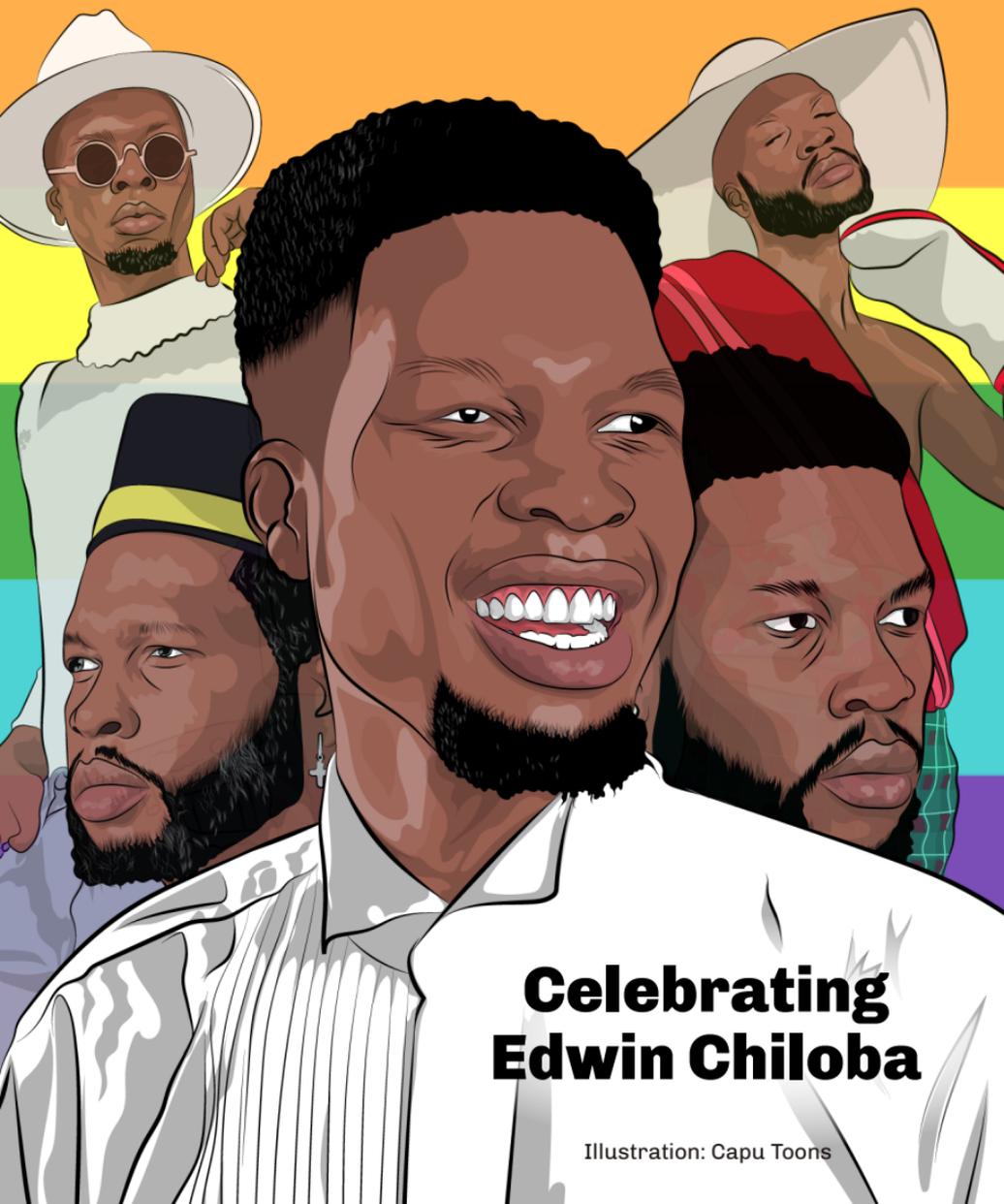


African journalism. 21 JANUARY 2023 | ISSUE 112

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



**Celebrating
Edwin Chiloba**

Illustration: Capu Toons



Cover: Edwin Chiloba, the 25-year-old LGBTIQ activist from Kenya, was buried on Tuesday. Police have arrested one person in connection with his brutal murder on 1 January. Homosexuality is illegal in Kenya. Gay sex is punishable with 14 years in prison. And the Supreme Court recently defended this discrimination. Each act emboldens hate. This week, we are celebrating Chiloba's life. We speak to his family, who paint a picture of someone who loved fashion and chapatis, who was hardworking and ambitious, and who was tragically denied the chance to fulfil an incredible potential. (p10)

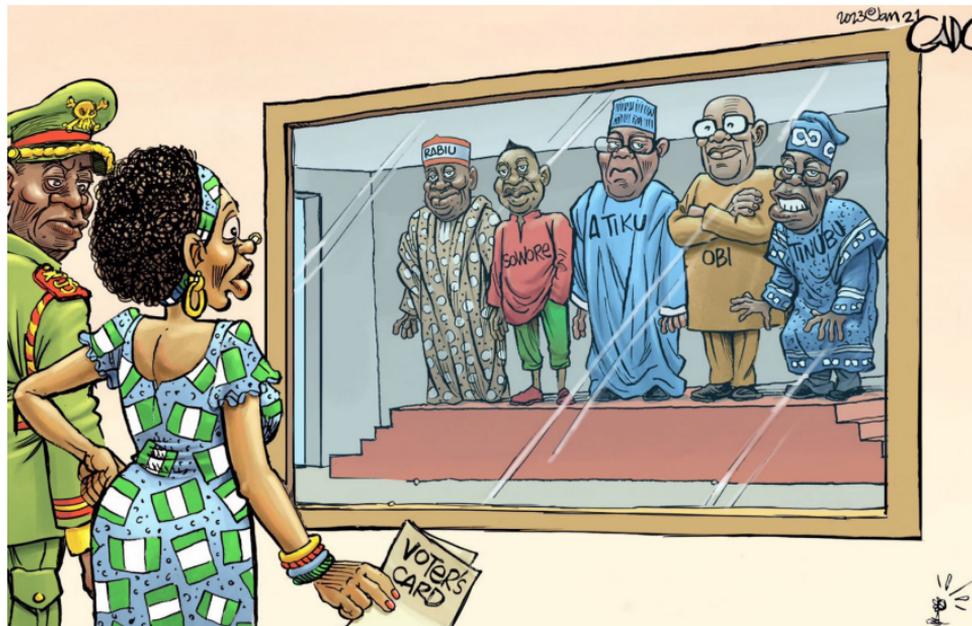
Inside:

- **Russia-Zambia:** Family can't identify slain student's body (p8)
- **Facebook:** Controversy over severance for African moderators (p9)
- **We asked, you answered:** What does it mean to be African? (p16)
- **Turning the page:** 2023's best African books (p18)
- **Power crisis:** How did South Africa get into this mess? (p20)
- **Investigation:** Dutch

missionary in Malawi embroiled in sexual assault allegations (p22)

■ **Analysis:** Ethiopia's fragile peace (p28)

Get the latest edition of *The Continent*, plus every back issue (all 111 of them) on thecontinent.org. To subscribe (for free!), save *The Continent's* number to your phone (+27 73 805 6068) and send us a message on WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram.



EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Teddy Junior clips his brother's wings

Ruslan Obiang Nsue, the son of Equatorial Guinea's leader, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, has been placed under house arrest in connection with the theft of an aircraft from the national airline. Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, also a son of the president, said: "I will not allow myself to be carried away by familialism or favouritism, which is why I have ordered his immediate arrest." We're sure it has nothing to do with the fact that this means less opposition should he ever desire to succeed his father, who has been in power for 44 years.

LIFE ON EARTH

Carbon offsets are junk dressed as jam

Carbon offsets are a good idea: While polluters are reducing their pollution, they can pay for things like forests to be conserved, so they keep sucking carbon out of the atmosphere, to stem the already unfolding, large-scale and catastrophic collapse of our ecosystems. But in practice, offsets don't work. An investigation by the British *Guardian* newspaper found that offset schemes used by industry giants like Shell and Disney are "worthless" fancy maths. That's a problem for Gabon, and other countries that plan to corner the carbon credits market.



Class act: New Zealand's soon-to-be Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

NEW ZEALAND

Head of state quits before turning 97

At 42, and after only five and half years in power, Jacinda Ardern, the prime minister of New Zealand, resigned this week, saying: "I know what this job takes. And I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice." The leaders on this continent who should be taking notes won't — their eyesight, compassion and leadership skills faded decades ago. Ardern's term will end on 7 February, after which she plans to spend her time with family.

DRC/RWANDA

Mass graves found in Eastern DRC

The United Nations confirmed the discovery of 49 bodies in mass graves in the Democratic Republic of Congo this week. The graves in Ituri are believed to be the results of attacks by Cooperative for Development of the Congo (Codeco) militias last weekend.

EUROPE

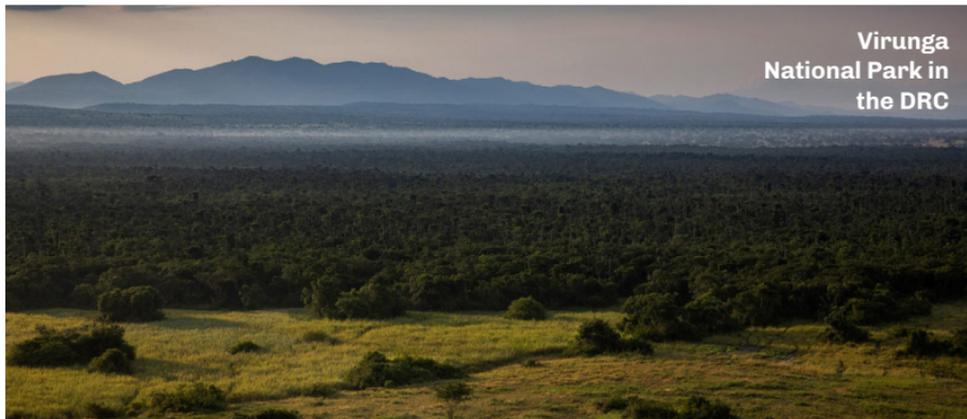
The language of xenophobia

Italy's foreign minister Antonio Tajani said this week his nation was ready to accept more "regular immigrants", but more efforts were needed to reduce "irregular immigration". His right-wing government has been quick to pick up the coded language of its neighbours.

BURKINA FASO

50 women abducted

About 50 women have been abducted in Burkina Faso by alleged jihadists, according to Rodolphe Sorgho, the Sahel regional governor. They were taken from the Arbinda area, which is under blockade by jihadists. Almost one million people are living in blockaded areas of the country. Thousands have died in jihadist attacks since 2015.



Virunga
National Park in
the DRC

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Refugees' plight adds fuel to forest's fires

Virunga National Park is one of the world's most important forested areas. It's also in an area of the Democratic

Republic of Congo where people displaced by the ongoing conflict with Rwanda (it denies involvement) have fled to stay alive. Some 500 acres have been chopped down for firewood in two months. The park's Méthode Uhoze said: "We have an obligation to protect the park, and that really puts us in a difficult situation."

PHILIPPINES

Ressa cleared of trumped-up tax evasion charges

Nobel laureate Maria Ressa and her online news website *Rappler* have been cleared of all tax evasion charges by a court. The ruling noted that the prosecution could not prove the allegations – possibly because the case was created to shut up a publication which keeps annoying leaders by asking tough questions. Ressa is also appealing a six-year sentence for libel.

SOUTH AFRICA

A ship off the old bloc

South Africa is taking part in joint naval exercises with Russia and China. Its fleet is barely able to leave port, thanks to budget cuts and corruption. But this is about political statements. And South Africa has stayed loyal in its alliance with Russia, even refusing to use the word "invasion" when talking about the invasion of Ukraine. In these actions, the wider point South Africa makes – that countries should not be forced to choose between binary options on the global stage – is lost.

SWITZERLAND

**Out with the new,
in with the same old**

The would-be leaders of the world are in Davos, Switzerland again to decide how things ought to work. This lot (with some

honourable exceptions) have pushed the world into fire, flood, hunger and desperation, but at least they can still source quality materials for their pressed suits and afford the fuel for their private jets. On the plus side, the guest list could come in handy when the revolution comes.



**Lots of red
flags on such a
slippery slope.**

THE GAMBIA

**Vice President Joof
dies in India, age 65**

Badara Alieu Joof, The Gambia's vice president, died this week in India, aged 65. President Adama Barrow announced his passing on Twitter. Appointed last year, he had previously served as minister of higher education, research, science and technology. He was seen by many as a leader who was pro-poor and pushed to make government programmes and policy account for and benefit ordinary Gambians.

RWANDA

**Kagame critic killed
in motorcycle crash**

John Williams Ntwali, editor of *The Chronicle* news site in Rwanda, died in a motorcycle incident this week. He had been a thorn in the side of the government, in his work suggesting life in Rwanda was not as rosy as President Paul Kagame's slick PR machine made out. Police said that on Tuesday a speeding car hit a motorbike Ntwali was on, killing him, but he was only identified as the victim on Thursday.

