

The Continent

Ghosts of empire





COVER Lesotho has convicted a former South African navy officer with possession of marijuana. But the real reason he was arrested? His links to a territorial controversy over the return of land incorporated into South Africa during the 19th century. The Basotho Covenant Movement's claim to more than 200,000km² of South Africa echoes other calls to redraw African borders based on precolonial rights or historic grievances. These disputes resurrect a question the African Union's predecessor tried and failed to put to rest in 1964. Whether it is Somali-speaking people's irredentism in the Horn of Africa, Rwanda in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, or the 50-year Sahrawi crisis, the borders of empire are a thorn in many sides (p11).

Inside

- 7 Guinea-Bissau:** What's one more coup, between friends?
- 9 DRC:** M23 puts Goma boss on ice for beating civilians
- 15 Gaza:** Surviving the 'ceasefire'
- 21 Travel:** The hills in Maragoli, Kenya are ancient, beautiful and brutal – even on leg day
- 25 Data:** At this point we probably need 365 days of activism against gender-based violence
- 26 Review:** Shapeshifting creativity from Adekunle Gold



SUBSCRIBE

Get the latest edition of *The Continent*, plus every back issue (all 221 of them) by visiting thecontinent.org.

To subscribe (for free!), save *The Continent*'s number to your phone (+27 73 805 6068) and send us a message on [WhatsApp](#)/[Signal](#)/[Telegram](#). Or email us: read@thecontinent.org

THE WEEK IN BRIEF



Bubble and squeak: Cyril Ramaphosa and Donald Trump in Washington, D.C.

SOUTH AFRICA

Imaginary genocide forces Trump to bar SA from next G20

US President Donald Trump announced South Africa will not be invited to the 2026 G20 summit in Miami. He cited Pretoria's "failure" to properly hand over the G20 presidency after the just-concluded summit in Johannesburg and unfounded claims of persecution against white farmers. South Africa condemned the decision as diplomatically punitive. European allies urged Washington to reconsider — warning that the blockage undermines the G20's legitimacy. In the two decades that the group has existed, no country has ever been excluded from meetings.

KENYA

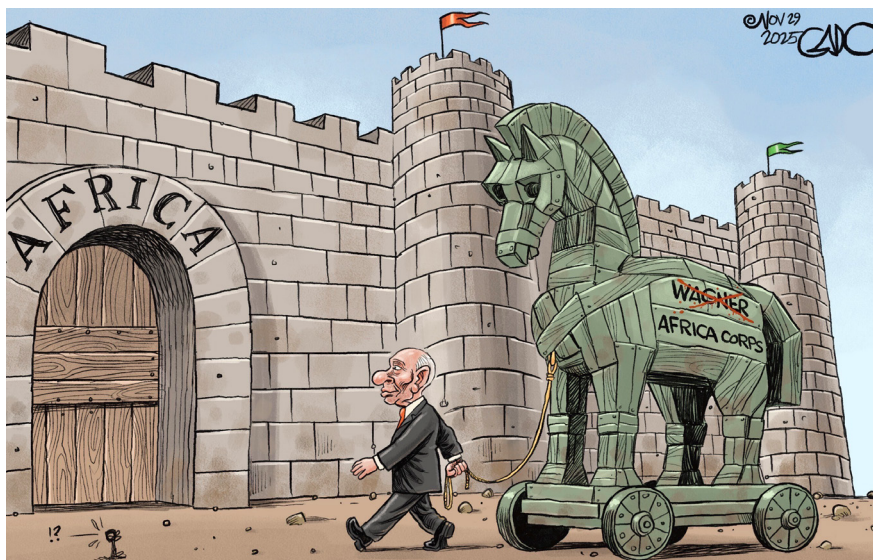
Who influences the influencers?

Several prominent Kenyan influencers and gospel artists are facing the slings and arrows of outraged social media users after flying to Israel on a fully sponsored trip, organised by the Israeli government as a cultural exchange. Critics accuse them of whitewashing Israel's global image during its ongoing genocide in Gaza by posting content of landscapes, food, and historical sites, in stark contrast to the bombings, missile attacks, and forced displacement of Palestinians reported in the region.

