

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



Don't forget about Sudan

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

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WE'RE BACK!

Recharged and ready for summer, we're back for a new season of your favourite African newspaper – not too bold a claim on your behalf, we'd gamely venture. Expect plenty more of the news and stories about life on our continent that 20,000 of you have come to expect of us each week. The world will be busy, but each Saturday we'll help you catch up on what's happening on this part of the planet. As ever, thank you for your support and please keep sharing *The Continent* with those that would benefit from quality journalism.



Cover: Ours can feel like an overwhelming world, especially when the news cycle is filled with violence, chaos and collapse. Hamas's murder of Israelis, and the Israeli state's continued, industrial destruction of life in Gaza, has replaced Ukraine in our push notifications. Other conflicts, particularly when they happen in Africa, fade from view in these cycles. But those struggling to survive the violence in Sudan are asking us not to look away. Writing in devastating sorrow, a humanitarian worker in Sudan asks us to help save Darfur – again (p12).

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FINAL ...



GHANA

Minister blames flood victims

Ghana's minister for water has accused flood victims of having "refused to leave" land that authorities flooded. The intentional spillage was meant to prevent the dam from bursting – like that of the Libyan coastal town of Derna – after it filled beyond its capacity thanks to heavier than usual rains attributed to climate change. At least 31,000 were displaced. Local newspaper *Pulse* says minister Freda Prempeh complained that "now the government has to spend millions of money on relief." She has said that she was quoted out of context.

PALESTINE

Africans among Hamas hostages

Two Tanzanians and a South African are among the 224 people who were taken into Gaza from Israel by Hamas militants in their 7 October attack, the BBC reported on Thursday, citing the Israeli government. The UK outlet said the Tanzanian ambassador in Tel Aviv had confirmed the information but South Africa had not. Among the varied positions taken by African governments on the Israel-Palestine issue since the recent escalation, South Africa has notably expressed support for the Palestinian side.

DRC

Boat accident claims 54 lives

At least 54 people died and more than 250 were rescued after a boat capsized on Lulunga River in the DRC. This comes after more than 160 people died on another capsized boat in the same area: Equateur province. The country's rivers are infamous for being hard to navigate and a combination of old boats, lax law enforcement, and poor rescue services is not helping.

SAHEL

Norway sends its love – and its money

Despite closing the Bamako embassy which served the entire West African Sahel, Norway will increase its annual humanitarian aid to the region by 40-million kroner (\$3.5-million) from 248-million kroner (\$22-million). Norway's international development minister told the French news agency, AFP, that only 40% of the region's humanitarian needs were being funded.

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP



NIGERIA

Supreme Court gives its thumbs up to Bola Tinubu's electoral win

The highest court in Nigeria on Thursday dismissed the last legal challenge against Bola Tinubu's February victory at the polls. Tinubu was declared winner with

37% of the vote. His two main opponents filed separate challenges with the country's electoral tribunal, which ruled against them. They alleged that he didn't meet the threshold for victory and that the electoral commission's systems failed so massively that results could not be trusted. The court also rebuffed a bid to add to those grounds allegations that Tinubu forged a degree paper from an American university.

INTERNATIONAL

Over 114-million people robbed of their homes

The United Nations' refugee agency said this week that "the number of people displaced by war, persecution, violence and human rights violations globally is likely to have exceeded 114-million at the end of September." War and its purveyors remain the biggest drivers of displacement – as in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar and the DRC this year. But climate shocks like drought and floods, especially in places like Somalia that are already drained by war, are also a big contributor.

ETHIOPIA

Even Abiy appears to be weary of war

There has been a lot of talk in Addis Ababa that Ethiopia needs a sea port, with propagandists on state television claiming the country's development ambitions are threatened by its landlocked status. Two weeks ago, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that regional peace depends on Ethiopia getting sea access. This week however, Abiy walked back that rhetoric, saying that "Ethiopia will not assert its interests through war" but seek peaceful negotiations. Somalia has already rebuffed overtures to enter sea port talks with Ethiopia.



Outbreak: Bird flu has forced South Africa to cull 30% of its chickens.

Photo: Shiraz Mohamed/AFP

LESOTHO

Chickens won't be coming home to roast

Fast food chain KFC has closed all its restaurants in Lesotho less than two weeks after the mountain kingdom banned the import of poultry from South Africa. The chain says it can't find enough chicken to serve. South Africa, one of the biggest poultry exporters on the continent, has seen at least 60 outbreaks of bird flu since April, forcing it to cull up to 30% of its chickens, according to its poultry association. To keep the disease out, neighbouring countries including Namibia banned South African poultry imports.

