

The Continent



Crafting
beauty and
calm in a year
of chaos



COVER “We live in a perpetually burning building, and what we must save from it, all the time, is love,” wrote Tennessee Williams, the celebrated 20th century playwright. “Love for each other and the love that we pour into the art we feel compelled to share: being a parent; being a writer; being a painter; being a friend.” In our penultimate edition of the year, we search for what we would save from the dumpster fire that 2025 has been. We find plenty: Temba Bavuma’s form and leadership of South African cricket (p11); Danai Gurira’s love for Zimbabwean drama (p13); Wanjiru Wanjohi’s *Disconnect* Saturdays in Nairobi (p18); communal nuptials in northern Nigeria (p20); and gaming with friends across the globe (p27).

Inside

- 7 AU:** All Billy Ruto wants is peace – and a billion bucks
- 8 Kenya:** Court will help the BBC pursue evidence on BAT graft
- 9 Malawi:** Who let the dogs out?
- 11 Sports:** Which country currently has the best men’s cricket team in the world?
- 30 Data:** A lot of Africans still support the death penalty
- 31 Quiz:** Remember the last king of Scotland?
- 32 Column:** The path out of our perfect storm begins with self-love

Help shape *The Continent*:

Last year over 1,300 of you filled out our annual survey. Those answers helped shape this newspaper and guided us in how we do what we do. We also just love hearing why you are part of this human-to-human global community. Do the right thing and give us nine minutes for this, our sixth annual survey. Click [here](#).

➡ EMAIL US

If your media house would like to republish stories from *The Continent*, email read@thecontinent.org. Syndication is free for partner publications in Africa.

THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: JEWEL SAMAD/AFP

Dope pope: Leo XIV (no relation to Charli XCX) makes waves in Catholicism's Brat era.

RELIGION

Leo eyes Africa for papal peripatations

Pope Leo plans to visit Africa in 2026 to encourage dialogue between Christianity and Islam. His pastoral visit is likely to include Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Algeria. There he plans to trace the footsteps of St Augustine, the North African Christian who inspired the Augustinian priestly order the pope belongs to. The African Catholic population grew from about a million in 1910 to 265-million in 2024, according to the National Catholic Register. By 2050, a third of all global Catholics will be African, as congregations shrink elsewhere, so the church needs to lock down its revenue generators.

ALGERIA

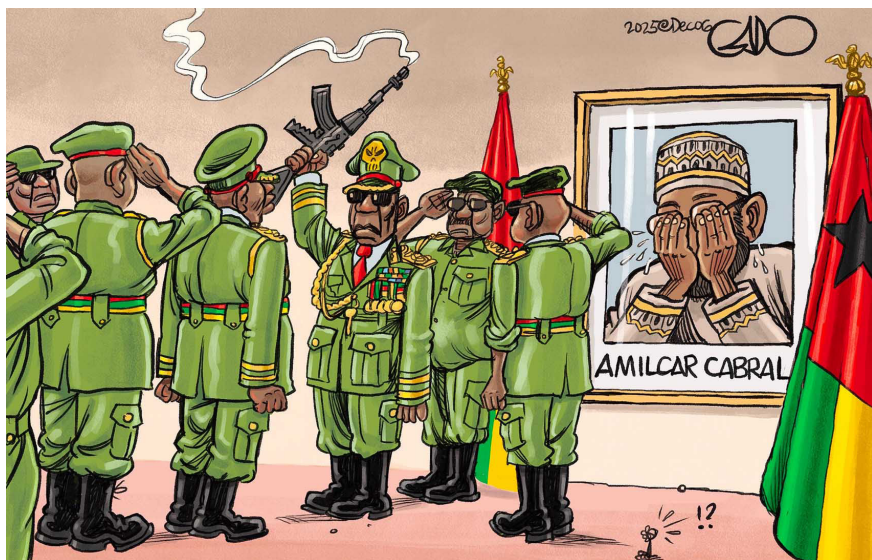
Sports journalist jailed for 'glorifying terrorism'

An Algerian appeal court has upheld a seven-year prison term imposed on French journalist Christophe Gleizes. He was arrested in May in Kabylia, east of Algiers, while reporting on Algerian football club Jeunesse Sportive de Kabylie, the *New Arab* reports. The region is home to the Amazigh Kabyle indigenous people. Algiers designated their movement for self-determination a terror group in 2021. Prosecutors characterised Gleizes' reporting as "glorifying terrorism".

NAMIBIA

The pandemic isn't over for the tourism sector

Namibia received 1.25-million tourists in 2024, according to a report released by the tourism ministry on Wednesday. While that is a nearly 46% surge in arrivals compared to 2023, it is just 79% of the number of visitors in 2019, before the Covid pandemic. To encourage more visits, the Namibia home affairs ministry relaxed visa rules in May, making travellers from 28 African countries eligible for visas on arrival. The policy also covers 95 countries from over various oceans.



Lost legacy: Guinea-Bissau's founding father Amílcar Cabral is celebrated as one Africa's greatest political thinkers. His countrymen don't seem to read him much, however.

DRC

The presidents' new peace treaty

In Washington DC on Thursday, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and Democratic Republic of the Congo President Felix Tshisekedi signed a peace agreement that host United States President Donald Trump called "historic". The Kinshasa government and Rwanda-backed M23 rebels are fighting over North and South Kivu. The Armed Conflict Event and Location Database has recorded 155 incidents of armed clashes, territory grabs, shelling, sexual violence, and abductions in this area since June.

UNITED STATES

Trump slams door on African asylum seekers

The US has paused asylum, green card, and other immigration applications by citizens of 19 countries it designated as being "of concern" earlier this year. It said the move was triggered by last week's shooting of two US soldiers by an Afghan national but an immigration lawyer told *ABC News* that a similar policy had been released two days before the incident. The countries include Burundi, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Libya, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Togo.

