

The Continent

On the campaign trail in Tanzania





Cover: Abductions. Assaults. Arbitrary detentions. Disappearances. There has been a spate of violent, repressive incidents in Tanzania in recent months, all with a common thread: the victims are opposition party members or government critics. No one, it seems, is safe – not even the country's most senior Catholic priest, who remains in hospital after a brutal attack. Could this have anything to do with the presidential election scheduled for October this year, in which President Samia Suluhu Hassan will be seeking her first popular mandate? (p12)

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SOUTH AFRICA

Malema vents spleen after UK visa denied

Opposition politician Julius Malema has been vocal in his frustration after being denied a visa to visit the UK, where he was to address students at Cambridge University. Malema is the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters, a minor opposition party in South Africa. He said the decision came just four hours before he was to board his outbound flight. His party has condemned the decision, adding that Malema's itinerary also included a visit to the late queen's grave "to confirm that she has indeed died so that our people can find justice and peace through her departure".

GAZA

Every day closer to total annihilation

Israel is continuing a "starvation war" in Gaza, as more than 20 independent experts – mandated by the UN's Human Rights Council – said on Wednesday that the world faced a "stark decision" to "remain passive and witness the slaughter of innocents or take part in crafting a just resolution". Gaza has been under a two-month aid blockade. The World Central Kitchen, which ran one of the last operational bakeries there, said it no longer has the supplies to cook meals or make bread in Gaza. Israel's finance minister vowed this week that "Gaza will be entirely destroyed".

INDIA-PAKISTAN

UN alarm as nuclear powers trade blows

India and Pakistan are escalating their cross-border military strikes following a deadly 22 April attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Kashmir, which India blames its neighbour for instigating. Pakistan says it shot down 25 drones this week, including over Karachi and Lahore, *Reuters* reports. Pakistan says 31 of its civilians were killed, while India places its death toll at 16. Both countries possess nuclear weapons. The UN is urging restraint, saying the world “could not afford” a military confrontation.

UNITED KINGDOM

UN judge sentenced in enslavement case

Lydia Mugambe, 50, has been jailed for six years and four months after being convicted of enslaving a young Ugandan woman in the United Kingdom. Found guilty on charges including forced labour and witness intimidation, Mugambe exploited her status to deceive the victim into coming to Britain, where she was made to work for free as a maid and provide childcare. Mugambe, a high court judge in Uganda before joining the UN’s roster, claimed diplomatic immunity during her arrest.



Out of order:
Pro-democracy youth
leader Cheick Oumar Diarra,
surrounded by supporters at
a protest. Photo: AFP

MALI

‘Now you’re just some party I used to allow’

Junta leader General Assimi Goïta has suspended all political party activities in Mali until further notice, amid growing

opposition protests. The decree, citing “public order”, targets all political associations, *France24* reports. The suspension follows the repeal of a law governing political parties on 30 April, seen as a step towards their dissolution. Critics view the suspension as further repression in a shrinking of civic space.

THE HAGUE

ICJ rejects Sudan's UAE genocide case

Sudan has lost an application at the International Court of Justice to hold the United Arab Emirates legally accountable for acts of genocide in West Darfur. The World Court declined to rule on the genocide claim, because it has no jurisdiction in Sudan's case, *The Guardian* reports. Sudan alleges the Emirates have been arming the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces during its two-year civil war with the Sudanese Armed Forces. The UAE described that allegation as "misinformation".

GHANA

Protesters rally for suspended justice

Hundreds of opposition protesters marched in the capital Accra this week, demanding the immediate reinstatement of Chief Justice Gertrude Torkornoo, *Modern Ghana* reports. She was suspended by President John Mahama following petitions alleging misconduct. Protesters accuse the president of violating the constitution and undermining judicial independence. A coalition led by the opposition New Patriotic Party and the Ghana Bar Association have branded the suspension unconstitutional.



Twice the Brice: Once junta leader, now president, Brice Oligui Nguema is paraded around a stadium in Libreville. Photo: Nao Mukadi/AFP

GABON

Nguema gilds putsch with his presidency

Brice Oligui Nguema, who led the August 2023 coup that ended the Bongo family's 55-year rule in Gabon, has been sworn in as president after winning nearly 95% of the vote in last month's election. Nguema, 50, led a 19-month transition government following his cousin Ali Bongo's ousting in 2023. The general and former military government leader faces significant challenges in rebuilding the oil-rich country's economy, tackling debt, and improving Gabon's infrastructure after decades of inequality.