MEDIA

Israel keeps killing journalists

At least 24 journalists are thought to be among the thousands killed in Israel's ongoing bombardment of the Gaza strip. They include Duaa Sharaf, a journalist who was killed with her child at home on Thursday morning, according to the Anadolu news agency. Israel was killing journalists before the terrorist attack by Hamas. In May 2022, its forces shot and killed renowned *Al Jazeera* reporter Shireen Abu Akleh when she was reporting in the West Bank area. Separately, on Wednesday, the family –



Levelled: The aftermath of an Israeli strike on Gaza City on Thursday this week. Photo: Omar El-Qattaa/AFP

wife, son and daughter – of *Al Jazeera* Gaza correspondent Wael Al Dahdouh were killed in a refugee camp they had escaped to.

SENEGAL

Opposition figure Sonko in grave condition

Jailed Senegalese opposition figure Ousmane Sonko briefly fell into a coma after eight days of hunger strike. Doctors resuscitated him but he remained very frail. Sonko is protesting what he says are politically motivated court cases designed to pull him out of next year's presidential race. He was convicted of defamation in May and a sexual offence in June, and he called for mass protests around both trials. Senegalese authorities dissolved his political party in July and brought charges of insurrection against him.

REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Global rainforest custodians convene in Brazzaville

Delegates from countries in the basins of the Congo, Amazon and Borneo-Mekong river systems, gathered in Brazzaville this week to discuss how to finance the conservation of their forests. The three basins contribute 80% of the earth's tropical forest cover and host more than 65% of its biodiversity but are also where most of the deforestation in the world happens. More than 4-million hectares of forest were lost to deforestation last year, a trend that undercuts global ambitions to reduce emissions through arboreal carbon capture.

Kenya

A decade without justice

A Kenyan woman was murdered at a party with British troops in the country's north in 2012. Reports indicate that a soldier killed her, but nobody has been brought to justice. Mwangi Maina writes that her family is looking to the British king, who visits Kenya this week, to lend his influence to their quest for justice from the UK government.

Parts of Kenyan society are looking forward to hosting Charles Windsor, but the family of Agnes Wanjiru are not among them – unless he can answer for her murder by British soldiers who still walk free a decade later.

“Justice is all we want,” Rose Wanyua, the elder sister who raised Wanjiru, tells *The Continent*.

In 2012, Wanjiru's body was retrieved from a septic tank in a hotel in Nanyuki. The town, 200km north of Nairobi, is where the British army maintains a military base for its soldiers to do hot-weather training. She was last seen

alive in the company of hard-partying British soldiers. At the time, Wanjiru had reportedly turned to sex work to feed her five-month-old baby.

Esther Njoki, Wanjiru's niece, was not yet a teenager when her aunt disappeared but the family's 11-year search for answers has given the now 19-year old the anguished yet determined voice of an activist. “The killers, who are known in London, are walking free,” Njoki says. She demands compensation and the arrest and extradition to Kenya of the British soldiers suspected of the murder.

A 2019 inquest by Nanyuki magistrate Njeri Thuku found that Wanjiru was probably alive when she was thrown into the tank but had been beaten and stabbed. A 2021 investigation by British newspaper *Sunday Times* revealed that a British soldier had been bragging to his peers that he killed her and another told their military base leaders that the alleged murderer even showed him Wanjiru's body back in 2012. Kenya announced that it would reopen the investigation into Wanjiru's murder and days later, while visiting the Nanyuki base, the UK's deputy minister for armed forces, James Heapey, said: “We will leave no stone unturned as we provide our full support to the investigation.”

Nobody has been charged for the murder.



Justice: Activists demonstrate in London in memory of Agnes Wanjiru.
Photo: Wiktor Szymanowicz/
Future Publishing
via Getty Images

The Continent reached out to Mohamed Amin, Kenya's director for criminal investigations, but calls and messages went unanswered.

Wanjiru's family and other victims of alleged abuses by British soldiers in Kenya would like to draw the British monarch's attention to their pain. The African Centre for Corrective and Preventive Action, a campaign group that supports them, had planned to picket the British high commission in Kenya on 30 October, the day before Windsor jets in. But their notice letter to Kenya's police was declined, meaning that the protest, if it goes ahead, might be brutally repressed.

The group's executive director, James Mwangi, sent the British envoy in Kenya a letter requesting a physical meeting between the monarch and Wanjiru's family but has not received a response.

Meanwhile, the UK continues to keep at least 200 military personnel in Kenya. Most of them are involved in training Kenyan soldiers for deployment to neighbouring Somalia for combat

against al-Shabaab. London invests more than \$9.6-million every year into the partnership which passes out more than 1,000 Kenyan soldiers annually.

But the price Kenyans pay is less eagerly quantified. In another Kenyan loss, a fire that started during military exercises by the British troops in Nanyuki burned some 12,000 acres of land. The more than 7,000 people who lost their land and livelihoods have not received any compensation, according to their lawyer Kelvin Kubai – who called a press conference in Nairobi last week.

