

The Continent

with Mail Guardian

**The Chagos
Islands'
uncertain
post-colonial
future**



Artwork: Modeste Alexis



Cover: Images of the Chagos Islands, illegally occupied by Britain, are rare. Images of Chagos by Chagossians are even rarer. They were brutally evicted from the islands in 1973, and prevented from returning. Our cover is a painting of Chagos by Modeste Alexis, son of the late Charlesia Alexis, a campaigner for the rights of Chagossians. That struggle is paying off, with Britain – shamed in international courts – handing the isles over to Mauritius. But now the deal is dividing the tight-knit Chagossian community (p13).

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- **Egypt:** Let them eat speeches (p7)
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A BREAK IN REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING

Contrary to popular belief, *The Continent's* editorial director Siphso Kings is not, in fact, wedded to the news.

He will be marrying his wonderful partner Anzet du Plessis in a small ceremony next Saturday. To allow us to celebrate with them, we will pause publication of *The Continent*. Expect us back on 28 October.



FOOTBALL

World Cup set for world tour in 2030

Morocco will co-host the 2030 men's football World Cup, together with Spain and Portugal. This will mark 100 years since the inaugural tournament was held in Uruguay. Gianni Infantino, the president of the sport's governing body Fifa, announced that the opening three matches will happen in South America to honour this history. The 2030 opening game will be in Uruguay's capital Montevideo, while Argentina and Paraguay will host the next two. By the time the winning team lifts the trophy, the tournament will have been played in six countries across three continents.

SEYCHELLES

Herminie danger: Witch or stitch-up?

Patrick Herminie, a Seychellois opposition leader who intends to contest the presidency in 2025, was arrested on Monday in connection with two dead bodies found unearched at a cemetery in August. Police connected their unlawful exhumation to a foreign suspect. The man was apprehended and found to be in possession of supposedly occult paraphernalia, and with messages on his phone allegedly connecting him to Herminie, who was charged with witchcraft and engaging in unnatural acts. Herminie says the prosecution is politically motivated.



Fixer-upper: Footballer, mover and shaker Samuel Eto'o. Photo: Nicolò Campo/LightRocket via Getty Images

CAMEROON

Eto'o under investigation

Police are investigating Samuel Eto'o for alleged match-fixing. The football star has been president of the Cameroon Football Federation since 2021 and there is some speculation that he wants to succeed Cameroonian President Paul Biya as head of state. He denies the accusations, which include an audio recording alleged to be of Eto'o promising to promote a local club from the second division by manipulating matches. Spanish authorities previously convicted the former Barcelona striker of committing tax fraud worth \$4-million, giving him a 22-month suspended prison sentence.

CLIMATE CRISIS

Hello, hellscape

Last month was the hottest September ever recorded by a margin of 0.5°C. This heat is partly down to a powerful El Niño phenomenon which is heating parts of the Pacific Ocean, driving drought in the southern hemisphere and floods in the north. But it is also in keeping with increasingly dire global warming trends. The world agreed to limit global average warming to 1.5°C but September was 1.7°C hotter than before humans started pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

KENYA

Rent-a-cop brainiac put out to pasture

Alfred Mutua, cabinet minister and cheerleader-in-chief for Kenya's plan to send policemen into Haiti at the bidding of the United States, has been demoted from the foreign ministry to tourism, and placed under closer supervision within the premier's office. The widespread backlash against Kenya's plan to send its police officers to combat gang activity in Haiti appears to have surprised President William Ruto's administration whose "open for business" approach tends to pimp Kenya out for all manner of paid gigs – from security contracting to carbon credit schemes and big tech sweatshops.

DRC

'Dr Miracle' to run for president

The Congolese winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, Denis Mukwege, told a jubilant crowd in Kinshasa on Monday that he will run for president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against the incumbent, Félix Tshisekedi, in December. The outspoken doctor is famous for calling out the use of rape as a weapon of war, and providing medical treatment to survivors. This earned him the moniker of "Dr Miracle". He survived an assassination attempt in 2012.



Noble pursuit: Acclaimed DRC activist Dr Denis Mukwege is running for president. Photo: Arsene Mpiana/AFP

MAURITIUS

Colonial-era bigotry gets the old heave-ho

The Supreme Court ruled this week that the "sodomy" law left by British colonialists violates the country's Constitution and doesn't reflect any indigenous Mauritian values. The ruling means that same-sex relations are not illegal in Mauritius for the first time since 1898. The development adds to the continent's mixed human rights record on this issue. Some countries like Uganda and Ghana have passed, or are considering, harsher laws to bolster colonial criminalisation of LGBTQIA+ people; while courts in others like Namibia and Botswana have repealed or weakened the colonial hangover.

MOZAMBIQUE

Swiss bankers write off fishy \$100m debt

Credit Suisse will write off all of a 2013 loan of about \$100-million lent to Mozambique as part of the infamous "tuna bonds" deal, in an agreement reached over the weekend. Between 2012 and 2016, Credit Suisse arranged \$1.3-billion in loans backed by Mozambique government guarantees. The loans were intended to build a state tuna fishery, among other things. But after millions of dollars were skimmed off in bribery schemes – including by Credit Suisse bankers – the Mozambican government was on the hook for paying off more than it had received.