NAMIBIA

Let's not get hung up on names, says Adolf Hitler

A Namibian politician named Adolf Hitler Uunona is expected to win re-election this week in Ompundja, where he was first elected in 2020. Uunona is a member of the ruling Swapo party. He has long disavowed any Nazi ideology, telling German newspaper *Bild* that his father likely did not understand the historical significance of the name when it came time to record his birth. Adolf is a relatively common name in Namibia, reflecting the country's colonial-era German influence.



At the AU-EU conference in Luanda on Monday, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu warned that the growth of 'private' military contractors in Africa complicates the anti-terror fight and threatens sovereignty.

TANZANIA

Activists seek ICC charges for Suluhu

International human rights activists, including several anonymous Tanzanian NGOs, have asked the International Criminal Court to open a case against Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan for crimes against humanity during the crackdown on protesters after the October elections. The activists submitted an 82-page dossier detailing instances of murder, torture, rape and abduction. They estimate Tanzanian security forces killed between 700 and 3,000 protesters.

UGANDA

'Sorry fam, you're too stable to be a refugee'

Uganda will stop granting refugee status to asylum seekers from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, saying those countries no longer experience active armed conflict, *Daily Monitor* reports. Officials also say dwindling funding is making it difficult to sustain the open-door policy. The change will not affect those already holding refugee status, only new applicants. The country hosts over two million refugees; more continue to arrive from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan where fighting is ongoing.



PHOTO: DANIEL BELUMNOU OLOMO/AFP

Inciteful? Cameroon would like a word with Issa Bakary, currently a guest of Gambia.

GAMBIA

Run for office, run from officers

Gambia is temporarily hosting Cameroonian opposition leader Issa Tchiroma Bakary after a disputed election returned President Paul Biya to an eighth term, triggering deadly protests. Gambia said Tchiroma arrived on 7 November and is being sheltered on humanitarian grounds, while it works with regional partners to ease tensions, *AP* reports. Tchiroma insists he is the legitimate winner of the 12 October vote. Cameroon's government has said it plans to take legal action against him for allegedly inciting the violence, which has left dozens of people dead.

MALAWI

No fertile ground this planting season

President Peter Mutharika has admitted that Malawi is entering the 2025/26 planting season without enough fertiliser, saying procurement is seriously behind schedule. "We are struggling with supplies... we are not yet ready," he told an International Monetary Fund delegation. This confirmed months of warnings from farmers and civil society. The Malawian government is under severe strain, with a foreign-exchange shortage, unstable fuel supplies, and heavy debt repayments all undermining its ability to secure essential agricultural imports, the *Nyasa Times* reports.

MALI

Mining standoff resolved, for now

Canadian mining group Barrick says it has reached a deal with Mali to end a two-year dispute over the Loulo-Gounkoto gold complex, *The Financial Times* reports. The agreement will restore Barrick's control of the mines. Four detained employees will also be released. The dispute was triggered in 2023 after Mali rewrote its mining code, which lets the state own up to 30% of new mining projects. Barrick has now agreed to sign the code and Mali will renew the group's mining licence for the next 10 years.

ETHIOPIA

Ignored volcano finally blows its top

Hayli Gubbi – a volcano inactive for more than 10,000 years – erupted on Sunday, sending ash plumes from Ethiopia's Afar region across the Red Sea toward Yemen and Oman for hours, *Al Jazeera* reports. The volcano blanketed nearby Afdera with ash but caused no casualties. Ash plumes rose up to 14km, reaching as far as India and northern Pakistan, where flights had to be cancelled or rerouted. Ethiopian officials warn that the ash has diminished grazing areas in the nearby villages, where many herders live.

HEALTH

That spoonful of sugar isn't going down well

Nineteen African civil-society groups have urged Nestlé to stop adding sugar to baby cereal Cerelac. Their call came after Swiss investigative watchdog *Public Eye* found that Cerelac in Africa contains 6g of added sugar per portion, on average. The same product in Europe has no added sugar. Exposing young children to high sugar content can lead to chronic illnesses later in life, the WHO says. The food giant disputes *Public Eye*'s findings, claiming its "approach to nutrition is consistent across all countries".