TOGO

New title, same old president-for-life

Togo leader Faure Gnassingbé has been given the powerful new role of President of the Council of Ministers, which has no fixed term limit, *Reuters* reports. Opposition groups describe the move as a “constitutional coup”, arguing this could extend his rule for life. Last year, Togo’s Parliament downgraded the position of national president, and gave that now largely ceremonial role to politician Jean-Lucien Savi de Tové. “This process is neither legal nor legitimate,” opposition parties and civil society groups said in a joint statement.

NIGERIA

Press the like button, or else ...

Nigeria has accused Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, of running a “negative” PR campaign against it. This came after Meta threatened to pull its apps from the country over a \$220-million fine, *Semafor* reports. The fine was issued last year by Nigeria’s consumer protection agency for Meta’s alleged violation of competition rules. Meta has also been fined by data and advertising regulators in the EU, India, Australia and South Korea. It said it may have to shut down Facebook and Instagram in Nigeria.

UGANDA

Threats, charges for ‘missing’ bodyguard

Eddie Mutwe, Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine’s bodyguard, has been charged with aggravated robbery – five days after going missing. The charges come days after military chief General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, President Yoweri Museveni’s son, said he had Mutwe in his custody and planned to castrate him. Mutwe’s lawyer told the *Daily Monitor* his client had been tortured. Mutwe’s arrest has drawn condemnation from rights groups in the country, who say it is part of a broader crackdown on the opposition ahead of the 2026 elections.



United States

‘Nowhere feels safe anymore’

Rwandan exiles are alarmed by a proposed deal to deport migrants from the US to Kigali.

Samuel Baker Byansi

Kalisa is a Rwandan journalist who fled to the United States after surviving an attempted abduction in Kenya. When he heard about a potential deportation agreement between the US and Rwanda, his hands began to tremble.

“Nowhere feels safe anymore,” he said from his apartment in Maryland. Kalisa, who requested a pseudonym for safety reasons, has lived in the US for six years while seeking asylum. “If they send us back or hand us over, it’s going to be a death sentence.”

Kalisa’s fear is shared by many in the Rwandan exile community following confirmation that the Trump administration is in talks with Rwanda and Libya to accept deported migrants. Rwandan Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe announced the discussions

this week, describing them as part of Rwanda’s commitment to addressing global migration challenges.

The country has also made similar arrangements with Denmark, Israel, and the United Kingdom, although the latter, under new governance, has since cancelled its migrant relocation deal.

In response, advocacy groups are mobilising, while observers warn that deporting individuals – even those with serious convictions – to a regime accused of transnational repression poses grave ethical concerns.

Rwanda’s government has a well-documented history of targeting dissidents abroad. A 2021 report from Human Rights Watch documented over a dozen cases of violence against Rwandan exiles, including assassinations, kidnappings and threats.

Claude Gatebuke, a Rwandan genocide survivor and human rights activist based in the US, said many in the diaspora feel vulnerable. “Part of the reason why people won’t speak up is because they know the government of Rwanda has a very tight relationship with the US government.”

Rwanda has consistently denied targeting dissidents and claims that the accusations are politically motivated.

For Kalisa, each headline deepens his anxiety. “I left Rwanda to survive,” he said. “But if this deal goes through, I’m not sure survival is guaranteed anymore.” ■

Nigeria

Powerless in the ‘Power State’

Thanks to chronic electricity and water shortages, hospitals are being forced to withhold critical care.

Justina Asishana in Minna

Imagine facing water shortages so severe you're forced to buy water from vendors, just so your hospitalised relatives can bathe. This is the grim reality for residents of Niger State in central Nigeria, thanks to widespread power outages that have also throttled water supplies.

This is despite Niger State's reputation as the “Power State” – it hosts four of the country's major hydroelectric dams: Kainji, Jebba, Shingoro, and Zungeru.

In recent weeks, power supplies have been limited to just two, four or eight hours a day. The Abuja Electricity Distribution Company, which is responsible for the distribution of electricity in the state, has blamed unusually hot weather and non-payment of bills for the outages. The company has been criticised for failing to invest in the grid's infrastructure, and state authorities have created a new commission to take over distribution responsibilities.

The power shortage has a direct impact on the availability of water, as most boreholes need electricity to pump water. Without water, everyday life – including

urgent medical care – grinds to a halt.

The Jummai Babangida Aliyu Neonatal and Maternity Hospital in Minna, the capital of Niger State, has been without electricity or running water since 1 May.

Adec has blamed unusually hot weather and non-payment of bills for the outages.

Families are obliged to buy water for their loved ones in critical condition, and many face a cruel choice: pay exorbitant fees at private hospitals or risk watching them die from lack of care.

Residents and institutions alike are scrambling for solutions. Even Niger State's government house has had to install a solar grid to assure its own access to electricity – an implicit admission that the public grid is failing.

