Surf Senegal

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi
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Cover: Forgive our ignorance, but we always thought surfing was an American thing, or imported from Hawaii. As it happens, the jury is out – like many of the best things in the United States, it may have been introduced by enslaved people from West Africa, where surfing has been practiced for a thousand years. Now, on the coast of Senegal, surfing is once again making waves (p14)

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SEE YOU AGAIN IN AUGUST!

Every 10 issues or so, *The Continent* takes a publication break. This is good for our physical and mental wellbeing (and also for our finances). This time around, we will be working hard to secure the publication’s long-term future by establishing a new legal entity with a fully independent advisory board. We will be back some time next month. Make sure you don’t miss our next edition by subscribing (for free) on WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal or email. If you would like to support us financially, please donate here.
ZAMBIA

Credit where credit is due

After a year’s delay and lots of tense negotiations, Zambia has reached an agreement to restructure the $6.3-billion it owes other governments. Although no debts have been written off, interest rates have been lowered to as little as 1% until 2037. Zambia owes another $3-billion to private creditors, who expect another deal to be reached soon. This is a victory for President Hakainde Hichilema, who made debt a central plank of his election campaign. It will also offer a way forward for other countries in debt distress, like Ghana.

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape hasn’t been this wet in half a century

Flooding in South Africa’s Western Cape province has killed two people and driven thousands out of their homes, especially in low income neighbourhoods. One person was washed away by a flooded river and a 64-year-old man died in his flooded house. The coastal province floods seasonally, but scientists say this year’s rains have hit historic proportions. According to climate researchers at the University of Cape Town, this year’s rain measures are higher than they’ve been for 47 years.
BURKINA FASO

Body count soars as state commits to war

As many as 100 people died this week in three separate attacks in northern Burkina Faso. Militants attacked Naoka and Gayeri on Monday and Namssiguia on Tuesday. The fatalities appear to be evenly split between anti-government militants, government soldiers, and volunteer fighters from a civilian militia that the state has mobilised over the past year. Burkina Faso’s prime minister, Apollinaire Kyélem, recently ruled out peace negotiations, telling Parliament that his government will instead recruit another 50,000 volunteers to end the insurgency on the battlefield.

SPORT

Tunisia is still pretty good at beach games

The men and women’s beach handball teams of Tunisia successfully defended their titles at the Africa Beach Games, hosted in the Tunisian coastal town of Hammamet. The women’s team beat Kenya for the gold, and the men’s defeated Togo. The Tunisians, who also won gold at the inaugural 2019 games, will head to Bali for the World Beach Games in August. Morocco delivered a similarly dominant performance in beach volleyball, with both men’s and women’s teams taking home the gold.

ETHIOPIA

We’re going to need a bigger acronym

Ethiopia wants to join the BRICS grouping of emerging markets, which currently includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. That's according to Ethiopia’s foreign minister, the Addis Standard reports. Ethiopia will have to join the queue: at least 19 other countries also want in. In the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, BRICS membership is seen as a way for some countries to hedge against becoming overly-dependant on international institutions dominated by the West.
Another ceasefire ends before it begins

To mark the Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Adha, the rival armies fighting for control of Sudan agreed to a 24-hour ceasefire – offering a brief respite from the violence that has killed more than 2,000 people and displaced nearly a million. Like all other previously agreed truces, this one was swiftly violated, with air raids striking parts of the capital Khartoum on Wednesday. “It doesn’t feel like Eid,” one Khartoum resident told the BBC. “Last night I couldn’t sleep because of the sounds of the gunfire.”

Eid Mubarak: A sheep is divided in three for family, friends and the poor.

SUDAN

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Obono jailed for 2022 standoff with police

A military court in Equatorial Guinea’s capital Malabo sentenced an opposition politician to 29 years in prison for “insults to security forces”, “abusive exercise of fundamental rights” and “homicide”. Gabriel Nse Obiang Obono was arrested with 150 others in September 2022, after a standoff between the police and his supporters. Presidential and parliamentary candidates from the party, Citizens for Innovation, had been ruled out of the country’s 2022 elections. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasango has ruled Equatorial Guinea for nearly 44 years.

MALI

New constitution in, United Nations out

Mali’s electoral body says 97% of the votes in its May referendum favoured adopting constitutional changes, which include amnesty for people involved in past coups. This is convenient for Mali’s current rulers, who seized power in 2020. The changes also make the government accountable to the president instead of Parliament. Separately, the United Nations voted to end its $1.3-billion-a-year peacekeeping mission in Mali, marking a dramatic reduction in support for the country.
MIGRATION

And after all, UK’s deportation dream hits Rwanda wall

On Thursday, the Court of Appeal in the United Kingdom ruled that the government sending asylum seekers to Rwanda would violate the European Convention on Human Rights, which the UK is party to. The court said there is “a real risk” that people sent to Rwanda will be returned to the home countries they fled. The UK has already given Rwanda $177-million for this plan and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said they will appeal this week’s verdict in the Supreme Court.

INTERNATIONAL

Rich country decides not to find out why poor people exist

The right-wing government of Sweden has decided to stop funding “research of particular relevance to the fight against poverty in the least developed countries,” a letter from the Swedish Research Council says. The same government has also positioned itself as tough on migration, a phenomenon often driven by poverty. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson praised Denmark for pioneering stricter immigration policies in the Nordic region and remarked that his country is 10-15 years behind.