FIGHT FAKE NEWS WITH REAL NEWS.

Disinformation is often shared on closed networks like WhatsApp. That's why *The Continent* exists. Help us fight fake news by subscribing to high quality journalism, and share that instead.



Get your copy delivered to your phone or inbox every Saturday. And if you like what you read, forward it to your friends, family and colleagues – not indiscriminately, but only with people who might appreciate it.



HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Email: Read@thecontinent.org with 'SUBSCRIBE' in the subject box

WhatsApp/Signal: Save +27 73 805 6068 on your phone, and send us a message saying 'NEWS'

Share real news.

The Continent with Mail Guardian

Russia



Slain Zambian man's family 'not convinced' remains from Russia are his

Lemekhani Nyirenda was jailed in Russia, then sent to fight in the Ukraine war

Mutale Pamela Kapekele

When the body of Lemekhani Nathan Nyirenda was returned to Zambia last year, it should have led to

closure for his grieving family. Instead, the controversy surrounding his death on the battlefield in Ukraine has only deepened.

The 23-year-old was a student at a Moscow university when he was arrested while working as a courier for carrying a package containing drugs, and sentenced to nine years in prison. His family say he had no idea what was in the package.

After Russia invaded Ukraine last February, the mercenary outfit Wagner offered early release to prisoners in exchange for fighting on the front lines. In September, Nyirenda was killed in the fighting in Ukraine. His remains were repatriated to Zambia on 11 December.

But his family are not convinced that the remains are actually his. "When the coffin was opened, they only found pieces of bones that were assembled into a skeleton, there was no flesh," said a source close to the family. A DNA test was carried out in South Africa but the results were inconclusive.

The Nyirendas plan to bury their son on the family farm in the Chongwe district east of Lusaka, but cannot do so until the identity of the remains is confirmed.

This week, Tanzanian outlet *The Chanzo* reported that Nemes Tarimo, a young Tanzanian man studying in Moscow, had also been killed on the front lines in Ukraine after being released from a Russian prison. ■

Kenya

Facebook moderators offered pitiful severance

The deal offered to African moderators is eight times lower than what Meta gave own staff

Lydia Namubiru

About 200 African content moderators are being laid off by Sama, Meta's Kenyan subcontractor. This comes after Facebook's parent company Meta declined to renew Sama's contract, which expires at the end of March.

Moderators – who have been exposed to the very worst content on Facebook, including graphic violence, suicide, and child pornography – will each receive 15 days of pay for each year they worked with Sama. They will be flown out of Nairobi to their home countries after 31 March.

This package is far smaller than what Facebook offered the 11,000 direct employees it laid off last year. US-based staff were offered 16 weeks of pay across the board, and an extra two weeks of pay

for every year served. The moderators learnt of the terms of their termination in a meeting on Wednesday.

They had feared for their jobs since May 2022, when both Sama and Meta were sued by former moderator-turned-whistleblower Daniel Motaung, who accused the companies of labour rights violations, including union busting and exploitation. The case is still under way.

When Motaung first went public, within Sama's operation "everybody was scared", one moderator told *The Continent* this week, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Sama management clearly wanted to know who was speaking to journalists."

A Facebook spokesperson told *The Continent*: "We respect Sama's decision to exit the content review services it provides", adding that Meta will work with its partners to continue content moderation during the transition.

Sama told *The Continent* that in addition to the severance pay and flights home, laid-off staff would also receive "one year of wellness benefits" and all other bonuses and holiday pay due to them through their last work day. Additionally, "those who work through the end of their contract will receive an ex-gratia bonus equal to 30 days pay", although it was not immediately clear who this might apply to. It also said the end of the contract was not connected to Motaung's lawsuit. ■

KENYA

Edwin Chiloba: A young fighter crushed by violence

“If I am going to fight what I have been marginalised for, I am going to fight for all marginalised people,” a young LGBTIQ-identifying Kenyan wrote on Instagram, before his life was violently ended.