In April Kenyan legislators renewed the defence co-operation with the UK for another five years but a parliamentary inquiry into the alleged wide-ranging abuses by British soldiers based in Kenya that was proposed in June appears to have gone nowhere. Asked about it, Caleb Amisi, an MP on the committee charged with the inquiry told *The Continent* that they will soon "make a visit soon to the affected areas and Parliament will issue a final report on the probe". ■

Rugby

The game that means everything

The Springboks and the All Blacks are playing for something that means much more than a trophy: the very soul of the game

Luke Feltham

The South African Springboks go to war with the New Zealand All Blacks on Saturday night for rugby's premier prize. It's a game that means everything to everyone, both practically and philosophically.

No other final could have been more tantalising. These are the game's two great sovereigns. The only champions of the last two decades, each with three titles and looking to pull clear of the other. And of course, it is the first time we've had a repeat of the 1995 final – Nelson Mandela's great act of sporting reconciliation.

Rugby has always carried a level of symbolism, and a penchant for a philosophical natter, that belies the brutal nature of the game. This World Cup has been no different.

The first great question has already been answered: the promised dawn of the Northern Hemisphere has proved to be a false one. Like with cricket, England has long been surpassed by its former colonies in the game that it codified. Their neighbours have been even worse off. Bar one English title in 2003, no other European name has ever been etched on the Webb Ellis Cup – its very name derived from an Anglican clergyman.

That was supposed to change in the year of Antoine Dupont, France's dynamic scrum-half; and in the final World Cup of Ireland's Johnny Sexton. But they were dispatched by the Boks and All Blacks respectively.

Now those two will battle for a meta-physical honour: the spirit of the game. On one side is an island nation whose identity is entwined with beautiful, running rugby. On the other is a force forged in the heat of the highveld, relentless in its grind for every centimetre of territory.

The beauty and the beast narrative looms large over the game – even if it can sometimes turn asinine. The Springboks in particular face ridiculous inquisitions after every victory, with earnest calls from pundits for rule changes to mitigate their “aggressiveness”.

The Boks have also given us many moments of inspiration over the past month. Manie Libbok's audacious, no-look crossfield kick is about as close as



Match winning run: Cheslin Kolbe charges down a kick from France's Thomas Ramos, saving two points in a quarter final the Springboks won by one point. Photo: Miguel Medina /AFP

you'll ever get to seeing Ronaldinho on a rugby pitch. Cheslin Kolbe's quick thinking and faster feet charging down the French kicker in the quarterfinals will live long in memory.

That said, they have more scrumming power, ball-carrying ability and depth than any other side in world rugby. Their unmatched ability to swap out almost the entire forward line with another "bomb squad" of equally talented fresh substitutes has become a meme. The South African way is to put their opponents under the mill until they make mistakes that can be converted into penalties or open territory.

New Zealand, by contrast, represents the romance of rugby. From the pre-match haka to the obsessive need to play attractive ball, the All Blacks safeguard all the traditions that the self-proclaimed

purist holds dear.

Since their opening loss, those lofty ideals have translated into devastating attacking play this tournament, with the side shooting past everyone else on the tries tally.

As their backline stretch the play, lanes invariably open up for runners like Will Jordan to dart into. Jordan's hat-trick in the semifinal took him to eight tries, tying him for most in a single World Cup with Jonah Lomu, Julian Savea and Bryan Habana – a list dripping with nostalgia.

One of rugby's bizarre facts is that the late, great Lomu never scored against South Africa – a truth embodied by his improbable shutout in the 1995 game. If the Springboks once more nullify his successors, no fan in the country will give a damn how they did it. ■

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The Continent

The world once mobilised to 'Save Darfur' – we need your help again

While two men fight for power at any cost, the ordinary people of Darfur are once again paying the price. As **Sara Mohammed Sulaiman** writes, they also wonder if the world will pay attention – like it did 20 years ago.



In ruin: The conflict between Sudan's army, under Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo is devastating Darfur. Photo: AFP

Every morning since the war started in Sudan six months ago, I have awoken to the sound of gunfire in my neighbourhood in North Darfur's capital of El-Fasher.

My morning routine includes logging onto Facebook (connectivity permitting) to see what my neighbours are saying. Is a battle under way? Are checkpoint guards

firing at random? Only when I am sure I can travel safely will I begin my journey to my office on the western side of the city.

Before the conflict, it was a quick trip from my home on the south side of El-Fasher to the main market at its centre. But now, riding in either a minibus or a taxi, I am forced to pass through half a dozen checkpoints, where weapon-toting

men demand to know my identity and destination.

At the main market, I wait for an office car to pick me up for the second leg of the journey – and another half-dozen checkpoints – before finally reaching the office. If I make it without being threatened – a gunman told me during a recent stop that “today we are going to beat you” – I consider myself lucky.

Nothing is normal in El-Fasher. We haven’t had electricity in four months. Criminality is rampant. We can’t go out after 6pm. A rash of malaria and dengue fever cases has filled the city’s (and region’s) only working hospital. We lack even the most basic of necessities.