MALARIA**Matrix-M malaria vaccine gets WHO nod**

The World Health Organisation now recommends the use of an affordable malaria vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and manufactured

by the Serum Institute of India. The R21/Matrix-M will become available by mid-2024 for between \$2 and \$4 per dose. It will be used in at least 28 African countries as part of their immunisation programmes. Nine in 10 malaria deaths are in Africa. The first vaccine recommended by WHO in 2021 is significantly more expensive.



Net loss: Malaria kills over 600,000 people a year around the world, 90% of them in Africa. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

SENEGAL**Writing duo win prestigious prize**

Mame Bougouma Diene and Woppa Diallo won the 2023 Ako Caine Prize for African Writing for *A Soul of Small Places*. Written in a six-day collaboration, it is based on Diallo's experience of gender-based violence, and is the first co-written work to win the prize. The now-married couple met at a talk given by Diallo at a shelter for survivors of gender-based violence. They will get a \$12,000 cash prize.

LIBERIA**George Weah risks a red card on Tuesday**

Footballer-turned-President George Weah will seek a second term on Tuesday, amid electoral unrest that has killed at least two people. Days before the vote, the electoral commission had not yet released the voters roll. Weah has overseen unpopular civil service pay cuts, imposed to appease the IMF, as well as a dubious carbon credits scheme that reportedly leased 10% of Liberian land to the United Arab Emirates.

Egypt

The politics of the belly

Kiri Rupiah

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has drawn widespread criticism for telling Egyptians that national hunger is a small price to pay for greatness.

In a speech on Saturday, El-Sisi said: "If the price of the nation's progress and prosperity is to go hungry and thirsty, then let us not eat or drink."

He made these remarks at a conference to showcase his administration's accomplishments during his nine-year rule, with footage posted by news website *Middle East Eye*. At one point in El-Sisi's often rambling speech, the president also explained how he could hypothetically destabilise the country by distributing tramadol, a highly addictive opioid pain medication, to trigger civil unrest.

On Monday, El-Sisi said he would seek a third term in the December elections. Later that day demonstrators in Marsa Matruh tore down his campaign posters, chanting "The people want to topple the regime!" – a slogan popularised during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising that saw off former president Hosni Mubarak.

The North African country is in the



Hangry: The new Abdel Fattah el-Sisi diet is low on carbs, high on tramadol.
Photo: Mohamed El-Shahed/AFP

grip of an ongoing economic crisis, which has been worsened by the war in Ukraine.

The billions spent on infrastructure projects, a currency in a downward spiral, dependency on aid, and the tight grip of the military have frustrated ordinary Egyptians struggling to make ends meet.

Nonetheless, El-Sisi goes into the election as the clear favourite to win – perhaps because most past and current opposition figures are either dead or in prison. And if any potential future rivals find themselves hooked on tramadol instead? Well. ■

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Correction and apology to Ivor Ichikowitz and Paramount Group

On 17 June 2023 (Issue 129), *The Continent* published an article on the role of Paramount Group founder Ivor Ichikowitz in the African leaders' peace mission to Russia and Ukraine. Although we did request comment from Ichikowitz, we did not present him with the specifics of the story prior to publication. While Ichikowitz's involvement in the peace initiative was not public knowledge, it was speculative to describe that involvement as secret, and to describe a tweet by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni – which

revealed Ichikowitz's involvement – as a mistake.

We apologise to both Ichikowitz and Paramount, as directed in a ruling by the South African Press Council's deputy ombud Franz Kruger. Ichikowitz and Paramount maintain that there was no secrecy surrounding his involvement, as claimed in the article; that they supply no weapons to either side in the conflict; and that they have no links to nor support the Russian government. The deputy press ombud dismissed the other complaints made by Ichikowitz and Paramount.

How to raise concerns about our reporting:

At *The Continent*, we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards. Journalism demands accountability from those that we report on, and we have to be open to similar scrutiny.

If we fail to meet these standards we must be held to account, which is why we are members of the Press Council in South Africa – an independent, external body that evaluates complaints and imposes remedy and redress if appropriate.

If you take issue with our reporting,

you can lodge a complaint with their ombud office. They reach out both to us and the complainant, and first try and mediate. If that doesn't work, the ombud goes through the complaint in detail and rules on whether we were at fault. They can then order us to apologise, or correct the record if we got something factually wrong.

To lodge a complaint,
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Somaliland



Hands off:
Somaliland
took control of
Las Anod from
Puntland state
in 2007. Photo:
Eduardo
Soteras/AFP

The faultline in Somaliland's quest for nationhood

The Las Anod conflict complicates the mission for true independence from Somalia, writes **Liban Mahamed**

On the day Somaliland forces were defeated in Las Anod, local shop owner Abdinasir Farah told *The Continent*: “Today, we are free people.”

It’s a sentiment shared by others who live or hail from the city and its surroundings. Somaliland had been in

control of the city – legally part of Somalia – for 16 years, which many experienced as an occupation.

That ended when the Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) militia seized control of the largest army base in the city on 25 August.

Open hostilities first erupted between

Somaliland's forces and SSC militia in February, following weeks of angry protests that were triggered by the assassination of local politician Abdifatah Hadrawi in December. He was in the Somaliland opposition, and locals held the government in Hargeisa responsible for his death.

Somaliland forces violently repressed the protests, killing a cultural figure in the city, Sheikh Bide Farah Caalin. Local elders representing the Sool, Sanag and Cayn regions declared their intent to secede from Somaliland and reunite with the Federal Republic of Somalia. Somaliland viewed that as treason.