While this may ease pressure on government facilities, it does little to help the ordinary people bearing the brunt of systemic neglect in the country's “Power State”. Mobile water tankers have increased their rates by as much as 500%, while traders and service providers have been forced to raise prices. ■

Kenya



Antibodies: Plundered queen ants stowed in syringes. Photo: Monicah Mwangi/Reuters

Don't go putting our ants in your pants

It doesn't matter how Belgian you are, you can't have any more African colonies.

Christine Mungai in Nairobi

A Nairobi court this week sentenced four convicted ant smugglers from Belgium, Vietnam and Kenya to each pay a \$7,700 fine, or spend one year in jail, for attempting to smuggle 5,440 Giant African Harvester Queen Ants out of the country.

The cases marks a shift from trafficking iconic species like elephants and rhinos to small creatures that are just as ecologically

important, according to *Reuters*.

Although the rulings were delivered on the same day, they involved two unrelated cases. One case involved a man from Vietnam, Duh Heng Nguyen, who was recruited by a wildlife trafficking network to collect around 400 queen ants from a Kenyan contact, Dennis Nganga. Both Nguyen and Nganga pleaded guilty after authorities busted the operation.

The other case involved two Belgian

teenagers who had collected more than 5,000 of the rare queen ants, worth more than \$900,000. They were connected to a group who described themselves as “Ant Gang”. The teenagers, who pleaded guilty, were preparing to smuggle the ants out of the country in syringes when their Nairobi guest house was raided by police.

The Belgians described themselves as ant enthusiasts and claimed ignorance: “We are not criminals ... we are naive and just want to go home,” they told the court last month.

Samuel Mutua, a wildlife crime expert at the International Fund for Animal Welfare, was not buying this defence. “Irrespective of their age, they were able to get a lot of ants,” he told *Reuters*.

Magistrate Njeri Thuku situated the crime in the context of centuries of extractive colonial practices, especially the exploitation of Africa’s natural resources.

The trafficking of insects as part of a colonial project is not without precedent, she noted. In the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors turned the cochineal insect – used by the Aztecs to produce a brilliant red dye – into a global commodity. The dye, known as carmine, was so prized in Europe that it rivalled gold in value. Producing just one kilogramme required over 150,000 insects. Spain guarded the insect’s origin to maintain a monopoly.

In her other ruling, on Nguyen and Nganga’s case, Thuku said the scheme had “the hallmarks of illegal wildlife trade and possibly biopiracy”. The ants, she noted, are more valuable by weight than ivory or rhino horn.

Entomological imperialism

The global demand for ants – particularly as exotic pets – has surged in recent years, driven by the appeal of unusual, low-maintenance creatures. Among the most sought-after are queen ants, which command high prices online.

Messor cephalotes, or Giant African Harvester Ants, the species at the centre of the Naivasha case, are especially rare. According to the Kenya Wildlife Service, this species of garden ants have “a very restricted distribution range” and are only known in East Africa.

The ant queens were likely destined to be sold to hobbyists in Europe, Asia and North America, who like to observe ant colonies grow in large, transparent vessels called formicariums. Queens are especially valuable because they alone can reproduce and create a colony from scratch.

Online listings on sites like *Ants R Us* and *QualityAnts.nl* show an average price of \$190 per queen.

This price does not include the potential cost of removing queen ants from fragile ecosystems. Magistrate Thuku highlighted the significance of ants in Kenya’s biodiversity, and framed the practice of ant smuggling as “genocidal harvesting”.

Watching a colony grow from one queen into a colony of thousands is “oddly therapeutic”, the ruling stated, yet there’s arguably a strange emptiness, rooted in colonial logic, in extracting such intricate life from the wild only to observe it behind glass. It seems that the wildlife smugglers took the concept of an ant colony a little too literally. ■

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The Continent

Tanzania

Blunt force and trauma

The road to Tanzania's presidential election has been paved with blood and fear.



Photo: Alinanuswe Mwanguku/AFP

A correspondent in Dar es Salaam

Last month, on the day that Pope Francis died, the most senior Catholic priest in Tanzania was fighting for his own life.

Father Charles Kitima, the secretary-general of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, was in the Aga Khan Hospital in Dar es Salaam. He had been viciously assaulted the night before.

The attack occurred late at night inside the national headquarters of the Catholic Church in Tanzania, where Father Kitima resides. The attackers did not identify themselves but clearly intended to cause grievous harm: according to sources who spoke to *The Continent*, the priest was struck forcefully in the head with a blunt object.

