

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent

**The things  
Sudan is losing  
in the fire**

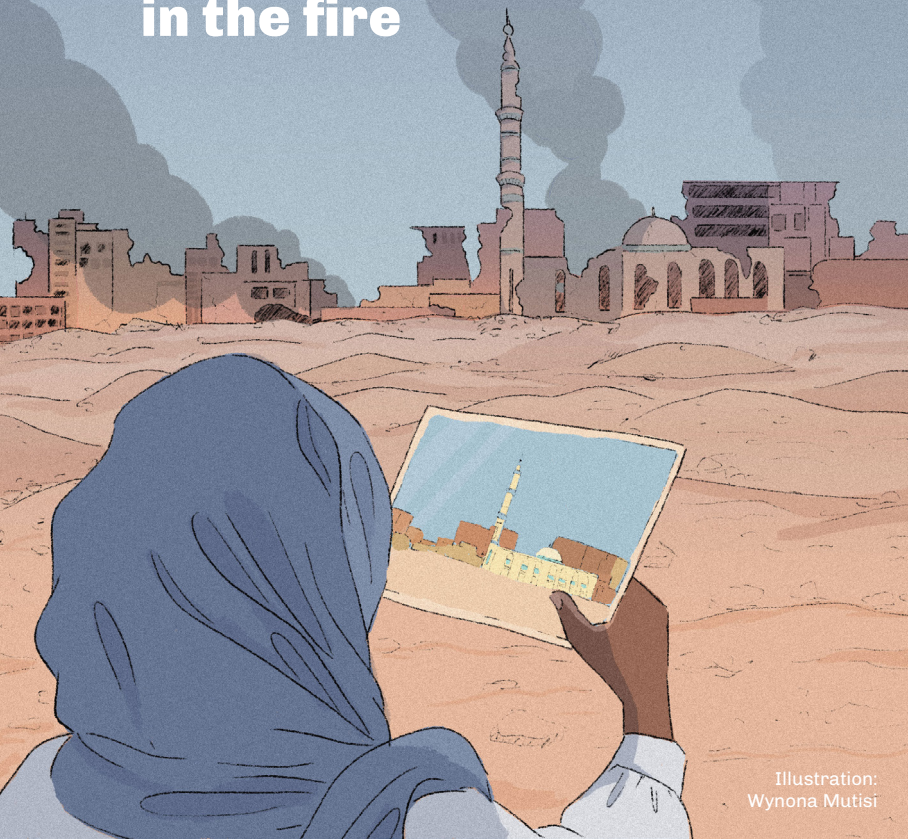


Illustration:  
Wynona Mutisi



**Cover:** The war in Sudan is destroying not just the country's future, but also the country's past. Museums and libraries have come under attack in what has been described as a "systematic" assault on the country's cultural and historical heritage (p11)

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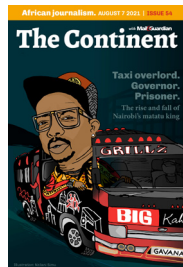
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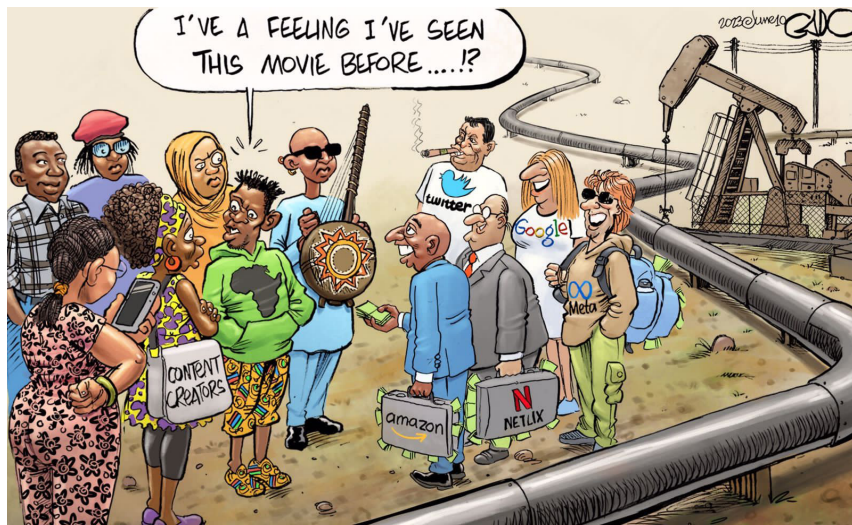
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## CONGRATULATIONS!