GUINEA-BISSAU

Where in the world is Umaro Sissoco?

Guinea-Bissau's ousted president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, is now in the Republic of the Congo after his military officers seized power in a coup. Embaló first sought refuge in Senegal. His opponent in the failed election, Fernando Dias, was offered protection by Nigeria at its embassy in the capital Bissau, *Reuters* reports. The coup leaders suspended the electoral process, closed borders, and imposed a curfew. But speculation continues to swirl that the coup was a sham, orchestrated at Embaló's own behest to block election results from being announced.

SOUTH AFRICA

Russian merc fiasco claims Zuma scalp

Duduzile Zuma-Sambudla, daughter of former president Jacob Zuma, has resigned from Parliament amid allegations she lured 17 South African men into fighting as mercenaries in Russia's war on Ukraine. According to *Al Jazeera*, police are investigating claims the men were promised security training but sent to the front lines instead. Zuma-Sambudla's party, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party, says her resignation is not an admission of guilt. South African officials say they are working to secure the men's safe return.



RIP: Cameroonian opposition leader Anicet Ekane had died in detention, aged 74.

CAMEROON

Opposition stalwart dies in detention

Cameroonian opposition figure Anicet Ekane has died in detention five weeks after his arrest, his lawyers and party said. The *BBC* reports the 74-year-old coalition leader, who backed Issa Tchiroma Bakary in October's disputed election, died on Monday. Ekane's party accuses authorities of denying him medical care, a claim the government disputes. Ekane was arrested in October and accused of hostility against the state, incitement to revolt, and insurrection. No official cause of death has been announced.

MOZAMBIQUE

Risky business in Cabo Delgado

Britain has withdrawn its \$1.15-billion backing for the TotalEnergies-led Mozambique liquefied natural gas project, citing increased security risks since 2020. The \$20-billion project was halted in 2021 by the insurgency in the region, and continues to face safety concerns and budgetary disputes, *Reuters* reports. UK Export Finance said ending its support best protects taxpayers. TotalEnergies says the project can proceed without British or Dutch financing as most funding is secured and gas production already contracted.

NIGERIA

Defence minister quits as abductions soar

Mohammed Badaru Abubakar has vacated his post as defence minister, reportedly for health reasons, amid rising insecurity in the country, including mass kidnappings. The UN says these incidents have affected more than 400 people in the past three weeks. The government says insurgents and criminal groups are to blame. More than 250 schoolchildren are still missing in Niger State. President Bola Tinubu accepted Abubakar's resignation and plans major police recruitment as the country's security crises persist.

LIBYA

Germany bundles El Hishri off to the ICC

Germany has transferred Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri to the International Criminal Court for prosecution. Prosecutors allege the Libyan national oversaw or ordered murder, torture, rape and other sexual violence at Tripoli's Mitiga prison between 2015 and 2020. Detainees were allegedly held in degrading conditions, subjected to brutal interrogations and prolonged abuse, the *AP* reports. El Hishri, who was arrested in Germany in July on a sealed ICC warrant, arrived at The



PHOTO: ICC-CPI

Nouvelle Hague: Khaled Mohamed Ali El Hishri appears at the ICC on 3 December.

Hague on Monday. Judges will hold an initial hearing before deciding whether the case proceeds to trial.

NEWS

AFRICAN UNION

Give peace a billion

Kenya's president wants more money – for multinational security interventions – but not from the usual donors.

KIRI RUPIAH IN LUANDA

AT THE African Union-European Union summit in Luanda last week, Kenyan President William Ruto urged his peers to shun charity, but also proposed increasing the continent's Peace Fund to \$1-billion. It currently sits at about \$610-million.

His plan: "Diversifying contributions" to the continental bloc by including African financial institutions and the private sector among its funding partners. The result, he said, would be "a more predictable, credible, and sustainably financed peace and security system" in Africa.

The Kenyan president is in position to change how the body operates. In February 2024, he was appointed champion of AU institutional reforms, taking over from Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who initiated them in 2016. The reform process is meant to make AU institutions more

efficient and better fit for purpose.

At home however, Ruto's enthusiasm for international peace interventions has been a hard sell.

In 2022, one of his first moves as president was to deploy nearly 1,000 soldiers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of an East African mission. It cost taxpayers nearly \$37-million in the first six months, sparking pushback from opposition MPs.

His 2024 decision to send 800 police officers to Haiti proved even more controversial, especially after Kenyans learned it had cost them at least \$35-million in the first nine months. Worse, other countries dragged their feet about joining: according to the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, only about 40% of the pledged 2,500 police officers had shown up by May 2025, most of them Kenyans.

This October, the UN Security Council belatedly agreed to expand the Kenyan-led effort to a 5,000-strong "gang suppression force" that will include police and soldiers from various countries.

Maram Mahdi, a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, applauds Ruto's ambition to expand the AU peace fund. But, she adds: "There has to be a dual focus on adequately financing the Peace Fund and disbursing it in a sustainable way." ■

KENYA

Legal ruling buys *BBC* time to find its smoking gun

The landmark court order sets a precedent for how Kenyan cases proceed when vital evidence lies abroad.

ROBERT AMALEMBE IN NAIROBI

KENYA'S appeal court has paused defamation proceedings against the *BBC*, after a ruling that may redefine how Kenyan litigants and defendants obtain evidence from outside the country.

At the centre of the dispute is a 2015 *BBC* investigation, *The Secret Bribes of Big Tobacco*. It exposed alleged bribery of politicians, government officials, and tax authorities by British American Tobacco (BAT). National Assembly speaker Moses Wetang'ula was among them, and it was he who brought the case against the *BBC*.

