Exclusive:

Ethiopian forces implicated in Amhara killings
Cover: At great risk to themselves, someone filmed what appeared to be Ethiopian soldiers executing two civilians in cold blood. The footage has caused an uproar online, but it was unclear where or when the killings took place – until now. A visual investigation by The Continent has geolocated the potential war crime to a specific spot in the town of Debre Markos, in Ethiopia’s northern Amhara region, where the government is waging yet another brutal war against its own people (p18).

Inside:

- Cameroon: Paranoid government shuts down newspaper (p7)
- Review: Trevor Noah comes home (p9)
- Libya: This is only the beginning (p10)
- Photos: Rare images from inside Johannesburg’s hijacked buildings (p13)
- Art: Two Ghanaian artists get angry (p23)
- Food: This week we eat in Oyo State, Nigeria (p25)

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CAMEROON

Rose Leke finally gets her flowers

Distinguished Cameroonian immunologist Rose Gana Fomban Leke has been awarded the 2023 Virchow Prize for Global Health. She will receive 500,000 euros and will be celebrated in a ceremony at the Berlin City Hall next month. The prize committee said Dr Leke has been tireless in fighting to eradicate malaria and address inequalities in global healthcare. Her research has expanded her peers’ understanding of health issues like malaria in pregnancy, polio, vaccination and infectious diseases, and she was also commended for advancing gender equity.

DRC

Top Congolese journalist arrested

One of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s most prominent journalists, Stanis Bujakera Tshiamala, was arrested last week, and his devices confiscated. The arrest at Kinshasa’s international airport is allegedly in connection with a report that linked the country’s military intelligence to the assassination of a former cabinet minister. Angela Quintal, the Africa programme co-ordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists, called on the Congolese government to “halt the unabated pattern of arresting journalists over publications deemed undesirable”.
Mali’s rulers have cancelled next week’s independence day celebrations, saying they will use the money earmarked for festivities to support victims of continued militant attacks. Soldiers overthrew elected leaders in 2020 over insecurity in the country’s north. But rebel militants continue to claim dozens of lives each week, while the junta in Bamako is mired in messy geopolitics that has seen it align hard with Russia, cut ties with France (Mali’s former coloniser) and expel a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

South Africa

Another bad week for Big Pharma

A week after it was revealed that Johnson & Johnson charged South Africa 15% more per dose of its Covid-19 vaccine than the European Union had to pay, the company is being investigated for allegedly overpricing a crucial tuberculosis drug. South Africa’s competition commission is probing why the country is paying double what other middle and low-income countries pay for bedaquiline, a treatment for drug-resistant tuberculosis. About 50,000 South Africans die from the disease each year.

Gabon

Dodgy general guns for dodgy companies

Companies that do business with the Gabonese government will soon receive a summons to prove they have nothing to hide. President Brice Oligui Nguema, the general who led the coup in Gabon two weeks ago, has reactivated a previously suspended task force to review public contracts for fraud and irregularities. The putschists, who accused Ali Bongo’s now overthrown regime of massive embezzlement, arrested the ex-president’s son, wife and several cabinet members within days of taking power. But investigative journalists have implicated some of the beneficiaries of the coup, including General Nguema himself, in suspect money schemes, too.
**ZIMBABWE**

Zimbabwe’s President Emmerson Mnangagwa is making his cabinet more of a family affair. Mnangagwa’s 34-year-old son David will be deputy finance minister and his nephew Tongai is nominated for deputy tourism minister. Mnangagwa won a second term in a disputed election last month. Nepotism is also rife in political appointments in Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and other countries on the continent.

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**ANGOLA**

**More fuel to fire up the apocalypse**

At a major oil conference in Luanda, Angola’s deputy minister for the economy, Jose de Lima Massano, urged fossil fuel companies to keep “making the necessary investments to ensure that natural resources, including oil, can continue to be explored”. In other words: Drill, baby, drill. According to Xinhua, Massano reportedly said that efforts limiting greenhouse emissions, had to be “adapted to the reality of each country”. Angola is Africa’s second biggest oil producer after Libya.

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**NIGERIA**

**The lights go out again and again**

For ten hours on Thursday, Nigeria’s national grid produced precisely zero watts of electricity after a fire in a power plant caused a grid collapse. According to Business Day, this happens about six times a year, driving many Nigerians to alternative power sources like solar and mini-grids. The World Bank and African Development Bank loaned Nigeria about $550-million to invest in those alternatives instead.

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**ZIMBABWE**

**Keep friends close and family closer**

Zimbabwe’s President Emmerson Mnangagwa is making his cabinet more of a family affair. Mnangagwa’s 34-year-old son David will be deputy finance minister and his nephew Tongai is nominated for deputy tourism minister. Mnangagwa won a second term in a disputed election last month. Nepotism is also rife in political appointments in Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and other countries on the continent.
ENKUTATASH

And a happy new year to you, too!

