

The Continent

São Tomé and Príncipe:

The difficult work
of preserving
colonial heritage

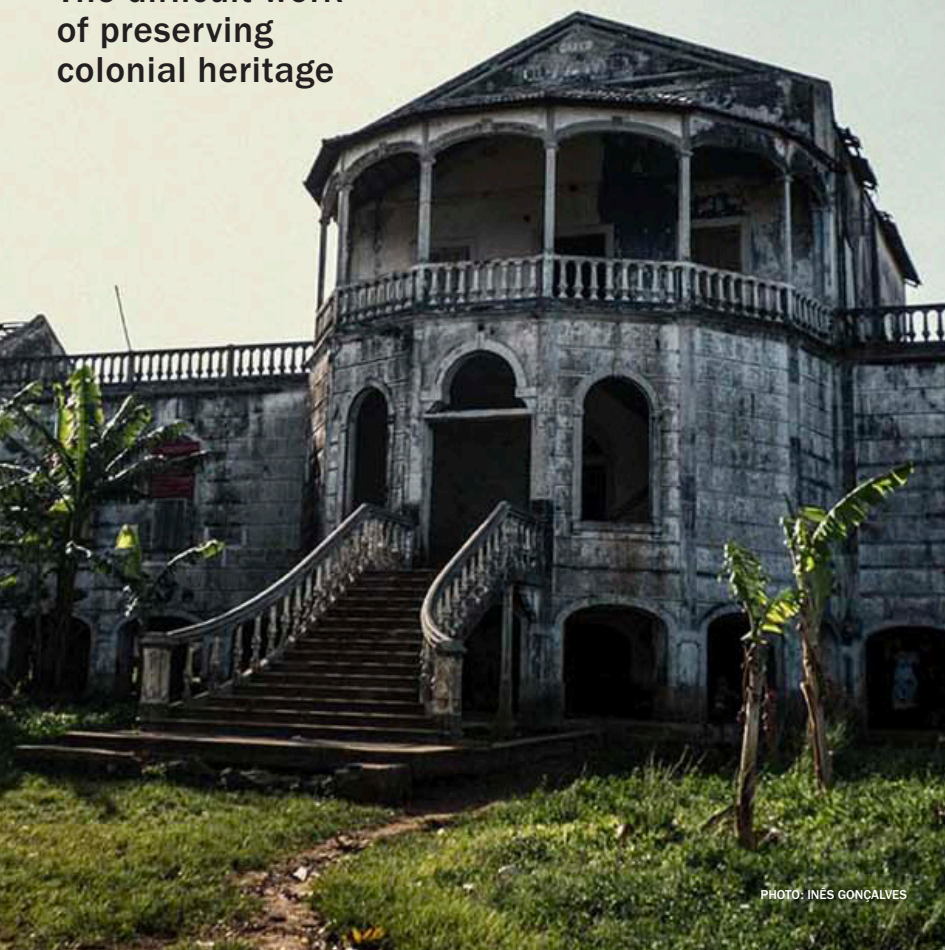


PHOTO: INÉS GONÇALVES



COVER The islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were one of the earliest places where Europeans assembled the defining elements of the tropical plantation complex: enslaved African labour, cash-crop monoculture, industrial processing, racial hierarchy, and export. That model was later expanded and reshaped in the Americas on a far larger scale. Now, six former agricultural estates in São Tomé and Príncipe – known as *roças* – have been recognised as World Heritage sites. The government hopes this new status will bring tourism revenue, jobs and opportunities as it grapples with high unemployment, youth emigration, and widespread poverty. But the Unesco status leaves critical questions unanswered: Who owns these structures, governs the stories they tell, and reaps the rewards of their new economic life? And how do the islands safeguard this cultural heritage without romanticising or sanitising the brutal history behind it in a quest to avoid offending tourists.

Inside

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF



PHOTO: EMMANUEL CROSET/AFP

Benin gone: Kémi Séba at the Pretoria magistrate's court after his arrest in April.

SECURITY

'Russia-backed' escape plot foiled

Franco-Beninese activist Kémi Séba, who is wanted in Benin over an alleged coup attempt, tried to flee South Africa, prosecutors say. He was arrested in Pretoria in April, along with François van der Merwe, the leader of the white nationalist Bittereinders movement, *Bloomberg* reports. Van der Merwe allegedly received money from Moscow to help Séba cross into Zimbabwe, from where he would have travelled to Europe. More than \$18,000 was seized during the arrests. Both men are alleged to have links to Russia, amid wider concerns over Moscow-backed influence operations in Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA

Miners buried in deadly rockfall

Fourteen people thought to be “zama-zamas” or illegal miners died after a mine dump collapsed in South Africa’s North West province. Eight people were injured and authorities suspect others may still be trapped, *News24* reports. The site was legally operated by Sustenza Trading, but police are investigating whether the firm was “in cahoots” with the miners, believed to be undocumented migrants. Last year, 78 bodies were recovered from a disused shaft in the same province.

ZIMBABWE

Rescue efforts under way after ferry capsizes

President Emmerson Mnangagwa has declared a state of disaster after 44 people drowned when a ferry capsized on Lake Kariba, the *BBC* reports. Search and recovery efforts continue, with 77 people rescued so far. Police said 95 people were aboard the *Mbuya Nehanda* but ticket sales suggested there were 114 adult passengers and an unknown number of children. Witnesses said the vessel was in a state of disrepair, and was hit by a big wave that caused its engines to lose power.