The *BBC* said it needed Kenyan court assistance to access vital documents held in England, where BAT is based. The court ordered a pause on the case until the *BBC* could obtain this evidence.

With that decision, the three-judge bench has set a precedent that compels Kenyan courts to tweak trials proceedings for parties that need to pursue crucial evidence held overseas. Such legal wiggle room would have been useful during the Kenyan 2017 presidential election petition, when data



PHOTO: MONICAH MWANGI/REUTERS

Infamy: National Assembly speaker Moses Wetang'ula reckons the *Beeb's* got it in for him.

that was similarly needed as evidence was held on overseas servers.

"I think jurisprudence is evolving as Kenyan courts increasingly engage with multinational actors," said advocate Innocent Ondieki. "The winner will be justice – not the *BBC* or Wetang'ula."

Evans Teddy, a coordinator at the Media Council of Kenya, said the ruling would strengthen journalists' ability to conduct cross-border investigations. Joel Gitali, chair of the Kenya Tobacco Control and Health Promotion Alliance, said the ruling was "a fair step" towards uncovering the truth about the tobacco industry's possible underhanded influence in the country. ■

MALAWI

LC in dog house for clinging to bow-wower

Ex-president suspected of dognapping K9 ‘officers’.

JACK MCBRAMS IN LILONGWE

MALAWI police tried to search former president Lazarus Chakwera’s house last week. They were trying to find four German Shepherds last seen before the former president vacated public office in September. About 80 heavily armed police officers were deployed for the task, but were denied access to the premises.

A Lilongwe court authorised the search of Chakwera’s private home in Area 10, Lilongwe, on suspicion that the four canines were in his “illegal possession”.

In Malawi, police dogs are classified as police officers. “In this context, the act of stealing a police dog resembles the act of kidnapping a police officer,” Malawian security expert Wilson Khembo told *The Continent*.

The former president’s Malawi Congress Party immediately decried the action as brazen political intimidation. All the party’s MPs walked out of that

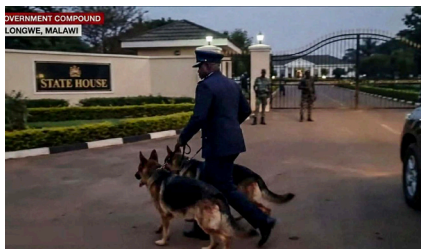
afternoon’s parliamentary session in protest. Meanwhile, groups from the politically volatile Nsundwe area were reported to be mobilising towards Lilongwe, which raised fears of political unrest.

Later that evening, the Lilongwe magistrate’s court set aside the search warrant.

Human Rights Defenders Coalition leader Michael Kaiyatsa said although the police were justified in searching for the missing dogs, “the approach used was excessive ... and created unnecessary alarm among the public.”

Before the confrontation, police had arrested former State House deputy chief of staff Godfrey Jalale for questioning. He is currently on remand after appearing in court.

Police spokesman Lael Chimtembo declined to comment further on the case or Jalale’s detention, but said there is no arrest warrant for the former president. ■



Zero Bark Thirty: Officials shepherd police dogs outside State House in Lilongwe.

*It is time.
Help us grow by
filling out The Big
Annual Survey™*

SURVEY



**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of The Continent *and* The Friday Paper

SPORT

Straight outta Langa

South Africa's cricket captain is constantly asked to prove himself. And he has – over and over again.



Boom: Temba Bavuma leads South Africa to a 2-0 Test victory against India. PHOTOS: DIBYANGSHU SARKAR/AFP

NIREN TOLSI IN CAPE TOWN

SOUTH AFRICA has beaten India in an away Test cricket series for the first time in 25 years. The 2-0 victory in late November, sealed at Kolkata's Eden Gardens, is a crowning achievement for captain Temba Bavuma. During his captaincy, he's had to convince critics – and racists – that a Black man belonged

at the highest level of South Africa's national cricket team.

Bavuma honed his playing style and temperament on Rubusana Street in Cape Town's Langa township, where he grew up, not in the elite former whites-only schools he would later attend on scholarship. At Eden Gardens, he scored a patient, gritty 55 runs on an unpredictable pitch on which no

other batsman had reached 40.

“What you saw in Kolkata came from the street cricket he played in Langa,” Bavuma’s uncle Tengo Sokanyile told *The Continent*. “He would bat and occupy the crease for two hours, never getting out, because he knew if he did he would have to wait four to six hours to bat again.”

For Black cricket lovers like Sokanyile, who introduced his nephew to the game, Bavuma’s achievements affirm the significance of the township and Black cricket scene. South Africa’s white cricket establishment and media has long ignored and even attempted to erase this reality, labelling players like Bavuma as “quota” players or diversity hires.

It wasn’t just Bavuma’s playing talent and skill on display in India. His leadership was too. At a crucial moment when Indian batsman Washington Sundar looked set to take the game away from South Africa, Bavuma brought on part-time bowler Aiden Markram to turn the game around. Then there was that cool over-the-shoulder catch to get rid of India’s final batsman, Axar Patel, which sealed the game.

After the match, Jasprit Bumrah – arguably the best fast-bowler in the world at the moment – hung his arm around Bavuma in post-match commiserations. The rest of the Indian team followed suit, lingering over their handshakes with the South African captain.

Bavuma had finally arrived in India. It’s the hardest place for a cricketer to receive recognition. For almost two decades, fans have preferred the big-hitting 20-over version of the game



PHOTO: DIBYANGSHU SARKAR / AFP

Bravo: India’s Jasprit Bumrah congratulates Temba Bavuma for South Africa’s Test victory.

to the classical five-day one that best suits Bavuma’s batting approach and technique.