UNITED STATES

No race, no case

The Supreme Court’s six conservative justices have found that race-conscious admissions programmes are unconstitutional, effectively ending affirmative action at US universities. Affirmative action first made its way into policy in the 1960s, as many all-white schools began admitting minority students. While conversations about affirmative action tend to focus on race, white women – who are among its fiercest opponents – benefit most from the policy. Many universities will have to change their admissions programmes to remove current race-conscious policies, which will affect the number of international admissions.
Russia

So much for Putin’s implausible deniability

In the wake of the Wagner Group’s failed rebellion, Russia’s ‘official’ activity in Africa is coming under renewed scrutiny

The activities of the Wagner Group have long been shrouded in secrecy and disinformation – especially on the African continent.

For years, the group denied it was controlled by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a former chef-turned-mercenary leader. It also denied taking funding and orders from the Russian state, even as it expanded its activities to the Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan and Libya.

It claimed to be a private military contractor. But after last weekend, things have become a little clearer. Prigozhin and his men – who have been fighting on the front lines of Russia’s war in Ukraine – turned on the Kremlin, threatening to march on Moscow. The rebellion ended almost as soon as it began, and Prigozhin is now in exile in Belarus.

In a meeting with military leaders on Tuesday, President Vladimir Putin confirmed for the first time that the Wagner Group was funded by the Russian state, to the tune of nearly $1-billion in the last year alone.

And in the Central African Republic, the African state where Wagner has been the most active, presidential adviser Fidèle Gouandjika told AFP that the country has “a defence deal with Russia and not Wagner”, and that he expects that deal to be honoured by the Russian state – even if Wagner goes out of business.

This week investigative outlet The Sentry detailed how Wagner – and, by extension, Russia – “perfected a blueprint for state capture” in the CAR by “supporting a criminalised state … amassing military power, securing access to and plundering precious minerals, and subduing the population with terror.”

Putin confirmed for the first time that the Wagner Group was funded by the Russian state

A spokesperson for Russia’s foreign ministry said that it is up to African states to determine whether Wagner continues to operate on the continent.
Opacity harms democracy

NEWS ANALYSIS
Mohamed Sesay

Last Saturday, Sierra Leone held general elections with President Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) seeking a second term. Although there was significant tension during the campaign, with the opposition All People’s Congress (APC) party calling for the resignation of the chief electoral commissioner, polling day was largely peaceful. However, the tabulation process has been marred with controversy.

Bio was declared winner with 56.17% of the vote, slightly above the 55% threshold needed to avoid a run-off, and was rapidly sworn in. But APC candidate Samura Kamara rejected the outcome, calling it “a frontal attack” on democracy.

Ahead of the final results the National Election Watch (NEW), a group of domestic election observers, said that, according to their figures, neither candidate had won enough votes for a first-round victory. NEW subsequently released data that suggested the results announced by the electoral commission were statistically implausible.

The government responded by casting aspersions on NEW, with the Office of National Security releasing a statement raising serious concerns over the unofficial publication of election results.

It is worth noting that in the 2018 elections, won by Bio and the SLPP, NEW also projected a run-off before the official results, much to the displeasure of the then-ruling party – the APC. Given this, any accusations that NEW is motivated by partisan concerns ring hollow.

The electoral commission has so far failed to share data necessary to analyse the credibility of its figures, such as polling station data and the full results for the legislative local council elections.

Given the concerns raised by NEW and a number of international observers, it is incumbent upon the electoral commission to be transparent, and on the judiciary to rise above politics and give election petitions a fair hearing if made.

What is at stake is not just the country’s international credibility and the legitimacy of the government, but Sierra Leone’s hard-won system of democratic rule following the end of a decade-long civil war.

Mohamed Sesay is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Science at York University. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.
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Share real news.
This World Cup will change absolutely everything

A ball has yet to be kicked, but already the 2023 Women’s Football World Cup is breaking new ground

Make it rain: Team Zambia, like other African faves Nigeria, Morocco and South Africa, will be one of the teams to watch this year. Photo: Alex Livesey, FIFA via Getty

Firdose Moonda

One in every seven people on Earth watched some part of the 2019 Women’s Football World Cup, witnessing an event that changed the face of the women’s game.

Stadiums in France were sold out, the tournament’s social media presence resulted in billions of impressions and the prize money was more than it’s ever been – and that was only the beginning.

The 2023 edition, which begins in Australasia next month, is going to be bigger, better, and will fill more players’ bank accounts in what is set to be a landmark event for women’s sport.

Payouts for this tournament add up to $110-million, an increase of $80-million from four years ago. Each member federation is guaranteed a participation fee of $1.56-million and individual
players will receive at least $30,000 each. That alone will push players to put their best feet forward in search of the game’s ultimate prize.

Just ask the ever-present Nigeria, who have appeared at all eight previous World Cups, and had to threaten to protest over unpaid salaries at the last one. Their star striker, Barcelona-based Asisat Oshoala, told the BBC the new payment model will “serve as motivation to the players” who no longer depend on their national boards for income from the competition.

Nigeria are grouped with co-hosts Australia, debutante Republic of Ireland and 2015 quarter finalists Canada. They enter the tournament as the headline African side, but not the one with the best recent form: at last year’s Women’s Africa Cup of Nations (Wafcon), Nigeria was beaten by all three of the continent’s other World Cup representatives.