What followed was an eight-month conflict that caused mass displacement, and drew fighters from different parts of Somalia and its diaspora to the SSC ranks.

Noor Siyad, who travelled from the United States to join the Las Anod

fighting, told *The Continent*: "SSC is fighting for justice."

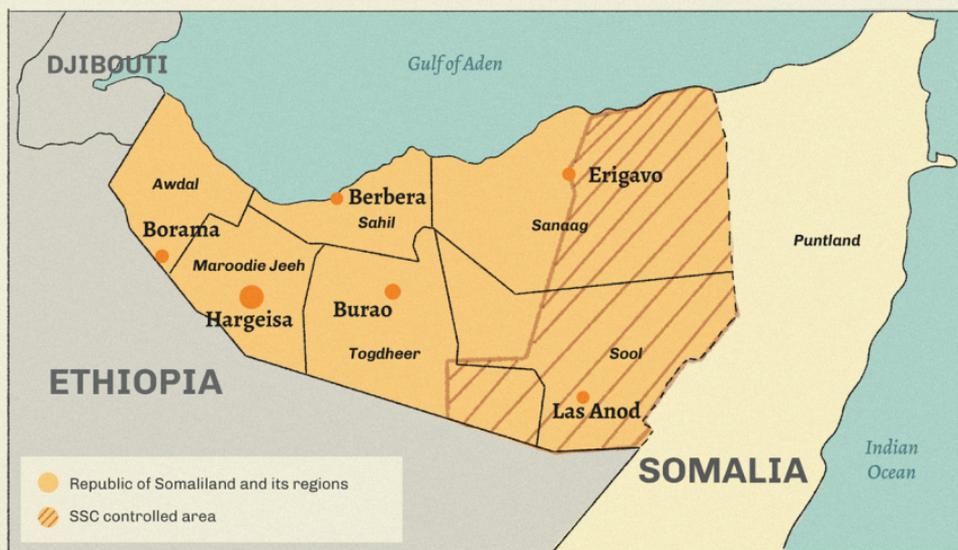
Ghosts haunting the present

The perception that Somaliland's control of Las Anod is controversial predates the December tensions.

It took control of the city from the Somali state of Puntland in 2007, and "the initial years were marked by a heavy military presence, and people felt like they were under occupation," said Professor Markus Virgil Hoene, a Dutch scholar who studies the region.

Those latent feelings of living under occupation were not helped by Somaliland's response to the February unrest.

Its shelling in the city often hit civilian facilities like hospitals and homes, and resulted in many civilian deaths, according to several witnesses contacted



by *The Continent*.

Hassan Abdi said that he lost his mother and three siblings in a shell attack that hit their home in August. “It was an early morning and suddenly, everything ceased to exist. I woke up in the hospital.” He was then told that his mom, two brothers and a sister were killed.

Jama Kadiye, a popular Somali poet, was killed in an artillery attack; as was Jama Mohamed Mire, former governor of the Sool province, for which Las Anod serves as the provincial capital.

Clan leaders in Las Anod are pushing for “mini-tribal states” which will undercut any national government.

An eyewitness told *The Continent* that Kadiye, who criticised Hargeisa during its presence in Las Anod, died when a shell landed outside his house.

Rights groups and multilateral agencies, including the African Union, United Nations, European Union and Amnesty International, have criticised Somaliland for indiscriminate shelling that resulted in “casualties and widespread displacement”.

Reacting to claims that it was responsible for the attack that killed Kadiye, the Somaliland ministry of defence previously said these were “attempts to distort the truth” and promised “a thorough investigation to bring the perpetrators of this heinous crime to justice”.

The Continent sent the government questions of the broader allegations in

this story but had not received a response at the time of publication.

The wider struggle

In the greater struggle over borders, Las Anod has been torn between sides for a long time. When colonial Britain and Italy partitioned Somalia into north and south, the Dhulbahante clan in the region refused to sign a “protective” treaty with Britain and instead supported the Somali cleric Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, who sought to establish a united republic.

The British dubbed him the “Mad Mullah” and defeated his movement in the early 1920s. At the end of the colonial era in 1960, north and south united to form the Republic of Somalia. In 1991, when the central government in Mogadishu collapsed and civil war broke out, the north separated from the south again to create the self-declared (but internationally unrecognised) Republic of Somaliland.

Some see the February declaration by elders in Sool, whose population is largely from the Dhulbahante clan, as an attempt to revive the historical struggle against a split Somalia, but others disagree.

Sagal Ashour, who leads a nonprofit in Somaliland, says clan leaders in Las Anod are pushing for “mini-tribal states” which will undercut any national government, whether in Mogadishu or Hargeisa.

In any event, the Las Anod conflict is hurting Somaliland’s bid for international recognition, whose hopes hinge on the perception that it is more stable and more democratic than the Somali state from which it separated in 1991. ■



Chagos Islanders confront their postcolonial future

Some Chagossians wonder if they are just trading one coloniser for another.

Lorraine Mallinder in Pointe aux Sables

The dream is within touching distance. Olivier Bancoult has pulled off a feat many would once have considered impossible – his people are on the brink of being allowed to return to their fabled homeland of Chagos.