TANZANIA

Opposition treason trial resumes

After a five-month hiatus, opposition leader Tundu Lissu is back in the dock to continue his treason trial. Lissu has been in custody since April 2025 on a charge that carries the death penalty. He has accused prosecutors of deliberately delaying the case to keep him locked up, *Africanews* reports. The trial was suspended while prosecutors appealed a ruling that would allow additional evidence, but the Court of Appeal dismissed that challenge last month. His party, Chadema, says the prosecution is a test of Tanzania's commitment to democracy and an indictment of the presidency.

NIGERIA

Faith leaders sign peace accord

More than 50 Muslim and Christian leaders have signed an interfaith peace accord in Abuja aimed at promoting religious harmony in Nigeria, *Reuters* reports. Nigeria has faced long-running religious tensions and insurgencies that have killed thousands of people over the past 15 years. Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province have largely operated in the Muslim-majority northeast. Most victims of the violence have themselves been Muslim. The accord comes ahead of Nigeria's January 2027 elections, where religion is expected to remain a sensitive political issue.



Let's talk about Bruno: Paris is reviewing diplomat Bruno Foucher's alleged security breaches — or French foreign liaisons.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Voulez-vous Foucher avec moi?

Disciplinary proceedings have begun against France's ambassador to the Central African Republic, Bruno Foucher, after allegations he brought about 30 women to his official residence in Bangui. The alleged incidents, which reportedly took place between January 2024 and March 2026, prompted a French foreign ministry investigation over possible security breaches as some of the women allegedly stayed overnight, the *BBC* reports. The ministry says administrative proceedings are under way. The 65-year-old has served as ambassador since 2023.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Low water levels heat up nuclear risk

Hungary will sharply reduce output at one of its nuclear plants, due to the lack of cooling water from the Danube river. Meanwhile, Romania has shut down its last working reactor. The record-low water levels highlight the growing climate risks facing nuclear power, particularly as drought and heatwaves become more severe in Europe, *Reuters* reports. As rivers become drier and less reliable, both countries are looking at engineering solutions to keep reactors running, including artificially raising river levels and finding alternative cooling systems.

GUINEA

Vive la résistance!

Guinea is seeking the return of the skulls of four 19th-century anticolonial resistance figures from France, including Boubacar Biro Barry, the last leader of Fouta-Djalon. Barry was beheaded by French forces in 1896. Guinea wants their remains back, as well as manuscripts and personal items belonging to resistance leader Samory Touré, *AFP* reports. The requests were submitted in July, as France moves to make the return of colonial-era artefacts and human remains easier. Guinea says this will allow the resistance leaders to “rest with dignity” in the land of their ancestors.

KENYA

Renewables boom overwhelms grid

The rapid growth in wind and solar power is putting pressure on Kenya's electricity grid, the country's power utility says. These energies account for more than 20% of grid capacity, *Reuters* reports. Kenya Power says that wind and solar fluctuations force it to bring backup plants online to keep the grid stable. It has to pay for renewable power even when it can't use it, adding costs for consumers. The utility seeks more investment in geothermal and hydropower, which are more stable.

EBOLA

Bundibugyo linked to new animal crossover

A new animal-to-human transmission may be driving the previously unknown strain of the rare Bundibugyo Ebola virus, researchers say. Analysis of samples from 22 patients in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda found the strain behind this outbreak was genetically distinct from previous ones. The animal source hasn't been identified yet, *Reuters* reports. Over 2,000 people have died and more than 4,300 cases have been confirmed in the ongoing crisis.

GABON

'We've got bigger fish to fry tbh'

A 19-year fisheries agreement between the European Union and Gabon has ended, with the latter arguing it no longer delivers enough economic value. The deal allowed EU vessels trawl for tuna in Gabonese waters, *Mongabay* reports. The European Commission found Gabon received just 23% of the money generated between 2021 and 2024, or an average of \$3-million a year for access to 32,000 tonnes of tuna. Gabon now wants a new arrangement that gives it greater control and a larger share of the revenue.

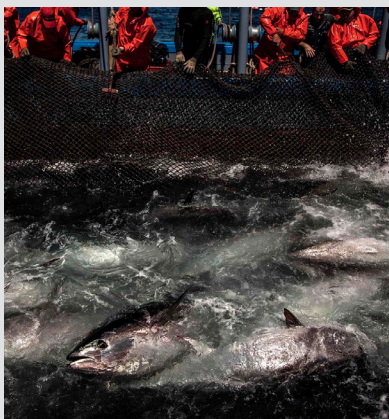


PHOTO: EMILIO MORENATI/AP PHOTO

Net loss: Spanish fishermen haul in tuna.

NEWS

SIERRA LEONE

How to pull a fast one

The government is promising a quicker and potentially less costly electoral process, but the opposition is crying foul.

ERIC KAWA IN FREETOWN

SIERRA LEONE'S parliament approved a constitutional amendment to lower the threshold for the presidency from 55% to 50% + 1 on Monday, sparking a walkout by the opposition All People's Congress.

According to the 1991 Constitution, a presidential candidate must secure at least 55% of votes to avoid a second round. This was to compel candidates to build broad national coalitions and bridge the sharp ethno-regional fault lines that historically fuelled instability, culminating in the 11-year civil war.

"The reason behind the 55% is to promote national cohesion and inclusiveness across the regions," political commentator Melvin Tejan Mansaray told *The Continent*.

Critics say the amendment will lower that threshold of inclusivity.

President Julius Maada Bio has backed the new amendment, which was passed by a simple majority, despite the opposition arguing it should have required two thirds of votes.

Sierra Leonean opposition legislator Osman Timbo described the changes as

a "slap on our collective conscience" and a "murder of our Constitution".

The new system also requires a quota of 30% women in political leadership positions and would require a candidate to win at least 20% of the vote in two-thirds of the country's districts.