I live 802 kilometres from Khartoum, where clashes began in mid-April between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in a fight for national control. The conflict quickly spread to other regions of the country. More than five million people have fled their homes since the war started. Roughly half of the country’s population (around 25-million people) need humanitarian aid and protection.

Human cost of a battle for power

In Darfur, we have witnessed ethnically motivated violence reminiscent of the war that started two decades ago and inspired the global “Save Darfur” movement.

I remember the early days of that war. I was 12 years old in 2003. In the months after the fighting began, relatives from rural areas arrived at our home in the city, some of them on the backs of donkeys. My uncles and aunts described

brutal attacks by militiamen. They told of how thousands were killed in the most horrible ways, how houses were burned, how women and children were raped.

Today, I work with desperate people who have fled areas that have come under attack in this new war, so similar to the old one. With my team, I travel from our office in El-Fasher to Zam Zam, the sprawling camp for internally displaced people around 15km south.

The camp, established 20 years ago in response to the earlier war, has seen its numbers grow by tens of thousands in recent months, pushing its population to upwards of 500,000 by some estimates. With the warring parties hindering humanitarian access throughout the country – I knew four aid workers who were killed here in North Darfur – we are one of only a few international organisations present in Zam Zam.

Horrific violence has been committed in West and Central Darfur, with recent onslaughts reported in South Darfur and its capital, Nyala. In North Darfur, we’ve seen savage clashes in Kutum and Tawila.

I have met survivors of those attacks in Zam Zam. One woman from Tawila told me about militiamen who ransacked her home, rifling through her belongings for anything of value. When they began to beat her two daughters and threatened to rape them, she pleaded: “I am a poor woman. Please do not harm them.”

The jeering militiamen relented only when she agreed to their demand that she eat live locusts, a humiliating act of subjugation that has left her deeply traumatised.

A young woman from Kutum told me how she and her sister were chased down by two militiamen on a motorbike. “I was able to help my sister get away, but they caught me,” the woman said. “They ripped my clothing and said they would rape me.”

She suffered stab wounds to her neck and stomach before a rival group of gunmen appeared, causing the attackers to flee. She is now recovering.

Many of the stories I have heard are far worse. The United Nations has characterised the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence by militia forces in this conflict as “brutal and widespread”.

And yet I have been inspired by the resilience I have seen, like that of a woman in the Zam Zam camp who survived a kidnapping and gang rape, but said she wanted to go public and tell the world about what is happening to women and girls in Darfur.

Save Darfur

I fear that North Darfur could be subject to worsening attacks in the days and weeks ahead. We hear rumours all the time.

The international community must deploy critically needed resources to protect civilians; prioritise efforts to achieve a durable negotiated settlement to the conflict; press the warring parties to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law; and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The world once mobilised in an attempt to “Save Darfur”, launching the largest global social movement since the end of South African apartheid. An awe-inspiring coalition of citizens,



Gutted: Fire rips through a market area in El-Fasher, capital of North Darfur, after an RSF bombardment. Photo: AFP

celebrities, artists, faith leaders, and civic organisations came together across continents and demanded action on behalf of Darfur. Let us build this movement again. Let us join together in a call to protect the people of Darfur and demand an end to this cruel conflict.

In our culture, we often use songs to mobilise people around issues of social justice. An Arabic-language song I often sing is called *Our Hands Boy, Our Hands for Our Country*. The message of the song is simple: It is our hands that will save our country and lead us to a promising future.

We can do the job ourselves, the song says. All we ask is for your help at this moment of need. ■

Sara Mohammed Sulaiman, a native of El-Fasher, north Darfur, is a National Protection Officer and gender-based violence focal point for Nonviolent Peaceforce, an international NGO.

Stay off the grass: The parks and recreation of Kenya's political spaces

Nairobi's parks have a long tradition of being political spaces, where Kenyans gathered to challenge a regime or mark a new chapter in the country's history. But the most iconic of those parks have been closed for two years, ostensibly for rehabilitation. What is clear is that when they do re-open, far fewer people will get to use them. And politics won't be welcome.

All photos: Gordwin Odhiambo/The Continent



Vincent Ng'ethe

When Uhuru Park reopens, at a date that keeps moving further into the future, the concrete hulk of an exit from the Nairobi Expressway will sit at its southern boundary – one of many changes in Nairobi people's relationship to the historic park.

Before November 2021, when the park was fenced with blue corrugated iron and a green wire fence with sharp spikes, families used to take children to Uhuru Park to row boats on the lake, play at the swings and roll around on the grass to their hearts' content. Entry was free – a Christmas or Sunday outing that any and all could afford.

Today, there are horses to ride, go-karts, and even merry-go-rounds – but they are crammed into a dusty field next to the closed park. Parents still bring their children to play, but they compete for space with a garbage heap.