Earlier this year, Bavuma spoke about the pressures of being “under the microscope”. He felt that he – and other Black players – could not have a good or bad run of form without race entering the conversation. That dynamic leaves Black players with constant performance anxiety, not just to be good at the game, but so great that they silence racists – and become inspirational figures. “We’ve almost accepted that you have to be better than normal,” Bavuma said, comparing the pressure to an expectation that Black players will “walk on water.”

“Your performances have to be at a certain level all the time,” he said. Double standards notwithstanding, Bavuma has risen to the challenge. Since assuming the captaincy, he has averaged 57 in Test matches, delivered the World Test Championship to his country, and become the first captain in Test history to win 11 of his first 12 matches in charge. ■

INTERVIEW

Danai Gurira's Zim baby comes of age

SHE IS world famous for her film and television roles in *The Walking Dead*, *Black Panther*, and *Wakanda Forever*, but Danai Gurira is a theatre kid before anything else. Her first published play, *In the Continuum*, won an Obie Award and she made theatre history with *Eclipsed*, a play about women in Liberia's civil war. It starred Lupita Nyong'o and was the first Broadway play made by an all black women cast and creative team. *Eclipsed* received six Tony Award nominations and won one.

Before all that fame and history-making, Gurira was a high schooler in Harare, acting in the local theatre scene. Her return to those roots may well be her most impactful production.

In 2012, she co-founded Almasi Collaborative Arts in Zimbabwe, which has focused on quiet, foundational work for 12 years. This year, they took a big swing by adding a groundbreaking two-week festival to Zimbabwe's arts calendar: Africa Voices Now. Most of the shows at the festival, which ran from October to November, were sold out. According to Gideon Wabvuta, the Almasi programmes director, all the performers and crew were paid a living wage, a rarity in the Zimbabwe art scene.

Gurira sat down with **Tawanda**

Mudzonga to reflect on Almasi, Zimbabwean theatre, and the future of both. (The interview has been edited for brevity and clarity).

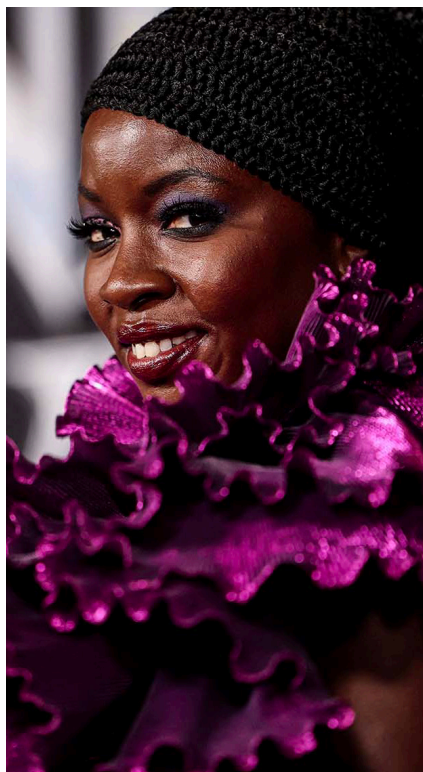


PHOTO: MARIO ANZUON/REUTERS

J'adore a Milaje: Danai Gurira at the premiere for Wakanda Forever in Los Angeles.



PHOTOS: JON PILCH/MACPHERSON PHOTOGRAPHERS

TAWANDA MUDZONGA: Why Almasi and why back in Zimbabwe?

DANAI GURIRA: As a child of educators, I really believe in the power of education. *[Gurira's father taught chemistry and her mother was a librarian. Both worked at universities in the United States and Zimbabwe.]* It was to try to bring more opportunity, education, and professional access to Zimbabwean artists. We don't have a higher education institution for the arts in Zimbabwe. I'm also American – US-born – and I have worked and been educated there since high school. I was trying to bring the relationships I built

there to here – to connect, grow, teach, collaborate, and bridge gaps.

TM: How does it feel to be here at this point?

DG: It feels great. It does take a lot of work, but it feels good. A festival is a bit more of a splash than we've ever done. We've always been quietly training, promoting, and working on the collaborative aspect of our title. Africa Voices Now is our first foray into a real showcase. But we have felt some real local support and that has been a beautiful thing. I feel we can make larger leaps and the community will

catch us. So now we're thinking, "Okay, we'll do this every year." We'll get more connection with you, the community.

TM: What was the journey to African Voices Now?

DG: Every year, we hold the Almasi African playwrights conference. It's based on my experience of benefiting from a conference in the US. I invited Robert Egan, who led that conference, to come here in 2015 and develop that sort of structure for us. We've been doing it ever since. Each year, we work on five plays.

[Gurira arranges for world-renowned dramatic artists to spend a few weeks

in Zimbabwe each year, working with local artists to hone their craft. The Continent spoke to some of the participants. All were effusive in their praise for the workshops. "Hats off to Emily Mann. She gave me a blueprint. I took it and used it to run my rehearsal room and we had a very comfortable room. We had so much fun," said Charmaine Mujeri, an award-winning Zimbabwean actor. Mujeri directed a play for the first time this year, after being mentored by Mann, a globally acclaimed director and playwright.]

DG: We've been working with this year's five playwrights since December 2024, so they've gone through a very



In dialogue: Can We Talk? performers Buhlebenkosi Chinhara and Munashe Goromonzi

meaty process. We put them in an in-residence writing retreat for the first time. We put them in a very nice Airbnb for a couple weeks, fed them, and had them be in community – turn off their lives and just create. Lynn Nottage came to work with them for two weeks. She's a celebrated US playwright and a fantastic teacher. Just from saying a few things in my ear, she helped me figure myself out as a playwright. I've never been in a room with her for two weeks. I was jealous as hell! Oskar Eustis, the head of New York's famous Public Theater (where the Pulitzer-winning *Hamilton* was first staged) also came here and he just loved these writers and the stories! He said something that made me think: We as Zimbabweans are in our golden age of theatre. We're not trying to impress or get validation. We're conversing with ourselves. And that's always when the best stories come out. Stories with unabashed, unapologetic, authentic humanity that is universally resonant. Eustis noticed this even while watching plays with whole chunks in Shona. It didn't matter. He understood the stories. That led us at Almasi to say: We must push ourselves harder to give the stories more of a platform.