This week, Ethiopians and Eritreans celebrated Enkutatash, the first day of the new year according to the Ethiopian calendar. The day commemorates the return on Meskerem 1 of the biblical figure the Queen of Sheba from her visit to King Solomon in Jerusalem. In the Gregorian calendar, this translates to 11 September (or 12 September in a leap year). The festival is marked with singing, gifts of flowers and the sharing of injera and wat.

TUNISIA

Your money is very welcome, you aren’t

Authorities blocked European members of parliament from entering Tunisia this week, a month after Tunis signed a billion-euro agreement with the European Union Commission to stop Africans from migrating to Europe. Speaking to The Guardian about the now-cancelled trip, German member of parliament Michael Gahler declined to speculate on why they were refused entry. But some of the blocked MPs have previously criticised the Tunisia-EU anti-migration deal, and the group’s agenda included meetings with Tunisian civil society and opposition politicians.

MOROCCO

Thousands are dead but politricks endure

The death toll from Saturday’s earthquake in Morocco has risen to more than 2,900 people, with rescue teams still desperately searching for survivors in the rubble. Humanitarian aid has been flowing in from all over the world – but, significantly, not from France, whose offers were rebuffed by the Moroccan government, allegedly for geopolitical reasons. Despite the persistently tense relations between the two countries – tense enough for Morocco to decline aid in its hour of need – the Moroccan king is said to spend much of his time at his multiple chateaux near Paris.
On Sunday evening, images of a newspaper front page circulated online. The headline read: “66% of Cameroonians want military coup – Afrobarometer survey”.

On Monday, when the paper hit the streets of Buea, the capital of Cameroon’s southwest region, the headline and the entire story were gone. Nonetheless, The Post has been banned for a month by media regulators, who claim the paper circulated “information that could disrupt national cohesion and social peace”.

The newspaper’s chief editor, Bouddih Adams, has gone into hiding. “Administrators are capable of doing just anything if it serves their interest and purpose,” he told The Continent.

He has good reason to say so. At least three Cameroonian journalists whose work caught the eye of the country’s powerful men have died mysteriously since 2019: Mbani Zogo Arsène Salomon, Jean-Jacques Ola Bebe and Samuel Ajiekha Abuwe.

One of Adams’s newsroom juniors, Andrew Nsoseka, and the paper’s finance officer were summoned to the Buea governor’s office for interrogation on Thursday. “They said we had done the damage, even if we did not print,” Nsoseka told The Continent.

The recent coups in west and central Africa appear to have unsettled the government of President Paul Biya, who has been in power for 40 years. Just hours after the coup in Gabon last month, Biya reshuffled his military top brass.

The statistic that caused all the trouble was taken from the most recent Afrobarometer column published in The Continent last week, although the draft front page omitted an important caveat. Afrobarometer’s findings – based on a survey of 36 African countries in 2021 and 2022 – showed that 53% of Africans, and 66% of Cameroonians, were willing to endorse military intervention if elected leaders abuse their power.
How Rema and Selena Gomez’s Calm Down hit one billion streams

The groundbreaking hit has been dominating the charts since its release over a year ago

Wilfred Okiche

Music streaming giant Spotify announced that Rema and Selena Gomez’s gigantic hit song Calm Down has crossed the one billion streams milestone on the platform. This marks the first time that an African artist-led track has joined the exclusive billions club on Spotify.

The 23-year-old Nigerian Afro-rave artist described the achievement as “a win for the culture”.

This is only the latest in a series of remarkable milestones Calm Down has achieved since it arrived in February last year as the second single from Rema’s top-selling solo debut album Raves & Roses. The album is also the most streamed African album of all time on Spotify.

Calm Down was an instant hit in Nigeria and soon crossed over into foreign territories, charting in United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Capitalising on the attention, Rema issued a remix of the song in August 2022 with American pop star Selena Gomez, who brought on her breathy vocals and massive fanbase.

The record then went on a slow burn up the charts, peaking at number three on the Billboard Hot 100. Not resting on his oars, Rema embarked on a promotional blitz in the United States. The global charm offensive continued with Rema drawing mammoth audiences in places like India and Brazil. Earlier this year, he tweeted in support of five Iranian young women who were reportedly detained for dancing to the song unveiled.

President Barack Obama was also one of the song’s advocates, listing Calm Down in his 2022 end of year playlist.
Noah’s arc: There and back again

Simon Allison in Pretoria

“Y

ou know what we like about Trevor?” asks comedian Schalk Bezuidenhout, the opening act for Trevor Noah’s sold-out tour of South Africa. “He comes back. Fok Elon!”

Elon Musk and Trevor Noah are South Africa’s most famous living exports. Both grew up not far from the venue in Pretoria, where The Continent went to watch Noah perform on Thursday night. Both went to America to find fame and fortune.

But whereas Musk has distanced himself from his heritage – adopting a US passport and an increasingly bizarre accent – Noah plays it up, even as he spends more time away from home.