For decades, Uhuru Park loomed large in national political life. It was at its podium in 1971 that Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, growled that he would “grind the country's enemies like flour” after detecting a coup plot. Kenyatta had opened Uhuru Park just a couple of years before. He would not be the last person to bring a fight to the park's green.

It was here in 1992 that Wangari Maathai, the Nobel prize-winning environmentalist, was beaten while supporting a group of mothers who stripped naked to demand the release of their sons, who were being held by the

Arap Moi regime for political dissent.

Uhuru Park was a centrepiece of Wangari's environmental activism. Starting in 1989, she led a dogged resistance against plans by the Moi administration to build a 60-storey skyscraper there. The government relented and in 1995 gazetted Uhuru Park (21 hectares) and Central Park (11 hectares) as monuments, prohibiting any development.

It was in Uhuru Park, in 2010, that Kenya's new constitution was held aloft, signalling a new dawn after the bloody election dispute of 2008, in which more than 1,000 people died. And it was here in 2018 that Raila Odinga staged a swearing-in ceremony to declare himself the “people's president” after a landmark ruling by Kenya's Supreme Court overturned the 2017 presidential election.

Kenyatta had opened Uhuru Park just a couple of years before. He would not be the last person to bring a fight to the park's green.

Then, in November 2021, photos emerged of the Uhuru Park stage, and all of its history, crushed to rubble. A shocked Nairobi demanded an explanation.

A few months earlier, complaining that Uhuru Park had become a rundown haven for muggers, the Nairobi County Assembly had passed a resolution allowing the Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) to renovate it and the adjacent Central Park.

The NMS, now defunct, was itself

**Green light:
Nairobi's Uhuru
Park should
open again in
December. But
on what terms?**



a controversial agency through which former president Uhuru Kenyatta took major chunks of Nairobi's governance from city authorities to the presidential office. It was led by Mohammed Badi, a major general in the air force, who promised that the park would be "a totally different place".

The renovations were initially scheduled to last three months. But after nearly a year of missed deadlines and mystery over what these renovations even entailed, Badi told a radio show that parades and political rallies would no longer take place, and Uhuru Park would "totally change ... to be for entertainment, for recreation". Exactly when the people of Nairobi had agreed to remove five decades of political history was not clear.

The park was still closed in August 2022 when Nairobi residents voted for Johnson Sakaja as the city's new

governor, and Badi the builder returned to his military role – though the defence ministry remained in charge of the works.

One month after being sworn in, Sakaja announced that the park would be officially opened for the inaugural Nairobi Festival on 12 December 2022 – Kenya's independence day. But when the festival ended, the park, which admittedly looked a lot better than it had in 2021, closed to the public once again.

When Nairobi hosted the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in September, some of the blue fencing around Uhuru Park came down. Kenyans on social media wondered aloud if the summit had anything to do with it. Environmental activists – and there were many – don't like their parks fenced off.

But Uhuru Park's grey gates, now visible after the blue fencing was removed, remain firmly shut, and Central Park is

still wrapped in blue sheets.

Occasionally, government officials use Uhuru Park to launch programmes, like the “Green Army” which is meant to clear the city’s drains before the El Niño rains.

Now, however, another formal reopening date has been set – December 2023 – for the second Nairobi Festival.

In a statement to *The Continent*, Nairobi County Executive Committee member Ibrahim Auma Nyangoya, said that the reopened park would stick to the path plotted by Badi, its purpose limited to “leisure, entertainment, and recreational pursuits”. Significantly, applications “to hold gatherings that will distract from the above-mentioned purpose may not be considered”.

Sakaja, who had previously assured Nairobi’s people that “there will be no entry charges” to the parks, because “sometimes you are stressed and just want to relax and think your thoughts,” said in a June interview that people will

be required to show IDs to enter Uhuru Park. He also suggested that visitors to parts of Central Park might be subjected to entry fees after all.

This increasingly limited access to the city’s parks “is continuing with the trend of privatising the commons,” said Dr Wangui Kimari, an urban anthropologist.

Dr Teresa Mbatia, a lecturer at the University of Nairobi who studies public spaces, told *The Continent* that privatisation does not always require a change in ownership. “It can be in the hands of the government but everything done around it makes it more exclusive, suitable to only certain people ... and inaccessible to the majority of the urban poor or low income residents.”

Already the Nairobi Arboretum and Karura Forest charge entry fees and such arrangements, said Kimari, have led to a Nairobi status quo where “green space is only for the rich in their homes, at a fee, or at roundabouts and along highways.” ■



Concrete jungle: Public access to green spaces is increasingly limited.



Choral assets:
The Power Singers
rehearse ahead of the
isicathamiya contest.

PHOTO ESSAY

Out of the deep

South Africa's annual isicathamiya song contest is in its 23rd year, but its lore goes back generations.