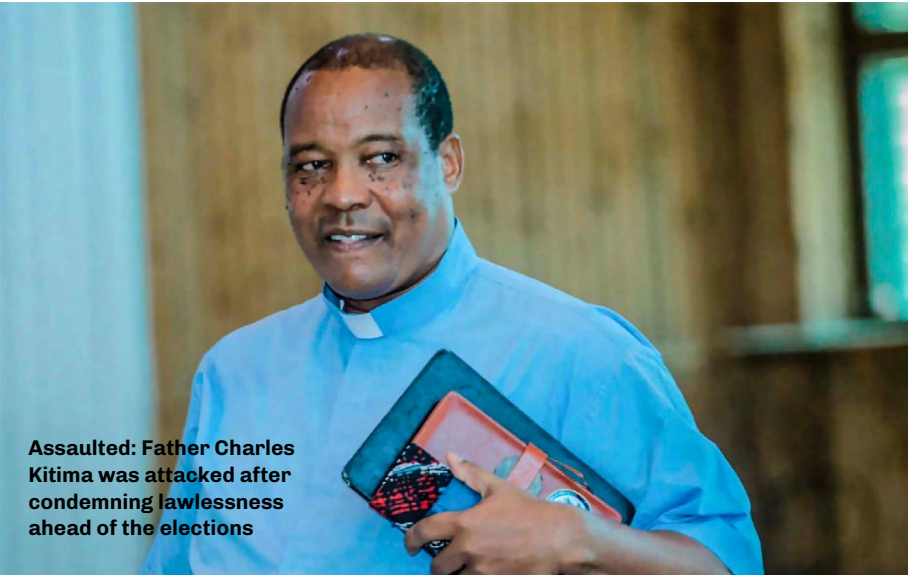
According to local publication *The Chanzo*, the attack happened hours after a recording of him went viral on social

media, in which he criticised “lawlessness” ahead of the presidential election.

Father Kitima remains in hospital. Police have arrested one suspect in connection with the attack, and confirmed to *The Continent* that investigations are ongoing.

The attack conforms to a troubling pattern. In recent months, there has been a spate of abductions, assaults, arrests and murders in Tanzania. The victims seem to have one thing in common: They are all opponents or critics of the government of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who is running for election in October.

This campaign of intimidation is so crude that, on Thursday, the European Parliament passed a resolution urging “Tanzanian authorities to end the escalating crackdown ... against opposition members, human rights defenders, indigenous peoples,



Assaulted: Father Charles Kitima was attacked after condemning lawlessness ahead of the elections

LGBTQIA+ activists, journalists and civil society organisations, and to independently investigate police abuses and enforced disappearances”.

In a statement, Tanzania’s foreign ministry rejected the findings of the European Parliament, implying that it was based on “incomplete or partisan information” that “misrepresents the situation on the ground”.

Opposition in the cross-hairs

It is an especially dangerous time to be associated with Chadema, the largest opposition party, whose leader Tundu Lissu was arrested in April while speaking at a public rally in Songea. From there, he was transported 13 hours by road to Dar es Salaam, and charged on two counts, including treason – which carries the death penalty – for allegedly inciting people to obstruct the upcoming election.

On the day that Lissu was charged, several of his supporters were arrested, beaten, and injured as they tried to make their way to the Kisutu Resident Magistrate’s Court.

In another incident, a well-known party member in Mbeya, Mpaluka Nyagali, popularly known as Mdude, was abducted from his home in the middle of the night last week. He is still missing. There have been reports of other party members who have been abducted or arrested, in some instances with reports of involvement from state security officials.

“The country is not safe,” said Boniface Mwabukusi, the president of the Tanganyika Law Society, in response to Mdude’s abduction. Mwabukusi alleged



Arrested: Tundu Lissu, leader of Tanzania’s main opposition party, Chadema. Photo: Ericky Boniphace/AFP

that it was police officers who assaulted Mdude before forcibly abducting him. “This is yet another disturbing incident that adds to the growing concerns over public safety.”

Tanzania’s police inspector-general, Camillus Wambura, did not respond to a request for comment from *The Continent*.

Another incident that shocked the nation involved the abduction and murder of Chadema secretariat member Ali Mohamed Kibao last September. He was forcibly removed from a public bus in Tegeta, Dar es Salaam, while travelling to Tanga. His lifeless body was discovered the next day in the capital’s Ununio area, bearing signs of torture and acid burns.



Cut from the same cloth: President Samia Suluhu Hassan, once hailed as a reformer, has fallen into the repressive habits of her predecessor. Photo: Elizabeth Frantz/Reuters

Growth at what cost?

President Samia succeeded the late John Magufuli after his death in office in 2021. She was deputy president at the time. She immediately reversed her predecessor's notorious Covid denialism, earning an instant popularity boost. She has also overseen some of the most impressive economic growth in Africa (GDP growth was 5.7% in 2024, according to the African Development Bank, and is set to surpass that this year).