South Africa loves Noah. He is a source of immense national pride: the kid from Soweto who conquered the world with a cheeky grin and a brilliant mind. His success is our success. But we worry he will forget his roots. Forget us.

“Fame works differently in South Africa,” Noah says. In America, when he gets recognised in public, people are starstruck. Here, he is greeted entirely without deference. “Treev-ah, wena, when are you coming back?”

The pandemic and the Daily Show kept Noah away from South Africa for several years. This tour is him making amends. And he delivers: a rollicking set that is so intrinsically South African that some jokes are lost on the foreigners in the audience. It is interspersed with his extraordinary gift for adopting any and every one of the country’s wide variety of accents, spanning race and ethnicity. This, perhaps, is the secret to his success: if you listen to Trevor for long enough, at some point you will hear yourself.

As always his sharpest jabs are reserved for our leaders. “Ramaphosa has to be the most disappointing president,” he said. “He promised consistency. We didn’t know he meant consistent loadshedding.”

By the end, as the 8,500-strong crowd delivers a standing ovation, it feels more like a collective therapy session than a comedy session. “This is not the worst country in the world. This is a great country going through a terrible time,” he concludes.

Trevor Noah is back. He never really left.
Libya

There will be many, many more Dernas

Climate change is already catastrophic. It is up to us to determine how much more catastrophic it gets.

Sipho Kings

The Libyan town of Derna is on the coast, at the end of a valley with a seasonal river. Because flooding has damaged the city before, two dams were built to contain the river. September’s rainfall is usually 1.5-millimetres. Last Sunday, 400mm fell in one day. One dam cracked and a 3-metre wall of water tore through concrete and flesh.

At the time of writing, more than 11,000 people are confirmed dead. The World Meteorological Association says the number would be much lower if people had been warned. But Libya does not have a functioning government, and a decade-long civil war is unresolved. It is divided in two. Derna is in the eastern half of the country.

Survivors told the BBC that they had raised the alarm about cracks in the top dam. The ruling warlords had other priorities.

In climate scenarios, a lot comes down to governance. Better leaders and institutions mean countries are more likely to plan ahead, maintain infrastructure, and respond to crises. Libya is ranked 126 of 185 countries on the ND-Gain Index, which calculates resilience to climate change.

Sunday’s flood came from Storm Daniel, which also battered Greece and Türkiye. When it crossed the Mediterranean, hot water from the sea energised it. That meant a more violent storm, and more rain.

Oceans and seas are hotter because human greenhouse gas emissions trap heat in the atmosphere. Most of that heat ends up being absorbed by oceans. Scientists have warned for decades that this will “supercharge” storms.

Those warnings are no longer being written in the future tense.

Calculated disaster

On the Friday before Derna was submerged, the United Nations climate agency released a report taking stock of what countries are doing to lower their emissions and adapt to a changing world.

The 2015 Paris Agreement, where 196 countries agreed to do their all to keep the world habitable, requires countries to submit plans every five years. The idea is...
that these plans become more ambitious over time.

Not that there is time. Thanks to corruption in Western politics, little was done to reduce emissions when there was time. Carbon levels are now at their highest level in two million years. The world is already hotter by 1°C.

The UN report warns: “There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”

To secure even a 50/50 chance of keeping heating to merely catastrophic levels, the report said greenhouse gases have to peak by 2025. That’s now 15 months away. They then have to drop 43% by 2030, 60% by 2035 and 84% by 2050.

That requires every single country doing every single thing it has promised to do. The continued rise in carbon emissions, and the numbers in the UN report, show that countries are not. The majority of plans submitted to the UN are not costed. Of those that are, 89% do not say where the money will come from.

And plans without money behind them are little more than wishful thinking.

There is, however, money to increase carbon emissions. Research out this week found that the United States is responsible for a third of all new oil and gas plans. It’s followed by Canada, Russia, Iran, China, Brazil and the United Arab Emirates – the host of the next COP climate meetings in November.

With more heat in the global climate system, weather will become ever more destructive. And Derna will be relegated to a mere footnote in the long list of communities that pay the price.
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PHOTO ESSAY

Life and death in Johannesburg’s hijacked buildings

Last month, a fire killed 77 people in a so-called ‘hijacked’ building in central Johannesburg. These buildings, abandoned by their owners and the municipality, are typically occupied by people who have nowhere else to go, but also by the criminally inclined. Living conditions are appalling, with no sewerage or garbage disposal systems – and no fire prevention measures. Water and electricity are intermittent at best, though the same might be said for the rest of Johannesburg.

There are hundreds of such buildings in the heart of South Africa’s commercial capital. These are very dangerous places to live, with families residing alongside criminal gangs and drug dens. For outsiders, it is nearly impossible to gain access. It took photojournalist Shiraaz Mohamed several years to snap these rare images of everyday life inside three of the city’s most notorious buildings.
Broken window panes. The stench of raw sewage. Rats running over used sanitary pads and nappies. This is the Florence Nightingale Hospital in Hillbrow, in central Johannesburg – a historic seven-storey building that has been plunged into ruin.

