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The Continent



**Sudan, one
year later.**

In words and images.

Photo: Ala Kheir



THIS WEEK'S COVER STORY:

The people of Sudan are living through a grim anniversary: a year since war broke out on 15 April 2023. They could be marking a much happier one: five years since the fall of Omar al-Bashir, the dictator who ruled with an iron fist for 26 years until he fell on 11 April 2019. In this issue, analysts and writers reflect on the horrors of the year that is past – and what is still to come (p11). It's all too easy to reduce the loss of life and home to numbers, but it is deeply personal, as the lived experience of Ala Kheir – whose photography graces our cover this week – tells us (p13)

Inside:

- **Ghana:** The bright pink boxer shorts of resistance (p7)
- **Cough, cough:** Good riddance to bad medicine (p9)
- **Review:** Escaping slavery in Réunion (p17)
- **Photos:** The images that reframe Africa (p19)
- **Essay:** What does 'South Sudanese' really mean? (p24)
- **Afrobarometer:** Democracy ain't dead, but it's not as popular as it used to be (p27)



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Venice féministe: *Little Big Sister* by Beninese artist Moufouli Bello

ART

Venice Biennale leans into African art like never before

In its 60th edition, which opened today, the Venice Biennale includes national pavilions for Benin, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Senegal for the first-time ever. Chloé Quenum, Ishola Akpo, Moufouli Bello and the renowned Romuald Hazoumè have a collaborative pavilion showcasing work on Beninese feminism. Painters Tesfaye Urgessa (Ethiopia) and Alioune Diagne (Senegal) are solo exhibitors for their respective countries while Tanzania's pavilion features work by Happy Robert, Naby, Haji Chilonga and Lute Mwakisopile.

SOUTH AFRICA

Eskom uncouples from loadshedding ahead of elections

South Africa's electricity utility, Eskom, promised on Wednesday that "until further notice" it will not intentionally switch the power off. The company has kept the lights on for 21 consecutive days, the longest break from loadshedding that South Africans have enjoyed in the past two years. *Unplanned* power outages have continued, however. South Africa's old coal-burning power generation plants are largely no longer fit for purpose and corruption at the power company undermined investment in new plants.

MALAWI

No jaunts to the US on the cards for Sattar's hench-pals

Four top Malawi officials have been barred from entering the United States over allegations of corruption. They are ex-police chief George Kainja, former solicitor general Reyneck Matemba, former director of public procurement John Suzi-Banda, and former police service attorney Mwabi Kaluba. In Malawi, they are on a list of 80 high-profile Malawians who are alleged to have had corrupt dealings with British-Malawian businessman Zuneth Sattar.

MAURITANIA

No survivors as grim voyage ends in Brazil

Brazilian police suspect that a Mauritanian fishing boat found off the coast of Para in northern Brazil was carrying migrants from Mali and Mauritania to Spain's Canary Islands and lost its way. Local fishermen discovered it adrift in the Atlantic Ocean with nine decomposing bodies on board. Authorities believe at least 25 people boarded the vessel at the start of its journey.

TOGO

Faure's a jolly good-bad visitable fellow

The Economic Community of West African States has backtracked on the nature of its visit to Togo. It initially said the visit was prompted by "controversial [planned] constitutional reforms", but later reframed it as just an "information mission". Togo's president of 19 years, Faure Gnassingbé, wants to rejig the Constitution to scrap universal suffrage in presidential elections, which would help secure his next term.



NIGER

No room for US when putsch comes to shove

Hundreds of protesters in Niger's capital Niamey on Saturday demanded the departure of US troops. For a decade Niger

was a strategic "war on terror" partner of the US, which trained Nigerien troops, including, according to *The Intercept*, five of the soldiers who overthrew the government last July. But in March, the putschists cancelled the country's security agreement with the US and ordered 1,000 American soldiers to prepare to leave.

BURKINA FASO**‘Subversive’ French diplomats expelled**

For alleged “subversive activities”, Burkina Faso’s foreign ministry has declared three French diplomats “persona non grata” and given them 48 hours to leave the country. Since coming to power in September 2022, the country’s military junta has worked to distance the country from France, its coloniser until 1960. It’s not just Burkina Faso that wants the French gone – Niger and Mali, like Burkina Faso, are all former French colonies that are now ruled by juntas. They too are working on saying au revoir to French interest and influence in the region.



French exiteers: Burkinabè protesters gather in Ouagadougou in support of the country’s putschist government.

Photo: Olympia de Maismont/AFP

NIGERIA**Slight turbulence for private jet flyers**

Nigeria’s Civil Aviation Authority has revoked all permits for non-commercial flights, saying that anyone who owns a private jet has to reapply for its licence and be reassessed. Since November, at least three charter planes have crashed or crash landed in Nigeria, prompting the crackdown. In the latest incident, a plane overshot the runway at an airport in Ibadan, landing “safely” in the nearby bushes. Its 10 passengers were shaken but unharmed. Nigeria’s electricity minister also survived death aboard a charter plane that crashed in November.