Eventual champions South Africa handed Nigeria defeat in the group stage, while Morocco beat them in the semifinal and Zambia in the third place playoff. The performances of Morocco and Zambia earned them their first World Cup appearances and represent a shift in the traditional footballing powerbase in Africa, which has been in the west. This time, the north and south of Africa are also at the World Cup and, of those, Morocco’s rise is the most impressive.

Thanks to an injection of investment by the country’s football federation in 2020, they have a two-tier professional league, some of the best facilities in the world and a string of good results to show for it. Their men’s team went where no African team has gone before and were semifinalists at last year’s World Cup,
while their women became the first Arab team to reach the knockout stages of the Wafcon.

Morocco takes on Germany, Colombia and South Korea with a squad made up of players who come from footballing families, such as Ghizlane Chebbak, the daughter of former men’s national team player Larbi; and young women who have had to fight for their place in the game. Rania Harrara is one example: she had to overcome cultural prejudices to play for her school’s boys’ team, where she faced so much discrimination that she started her own club.

Harrara’s story of being othered is not unique in the women’s game. Zambia’s captain Barbra Banda was left out of their Wafcon squad over controversial gender eligibility criteria, but has been cleared to play at the World Cup. She is best-known for scoring two hat-tricks in the space of four days at the 2021 Olympic Games, and has netted a total of 36 goals in 37 international appearances.

Zambia, in 77th place, is the lowest-ranked team at the event, and are in a tough pool with Spain, Costa Rica and Japan. But they know that anything they can achieve will inspire generations.

Each member federation is guaranteed a participation fee of $1.56-million and individual players will receive at least $30,000

That is also the mindset of South Africa, who will play a second successive World Cup and are still searching for their first tournament win. They are without talismanic former captain Janine van Wyk, who was ruled out of contention.
by a knee injury, but have been bolstered by the return of striker Thembi Kgatlana, who has recovered from a ruptured Achilles in time. Kgatlana was responsible for Banyana Banyana’s first World Cup goal, against Spain in 2019, and will doubtless be after a few more at this event. South Africa will play Sweden, Italy and Argentina in the group stage.

Van Wyk previously told *The Continent* she believes it will take more than just faith for an African team to win the World Cup, given the strength of sides like defending champions USA, European champions England and perennial favourites Brazil, whose iconic forward Marta will make a sixth World Cup appearance.

But that doesn’t mean the African contingent won’t dare to dream. Already, there have been some firsts for this competition and they will want to add to the pioneering spirit.

Female video match officials will be used for the first time and Heba Saadia will become the first Palestinian woman to officiate at a World Cup.

From a financial perspective, Fifa insisted for the first time on what they believed was a fair fee for television rights for women’s football. Bids from Europe’s big five countries – England, Germany, France, Italy and Spain – were initially rejected for being too low after Fifa’s president Gianni Infantino said it was the organisation’s “moral and legal obligation not to undersell” the women’s game.

The public broadcasters of those countries are now coughing up millions to screen the World Cup to an audience that is increasingly appreciative and interested in what female footballers can do.

Let the games begin!
Senegal rides the waves

Surfing culture is not new to West Africa’s coastlines. But with its perfect location – on the westernmost point of the continent, in reach of both northern and southern hemisphere swells – Senegal is riding a wave of renewed enthusiasm for the sport.

Lee Nxumalo

The first recorded description of surfing, anywhere in the world, comes from a German merchant on the coastline of Ghana, more than 400 years ago. Unsure of exactly what he was seeing, he described how parents would “tie their children to boards and throw them into the water”.

Photos: John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images
In fact, according to the surfer-historian Kevin Dawson, this merchant was witnessing a 1,000-year old tradition of surfing along West Africa’s coastlines – a tradition that was interlinked with religious and cultural practises, such as the veneration of the water deity Mami Wata, and eventually transplanted to North America by slaves.

In Senegal, this tradition is still going strong.

Along the country’s 500km of pristine coastline, surf culture is thriving. Nowhere is this more true than along the shores of Ngor Island – described by the local surf camp as “a paradise on a tiny island surrounded by a few world class waves, close to the city centre of Dakar” – which since the 1980s has played host to a resurgence of interest in the sport.

Leading the modern surfing renaissance were trailblazers Moustapha “Patina” Ndiaye, Renee Laraise and Oumar Seye. Seye became the first professional surfer from Senegal, after being discovered by a talent scout at age 16. With sponsorship from surfing brands Rusty and Rip Curl, Seye entered competitions in Europe in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, before retiring.

Now, this generation of surfers is determined to advance the development of the sport in Senegal.

“We wanted to help our younger brothers because we didn’t have that help when we started,” Laraise told The Continent. “We were trying to do things on our own and learning on our own. We want to give them opportunities in surfing so that they can do more than we did.”
In 2008, Senegal achieved a significant milestone by participating in the World Junior Championships, marking the country’s debut in international surfing competitions. Senegal achieved another ground-breaking moment in 2019 when Ngor Island became the venue for the World Surf League qualifying series – making it the first West African country to host a professional surfing event.

Laraise estimates that there are more than 300 active surfers in Dakar, and about 100 of them competed in this year’s national championship. Younger surfers will be hoping to qualify for the 2026 Summer Youth Olympic Games, which will be hosted in the Senegalese capital – the first African city to host any version of the Olympic Games.