TM: What does Almasi's future hold for African artists?

DG: This time we could only do three plays. That doesn't mean the other two and others won't be developed more. One play might go to the Public Theatre



Treading the boards: *Can We Talk?* cast members Nasibo Mutize, Munashe Goromonzi, Buhlebenkosi Chinhara, and Cathrine Douglas.

to get more development and exposure through a partnership we have with Eustis. This type of thing is what Almasi is starting to do in the second phase. We think we have the writers and are ready to start doing more exchanges of that nature. We've done some of it before, of course: our Walter Mparutsa Fellows, Tafadzwa Bob Mutumbi and Gideon Wabvuta, went to the US for higher education. Both are now leaders of our organisation. We want to do more of that: pushing for global exposure. Right now we have a focus on playwriting, but we are transitioning to film because theatre and film work adjacent to each other. We had Matt Negrete, an executive producer and writer for *The Walking Dead*, in 2022; Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Ezra Edelman and Emily Mann in October; and voice actor Peter Francis James and vocal and dialect coach Beth McGuire of *Sinners* and the *Thomas Crown Affair* in October.



Curtain call: *An appreciative audience applauds the cast of Can We Talk? by playwright Batsirai Chigama at its opening night at the Jason Mphemo Little Theatre in Zimbabwe.*

So we're navigating into that realm and will continually work to build it up. I like the hybrid of theatre and cinema a lot.

TM: Looking beyond Almasi, what is the most important thing we have to do to develop theatre in Zimbabwe?

DG: Keep focusing on ourselves. That's when we shine the brightest. It is really what made culture in other parts of the world successful. They focus on themselves. Believing in ourselves will make us globally competitive and attractive – that's the irony. Investing in ourselves locally can just involve sitting in a theatre to take in a story and support the theatre scene that

way. But if you have the means to support theatre in a bigger way, please do. Jo'burg has something I envy: the Market Theatre. It's got schooling, theatres, good community outreach and restaurants. I think we can expand on that here: add cinemas, an art gallery. A place for all the arts where people go to buy, watch, and learn about art. Why not?

For Almasi, that would be phase three, big time. We can sit and watch Netflix all day and that's great, but nothing really replaces the beauty of our own lives coming back to us in our own storytelling. We have a lot of stories to tell and we have a lot of talent that deserves development. ■

FEATURE

Airplane mode for scattered souls

The Serenity Social Club has nailed the blueprint for connecting by disconnecting in a bespoke little world free from wifi.

BRENDA HOLO IN NAIROBI

AT 10AM in Karen, Nairobi, on the last Saturday of the month, three dozen people hand over their phones. It's the first rule of the Serenity Social Club's *Disconnect* event – a whole day of no screens or digital notifications. In their place are yoga, pottery, crocheting, conversations with strangers – or even just sleeping on the grass.

Wanjiru Wanjohi created *Disconnect* in March 2025 when she was searching for community and a refuge from digital fatigue. “I felt like I didn’t have a place to connect with people on a genuine level,” she says.

November’s event was at Afrika House, a three-storey art gallery surrounded by a garden. The day began with yoga led by Victor Alfayo. “You get older gracefully,” he told the group. “Yoga teaches you how to ground yourself – how to see the world when it is chaotic.”

After the stretches it was solo time, during which participants scattered into the garden to crochet and journal. One simply napped on the grass.

Tech worker Marvin Denis had felt mild panic when handing over

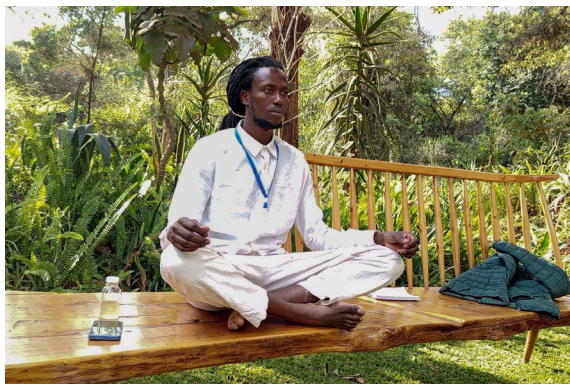
his phone. Then, something shifted. “Now I have a new definition of what disconnecting means,” he said later in the day. “It’s being with oneself, reconnecting with your inner child and connecting with other souls.”

Alice Kimani discovered the event through TikTok. Her remote work as a programme manager had shrunk her social life into a Zoom window. “I was looking for an event where I can refresh away from my phone and computer and meet people,” she said.

**“It’s being with oneself,
reconnecting with your
inner child and connecting
with other souls.”**

In a world in which productivity is idolised, there was something radical about doing absolutely nothing – and not apologising for it.

Nancy Maina lives in Meru, an upcountry town 220km away. “When I’m in Meru, I feel in touch with myself, but when I come to Nairobi, I don’t know what happens,” she said, adding that something about the city throws her off. Heads around the circle nodded:



One with everything:
The Serenity Social Clubbers trade screens for books, socials for ceramics, stress for naps, back pain for child's poses and lifestyle disorders for enlightened delight.

PHOTOS: BRENDA HOLO

everyone seemed to recognise the feeling. Maina came to the event to do her crocheting, which anchors her.