This may not be as difficult as it seems. Candidates in countries such as Nigeria, which has similar requirements, select running mates from opposing regions to achieve this criterion.

The reform promises a faster and maybe cheaper electoral process. But it risks weakening a safeguard designed to promote national cohesion in a country still shaped by political divisions. ■



PHOTO: JOHN WESSELS/AFP

Link in Bio: A voter marks his ballot at a voting station in Freetown during the 2023 elections.

NIGERIA



For better or for worse

Kano's mass weddings may seem romantic, but the charms of petty greed and polygamy are also great for pacifying the unruly.

YUSUF OMOTAYO

LAST weekend, 1,500 couples tied the knot in Kano State, Nigeria, in a government-sponsored mass wedding.

The 1.5-billion naira (\$1.1-million) scheme was introduced in 2012 to help financially struggling couples get married, officially. This year it expanded to include polygamy, for already married men who wanted another wife.

Brides received 100,000 naira as a dowry and additional funds to establish small businesses. Couples were also given household goods – furniture, beds,

and essential food items.

Religious authorities in the state say the mass wedding is a way of curbing the “immorality” of unmarried couples living together – Kano state is Muslim-majority and governed by Sharia law. But experts say the scheme also works to control political dissent.

Ololade Faniyi, a feminist scholar, says men “cannot complain” about the government that financed their weddings. But the cost of silence is ultimately paid “by women and girls whose backs and labour stabilise this control,” she told *The Continent*. ■

LIBYA

Spy chief killed in Benghazi car bombing

The assassination amplifies high-stakes jeopardy around US-backed efforts to reunify Libya's rival governments.

KIRI RUPIAH

THE HEAD of military intelligence for the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), Major-General Fawzi al-Mansouri, was killed in a car bombing in Benghazi on Monday night.

The LNA said an explosive device attached to Al-Mansouri's car detonated as he was leaving a mosque. No group has claimed responsibility.

Libya has been divided by two competing administrations since the 2011 uprising against Muammar Gaddafi. The eastern-based government is led by the LNA's commander Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi. Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah is head of the internationally recognised Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU) in the west of the country.

Hamish Kinnear, a Middle East and North Africa analyst at risk-consulting



Targeted: Major-General Fawzi al-Mansouri.

firm Verisk Maplecroft, told *The Continent* that the attack “challenges the notion that the LNA has a firm grip on eastern Libya, but it’s still too early to judge whether this is a one-off or the signal of a deeper security problem”.

The assassination could also destabilise a United States-backed effort to reunify Libya's divided institutions. Last week, a series of drone attacks targeted Zawiya oil complex, about 40km west of Tripoli.

The bomb and drone attacks are a direct challenge to the LNA and GNU, Kinnear said.

“Consequently, in the near term both the LNA and GNU will look to bolster their security credentials and to project power – meaning the compromises required to move the unity plan forward will be harder [for them] to swallow.” ■



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FEATURE

Out of the frying pan

Egypt has taken control of its local asylum-application process from the United Nations' refugee agency. The result so far: arbitrary arrests and detention, particularly of dark-skinned refugees.

YASMINE MOHAMED IN CAIRO

SARAH* was eager to start a new life when she joined her husband in Egypt in 2022. After fleeing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, she was among a growing number of asylum seekers longing for sanctuary in Cairo.

In early 2026, that new life was shattered when her husband was summarily deported in what human rights advocates say is a burgeoning campaign of hostility towards refugees – even those with recognised papers from the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

“I wished and believed that Egypt would be a refuge for me, my children, and my family,” Sarah tells *The Continent* from Cairo. “I wished for that, but I didn’t find safety.”

Sarah fears she could be next and mostly stays indoors. “We just live, we pay rent, we pay for water, and that’s it. We can’t even afford clothes or to get medical treatment.”

Egypt has long been a destination for refugees and asylum seekers



PHOTO: KHALED DESOUKI/AFP

Into the fire: Refugees fleeing war-torn Sudan cross into Egypt through the Argeen Land Port.

escaping wars and crises in other parts of Africa and the Middle East. But the country’s own economic challenges and competition for scarce resources have led to growing animosity towards refugees.

By early 2026, Egypt’s external debt reached a monumental \$150-billion, with a collapsing currency and rampant inflation severely testing public resilience.

According to the World Bank, the poverty rate surged past 32% amid devaluations and price shocks.

The result is that refugees, already living precariously, have been subjected to rising deportations, a buckling

bureaucratic system, increasing xenophobia, and little sense of hope.

International law prohibits the forced return of refugees to countries in which they face persecution or serious harm. Yet Sarah's husband was deported back to South Sudan.

Mohammed* is a community leader of Sudanese refugees in Egypt.

"The situation is very difficult," he tells *The Continent*, explaining that families are frequently torn apart when their primary breadwinner is suddenly detained, "without anyone knowing where they were for several days, or even longer."

Bureaucratic warfare

The UNHCR has long managed asylum applications in Egypt. But in 2024, the Egyptian government passed a new asylum law taking control of the process, which was implemented in June 2026.

Under the new system, refugees and asylum seekers are required to renew their residency permits annually with Egyptian authorities.

But a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report says many applicants are being given renewal appointments years into the future.

"Everyone I spoke to said, 'I would get my renewal tomorrow if I could, but they're giving me an appointment in 2028 – what am I supposed to do?'" says Michelle Randhawa, a senior officer at HRW.

Without valid residency documents, refugees become vulnerable to arrest and deportation.

Rights groups say dark-skinned Africans, particularly Sudanese and South Sudanese, are disproportionately targeted during identity checks in taxis, bus stations, and other public places.

Egypt has not published deportation figures, but Randhawa estimates the number is "in the thousands".