*Isaac Otidi Amuke's brilliant long-form profile of former Nairobi governor Mike Sonko ('The Rise and Fall of Nairobi's Matatu King', published in Issue 54) has been shortlisted for the prestigious True Story Award. Only 12 stories were shortlisted from more than 900 entries. Running at more than 4,000 words, this is the longest story ever published in The Continent – but also one of the best.*





## MOROCCO

### Knesset kerfuffle ruffles realpolitik's feathers in Rabat

The visit to Rabat of Amir Ohana – the speaker of Israel's legislative body, the Knesset – prompted a rare protest outside the Moroccan Parliament building. Hundreds of protesters held up pro-Palestine placards and chanted "Free Palestine". The Moroccan and Israeli governments have been working on normalising relations since December 2020, but the visit has been met with widespread condemnation from civil society groups who view Israel as an apartheid state, and describe the Knesset in particular as being dominated by right-wing fascists.

## GHANA

### Of their flesh thou shall not eat nor their carcasses touch

The food and agriculture ministry in Ghana confirmed this week that one person has died in an outbreak of anthrax in Binduri district, in the country's Upper East region. Anthrax is a serious disease that can be passed from cows to human beings, especially through eating or handling the meat of infected animals. It can be fatal unless properly treated with antibiotics. Ghanaian authorities have restricted the movement of animals in or out of Binduri, ordered a mass vaccination of cows, and are urging people to report any bodies of dead cows.



## KENYA

## Lest we forget

In Shakahola Forest in Kilifi County, a long and traumatic search for victims of a doomsday cult is nearing its end. So far, at least 250 bodies have been dug from

shallow graves, most of whom starved to death after being brainwashed by cult leader Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, who has been arrested. Kenya's interior minister said the site will be made into a memorial, "so that Kenyans and the world do not forget what happened here".

Photo:  
Yasuyoshi  
Chiba/AFP/  
Getty Images



## GEOPOLITICS

## Cyril's Vlad habit leads to Ukraine

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin took a few minutes off from managing his country's invasion of Ukraine to speak with his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa on the phone. Ramaphosa, along with five other African presidents, will be visiting both Kiev and Moscow next month in an effort to end the war – an ambitious plan given that he can't even end his country's power crisis. South Africa has been criticised for being too close to Russia, but it insists that it is non-aligned.

## SUDAN

## Babies rescued from burning Khartoum

Some 280 babies and 70 care workers were rescued this week from Khartoum's Maygoma Orphanage. They were moved to Wad Madani, a safer location 200km away. The babies, aged between one and 15 months, had gone without proper access to healthcare because they were living in an area "where conflict has been raging for the past six weeks," said a press statement from the International Committee of the Red Cross, which helped Sudan's welfare ministry to move the babies. Dozens of babies had already died before the intervention.



**Still got it: The coronavirus caught up with President Yoweri Museveni.**

## UGANDA

### Covid finally comes for old man in hat

Yoweri Museveni really, *really* did not want to get Covid. The president kept his country under restrictions until February 2022, long after others had opened up, and to this day he will not meet anyone unless they have tested negative for Covid. Even during election season in 2021, when facing Bobi Wine, his most charismatic opponent to date, Museveni did not dare go near the disease-riddled masses, preferring instead to wave from a distance with his N95 mask in place. This week, however, the health ministry announced that the president had finally tested positive for the virus.

## ETHIOPIA

### Addis Ababa in denial amid mounting war crimes evidence

Ethiopia has dismissed findings by Human Rights Watch that war crimes have continued in Western Tigray area, even in the wake of last year's peace deal. The government says the report was not informed by thorough and credible investigations. But the evidence of war crimes in Tigray keeps pouring in. This week, Yale University released its own report. The university's Lowenstein Human Rights Clinic found that Ethiopia, and its allies, broke international law during the Tigray war, by intentionally starving civilians.

## LIBYA

### Rivals agree on plan to plan an election

Libya is governed by rival governments, each with its own legislative body – not conducive to long-term stability. Over 10 days in Morocco, delegations from each legislature agreed to a new set of laws that will govern presidential and parliamentary elections, which will hopefully be held before the end of the year. The new laws need to be agreed upon by both legislatures, then implemented by the rival governments – who don't have a great track record when it comes to working together.

## RWANDA

## Alleged genocidaire ruled unfit for trial due to dementia

A man accused of having been a major financier of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is unfit for trial because he suffered “severe dementia”, a United Nations war crimes court ruled this week. The 88-year old Félicien Kabuga managed to evade arrest for 26 years. The evidence of his alleged crimes will still be adjudicated in a process that resembles a trial, but he cannot be convicted. This robs survivors of the genocide of whatever relief his 2020 arrest may have given them.



**Unfit:** Félicien Kabuga will not be held responsible for his alleged crimes.

## TECHNOLOGY

## WhatsApp debuts ‘Twitter but without the reply dudes’ for our consideration

WhatsApp has introduced a new feature called “Channels” in selected countries, before a wider rollout. The new feature will allow users to receive broadcast messages, and will exist in a separate tab to your chats with friends and family. *The Verge* described the new feature as “a Twitter feed, minus all the metrics and reply guys”. Your favourite newspaper that distributes primarily via WhatsApp (spoiler alert: that’s us) is watching with interest.