Half a century ago, as its empire crumbled, Britain held tight to the tiny Indian Ocean archipelago, which straddles one of the world's most important maritime trading routes. The fading imperial power leased one of the islands, Diego Garcia, to the United States for a military base. Its inhabitants were brutally evicted and dumped in Mauritius and the Seychelles, with little more than the bags they could carry. They were never allowed to return, and the community is now scattered between Britain, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Bancoult, 59, has devoted much of his adult life to fruitless battles in the British courts to reverse that. His fortunes shifted in 2019 at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) after he changed tack. He helped Mauritius, which is more than 2,000 kilometres from Chagos, to win sovereignty from Britain. Mauritian authorities have promised to allow the Chagossians – some 10,000 people – to return home.

It is not immediately clear how many Chagossians will take up Mauritius' offer to return home. "The numbers are not important," said Bancoult. "It's the right to live in the place."

At first glance, it seems like the perfect



Mauritian manoeuvre: Olivier Bancoult, leader of the Chagos Refugees Group.

Photo: Lorraine Mallinder

postcolonial win-win.

As sovereign, Mauritius is eyeing tantalising opportunities for Chagos in fishing, ecotourism, rare earth exploitations and foreign naval operations. The future landlord is already negotiating a potentially lucrative deal that will allow the US to continue operating its military base, for a monthly rental in excess of the \$63-million that Washington pays for a smaller base in Djibouti.

Chagossians on the other hand get justice. Bancoult is meeting Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth on a monthly basis for updates on the high-level handover talks with Britain. He foresees that Chagos will enjoy some form of regional autonomy similar to Rodrigues, another Mauritian dependency.

"My vision is that Chagossians will have their destiny," said the long-time



Next steps: Members of the Chagos Asylum People discuss recent developments in Roche Bois in the Mauritian capital of Port Louis. Photo: Lorraine Mallinder

leader of the Chagos Refugees Group (CRG), speaking at his office in the Mauritian capital Port Louis. But he cautioned patience. “Everything will not happen at once.”

Even when Mauritius officially gets the keys to the archipelago, there will be plenty of work to do. The islands’ infrastructure must be rebuilt; the thorny issue of reparations, for decades of suffering, must be settled once and for all.

But some Chagossians are not convinced that justice is in sight at all.

‘They talk ... like we’re still slaves’

In Roche Bois, an impoverished suburb of Port Louis, a group of Chagossians sit on a corrugated iron patio, hotly debating their future. These Chagossians belong to

a group called Chagos Asylum People, led by Claudette Pauline Lefade. She used to be part of Bancoult’s CRG; now she works in direct opposition to it.

Some Chagossians are not convinced that justice is in sight at all.

There is a sense of disillusionment among members, who feel that Bancoult and the CRG have sold them out. Bancoult oversees a welfare fund that receives an annual grant of seven million Mauritian rupees (\$158,000) from the Mauritian government and Lefade views him as beholden to that government.

“We need to take part in the negotiations,” Lefade says. “They cannot

decide behind our backs as they have done throughout history.”

Instead of preparing for a return to Chagos, Lefade is helping her members apply for British citizenship and training opportunities. Britain has recently relaxed citizenship requirements, which were previously restricted to first and second generation Chagossians. The charm offensive is belated but still offers an escape from decades of impoverished exile for some in the community.

Lefade is working closely with the UK-based platform Chagossian Voices. For Mauritius, sovereignty over Chagos would “be like manna from heaven”, said Frankie Bontemps, one of the platform’s leaders, based in Crawley, near Gatwick Airport – home to about 3,000 Chagossians.

“They’ll have this long-term lease with the US. I don’t think they have any long-term goals for Chagossians themselves.”

Chagossian Voices is instead fighting for recognition as an indigenous people at the United Nations and at other international forums, a claim based on generations-deep links to the slaves who arrived on the archipelago in the 1700s. Indigenous status, so far denied by both Britain and Mauritius, would provide legal underpinning for self-determination.

Loath to trust Mauritius, Bontemps reserves equal ire for Britain. He points out that a £40-million fund set up in 2016 to improve the lot of Chagossians, proved so byzantine that less than £1-million has been disbursed. And he dismissed British claims that Chagossians had been



Isle be back: UK courts ruled against Chagos Islanders in 2008 when they lobbied for the right to return to their Indian Ocean homeland. Photo: Shaun Curry/AFP

consulted during negotiations, saying that this amounted to a few online meetings in which participants' concerns were repeatedly batted away.

"They talk to us like we're still slaves, like they think we're stupid," said one member of Chagossian Voices after the second consultation meeting in May, which was observed by *The Continent*.

Geopolitical jostling

Scepticism over Mauritian control is shared by Chagossian communities in the Seychelles, who worry that it would leave them permanently sidelined. Pierre Prosper, the head of the Chagossian Committee Seychelles, is concerned that his group will lack leverage in the Mauritian legal system. "We want a clear say on what happens to us," he said.

This year, Bernadette Dugasse – a Chagossian born in Diego Garcia, who had been exiled in the Seychelles and has no links to Mauritius – launched a legal bid at the London High Court to halt the negotiations between Mauritius and Britain. The suit argued that the British government's ongoing failure to hold "substantive consultations" with the islanders breached human rights law.

She would rather that the islands remain under British control until such time that Chagossians can assume full sovereignty themselves. At the time of writing, she was waiting for a judge to rule on her application.

"We're not ready to rule our island ourselves. But we still want the British government to be there to help us make the transition," she said. "Better the devil

you know than the devil you don't know."

Dugasse's challenge had an intriguing geopolitical backdrop, having been encouraged by British Conservative MP Daniel Kawczynski, who had his own motivations for throwing a spanner in the works. He fears that Mauritian sovereignty would open the door to Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean.