At the same time, growing numbers of Sudanese are returning home through Egypt's Sudan Return Train Initiative – a free train ride to the border town of Aswan.

That ride is supposed to be voluntary, but rights groups argue many asylum seekers are leaving because deteriorating economic conditions, fear of arrest, and legal uncertainty leave them with little real choice.

"We don't know the reasons people are leaving, but it's quite strange people would voluntarily go to an active war zone," says Mahmoud Shalaby, a researcher at Amnesty International.

For refugees like Sarah, any changes will come too late. Having fled one insecure situation for another, she remains in limbo. Like countless others, she lives in fear and longs to reunite with her husband.

"How long will this continue?" she asks. "I don't know."

The Continent contacted the Egyptian ministry of interior for comment, as well as the Cairo office for the International Organisation of Migration. Neither responded to our emails. ■

*Names have been changed to protect identities



PHOTO: BELOUMOU OLOMO/AFP

FEATURE

Slavery's a tough sell, but São Tomé drives a hard bargain

The islands were used to test the slave plantation system that would later be exported to European colonies across the world.

Relics of this benighted era have now won World Heritage status. But preserving the roças is a balancing act – protecting their architecture without romanticising their history.

JOÃO MOREIRA DA SILVA IN SÃO TOMÉ

IN JULY, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) recognised six of São Tomé and Príncipe's former colonial plantations, known as roças, as World Heritage sites.

The six estates – Monte Café, Água Izé, Diogo Vaz, São João dos Angolares,

Sundy and Belo Monte – were part of a colonial system built around enslaving people and farming sugar, coffee, and cocoa. They combined agricultural land, processing facilities, transport infrastructure, workers' housing, hospitals, schools, and churches.

The government has welcomed the designation as a potential lifeline

for tourism, investment, and rural development.

São Tomé and Príncipe and its 200,000 people are confronting severe economic and infrastructural pressures, including persistent electricity shortages and high levels of poverty, particularly in rural areas.

But that opportunity also creates a risk: a plantation system built through forced migration and labour could now be repackaged as an export of colonial nostalgia.

Chef and cultural entrepreneur João Carlos Silva told *The Continent* he believes the Unesco designation presents an opportunity to reinvent the roças and turn them into spaces to reflect on culture, the environment, and local production.

“We must think big on a small island,” he said.

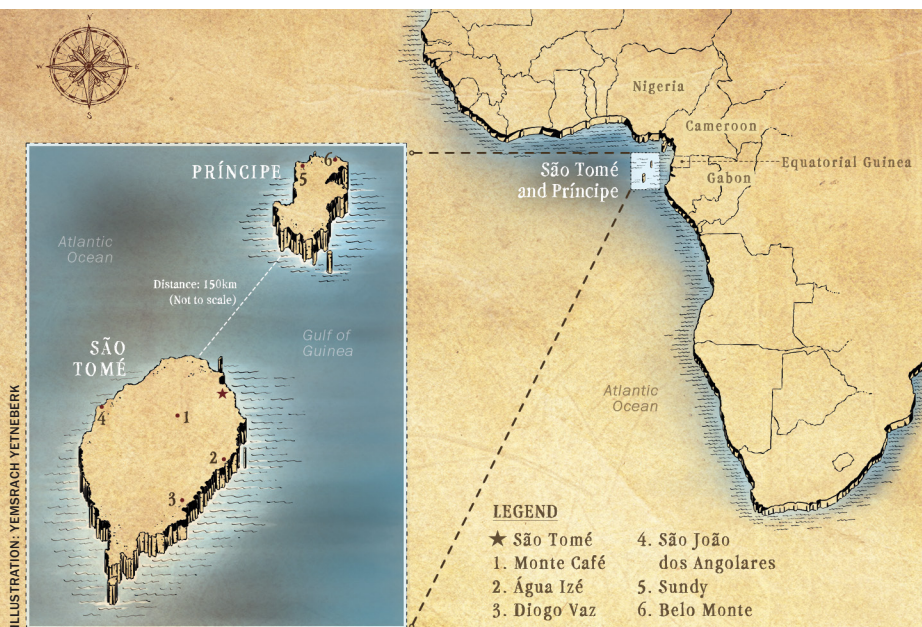
São Tomé is just 50km long and 30km wide. Príncipe is even smaller.

A model for Atlantic slavery

The country’s dire economy is rooted in a colonial past and the creation of a monoculture that benefited a few.

That all began in 1470, when Portuguese explorers landed on what they recorded as two uninhabited islands just off the coast of West Africa. Their location near the equator made them ideal for sugarcane and a colonisation project was rapidly implemented.

But crops need workers and no willing workers existed, so the Portuguese brought in enslaved people from elsewhere in Africa. Those people



powered what quickly became one of the earliest Atlantic slave-plantation societies. They resisted, and several revolts were violently suppressed.

A few people became very rich. That sugar economy formed part of a wider model of coerced labour, export agriculture, and racial hierarchy. The lessons in São Tomé would be replicated in British, French, and American slave plantations at an industrial scale.

And sugar was just the beginning.

In 1822 Portugal lost its biggest colony, Brazil, when it declared independence. Brazil had a booming sugar industry, thanks in large part to slavery. That meant Portugal renewed its attention on São Tomé and Príncipe with new crops in mind – coffee and cocoa – as global demand for them grew.

Large estates expanded across the islands, consolidating fertile land in the hands of Portuguese planters and companies. By now, the islands had free-born African people, known as *forros*, and this new agricultural expansion



meant less land available for them.

The official abolition of slavery in 1865 made Portuguese authorities and plantation owners recruit tens of thousands of workers from Angola, Mozambique, and Cabo Verde. They were classified as contract labourers, but the nature of their contracts and restrictions on movement often made it slavery in all but name.