Words and photos by Oupa Nkosi

Nkululeko Maphumulo was having fun singing different songs over drinks with former high school friends when the idea to start an isicathamiya/cothoza group came to them. Umoya Omusha (which means “light breeze”) was formed in 2012 and now has over 30 members of different ages.

Isicathamiya is a South African traditional music genre made famous by Grammy winners Ladysmith Black

Mambazo. The annual Isicathamiya Competition has pride of place on the arts calendar of KwaZulu-Natal province.

Umoya Omusha from Ndwedwe village, 60km north of Durban, is among the 131 groups participating in the competition's 23rd year. The groups – whose origins stretch from South Africa's Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces – sing through the night. Maphumulo (45) is optimistic that his

group will do well as they did in 2014, when they scooped the first prize in an open section of the competition.

This Zulu *a cappella* choral style was developed after the first world war, when Zulu men were forced to travel from rural areas to work in coal mines and factories.

Within the migrant communities, workers formed vocal ensembles – usually named after their homelands or their leaders – as a type of competitive entertainment within and between

the workers' hostels. They would sing at night about their poor working and living conditions and would cothoza (tread softly) through their dance steps choreographed so as to not disturb the camp security guard.

This tradition followed them when they went back to their rural homes and started holding friendly competitions – to which they brought a fierce rivalry. The winners were awarded a goat for their efforts – and the adoration of their fans.



Slick kicks:
The Freedom Stars, led by 'Mr Buthelezi' during their competition performance at the Playhouse Theatre in Durban.



Here comes treble:
The higher voices take centrestage, but they'd be lowkey lost without the drive and depth of the bass-line bop.

Although influenced stylistically by Europeans and Americans in the way they dress, the music still delves into the issues that many people at home resonate with, as their forefathers did in the hostel dormitories.

The songs are performed in call-and-response fashion, typically by male choral ensembles, though some groups have women members. Group sizes range from 12 to more than 20 singers. All vocal ranges – soprano, alto, tenor and bass – are represented, but the bass vocalists are the greatest in number.

The group sings in four-part harmony,

typically led by a tenor soloist in front, dressed differently to the rest.

The contestants are evaluated not only on the precision of their singing but also on the neatness and integrity of their appearance, co-ordinated gestures, footwork and smooth overall execution.

Before sunrise the next day, the winners are announced.

This year's laurels – prestige, accompanied by a not-insubstantial monetary reward – go to Zulu Messengers, with Maphumulo's Umoya Omusha coming in at an eminently respectable fifth position. ■



Class act: Nothing but the sharpest duds will do when the velvet voices of an Isicathamiya group like Umoya Omusha take the stage.

Should you have access to government information?

Did you join in this week's observance of World Development Information Day (24 October)? Or maybe you weren't informed?

We'll catch you up with a little info about the kinds of development-related information that Africans think they're entitled to.

Based on Afrobarometer surveys in 39 countries between late 2021 and mid-2023, a majority (55%) of Africans endorse the general idea that information held by the government should be shared with the public.

Almost four in 10 (38%) think instead that such information should be reserved

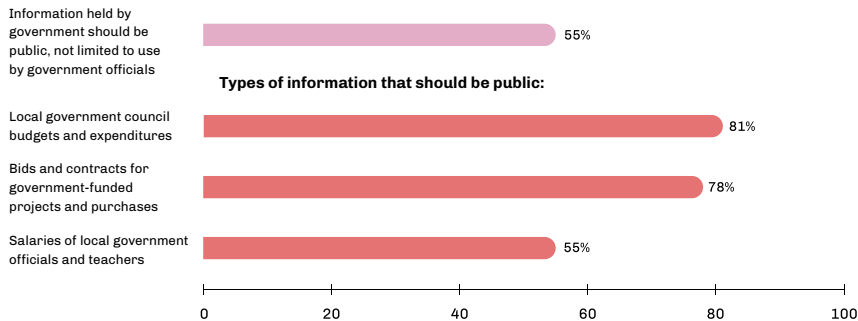
for use by government officials, while 7% don't take a position.

Drilling down a bit, 81% say ordinary people and the news media should have access to budgets and expenditures of local government councils. This is the majority view in all surveyed countries, ranging up to 95% in Kenya.

Almost as many (78%) want access to bids and contracts for government-funded projects and purchases, again a majority position in all countries.

A much slimmer majority (55%) think they should have the right to see salary information for local government officials and teachers, while 42% disagree. ■

Which types of government information should be public? | 39* African countries | 2021/2023



* The questions about local government budgets and salaries were asked in 38 countries.

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.



Wet, wild and wonderful

Amaarae is not afraid of sonic experimentation – or of steaming things up.

Wilfred Okiche

Ghanaian-American singer-songwriter Amaarae's sophomore studio album continues, and perhaps realises, the adventurous potential the 29-year-old showed on her 2020 debut.