## SOUTH AFRICA

## Government keeps Zimbabweans in limbo longer with exemption extension

Just weeks before it expired, South Africa extended the validity of the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit (ZEP) – a visa that allows over 200,000 Zimbabweans to live and work in the country. The extension is for six months. ZEPs were granted to accommodate refugees fleeing economic devastation and political persecution in Zimbabwe, but have become a major political issue, with populist Afrophobic movements calling for Zimbabweans to be expelled.

# Senegal

## A nation holds its breath

Fears for the future follow days of deadly protests

Azil Momar Lô in Dakar

Life in Dakar seems to have returned to normal after four days of deadly protests that rocked the nation and turned the capital city into a ghost town. Sixteen protesters were killed when security forces responded with deadly force.

Now, markets and banks are open again, and traffic has resumed. The air, which had turned fetid from piles of uncollected trash – garbage collectors also stayed at home – is breathable again. Internet, which was partially shut down, has been restored. The foreign ministry just announced the reopening of consulates abroad, after shutting in response to reports of attacks on diplomats abroad by angry countrymen in France and the United Kingdom.

But universities and other institutions of higher learning – considered hotbeds of opposition – remain closed.

Tensions have been running high in Senegal for months, amid uncertainty over whether President Macky Sall intends to



**Riotous: Protesters throw stones and light fires in Dakar on 1 June.** Photo: John Wessels/AFP/Getty Images

run for a third term in office, in violation of the Constitution. The spark for the protests was the conviction last week of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was found guilty of “corrupting youth”. This could prevent him from running in next year’s election. Sonko says the charges are politically motivated.

Over 500 people were arrested in connection with the protest.

Opposition leaders have called for new protests this weekend, despite a formal ban. The government, meanwhile, is scrambling to repair the damage to the city ahead of Eid-al-Adha, a major Muslim festival, at the end of this month. It is also hoping to blunt public frustration over sharp cost-of-living increases by reducing the price of live sheep, which families slaughter during the festival. ■

# Rwanda

## Kagame's big soldier shuffle triggers alarm as neighbours batten down their hatches

Samuel Baker Byansi

**P**resident Paul Kagame this week fired at least 15 army officers and over 200 other soldiers without explanation. The changing of the guard comes amid heightened tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, each of whom accuses the other of supporting rebel uprisings against them.

The mass dismissal came just a day after Kagame replaced his defence minister with Juvenal Marizamunda, a man who has been out of army service for nearly a decade.

The army's chief of staff, a general, was replaced with the lower-ranked Lieutenant-General Mubarak Muganga from the army's intelligence division, who has spent most of the past 15 years working on diplomatic missions in the United States.

There seems to be some concern within Rwanda about external threats to Kagame. The pro-state newspaper *The New Times* has played up a US intelligence leak that claims that a Congolese intelligence chief advocated for overthrowing the Rwandan government. But the military shake-up appears to favour relative outsiders, which suggests internal politics may be at play.

Uganda also appears concerned at the prospect of transnational conflict. *The Daily Monitor* reported that a senior Ugandan intelligence officer put districts on the border with the DRC on high alert.

"We are going to have a fight there [in the DRC] and the powers that are interested are very many outside East Africa. But either one government will collapse or two," Emmanuel Katabazi, the deputy director general of Uganda's internal intelligence service, was reported to have said. ■



**Lock loading: President Paul Kagame inspects troops.** Photo: Presidency



# Africa

## What the consultants of capitalism say about us

Like it or not, McKinsey has immense power to shape the future of countries on the continent

**A**s ever, Africa is at an inflection point. Things are bad and they will get worse unless policy makers and leaders seize on opportunities to unlock the continent's opportunity.

That's the pitch from McKinsey, the global consulting firm whose reports and framing of the facts come with very real consequences: it currently advises the governments of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa.

This week, it released a look at the continent. Titled "Reimagining economic growth in Africa: Turning diversity into opportunity", the report sets out the bad:

- Growth since 1990 has been 1% a year (a fraction of India and China);
- Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa have two thirds of Africa's biggest 345 companies, but their economies have stagnated and this has had a knock-on

regional and continent-wide effect;

- Just 10% of all African trade is between African countries;
- 60% of Africans live in poverty and 500-million people will move into cities that already have insufficient infrastructure;
- Agriculture and manufacturing continue to be less productive than any other part of the world; and
- Climate change is already making things worse.

But in these failures lies the necessity for change – an "unprecedented opportunity to rekindle growth and set the continent back on a path of strong, sustainable and inclusive growth".