Confessions in clay

After solo time, ceramicist Lorine Otieno led a pottery session, guiding fingers into clay and reminding the group to trust the process and not rush to the final product. "Clay demands you slow down and be delicate with it."

As bowls took shape, conversation loosened. One participant spoke about choosing a child-free life; another about a painful decision from years earlier. The room felt unusually safe: strangers willing to listen without distraction. By

late afternoon, the workshop had shifted into a group dialogue about burnout, healing, and finding gentler ways to live in Nairobi.

"It was a 10 out of 10 experience. I feel revamped, rejuvenated," said Denis as the phones were eventually returned.

For founder Wanjohi, who once measured weekends by how many bottles could be emptied, watching strangers bond over clay and crochet feels like evidence that joy can be reimagined. "With Nairobi's culture, you can get drowned so fast," she said. Her dream is to grow the community and eventually start a support group for people struggling with alcohol. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Slow love in a cut-throat world

It often feels like everyone's out for themselves – but in Shao, matrimonial rites unite more than just the newly wed.

WORDS AND PHOTOS:
SOGO OLADELE

SHAO IS a quiet, unassuming town nestled between rocky mountains in northern Nigeria. It's not well known outside Kwara State. We visited for its annual mass wedding festival, an enduring gentle rebellion against modern individualism.

Life in Shao moves slowly and tradition shifts ever slower, a stillness that has allowed this tradition to survive for generations. The festival itself is unhurried, often stretching over three days of rituals that blend several elements of Yoruba wedding culture. In *ekun iyawo*, the brides perform poetry to thank their parents and seek blessings for their new life as they transition from their



***Shadowbright:** Shao brides – as many as 40 this year – come together to dress and prepare their make-up for the collective wedding rituals that take place over three days in the small town in Kwara State.*



That's a wrap: With blue umbrella in hand, a bride has her gèlè tied, before setting off to dance through town to the Shao Awon Mass Wedding festival venue with drummers, singers and well-wishers in tow.

birth families to their husband's.

Many Yoruba cultural expressions at Shao's mass wedding have been replaced by marriage traditions from Abrahamic religions or diluted for modern tastes. At this year's festival, something beyond the rituals, colourful aṣo-oke fabric, and the brides' blue umbrellas, made the case for returning to our roots.

In the current Nigerian economy, in which the cost of basics is out of many people's reach, planning a wedding is an extreme sport. As 40 brides beam with joy as they participate in the mass wedding, the wisdom of this communal approach was apparent.

Here, the burden of planning a wedding is shared by the entire

community, not borne by a single family.

The festival is rooted in local Yoruba mythology about a single-breasted woman who met a hunter, Olarele, at a river near the town. The mysterious woman, known as Awon is believed to be the sister of Osun, another famous river goddess. Awon then visited the town, which welcomed her with open arms. To repay the community's kindness, she promised to protect its people and make them fertile, asking that they set aside a day each year on which to wed every woman of marriageable age.

This year's celebration felt particularly magnetic for being an eruption of collective joy in northern Nigeria, which is more often the subject of news reports

on violence. Just a few weeks before the festival, armed bandits had attacked the Oke-Ode community in another small and largely unknown town about 77km away from Shao. The fear lingers across

Kwara. Meanwhile, the people of Shao celebrate love in community, honouring Awon and praying she shelters them as Abuja slowly responds to the violence marching to their doorstep. ■



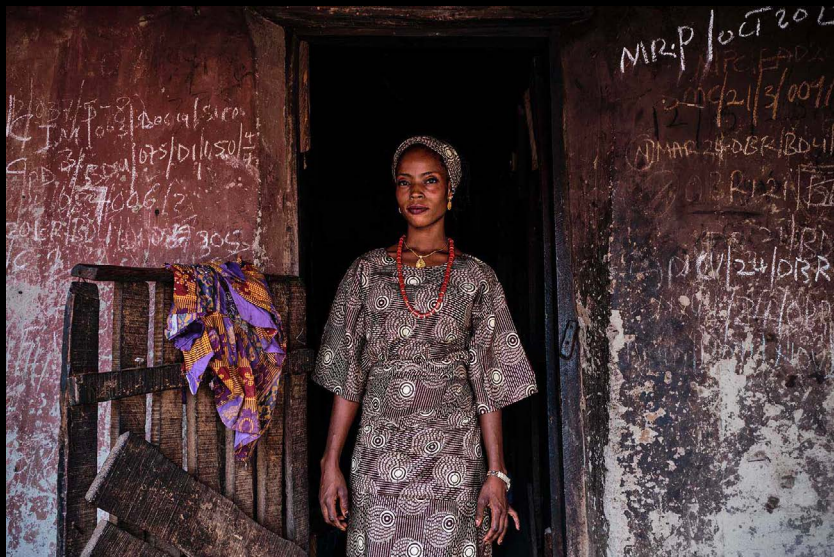
All you need and more: Monsura Babatunde and Adebisi Abosede get ready for their shared wedding. More than a pooling of time and money, the festival is cherished as a testament to the spirit of community.



It's okrah, don't be alarmed: Jimoh Azezat sits with family and well-wishers on the morning of the mass ceremony in which she'll be wed, which has its roots in local Yoruba mythology.



Anticipation for felicitation: Now dressed in her bright blue best, Jimoh Azeezat takes a minute before gathering her entourage and beginning her dance to the venue of the wedding.



New beginnings: Adewale Taiwo, stands in front of the home she grew up in, a few hours before setting off to take her place – and her husband – at the Shao Awon Mass Wedding festival.



Something blue: When the sun shines, the brides shine together as they stand under their umbrellas before dancing off to take their oaths at the wedding venue.