“Don’t go to the top, it’s dangerous. There are criminals up there,” warns one resident.

Inside, the corridors are dark. People who live here use the torches on their phones to navigate around the building. There are pools of stagnant water in the corridors, and garbage is strewn all over.

Children play in these corridors. Their parents think it is safer than playing on the street outside. There is even an orphanage operating from one section of the building – evidence, perhaps, that light shines even in the darkest of places.

Nonetheless, the dangers are all too real. In June, two children – aged between five and seven – were killed in a fire after being left home alone in their apartment with the door locked.

Two years ago, local civil society groups tried to revive the building, removing 500-tonnes of waste. But in
Anywhere but here

Vannin Court resident Myandu Thoko, 67, lives in a single room with a bed, a table, and a small tabletop stove.

the absence of longer-term support, little has changed.

Vannin Court is less than a kilometre away. This building has a bad reputation. The entrance is a mugging hotspot: thieves can run through the building and make their escape through a shaft that leads to a back alley.

The thieves don’t even live in the building, says one resident, who declines to give her name. If she could live anywhere else, she would.

“If I want to go to the toilet. There is no toilet, I must take a bucket and shit there,” she says. “Who wants to stay in conditions like that? Nobody.”

Myandu Thoko lives in a single room in Vannin Court. Inside is a bed, a table, and a small portable electric stove. She is 67 years old. “I have been living here for many years. I’m struggling, I’m not working, sometimes I am lucky to get a piece job as a domestic in Yeoville for 100 rands ($5.30).”

The San Jose, in neighbouring Berea, was once a relatively affluent apartment block. It has been stripped of all its windows, doors and furnishings, which were allegedly sold for cash at local scrap yards by nyaope boys – drug users who
are addicted to a potent combination of low-quality heroin and marijuana. Window panes have been replaced by cardboard.

Some rooms have been designated as smoking rooms. In one, on a broken couch, a man prepares a mandrax pipe – another dangerous concoction of marijuana and methaqualone, a hypnotic sedative also known as quaaludes. Needles litter the room. The curtains are closed and small candles provide scant illumination.

Authorities say that criminals use the building while on the run. Many ex-prisoners also take refuge here, with nowhere else to go as they attempt to reintegrate into society.
In darkness together

With nowhere else to go, destitute families brave the dangers of hijacked buildings like Vannin Court.

Cutting corners

A man stands outside Vannin Court, known as a hotspot for muggings.
Ethiopian forces implicated in war crimes in Amhara

Faced with another rebellion in the north, the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency in the Amhara region last month and blocked the internet there. Despite this, The Continent has established the exact location and approximate date when soldiers – believed to be in the national army – were filmed committing a possible war crime. We have also independently collected multiple accounts of killings and gross human rights abuses in the region.

Zecharias Zelalem

The footage is grainy. But what it depicts is very clear: the apparent execution of two unarmed individuals, in broad daylight, by uniformed troops. Believed to have been filmed in the Amhara region of northern Ethiopia, it was widely circulated by Ethiopian social media users and has sparked outrage.

An investigation by The Continent has confirmed that the footage was filmed in Debre Markos, a city in Amhara, just a few kilometres from the local police...
In the undated 93-second clip, several people in civilian clothing are seated on the sidewalk. They appear to be held captive by the men in uniform.

They are beaten and then dragged from the sidewalk into the street.

Two bursts of automatic rifle gunfire are heard, and a man slumps over in a way that suggests he has been shot in the back.

At another point, a different person is on his knees and appears to be pleading for his life.

As the clip ends, several people in civilian attire walk away with their hands in the air. Two dead bodies are left behind.

“[The footage] is under investigation,” Daniel Bekele, the chief commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, told The Continent.

By analysing the landmarks seen in the video – including a gas station and nearby residential buildings – The Continent geolocated the killings to an area in the south of Debre Markos, along the main A3 road to the capital Addis Ababa, which is about 380km away.

Although it was filmed at a distance, the attire of the dozen or so soldiers in the video is discernible and consistent with the uniforms worn by soldiers of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF).

These are not isolated scenes.

Residents of Debre Markos told The Continent that, beginning in the middle of August, government forces have killed scores of civilians in the city, after accusing them of being members of, or sympathising with, a local militia known as Fano.

“I witnessed killings and only just escaped with my life. Children have died too,” said a resident who, like everyone else in this story, requested anonymity.

A sudden escalation

What is happening in Debre Markos is part of a broader conflict that has recently engulfed this part of the country. It has its

Geolocation: Landmarks from a video on social media, in which soldiers appear to execute civilians, correspond to the town of Debre Markos in Amhara, Ethiopia.
roots in the two-year civil war between the Ethiopian government and the regional government of Tigray, which officially ended in November 2022.