It hasn’t all been easy riding. Getting women involved in the sport has been a slow process, in part due to societal pressures on girls that prioritise marriage and motherhood over participation sports. But the Fédération Sénégalaise de Surf has been pushing hard to address this, and its efforts are paying off: in 2020, Khadjou Sambe – who grew up on Ngor Island – became the first woman professional surfer from Senegal.

She dedicates some of her time to teaching the other girls how to master the waves. “I want it for black girls, all girls, not just me,” Sambe told Outside magazine in an interview.
Things that make us hungry

In The Continent this season, we asked you to tell us about your favourite dishes, recipes and ingredients – because if there is one thing that unites this continent, it is the love of great food. We have been overwhelmed with responses – and now we are very, very hungry. If you want to tell us about the things that get your stomach rumbling, send your contribution to letters@thecontinent.org. We pay $100 for published letters.

The care-free chicken
Angela Chukunzira

There is chicken, and there is kuku kienyeji. I promise you the two are not the same. There are a number of ways to describe this chicken, as I have heard across different parts of Africa that I have travelled. The roadrunner. Hard-bodied. But in Kenya, it is known as kuku kienyeji.

The chicken is seen scouring the earth in search of food. I have always marvelled at how they live their lives care-free. Wandering on the fences, near the dishes that have been put outside to be washed while they scavenge through the leftovers. That is how they build their flavour. The chasing and capturing of a chicken for a meal is a real adventure of hide and seek. Preparing it is a story worth telling – from removing the feathers, to cleaning it and finally cooking it.

But what makes this dish particularly tantalising is the addition of “munyu musherekha”. In Western Kenya, munyu musherekha is a form of ash salt that is made by burning dried bean pods or dried banana peels. It is not only a superior meat tenderiser, but also a punch of flavour. It is what makes the “hard-bodied” chicken fall off the bone while you mould a piece of ugali in your hand to savour it with.

Gilding the water lily
Amanda Kubuitsile

When you visit the rest of Botswana from Maun, which is the gateway to the famous Okavango Delta, there is only one thing
that people want to know: Did you bring tswii?

Tswii is a delectable, juicy, beautiful combination of beef and a smoky, bitter, distinctive-tasting water lily tuber, which itself is called tswii in Setswana and Seyei. With big chewy bones in there as the cherry on top, the combination is seasoned with salt only and slow-cooked to soft perfection.

The ratio of tswii to the meat and the oil, and how they are all mashed together, is where you get the cook’s flair. My favourite chef makes it with a lot of tswii, almost as if there is no meat, and then blends it really smooth. The tswii flavour somehow is not overpowering, like it can be in other dishes. Some people leave many chunks of chewable tswii which you can see and pick out. Some tswii is more oily than others. But it hits the spot every time.

Tswii is traditional enough to be found at a wedding but remains a much-loved street food in Maun. It even has its own centre. A square courtyard formed by shop buildings. We call the spot “Copper Ras” – in other parts of Botswana, it would be “Koporase”, referring to a co-operative.

People go there with the craving hanging heavy over them and the dishing ritual commences. First, the chef has to open up the black plastic which is covering layers of newspaper or cloth used for insulation. Then she stirs for what seems like an hour for the tswii to raise to the top. Finally she offers you a small spoonful to taste. Now she starts digging deep into the pot looking for a huge bone which will fill up the plate. You will feel like it is a scam, but you are also dying for that bone.

Your craving is too much; you are bursting with impatience as she searches. But you are not even going to say a word; that’s her pot and she feels like your grandmother. Finally she puts the last little bit to complete your “spoon” – which goes for 15 pula ($1.10) at most – and she hands it to you. The whole world does not matter anymore.

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The bean that seals the deal

Joyce Kimani

This food – commonly known as njahi – has inspired more memes and likes on social media than some of Kenya’s leading musicians. This black bean is a divisive food. Some say they should be sold in a hardware store because it tastes like soil in your mouth, but it stands as one of my favourites.

Njahi is a very important part of our traditional wedding ceremony. Among my people, the Gikuyu, it is a “seal the deal” food you serve your prospective in-laws during bridewealth negotiations. It
slaps differently when mashed with boiled ripe bananas or when shallow fried with grated carrots.

My mum convinced me that it is very rich in iron and perhaps this is the reason new mothers are stuffed with a stew made from it. Legend has it that it increases breast milk production.

When I suffered low blood levels (especially during that time of the month) giving me dizzy spells, shivers and a sharp chest pain, my nutritionist smiled and told me she had the perfect solution: njahi. I ate njahi till I fell in love with it.

While some prefer it with soup, the best way I enjoy it is as a snack. And so, next time you find me reaching for a quick bite, your bet would be right – I’m there for the black beans.

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**Like a warm hug**

Anna Kirya

I always say, two of the best things about living in Uganda are the food and the weather. On any given day, you can walk into a restaurant, ask for food and have a rainbow of posho, matooke, yams, sweet potatoes (yellow or creamish in colour), kalo (millet bread) and pumpkin – and that doesn’t even cover half of it. Tying all this wonderful food together are the sauces. I love boo sauce because it is something I cannot make at home. I do not know how and I do not care to learn. Eating it is literally self-care and you wouldn’t want to give yourself a massage would you? It is a treat.