That record, *The Angel You Don't Know*, reinvented Amaarae – born Ama Serwah Genfi, transporting her from her R&B origins and establishing her as a cosmopolitan ingénue connected to an increasingly global post-pop multiverse. The album's most significant success was the TikTok-approved and devastatingly

sexy *Sad Girls Luv Money*, buoyed by a remix featuring Kali Uchis and Moliy.

Fountain Baby is Amaarae's full-throated evolution. The studio album is the inevitable next phase of a performer with plenty of style and confidence to burn. Her voice, a restrained soprano that can be enchanting or screechy, domineering or submissive depending on who is listening, feels in sync with the several worlds – highlife, afrobeats, 90s pop, hip hop, soft rock, Japanese folk, dancehall, trap – that she's curated.

Amaarae is comfortable with sexuality and the pursuit of hedonism and, in lyrics and imagery that highlight a sexual fluidity, she spills her guts. In the opening lines of *Disguise*, she squeaks, “*I like my coffee with some head in the morning – two shots*” over synths and bass lines.

“*Me and my bitch got matching titties/ She got Fountain Baby tatted 'cause she fucking with me,*” she declares on the hard-hitting and formally adventurous *Counterfeit*. *Princess Going Digital*, a sadly euphoric yet surprisingly relatable achievement of storytelling is an undeniable highlight that makes a strong case for being the album's pièce de résistance.

An embarrassment of riches, *Fountain Baby* is held together into a cohesive, airtight whole by the force of Amaarae's magnetic talent and personality.

No two songs on *Fountain Baby* sound quite the same and the diversity of sounds, interests and influences make it quite the distinct experience. ■

In praise of okpa

Ifunanya Ezeh

Originating in northern Enugu, the south-eastern Nigerian state, okpa is a well-known and loved staple food in Nsukka, where I grew up and currently live. I don't consider it just a quick breakfast, like others do. It is tradition for my family to make it on the eve of every significant holiday or celebration.

Because of this, okpa has become an indispensable part of my life and I find myself craving it before or after any big event, like an important exam or interview. In some way, eating okpa reassures me, just like a hearty pat on the back, that everything will be all right.

The making of okpa starts when my mum buys a big sack of bambara nuts at the end of the year. A few basins are kept aside, picked and ground into a flour-like powder, which is what we use to make okpa that will last about a month. The rest is stored for the following year.

Seeing someone prepare okpa feels like watching an ongoing chemistry practical because it requires that one is careful: You don't want to add too much or too little water or palm oil to the okpa flour; it has to be the right temperature and the right consistency so as to not ruin the final



U OK? Okpa shouldn't be confused with the okapi, an animal that looks like a zebra had a baby with its side-giraffe.

outcome; then you can add uziza, pepper and salt to taste. There are a variety of wrappings to cook the okpa mixture in, like small transparent nylon bags, banana leaves or plantain leaves. Depending on your taste, bitter leaves can be added into the mix before wrapping it and cooking it in the pot of boiling water.

What comes after is the best part. The fun of okpa is that it can be enjoyed accompanied with basically anything – pap/ugali, garri (cassava granules), or my personal favourite, a chilled glass of Coca-Cola. ■



We ended last season in Western Nigeria, sampling tuwo. This season the food journey continues in South-East Nigeria where we are trying out okpa. 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.

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

"TFW you need coffee to 100% the quiz, but there's none left."



- 1_ Darfur is the western region of which country?
- 2_ Name the Ghanaian diplomat who served as the UN's secretary-general from 1997 to 2006.
- 3_ Who preceded George Weah as president of Liberia?
- 4_ What is the name of South Africa's national rugby team(s)?
- 5_ What is Uganda's currency called?
- 6_ Name the city (pictured) that was founded in 1892 and was the main harbour of German South West Africa.
- 7_ Tamazight is an official language in which country?
- 8_ Uhuru Park in Nairobi was opened by which Kenyan president in 1969?
- 9_ True or false: Dar Es Salaam is the capital of Tanzania.
- 10_ Léopold Sédar Senghor was the first president of which country?

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

You've got to hand it to the West. Each year, at the moment in which, according to their folklore, the veil between this world and the spirit realm is at its thinnest, their response is to take the idea of ghosts, goblins, witches and devils spilling out into the world, dress it up as an excuse to party, and export it to the rest of the world.

The spookiest part of this is how successful they've been – Halloween is now a mainstay of social calendars all around the world – possibly even at the African Union!

If there's anyone who might get a kick out of a scary monster's ball, after all, it's surely our well-heeled gang in Adidas Ababa. And if they invite the Boo-dashians from Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Gabon to attend, they wouldn't even have to pretend to be scared witless.

Someone who is apparently not scared of things that bump you off in the night is Niger's ousted president Mohamed Bazoum – according to the junta there, he tried to escape, just the other day!