During that war, the Ethiopian government empowered the Fano – a militia group which recruits its members from the Amhara, Ethiopia’s second-largest ethnic group. The militia fought alongside government troops against the Tigrayans.

But following the ceasefire last year, the militia took issue with orders from Addis Ababa to disband.

Fano leaders argued that the federal government did not have the capacity to protect ethnic Amhara civilians, who in recent years have been targeted in massacres across western Ethiopia.

The parties also disagree on how to deal with the disputed Western Tigray territory bordering Sudan. Amhara forces have controlled it since capturing the area from Tigrayan forces in 2020, but Defence Minister Abraham Belay recently announced that the region’s fate would be decided in a referendum.

Tensions simmered between the two parties until early August, when the Fano militia suddenly announced that they had captured a slew of cities and towns across the region from federal forces.

On 3 August Yilikal Kefale, Amhara’s regional president at the time, wrote to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed asking him to intervene by sending federal troops. The next day, Addis authorities declared a six-month state of emergency in the region and began a forceful response. Within weeks, federal troops had forced the rebels from major towns – but, as reports on the ground show, and The Continent’s reporting confirms, the campaign has been extremely brutal.

**A brutal pattern**

Debre Markos was one of the cities that was captured by the Fano and then retaken by federal forces. The extrajudicial killings captured in the viral video are likely to have happened in the immediate aftermath of government soldiers entering the city on 11 August.

This is supported by elements of the video itself. On 2 August, locals in the city had set up makeshift road blockades to slow down the advance of federal military vehicles. Photos published by local media, and eyewitnesses interviewed by The Continent, confirm this. In the video, these roadblocks appear to have been dismantled – a tyre and large rocks are strewn about the street.

The spate of extrajudicial killings in Debre Markos appears to have continued for several weeks following the filmed incident.

On 27 August, Ethiopian troops shot and killed Limatu Amare, a lecturer at the town’s university as he was leaving a church, witnesses in the city said.

“He was a hard-working and beloved teacher to many students in the area. He wasn’t a member of any armed group,” the witness added, explaining that he too was shot at in the same incident. “I remember Limatu used to speak glowingly of the Ethiopian army. But they are the ones who spilled his blood.”

According to the Fano militia, the
Broken alliance: Fano militia in Lalibela, Ethiopia in 2021 during the civil war in which they fought alongside the government forces now said to be hunting them. Photo: Solan Kolli/AFP via Getty Images

brutality in Debre Markos was repeated elsewhere in the region. “Debre Markos wasn’t the only city where such killings happened,” said Mere Wedajo, a Fano military commander. “To compensate for their battlefield losses, the soldiers get emotional and massacre the people.”

Accounts from Majete, a town 500km east of Debre Markos, give credence to Wedajo’s claims.

Several Majete residents told The Continent that on 2 September, upon entering the town after days of fighting, federal forces conducted a house-to-house search during which they killed several residents and physically assaulted many others. They blame federal forces for 31 civilian deaths in the town.

One woman said that her young brother was shot dead inside their house, where he was sleeping when soldiers forced their way in late in the night.

“He begged them not to kill him. My older brother fled but they caught my younger brother,” the woman said. She and several others fled Majete that night, fearing further violence, especially the threat of sexual assault.

Another resident, who spoke from a nearby town where he is in hiding, said that he found the dead bodies of his two sons on the outskirts of Majete three days after they were taken into custody by federal forces.

At least 183 people have been killed so far since the Amhara conflict escalated last month, according to the United Nations. At least two dozen of them were killed in a 13 August government air strike on the town of Finote Selam (about 83km northwest of Debre Markos).

Billene Seyoum, spokesperson for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, did not respond to an email seeking comment on the allegations contained in this story. The Continent also sent questions to the ministry of defence. No response was received.

Additional reporting by Liban Mahamed
Most Africans, but not all, reject violence against women

Did you know that violence against women wasn’t officially recognised as a violation of human rights until 1992? Three decades after the United Nations declared violence unacceptable under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the majority of Africans agree. But not all.

On average across 37 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2021/2023, seven in 10 adults (70%) say a man is “never” justified in using physical force against his wife if she’s done “something he doesn’t like or thinks is wrong.” But three out of 10 (30%) think it’s “sometimes” (21%) or “always” (9%) justified.

The nine countries offering a strong endorsement of physical force are in West or Central Africa, led by Guinea (67%), Gabon (65%), and Cameroon (63%).

Acceptance of physical force is almost as widespread among women (27%) as men (33%), and is more common among youth (32%) than those over age 55 (26%).

Even among those with post-secondary education, 25% accept the use of force against women. In public health terms, that constitutes a raging epidemic.