Boo is not for you if you want a sweet meal. If you are looking for a light snack on the go, you’re better off trying something else. If what you want is a thick sauce that has vegetables, a heavy mouth feel and one that will fill you right up, then this sauce from Northern Uganda might just be what you need.

Boo, pronounced “boe”, is made from groundnut paste, gobe and otigo greens, and can be eaten as a side or as the main sauce. As with any dish, recipes vary and may include okra. Because it is something of a speciality dish, it used to be hard to find boo in Kampala restaurants. Luckily, this has changed.

When it comes to the taste, I have found boo to often be smoky and slightly tart. That tell-tale sweetness you’d expect from the ground nuts is muted by the gobe greens. That slightly bitter taste at the end, in the way that dark chocolate is slightly bitter – that’s the otigo.

I often associate food with feelings. Chips for when I’m feeling light, katogo for when I miss home. Boo? It is the sort of meal that makes me feel like I’m being given a warm hug.
Ultimate rainy day comfort food
Abdul Brima

I can conjure the aroma and sweet taste of a delicately-prepared groundnut soup even from a distance. Its oily, smooth and creamy appearance makes it irresistible. The craving for it is more appealing on a wet evening because the spices used to prepare it are a comfort against cold. When cooked with the right amount of hot pepper, you will be sweating by the time you finish a small bowl.

The nuts, grown and sold all over Sierra Leone, are ground thoroughly until they become like peanut butter. This paste is then boiled before adding hot pepper, fish, meat or chicken. It can be cooked with palm oil or olive oil, and vegetables like onions, tomatoes, garden eggs, bitter balls, and one or two maggi cubes.

Groundnut soup – or granat soup, as it is locally called – is also very popular in other West African countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. International tourists go for a taste and it often becomes their favourite afterwards.

During traditional festivities like weddings, or the naming of a child, people serve groundnut soup with meat or fish alongside boiled rice.

Food that makes me miss my mom
Maria Ithana

Oshigali, a relish made out of okalunya (cowpeas, also known as black-eyed peas) is beloved by the northerners of Namibia. You feel its unique flavour first in the nostrils and then it hits the back of your tongue. Eating it for the first time throws the mind all over the place in an attempt to identify what the ingredients could be. The base ingredient is a bean type that is white with a black face.

Mothers serve oshigali to their families on special occasions and every time I eat it today, I can’t help but miss my late mother who used to prepare it so well.

To make it, soak the beans in cold water for two or three minutes so that their skins puff up and can be easily removed. After that, wash the beans and boil them. Once the pot is boiling, reduce the heat and cook until the beans are soft. At this stage, the beans are blended or mashed into a thick sauce or soup. Add salt, marula oil, olive oil, butter or pepper to taste.

Oshigali is best served with mahangu (pearl millet meal), oshithima (our version of pap/nshima/ugali/posho) or rice.
Entoto, the Ethiopian capital before Addis Ababa, was not popular with the royal family. Taytu Betul, who would go on to become Empress Taytu Betul, thought it cold and miserable. Perched on a mountaintop, firewood was hard to come by, and there was not enough room for the 50,000-strong population.

The valley below, however, was lush, fertile farmland, near to the hot springs – Finfinne – that gave the existing settlement its name in the local Oromo language. In 1886, the empire moved its court there, and gave it a new Amharic name: Addis Ababa, the new flower.

Since then, it has grown to become one of Africa’s busiest cities, home to about four-million people, and is the continent’s
diplomatic capital, with the African Union headquartered in a glittering glass-and-steel skyscraper – one of many that dominate an ever-changing skyline.

Amid the hustle and bustle and the many construction sites, it can be hard to remember the city’s humble origins. A new photo exhibit intends to change that. *Addis Ababa: The Birth of a City*, housed in the Yimtubezina Cultural Museum and Centre, has, for the first time, gathered most of the earliest photographs of the city in one place.

“At the end of the 19th century,
Ethiopia attracted explorers from all over the world. As photographic technology became simpler, many of these travelers equipped themselves with a travel camera and recorded ‘views and types’ of the country they discovered, and photographs of the landscape and its inhabitants,” curator Abel Assefa told The Continent.

The photos are all more than a century old, and represent a priceless snapshot of Ethiopian history. So too, incidentally, does the Yimtubezina Museum itself, which is housed in a 123-year-old building – one that would have been standing when the photographs on display inside were first taken.
Ghana takes the Venice Biennale

Africa is well represented at the world’s most prestigious architecture showcase, and Ghana’s presence is particularly notable.

Esther Appiah-Fei and Dennis Nartey Awatey

This year’s Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious events in the world of architecture, is curated by Ghanaian-Scottish architect and novelist Lesley Lokko. More than half of the participants are from Africa and its diaspora, including fellow Ghanaian Serge Attukwei Clottey, a fascinating multidisciplinary artist who plays as much with material as with the art making process. He spoke to The Continent about his craft and journey.

The son of a trader and an artist, Clottey grew up in the Labadi beach area of Accra. Clottey first became interested in art by helping his dad paint. “I enjoyed
painting, but I also wanted to create a way of expression that I understood better,” Clottey recalls.

*Time and Chance*, Clottey’s piece at the biennale, is part of the artistic concept he calls “Afrogallonism” after the old plastic cans popularly referred to in Ghana as Kufuor gallons (after former president John Kufuor, whose tenure in the early 2000s was plagued by chronic water shortages).