TUNISIA

Protests aim to loosen Saied's iron grip

Hundreds of Tunisians protested in downtown Tunis on Saturday against President Kais Saied's rule. Protesters chanted anti-regime slogans and demanded political prisoners and activists be released from prison. Organisers denounced Saied's interference in the judiciary and the police and his use of the national-security apparatus against political opponents, *Arab News* reports. On Thursday, Tunisian authorities released Sonia Dahmani, a leading human rights defender who has spent 18 months in prison. Her release was



PHOTO: FETHI BELAD/AFP

Seeds of dissent: Tunisians demonstrated this week against authoritarian rule.

ordered by the justice minister and is conditional, according to Tunisian state media.

NEWS

GUINEA-BISSAU

Army head elbows in

N'Tam's putsch has quashed vote-count bickering, as the incumbent supposedly languishes under armed guard. But critics suspect a ruse, with even more shenanigans afoot.

GENERAL Horta N'Tam, the Soviet-trained boss of Guinea-Bissau's army, was sworn in as the country's new head of state on Thursday, a day after the military announced it had taken control of the country and arrested President Umaro Sissoco Embaló.

The coup aborted a bitter presidential contest in which both Embaló and his main challenger, Fernando Dias, claimed electoral victory.

On Wednesday, the day before official election results were due, gunfire erupted outside the presidential palace and near the offices of the interior ministry and electoral commission in Bissau. Military officers then announced that they were suspending the vote count "to prevent manipulation of the electoral process".

Meanwhile, Embaló told a news agency that he had been deposed and was being detained. Dias, the electoral commissioner, and senior military officials were also reportedly arrested.

Embaló had the opportunity to become Guinea-Bissau's first president in 30 years to secure a second consecutive term. He had



PHOTO: PATRICK MEINHARDT/AFP

Beret that order: Brigadier General Denis N'Canha conveys the crux of the coup's plan.

already arguably overstayed his tenure, dissolving parliament in 2023 and repeatedly delaying elections.

During his tenure, Embaló claimed to have survived coup attempts on several occasions but critics accuse him of fabricating the crises to suppress dissent. Even the most recent coup is being read in some quarters as "simulated".

Per the *BBC*, civil-society coalition Popular Front has alleged Embaló orchestrated the recent coup to block election results that might have been unfavourable.

This latest military takeover is Guinea-Bissau's ninth coup or attempted coup since independence in 1974. ■

NIGERIA

T-Pain finally throws muscle at cascading kidnap crisis

The president also told officers to stop focusing on VIPs and protect the children who are being abducted.

HUSSAIN WAHAB IN OYO

PRESIDENT Bola Tinubu declared a nationwide security emergency on Wednesday and ordered the recruitment of 20,000 additional police personnel, which will bolster forces to 50,000. Tinubu also authorised the use of National Youth Service Corps camps for training and directed officers to redeploy from guarding VIPs to conflict zones.

The measures follow the abduction of more than 300 students and 12 teachers from St Mary's Catholic School in Papiri, Niger State, on Friday – one of the largest school kidnappings since Chibok in 2014. A week earlier, two dozen schoolgirls were kidnapped from a school in Kebbi State. On Monday, 11 people, including a pregnant woman, were abducted in Isapa, Kwara State.

All 24 schoolgirls kidnapped in Kebbi have since been rescued through negotiations and military pressure. Officials in Niger State say 50 of Papiri pupils have also been freed, as have all 38 abductees from a church in Kwara.

Militants and bandits see schools as soft targets for abductions. The sheer scale of ongoing nationwide attacks has forced Nigerian state governors into defensive mode. Last week, Kebbi and Niger states ordered the immediate closure of most public institutions of higher education. Zamfara and Kaduna states ordered similar shutdowns earlier.

Education experts warn the closures will have long-term costs. “Whoever opens a school door closes a prison ... it implies that he who closes a school opens a prison door,” said Mahfouz Adedimeji, vice-chancellor of the African School of Economics in Abuja. ■



PHOTO: BILUS DAUMA YOHANNA/AFP

Gone girls: Empty bunks at St Mary's in Papiri, where 25 pupils were kidnapped this month.

DRC

M23 send its torture mayor to the naughty step

SEMENI KITOKO IN GOMA

LEADERS of M23 – the March 23 Movement paramilitary group occupying large parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – have suspended their mayor of Goma, Julien Katembo, for 15 days after he ordered troops to beat civilians. A video emerged last Saturday of men in military uniforms beating two men with sticks for allegedly absconding from mandatory community service.