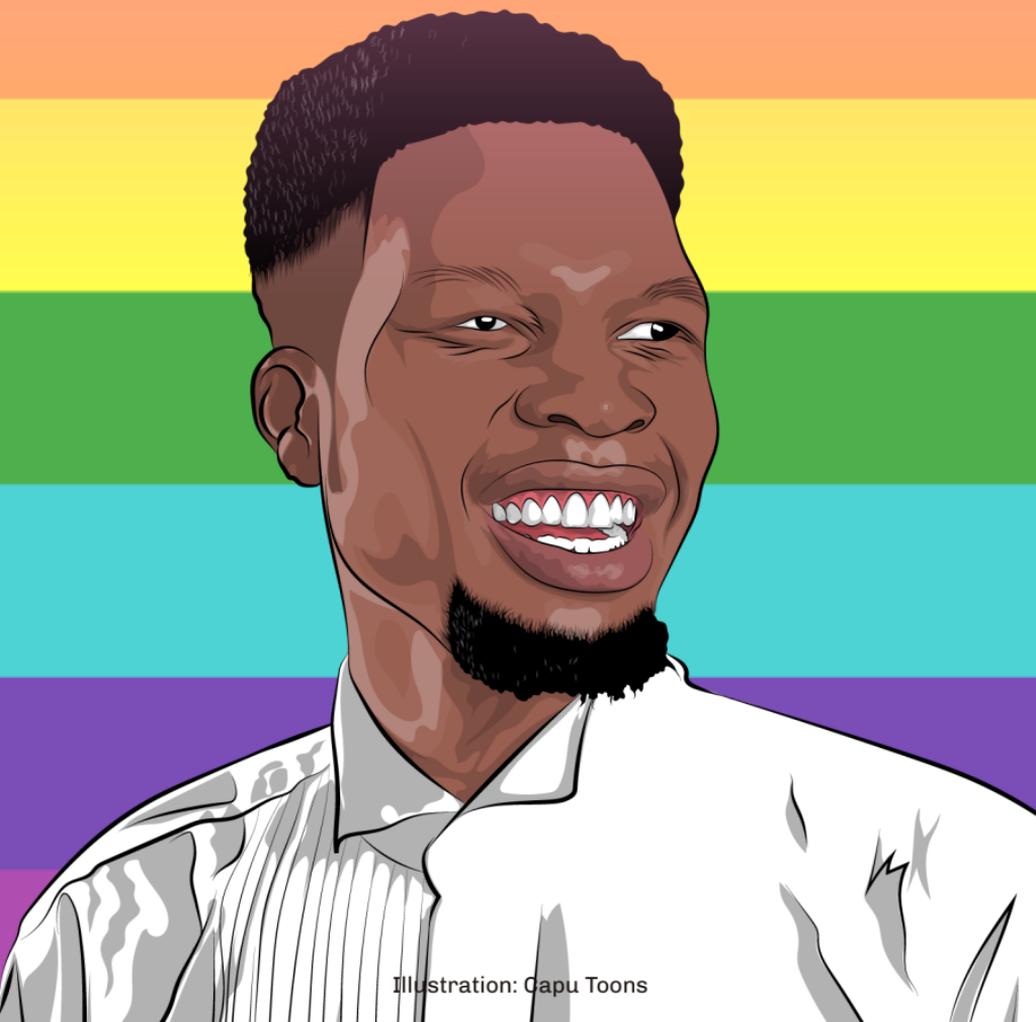


Illustration: Capu Toons

Rael Ombuor in Nairobi

At 6pm on New Year's Eve, Faith Melvin, a cashier at an entertainment spot in Eldoret near Kenya's western border, got a call on Facebook messenger. The caller turned out to be her long-lost brother, her mother's only son, Edwin Kiprotich Kiptoo – "Rotich" to her. They exchanged numbers and were soon on the phone talking.

Melvin had to work that night and her workplace was charging a \$10 entry fee – a premium for revellers to usher in the New Year. At 10.30 pm, with the club filled to capacity and the bar keeping her mad busy, she spotted her brother. "Rotich told me he had paid the money so that he could see me," Melvin says.

He was in the company of a friend Melvin had previously only seen in his TikTok videos. "He introduced me as his sister to the friend and almost every 10 minutes, he would come to the counter and tell me how much he had missed me," Melvin recalls.

At midnight they watched the fireworks together and when he was leaving, he told her he would miss her. She is the one missing him now. On 4 January, his body was found stuffed in a metallic box by the roadside outside Eldoret. No wonder he had not responded to Melvin's messages asking him to send the pictures and videos they took on New Year's night.

Edwin Kiprotich Kiptoo, the 25-year-old known publicly as Edwin Chiloba, was a budding gay rights activist and fashion designer. The government pathologist who examined his body said he died of



asphyxia, adding that socks were stuffed in his mouth and denim cloth tied over his nose and mouth to cut oxygen off.

This week, his family buried him in Sergoit village in western Kenya where he was raised.

In the days that followed news of his killing, Chiloba was a trending topic on Twitter in Kenya. For at least three days, many used it as an occasion to hurl homophobic slurs. Politicians used it to remind their followers that homosexuality was ungodly and illegal in Kenya.

Homosexuality is indeed illegal in Kenya, with devastating consequences. Gay sex is punishable with up to 14 years



Edwin Chiloba was a budding gay rights activist and fashion designer.

in prison. In 2019, the country's Supreme Court ruled against a petition to repeal that provision, despite arguments by human rights defenders that it fuels and entrenches homophobia in the country – and sometimes causes homophobic attacks that kill LGBTIQ Kenyans. In the years since, at least four Kenyans have been killed in suspected anti-LGBTIQ hate crimes.

Last year, Sheila Lumumba, a non-binary lesbian and Rose Mbesa, an intersex person, were found raped and murdered. In 2021, Erica Chandra, a transgender woman, and Joash Mosoti, a gay man, were killed.

When news of Chiloba's murder first broke, rights defenders in the country suspected it was a hate crime. Police have

however since arrested a 24-year-old man identified as his partner, Jackton Odhiambo, and arraigned him in court as the main suspect in the killing, raising the possibility that it was intimate partner violence instead – another widespread problem in Kenya.

A mother's unbearable pain

The tragedy is almost more than Chiloba's mother can take. "I had a really nice child. I feel so much pain that someone killed my child," 50-year old Rael Chepketir tells *The Continent*, days after the funeral. She relied on him for material support, family members say. "I am just here at home. I do not have a job, just here," Chepketir says.

Chiloba's premature death is doubly tragic for Chepketir because she was

robbed of regular family life with him before his adulthood. Her male partners separated her children from her at very young ages. “My father came for me. His father came for him. We were young children – even before he started school,” his sister Melvin recalls.

Although Chiloba visited his mother often during the time he lived with his father, 24 kilometres away, it was his adulthood that held the most promise for them to make up for lost time.

“Kiprotich told me to be patient, that he was going to look for a life and that he was going to come back home,” Chepketir says. He promised to build her a big house and hire people to help her with its chores.

“He had a good vision and had such a pure heart. My son loved everybody. He laughed all the time.”

But all that is gone now. She last spoke to him on Christmas Eve. “He sent me some money and told me that we would speak on the 1st. When I tried calling him, I was not able to reach him.” The night before she learned that her son was dead, Chepketir says she had become so off-kilter that she went to bed with her shoes on. “My child was dead,” she later concluded. “That is why I was uneasy.”

The kindest soul

Headlines have made much of Chiloba’s gender expression and sexuality. “A man



Heartbreak: Relatives mourn Kenyan LGBTIQ activist Edwin Kiprotich Kipruto, known as Edwin Chiloba, at his funeral in Sergoit. Photo by Simon Maina/AFP

in women's clothing has been found dead, stuffed in a box," one headline read. "Chiloba family dismisses LGBTQ claims," another read. Asked about it, his family members brushed aside talk of his real or perceived sexuality.

"I cannot say he was gay. He is the one who knows. He chose his life. Even if someone is gay, they do not deserve to be treated the way he was treated. The way he was killed," says Melvin.

"It feels bad that some people are mocking him but we knew how good he was. He was the kindest soul, undeserving of such a death."

Although they grew up apart, Melvin had tried to keep up with Chiloba's life and support his pursuits. In 2018, she voted for him in a local modelling contest and sent the link to her friends encouraging them to vote for him too. "I just thought that he was just being himself and trying to be successful," she says.

Gladys Chepkoech, Chiloba's eldest sister, echoes these feelings. She fondly remembers that he loved to dance, even when he was herding cows during their childhood. "It feels bad that some people are mocking him but we knew how good he was. He was the kindest soul, undeserving of such a death."

Born in 1997, Chiloba attended St Francis Kimuron before enrolling at Moi University's Eldoret West campus to study to be a teacher. According to his family,



with just a year left to complete his initial degree, he dropped out and switched to University of Eldoret in Chepkoleil to study his true passion: fashion.

At his funeral on Tuesday, one of his teachers described him as "very determined, hardworking, talented and creative". His sisters fondly remember him as a lover of chapati and snacks, but also as a man who often hid his troubles behind a smile. "To us, he was and will remain Rotich," Chepkoech says. ■

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

"Timbuktu is easy. But where is Two-buck Tim? Guy owes me money."