But several massive corruption scandals have contributed to a perception that this growth is not being evenly distributed, while democratic space has continued to shrink under her watch. In its annual Freedom in the World Index, Freedom House downgraded Tanzania to “not free” (from “partly free” in 2024).

Some within the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party – which has governed Tanzania since independence in 1961 –

are concerned that these factors could contribute to a poor showing in October's presidential election. This may explain the crackdown against opposition party members, and the recent decision by the electoral commission to disqualify Chadema from that election. The commission said that Chadema had not signed an electoral code of conduct (Chadema has previously said that it will boycott the vote in the absence of meaningful electoral reforms).

The Institute for Security Studies, a South Africa-based think tank, wrote in an analysis that Tanzania's troubles are symptomatic of a worrying regional trend. “Democracy is in bad shape in East Africa and seems to be getting worse. Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan's political reforms after she succeeded the authoritarian John Magufuli in 2021 raised a glimmer of hope – but she now seems to have regressed.” ■



Down the streets of Dakar.

PHOTO ESSAY

The wild migration

All Photos: Nicolas Remene/AFP

Puppeteers and members of the Danuu collective in Senegal showcased life-sized animal puppets last month in Ouakam, Dakar, as part of *The Herds* public art.

More than 250 puppets, including a wildebeest, gorilla and giraffe, are travelling a 20,000km route from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the Arctic, highlighting the

impact of climate change on animal migration.

Launched on 9 April and ending in August, *The Herds* project involves performances across 10 countries, featuring collaborations with choreographers, artists, musicians and climate activists.

On their journey, the troupe will shepherd the puppet procession

through major cities in Nigeria, Senegal, France and Norway, among others.

The life-size animal puppets were designed by Ukwanda Puppetry and Design Collective in Cape Town, South Africa. Amir Nizar Zuabi is the project's artistic director. He gained international

acclaim in 2021 for his leading role in bringing the 12-foot puppet *Little Amal* to the attention of the world, during a months-long trek over many thousands of kilometres from Syria to the United Kingdom, to raise awareness of the Syrian refugee crisis. ■



Through the alleys of Ngor.



By the African Renaissance Monument in Ouakam.



Past the Kumpo dancers of the Jola people.



Among the Danuu Collective.



Along the shores of Guédiawaye, and on.

Africans show material gains

Afrobarometer has previously covered how lived poverty is surging and how governments are failing to address inequality. But there's another, perhaps counterintuitive trend, too: Asset ownership is on the rise.

Across 32 countries we've surveyed consistently since 2016, growing shares of citizens report personal ownership of some key material goods.

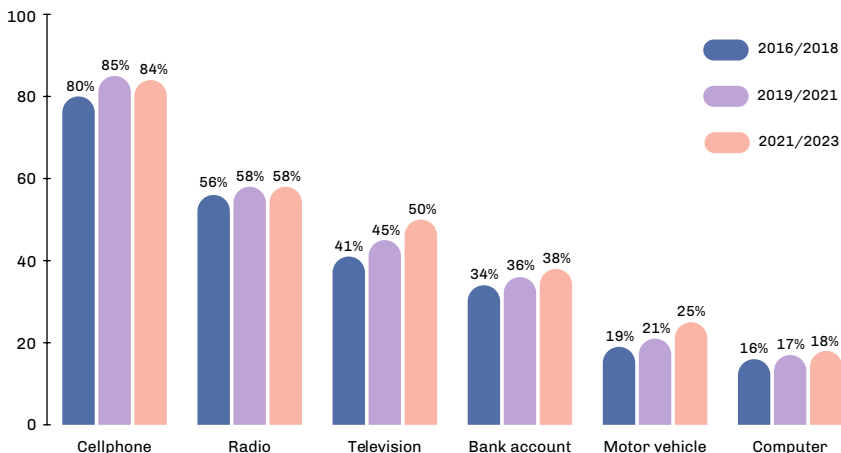
Compared to 2016, Africans are more likely to have their own televisions (+9 percentage points), motor vehicles or motorcycles (+6), cellphones (+4), and bank accounts (+4), and marginally more

likely to own computers (+2) and radios (+2).

If you consider the whole household, the vast majority of adults now have access to a mobile phone (94%), while half or more can listen to the radio (77%), watch TV (66%), save their money (54%), and ride around with the family wheels (49%).

As part of the African Union's Agenda 2063, member states seek to achieve "a high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all." The progress shown here won't ensure all of that, but it's surely not immaterial. ■

Trends in personal asset ownership | 32 African countries | 2016-2023



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 to 2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



The slow train to the sea

The cities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Kapiri Mposhi, Zambia, are connected by one of Africa's most iconic railways: Tazara. The "Freedom Railway" became a symbol of African countries working across borders. Its tracks span nearly 1,900km with 274 bridges and 19 tunnels. Today, that journey takes place mostly on a bus. Now, a Chinese state-owned utility is proposing a 30-year lease to get the trains rolling again.