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**Data**

Is it ever justified for a man to use physical force against his wife? | 37 African countries | 2021/2023

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<thead>
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Never justified</th>
<th>Sometimes or always justified</th>
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<td>Guinea</td>
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**Source:** Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.
‘I want people to see my work and get angry’

Art does not owe us joy and escape, say two Ghanaian artists who are challenging their country’s safe, pretty and commercially driven art scene

Delali Adogla-Bessa

At the opening of his latest exhibition, Sela Adjei poured libation instead of the Christian prayers that typically open all formal events in Ghana. The painter, who specifically chose to open on African Unity Day, was making a statement. That statement is threaded through the entire Zadokeli exhibition – a proud display of abstract paintings with a voodoo aesthetic.

Zadokeli is the Ewe word for an eclipse of the sun. Adjei – who describes himself as “an artist following in the line of priests and priestesses” – reads meaning into the eclipses that took place in 2020: the first in early January and the last in mid-December. Ewe tradition views eclipses as meaningful supernatural phenomena and the events of 2020 appeared to vindicate that practice.

First came the global Covid-19 pandemic – officially declared in March 2020. In April, Ghanaian state security claimed a life when a soldier shot a homeless, mentally ill man in the head while enforcing pandemic lockdown. Across the continent, similar brutality was visited on African people, with state security claiming more lives than Covid-19 in some countries in early 2020.

The paintings displayed in Zadokeli document and evoke memories of the events of 2020 and after. He draws on tragedies, like the police shooting of 13-year-old Yassin Hussein Moyo in Nairobi and the Lekki tollgate massacre during the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

“What I am doing with Zadokeli is to draw connections between the eclipses of 2020 and these inequalities, injustice and violence against the black body,” Adjei tells The Continent.

It makes for difficult viewing – the art pieces are often haunting, with their monochrome biomorphic figures meting out violence or sprinkles of red that evoke blood splatter.

But sitting with the unfortunate is something Adjei wishes Ghanaian art lovers to become more comfortable with.

“When people experience my paintings, I want them to experience the same emotions that victims of police brutality and violence experience,” he says.

That choice is a sharp departure from
much of the contemporary art he sees in Ghana, which he says is driven by commercial interests and avoids engaging with politics. In contrast, he seeks to contribute to the carving out of a space for political activism and advocacy. Ghana’s contemporary art scene would mean much more, he believes, if it reflected a country contending with political and economic crises.

Another political artist, Bright Ackwerh, shares Adjei’s sentiment. “Artists have to be historians. Artists have to be thinkers. They have to be revolutionaries, and they have to inspire change,” says Ackwerh, who describes his own art – satire that often mocks state incompetence – as “born of basic rage”.

But to make glaringly political art is to take the path of greatest resistance, Ackwerch admits. He has had to stick to the internet and smaller alternative exhibition spaces to get around censorship, after a 2018 incident in which he says a prominent gallery in Ghana pulled “all the pieces that featured the current president” out of an exhibition headlined by Kenyan Michael Soi.

But still he rages. “For some of my work, when people laugh, I feel like revisiting the topic and taking the humour out of it, bit by bit,” Ackwerh says. “I want people to see my work and get angry.”

Photo: Ernest Ankomah
In praise of amala

My love for this ‘uncool’ meal has come full circle.

Adebisi Amori

My mother says amala, the starchy meal my people make from yam flour, was the first solid food I took to after I was weaned. In my teens, however, I wouldn’t let anyone outside my family know I loved it. I avoided it at parties even when I really wanted it. Amala was “local” and therefore uncool.

But then came a family reunion in my hometown in Oyo State, Nigeria. I expected rice and chicken, but was greeted with hot amala and gbegiri, a soup we make from black-eyed beans. My cousins complained that amala wasn’t cool, but I decided to dig in anyway, and soon they did too. I have never looked back.

I enjoy eating amala with abula, a mixture of gbegiri and ewedu, a leafy vegetable with the texture of okra. Making amala is straightforward: simply pour yam flour in hot water, stir until smooth, and let it cook for a couple of minutes.

University cemented my love for amala. Classes, assignments and extracurriculars left little time for making proper meals. One day, I asked a friend to follow me to an amala spot not far from our faculty building.

While some use cutlery, I prefer eating it with my hands. There’s just something about feeling a smooth morsel of amala in your fingers and dipping it in soup. I dragged my friend along because I hoped a familiar face would make me feel less self-conscious. I shouldn’t have worried. The hands-on way people ate showed the love they had for their meal and soon I was happily elbows deep myself.

“Amala dates” became a thing for me. A bad test? Amala to deal with the pain. Something to celebrate? Amala!

I’ve come to appreciate my culture even more because of this meal. Amala is “local”, you see. Amala is cool.

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Last week we sampled a Sesotho traditional food, lipabi. This week we are visiting Nigeria for their amala. 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.
Africa’s reliance on private care is a health hazard

Public healthcare systems on the continent are overwhelmed. There are other options available – for those who can afford it. And even then there are risks.