- 1_ Banjul (pictured) is which country's capital city?
- 2_ Timbuktu is a city in which country?
- 3_ True or false: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the head of the World Economic Forum.
- 4_ In which country can you visit the Virunga National Park?
- 5_ What acronym is used for the African Nations Championship?
- 6_ What is the demonym for people from Mauritania?
- 7_ What is Burundi's currency?
- 8_ Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has been president of Equatorial Guinea since 1979 or 1981?
- 9_ Does Burkina Faso's national flag have a red or gold star in the middle?
- 10_ Which country does Ons Jabeur represent?

HOW DID I DO?

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

FEEDBACK

Africa - In your words

What does it mean to be African?

Pride, a sense of fighting against a rigged global system, love, humour, being misunderstood, hope, joy ... these are all thoughts that you repeated in answering our annual reader survey.

It was our third survey and hundreds of you took part.

Two thirds of you told us that you identify as African. And while you read us in over a hundred countries, two thirds of you live in Africa.

So, to celebrate the one thousandth day of *The Continent*, here, in your words, is what it means to be an African.

Being African feels like joining a group of friends when they are in the middle of a story. You join, interested to find out and be part of the fun but you are always left catching up and your attempts to join the group is met by scepticism. They think you came too late to get the jokes. Plus the joke really is about you. You just don't know it yet.

Nothing special. It means that I happen to be born in Africa.

To have resilience in the face of unrelenting external pressures.

In one word: Pride. ● A long story. ● Ubuntu. ● Potential.

Regardless of race, if you're born in Africa and share the unique experiences of living in Africa, you're African.

I find this a difficult question to answer. I have known no other existence. I know that when I travel outside the continent, being an African means I am different from others – and I surprise them because of their jaundiced expectations of Africans.

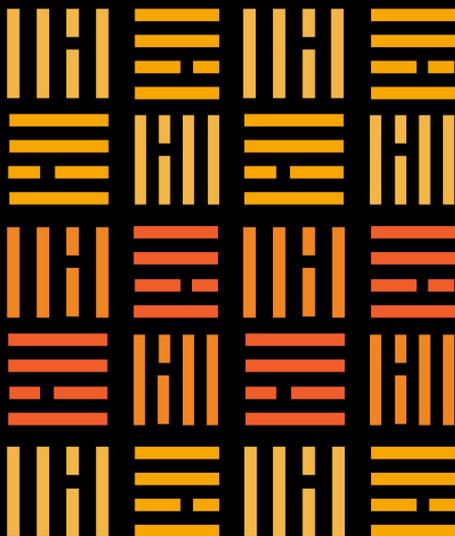
“

It means that I am part of a rich heritage of the most beautiful and innovative people to ever exist. People who value each other and live, drink, eat and party loudly wherever they are in the world.

I am European by ethnicity but have spent a large part of my life in Africa. I have Africa inside me.

To be a resilient survivor, sold short by their own kinfolk and battered by the rest of the world.

To be African is to be glorious, powerful and inexplicably central to the world.



- The originators of civilization. Pride. Humanity. Ubuntu.
- It means that I am on my own and must use my brain to survive.
- I think Africans see each other. We connect people and the land.
- A proud people, decimated by colonialism.
- To live a tough life, a victim of all forms of injustice, with no freedoms, and needing to manage political hypocrisy.

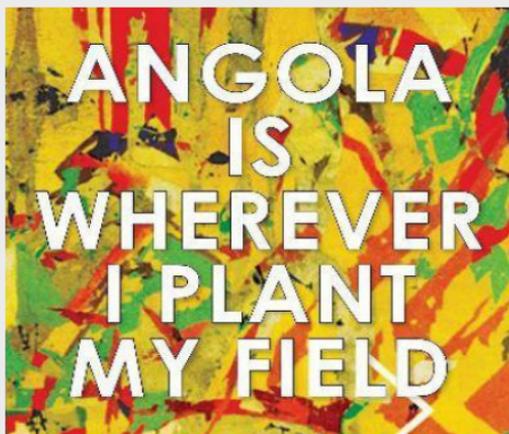
It's a shared experience of all that comes with the world's perspective of Africa — the stereotypes, the visa challenges, the lack of respect, the qualifications on your humanity. It's a sense that we're in this together.

”

Turning the page in 2023

No matter what happens this year, we know for certain that we're guaranteed some good reads from Africa and the diaspora. These are just a few to expect.

By **Jacqueline Nyathi**



Angola is Wherever I Plant My Field,
by Joao Melo (Fiction)

A story collection with themes of postcolonialism and Angolan history, set in Luanda, Haifa, America, and North Korea.

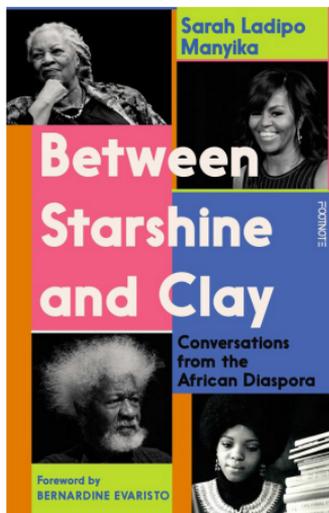


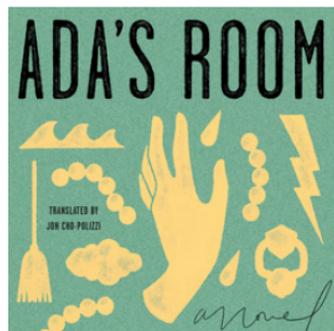
**No Edges, by Lusajo
Mwaikenda et al.**
(Fiction)

An anthology of speculative fiction translated into English from Swahili, with sorcerers, cross-country matatus, and spaceships.

**Between Starshine and
Clay, by Sarah Ladipo
Manyika (Non-fiction)**

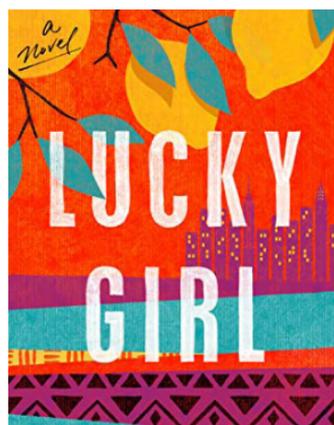
A collection of writing discussing the ideas of prominent Black thinkers from around the world, including Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka, Claudia Rankine, Michelle Obama, Margaret Busby, Xoliswa Sithole and Evan Mawarire, among others.