All Photos: Katumba Badru/The Continent



**Stay in, you're layin':
A bus conductor
sleeps on a mattress
on the route to
Lusaka in Zambia**

Simon Mkina in Tunduma

On the outskirts of Dar es Salaam, not far from the airport, is an international train station. It is from here that the Tazara Express – along with its passengers and cargo – is supposed to begin its days-long journey across the border to Zambia.

But, since June last year, “operational challenges” have caused the famous train journey that traverses the two countries to be suspended. Instead, in the scorching midday heat, Zambia-bound passengers gather at the ABC Bus Point in Manzese, waiting for a bus to take them on the 925km journey to Tunduma – the final Tanzanian town before the border.

As the passengers settle into their seats, the 18-hour journey begins. The bus driver navigates carefully through the chaos of Manzese, dodging reckless motorcycles,

bicycles, and impatient vehicles. It's a dangerous ballet through one of Dar's most congested areas.

Once free from the city's traffic, the highway stretches into the Morogoro Region. There, massive cargo trucks dominate the road. Laden with goods headed for Zambia, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zimbabwe, they are in no particular hurry.

The sheer volume of trucks tells its own story: previously, many of these goods would have travelled this section by rail instead. But now all the cargo must go by truck, on roads that were not designed to handle heavy-duty loads.

“These trucks are destroying everything,” says Mussa Kiwanga, a household goods trader en route to Ndola, Zambia, while traversing a badly damaged section of the road in Songwe Region. “It all got worse after Tazara shut down.”

It also got more expensive – a sentiment echoed by dozens of traders en route.

As the bus continues into the Iringa Region, the narrow mountain passes slow its passage even more. At times, it feels more like a wedding procession than a highway journey. When the bus finally arrives in Tunduma just before dawn, the passengers are exhausted. Some struggle to walk, their feet swollen from hours of cramped travel.

Crossing into Zambia should be a routine formality. It is not. On the Tanzanian side of the border, a quick passport stamp clears *The Continent* for exit. But, at the Zambian immigration office, a forgotten yellow fever certificate leads to questioning – and a request for a \$20 bribe.

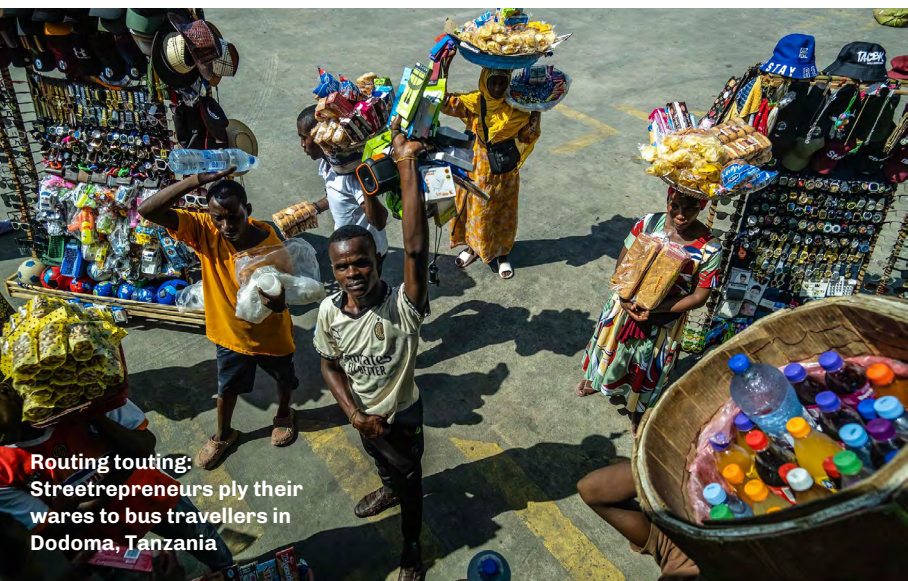
The Tazara Railway still operates in Zambia from the border town of Nakonde to Kapiri Mposhi, which is 200km north of



Hydration station:
Vendors display their merchandise to the long-haul bus travellers



Lord aboard:
A preacher reads from the bible on the bus from Nakonde to Lusaka



Routing toutting:
Streetpreneurs ply their wares to bus travellers in Dodoma, Tanzania

Lusaka. But services only run on Tuesdays and Fridays.

On other days, passengers – most of whom are small-scale traders – must get on another bus for the 17-hour and 1,020-km trip to Lusaka. The bus leaves 90 minutes late. At nightfall, it stops at Serenje for replenishment at the roadside bars and eateries, which specialise in *ichimbombo* – boiled chicken feet seasoned with salt, onion, and ginger.