KENYA**Doctors’ protest enters fifth week**

Kenya’s nationwide doctors’ strike has continued for a fifth week as medics demand better pay and working conditions, and improved hospital staffing levels. The government appears unlikely to meet their demands: on Wednesday, President William Ruto dismissed other leaders who have expressed solidarity with the medics, saying, “if you support the doctors’ strike, pay the money they are asking for.” The president, who sometimes sports \$50,000 watches, urged: “We must live within our means.”



Untenable: The confluence of war and drought has plunged 12-million people in Ethiopia into acute food insecurity.

Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP

ETHIOPIA

Aid needed to help state out of war-hole it dug itself

The Ethiopian government has committed \$250-million for humanitarian support for communities in the country that are facing hunger as a result of armed conflict and climate shocks (a bill the government could have lowered by not going to war in the first place). But the United Nations estimated this week that it would take at least \$1-billion in aid to assist the 21-million people who need it over the next three months. About four million of those are internally displaced people.

CULTURE

Nigerian checks off a world record from his to-do list

Nigerian chess master Tunde Onakoya had raised nearly 70,000 by press time for his charity organisation, Chess in Slums, by going after the Guinness World Record for the longest chess marathon. The current record, set in 2018 by Norwegians Hallvard Haug Flatebø and Sjur Ferkingstad, is 56 hours, nine minutes, and 37 seconds. Playing US master Shawn Martinez in New York, Onakoya and his opponent aimed to up the record to 56 hours. At the time of going to print, with just a few hours left on the clock, they were still playing.

IRAN-ISRAEL

Shadow war spills out into the open

After years of arm's distance antagonism, Israel and Iran have launched attacks on each other's soil. Last Saturday, Iran attacked Israel with hundreds of drones and missiles, most of which were stopped by Israel's air defences. Four days later, Israel sent flying explosives into Iran's Isfahan region, which hosts military and nuclear facilities. The attacks increased both speculation that a full-throated regional war was imminent, and diplomatic effort to stop the escalation.

Ghana

'You cannot legislate love'

Lydia Namubiru

Texas Kadir Moro stripped down to his pink boxers and, in the company of about 15 police officers, walked to Parliament. His was a solo protest against the anti-homosexuality law passed by the House in late February.

Since Ghana's legislators want to write sex-related laws based on the standards set by religious books, Moro wants them

to focus on fornication and adultery. He says the two are more widespread in society and so have more negative impact.

"If it comes to homosexuality, what harm are they causing the society? If this is not hypocrisy and injustice, what is it?" Moro told *The Continent*. He said he would take his one-man protest to Kumasi, home to the assembly house of Ghana's traditional chiefs, who were also strong proponents of the law.

With elections at the end of the year, only one presidential candidate has spoken against the bill. "Love cannot be legislated," said the Progressive People's Party's Brigitte Dzogbenuku. ■



Short shrift:
Texas Kadir Moro
protests against
Ghana's anti-gay law.
Photo: Ernest Ankomah

Sport

'After you, sir.' 'No, no, I insist – after you!'

Sino-Africa relations take a comedic turn off the not-so-beaten track.

Chinese runner He Jie won the Beijing half-marathon last Sunday, but days later he was stripped of his laurels by race officials – as were the three African runners who finished just behind him.

Willy Mnangat and Robert Keter from Kenya and Dejene Hailu Bikila from Ethiopia had appeared to slow down just before the finish line and wave He through, prompting an outcry from onlookers and the general public.

Amid claims that the result was fixed, Mnangat had a simpler explanation: the trio were acting as pacemakers for He, who was trying to break the national half-marathon record (he did not succeed).

But authorities weren't buying it, saying that the Africans were not properly registered as pacemakers, and stripped all four athletes of their medals and prizes.

Long-distance running has exploded in China in recent years, with dozens of new events added to the calendar every year. This has led to increased ties between



Got your back: Willy Mnangat, Robert Keter and Dejene Hailu Bikila follow He Jie over the finish line. Photo: Weibo

Chinese athletes and their counterparts in East Africa, the home of all of the world's fastest long-distance runners. Chinese teams travel regularly to training camps in Kenya's Rift Valley, while runners from Kenya and Ethiopia compete in – and win – races in China. This is a burgeoning industry: companies are raking it in by sponsoring flights and visas for African athletes in return for a cut of the race fee.