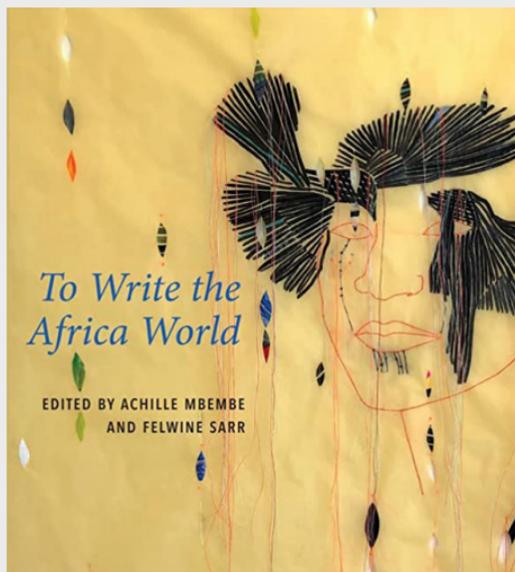
Ada's Room, by Sharon Dodua Otoo (Fiction)

A story linking four women named Ada that ranges from 15th century Ghana to modern-day Ghana, via Victorian England and Buchenwald.



Lucky Girl, by Irene Muchemi-Ndiritu (Fiction)

Soila, a young Kenyan woman, flees her life of privilege in Kenya and must reckon with immigrant life in the New York of the 1990s.



To Write the Africa World, edited by Achille Mbembe and Felwine Sarr (Non-fiction)

Texts from the proceedings of the 2016 Les Ateliers de la Pensée, a conference on the present and future of Africa.



River Spirit, by Leila Aboulela (Fiction)

The stories of seven men and women unfold as they search for love, safety and freedom during the years leading up to the beginning of British colonial rule in Sudan in 1898.

These are dark days for South Africa

The power crisis is worsening, but its effects are not equally felt

Andile Zulu

It is just three weeks into the new year, and South Africans have spent most of it without consistent power, with little sign of improvement on the horizon. Rolling blackouts of up to 10 hours a day are exacerbated by ageing infrastructure and unplanned outages. Simply put, Eskom – South Africa's national utility – cannot produce enough electricity to go around.

So acute is the crisis that President Cyril Ramaphosa cancelled his planned trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos to deal with it.

This is not a new problem. Loadshedding, as the blackouts are termed here, has been part of South African life since 2007. But what first appeared to be a temporary fumble, caused by short-sighted planning, has evolved into a national energy crisis that is impacting every facet of everyday life.

Without reliable electricity, food security is threatened, mobile networks are disrupted, industrial activity is slowed and small businesses are drowned by

the rising cost of daily operations and decreasing profitability. Some economists estimate the power crisis is costing the country up to \$233-million a day.

South Africa is already the world's most unequal country, with over 18-million of its 62-million residents living in extreme poverty. The power crisis is making these inequalities ever-more stark. Basic activities like storing precious food; finishing homework after school; accessing the internet for job opportunities; and safely travelling home after a night shift become impossible for the poor in the absence of reliable electricity. Meanwhile, South Africa's elites are equipping their homes with solar panels, battery packs and generators to ensure that their lights stay on.

A broken model

Looking at Eskom's recent history and examining the policies which govern its operation, there are three primary sources of the utility's dysfunction: debt, corruption and corporatisation.

Eskom is plagued by a paradoxical financial model: it is publicly owned but has a corporate mandate. In other words, Eskom must provide electricity as a universal public good, while at the same time remaining profitable by making end-users pay the full costs of electricity generation and supply.

Several obstacles have hindered Eskom's revenue raising efforts. Firstly, there is the reality of widespread poverty, heightened by mass unemployment and

a stagnant economy. Millions simply cannot afford the electricity Eskom sells.

Compounding the latter is the obstacle of numerous municipalities failing to make their payments to the energy utility. Eskom's management has stated that municipalities across the country owe Eskom a stunning \$3-billion. One source of this debt is the misappropriation of funds by various municipalities. A 2021 report released by the Public Affairs Research Institute found that from 2014 to 2020, \$2.2-billion that was meant to fund free basic electricity for poor households was instead used by municipalities for "unauthorised" reasons.

As revenue streams narrow, Eskom cannot maintain its power stations or build new energy generation capacity. Nor can it service its growing debt. Currently, Eskom's total debt stands at \$22-billion.

To make matters worse, a hefty chunk of that debt – some \$3.75-billion from the World Bank – went towards the construction of two massive new coal-fired power stations, Medupi and Kusile, which have been plagued by construction delays, cost overruns and endemic corruption. Initially priced at \$4.7-billion each, they have since 2008 cost Eskom nearly double that at \$17.5-billion in total. Neither is fully operational yet.

A toxic mess

Solving South Africa's energy crisis requires the total rejuvenation of Eskom as a socially owned, publicly funded utility. Undertaking this transformative project necessitates building new generation capacity and maintaining



This cartoon was originally published in the Mail & Guardian in 2019.

current infrastructure while beginning a substantial transition to renewable energy and a low-carbon economy.

To effectively execute this project, the government must abandon the full cost recovery model, cancel its odious debt to the World Bank, effectively eradicate corruption within the utility and throw away austerity policies which stop the state from strategically spending on what should be universal goods such as education, healthcare and electricity.

Easier said than done, however.

The outgoing Eskom chief executive, Andre de Ruyter, was recently the target of an alleged assassination attempt by poisoning – to deter him, he says, from implementing his reform agenda.

And even if such reforms are successful, it is likely to be years before South Africa's grid is able to keep all the country's lights on. ■

Andile Zulu is the Energy Democracy Officer at the Alternative Information and Development Centre. He writes in his own capacity.

The missionary accused of serious sexual abuse

A Dutch national is facing multiple criminal charges in Malawi. Now, he is pursuing an unlikely legal defence – as a protector of gay rights

Olivier van Beemen

In the Netherlands, only a quarter of the population consider themselves to be Christian. However, this small European nation has a Bible belt – a region where many are very strict in their beliefs and some are convinced that God has given them a mission to evangelise far beyond Dutch borders.

A popular place to do so is Malawi, a country that is safe, stable and welcoming to foreigners. “Africa for beginners”, it is sometimes called here.

Like in colonial times, modern European missionaries also claim to bring development. Along with the Bible, they provide food, shelter and schooling.

In 2009, the Netherlands-based Stéphanos Foundation – which aims to provide education “from a biblical viewpoint to the most vulnerable” – dispatched Wim* (now 52 years old) to Blantyre, Malawi’s second city, as a teacher. The foundation manages a village for orphans, a primary school and a vocational training centre in the country.