The giant wave made from hundreds of squares cut from reclaimed old Kufuor gallons pays homage to the Labadi beach neighbourhood where Clottey is based, but is also an act of environmentalism. “Some of these gallons were sourced from the beaches of Labadi where they were washed ashore after being discarded improperly,” said Clottey.

Clottey’s experimentation with materials beyond his father’s paint, brush and canvas started with grown-ups teasing him for playing with imported electronic toys. “According to them, kids as young as 12 or 14 made the toys and electronics that I was fascinated by,” he recalls.

It made him want to take them apart and figure them out. If he understood what made them work, would he become “a black person who created his own inventions” he wondered. Soon, he was frequenting dumpsites to scavenge for broken toys and electronics – but instead of becoming an inventor he grew into an artist who recycled discarded objects.

His dad, however, wanted him to focus on painting. “I took his advice and attended Ghanatta College of Arts,” Clottey says. He also studied in Brazil for a few months. “It was there that I experienced new forms of art, eventually combining painting with other art types. Most of my early work focused on robots, electronics, and sounds.”

In 2016, Clottey turned heads in Accra when he took to wearing his deceased mother’s clothes, to mourn and remember her. These days, even the team members with whom he visits dumpsites to scavenge for gallons wear women’s clothes. That play on gender is a political statement in Ghana’s current environment of charged culture politics where the Parliament is considering a harsh anti-LGBTIQ+ law. And Clottey intends for it to be political. “Sexuality and identity are human rights, and everyone deserves to be able to be themselves without strict gender stereotypes.”
The marathon that doesn’t stop till you do
Thembinkosi Sojola and the punishing art of running around in circles

Ryan Lenora Brown in Johannesburg

At 2pm on a spring afternoon last year in Johannesburg, Thembinkosi Sojola went out for a 6.7km jog.

When he finished, he took a swig of water and spent a few minutes chatting with friends and fellow runners at the Taroko Trail Park in a nature reserve in the east of the city. Then, exactly an hour after he started his run, he headed out for another one.

Again, he completed 6.7km. Again, he waited until the top of the hour, and again, he did the same thing all over. And then he did it another two dozen times.

By the time Sojola stopped, he had run 207km in 31 hours to win the South African national championship of a brutal race with a deceptively cosy name: The Backyard Ultra.

Now held in 37 countries around the world, Backyard Ultras play by a simple set of rules. Competitors have an hour to finish a course of exactly – yes – 6.7km. Whatever time they don’t use is theirs to rest and eat. At the top of the next hour, they do it again, continuing until only one runner is left. The races are often delirious, days-long suffer-fests, with the longest on record lasting 101 hours.

“When you think you’re done, that’s the point where you learn what you’re really capable of,” says Sojola, who will be the only runner from sub-Saharan Africa to compete in the Backyard Ultra world championships in Tennessee in October. “In my mind, I’m saying I’m tired, I want to stop. But then I see my body continuing to go, and I realise I can do things I think are impossible.”

Sojola was a 35-year-old father of four who had never so much as gone for a jog when, in 2018, his wife convinced him to join her for their local 5km Park Run in the South African coastal city of George. The run went well, so he thought: why not a 10k? “That one was really hard,” he remembers, “I hated it. And I couldn’t stop. I went right back.”

Within months, he had extended his reach to marathons, and by 2019, he found himself on the starting line of the Comrades Marathon in Durban. In any other country, an 89km race through a region known as the “Valley of a Thousand Hills” would be a distinctly fringe pursuit. In South Africa, it attracts 20,000 runners annually, along with throngs of screaming fans and millions of television viewers.

“It changed my life,” says Sojola. From that moment, he says, he was hooked on running extremely long distances. Then, in 2021, he saw an ad for a weird looking
little race called a Backyard Ultra.

He signed up without having any real plan – and won. And he kept winning. To date, Sojola has won four of the five Backyard Ultras he has entered, including the national championship last year.

Keeping it going

That race earned him a berth at the sport’s Olympics: the Big’s Backyard Ultra, held in the literal backyard of its founder, Gary Cantrell (alias Lazarus Lake) in Tennessee. Cantrell, who cuts a Santa Claus-like figure, is an ultra-marathon organiser once dubbed an “evil genius” and the “Leonardo da Vinci of pain” by Trail Running magazine. “I cannot wait to meet him,” Sojola says.

In the meantime, as he hustles to find sponsors and raise funds for his trip, he decided to run another Comrades this June, this time with a friend.

In the Backyard Ultra parlance, there is only one finisher to every race – the last person left on the course. Every other competitor receives a “DNF,” or “did not finish.” But since the winner can only go one lap further than the second place runner, the race also gives a nod to that person, who is known as “the assist”.

Since Sojola was training for the Backyard Ultra world championships, he decided to run this year’s Comrades Marathon as a kind of assist for his friend Sam, who was targeting a finishing time of less than seven and a half hours.

For 87.7km, they ran together, stride for stride, through the farming towns and sugar cane fields of KwaZulu-Natal. Several times, Sam asked if they could slow down, or stop altogether. “I said, Sam, just talk to your mind,” Sojola says. “Tell it you are going to keep going.”