Kenya's Kelvin Kiptum holds the men's marathon world record, with a time of 2:00:35. The Chinese national record is a full six minutes and 22 seconds slower – a time set just last month in Wuxi by none other than He Jie – and no one had to wave him through. ■

Health

Children's cough medicine pulled from shelves

Batches of Benylin syrup produced by Johnson & Johnson in 2021 contain high levels of a toxic chemical.

Kiri Rupiah

Days after Nigeria recalled Johnson & Johnson's Benylin paediatric syrup, other African countries have followed suit. Some batches of the drug were reportedly contaminated by the toxic compound diethylene glycol. Drug regulators in Tanzania, Rwanda and Zimbabwe joined their peers in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa with precautionary recalls.

Benylin Paediatric is a bright red, raspberry-flavoured syrup used to treat coughs, hay-fever, and allergies. Diethylene glycol is a colourless, sweet liquid typically used in antifreeze solutions and as a solvent. Ingesting it can cause intoxication, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, kidney damage and even death. Because it can be hidden in juices and sweet foods, it has featured in a number of criminal cases of poisoning.

Johnson & Johnson no longer produces Benylin. The batches that Nigerian regulators recalled were produced in South Africa in 2021 and were set to expire this month. They contained an

“unacceptable high level of diethylene glycol and was found to cause acute oral toxicity in laboratory animals”, Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control said.

Product recalls save lives, but they often come too late. The World Health Organisation and the Gambian health ministry found that at least 70 Gambian children under the age of seven died of acute kidney injury between June and October in 2022 after taking promethazine or similar drugs, *FT* reported last year.

Countries in the Global South often have less money to spend on regulatory bodies and measures, which lets substandard medicines reach the market.

On Wednesday, *The Guardian* reported on research from Public Eye, a Swiss investigative organisation, that found that consumer goods giant Nestlé adds sugar and honey to infant milk and cereal products sold in many poorer countries, contrary to international guidelines on preventing childhood obesity. In European markets, similar Nestlé products have no added sugar. ■

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The Continent

One year of war

The civil war in Sudan broke out on 15 April 2023. Two generals, who together had conspired to depose a civilian prime minister, turned on one another – with devastating consequences for everyone else. Writers and analysts reflect on a bitter anniversary.

"Even though it has been a year, there is still a sense of whiplash, of disbelief that it has actually happened, is actually happening. Every development expands the theatre of war and makes a return to peace more remote. Writing these words is a halting, painful process, like stepping on shards of broken glass ... And more jarring is that the world has gazed with indifference upon this crucible of war. The 'forgotten war' is what it's called now, when it's referenced in the international media ... One of the reasons for this is Gaza and the escalating Middle East conflict, and how they have monopolised global attention and diplomatic bandwidth for the past six months ... But the rest, I suspect, is down to what to most will seem unremarkable: this is just another African country succumbing to intractable conflict."

Sudanese journalist Nesrine Malik, writing in *The Guardian*

"You do not have two hours that pass in Khartoum without hearing gunshots. You do not have a single day or a single night that passes without the sound of bombs,

whether it's shelling or airstrikes. It's every single day ... the longer it is left like this, the worse it is for people, and it can also have regional ramifications and spillover."

Joel Ghazi, emergency co-ordinator for Doctors Without Borders

"Nine million refugees and internally displaced people, millions at risk of acute food insecurity and famine – and tens of thousands of lives already lost. The world is facing many challenges, but we must ensure that the people of Sudan are not forgotten. Events in Ukraine and now Gaza have captured the attention of the world, while Sudan's collapse has become just another far-away war."

Sudanese billionaire and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim

"After one year of conflict, the egregious damage to the country and its citizens is almost immeasurable. Much of this suffering has taken place in silence as international attention is directed elsewhere ... While the conflict is

ostensibly between two warring parties – the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces – it is the Sudanese civilians who remain the main victims, especially women and children.”

Sudanese media house Ayin Network

“Both the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces are now relying on irregular forces to bolster their ranks, which has led to a proliferation of armed groups throughout the country, and we are now seeing the conflict increasingly play out along ethnic lines. This will not only put a significant obstacle to any peace effort ... but also heighten the risk of the conflict spreading beyond Sudan’s border.”

Shewit Woldemichael, Senior Sudan Analyst at International Crisis Group

“It has become a morbid sort of trivia game. Which country has the world’s largest population of internal refugees? The highest number of people facing famine? And where do aid agencies have the biggest humanitarian load, but remain 95% short of the funding they need? The answer is not, as many might assume, Gaza or Ukraine. It is Sudan.”