Charles Ebikeme

It’s not a state secret: African leaders are notorious for seeking private healthcare outside of their own countries.

In 2019, Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe died 8,000km away from home in a hospital in Singapore. Breaking one of his own electoral promises – to end medical tourism – former Nigerian president and frequent-flyer Muhammadu Buhari spent more of 2017 in the United Kingdom for treatment than he did in his own country.

That same year, Benin’s President Patrice Talon spent nearly a month in France being treated for an undisclosed illness. Upon suffering a stroke, Ali Bongo Ondimba, Gabon’s recently deposed president, was rushed to a hospital in Saudi Arabia in 2018, then later to the UK. Two former Zambian leaders died in foreign hospitals and, in 2018, South Africa’s then-deputy president, David Mabuza, went to Russia, apparently for a routine check-up.

The reasons for exercising this choice are apparent: African leaders lack confidence in the health systems they oversee, and the cost of foreign treatment doesn’t come from their pockets – taxpayers foot the bill.

This lack of confidence is not restricted to Africa’s leaders. In 2016, Africans spent over $6-billion on treatment outside of the continent. Nigerians spend more than $1-billion each year on so-called medical tourism, thanks to a public health system that lacks the quality of care they seek.

And no wonder Africans are looking elsewhere: According to Afrobarometer, 45% of Africans who went for medical care at a public clinic or hospital during the past year say that it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to get the care they needed.

For Africans who can’t afford to jet off to doctors overseas – most of us, in other words – the next option is the private sector, which has seen huge investment in recent years. More often than not, external European development finance institutions are a source of funding for such quality private healthcare.

Research from Oxfam UK found that between 2010 and 2022, the four principal development finance institutions made a total of 358 direct and indirect investments in private health companies in low- and
middle-income countries – of which more than half (56%) were in for-profit hospitals or other for-profit healthcare providers.

Private healthcare comes with its own risks – especially given that private hospitals are subject to very little oversight in the countries in which they operate.

Unethical behaviour by private healthcare providers across the continent has been reported. In 2020, Kenya’s Daily Nation newspaper quoted staff at a private hospital in Kenya saying that the hospital’s owners had told them to “make money from patients by any means necessary”.

At the Nigeria-based healthcare provider Hygeia, the cost of unassisted childbirth ranges from 280,000 to 430,000 naira ($728 to $1,118). In a country where the average monthly income is 141,667 naira ($175) according to World Bank figures. This means a significant income burden for more than half the population simply to give birth.

Price gouging is only one issue in a litany of problems. In 2021, Kenya’s High Court ordered the Nairobi Women’s Hospital, a leading private hospital chain in Kenya, to pay more than three-million shillings ($27,000) in compensation for illegally detaining a patient for more than five months because of an unpaid bill.

With national governments looking to reduce burdens on public purses, the deepening financialisation within healthcare represents a fundamental shift in the organising principles for healthcare systems, with possible negative implications for health and equality.

For example, a report by the British Medical Journal found that private hospitals in the UK showed limited efficacy during the coronavirus pandemic.

Expansion of private services in healthcare is a “financialisation” trend that is going unabated globally – with similarly disastrous results. Studies in the United States, France, Germany and the UK show higher rates of mortality and lower staffing levels in care homes owned by private equity firms, and lower quality of care in for-profit homes, compared with public or non-profit equivalents.

The pattern in African countries is likely to be similar.
1. How many imperial cities does Morocco have?
2. What is the currency of the Comoros?
3. *Calm Down* is a chart-topping 2022 song by which Nigerian artist?
4. Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica are regions of which country?
5. Which country are Amhara people from?
6. Levy Mwanawasa was the former president of which country?
7. Which country are Malagasy people from?
8. What is another name for the Atlantic-facing Grain Coast?
9. What is Senegal’s largest city?
10. The Isbahaysiga Mosque (pictured) overlooks the Somali Sea. Which city is it in?

**HOW DID I DO?** WhatsApp ‘ANSWERS’ to +27 73 805 6068 and we’ll send the answers to you!
A great act of bravery took place this week. An act of such courage and determination you would be forgiven for gasping aloud in awe and disbelief. But believe it you should, for it was carried out by this very columnist, whose derring-do you surely dare not doubt, even in light of this most audacious development. Her daring deed? Her audacious act? Hold on to your hats, dear reader, for she has exited every single one of her WhatsApp groups!

All of them! And by all, we mean all. Most, anyway. A lot of them, at the very least. That’s right, no more forwards about how drinking a gallon of artisanal water containing salt from the Dead Sea mixed with the blood of a unicorn will cure all your ailments. No more warnings about how “a cup of coffee every day will kill you”. (As if the alternative wasn’t unthinkable.).

And no, she wasn’t kicked out by the admins. How dare you, that was one time. And no, she wasn’t deposed in a WhatsApp coup. Although... do you suppose that happens in the African Union group chat? In between the forwarded jokes about activists being arrested and heads ups on tear-gas deals at Guns’R’Us, do they do a roll-call to weed out the recently un presidented?