For a brief period in the early 20th century, São Tomé and Príncipe was the world's leading cocoa producer and exporter. But the boom depended on the



Above: *The roça Agostinho Neto.*

Left: *People from Portuguese Guinea were brought to Príncipe Island to work. Slavery was abolished in 1865 but continued in practice.*

PHOTO 1: ALEXIS HUGUET/AFP
PHOTO 2: MUSEU DO ALIUBE RESISTÊNCIA E LIBERDADE

contract labourers whose treatment was exposed by journalists, missionaries, and campaigners.

In 1909, allegations that the contract system functioned as slavery helped to trigger an international scandal and major British chocolate manufacturers boycotted the country's cocoa.

After independence in 1975, São Tomé and Príncipe's first government nationalised the roças, seeking to place the country's principal productive assets under national control. But it inherited a plantation system already weakened by declining productivity, dependence on foreign technical expertise and capital, deteriorating infrastructure, and vulnerability to international cocoa prices.

Five decades after independence, much of the islands' rural landscape remains organised around the former plantations. When Portuguese rule ended, the administrative buildings, workers' quarters, and processing facilities were occupied by local families, who continue to live in many of the old buildings.

'A genuine city'

João Carlos Silva's roça reflects the changing history of the former plantations. In the early 1990s, his father acquired São João dos Angolares as the country privatised many of the roças.

Silva later restored part of the complex and adapted it for tourism. The restoration retained elements of the original architecture while converting the former estate into a restaurant,



Reframed: Roça São João dos Angolares is now a guesthouse and restaurant. PHOTO: INÊS GONÇALVES

guesthouse, and space for artists' residencies.

More recently, Silva has turned his attention to another former plantation, roça Água Izé. "Reinventing Água Izé means transforming it into a genuine city," Silva says, "built around sustainable local production, with investments in education and infrastructure."

Their owners are primarily interested in generating revenue, particularly through tourism. This raises questions about how the history of the roças will be remembered.

His plans for Água Izé include establishing a school of arts and crafts and transforming the old colonial factory into a Museum of Cocoa.

Some locals have a different view of the Unesco recognition.

"We must ask who truly benefits from it," says Ivanick Lopandza, a Santomean



project manager and writer. Five of the six Unesco-listed roças are privately owned, he notes, and their owners are primarily interested in generating revenue, particularly through tourism.

This raises more questions about how the roças will be remembered.

“The owners of roças often remove parts of their history, such as colonial violence, that might offend European tourists,” Lopandza says, adding that the state should play a stronger role. “We must not leave this task in the hands of the few.”

Silva is one of the few Santomeans who owns a tourism-oriented plantation estate. Across the sea in Príncipe, South African billionaire Mark Shuttleworth has acquired nearly half of the island as part of a large-scale ecotourism project. One of his flagship investments is the



Top: A street in the sanzala of Água Izé, the living quarters built to house indentured labourers.

Above: View of the horse paddocks at Roça Sundry, the focus of a complete restoration by South African billionaire Mark Shuttleworth.

PHOTOS: DANIEL BELOUMOU OLOMO/AFP

complete restoration of roça Sundry, another of the newly nominated Unesco heritage sites.

More than 200 roças remain across São Tomé and Príncipe. Many buildings are abandoned, but others remain home to

families living without reliable electricity or water.

The climate crisis – and its resultant rising sea levels, flash floods, and coastal erosion – has displaced several communities. Young people are leaving the country because of the lack of job opportunities and low wages. By 2025, an estimated 46,000 Santomeans – about 20% of the archipelago's population – lived in Portugal.

“People, especially young people, would rather leave, even if it means facing difficult times somewhere else,” Carlos Agostinho das Neves, a Santomean historian and former

diplomat told *The Continent*. “And when a people loses hope in its country, its institutions, and its authorities, it becomes difficult to move forward.”

Unesco recognition may bring a much-needed lifeline, in the form of conservation funding, tourism, and new markets for local cocoa, coffee, and cultural production. Whether that status can preserve the evidence of exploitation without reproducing the inequalities that drove it remains an open question.

Lopandza, for one, sounds a note of caution. “The roças are living spaces, with communities. Unesco recognition risks turning poverty into a museum.” ■



High and dry: Fisherfolk of Praia Abade on the beach in Príncipe Island. PHOTOS: DANIEL BELOUMOU OLOMO/AFP



PHOTOS : DANIEL BELOUMOU OLOMO / AFP



PHOTOS: DANIEL BELOUMOU OLOMO/AFP



Coffee with The Continent



INTERVIEW

Welcome to Coffee with *The Continent*, where we chat to smart people with smart ideas. You're all invited. This week, our guest is **MUMBI KANYOGO** – the Kenyan feminist researcher and activist on the front line of the fight to reshape the narratives that keep us poor and subjugated.

VENUE* “When I was growing up, the place we used to have tea was at my grandmother’s. There was a kitchen shed. We would sit on small stools – pastel green, made out of wood – or tree stumps... She used to enter her kitchen – she would be doing her thing – and she would sit with me and my cousins there.”

DRINK Masala tea. “I get all the spices from scratch myself, when I have time. On Sundays, usually. You roast the spices and add the tea, the water, and the milk afterwards.”

MONUMENT** Jeevanjee Gardens, a small park in Nairobi Central that has become a staging ground for various protest actions since 2024, and a safe space for protesters fleeing police brutality. “Rather than being a monument to someone, it’s a monument that allows for gathering, safety, and refuge.”

READING *Minor Detail*, a novel by Palestinian author Adania Shibli. In it, a young girl investigates a decades-old atrocity.

