

## Comment

# Vaccine apartheid spreading the same strain of racism

Not only do Black lives not matter in Canada, in interpreting the actions of the Liberal government, they're worth less around the world.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



OTTAWA—Tell me anti-blackness is global without telling me anti-blackness is global.

On Nov. 26, researchers in South Africa detected a new addition to the coronavirus family, a variant named omicron (B.1.1.529). It was first detected in Botswana but identified by South African researchers, after a rapid spike in cases in the city of Pretoria. In just two short weeks, the variant had reached outbreak status, with cases detected in Belgium, Botswana, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, and the United Kingdom, meaning it's already on its march towards

global domination as the variant of fear for 2022.

Happy New Year. This variant is scarier than delta. In a primer by Al Jazeera, the new omicron variant is more transmissible than previous iterations of COVID-19. "Experts believe there are at least 50 mutations on the new variant, with 32 mutations on the spike protein, the part of the virus that enters human cells." However, little is known as to how that translates into physical implications, as compared to previous variants. Of great concern is the potential for reinfections.

The research continues, particularly since South Africa is one of the leading researchers on coronavirus in the world. This is because for the last few decades, South Africa has been battling both HIV and TB and has some of the best resources and health networks on the continent. According to Science.org, this gives South African researchers an advantage in fighting the coronavirus: "Infection control measures are similar for COVID-19 and TB ... because both seem to spread through exhaled droplets. That means health care workers are familiar with the protective gear they need to treat suspected COVID-19 patients. And South Africa's government is repurposing the aggressive 'find, treat, and prevent' strategy that's

key to its HIV response .... It began to send mobile COVID-19 testing clinics into densely populated areas this week to identify cases and contacts." This article was written in April 2020. Although Canadian provinces did set up drive-throughs, that approach is a narrow one, which doesn't reach those most exposed and/or most marginalized.

I see Canadian excellence is alive and well.

The political response to the detection of omicron was as expected from the Liberal government: swift and anti-Black. By imposing a travel ban on African countries that will do little to stop the spread of the variant, it left out the rich countries (read: white) that have also detected the variant. Of the aforementioned countries who detected the strain, Belgium, Botswana, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, and the United Kingdom, only one was hit with the travel ban. Because only one is in Africa. Because only one is a majority Black country.

(In true clapback fashion, Hong Kong has just banned Canadian travellers over omicron.)

Eventually, the South African variant will soon lead some media outlets to dub this iteration of COVID as "The African Virus" to stoke the omnipresent Africa-is-a-basket-case-narrative, just as they did with the first COVID iteration



Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos is pictured during a Nov. 26 press conference. The political response to the detection of omicron was as expected from the Liberal government: swift and anti-Black, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

when it became known as the "China virus" or "Kung-Flu". (Notice that the U.K. strain didn't lead COVID to be called, "The British Virus" or "COVID Colonialist.") It's the same noose of the characterizations of weakness, stupidity, and incivility that have plagued the continent since colonialization. It's that underlying white supremacist belief that led WE Charity to raise money for building homes in Kenya for the poor, feeble, and dotish Africans when they allegedly laid minimal bricks, in the name of White Saviourism. It reveals itself in the eco-colonialism of Prince William who blames African women having too many babies for African wildlife to survive, echoing 2017 comments that, "Africa's rapidly growing human

population is predicted to more than double by 2050—a staggering increase of three and a half million people per month. There is no question that this increase puts wildlife and habitat under enormous pressure."

Abolish the monarchy.

The truth is that vaccine apartheid is the real problem. The lack of equity in the distribution of vaccines due to patents and money, as well as vaccine hoarding by rich countries, including Canada, means that the Global South is largely unvaccinated, making them highly susceptible for mutations. Basically, rich countries used their power and might to get vaccines for themselves, starved the Global South, and turned around and blamed the Global South for not having high vaccination rates. And to make matters worse, even if those in poorer countries do get vaccinated, if they haven't received the Cadillac cocktail of Pfizer or Moderna, they're banned from entering those rich countries anyway. What a racket of epic white supremacist proportions.