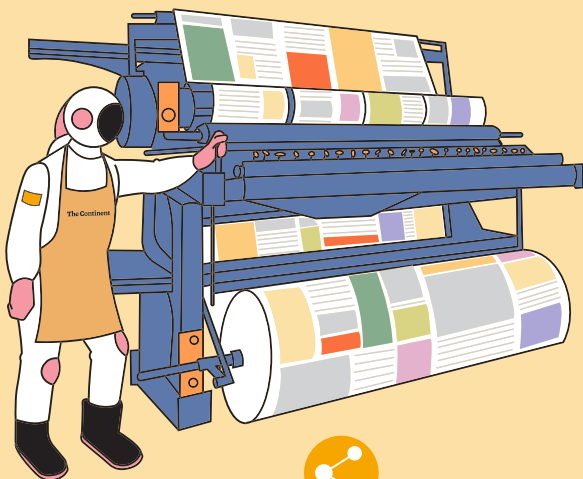
Strategic decisions now could mean huge improvements this decade:

- Better cities would offer their growing populations better livelihoods and less poverty;
- With 130-million new consumers this decade, companies will have more opportunity to grow and the global renewable energy build will need resources Africa has a near-monopoly on;
- Africans are already leapfrogging technology in micropayments and data access, and the African Continental Free Trade Area will mean companies sell locally and then globally.

After growth in the 2000s and stagnation in the 2010s, this decade will be critical. ■

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# Sudan

## The war raging over Sudan's present – and its past

In the grounds of the Omdurman Ahlia University, in the Sudanese city of Omdurman, there is a library filled with rare books, handwritten manuscripts and historical documents. That library no longer exists.



**Razed:** The conflict has left Sudan's history and culture in literal ashes.

### El Zahraa Jadallah and Tom Rhodes

Last month, as armed groups fought on the streets of Omdurman and its sister city Khartoum, the library of the Mohamed Omer Bashir Centre for Sudanese Studies was consumed by fire.

The collection was destroyed, and with it one of the most significant repositories

of Sudanese history and culture.

The fire was no accident, although no one knows for sure who set it.

The surrounding area is controlled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the paramilitary group which is fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces for control of the state.

“We notified them, but they did not

care to respond,” said Al-Mutassim Ahmed Al-Hajj, the head of the centre, which is housed in the prestigious Omdurman Ahlia University.

It was, he said, “a systematic act designed to harm the private university, which is highly symbolic as a beacon for private education in the country”.

The loss is incalculable, and irrecoverable.

“The library represented a vital conservation institution for Sudanese heritage,” said Osman Shinger, an author and former head of the Sudanese Writers Union.

It had taken decades to build up the collection, which included a wide array of original volumes and documents on Sudan’s politics, history and culture, all of which are now in ashes.

## The things we lost

The fighting began on 15 April this year, and is now in its eighth week, despite a number of attempted ceasefires.

Bloody street battles have been fought in Khartoum and Omdurman, with residents caught in the crossfire; fighter jets have dropped bombs on the capital; and soldiers have robbed and occupied homes.

The rest of the country has not been spared, with the most serious clashes happening in Darfur in the west, where cities such as Geneina have become battlefields amid reports of widespread civilian casualties.

The war is destroying Sudan’s present. The latest confirmed death toll is 865, although this is likely to be much higher,

with more than a million people displaced.

The war is destroying Sudan’s future – even if the fighting stops today, it will take years, and billions of dollars, to repair the damage and recover all that has been lost.

And the war is destroying Sudan’s past. “Museums are now without guard ... to protect them from looting and vandalism,” said Sara Abdalla Khidir Saeed, director of the Sudan Natural History Museum in Khartoum, in an open letter.

She believes that all of the animals that were in her care are now dead. “I asked everyone who can pass through the university to break the locks of the cages and allow the birds and monkeys to come out – but nothing happened. We lost animals that are rare to find now in their natural habitat.”

The National Museum, also in Khartoum, was occupied last week by the RSF. Fighters were filmed inside the museum’s Bolheim Bioarchaeology Laboratory, where ancient human remains are stored and analysed, including some mummies that are several thousand years old.

The priceless exhibits had been thrown open. One fighter erroneously describes the ancient skeletons as recent victims of former president Omar al-Bashir, and pledges to seek justice for their deaths.

“To start with, I did not believe what I was seeing,” said National Museum director Ghalia Gharelnabi, in an interview with the *Guardian*. “Now I am worried about where else they might have gone in the museum that no one filmed, and what else they are going to do.”





Where there's  
smoke: The  
violence has its  
roots in the past

## Identity crisis

Sudan's leaders have long sought to erase anything that does not suit their own narrative. According to Shinger, threats to wipe out Sudan's rich historical, cultural and artistic heritage date to the 1940s.

Under the rule of Bashir's National Congress Party – which ended when the dictator was toppled in a revolution in 2019 – cultural events at Khartoum University were routinely censored; the theatre, music and sculpture departments at the Fine Arts College were shut down; and attempts were made to destroy an invaluable archive of Sudanese music.

Shinger says that the party was trying to erase 7,000 years of Sudanese culture, “as they try to rewrite history to start when Islam entered the country or pretend that it begins with their coup in 1989”.

He referenced the Taliban in Afghanistan, who destroyed monuments, such as the Buddhas of Bamiyan, that were inconsistent with their beliefs – or might inspire resistance.