Since the coup in Niger on 26 July, Bazoum has been under house arrest. Apparently by last week he'd had enough,

and at around 3am last Thursday, tried to escape with his wife, son, a pair of security staff and two cooks – which tracks, no point in escaping if you can't snack on the way. Unlike the coup, his dash for freedom was thwarted, and he never made it to the helicopters "belonging to a foreign power" that the junta says were meant to whisk him away. No whisk, no reward.

Now, if you asked some of our leaders for a scary story, it might go something like this: "Once upon a time there was an election – and I did not win it." Which means Liberia's recent election must have had them hiding under their blankets in terror!

The results of the country's election on 10 October were announced this week and there must have been gasps of horror when it

emerged that President George Weah had won a mere 43.83% of the votes, with opposition rival Joseph Boakai less than half a percentage point away at 43.44%, triggering a run-off on 14 November.

We just hope the tension of a nation so starkly divided doesn't spill over into the real kind of horror that we've sadly become all too familiar with on this continent, and in this world. Darfur,

The horrors of Halloween



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia. Ukraine. Palestine.

Palestine. Though we sometimes feel numbed by the violence of the world – inured to it by relentless exposure, even – the last few weeks of monstrous horror in Gaza have shattered that numbness.

You know all the numbers. The children – traumatised, injured, dead. The medics working day and night to save as many people as possible as systems collapse. The journalists and photographers capturing the losses of others while mourning their own. Aid workers warning that supplies are running out, people are hungry, there's no fuel for aid trucks. Israeli civilians have been killed. Palestinian civilians continue to be murdered en masse. Every person who has allowed this to happen has blood on their hands.

Social media shadow banning those bringing news from the region. People losing their jobs because they have spoken out in support of the Palestinian struggle. Journalists referring to Palestinians as having “died” while Israelis were “killed”. Media houses leading the dehumanisation of people whose voices have been stifled for decades, people who have time and again tried to show the hardship of life under occupation, dismissed and demonised even in death.

The greatest powers in the world, so proud of their self-appointed positions as paragons of all that is good, voting against a ceasefire. The president of the United States, stating that he has no notion if the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people have been killed – he's



Bereft: A woman looks in horror at the ruins of her home in Rafah, southern Gaza. Photo: Mohammed Abed/AFP

“sure innocents have been killed, it's the price of waging a war”.

The people of Palestine are whole humans – with lives, loved ones, dreams and aspirations. They are not lesser beings. They are not collateral damage. They are not cannon-fodder. They are not something to be made examples of. Let us not be so naïve that we only brand something as an act of terror based upon who carries it out.

Here in Africa, too often we see Nelson Mandela's legacy co-opted into kumbaya passivity. Yes, he championed peace and reconciliation. But before there was even a whiff of reconciliation in South Africa, he stood for justice, and he stood for liberation. And as he stood, he said: “Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians”.

We've had enough horror, this Halloween: Let freedom reign. ■

The devil of devolution is in the details

Sending power to Kenya's counties was meant to help them grow. Instead, a series of audits shows it helped the corrupt to help themselves.

Raphael Akeyo

The 2010 Kenyan constitution devolved power to 47 new counties, each with its own directly elected governor. Early reports of devolution's performance were mixed – it made a difference in far-flung areas such as Turkana, but there was also concern that it led more to the devolution of corruption than an improvement in service delivery.

The case of Kisumu County – the stronghold of opposition leader Raila Odinga – perfectly illustrates this tension.

Following its establishment in 2012, the county government has been flagged by Kenya's auditor general for adverse audit reports every financial year, indicating that its financial statements did not reflect its true financial position.

According to this year's County Treasury Reports, Kisumu received more than 61-billion shillings (\$406-million) since 2018. Reports by the auditor general and the Institute of Economic Affairs in Kenya indicate nearly 12% of this was lost, pointing to issues including but not limited to the violation of county financial laws, ghost workers, and a bewildering

array of improper payments for salaries, allowances and unnecessary assets.

In addition to threatening to bankrupt the county, this has undermined services and public confidence. The health system, for example, has been grounded by slowdowns and demonstrations by health workers, as well as inadequate equipment and supplies. Partly as a result, Kisumu suffers from ill-equipped hospitals and ranks as the county with the highest rates of HIV prevalence and second-highest rates of tuberculosis in the whole country.

While Kisumu is clearly not representative of all Kenyan counties, its experience is a stark warning that when decentralisation is poorly managed with insufficient mechanisms to correct and discipline failing county governments, it may neither bring power closer to the people, nor generate more effective public services. ■

Raphael Akeyo is a research and public policy specialist and holds a Master's Degree in Research and Public Policy from Maseno University. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



THE BIG PICTURE

Left on reed: Swati maidens gather during the Umhlanga Reed Dance at the Mbangweni Royal Residence in Eswatini. During the eight-day ceremony in October as many as 400,000 young women present reeds to the Indlovukazi (queen mother) and dance before the king.

Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



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