After an internal dispute, a similar



Blurred lines: The missionary is accused of sexually abusing vulnerable students. Photo: Anthony Asael/ Gamma-Rapho via Getty

foundation was created, the Timotheos Foundation, where Wim was appointed financial director. The foundation is supported by boards in the Netherlands and Canada.

At the Blantyre office of the NGO People Serving Girls at Risk, which stands up for alleged victims of sexual exploitation, *The Continent* spoke with two men, Francis and Samuel**, who

described being sexually abused by Wim.

Francis (24) grew up in poverty. In 2015, he was awarded a scholarship from Timotheos for secondary education. “I was happy at school, things went well,” he says.

But then, in 2019. Wim wanted something “that costs nothing”. As Francis speaks, Samuel covers his face in his hands.

Wim picked him up to go to a hotel. “You can’t refuse that to your boss,” Francis says. “Wim pulled down his pants and asked me to touch his penis. He was intimidating, I was scared. If I said no, he would stop my scholarship. Afterwards he gave me a smartphone and 4000 kwacha (\$5) for travel expenses.” According to Francis, Wim later asked for oral sex.

Samuel (23) says he had similar experiences. After working in Wim’s garden, he went into his house to collect his payment.

“To my surprise, he undressed and asked me to do the same. I was terrified, but also thought: maybe that’s how things go in his house. ‘I need sex,’ he said. I had no idea how men do that and masturbated him until he came. He gave me 5,000 kwacha (\$6) to buy food, but I was very frustrated. I wanted to go home, but I was afraid of disappointing him. I had to stay calm.”

In an internal enquiry, based on interviews with 63 current and former bursary students and employees of Timotheos, 32 of them claim to be victims of abuse and/or transgressive behaviour by Wim. They were all above the age of

18 at the time of the alleged incidents and they all say they let it happen out of fear of losing their job or scholarship.

Nine of the alleged victims reported Wim to the police, which resulted in his arrest in April 2020, for “gross indecency”. After six days in detention, he was released on bail and signed a caution statement: “Although I never had the intention to abuse [alleged victim 1], actually it looks like he felt like that. [...] Now I admit to doing wrong to [alleged victim 1]. To [alleged victim 2], only once he touched my penis and I paid him for that and he said it was not any problem to him.”

Nine of the alleged victims reported Wim to the police, which led to his arrest in April 2020, for ‘gross indecency’.

Wim later withdrew this statement, claiming it was written under police pressure. But according to an internal Timotheos report, he admitted to transgressive sexual behaviour in four other conversations with board members and an external investigator. He denied some of the other allegations raised against him. Wim did not respond to requests for comment from *The Continent*.

Paul reverts to Saul

Homosexuality is technically prohibited in Malawi – the legislation dates back to colonial times – but prosecutions are rare. Somehow, Wim’s lawyer succeeded in

getting the case before the Constitutional Court instead of a criminal court. Therefore, the question became not whether he is guilty of sexual abuse and/or abusing power over people in a relationship of dependency, but whether a criminal court is allowed to rule on what happens inside the bedroom.

In an ironic twist of fate, Wim now presents himself as a gay rights activist. “I never suspected that as a strictly reformed Christian man, I would become a symbol for gay rights in Malawi,” he told the Christian daily *Nederlands Dagblad*. “But that’s what happened. And I stand for it, because I think government has nothing to say about someone’s sexual preference.”

In an ironic twist of fate, Wim now presents himself as a gay rights activist.

In September 2020, he became a suspect in a new case. Photos of a sexual nature depicting three young African women with an older European man were circulating, and witnesses claimed they recognised Wim’s body and clothing – his face is not on the photos. One of the women, who is allegedly involved, reported him for abuse and human trafficking. This time, Wim strongly denied the allegation and claimed to be a victim of a conspiracy. He said that one of his co-workers at Timotheos was spreading lies to destroy his reputation in order to get his position. The woman later changed her statement to exonerate Wim.

Almost two and a half years later, not

much progress has been made in either case. All parties accuse each other of bribing and menacing witnesses. One of the alleged victims received a phone call from Patricia Kaliati, the influential minister of gender and social welfare, which he experienced as threatening. “Were you abused or did someone tell you to say so?” she asked in a conversation that lasted one minute and six seconds.

“As a minister of gender, where we protect the children, it’s normal for me to ask what has happened,” Kaliati tells *The Continent*. She admits to knowing Wim, saying that as minister she works closely with NGOs. However: “These children [the alleged victims are adults] should not come to you, but to me, because this is the ministry.”

Meanwhile, by the end of 2020, Wim co-founded a new school in Malawi, the Kids Academy of Excellence. He also got involved in the establishment of the Lukas Foundation in July 2021, “offering help to people in Malawi who are having an extra hard time, such as victims of abuse, and prisoners.”

At the Blantyre office of the NGO People Serving Girls at Risk, chairman Caleb Ng’ombo is firm: “These people don’t practice what they preach. The Netherlands is not a Christian country. Just look at the Red Light District in Amsterdam. We should send missionaries there.” ■

*Full name withheld for legal reasons.

**Francis and Samuel are pseudonyms. Their real names are known to *The Continent*.

High lived poverty is getting higher

Last week we reported that a majority of African families experience “lived poverty,” meaning they suffer shortages of food, clean water, medical care, cooking fuel, and/or a cash income.

The bad news is that lived poverty is getting worse. The worse news is that high lived poverty – meaning that people go without these basic necessities “many times” or “always” – is getting worse, too.

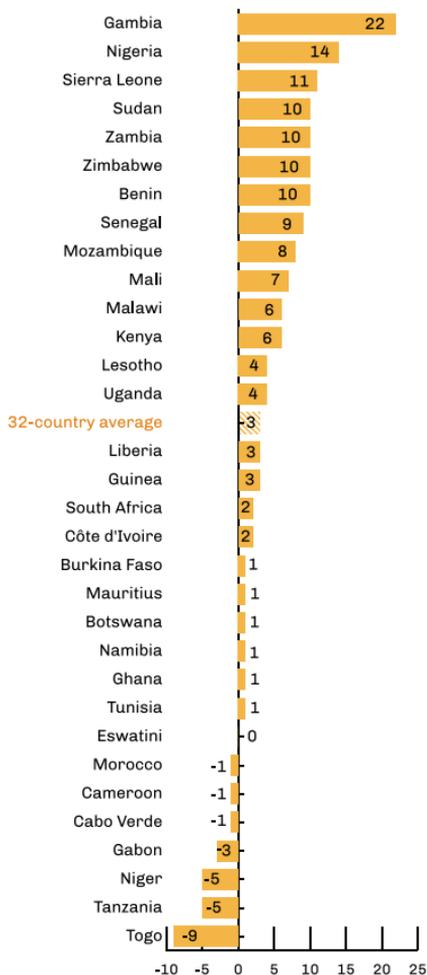
Why? Our analyses point to economic slowdowns exacerbated by severe restrictions in response to Covid-19.