The irony is that all this history is far from being forgotten. It has fueled the current conflict, which is rooted in power dynamics and historic injustices that were so rigorously documented by the library at the Centre for Sudanese Studies – before those documents were destroyed.

Many of the books in the library were a donation from the family of researcher and writer Reem Abbas. “My family decided to donate all of the books belonging to my great grandfather, Al-Tijani Amer [a writer, politician and civil servant] to the university,” said Abbas. “When I heard about the destruction, I felt it was a loss on so many levels ... The motivation is just a way of completely erasing this country's history and heritage, disempowering its population from the things they valued and the things that connected them to their history and this city in particular.” ■

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*This story was published in partnership with the Ayin Network.*



Photos: © VII Mentor  
Program/Visura

## PHOTO ESSAY

# Before It's Gone

*The World Press Photo Award recognises the very best photography in each part of the world. Its long-term category is for projects with up to 30 photographs, spread across at least three years. **M'hammed Kilito**, this year's winner in Africa, is documenting how a changing climate and humans are destroying Morocco's oases.*

**A**n oasis depends on a delicate balance of abundant water, good quality soil and date palms to function as an island of biodiversity and as a barrier against desertification. In Morocco, human activity and global heating are currently disrupting this ecosystem. About two

thirds of Morocco's oasis habitats have disappeared in the past century due to steadily rising temperatures, fires, and water scarcity. Oasis degradation in turn affects those who depend on them, causing decreased agricultural production, poverty, and displacement. ■



**Shifting sands: A man checks the water level of a well at Merzouga Oasis in eastern Morocco, near the Algerian border. Deep wells can deplete the water table, leaving farmers who have no access to them without a supply.**





**Holding water:** Pots from the Tighmert Oasis in southwest Morocco are on display at the nearby Kasbah Caravanserail Museum, which is dedicated to oasis domestic culture.



**Keeping the faith:** Mohammed, pictured in the village of Ait M'hanned near Tighmert Oasis, belongs to one of the last four families who were living in the village in 2020.





**High, not dry:**  
A water tower in Zagora. Families often join forces to build and finance these towers to benefit from a more stable water supply.

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**Brush work:**  
Each Sunday Mohammed Elfakhar, a potter, collects wood at the Skoura Oasis for fuel to fire the pottery he has made during the week.



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# Cameroon

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## Flying quarry stones smash homes apart

**Family homes are cracking apart, with people's lives threatened by flying debris. But the government has allowed mining to start again.**

**Louvier Kindo Tombe in Yaoundé**

**V**iviane had just come back from work and was getting ready for evening prayers when a huge stone smashed through the roof of her home and crash-landed on the chair she had been sitting on just seconds before.

Her family was also in the house, and she tells *The Continent*: “I still thank my God because none of my family members were injured.”

The 47-year-old went outside. Her neighbour, who saw the stone whizz through the air, said it had come from a nearby quarry, one kilometre away from her home in Messebe, on the outskirts of Cameroon's capital Yaoundé.

This was in 2020.

Around the same time, a worker on

the site was buried in a landslide, and an expert who was brought in said the use of explosives in the quarry meant the land around it was loose and liable to suddenly shift. Local authorities suspended operations, demanding that more safety measures be put in place.

Operations have now resumed.

When *The Continent* visited the quarry, operated by the China Meilan Cameroon Company, security said the person responsible for answering questions was on holiday. Attempts to contact them directly were unsuccessful.

But the community says little has changed.

According to Viviane, explosions of dynamite intended to crack rocks are again triggering tremors that she says residents feel in the soles of their feet, and through the foundations of their homes.

Ferdinand Tchoffo, another resident of Messebe, says that after the shutdown he repaired his cracked walls “thinking it was the end of the disaster”. Since operations resumed, however, “all that I repaired has been destroyed again, and even more”.

Six houses in the community report that fissures created by the vibrations have become worse.

“The first time I noticed it here, I was on the second floor,” says Sousoumou Fadimatou, who had just moved from a nearby village that also suffered from the effects of the blasting. “I don't know



Trucking hell: The quarry is literally a stone's throw away. Photo: CRTV

how but when I managed to find myself I was outside running, thinking it was an earthquake.”

**Viviane says dynamite explosions – set off to crack rocks – are again driving tremors that residents feel in the soles of their feet, and through the foundations of their homes.**

The village he moved from, Leboudi, is closer to the rocky mountains that attracted the quarry in the first place. Jean Nkoa, a resident there, says people call the vibrations an earthquake because that is what it feels like. “When the dynamite explodes, you have about 40 seconds of

intense vibrations.”

An environment expert told *The Continent* that the loud noises, and violent vibration, impact on local wildlife. The chemicals from the explosives can also end up in local water sources, they said.

Residents say they have written countless letters to their local authorities to get them to force the quarry to make amends. Some locals went as far as meeting the regional governor, and the minerals minister, but to little avail. Others have gone to court but that process is stuck, they said.