The Economist

“As Sudan enters its second year of this devastating war, the question is whether the African Union, countries in the region, and international actors appreciate



Top: Sudanese refugees arrive at Renk transit centre. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP
Above: People watch as rebel fighters 'graduate' from their training in southeastern Gedaref. Photo: AFP

the urgency and gravity of the imminent danger of state collapse in Sudan and whether they are able and willing to do all that it takes to avoid it. Are they willing and able to halt the supply of weapons to the warring parties and cut off their funding sources? How about establishing a rigorously monitored and enforced ceasefire ... If the AU, its member states and the wider international community care about Sudan, the region, and international peace and security enough, this is the moment to show it.”

Solomon Ayele Dersso and Tefesehet Hailu for Amani Africa ■



Cast off: People prepare to flee the war in Khartoum. Photos: Ala Kheir

Torn apart: A fractured life in limbo

Photographer Ala Kheir was using his camera to document the scars of Sudan's old wars. Then came the new war.

Mukanzi Musanga

In 2018 Ala Kheir asked his family to move from Khartoum to Cairo. After settling them in an apartment in the Egyptian capital, he returned to Sudan with his camera to document the anti-government protests that were rippling across the country. If anyone became angry with his work, they would not easily harm his family for it.

Those protests turned into a revolution.

Kheir recalls how hopeful Sudan was at the fall of dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019, after three decades of dictatorial rule. Those hopes were dashed when the Transitional Military Council toppled the interim civilian government in 2021.

As citizens resisted what they saw as a coup in disguise, Kheir kept taking photos. He was also working on a photo project that was close to his heart. Kheir's parents had moved to Khartoum from Darfur in the 1990s, and he wanted to



Relieve: A school in Gedarif, Sudan, has become home to hundreds of families fleeing Khartoum.

reconnect to his Darfuri roots. “I was creating a series that told the story of Darfur 20 years after conflict,” he says.

Every month, Kheir travelled north to see his wife, sons and mother-in-law in Cairo for a few days before returning. His trip in March 2023 would be his last.

The next month, the rift between Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, the two generals on the Transitional Military Council, escalated into all-out war.

Kheir was in Khartoum when the rival groups started exchanging salvos. Three weeks in, he fled the city.

“People were getting shot and killed in my neighbourhood streets, just near my apartment,” says Kheir. “The city was shutting down and there was no food,

water or electricity. It was a very difficult time and I wanted to be near my parents. So, I went to them in Omdurman.”

Knowing there would be checkpoints on the way and that Sudanese soldiers wouldn’t take kindly to being documented, Kheir left his camera behind.

It was at these checkpoints that the severity of what was ahead for Sudan sunk in. There, he came face-to-face with some of the men doing the fighting: soldiers of Rapid Support Forces. He describes the look in their eyes as “haunting” and “more terrifying than the dead bodies” he had seen strewn by the streets. They looked like people who were accustomed to killing; men fighting without a cause – without needing one.

“These are the same forces that have

killed thousands of Darfuri people, looted communities and grabbed land since the conflict started in 2003,” he says. “Seeing them at the checkpoints made it clear this war would not be over any time soon.”

The United Nations Refugee Agency estimates that in its first year, the war has displaced 8-million people and more than 14,000 have been killed. Furthermore, nearly half of Sudan’s population needs humanitarian aid as famine looms, yet only 6% of the funding for humanitarian response in the country has been raised. The warring groups continue to block most corridors for delivering aid.

Kheir spent three months in Omdurman, Khartoum’s twin city, before setting off to find work in Sudan’s second largest city, Wad Madani. This is the capital of Al Jazirah, the east-central state

straddling the Blue and White Nile. Using a friend’s camera, he took assignments from NGOs to document the war crisis. But by November, he also wanted out.

However, although travel between Egypt and Sudan was previously visa-free, authorities in Cairo had introduced new visa rules shortly after the war began, and were now turning away many Sudanese people, and restricting the stays of more.

It quickly became clear that Kheir could not rejoin his family in Cairo unless he paid the Egyptian government a security fee of between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Even then, he would only get a short-term visa to stay as little as a week to three months – if he was lucky.

In theory, there was a cost-free visa option for Sudanese people but he and countless others were rejected each time



Inbetween:
Refugees on the
route from Renk
to Malakal.



River refuge: A barge carries displaced families between rocks and hard places.

they applied. He got his sixth and most recent rejection this month.

“Sometimes they refuse you right there and then, other times they ask you to come back after they have assessed your application, only to decline your entry without any explanation,” Kheir says. “The real reason that Egypt is afraid of letting us in is that there already so many Sudanese people in the country.”

The United Nations’ refugees agency says that 300,000 Sudanese refugees have entered Egypt since last April, and 250,000 more are waiting to join them. This week, the agency appealed for \$175-million in aid to help maintain the support they are providing refugees from the conflict.

Kheir eventually took a job in the United Arab Emirates, so that he could pay for the apartment in Cairo and support his parents and his younger brother, who remain in Sudan.

