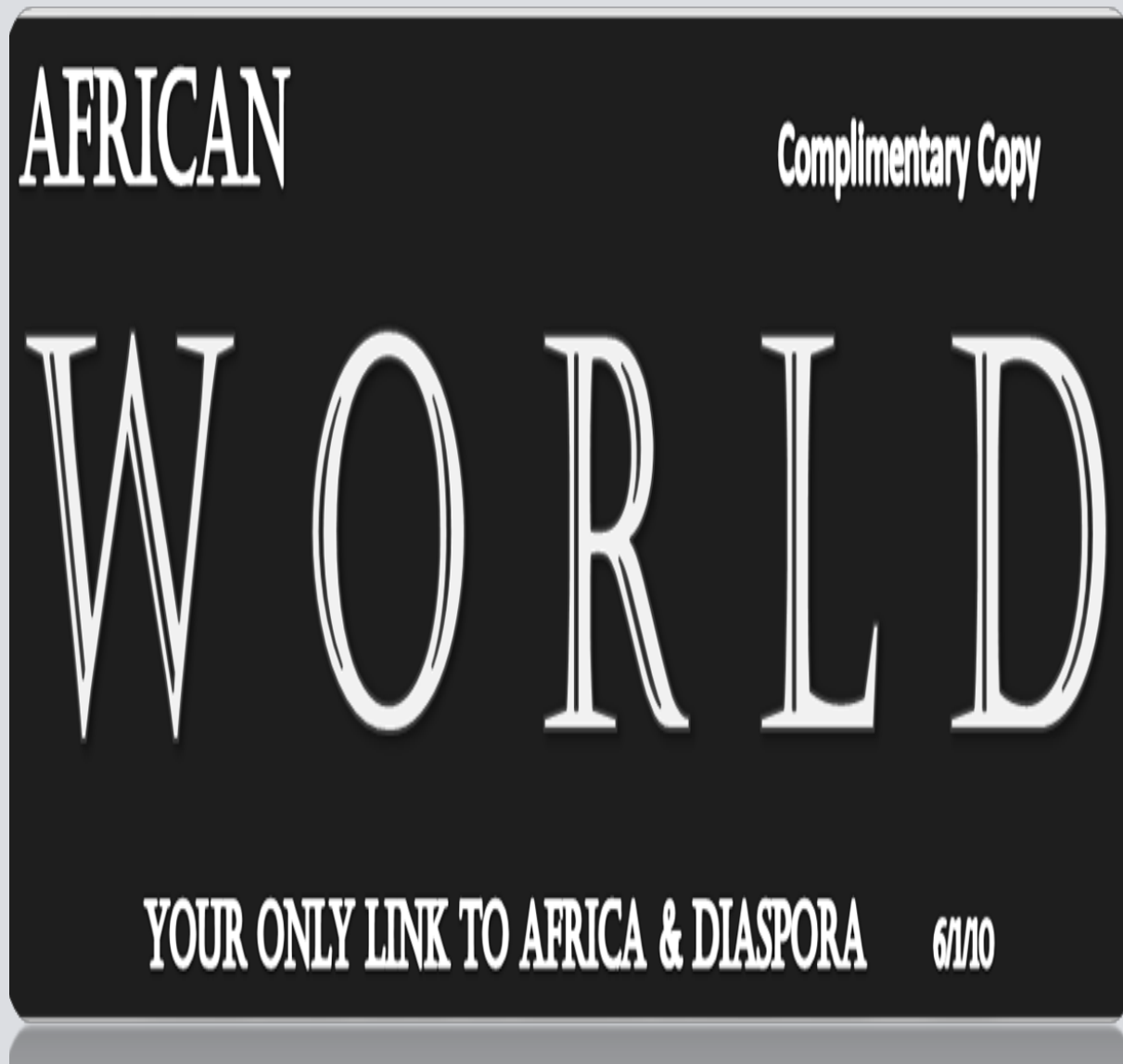
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