The mayor told a press conference that day that the victims, a bus driver and his conductor, had skipped *salongo* – the mandatory sanitation work that M23 introduced to Goma – and attempted to flee when accosted. A similar exercise called *umuganda* happens in Rwanda every last Saturday of the month. In Goma, M23 authorities mandated it for every Saturday morning.

“When we caught [the driver], we punished him with 10 lashes, and he will spend two days in jail without paying any fines,” Katembo told the press. However, M23’s deputy governor



PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AFP

When putsch comes to shovel: Goma residents do mandatory sanitation work, enforced by M23.

of North Kivu, Willy Manzi Ngarambe, suspended the mayor, describing his actions as a “serious breach” of M23’s values and code of conduct.

Critics of the occupation were unimpressed. “I think it’s a bitter mockery,” said Aimable Gafurura, a human rights activist from Goma living in exile, arguing that the 15-day suspension is a slap on the wrist given the mayor’s actions.

Human rights activists have documented numerous cases of beatings and torture in the city by the M23 officials who control the region.

One resident, Paul* told *The Continent* his brother Simba had been severely whipped by M23 men while they detained him in a dungeon. “He was released in critical condition and hospitalised. He died a few days later.” ■

* Name changed to protect the source’s privacy

*It is time.
Help us grow by
filling out The Big
Annual Survey™*

SURVEY



**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of The Continent *and* The Friday Paper



Mountain Kingdom Come: Lesotho's borders were carved out in 1866.

PHOTO: PAUL BOTES/THE CONTINENT

REPORT

Lesotho and the broken borders of empire

The African Union's predecessor accepted colonial borders, despite their injustices and contradictions. Many Africans never embraced that bargain and the faultline continues to shape politics, including in Lesotho today.

TŠOLOANE MOHLOMI IN MASERU

IN THE 19th Century, huge swathes of land around what is now the country of Lesotho were incorporated into what is now South Africa. A small but vocal movement in Lesotho wants it back, to the dismay of mortified authorities in Maseru.

In the latest chapter of this territorial controversy, which has been simmering since 2022, Lesotho authorities have set their sights on a mysterious former South African army officer, who they believe is stoking the fires of hyperlocal geodiplomatic awkwardness.

Lieutenant Sylvester Mangolele –



Repatriot: *Dr Tšepo Lipholo appears in court in Maseru earlier this year.*

PHOTO: KHOTOSFALENG KOLOI

who was dismissed from the South African navy in 2018 – appeared in Maseru earlier this month. He claimed he had been sent by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on a fact-finding mission into the imprisonment of Dr Tšepo Lipholo, a sitting Lesotho MP.

Lipholo's party, the Basotho Covenant Movement (BCM), of which he is the sole MP, has been advocating to reclaim the “conquered land” from South Africa. The former officer said the BCM had invited him to Lesotho, adding that the way Lipholo had been treated was a “miscarriage of justice”.

SADC disavowed Mangolele, and he was arrested on suspicion of impersonation and breaching Lesotho's internal security. However, he was convicted only of possessing cannabis, and fined 1,000 rands (\$58). Police spokesperson Mpiti Mopeli said the impersonation charge was

still being investigated.

A fight Maseru doesn't want to pick

The land in question – which would include most of South Africa's Free State and parts of Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, coastal Kwa-Zulu Natal, and the Eastern Cape – was cleaved off Lesotho in 1866. This was after its founder, King Moshoeshoe I, lost a war to Afrikaner forces who had trekked into the then Orange Free State looking for better pasture.

If BCM's cause were to succeed, Lesotho would go from being a 30,000km² enclave surrounded by South Africa to a 240,000km² country with access to the sea. But few Maseru politicians want this fight. Lipholo's 2023 and 2024 parliamentary motions calling for the land to be returned landed flat. Nonetheless, he has ramped up his crusade this year.

In January, the lawmaker went to

the United Nations in New York to rally international support. Caught off guard, Lesotho's government distanced itself from him. The foreign affairs minister said the government sympathised with Lipholo's claim, but his methods were "potentially dangerous and could lead to conflict between our two nations".