Never forget that Canada raided the COVAX kitty, meant to provide vaccines for those same countries struggling with vaccination rates now. Never forget that Canada was the only G7 country to do so. And it was all done for short-term political gain on the backs of Africans' lives. Not only do Black lives not matter in Canada, in interpreting the actions of the Liberal government, they're worth less around the world.

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# The Quebec Liberal Party struggles for its soul

The Quebec Liberals' winning formula in the past was to be federalist and nationalist, be good stewards of the economy, keep a window open to the world, encourage basic rights, welcome immigrants, and encourage business to thrive.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—Dominique Anglade is the eternal optimist. Coming out of its weekend policy convention in Quebec

City, the Quebec Liberal Party gave her a ringing endorsement to develop a platform focused on the environment and a left-wing tilt to the economy. She believes this platform is her road to victory.

On the environment, the Liberals are calling for Quebec to nationalize hydrogen energy and reduce greenhouse gases 45 per cent by 2030. On the economy, Anglade is calling for companies to share profits with employees, rely on domestic suppliers, and emphasize clean technologies.

Normally, the chief opposition party is thought of as a government in waiting. But in the unyielding politics of today's Quebec, it would be impossible to find someone willing to put money on Anglade's Liberals beating François Legault and his Coalition Avenir Québec next year. It is unfortunate: Anglade is an engineer, and the brilliant daughter of Haitian immigrants. She speaks four languages, including German. She is the poster child for modern Quebec.

The problem is Legault's mix of charm and authoritarianism has gained the nationalist vote, and neutralized the moribund Parti Québécois and the upstart left-wing Québec solidaire. He has overwhelmingly won over the sup-

port of conservative francophones in the rural regions of Quebec, whose votes count disproportionately more than those in the cities. He has two pillars for his government: Bill 21, the so-called "secularism law" that discriminates against practicing Muslims, Sikhs and Jews; and Bill 96, his proposed language law. Never mind the thousands of Quebecers who died during the pandemic due to incompetence, or the lack of a cogent government strategy.

The Liberals, on the other hand, are dependent on urban voters, especially in Montreal. Within cosmopolitan Montreal, the anglophone and ethnic communities have almost always skewed Liberal, and federalist. Anglade's dilemma is therefore this: appeal to anglophones and lose francophone votes, or seek out young people, nationalists, and those in the regions with a stronger pro-French message and gain seats.

Wading into this political minefield is former provincial minister of intergovernmental affairs Benoit Pelletier. Pelletier, who teaches law at the University of Ottawa, and who recently recovered from a two-month-long battle with COVID-19, wrote a lengthy article in *La Presse* last week entitled "The Quebec Liberal party has to find its soul."

In it, he offered Anglade some advice on how to win the next election. He proposed Quebec emphasize its nationhood at home and abroad, press the French language everywhere, and promote its ability to decide its own constitutional future. He suggested to be a federalist means to support greater autonomy for Quebec, and that while rights are important, "they should not be an obsession."

Pelletier is a contradiction: he sees himself as a great intellectual, and then comes forward with all the most hackneyed arguments one could imagine. He passes himself off as a federalist, only to be revealed to be what the late constitutional scholar and senator Eugene Forsey called a "hemi-demi-semi" separatist.

I heard Pelletier offer similar ideas at a McGill conference as a minister many years ago. He proposed Quebec pursue an international policy that would be the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine on steroids. The doctrine, named for late Liberal minister Paul Gérin-Lajoie, posits Quebec has the right to work in the international sphere in any area in which it is sovereign. For Pelletier, that means Quebec should be able to negotiate treaties on the world stage in health, labour, and education.

When he proposed that at McGill, he was eviscerated by longtime diplomat Paul Heinbecker, among others. Indeed, at Global Affairs, while consultation with provinces was primordial, unless the doctrine caused serious problems between Ottawa and Quebec, we just ignored it.

His final point, to throw out rights and established conventions because they are not politically convenient, is morally bankrupt. In short, Pelletier's scrambled thoughts do not constitute a strategy.

The Quebec Liberals' winning formula in the past, from Jean Lesage to Robert Bourassa to Philippe Couillard, was to be federalist and nationalist, be good stewards of the economy, keep a window open to the world, encourage basic rights, welcome immigrants, and encourage business to thrive. It still makes sense, and Anglade should recognize that, no matter what warhorses like Pelletier have to say.

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