When asked about their role in oversight and protecting communities, local authorities said they didn't want to be quoted, but insisted they don't manage “the file” for the quarry at a local level. ■

# Healthcare is a right, but not always easy

The World Health Organisation, which celebrates its 75th birthday this year, has global success stories to tell, from the eradication of smallpox to major reductions in maternal and child mortality. Perhaps its greatest achievement is defining health as a human right.

That right is a lifesaver – but not always easy to enjoy, especially if you're not wealthy.

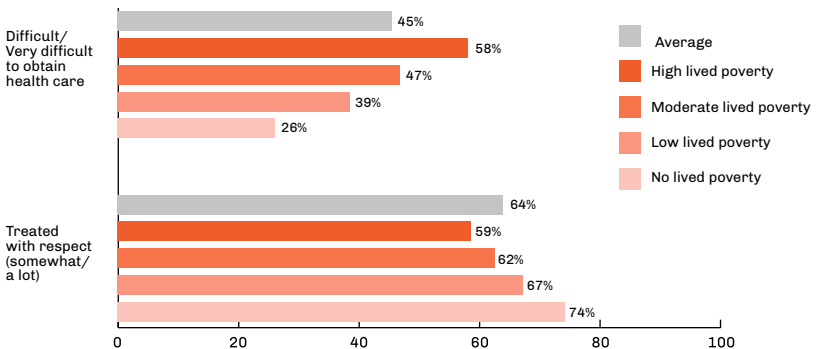
Among Africans who went for medical care at a public clinic or hospital during the previous year, Afrobarometer found that on average across 36 countries, almost half (45%) say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to get the care they needed.

Difficulties rise along with material disadvantage: Citizens experiencing “high lived poverty” are more than twice as likely to report problems as well-off respondents (58% vs 26%).

And respectful treatment by the medical staff declines as poverty rises: While three quarters (74%) of well-off patients felt at least “somewhat” respected, only 59% of poor citizens say the same. Respondents’ education level and urban versus rural location don’t seem to make the same difference.

Levels of difficulty and (dis)respect vary widely by country, but the rich versus poor pattern holds true in most of them. ■

## Getting healthcare: Difficulty and respect | by economic status | 36 African countries | 2021/2022



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 +/- two to three percentage points.





## Childhood dreams vie with identity nightmares

The realities of class dynamics, assimilation and loss force young Hawa to recreate her life in her imagination

Wilfred Okiche

French auteur Maïmouna Doucouré stunned Sundance and inspired an online ruckus over the provocative depiction of child actors with her debut feature, *Cuties*. She returns with *Hawa*, a more tasteful but no less absurdist fable of lost innocence and cultural memory.

The titular heroine played by newcomer Sania Halifa is a plucky, resourceful child who deals with the impending loss of her beloved grandmother – and last

remaining relative – by running away.

Hawa becomes obsessed with the idea that she must convince Michelle Obama – yes, the former American first lady – to adopt her. Hawa then goes on a profound, bittersweet adventure across Paris in search of Obama, in town to promote her book, *Becoming*. Along the way she encounters famous French figures like singer Yseult and astronaut Thomas Pesquet. Each has as much to learn from her as they can teach her.

The push and pull of assimilation versus cultural identity shows up in Hawa's interactions with Maminata, her griot grandmother, played with a captivating vigour by legendary Malian diva Oumou Sangaré. In a film that pays homage to the griot tradition of recounting histories, casting Sangaré in her first film role is as close to life as one can get. Doucouré understands this, opening the film with a tracking shot of Sangaré in flowing robes, walking with pride on the streets of Paris. She also has her contribute her famous voice to the soundtrack.

Balancing burning social drama with elements of magical realism and a strong emotional core, *Hawa* continues Doucouré's fascination with exploring the stories of people with cultural backgrounds similar to hers. With *Cuties* and *Hawa*, she continues to home in on the lived experiences of children of West African immigrants growing up in Paris communities. ■

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Hawa is streaming on Amazon Prime.

# THE QUIZ

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

"I'd let you fly me to the moon if it really looked like that."



- 1\_ Congo Belge was a colony of which European country from 1908 to 1960?
- 2\_ Tambacounda, Saint Louis and Thiès are cities in which country?
- 3\_ Name the artist who became the first African to sell out London Stadium last week.
- 4\_ Élisabethville is the former name of which city in the Democratic Republic of Congo?
- 5\_ The demonym for people from Guinea-Bissau is Guinean-Bissauns. Is this true or is it false?
- 6\_ Which country did Guinea-Bissau gain its independence from?
- 7\_ In which country is the Miradouro da Lua, "viewpoint of the moon", (pictured) found?
- 8\_ Which African country is part of the BRICS bloc?
- 9\_ Is the current king of Eswatini named Mswati III or Mswati IV?
- 10\_ Name the Inter Milan football player whose father played for Zaire in the 1994 and 1996 African Cup of Nations.