On average across 34 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2019/2021, more than one in five adults (22%) reported frequent shortages of this basket of five necessities. As you might expect, these rates vary widely by country. High lived poverty is rare in Mauritius (2%), Morocco (3%), and Ghana (4%) but widespread in Guinea (48%), Gabon (43%), and Benin (38%).

Across 32 countries surveyed in both of our last two survey rounds, high lived poverty increased by an average of three percentage points over a three-year period. Fourteen countries recorded increases of 4 points or more, led by the Gambia (+22 percentage points), Nigeria (+14 points), and Sierra Leone (+11 points).

Only three countries reported decreases of more than 4 points: Togo, Tanzania, and Niger. ■

Changes in high lived poverty (percentage points) | 32 countries | 2016-2021



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.

Zimbabwe

Child brides condemned to rape and death

Even with laws to protect girls from early marriage and sexual exploitation, poverty, politics and power mean such abuse continues unchecked

Hazel Marimbiza
& Panashe Makufa

On 2 January, three days after giving birth to a baby girl, 14-year-old Delight Masomeke died from labour-related complications. This was shortly after she had been married to an older man – in violation of Zimbabwean law, which makes it illegal to get married under the age of 18.

The circumstances of Masomeke's death are similar to that of Anne Machaya in July 2021. Machaya, who was 15 at the time of her death, had been forced to abandon her schooling as she had been promised by her parents to a 26-year-old man, Hatirarami Momberume.

Machaya's parents, along with their son-in-law, would eventually be arrested.

These are no isolated incidents. According to a study released by the United Nations Children's Fund, from 2015 to 2020, Zimbabwe recorded an adolescent maternity rate of 86 per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19 – nearly twice the global average. According to the country's statistics agency, fully a third of Zimbabwean girls are married by the time they turn 18. In comparison, just 2% of boys get married before they are 18.

Poverty makes parents desperate

Child rights activist Sandra Muzama said safety nets that safeguard people from harsh economic factors should be strengthened regularly in order to curb child marriages. This is especially true in communities that rely on farming.

Increased community coping mechanisms and resilience would, Muzama said, “decrease the marrying off of girls for economic resources and also decrease eloping among girls as there would be participants and beneficiaries in these projects.”

In the Mzingwane district, acting district development coordinator Siphathisiwe Mlotshwa said campaigns against child marriage are appealing to parents to not enforce harmful cultural and religious practices.

“Due to poverty, parents are encouraging their young daughters to get married to older men. Parents need

to be educated about the importance of allowing their girls to continue with their education,” said Mlotshwa.

In 2016, human rights lawyer and Citizens Coalition for Change vice president Tendai Biti successfully lobbied for the review of the age of consent from 16 to 18 in a landmark ruling by Zimbabwe’s Constitutional Court. “It is vital that we protect children, especially girls. This ruling will not stop child abuse, but it will mitigate it and act as a deterrent,” Biti told *The Continent*.

Turning a blind eye

Despite the new law, arrests and prosecutions of offenders are rare: authorities and politicians have often been accused of turning a blind eye to paedophilia, particularly when it occurs in religious sects, which often have a lot of political influence.

Despite the new law, arrests and prosecutions of offenders are rare, and authorities including politicians have often been accused of turning a blind eye to paedophilia

Child rights activist Bonlat Machiha sees a pattern of abuse in the apostolic faith, with some sects allowing older congregants to marry girls as young as 12.

These marriages are often polygamous. “What is most painful is that when these children get pregnant they are not allowed to go to hospitals and this causes a number



We failed her: Anna Machaya died giving birth in 2021. She was just 15.

of deaths, especially when the girls have complications in giving birth.”

Machiha added that arrests are rare. “This just shows that there is a need to enforce laws that are available so that girls can be protected.”

In the absence of effective prosecution, the best solution is better education, according to the World Bank. In a 2017 report, it argued that child marriage would be reduced by 64% if every girl received 12 years of education.

“Educated individuals have more self-confidence and a better ability to make their own choice, as well as to make their voices heard.”

At schools, girls would learn about the illegality of child marriages, it said, adding: “Indeed, one cannot claim a right if one is not aware of its existence.” ■

Can the Ethiopian peace agreement hold?

The country has never had free and fair elections, and over-hasty post-war polls could just set things off again.

Kjetil Tronvoll

The November peace agreement between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has provided much-needed respite for the suffering Tigrayan people. Its implementation, however, faces several hurdles.

The presence of Eritrean forces in northern Tigray and the politico-military annexation of west Tigray by Amhara state go against the principles of the agreement, and may stall the establishment of an inclusive interim regional administration, which is needed to facilitate fresh elections. Without elections, a regional assembly and Tigrayan representation in federal institutions cannot be restored.

Yet forming the interim administration and holding elections may prove to be destabilising. The peace deal was essentially an elite pact between TPLF and the Prosperity Party (PP). It is unclear how inclusive the interim administration will be, but it will be crucial to include civic and opposition party members. But the question of how to do this may create discord within and between the PP and

the TPLF, slowing progress.

The need for fresh regional elections raises other tough questions. Who will be allowed to run for office in Tigray, and will any restrictions be placed on political campaigns and platforms? Will the pro-independence nationalist parties be barred? Will parties be allowed to argue for the indictment of political and military leaders for war crimes committed in Tigray? Will the PP accept the results if it fails to win a single constituency?

Ethiopia has never held a free and fair election, and is a deeply divided society. An election could prove counterproductive to restoring a just and legitimate political order. Instead of resolving contentious political issues, it may highlight fundamental disagreements and deepen the incongruities in Ethiopian politics that ignited the civil war in the first place. ■

Kjetil Tronvoll is the professor of peace and conflict studies, Oslo New University College. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



The Big Picture

Photo: Amanuel Sileshi/AFP

Bunch of idioms: Ethiopia is one of Africa's most water-rich nations, contrary to the assumptions of many outsiders who show that you can lead a man to water but you can't make him think. Hora-Dambal, below, is one of the lakes of the region's Rift Valley, where a nearby monastery is said to have housed the Ark of the Covenant. (Long story – it's a whole Ethiopian Orthodox thing.) Also: Horses!



The Continent is published by the Adamela Trust, a not-for-profit organisation founded by Mail & Guardian journalists that is dedicated to fostering quality journalism. It upholds strict editorial standards. For queries and complaints, or to make a donation, please contact read@thecontinent.org