We’re pretty sure the group chat is also a place to exchange ideas on how to better the lives of the people they love and serve. No, not their citizens! Their own flesh and blood. After all, if you’re not keeping it in the family, are you even really keeping it?

Prime example: Zimbabwe’s own President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Declared winner of an election so controversial that even SADC looked sceptical of the result, he announced his cabinet this week. And on the list of ministers-to-be was his son, David, as deputy minister of finance. And nephew Tongai as deputy minister of tourism!

Can’t say we’re shocked though – we’ve all seen the pressure of the family WhatsApp group in action. “Yes aunty, tourism. Got it.”

Meanwhile the uncles are just swapping tips on how to block the internet on the cheap, or the best time of day to arrest a journalist, or arguing over which opposition group to stifle first.

The Uganda family chat must have been lit this week. Police there announced the suspension of activities of Bobi Wine’s

Love it or leave it

CONTINENTAL DRIFT
Samira Sawlani
party, the NUP. Their reasons ranged from the party causing public disorder to promoting sectarianism, and making “defamatory statements against the person of the president of the Republic of Uganda”.

Something of a trending topic that. Someone must have forwarded it from the group chat of the DRC, where Jean-Marc Kabund – a former friend of President Félix Tshisekedi who became an opposition politician – has been sent to jail in part for “insulting the president”.

And then there’s the Coupdashians. Gabon, Niger, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso must surely have their own group going by now. Probably on Telegram instead of WhatsApp.

And probably quite lively this week, too, sharing the latest tea from France in support of their latest member. It’s spilling out: Niger’s Colonel Major Amadou Abdramane was on TV this week accusing the “underhanded” French of planning a military intervention in the recently couped country in collaboration with regional bloc, Ecowas. The way he tells it, Paris has deployed troops and military equipment in neighbouring countries as part of a possible act of aggression.

Manny Macron has continued to dismiss the junta’s claims, while also reminding them that France simply does not recognise their legitimacy.

Days after accusing France, the junta spokesperson – who we’ve seen more often than we’ve some of our loved ones lately (probably due to leaving the WhatsApp group, oops!) popped up to announce suspension of a military agreement with Benin, claiming that the country had authorised the deployment of troops and materials as part of the aforementioned potential Ecowas military intervention.

**Heavy hearts**

Here at Drift we aim to inform, and, yes, hopefully make you laugh a little. Sometimes that’s a tough ask, though.

This week the earthquake in Morocco, the floods in Libya and the continuing conflict in Sudan are very much on our minds and in our hearts. And in our anger, at the many failures past and present, that have led to such calamity. We’re tired of excuses, of promises, of impunity and of systemic failures on an international level. But are we leaving this group chat? Now? When things are so unbearably bleak?

Reader, we are not. ■
Nepotism is alive and well

Nigerian governors appointing family members to positions continues to undermine trust in government.

Toheeb Babalola

In Nigeria, the executive arms of government at the state and federal level have the right to nominate people to the position of commissioners and ministers. Legislative bodies then have 21 days to scrutinise the nominees, but there is little evidence this scrutiny is actually being done. Instead, many executives have turned their public offices into family affairs, with spouses, siblings and relatives appointed to key positions.

One especially egregious example: A 2017 *Premium Times* report revealed that Rochas Okorocha, governor of Imo State in south-east at the time, had appointed his sister, Ogechi Ololo, as the “commissioner for happiness and couples’ fulfilment”. Despite widespread criticism, Ololo stayed in office. Many Nigerians argued passionately that such a farce should not be allowed to happen again.

Yet now we see that Ademola Nurudeen Adeleke, the governor of Osun State in the western region of the country, recently appointed three family members to his state cabinet. They include his sister-in-law Adenike Adeleke, who was appointed as a commissioner at a state ministry, and nephew Rasaq Salinsile, who was appointed as the board chairman of the Teaching Service Commission. The governor also named his own son chairman of the Local Government Service Commission.

The main problem with the current system is that governors have so much patronage and political power that legislators do not want to anger them by blocking their nominations.

Citizens don’t always vote out corrupt leaders when loyalty and identity come into play

The electorate is left as the main check on nepotism, then, but citizens may not always vote out corrupt leaders when partisan loyalties and communal identities come into play in the heat of an election.

This does not mean the public is happy with bad leadership, however, and stronger laws are required to prevent nepotistic politics from further undermining public trust in the political system.

Toheeb Babalola is a campus journalist, pen-activist and media volunteer from Nigeria. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.
Reign check: Nkosinathi Mthethwa Nyambose of the king’s regiment at a ceremony near Bulawayo, honouring King Mzilikazi, founder of the Ndebele Kingdom. In Zimbabwe, the state today acknowledges cultural traditions but does not offer kings elevated legal status.