Banner day: A bride poses for pictures against an unfurled backdrop at the wedding festival, which takes place over three days in the small northern Nigerian town of Shao.



Rite of way: Practitioners of Yoruba spirituality honour the river goddess Awon, protector of Shao, in preparation for the wedding festival in the Kwara State town.



Streaming influencer: A Yoruba spiritualist leads a dance to the river to greet and honour the goddess Awon, whose blessing is sought for the brides and their new families.



Beats walking: Jimoh Azeekat is serenaded by drummers and singers as she dances through the streets of Shao on the way to her wedding.

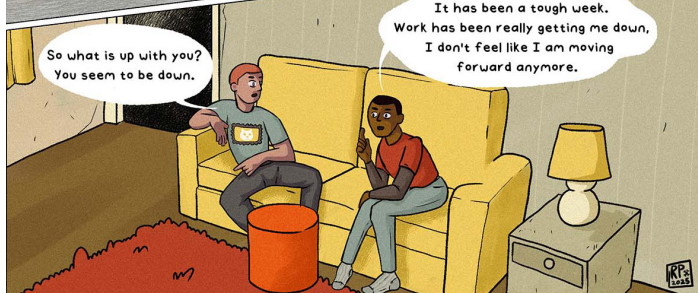


Go on, let it pour: Wending weddingward, beaming brides brandish big blue brollies.

REVIEW

A great, global community

This year's biggest first-person shooter is a redemption story after the biggest failure in gaming history.



SIPHO KINGS

I'M BLEEDING out. The sounds of war fade as the thump of my heart gets louder. The bullet hit me high up on my chest. Probably my nemesis, a single sniper in this far wider battle of 64 players. I've got 20 seconds to live. Then a shout in my headset – "I'm coming!" Our medic is sprinting 160m up a mountain to get to me. Bullets hit the rocks around him. A tank shell hits the building he was in. Splinters fly. He makes it. I get back up, crouch and successfully seek my revenge.

But our team is stuck and we lose.

As the next game loads, the four of us playing in a squad are pumping with adrenaline. The chatter is happy. We swap notes and tips. Then we segue into United States President Donald

Trump deploying the National Guard to California. One person in our squad is in that state with his family. That's 12,000km away from me. Another is closer to home – 20km away – and the fourth is 10,000km away. Playing Battlefield together bridges these distances.

Gaming is our way of hanging out – and it's not just us. Gaming is one of the world's biggest sources of community. One in two people game on some sort of device. How much time we spend together depends on life, the weather, and how good a game is.

At the height of Covid, in 2020, that community kept us vaguely sane and alive. *Call of Duty*, or *CoD*, launched a new game a few days before South Africa's hard lockdown began. I had a toxic job, winter was intense, and by the end of the year some of my family



PHOTO: BATTLEFIELD/ELECTRONIC ARTS



PHOTO: CALL OF DUTY-BLACK OPS/ACTIVISION

members would be dead. But in that game, we could escape, have fun, and make sense of the world. At its height, 75-million people were playing *CoD*.

Battlefield and *CoD* – the two big rivals of the gaming universe – have been around for over two decades. In 2002, gaming together meant lugging a computer to a friend, plugging in around a table, and eating all the food in the house. Now the cables cross continents and oceans. That means some lag.

Lag is the curse of African gamers. When you're flying a helicopter it's the sort of thing that means you fly into a tree or a sniper shoots you before you can shoot them. Lag really matters in *Battlefield*, a first-person-shooter game in which you navigate through your character's eyes.

Big, and often bad, business

Gaming is a \$450-billion industry. But top-tier games like *Battlefield* can cost \$400-million to make. The last

Battlefield, out in 2021, was the most spectacular failure in modern gaming history. It reportedly lost the developer, Electronic Arts, \$100-million. It's now being bought by a consortium headed by the Saudi state, which wants that franchise, *The Sims*, and the world's biggest football game (shout-out if you instantly think of the tagline, "It's in the game"). Microsoft recently bought the maker of *Call of Duty* for \$74-billion to strengthen its subscription offering.

Gaming developers are struggling to find the right business model. The dominant one is an initially free game that nudges people to buy trinkets and boosts. In the last *Call of Duty* this got to a point where you'd be fighting against people dressed as Beavis or Butthead – sound effects included.

Battlefield 6 has not descended to that point. At least not yet. It probably will – corporates will be corporate. But for now, it is back as a source of global community. ■

DATA

Capital punishment is not dead yet

A YEAR ago, Zimbabwe became the 24th African country to abolish capital punishment (except during states of emergency). Yet fewer than half (44%) of Zimbabweans believe the death penalty is never justified, with 55% saying it is fair punishment for the most serious crimes, such as murder.

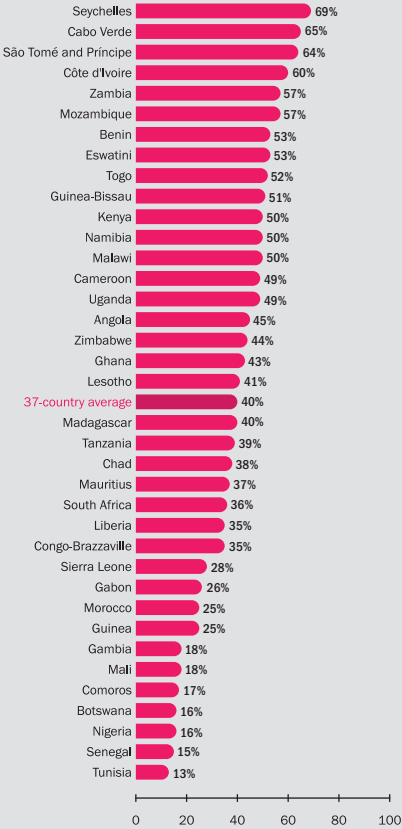
What about other Africans? Ahead of Human Rights Day (10 December), let’s see how citizens across the continent view the death penalty.