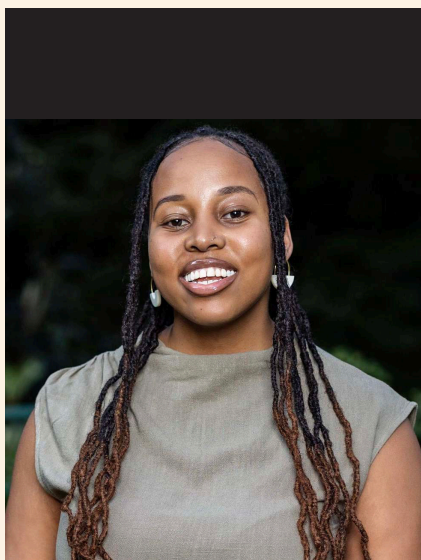


PHOTO: MUMBI KANYOGO

*We interviewed Kanyogo online. Her dream venue was brought to life by illustrator Wynona Mutisi.

**Last year, *The Continent* ran a series on iconic monuments across Africa. We're asking each guest to nominate a monument iconic to them.

Organising as praxis

MUMBI Kanyogo was studying in the United States, at a prestigious university perceived as a bastion of knowledge, when she realised her professors didn't always know what they were talking about. They were working from a different set of assumptions to her.

She cites her economics classes, where the discussion on universal healthcare wasn't about how to achieve it but rather about which groups of people, like poor or obese people, might freeloader off the contributions of others – and whether they should be included at all.

It was baffling, but also clarifying. Kanyogo knew then that the key to making better policy was to make explicit the assumptions from which that policy

flows. That's the real fight – and, yes, it is a fight.

“Knowledge is a site of struggle that needs to be wrestled with,” she says. “Policies are not just technocratic exercises... they're shaped by ideology.”

Take, for example, the Kenyan government's attitude towards youth unemployment.

“The way that young people have been talked about is in this language of the ‘youth bulge,’ Kanyogo notes. “Like, it's about the idea that if these people's energy is not actually...engaged, then they will cause political chaos and be able to destroy our countries.”

Youth are, in other words, a danger.

Witnessing the violence visited on so



ACAB: Kenyans dodge tear gas at a protest over the death of blogger Albert Ojwang in custody last year.

many Kenyan youth during almost any kind of protest action – like the protests against the Finance Bill in 2024, in which Kanyogo participated – it's easy to see the connection between this attitude and the state's response.

What it means, in practical terms, is that “the question of how ... people are going to survive and lead actual good lives is not being addressed by anyone”.

That's where Kanyogo comes in. Her practice rests on two pillars. First, research, writing and advocating for progressive causes. She's trying to shift narrative frameworks through which we understand complex social issues.

Her work on unemployment is an example. Usually, the issue is framed through the lens of individual failings: unemployment happens to people because they don't study hard enough, work hard enough, or fail to seize opportunities presented to them.

Instead, the debate should be around how the economy is structured – in Kenya, for example, cheap labour is increasingly packaged for export, meaning there is no incentive to make workers' conditions better.

“The burden of proving that you are valuable labour is often put on unemployed people in Africa, as opposed to people who are holders of capital – and the state – which is supposed to be organising [the economy],” she says.

Kanyogo's second pillar is mobilising: getting people and organisations to move in the same direction together.

“You're bringing a lot of groups together who have typically done

organising work on their own,” she says. “We might not agree on everything but maybe there's a common space that we can all agree on and we can move in that direction together.”

In this way, she argues, “we create power together” – proactively, rather than operating from a space of grievance.

These pillars come together in the Kenya Comms Hub, a strategic communications network for social justice organisations that she co-founded. Its aim is to provide social justice organisations with the tools they need – research, communications tools, network-building – to start to shift the narratives that are holding society back.

“The question of how people are going to survive and lead actual good lives is not being addressed by anyone.”

As it says on the website: “The greater public support for social justice issues becomes, the more likely that progressive laws and policies will be enacted and implemented.”

Kanyogo wants us all to question our own assumptions and begin to imagine what we want our lives to be like – and then plan to get there together.

“We're inundated with a lack of hope every day, especially in Kenya,” she says. “So it's been nice to get people together to think about what we need to do to make our lives better.” ■

SPORT

Chaos is a ladder and Wafcon never dies

LEE NXUMALO

ON SUNDAY, a new champion will be crowned. The past month has offered entertaining football featuring an ignominious procession for a 10-time Women's Africa Cup Of Nations winner, tournament hosts getting buried in their backyard, and Kenya and Egypt attending only for the vibes and nothing else.

One of two unlikely teams – Cameroon or Malawi – will walk away with continental bragging rights.

Malawi are the debutantes of this edition, topping the Group of Death and handling business in the knockouts. The Chawinga sisters, alongside the midfield pairing of Faith Chinzimu and Rose Kadzere, are goal-scoring bandits with blistering speed. But for all that attacking firepower, the Scorchers are unfamiliar with the concept of defence, yet to finish a game with a clean sheet.

In contrast, the Indomitable Lionesses' goalkeeper Michaely Bihina has displayed near-paranormal skills. And Myriam Nyadjou channelled David Luiz with her stunning free-kick to send Joloff FC packing. In the semifinals they had a slugfest with the Moroccans that led to penalties. Unfortunately for the North Africans, halaal choke artistry



PHOTO: CAF WOMEN

Supersibs: Temwa and Tabitha Chawinga.

prevailed as Bihina showed she's the new sheriff in African football. Yet for all their Chuck Norris-like activities, Cameroon's attack leaves much to be desired: goals come as easy as free and fair elections.

Good thing none of us tell fortunes for a living, because this isn't a final anyone predicted.