Former British prime minister Boris Johnson made the same argument in a recent newspaper column, in which he said that Britain is making "a colossal mistake". He wrote: "A future Mauritian government might close the base or allow the Chinese, at the right price, to build their own runways on the same archipelago."

"We're not ready to rule our island ourselves. We want the British government to be there to help us make the transition"

These claims seem wide of the mark – if anything, Mauritius is closer to India, having allowed New Delhi to build a military base on Agalega, another of its other island dependencies. On the margins of the Chagos negotiations, there has also been talk of a new Indian Ocean entente that would align Mauritius and India with British, American and Australian interests in the region.

As for Chagossian interests? "It's an interstate dispute and that's the problem," said Gareth Price, a senior research fellow at London-based think tank Chatham House. "Chagossians are the pawns in all this." ■





PHOTO ESSAY

Decades of pan-African diplomacy

When they leave office, it is a tradition amongst American presidents to establish a presidential library: a place that collects and preserves all the letters, documents, photographs and videos associated with their administrations. No such tradition exists in Tanzania, or indeed in most African countries. Notable exceptions include the archives maintained by the Nelson Mandela Foundation in South Africa, and the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library in Nigeria.

To that list can now be added the Dr Salim Ahmed Salim Digital Archive: an online repository of the great Tanzanian statesman's speeches, interviews, correspondence, research and photographs (this can be freely accessed on salimahmedsalim.com). Salim was prime minister of Tanzania in 1984, but he made an even bigger impact as secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity from 1989 until it transformed into the African Union in 2001.

In this capacity, he toured the continent and the world – travelling, literally, through the corridors of power, and meeting some of history’s most iconic people. Now, for the first time, the rest of us can travel with him through his notes and photos, some of which are reproduced here. They offer a

rare glimpse into decades of high-level pan-African diplomacy.

His son, Ahmed Salim, hopes that other African leaders will copy this approach. “We need to understand what transpired in our history so that we can be better prepared to lead in the future,” he told *The Continent*. ■



Highly respected: As chairman of the United Nations special committee on decolonisation, Salim led a number of delegations across Africa, including this one to meet Emperor Haile Selassie in Addis Ababa in 1972.

The interruptor: At a cultural conference in Yaounde in 1990, Salim paid tribute to Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, saying that the power of his pen had contributed to the ‘liberation of the African mind’.



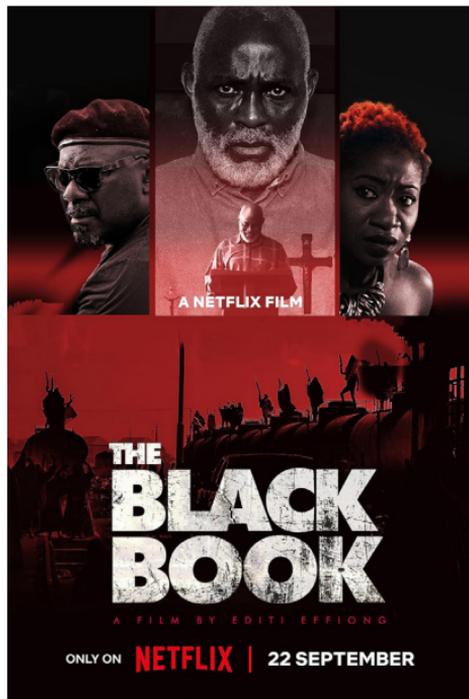


So near, Sahrawi:
Sahel Salim, secretary-general of the Organisation of African Union at the time, on a fact-finding mission to Western Sahara in 1993 – a situation as intractable then as it is now.

Oh, hey you:
Kofi Annan, then a relatively new secretary-general of the United Nations, pays a visit to the OAU in 1998 where he is hosted by Salim.



Tripoli advisor:
Salim with Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi, at the launch of the African Union in 2001.



Taken, with a pinch of salt

Netflix's African shows and movies are made with a global audience in mind.

Wilfred Okiche

The latest Netflix Nigeria original feature, *The Black Book*, continues the streaming platform's oversized appetite for commissioning or acquiring content that is produced locally but positioned to attract as many viewers as possible

outside the continent.

To Netflix execs, maximising the potential for films or TV shows to “travel” is now shorthand for doubling down on genre and using established structures and formulas, usually lifted from Hollywood. This is why there's been a glut of formulaic, similar-looking African content.

Not all of it is bad, of course.

Editi Effiong's action thriller *The Black Book* manages to be both criminally entertaining and yet incredibly superficial, even as it manages to take on weighty themes – police brutality, the illicit drug trade, structural inequality – that have now become tethered to Nigerian living.

Nollywood veteran Richard Mofe-Damijo plays Paul Edima, a retired dark operative pulled back into the underworld when his only child is murdered by rogue police officers. Edima's personal story of loss and revenge struggles for attention with Effiong's interest in the sociopolitical commentary he hopes will distinguish his film from being dismissed as a copy of, say, Liam Neeson's *Taken* franchise.

To his credit, Effiong's first directorial feature, lensed by maverick Yinka Edward, is easy on the eye. And the bombast of the production will likely draw away attention from the weakness of the story: the film lacks an emotional core despite featuring trauma dialled up to the max.