**HOW DID I DO?** WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

# In praise of mabele

**Tšoloane Mohlomi**

**A**s legend has it, there was once upon a time a jealous woman who married into a polygamous marriage. She couldn't bear any children. But her sister-wife, who had only just got married, produced a baby straight away. The husband, in need of an heir, was delighted.

In an attempt to spite the young mother, the jealous woman fed her a porridge made of sorghum. The grain was only used to make Sesotho beer, or to feed the pigs – it was not usually eaten.

But the jealous woman's cunning plan backfired. The young mother only got healthier, and produced more milk, and the baby grew big and strong. What's more, the new porridge also tasted delicious.

And so began a centuries-long tradition in southern Africa, where sorghum porridge – mabele, also known as lesheleshele in Lesotho – became the cereal of choice. Historically, it gave us the kick we needed to wake up early, fortifying us when working in the fields, drawing water from wells or herding cattle.

The highly nutritious grain is ground up and mixed with boiling water until it

thickens. I like to add sugar, margarine and a little bit of milk until it is sweet and succulent, with a melt-in-your mouth consistency.

These days, mabele porridge is still widely consumed in Lesotho, South Africa and Botswana (where it is fermented for extra flavour and known as *ting ya mabele*).

It has taken a while, but finally the rest of the world is catching on to the nutritional benefits of sorghum. It is now considered a superfood, as it is so marvellously rich in protein, vitamins and micronutrients. ■



Last week we sampled pilau in Kenya, this week it is mabele from Southern Africa. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know by sending an email to [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org). \$100 for the winning letter.



Photo: Buda  
Mendes/Getty  
Images

## If Africa expects a miracle, we'll need more than just faith

**Janine van Wyk is two matches from becoming Africa's most capped international footballer. She tells us what needs to change before teams from the continent can achieve their true potential on the world stage.**

**Firdose Moonda**

**W**omen's football is growing fast, with record stadium attendances, television viewership figures and transfer fees over the last 18 months, but not everybody is benefitting from the boom equally. The major milestones have been achieved in Europe, but Africa risks being left behind unless strides in investment and development are made quickly.

"There's a big gap between African football and the rest of the world – we still have a long way to go," Janine van Wyk, the former South African captain, who has just completed a stint with Ergotelis FC in Greece, tells *The Continent*.

"But with limited resources and without a competitive league, South Africa were still able to reach World Cups in 2019 and 2023, and the Olympic Games in 2012 and 2016. If you look at other

teams that qualify – Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana – they also have limited resources. They don't have established leagues. Africa as a whole needs to develop much more."

As expectation builds ahead of July's Women's World Cup, Van Wyk cautioned against predicting any big returns for the four African participants.

"It will take a lot for South Africa or any other African country to win such a competition because of lack of resources and development. People expect miracles when they hear South Africa are going to the World Cup and they think we could win, but it's not going to happen in the near future."

South Africa are the current Africa champions and are making their second successive World Cup appearance, but have yet to win a game at the event. Nigeria have been part of every World Cup since the tournament's inception in 1991 and reached the quarterfinals in 1999, while Zambia and Morocco are making their debuts.

Van Wyk identified Morocco as the real leaders on the continent, given the pace of their development programme over the past three years.

In August 2020, the Royal Moroccan Football Federation unveiled a four-year plan for women's football. It included setting up a two-division professional domestic tournament and providing \$30-million in funding. The plan has already paid off. After failing to reach the last 10 editions of the Africa Cup of Nations, Morocco qualified as hosts for 2022 and reached the final.

"Morocco is flying at the moment; they are so well invested in their teams, from development up until their first teams," van Wyk said. "At Afcon, we trained at their national facility – it was top-notch. And they are investing in developing players from a young age and getting the structures right."

It's this template Van Wyk would like to see other African countries follow, rather than the ad-hoc model of girls getting into the game by forcing their way into boys' teams – a route she herself took.

"Playing with boys increases your performance, but there are no structures there – no coaches or educators in place to make sure these girls actually learn about the game," she said. "It's one thing for girls to just be put on a football field but are they actually learning the game? That is where Morocco has got it right, and where we still are lacking."

To address that, van Wyk has set up her own club – JWV FC – who play in South Africa's top flight. She has also earned a Uefa B coaching licence, with a view to contributing to the professionalism of the women's game.

But before that, she has one more goal to score: Van Wyk is two international caps away from becoming Africa's most capped footballer – male or female – and would have achieved them at the 2023 World Cup had it not been for a knee injury that forced her to withdraw from the squad. She's not done yet though.

"I've achieved everything I wanted to achieve, except those two caps. I'm going to get it – whether it's before or after the World Cup." ■



**W**e at Drift recently embarked on a digital detox. How blissful it was to switch off from the internet, the screens and all technology connecting us to the outside world.

For about 15 minutes. Until being alone with our own thoughts became a little too much, as did the deafening silence emitted by a phone that would otherwise be pinging non-stop with notifications.

Luckily, those 15 minutes were just enough time for us to ponder some really rather profound matters – not just the meaning of life (also known as what we’re going to have for dinner), but also regarding our dearest of dear leaders.