Meanwhile, Ghana and South Africa thugged it out for spots in the intercontinental playoffs, beating Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire and will hope to add to the African headcount at next year's Women's World Cup.

There is no rest for the wicked and no such thing as peace in football. ■

Lee Nxumalo is an award-winning journalist whose work explores the intersection between sports, politics, and culture

DATA

Itching to get moving

AFRICANS are finding it harder to move around. Europe is adopting hard-line policies aiming to curb immigration from Africa. The United States under President Donald Trump has instituted partial or full visa bans for many countries.

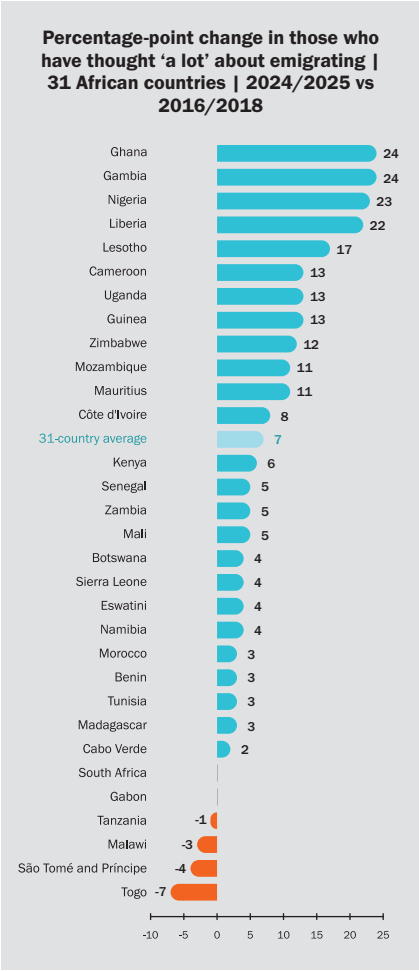
But Africans have itchy feet: Across 38 countries we surveyed in 2024/2025, close to half (45%) of adults say they have considered moving to another country, including 25% who say they have thought about it “a lot”.

That contrasts with fewer than a third of citizens in 17 Latin American countries (32%) and eight Middle Eastern/North African countries (29%).

And the itch is getting stronger. Since 2016/2018, Africans across 31 countries are seven percentage points more likely to think “a lot” about emigration.

Four West African countries lead the rise: Ghana (+24 percentage points in those considering emigration “a lot”), Gambia (+24), Nigeria (+23), and Liberia (+22). In the latter, more than three-fourths of respondents (77%) now say they are dreaming of greener pastures.

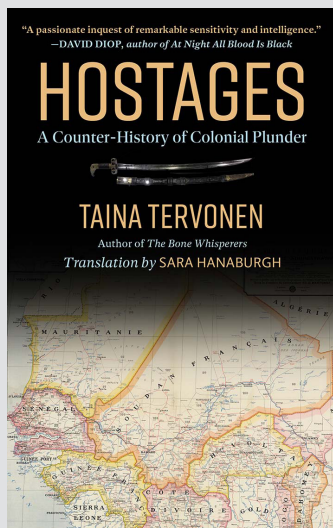
Most potential emigrants say they would leave in search of employment (50%) or in order to escape economic hardship or poverty (29%). ■





TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



History for the taking

Whiteness didn't just direct the colonial-era looting of African artefacts and people. It continues to dominate the discourse around them and dictates the terms of their return.

ONE morning in April 1890, French general Louis Archinard led his troops in a raid on city of Ségou, the capital of the Toucouleur Empire, located in present-day Mali. Its ruler, Ahmadou Tall, wasn't home, so Archinard ransacked the city, leaving with "weapons, gold and silver jewellery", and 518 manuscripts.

Archinard also took the emperor's 10-year-old son and daughter. All of the treasure – and abducted children – ended up in France.

In the non-fiction work *Hostages*, writer and journalist Taina Tervonen travels between France and Senegal to retrace the movement of Archinard's "treasure", and to find its current location.

This is no mean feat, as contemporary restitution claims have shown. Looted artefacts languish in Western museum basements – forgotten, mislabelled, lost – because no one tracks their movements. Sometimes they are stolen more than once. Hunting down specific artefacts is frequently unsuccessful, except when such objects are famous.

One object Tervonen traces is a sabre reportedly owned by El Hadj Oumar Tall, the general and scholar who founded the Toucouleur Empire. The sabre was said to have been used by his grandson, Abdoulaye, to defend his mother from the invaders on that fateful day in 1890.

Tervonen found the sabre at the Army Museum in Paris and it was "restored" to Senegal in 2019. But according to French

law it still belongs to France and was only loaned to its country of origin.

Whether this sabre belonged to El Hadj Oumar Tall is in question, but readers will wonder if that matters, when the value of cultural objects is decided and defended by that culture's elders and history.

Tervonen's mission ends on a poignant note: ultimately, Archinard's treasure comprises only objects, even if they are culturally and religiously valuable. A far more terrible story unfolds: Tervonen finds that Archinard, likely plotting a political future for the kidnapped boy Abdoulaye, put him into the care of a couple in France. Abdoulaye was educated and no doubt socialised to become an upright young Frenchman.

The idea was that he would eventually join the military and return to Senegal to serve France and perhaps challenge or weaken his uncle's rule. Sadly, Abdoulaye's letters reflect his extreme disillusionment with his adoptive country. He died of tuberculosis when he was only 20 years old. The fate of his sister is not mentioned in the book.

Tervonen's book is an engaging and incisive account that invites readers to interrogate colonial practices. It also raises pertinent questions about who gets to tell history.