Characters feel like robots marching to the predetermined beat of Effiong and Bunmi Ajakaiye – with whom he shares a writing credit – as the film rushes to its inevitable, violent climax. ■

In praise of tuwo

Toheeb Babalola

In the Akinyele area of western Nigeria, we eat tuwo, made with maize flour. My father introduced me to this energy-rich dish to help keep us going the whole day.

Before he died, my father and I used to join the other farmers of Lagbeja village for breakfast. As early as 6am, we would sit at the local canteen shed and fill up on hot tuwo before embarking on the two kilometre journey to work at the farm.

The tuwo gave us the strength to work from morning till evening – and even though that made it something more like a simple fuel source than a fancy meal, somehow I fell in love with it.

Whenever I tried to get out of going to the farm with him, my father would try to bribe me: “I will buy two plates of tuwo for you!” It always worked.

When he was away working in the forest, I sometimes went to Iya Seki, the tuwo seller, for a meal on credit.

She usually gave me extra gbegiri (a soup made from black-eyed beans) and ponmo (cow skin). Her tuwo was famous. People from different villages would come to her for tuwo. Then one day Iya Seki went to build a house in the city with the profits.



It takes tuwo: This Yoruba fare will fuel family bonds – and a hard day's work.

When my father passed I, too, came to the city, to live with my mother and siblings. I thought that would mean the end of the tuwo for me, but lo and behold there this Yoruba meal was – being served in restaurants! They use spoons, here in the city. I still use my hands.

Just last week, I took my siblings to the mall for some tuwo, but the best will always be from the village.

I wonder where Iya Seki is now. ■



Last week we tried Ugandan chapati with a twist, Rolex. This week, we are in Nigeria trying out the energy-rich tuwo. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org. \$100 for the winning letter.

Is help available for vulnerable children?

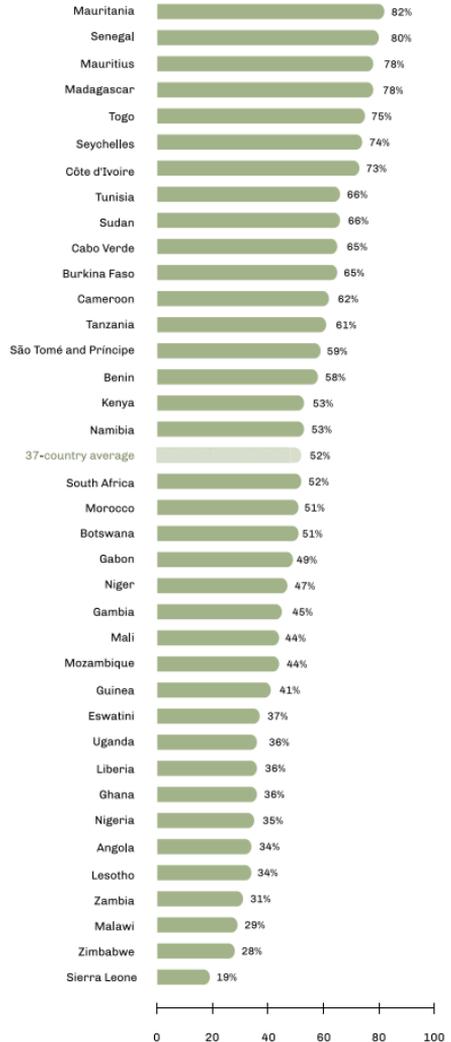
Last week we reported that some Africans (but far from all) say support for vulnerable children is available in their communities, and that poor people are less likely to think so than the rich.

Based on citizens' views recorded in Afrobarometer surveys across 37 African countries in 2021/2023, your chances of finding local sources of help for abused or neglected children (59% on average), children living with disability (57%), and children or adults with mental or emotional problems (52%) may also depend on the country you call home.

Three quarters of citizens say there is community-level help for children and adults with mental or emotional problems in Mauritania (82%), Senegal (80%), Mauritius (78%), and Madagascar (78%). But fewer than a third say the same in Sierra Leone (19%), Zimbabwe (28%), Malawi (29%), and Zambia (31%). In 17 countries, fewer than half think such help can be found at the community level.

We find a similar range when it comes to support for abused or neglected children and for children with disability, with Senegal at the top (83% for both) and Sierra Leone bringing up the rear (29% and 27%, respectively). ■

Help is available for children/adults with mental or emotional problems | 37 African countries | 2021/2023



Source: Afrobarometer is 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.

Somalia is fighting the war on terror – and waging it

Vulnerable Somalis are being terrorised by state security and its allied militia. But as long as Somalia is fighting Al-Shabaab, the world looks the other way.

Abdalle Ahmed Mumin

No arrests have been made in the eight months since three men brandishing AK-47s entered the house of a family of herders in Somalia's Hiiran region, dragged a pregnant 18-year-old out, cut into her thigh and hand and raped her.

The February incident was as shocking as it was inexplicable, because the family understood the men to belong to Ma'awisley, a local community militia that has been praised as heroically fighting alongside official Somali government forces in their strongest push against al-Shabaab in years.

The close ties would suggest that official forces can identify the abusive militiamen and bring them to justice. They have not. Instead, reports of similar abuses keep piling up.

In the nearby village of Inji, a 35-year-old mother of five says she too suffered a traumatic sexual assault in late May, at the hands of militiamen she believes were part of the Ma'awisley. In early June, a 19-year-old woman was kidnapped and held captive overnight. "The men tortured me as they raped me repeatedly under the

trees. They were threatening to kill me," she said.