Local media claimed, without evidence, that Lipholo's UN trip was sponsored by Israel, which is at odds with South Africa over its war in Gaza.

At home, Lipholo's campaign continued. In a radio interview in June, he said King Letsie III and the Maseru government had turned Lesotho into South Africa's "10th province". That same month, he was arrested for "uttering seditious words", inciting public violence, and harming the reputation of the royal family when he declared himself paramount chief of Basutoland – the country's colonial name.

The charges against him were later escalated to treason, with Lesotho's security agencies claiming in July Basotho youths were being trained in military-style camps in South Africa's Free State province, allegedly to seize the disputed territory.

South African police commissioner Fannie Masemola denied the existence of these camps, but Mopeli, the Lesotho police spokesperson, insisted the claim was grounded in concrete intelligence. He told *The Continent* authorities "had a list of the youths who were about to be recruited, so we actually prevented a situation from occurring".

Lipholo was remanded to prison, his

bid for bail on medical grounds denied. This has fed BCM's narrative that he is being persecuted because the Maseru government does not dare to stand up to South Africa.

Wider homeland nostalgia

BCM's campaign is part of much wider tensions between modern African state borders and older patterns of settlement and authority. By one count, 177 African ethnic groups were arbitrarily split into discrete countries by colonial borders. Another count puts it at 230.

In 1964, the Organisation of African Unity, the predecessor of today's African Union, resolved to respect colonial borders to avoid conflicts, for the stability of the newly independent African states. The resolution left many borders that sit uneasily with local identities and historical memory.

By one count, as many as 177 African ethnic groups were arbitrarily split into discrete countries by colonial borders. Another count puts it at 230.

In eastern Africa, these claims have sporadically destabilised parts of nearly every modern state in the region. Between 1963 and 1968, an armed insurgency by Somali-speaking people in northern Kenya waged what the Kenyan government called the Shifta War. The ambition to create a Greater Somalia state in the Horn of Africa also fuelled the 1977 to 1978 Ogaden War in



Landlines: In 1964, the Organisation of African Unity – its ceremonial guard shown here at its founding in '63 – resolved to respect colonial borders to avoid conflict. No prizes for guessing how that's been going.

PHOTO: SEPP RIFF/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Ethiopia. Kenya and Ethiopia violently suppressed the insurgencies, but cross-border militant activity remains a source of insecurity in both countries.

In West Africa, soon after independence Togo laid claim to the areas of eastern Ghana inhabited by Ewe-speaking people, who were split by the colonial border. Accra responded with a counter-claim over all of Togo before both sides stepped back.

Benin and Burkina Faso remain deadlocked over who will govern the 68km² Kaolou-Kourou commune on their border. About 5,000 people live there, largely abandoned by both states.

In North Africa, the Sahrawi people want a homeland that matches their

precolonial self-identity. Their Polisario Front independence movement has been fighting Morocco for it for 50 years.

The untidy question of cultural reunification across colonial borders has also lent itself to justifying more cynical territorial ambitions. Kigali has defended incursions into the mineral-rich eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo as solidarity actions with Congolese Tutsi communities, who share language and customs with Rwandans. Meanwhile, Nigeria and Cameroon fought a long diplomatic and low-level military struggle for the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula, before the International Court of Justice awarded it to Cameroon in 2002. ■

ESSAY

Wounds in my body, scars in my heart

Days after we published her essay about reporting from Gaza amid Israeli attacks on journalists, a Palestinian reporter was injured by an explosive dropped from an Israeli drone as she walked with her family. Seven weeks into the Gaza 'ceasefire', she writes for us again.

ANSAM AL-KITAA IN GAZA

FOR TWO years of blood, death, and fear, we waited for news of a ceasefire. But when the announcement came on 9 October, my feelings froze. I couldn't believe it was real. I didn't believe the war had truly ended.

For the first weeks of the truce, fear that the bombing would return inhabited us. The Israeli occupation stole even our hope – for life, for joy, for a real end of the casualty counts and grim news bulletins.

True to our fears, the strikes never completely ceased.

We've lived through a compounded tragedy that cannot be described or imagined. Bombing, starvation, and forced evacuation.

We try, as journalists still living in Gaza, to document part of the truth and suffering, but our pens, cameras, and even our voices stand helpless before the enormity of this catastrophe.