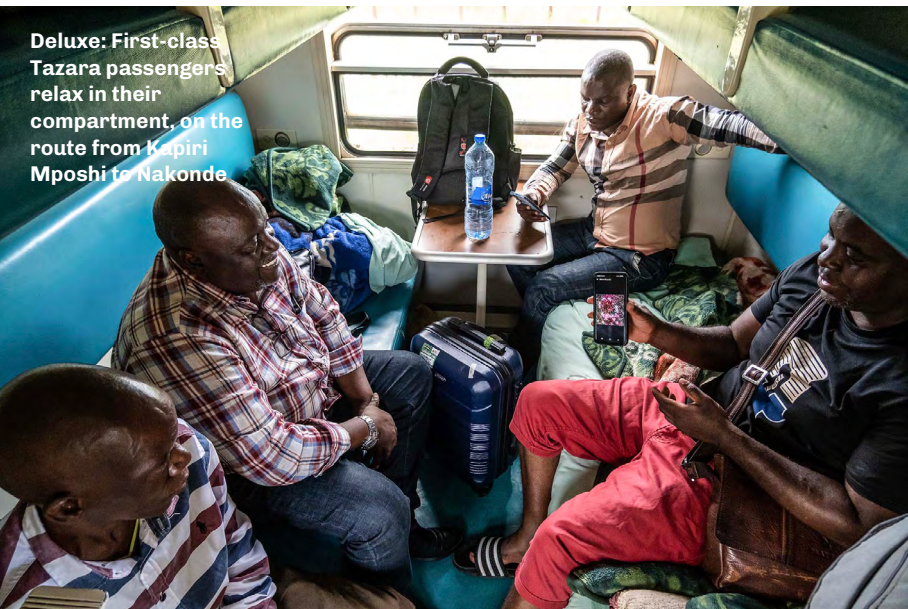
It is only on the way back from Lusaka to Dar es Salaam that *The Continent* finally experiences the joys of train travel: after taking a bus from Lusaka to the New Kapiri Mposhi Station, the train departs at 2pm – only two hours late. There is no explanation for the delay. The journey itself, which is supposed to take 12 hours, takes 16 hours because the train breaks down near Chozi.

Inside the train, especially in the second and third class carriages, conditions are poor. There is no running water, no toilet paper, and not enough seating for passengers, who sprawl on floors, aisles and even restrooms. The air reeks of perspiration, food, and livestock – there are more than a few chickens and ducks tied under seats.



Mind the gap: Passengers wait at the Kagera bus station in Tanzania

Deluxe: First-class Tazara passengers relax in their compartment, on the route from Kapiri Mposhi to Nakonde





Supply run: Achon Mary, a Zambian businesswoman, is riding the Tazara to Nakonde to buy goods for her shop back in Kapiri

In the long grass

On the arduous journey to Lusaka and back, *The Continent* interviews 32 traders, all of whom once relied on the Tazara to transport their goods at a reasonable price. Their situations are not all identical, but one common message is clear: “Bring the trains back – now.”

“We can’t afford road transport,” one trader says. “Tazara was our only affordable option.”

For the towns and villages along the route, the impact has been similarly disastrous. In Kapiri Moshi, some guesthouses and hotels have closed down, some with tall grass growing through cracks in the floor.

John Simbole, a trader from Chozi, was forced to close his cosmetics shop located near the railway station. He used the Tazara to bring in products from Lusaka and Dar es Salaam, and also to bring in new customers.

“You have to understand – without



Chequered past: One of the prominent bars in Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia, which used to play host to VIPs and first-class passengers using the Tazara railway

Tazara in our villages, there is no business. We are appealing to the government to ensure this vital railway line is revived,” Simbole says.

But the Tanzanian government has offered no timeline on when the rail service will resume.



Veldt and road: A Chinese construction company's tanker waters an extension of the Tanzam highway



Urbane crawl: The genial bustle of commerce and industry near the border crossing in Nakonde

Benson Magoha, Tazara's senior passenger officer, confirms that the suspension began on 18 June, 2024.

Carefully choosing his words, he says the problem lies with ageing engines. "We're working on it," he assures us. "Operations will resume soon."

Light at the end of the tunnel?

Built with a \$412-million interest-free loan from China, the Tazara opened in 1976, linking Zambia's copper mines to Dar es Salaam's port — a 1,860km steel artery through 274 bridges and 19 tunnels. Since then, it has transported an



Track and field: Railway lines in Lusaka close to Zambia Railway Station

estimated 55-million passengers.