Again, the family knew who the captors were: Ma'awisley militiamen. "Even if we know them, what can we do?" her sister angrily said to me when I went out to verify these reports for the *Horn Observer*.

Over and over, in this riverine region of Somalia, I heard deeply distressing accounts of attacks on civilians, especially women, by Ma'awisley militiamen.

There is hardly anything victims can do about it, especially since they are from marginalised communities like the Bantu agriculturalists and small clans such as the Kaboole.

But it is unacceptable that the Somali government has also chosen to do nothing about holding its fighting allies accountable.

While al-Shabaab remains a significant threat, and continues to commit grave human rights violations, the actions of government forces and their allied militias must also come under scrutiny.

In September, the US-trained Danab Brigade – an elite unit of the Somali National Army – reportedly destroyed a local health centre in Shaw town,

Hiiraan, demonstrating that the disregard for civilian safety extends beyond the Ma'awisley militia.

The situation is not any better in the breakaway territory of Somaliland, where Amnesty International and others have documented indiscriminate shelling by official security forces in the fight against Dhulbahante clan fighters in Las Anod city. This shelling has damaged hospitals, schools, mosques, and displaced tens of thousands.

Yet justice and accountability remain elusive. Instead of fighting abusers, the state is waging a war against those who report them.

Somali journalists face continuous attacks and restrictions on reporting violations. Many have made the difficult decision to leave the country, or resorted to self-censorship out of fear for their safety and well-being.

I have experienced state repression too. A year ago, armed men from the national intelligence services raided my office just when I was preparing to leave for Nairobi. I would be detained for 44 days in an underground cell, suffering relentless mental and physical torture, while also facing politically motivated charges. All because I had dared to join others on 10 October 2022 in a press conference to express concern about a directive from the deputy information minister on media coverage of the ongoing conflict.

My colleague, journalist Mohamed Bulbul, remains incommunicado in arbitrary detention in Mogadishu since 17 August 2023, for his reporting on police corruption.



Convoy: Soldiers patrol near Sanguuni military base south of Mogadishu.
Photo: Mohamed Abdiwahab/AFP

In my detention, I found that there was a pattern to who is victimised and who victimises. Fellow detainees overwhelmingly came from minority communities and spoke of abuse at the hands of armed clans.

Yet, such powerful clans and individuals continue to be armed, using international funding from western taxpayers in the European Union, United States and United Kingdom. They even empower themselves with supplies from the United Nations.

As long as the Somali government and its allies are also fighting against al-Shabaab, their own terror waged upon less empowered Somalis is ignored. Until this changes, the nation's aspirations for a peaceful and democratic future will remain elusive. ■

Abdalle Ahmed Mumin is a freelance journalist and the secretary-general of the Somali Journalists Syndicate. He is currently a fellow at the University of York's Centre of Applied Human Rights.

THE QUIZ

0-3

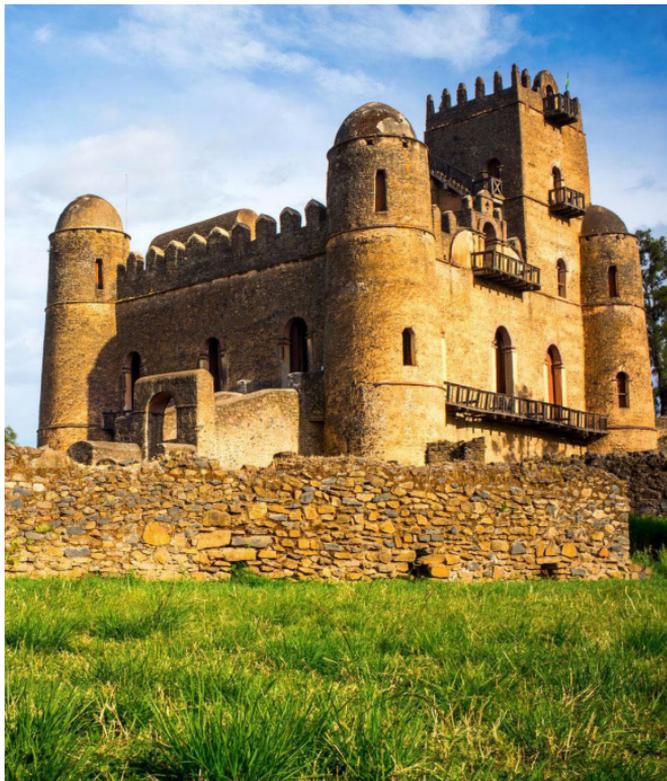
"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"I offered to host the World Cup but it didn't even bother to RSVP."



- 1_ What are people from the Chagos Islands called?
- 2_ Salim Ahmed Salim was the former prime minister of which country?
- 3_ What does the acronym SADC stand for?
- 4_ When did Abdel Fattah El-Sisi become president of Egypt: 2014 or 2015?
- 5_ In which country was model Adut Akech born?
- 6_ Dinka people are native to which country?
- 7_ Which African country will be one of the three hosts of the 2030 men's Fifa World Cup?
- 8_ What are Somalia's two official languages?
- 9_ The Fasil Ghebbi (pictured) is found in which country?
- 10_ Nobel peace prize laureate Dr Denis Mukwege announced his candidacy for president of which country this week?

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

As we were perusing the news this week, we learned that a university in the United Kingdom has gone full Hogwarts, offering a masters degree in “Magic and Occult Science”. How exciting! Perhaps they’ll teach students a spell to make a certain lying, problematic prime minister and his racist, stuck-up, inhumane colleagues disappear.