My mind returns often to the days



Find Ansam Al-Kitaa's previous essay in The Continent Issue 212 of [The Continent](#)

before 7 October 2023 when we had lives, routines, families, and photographs.

Between then and now are the days I wish I didn't remember. Like the afternoon of 13 September 2025.

At about 1pm, I was walking with my family near Tamraz station on Al-Nafaz Street when a drone dropped an



Above: A minibus inches through floodwater at a makeshift camp for displaced Palestinians after heavy rains in Gaza City on 25 November.

Left: A Palestinian boy collects plastic near an unexploded missile at a rubbish dump in the Firas market area of Gaza.

PHOTOS: OMAR AL-QATTA/AFP

explosive. The blast was deafening. With my mother, my brother Sameh, and my brother Mohammed's wife Hala, we ran toward a nearby mechanic's shop.

I felt a sharp pain and blood quickly began pouring from my side and both of my feet. I wasn't the only one injured. Sameh was bleeding and dizzy; our mother, who was desperately checking us for injuries, seemed to be bleeding

from her entire body too. She came to me, then towards Sameh, then towards Hala. She didn't seem to feel her own pain. Her fear for us was stronger than her wounds.

For half an hour we stayed inside the mechanic's shop waiting for an ambulance that never arrived. A few young men tightly bandaged our wounds to stop the bleeding.

We found a private car that took us to the hospital, where medical teams faced a flood of injured people, each waiting their seemingly interminable turn.

The scene inside the hospital was gruesome: corridors packed with injured, bleeding, and screaming people. Beside us, an injured man was screaming in agony as he called for his fiancée who had just lost her life. Next to him, a crying mother pleaded for anyone to save her bleeding son.

I couldn't stop my tears.

I cried like I'd never done before.

Everything that had accumulated inside me during the two years of reporting the genocide came out all at once. A terrible fear that I would be hit by shrapnel had accompanied me since the start of this war. It had now come to pass. I feared that my foot would need amputation and thought: I would prefer death.

I couldn't stop my tears. I cried like I'd never done before. Everything that had accumulated inside me during the two years of reporting the genocide came out all at once.

When the doctor arrived, she sent me for X-rays. I could barely walk to the room and when I got there, the machine needed charging so I waited another half hour.

After the X-ray, my wound was dressed and, exhausted, I left for the arduous journey "home", to where we

were staying after being displaced.

I was among the lucky ones who left a hospital in Gaza with an intact body in those months.

My left foot injury began bleeding heavily again and I went to another hospital, Al-Shifa Medical Complex, because it was closer. There it was cleaned, disinfected, and I got several stitches. During that procedure, I lost consciousness from exhaustion.

About a month later, on 9 October, the truce was signed.

What truce?

Despite the "official" ceasefire, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains catastrophic, with prices still elevated beyond people's capacity to bear them.

Not enough aid arrived to satisfy the hunger of thousands of families exhausted by siege and starvation.

Even in supposed peacetime, the war inhabits the details of our daily lives – in bread lines, in the eyes of mothers searching for medicine, in children's fear of any loud sound.

We still live by force, with no luxury in our choices and no space for rest as we breathe amid the rubble and convince ourselves that survival is a form of life.

Yet, even survival was not guaranteed, as Israel broke the ceasefire to kill hundreds more people in the first three weeks. By 20 October, it had killed nearly 100 Palestinians in Gaza and wounded 230 more, *Al Jazeera* reported. In a 24-hour period between 28 and 29 October, it killed another 100 people, including 46 children.



Hope endures: Palestinian children play in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip. The conflict between Israel and Hamas has reduced much of Gaza to rubble and displaced the vast majority of its population.

Pain and anxiety from the injuries in my feet has weighed me down and forcibly distanced me from my own reporting work, which was always my only livelihood and means of resistance.

I have barely been able to change my wound dressing, which causes painful inflammation and makes walking difficult. Medicine is nearly non-existent and sterilisation tools, gauze, and antibiotics are rare. Most hospitals in Gaza have been forcibly put out of service.

Around Gaza, sporadic killings continue. On Monday, an Israeli drone killed two Palestinians east of Khan Yunis and a shelling killed another person in Gaza City.