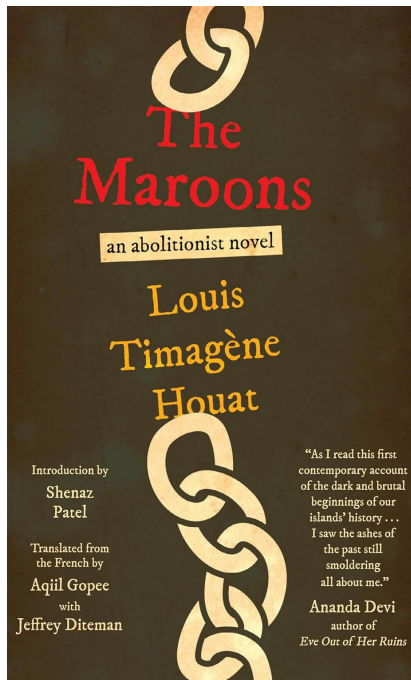
He tries to video call his family as much as possible. His eldest son is eight years old, and his youngest is two. He is distressed by the prospect of missing their formative years. “I try to help my eldest with his school work and other things virtually, to stay connected,” he tells *The Continent*. But he does not know when he will see them again.

Kheir’s story is not unique.

Far from it. The story of Sudan at the moment, as the war rages on, is of the loss: of home, of family and of life.

But Kheir and other young revolutionaries like him have not totally given up hope. He dreams of going home, to Khartoum, and starting again.

“I loved exploring that city. Most of my personal photography was about engaging and connecting with it. My relationship with Khartoum goes deeper and remains special to me.” ■



Marooned in the mountains

Réunion Island's very first
novel reveals a neglected
history of enslavement.

Jacqueline Nyathi

After a botched sedition trial for allegedly plotting to unsettle the settlers from Reunion Island, Louis Timagène Houat was exiled to France

where he became a physician, and also wrote this novel. The very first Réunionese novel!

Written in 1844 and newly translated into English by Aqil Gopee and Jeffrey Diteman, *The Maroons* is the story of four enslaved people who plan their escape. They've been brought to Réunion from Madagascar and other places.

One young man in the group manages to reach a remote part of the island where he meets a couple: a black man, Frème, and his white wife, with their young child. Frème was born free, but the couple moved from the village where their relationship was frowned upon to the mountains where they live among other maroons (although we don't meet them in the book, and only hear rumours of them). Later, the escaped enslaved man is recaptured and taken back to his cruel master, but he escapes again.

The escape attempt of his three friends as they try to recross the ocean fails. They are caught, and are set to be executed as an example to other enslaved people.

While the plot itself is not particularly engaging, *The Maroons* paints a vivid picture of the cruelty of slavery in French territories, and Réunion Island in particular. Also important is that this is a portrayal of the slave trade on the eastern side of Africa, across the Indian Ocean, neglected in literature and already partly forgotten in collective memory. As such *The Maroons* provides a snapshot of this important part of history. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"How do you fit 20,000 elephants into a Volkswagen?"



Photo: Peter Adams/
Avalon/Universal Images
Group via Getty Images

- 1_** Which country recently threatened to send Germany 20,000 elephants?
- 2_** The Bamoun kingdom was a state in which present day country?
- 3_** What were German West Africa's two territories?
- 4_** What country did the Togoland protectorate become?
- 5_** "The Slave Coast" was a historical name used for parts of East or West Africa?
- 6_** European traders called what is now Liberia the "Pepper Coast". What was the alternative name they used?
- 7_** Who was Ghana's president from 2012 to 2017?
- 8_** The Republic of Sudan gained independence from Egypt and the UK in which year?
- 9_** South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in which year?
- 10_** Who has been president of South Sudan since independence?

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



Vincent Haiges won the Africa Singles category of the 2024 World Press Photo Contest. © Vincent Haiges, Republik, Real 21

Kibrom Berhane (24) greets his mother for the first time since he joined the Tigray Defense Forces, two years earlier. Saesie Tsada, Ethiopia, 21 September 2023.

ANALYSIS

African photography's new era

Nii Obodai

Africa has been making significant strides in the world of photography, with our emerging photographers breaking free from colonialism's clutches. We are embracing technology and knowledge to define our inner visions and narrate our stories on our own terms. The healing process is ongoing as we navigate a world still affected by the insensitive nature of past documentary photography.

Bringing some of the most progressive definitions of Africa's visual narrative, the jurors – Fiona Wachera (Kenya), Nariman

El-Mofty (Egypt), Sodiq Adelakun Adekola (Nigeria), Candice Jansen (South Africa), and myself from Ghana as chair, were acutely aware of the responsibility to avoid framing African stories through old visual stereotypes that have caused deep damage. In the plethora of submissions, we found local stories told by local storytellers who deserve recognition for their sensitivity and determination.