Zimbabwe is above average: Across 37 countries we surveyed since the start of last year, only four in 10 (40%) say the death sentence is never justified.

Three island nations take the lead in rejecting capital punishment: Seychelles (69%), Cabo Verde (65%), and São Tomé and Príncipe (64%). Majorities oppose execution in 10 of the surveyed countries, among which Eswatini still retains the death penalty (for murder and treason).

At the other end of the spectrum, fewer than a sixth say the death penalty is never justified in Tunisia (13%), Senegal (15%), Nigeria (16%), and Botswana (16%). Religion may play a role: Fewer Muslims (27%) than Christians (47%) oppose capital punishment. ■

Death penalty never justified | 37 African countries | 2024/2025



The Quiz

- 1 In which country are the Tugela Falls (pictured) located?
- 2 Which ocean lies north of Libya?
- 3 How many African countries have “Guinea” in their name?
- 4 True or false: The star on Cameroon’s flag is green.
- 5 Is Réunion an African island?
- 6 What is the name of Mauritania’s capital city?
- 7 What is Sierra Leone’s currency called?
- 8 What river is Victoria Falls located on?
- 9 Which country was film star Djimon Hounsou born in?
- 10 Which former president was 2006’s *The Last King of Scotland* based on?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

“I think I need to start reading more newspapers.”

4-7

“I can’t wait to explore more of this continent.”

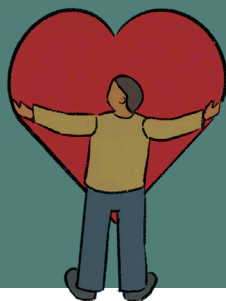
8-10

“If you can’t pull off the correct pronunciation of Tugela then you should probably tug a little less.”

COMMENT

From rock bottom we can only go up

With an opportunity to build back better, we'll start by learning to love ourselves.



L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

GUINEA-BISSAU'S coup d'état on 26 November was the ninth attempted or successful coup in the country since its independence from Portugal in 1974.

The Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) quickly suspended Guinea-Bissau's membership, prompting jokes that Ecowas will soon have more suspended states than members.

A general was declared leader. For a year, he said. Ecowas dispatched officials to urge a return to the constitutional order. We've seen this before.

The plot thickens. Deposed president Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who'd been seeking a second term, flew to Senegal but moved again in a huff, this time to the Republic of the Congo. He was offended that Senegal's president referred to the coup d'état as a "sham". Former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, who went to Guinea-Bissau to observe the elections, also called it a "ceremonial coup" engineered by Embaló himself, now "in exile". Huh?

Jonathan urged the general-now-in-charge to release the election results

anyway. The electoral commission said it couldn't because armed men had destroyed their computers and seized tallying forms. From doctoring results around the rest of the continent, we have now escalated to destroying results.

Civic actors in Guinea-Bissau have called for total civil disobedience. Embaló allegedly couldn't – wouldn't – countenance results in which he didn't "win". Not even Nollywood could make this up. This is beyond a performative election. This is saying to hell with the very concept of elections.

We cannot tell how matters will settle in Guinea-Bissau. If the trajectory of other military takeovers is anything to go by, the country will be under military rule for years to come. This is where we are, as a continent: at rock bottom, with a social contract that is null and void.

Taxation in these circumstances is a joke. Every rational person – top to bottom – will do everything possible to evade paying taxes. The process of establishing the social contract is ineffective. The ability to deliver on the social contract is nonexistent. Not just because those people in political office have zero intention of delivery, except as



Run out of road:

The era of external aid and endless borrowing is over – but internal corruption is also done for if there's nothing left to loot. Now the work of rebuilding infrastructure, society and dignity can begin in earnest.

PHOTO: PATRICK MEINHARDT/AFP

it benefits themselves, but also because we have no money to deliver.

We can't borrow more to plug the hole. Those people in political office long ago breached the outer limits of borrowing thresholds to keep the state (and their own interests) afloat. Nor can we beg instead. The age of "aid" is over.

Trade and foreign direct investment are not making up the deficit. Our trade with the world is down and intra-African trade is not rising as fast as it needs to. The continent's share of foreign direct investment is so paltry as to be practically nonexistent – except for the new scramble for critical minerals and rare earths. Concessions to the lands these minerals lie under are dished out without any attempt to use them as leverage.

What then gives us hope?

First: the generation gap between the leaders and the led – so extreme on this continent – is coming to an end. If coups d'état (real ones) are one form of protest at the jokes that our republics have become, then youth uprisings are yet another. And the latter hold more transformative potential than the coups.

Second: the financing crisis is an opportunity. The ever-diminishing sources of slush funds for our political actors can only be a good thing. When the buck can no longer be passed to external actors for entire public-sector services, education and health for example, our political actors will eventually be pushed to deliver – or at least to attempt to do so.

Third: the current nakedness of the global disrespect for Africa can also only be a good thing. Enough Africans – even among those who hold political office – are mortified by the contempt within which we and our lives are held. That mortification is creating anger and (more importantly) a determination to do right, not by external actors, but by our internal constituents. Africans loving ourselves. What a concept.

It's become a cliché but what the Argentinian-Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara once said still holds: "A true revolutionary is guided by great sentiments of love." ■

Dr L. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan political scientist

Big Pic

Bigger fish to fry: A porter carries fish from a beachside market in Mogadishu. Somalia's capital is bootstrapping itself out of the ashes after decades of war, terrorism and disjointed cycles of US military deployment and withdrawal.

PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AFP



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website — www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of The Continent and The Friday Paper

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org.