Seven hours and 10 minutes after they left Pietermaritzburg, the two men crossed the finish in Durban. Sam first, and just behind him, his friend Sojola – who for once wasn’t there to push his own limits, but to help someone else push theirs.
Tabitha Chawinga: Queen of the football field

The Malawian athlete’s star has been rising for nearly a decade and now she’s shining her brightest yet

Jack McBrams in Lilongwe

In May, Tabitha Chawinga became the first African to win the golden boot in the Italian Serie A Women’s League. “Reflecting on my humble beginnings in the impoverished village of Rumphi, Malawi, and now holding this golden boot, fills me with profound gratitude and humility,” she said. The 23 goals she scored for Inter Milan last season were a remarkable eight more than her nearest rival from Juventus, Cristiana Gireli.

Chawinga has indeed come a long way from the days when she darted barefoot across dirt fields in Rumphi, a town tucked away in northern Malawi. A cousin introduced her to the game when she was five – he used to pull her into the neighbourhood matches with his older peers. She hasn’t looked back since. At 13, she caught the eye of a local women’s league side, DD Sunshine, before being spotted by a Swedish scout in 2014.

Joining Sweden’s third-division club Krokom/Dvärsätts IF at 18 made Chawinga the first woman footballer from Malawi to don the colours of a European club. But she was just getting started: although the season was mid-drift, in just 18 games Chawinga scored an awe-inspiring 39 goals to win her first golden boot.

In China, where she has been the star...
striker for top flight clubs Jiangsu Suning and Wuhan Jiangda, Chawinga has won the golden boot three times.

Her former Chinese club secured Chawinga from Sweden’s second-division Kvarnsvedens IK for a record-breaking transfer fee. She had scored 43 goals for the Swedish club in her first season, helping it join the country’s top league. They were not eager to see her go and replaced her with her comparably talented sister, Temwa Chawinga. Both Chawinga sisters now play for Wuhan Jiangda, which loaned Tabitha to Inter Milan.

Returning home for a well deserved holiday after her Serie A golden boot award, Chawinga, who is also captain of Malawi’s national women’s football team, met President President Lazarus Chakwera. He praised her immense talent, saying she has had a tremendous impact on countless young girls and women in Malawi and across the African continent.

And continental impact is what Chawinga is going for. She says she wants to win African Footballer of the Year before she hangs her boots up. So far, ESPN has named her the best African player of the month in Europe on two occasions. Elite European clubs like Chelsea, PSG, and Espanyol now clamour for Chawinga’s signature. Speaking to The Continent during her holiday in Lilongwe, she remained tight-lipped about her next move. But her commitment to the beautiful game and her relentless pursuit of greatness shone through all she said.

Bet on her. But also protect her – and other African women footballers.

Like many women footballers, Chawinga has endured relentless ridicule and mockery based on her appearance rather than her performances. “I wouldn’t say the ridicule stopped; it’s ongoing but I found ways to silence it,” she said.

The mistreatment of African women footballers for “seeming masculine” spreads wider than Chawinga – and beyond trashtalk by fans into official policy: Bodies like the Confederation for African Football are increasingly testing women footballers to check if they are “real women”. Last year, four Zambian national players, including star striker Barbra Banda, were ruled out of the Women Africa Cup of Nations, after refusing treatment to lower their natural testosterone levels.

For Chawinga, personal accomplishments like the golden boot help drown out the negative voices, but “what has really worked for me is building a supportive network and relationships. I am surrounded by so much love that there isn’t time left to focus on the ridicule”. ■
Is there an actual problem, officer? Like, a real one?

How often do people encounter the police in their everyday lives?

More often than they’d like to, apparently – at least when they’re driving.

On average across 36 African countries surveyed in 2021/2022, Afrobarometer found that fully two thirds (66%) of adults say the police at least “sometimes” stop drivers without good reason. Four in 10 citizens (39%) say this happens “often” or “always.”

Police in Gabon and Kenya have the worst reputation among drivers: 68% and 66% of respondents, respectively, say drivers are frequently pulled over without cause. Senegal and Madagascar follow with 58% each.

Drivers are least often hassled, according to respondents, in Benin (16% often/always), Cabo Verde (16%), Morocco (20%), and Seychelles (20%).

Botswana joins Benin and Cabo Verde as the only surveyed countries where fewer than half of citizens say the police at least “sometimes” engage in this little game.

Afrobarometer didn’t ask – dumb question? – what happens after the police stop them.

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.
1. In which city is the Hassan Tower (pictured) located?
2. Who was declared the winner of Sierra Leone’s election last week?
3. How many colours make up the Zimbabwean flag?
4. Adama Barrow is which country’s president?
5. Mansa Musa was the ninth mansa of which country?
6. Ngor is a commune d’arrondissement of which Senegalese city?
7. In which country are the Itombwe Mountains located?
8. “Adu Genet”, “City of Humans” and “Sheger” are nicknames of which city?
9. What does “CAF” stand for?
10. What currency is used in Guinea?

**HOW DID I DO?** WhatsApp ‘ANSWERS’ to +27 73 805 6068 and we’ll send the answers to you!
I am getting on a plane. Or I was getting a plane. Strictly speaking by the time you, dear reader, read this, I will – barring a repeat of the whole African Peace Delegation debacle in Warsaw two weeks ago – have gotten on a plane.

It’s exciting, isn’t it? The thrill of travel. The anticipation of arrival. And of course the big existential question – will your peripatetic pen-pal respect the traditions of her ancestors, of her culture, and of the generation that came before her, by having luggage that is over the weight limit and will more than likely get her into trouble at check-in? (Spoiler: Yes. Yes she will.)