Heartfelt congratulations and deep gratitude to the winners of the Africa Regional Contest. Your vision, determination, and visual sensitivity have inspired us all. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Valim-babena

South African photographer Lee-Ann Olwage won this year's World Press Photo Contest's Story of the Year category for documenting one family's care for an elder with dementia. The story illustrates the Malagasy principle of valim-babena – the duty of grown children to help their parents.

In Madagascar, the public is often unaware of dementia, meaning that people displaying symptoms of

memory loss are often stigmatised. For years, Paul Rakotozandriny, “Dada Paul” (91), who lives with dementia, has been cared for by his daughter Fara Rafaraniriana (41).

Olwage's approach to the project has been described as dignified and intimate, and her resulting story as one that “resonates with families across the world, while challenging conflict-focused stereotypes of Africa”.

Photos: © Lee-Ann Olwage, for GEO



Sunday best: Dada Paul Rakotazandriny (91), who is living with dementia, and his granddaughter, Odliatemix Rafaraniriana (5), get ready for church on Sunday morning at their home in Antananarivo, Madagascar. 12 March 2023





In it together: Joeline (Fara) Rafaraniriana (41) and her daughter Odliatemix share their home in Mandrosoa Ivato, Antananarivo with Dada Paul, Fara's father. Fara is the sole provider for the family and must split her time between caring for her father, work and raising her daughter.



Family feast: Fara watches Dada Paul clean fish at their home on a Sunday afternoon. A typical Sunday for the family involves attending church in the morning and spending time together in the afternoon. Dada Paul may be living with dementia, but he is still able to help with household chores like carefully cleaning and preparing the fish for their meals.



ESSAY

Being South Sudanese

It's complicated.



Magdalene Chol Thon

My life as a South Sudanese has been a difficult yet beautiful journey.

I was born in a town called Nimule, on the border with Uganda. My family had relocated from the northern city of Malakal, the capital of Upper Nile state. My father was at the forefront of the civil war with the North Sudanese – unlike his brother, who went to the United States to study engineering.

My father, a freedom fighter, moved to Nimule and my elder siblings and I were born there. The younger ones were born in East Africa later on.

Because of my father's patriotism, all of us were proud to be known as South Sudanese. He fought hard for the freedom of our country and almost lost his life countless times. Because of the war, he was rarely home during my childhood.

It was difficult for us and, of course, for him as well. This went on until 9 July 2011, when South Sudan finally became an independent country. We all celebrated the birth of this new country.

Later that year my father came back home alongside other soldiers, but he was in low spirits. Asked about it, he said: "Acin ki piec e' tong, achin miet de' piou eyuok thieng – there's nothing good about war, and there's no happiness in it."

In other words, violence should not be the only way to attain that which you seek. He believed that there was always a more peaceful approach to resolving conflict. With that in mind we grew up with the mentality of resolving our differences peacefully.

It was difficult for others to accept this resolve. They called it cowardice; I called it civilisation.

In 2013, a year after my family moved to Uganda to further our education, civil war broke out in South Sudan, starting in the north and making its bloody way southward.

We grew up with the mentality of resolving our differences peacefully. It was difficult for others to accept.

My relatives who stayed in Malakal were affected greatly by the war, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and widespread destruction of property. Many people fled their homes in search of sanctuary. All of this represented another setback to our political and social development as a country.

Being South Sudanese in a Ugandan school was difficult. We were bullied for our dark skin and height. Children and adults called us names and made fun of our skin tone. We could have fought them and scared them off but we had learned otherwise. My dad had taught us that violence is never the answer.

The bullying was sometimes so unbearable that it made me despise my skin tone. I grew ashamed of my dark skin and origin as a South Sudanese. I often looked around at other South Sudanese who had changed their lifestyle to adapt to the foreign culture, and they bleached their dark skin to fit in.

I could not judge them: it was a desperate attempt to escape

discrimination and stigmatisation, and for some it proved effective. No one talked and whispered behind their backs as they passed by. I envied them that.

Life grew harder yet, over time, and so did my insecurities – but as I thought about it, I realised that changing how I look would only make me lose my identity as a South Sudanese.

Just because it was easier did not make it right. I could try to be someone else, but then who would try or want to be me? I always asked myself this question – because as simple as it seemed, it demanded a difficult answer.

I had only one answer: No one would want to be me because I would have no identity. If I lose myself then I lose the South Sudanese in me, and if I fail as a South Sudanese then I fail the millions of people that lost their lives for my country.

As I thought about it, I realised that changing how I look would only make me lose my identity as a South Sudanese. Just because it was easier did not make it right.

And with time I realised that the problem was not with others. It was within us. We tend to forget that this was the country we fought for, and that our forefathers fought for.