Do they ever switch off from the world, we wondered. Do they reset their minds the way they do the constitution? Do they run in nature the way they run for the presidency, again and again and again? Do they take time to sit in the dark in quiet reflection, or, like Cyril Ramaphosa, do they have it thrust upon them in intervals scheduled by their national power companies?

Do the Coupdashians in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso take a break from overthrowing governments to tend to

their tender hearts and the hurt, pain and sorrow no doubt caused by regional organisations demanding a return to constitutional rule?

Probably not.

To be fair though, while they themselves may not want to switch off, they are not averse to deploying digital detoxes to the general populace in the form of the dreaded internet block.

The most recent government to impose a ban on mobile internet and social media platforms is Senegal. There has been unrest in the country in recent weeks after opposition leader and presidential aspirant Ousmane Sonko was found guilty of “corrupting youth” and then sentenced to two years in prison.

Sonko also faced allegations of rape, charges of which he was acquitted. He claims that all charges against him are politically motivated in order to block him from vying for the presidency in 2024.

Meanwhile Macky Sall seems to have taken a vow of silence when it comes to addressing rumours that he will vie for a third term next year in spite of Senegal’s two-term limit.

## Choose: Detox or de tear gas?



**CONTINENTAL DRIFT**

**Samira Sawlani**



**Whatsoff: South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa has for years overseen an excessive amount of digital detoxing.**

Cue Sonko's supporters taking to the streets, the military being deployed and police bringing out the tear gas. The government then announced that access to mobile internet would be restricted in certain areas of the country at certain times, citing the posting of "subversive messages".

They also announced the temporary closure of its diplomatic missions in Paris, Bordeaux, Milan and New York as a "precautionary measure" as a result of what it describes as attacks which saw some material damage. Local media in Italy reported that protesters had broken into the consulate in Milan.

At the time of writing, Sonko has not yet been detained, the government announced the lifting of internet restrictions and things seem largely calm. For how long, remains the question, and at what point do authorities ask questions regarding why some sectors of the population are disillusioned.

While our digital detox involved the scent of essential oils, we're pretty sure

that for our leaders, tear gas is the most calming scent. Not only was it used in Senegal this week, but even our Kenyan friends decided to bring it out.

You see, President Billy Ruto and his friends have proposed the "Finance Bill 2023" which, if passed, will see a rise in all sorts of taxes, an idea some people found distinctly odorous, so much so that they marched to Parliament to protest against the bill.

Some held signs stating, "Will more taxation lead to low cost of living?" and "poverty is man-made", while others chanted slogans along similar lines.

Well. As soon as Kenya's police got a whiff of what was going on, out came the tear gas and that was the end of that.

While the proposed bill has been an issue of debate, what should not be up for debate are the rights promised by the Kenyan Constitution, which clearly state that "every person has the right, peaceably and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions to public authorities".

Elsewhere, fighting in Sudan has entered its eighth week. The United Nations says the number of people displaced as a result of the conflict in the country has already exceeded 1.9-million.

Access to critical health services have been severely hampered and fuel shortages and electricity cuts have forced many hospitals to suspend emergency services.

This is a situation the world cannot and must not look away from.

Yet all we hear is a deafening silence. ■

# South Africa braces for its coalition era

**For the first time in its history, the ruling ANC has to seriously prepare for the possibility of losing its majority hold on power**

**Kira Alberts and  
Sonia Twongyeirwe**

**S**ince its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa has never had to contend with a government that needed a coalition to maintain a legislative majority – until now. There is an ongoing transformation in party politics characterised by a gradual decline in support for the ruling African National Congress.

In the 2024 general election, it is not inconceivable that the ANC will receive less than 50% of the vote, requiring a coalition at national level for the first time.

The most likely scenario is an ANC-dominated government propped up by one or two smaller parties. This is unlikely to involve the Democratic Alliance, given the large policy differences between the two parties. But a coalition with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) might also be uncomfortable given the strong

criticism levelled at the government by EFF leader Julius Malema and his demand for a more radical approach to issues such as land redistribution. The ANC is unlikely to pursue this option unless it receives less than 45% of the vote and requires more seats to govern comfortably.

An alternative to coalition government would be a more ad hoc arrangement, with opposition parties being engaged to provide support to the budget and other important legislation on a case-by-case basis. This would be time-consuming, however, and risks confusing or alienating voters. It seems more likely that the ANC would approach some of the many small parties that comprise the National Assembly, such as the Congress of the People, to form an alliance.

Optimists hope a coalition government would promote accountability and better service delivery.

But coalition governments at the local level, where the ANC has lost control in many parts of the country, have been characterised by infighting, competition over spoils and instability – something that South Africa can ill afford. ■

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# THE BIG PICTURE

Reaping sorrow: A young woman in Senegal prepares for the funeral of a family member killed during protests last week over the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was acquitted of rape but sentenced to two years in prison for 'corrupting youth'.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images



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