It’s not fair though. I bet our leaders don’t have to sit on top of their suitcases, squashing down their socks until the zip consents to go all the way round and the latch submits to the lock.

In fact, how much do the going-abroad-for-healthcare gang even need to pack, anyway? Does Paul Biya buy two of everything and keep one for his visits to Cameroon and another at his home in Geneva? Or is he not in Cameroon often enough to justify the expense of keeping stuff there?

Who’s leading the pack?

CONTINENTAL DRIFT
Samira Sawlani

And how many of our leaders are so scarred by the Coupdashians that they’ve developed a fear of flying and need emotional support items, like a bottle of therapy tear gas or something similarly reassuring, in case the army takes over while they’re in the air.

While we may be packing our bags, one of our leaders, it seems, is not: Julius Maada Bio, who has secured a second term after being declared winner of Sierra Leone’s presidential election. We don’t know if he packed up his stuff just in case he didn’t win. But if he did, he might want to wait before unpacking – the opposition has rejected the results, with runner-up Samura Kamara slating the result as “not credible” and declaring that it was a “sad day for our beloved country”.

He might have a case worth arguing: the Commonwealth observer mission said the elections were largely peaceful but that there were “gaps in transparency” – and monitors from the European Union noted “statistical inconsistencies” and urged Sierra Leone’s electoral commission to “publish disaggregated results data per polling station” to back up their verdict.
We’ve all got baggage

Packing is stressful though. Some of us can’t help but leave it to the very last moment. We definitely don’t expect the president of Gabon, for example, to have done any pre-emptive packing ahead of elections in August. Even though Ali Bongo has not yet even said whether he will run for president again – the word “run” doing a lot of heavy lifting here.

But he’s only been in power since 2009 – his dad managed 42 years! And at just 64 years old, Bongo is basically still a teenager in politician years, so we’re willing to bet he’ll be up for a few more years of presidenting.

The opposition haven’t even managed to unite behind just one candidate, so Bongo is probably not losing any sleep over the election and will get around to running for re-election eventually. Or briskly strolling for election, more likely.

Considering a recent report on how much the current Kenyan government has spent on travelling, it’s clear that Billy Ruto has no problem packing – even if it’s all just for work, as he insists.

And even if it is for holiday purposes, why should they not travel? Do you know how stressful it is to run a country? No, you don’t, because you’ve never done it. Unless you’re one of our leaders – if so, drop me a DM already, we can go do coffee or a coup or something!

Billy’s been a busy bae though, what with signing the controversial finance bill into law, and bringing all his new taxes and levies into being. And figuring out what to do about his opposition nemesis Raila Odinga, who has called for a civil disobedience campaign to force him to repeal the Finance Act.

Earlier this year the opposition held demonstrations which, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, saw at least 12 people killed. Will we see more of the same? And just how are ordinary Kenyans going to survive these tax hikes? It’s a lot to unpack.

While we wish our Muslim readers Eid Mubarak for this Wednesday past, our thoughts are with the people of Sudan where despite an Eid ceasefire being declared, war raged on regardless.

For many, this was an Eid like no other – separated from loved ones, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, or displaced in their own country.

When it comes to this conflict, it’s past time to end the suffering.

It’s time pack it all up. ■
The high cost of elections in Zimbabwe

Hiking the fees charged just for being on the ballot is an attack on democracy

Leon Poshai

Zimbabwe will go to the polls on 23 August. But the nomination process for candidates has already raised questions about whether these will be the most exclusionary elections the country has ever seen.

Nomination fees set by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission with the approval of the minister of justice, legal and parliamentary affairs, massively increased this year. The cost of standing for the presidency went from $1,000 to $20,000, while the cost of standing for a parliamentary seat has gone from $50 to $1,000. These increases would be dramatic in any country. In one where poverty has relentlessly risen over the last 15 years, they are prohibitive.

This has had a dramatic impact on the number of candidates standing at all levels. Presidential candidates halved from 23 in 2018 to 11, and many parties struggled to field a full set of candidates. Parties such as the National Constitutional Assembly and the Movement for Democratic Change have only been able to register their presidential candidates. The Citizens Coalition for Change, the main opposition to the Zanu-PF government, navigated this thorny terrain through crowdfunding and did somewhat better, registering 210 National Assembly candidates and 1,970 potential councillors in addition to its presidential candidate.

Some aspiring candidates submitted an urgent high court challenge seeking a review of the exorbitant fees. The applicants argued that the statutory instrument SI 144/2022 was a violation of their constitutional right to participate in the elections, but the high court ruled that the case was not urgent – even though the nominations court was due to sit the very next day – a classic strategy to allow the ruling party to have its way.

Only Zanu-PF benefits from the changes, because it has access to government resources

Only Zanu-PF, the ruling party, benefits from the changes, because it has access to government resources. As so often happened in the past, it has found a low-profile way to give itself an advantage even before the campaigning had begun.

Leon Poshai is a researcher, elections analyst and writer based in Zimbabwe. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.
Baaaad news: Ahead of Eid al-Adha, a vendor carries a ram to market in Nigeria’s Ogun State. Muslim celebrants here were less than amused by the high prices charged for rams for slaughter this week, thanks to the removal of the fuel subsidy and the state of the naira.

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images