Currently when information about our country is sought on the internet, nothing positive shows up. Just negative information about the civil wars and corruption, which is why people from around the world look down on us and discriminate against us. Their negativity is based on the bad image about us.

To change that image we must address and fix the major problems affecting us as citizens.

We must reimagine our country, but to do that we must first appreciate the beauty of being who we are – because only when we truly know and understand who we are can we come together in unity and rebuild this precious country.

It was indeed difficult to grow up and live as a young South Sudanese, facing discrimination and stigmatisation. But just because it can be difficult does not make it a crime to be seen as one.

I study hard each day to get enough knowledge to rebuild my country, but I never forget to pause and appreciate the beauty of being a citizen of this one.

And I always try to put it out there for people going through the same problems: be proud of yourself and of your identity as a South Sudanese, because it is a luxury we are getting after so many lives were sacrificed.

I am proud and every other South Sudanese should be just as proud of who we are as citizens of this great country. ■

This essay, first published in The Continent, won the third Christopher Allen Prize for Writing. Christopher Allen was a journalist who was killed in 2017 while reporting on the conflict in South Sudan. The prize was established in his honour by his parents, and is open to all secondary school students of South Sudanese descent living in Africa.

Do Africans really want elections?

A year like this one, packed with elections all across the continent, seems like a good time to ask some basic questions, starting with: Do Africans even want elections?

The answer, based on 53,444 interviews in 39 African countries, is a resounding yes – but not as much as they used to. Three quarters (75%) say fair elections are the best way to choose their leaders. Strong majorities support elections in all surveyed countries except Lesotho (44%).

But Africa's passion for elections isn't what it used to be. Across 29 countries where we've asked consistently since 2011, the preference for elections has declined by eight percentage points, including massive drops in Tunisia (-24 percentage points), Burkina Faso (-19), and Lesotho (-19). Sierra Leone is the only surveyed country where support for elections increased significantly (+13).

Why the decline? Maybe we're disillusioned after too many rigged or violent elections. Or we recognise that elections by themselves don't guarantee democracy or reliable electricity.

Still, it appears that most of us see elections as an essential if imperfect tool – one we might as well use. ■

Change in support for elections | 29 African countries | 2011-2023

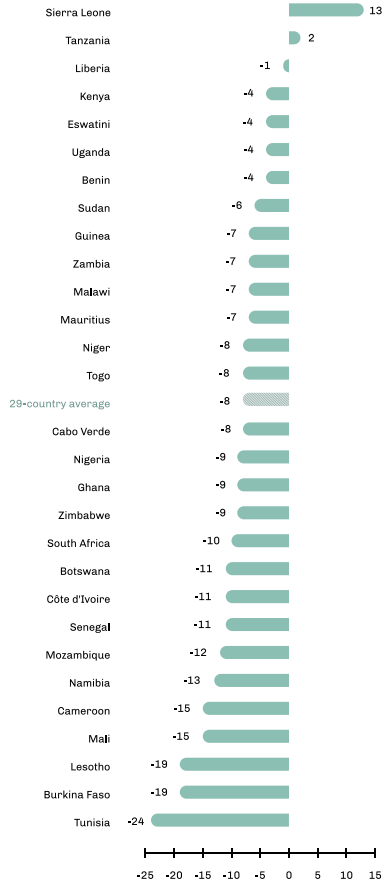


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2011/2013 and 2021/2023 in the proportion of respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that leaders should be chosen through elections.

Source: Afrobarometer is a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.

Sometimes someone pretending to be wise will say that you can't blame others for your own misfortunes – you might as well blame the sun, the moon and the stars.

First off, that sounds like something someone with a pith helmet and a flag and zero understanding of historical trauma and accountability would say. And secondly, they're absolutely right – it's time the sun and the stars answer for their crimes! And all the other planets, in fact, even if they're just the sun's hangers-on.

Which, dear reader, is why we have been dedicating ourselves to the scholarly pursuit of astrological shenanigans and their role in some of the unacceptable turns of fate that have imposed themselves on our lives.

Astrology tells us that assigning blame to big blobs of heated gas and rocks in the sky is exactly the sort of thing a Scorpio would do. And seeing as your devoted columnist is a Scorpio, and that's exactly what she's doing, astrology is ipso facto real and legitimate and our reasoning is perfectly sound, thank you very much.

Now. Having established the scientific validity of it all, we may consider how this applies to the footsoldiers of fate who

govern not just their own (mis)fortunes, but the actual countries we live in. Our dear leaders – whose star signs, rising signs, and sun signs should not be seen simply as fodder for weekly columns in the best newspapers on the planet, but also as matters of national, regional and global security.

Take Cameroon's President Paul Biya for example. An Aquarius, obviously.

Yes, yes, it's true that Aquarians are the most innovative of all the signs, but they also require appreciation and love. (That's astrological code for "attention-seeking".)