But if they’re on the hunt for professors to teach magicology, then we have some ideas for candidates from the continent who are already experts in the dark arts.

Most of them currently have another day job, but at the rate our heads of state are rolling, who knows how many of them are dusting off their CVs right now, and this might be just what the witchdoctor ordered. They know all the tricks, after all. How to make a human rights activist disappear, how to turn an election loss into an election win, and even how to turn a tender for building roads into a walk-in-wardrobe for the first lady.

A question that has plagued many of our leaders over time is, “How do you solve a problem like the opposition?”

While some might prefer to wish them

away with a wave of a wand, others have to stick to tried and tested methods.

This week Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine landed back in Uganda following a trip abroad. Plans had been made for his supporters to gather and welcome back their hero, an event police branded “illegal” and warned people against taking part – maybe because *they* wanted to be the ones to, uh, welcome him.

While we agree with the sentiment that “airport pick-up is a love language”, we don’t think this qualifies. Videos on social media showed him being grabbed by two men and bundled into a car.

His opposition party, the NUP, immediately put the word out that Bobi Wine had been arrested, but soon after Uganda Police

took to social media stating that they had merely escorted him home.

How nice! Less nice is that, at the time of writing, Bobi Wine’s home is surrounded by security officers, and he’s said he is under *de facto* house arrest.

Of course, as if by magic ... out came the teargas in a puff of smoke as police dispersed his supporters and stopped them from getting too near his home.

A liar, a witch and a wardrobe



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Homebound ward: Ugandan opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, is under house arrest. Again. Photo: Sumy Sadurni/AFP

Another approach if you don't want to be the one doing the magic is accuse others of doing it! This week in The Seychelles, leader of the United Seychelles opposition party, Patrick Herminie, was charged with actual witchcraft. He faces charges including conspiracy to exercise witchcraft and being in possession of anything intended to be used for the purpose of witchcraft.

According to reports the arrest is linked to the discovery of two bodies on the island of Mahé. Herminie, who has now been released on bail, says the whole thing is an attempt to destroy his image ahead of the 2025 elections.

If you've ever been impressed by seeing a magician pull a rabbit out of a hat, wait till you hear what our leaders can pull out of their ... uh ... let's stick with hats!

There they are in the middle of an economic crisis, complete with rampant

inflation and freedom of expression clampdowns and human rights abuses coming out of their ... hats, still hats ... and they will get up on stage and recite their mystical incantations, saying "Abracadabra, abracazoo, I'm running for a third term and I'll be winning it too!"

The latest person to do this is Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who announced that he will be vying for a third term in the December elections in response to the "call of the Egyptian people" (they've also been calling about the rising cost of living, Abdel dear, but guess you missed that!).

While he is likely to win (he got 97% of the vote during the last polls, but the voter turnout was a measly 41%), some opposition members are crying foul, saying their supporters are harassed or being turned away when they attempt to register in support of their candidate, which is needed to gain a spot on the ballot.

On 10 October 2023 Liberia will hold its general election in which 20 candidates, including current President George Weah, will be vying for the presidency. Earlier this week the UN Human Rights Office said it is "concerned by reported instances of election related violence, use of language that could amount to hate speech and attacks on journalists" ahead of the polls.

So we end this week's column sending good wishes to the people of Liberia and with a reminder that no-one should lose their life, livelihood or home over an election. We wish Liberians and all of you a magical week ahead. ■

In southern Africa, the old boys' club is alive and well

SADC's response to Zimbabwe's elections speaks more to mutual back-scratching than to democracy.

Innocent Batsani-Ncube

After the 2023 Zimbabwe elections, many commentators celebrated the Southern African Development Community's observer mission, which concluded that "aspects of the elections fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and SADC principles and guidelines governing democratic elections".

To many this signalled a turning point in SADC's electoral peer review, which has often been seen to confer credibility on problematic polls. This apparent progress was quickly undermined, however, because rather than call out Zanu-PF, key SADC leaders sent out congratulatory messages within a day of the results announcement, including from Namibia, Tanzania, Botswana and South Africa.

President Hage Geingob of Namibia tweeted: "On behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of Namibia, I extend my warmest congratulations to @edmnangagwa on his re-election as President of Zimbabwe. I also extend felicitations to @ZanuPF_Official our sister party..." Geingob's last sentence

was an implicit acknowledgement of the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa (FLMSA) association.

The FLMSA was formed in 2000 and consists of the ruling parties of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. It hosts annual summits and meets during members' party conferences to share ideas about how to retain power. Furthermore, in July 2022 the FLMSA commissioned a Chinese Communist Party-funded party leadership training centre in Tanzania.

The network's influence is often overlooked, yet explains a lot about the survival mechanisms employed by parties such as Zanu-PF, and the regional support they rely on.

As FLMSA parties face closer electoral contests, we are likely to see more brazen examples of this "old boys' network" in action, which bodes ill for the consolidation of an inclusive democratic culture in the region. ■



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THE BIG PICTURE

Say my name: South Sudanese-Australian model Adut Akech on the catwalk for Thierry Mugler in Paris this week. Akech was born in 1999 in what is now South Sudan, but grew up as a refugee in Kenya and then in Australia, where her teachers tried to get away with calling her "Mary".

Photo: Julien De Rosa/AFP



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