As one interlocutor asks of its author – “a white woman, a descendant of the colonisers”: What drives her interest in these objects? Tervonen's true interest may be both intellectual and nostalgic: she grew up in Senegal as the child of



PHOTO: SEYLOU/AFP

On edge: Former Senegalese president Macky Sall inspects El Hadj Omar Saidou Tall's sabre in 2019.

missionaries and learned some of this history in school.

Finally, as Tervonen writes: “Domination requires controlling the other's gaze and limiting its scope [...] Both the dominant and the dominated need to see each other as such until that gaze becomes so natural and integrated that we no longer notice it, and then even when everything around the visible shackles of domination shatters, the gaze remains, because it is part of us now. The other remains locked up inside, in an identity that has been assigned: the Black man is like this; the Toubab [white person] is like that.”

As in the proverb Nigerian author Chinua Achebe made famous, historians have always been the hunters, rather than the lions. For all its self-reflection, *Hostages* cannot fully escape protestations about the colonial gaze and the access to sources and resources its author's whiteness grants her. ■

The Quiz

- 1 Which country has the largest population of lions?
- 2 True or false: The capital of Libya is Benghazi.
- 3 What country is footballer Sadio Mané from?
- 4 The dalasi is which country's currency?
- 5 Who was president of Zambia before Hakainde Hichilema?
- 6 The Atlas Lionesses are which country's national football team?
- 7 The Indomitable Lionesses are which country's national football team?
- 8 In which African country did Oprah Winfrey open a school in 2007?
- 9 São Tomé is which country's capital?
- 10 In which country can one visit the Serengeti National Park (pictured)?



HOW DID I DO?

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

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

"Met some folks who swore they played in the national football team. But I think they might have been lion."

ANALYSIS

Out of office, still in power

The presidents of Cameroon and Guinea are perfecting the art of governing by proxy, taking autocracy to a new level.

BEVERLY OCHIENG

THERE is dictatorship and then there is Paul Biya's dictatorship: governing remotely without fear of losing power. Biya has become a sort of visiting president to Cameroon while mostly living in Geneva, Switzerland.

His latest out-of-office governance has lasted more than two months, although the government has assured citizens he will be visiting soon. Last week, Biya reshuffled the leadership of Cameroon's military, reminding everyone he was still in charge, albeit from a safe distance.

In Guinea, junta-leader-turned-president Colonel Mamady Doumbouya is also learning the ropes of governing a country remotely. He left for a holiday

in Greece two weeks ago after what the presidency termed "a period of intense mobilisation in service of the country".

Doumbouya is now reportedly back in Conakry. Authorities announced his return after questions emerged in the public over the uncertain length of his vacation. This is because in February Doumbouya was missing in action. Unconfirmed reports suggested he was receiving treatment for an undisclosed illness. Authorities denied this, framing it as a "well-deserved" rest.

Official reactions to a president's absence demonstrate how political stability depends on managing public perception about a leader's well-being.

Public speculation frequently provokes punitive responses. In



Aegean before duty:
Mamady Doumbouya (right) on a yacht in Greece, in a photo circulated on social media this month. The picture fuelled speculation over his health as he's wearing a sweater during a record-breaking heatwave.

PHOTO: PRÉSIDENTE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE DE GUINÉE

Cameroon, a social media user was jailed for six months on 26 July for “insulting” Biya in a post commenting on the death of Senate president Marcel Niat that said: “Lord, you’re already so close to the target – just a little more effort, please.”

Meanwhile, on 4 August the Guinean army issued an unusual statement affirming its loyalty to Doumbouya as social media posts made unverified claims about the president’s health.

Remote control

This remote exercise of presidential authority is not without precedent. During his presidency (2015-23), the late Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria spent lengthy periods in Britain for “medical checkups”. His successor, Bola Tinubu, has also been absent from state events and official engagements, fuelling speculation about his health.

A similar leadership crisis prevailed in Zambia when late president Michael Sata died in office after several absences in 2014. Assurances by aides that Sata was still in charge fuelled public apprehension and triggered power struggles in the governing party.

A leader’s lengthy tenure – like in Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda – provides its own form of stability. Biya, who has ruled since 1982, won an eighth term in October 2025 with 53% of the vote despite making a single campaign appearance. His main opponent, Issa Tchiroma, rejected the result. Violent clashes killed 48 people and Tchiroma fled into exile.

Doumbouya is also targeting a long-term presidency. He recently announced a flagship infrastructure project, backed by the country’s massive iron-ore reserves.

Winning the December 2025 election with 86% of the vote ended a four-year military transition and his political coalition secured a legislative majority in June. This dominance was aided by the junta banning or dissolving opposition parties and civil-society groups.

In both countries, public office and policy stability hinge on personality dynamics, not institutional capability and systems – hence the president’s bill of health becoming a political issue.

The problem with health intrigues is the focus on survival and succession hurts service delivery and creates short-term thinking. The primary threat isn’t an immediate collapse of government, but a system without any real leadership.

In Guinea, Doumbouya relies on a tight inner circle to maintain control during his absences. He is banking on economic dividends from infrastructure investments to strengthen his political leverage and keep allies happy.

Cameroon’s elite cohesion offers similar stability, though Biya’s age heightens succession risks. Despite reinstating the vice-presidency this year – a role that allows its bearer to govern temporarily without contesting elections – Biya has yet to make an appointment. ■

Beverly Ochieng is based in Dakar and is an associate director at Control Risks

Big Pic

Night light: A total solar eclipse left many in awe on Wednesday, as it cast its shadow over Russia's arctic north and parts of Europe. It was visible from northwest Africa as a partial eclipse, as seen here from Soliman Beach in Tunisia's Nabeul province.

PHOTO: FETHI BELAID/AFP



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