So of course Biya would find the most innovative way to ensure he is always appreciated: by staying in power for over 40 years!

Our Ugandan fave Yoweri Museveni, meanwhile, is a Virgo: a hardworking, sensitive perfectionist. So all of you who criticise M7 for being in office for 38 years need to understand that he can't quit till everything is perfect – and quite clearly he has a heck of a long way to go, and every time you complain about him he gets so frazzled he has to start over!

Those of you who have called out Kenya's President William Ruto for his frequent trips abroad should also quieten

Celestial accountability



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani



Sign of the times: According to Google, Aquarians like Cameroon's President Paul Biya are innovative but risk being out of touch with reality. Photo: AFP

down. Billy is a Sagittarius: passionate, curious and born to explore – so he was always destined to do the whole “I catch flights while you catch feelings” thing.

As for being curious, why, just this week Billy expressed his curiosity over why officials who support striking medics don't just pay them the money they're asking for out of their own darn pockets.

He also said that the government has “real issues we want to deal with”. Imagine a president thinking that a healthcare system that millions of people depend upon is not a “real issue”. Astrologically, this is probably the moon's fault because that's some loony thinking right there.

In our studies, we learned from experts on Instagram that Mercury is in retrograde. Apparently this has nothing to do with thermometers, unless you count global warming – which, now that we think about it, seems perfectly reasonable – but rather means that “everything that can go wrong *will* go wrong”.

This clearly explains why the mercurial Manny Macron and his French lieutenants are so out of sorts, and ties in neatly to this week's episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, which comes to us from Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou. There, the military junta has declared three French diplomats persona non grata, accusing them of “subversive activities” and giving them 48-hours to leave the country. Branding the accusations “unfounded”, Macron's government is anything but over the moon about it.

That Frexit energy is really holding strong among some of our Coupdashians, including Chad's transitional president Mahamat Déby. Ahead of elections in a couple of weeks, Déby was asked by Radio France International about whether he would respect the two term limit or if an election win would begin the creation of a “Déby dynasty”.

A bold question to ask of an Aries, who are driven by competition, rivalry and pursuit of their hearts' desire.

Yet he replied that it would be one and done? And that he would respect the Constitution? But then he keeps changing the Constitution, so we're starting to think that maybe astrology has its limits.

After all, we don't need a horoscope to show us the horrors all around us: climate change, genocide, wars both civil and decidedly un-

So why look to the stars when the Earth itself around is in such dire shape?

We will *not* take the blame for all that has gone wrong. But maybe it is up to us to make sure that it all starts going right. ■

Hassling the hustler

United only in making Ruto sweat, Kenya's opposition is divided on ideals and deal-making.

Westen K. Shilaho

Raila Odinga's Azimio alliance, the main opposition force in Kenya, was a marriage of convenience put together to prevent William Ruto from winning the presidency in 2022. Its leaders had little in common in terms of ideology – indeed, key protagonists such as Odinga and then president Uhuru Kenyatta had been fierce rivals right up until the notorious “handshake” that made them allies.

Opposition to Ruto remains the one thing holding Azimio together. After failing to keep him out of State House, Azimio is now focused on making life as difficult as possible for Ruto's Kenya Kwanza government. The lack of meaningful common purpose means that Azimio is fractious, with various leaders competing for supremacy. And it has hamstrung itself in at least two other ways.

First, Azimio continues to place the blame for its electoral defeat on rigging – a charge they have failed to substantiate – rather than facing up to their own limitations, and improving their structure and approach accordingly.

Second, its leaders have at times used the leverage gained from disruptive mass protests last year to force Ruto to make personal concessions – such as access

to high status quo jobs – rather than actually improving the status to benefit all Kenyans. Things may get even more challenging before the next elections.

The personal benefits Odinga gained from the recent negotiations between Azimio and Kenya Kwanza – such as being Kenya's candidate for African Union Commission chair – will deepen the criticism that his influence is for personal benefit rather than communal gain. They also put him in Ruto's debt, meaning that Azimio's criticism of the government will be muted, undermining its popularity.

Odinga's bid for a top AU post has also exacerbated the Azimio succession battle. His former running mate Kalonzo Musyoka, and prominent supporters such as Ali Hassan Joho, the former governor of Mombasa, both have presidential ambitions but neither has Odinga's political weight or national profile.

Despite Ruto's falling popularity, this means that Azimio may struggle to defeat him with and without Odinga as its presidential candidate. ■

Westen K. Shilaho is a Kenyan international relations scholar at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



THE BIG PICTURE

Rite of way: Young girls, dressed in their glorious best, make their way to Korite or Eid al-Fitr celebrations in Cap Skirring, Senegal, to mark the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan last week.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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