Tazara gave the region an export route that did not run through the white supremacist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia; it was dubbed the “Freedom Railway” – a symbol of pan-African unity. For China, the goal was to ship copper to fuel its booming industry, and cement ties with newly-independent African nations.

From 2001 to 2013, China poured another \$110-million into reviving Tazara. In 2014, it offered \$66.2-million more for engine repairs. Another \$80-million was provided by the governments of Tanzania and Zambia in 2015, to cover unpaid wages and operational costs.

Despite all this, Tazara has failed to meet operational costs, let alone turn any kind of profit worth mentioning.

Now, China is stepping in again. Through its state-owned China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation,

it is investing \$1.4-billion to take full control of Tazara operations – for the next 30 years.

Tazara’s CEO, Bruno Ching’adu, says the deal includes 32 new locomotives and 762 freight wagons. The first three years will focus on rehabilitation. For the 27 years after that, the train will be under full Chinese management – from maintenance to revenue collection.

This is not the future once envisaged for the railway line, which was meant to be a symbol of African self-sufficiency. But if the trains run efficiently, the cross-border traders who rely so heavily on its operations probably won’t mind. ■

‘Borderlands’ is a new series by The Continent, reporting from some of Africa’s most interesting border crossings. The series was made possible with support from the African Union and GIZ



Book Review

Jacqueline Nyathi

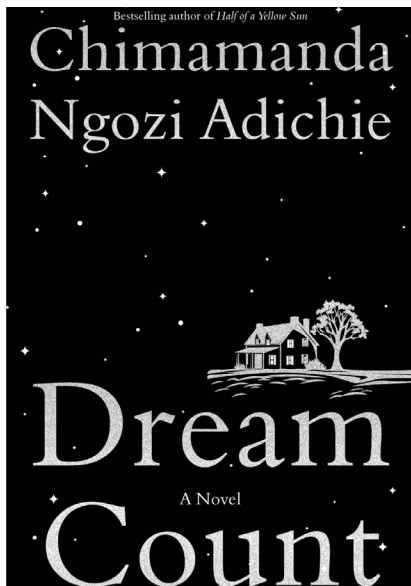
These lives that got away

Adichie's powerful return locks down new dreams.

First things first: the “dream count” of the title is an allusion to “body count”; a slang term that will be familiar to younger readers, referring to how many people a person has slept with. For Chia, the main character of Adichie’s pandemic novel, it’s about the ones that got away – and also about the dreams of the other women she is connected to: her friend Zikora, her cousin Omelogor and her house manager Kadiatou.

Adichie sets *Dream Count*, her first novel in 12 years, in the bewildering days of the Covid-19 pandemic. We all spent those endless days pondering our lives and meaning, and a fair few of us must have thought about whether we had achieved all we wanted. That’s what these four women are working through.

Chia considers whether she may have missed the love of her life; Zikora, the devout Catholic, thought she would be married by 31; Omelogor chases first money, and then a graduate school dream in the United States, and finds herself unfulfilled; and Kadi suffers a



series of catastrophes, finding herself the unwilling centre of an international scandal involving a powerful man.

Dream Count is a novel of women. It’s about love, work, money, the patriarchy, power, immigration, family ties and yes, life goals and dreams. It’s about disappointment and disillusionment. And it’s about perseverance and endurance, and finding a way to dream new dreams.

It’s occasionally excoriating about the US, demonstrating the disillusionment that migrants to that country often experience. It’s entertaining and cringey about dating and the pursuit of love. It presents what seems to be an excellent solution to the corruption of powerful officials. And, ultimately, *Dream Count* is a warm and humane portrayal of four deeply complex women’s lives. ■

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 could have sworn that Mali had a Timba too."



Photo: Xaume Olleros/AFP

- 1_** John Kufuor was the president of which country from 2001 to 2009?
- 2_** Maiduguri is a city in which country?
- 3_** What currency is used in Togo?
- 4_** Frelimo is which country's ruling party?
- 5_** What material was traded extensively in the 15th and 16th centuries from Côte d'Ivoire?
- 6_** Mão de Timba, or Hand of Timba, (pictured) is found in which city?
- 7_** *We Should All Be Feminists* and *Americanah* are books by which Nigerian author?
- 8_** Which country is Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr Denis Mukwege from?
- 9_** What is the full name of the paramilitary group known as RSF?
- 10_** *Agolo* and *Wombo Lombo* are songs by which Beninese artist?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to [+27 73 805 6068](tel:+27738056068) and we'll send the answers to you!

THE BIG PICTURE

CSI: A student inspects a taxidermied giraffe at a poaching 'crime scene', used to train conservation officials, at a forensic academy at the Buffelsfontein Nature Reserve in South Africa.

Photo: Marco Longari/AFP



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