And still we live

I try to remember my dreams before the war: a master's degree in gender and development studies felt so close to my grasp. I've begun searching again for an opportunity to continue my studies – a small attempt to reclaim myself and what was stolen. With death, injury, fear, loss, and pain, the war changed our futures and stole our dreams. Perhaps I won't recover quickly and perhaps the scars in my body and memory will accompany me for a long time. But I'll keep trying: staying alive with hope in Gaza is the truest form of resistance. ■

This article was published in collaboration with Egab

FEATURE

Call marital rape what it is, say scholars

Dubious theology, cultural conditioning, vague language, and a legal vacuum help to conflate rape with marital rights in Egypt.

FATEN SOBHI IN CAIRO

AT 17, Hala Ishaq* was married to a man 16 years older than her. She saw marriage as a path out of her village. It turned out to be 14 years of sexual coercion and violence.

A few days after the wedding, when Ishaq was having her period, her husband demanded sex and forced himself on her, ignoring her pleas that she was in pain. This became the norm in their union.

As a Christian in Egypt, Ishaq didn't know what her pathway to divorce was. Egyptian Muslim women can get divorced under provisions detailed in the Qur'an and contemporary Islamic theology, but this is less clear for Christians, who must rely on state law.

Nonetheless, Ishaq left when she began to suspect her two children were becoming aware of what was happening to her. Yet, when asked, she does not describe her experience as "marital rape" and says her husband had a right to sex as long as they were married.

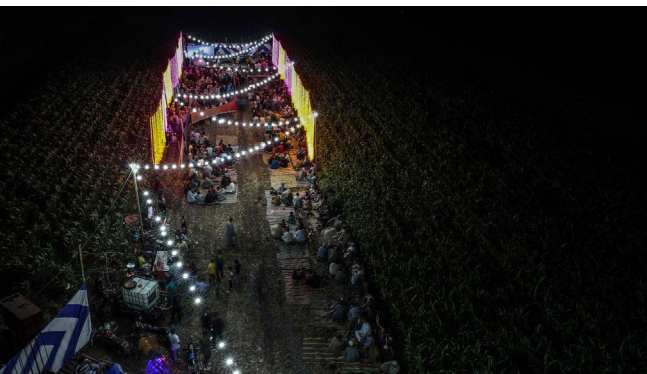
Ishaq's perception isn't unusual among Egyptian survivors of sexual violence in marriage. In what may

be Egypt's first in-depth academic examination of this taboo, scholars interviewed 15 women (aged 24 to 47) who had been in marriages marked by sexual violence for at least one year.

Many of the women struggled to define their experiences as rape. Rarely did they consider it sufficient grounds for divorce, citing their children's welfare and social stigma as the main arguments against leaving.

Instead, they described sex as a "husband's right" and those survivors who recognised forceful behaviour as wrong still avoided calling it rape. They preferred descriptors like violence or coercion, according to Nayera Shousha, who conducted the study, together with Dina Taha. The two women are social psychology professors at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

Shousha and Taha intentionally recruited women of middle-class educational and social backgrounds for their study. They wanted to control for the fact that economic dependency often keeps women trapped in abusive marriages. Even so, they still found that "patriarchal interpretations of religious texts persist, limiting women's awareness



Love, honour and obey:

Though meant as a joyous celebration of a couple's union, weddings can also serve to draw a curtain over their relationship, providing cover for violence, abuse and marital rape.

PHOTO: MOHAMED EL-SHAHED/AFP

of sexual rights and boundaries”.

Religion has also been reinforced by social conditioning. “Women are socialised to believe they belong to their husbands, available for sex whenever demanded,” says Said Sadek, professor of political sociology at the American University in Cairo.

Sexual violence within marriage is not legally considered “rape” in Egypt. As in 60% of countries worldwide, the act is not explicitly criminalised. “Even publishing research on sexual rights in Arabic is difficult, hence our decision to publish in English,” says Shousha.

The social atmosphere and legal vacuum leave women feeling they have nowhere to turn for support. Instead, Shousha and Taha found, they cope through more submission, religious justification, emotional detachment, and deeper spirituality.

A 2015 Economic Cost of Gender-Based Violence survey in Egypt found only 1% of women sought help from official institutions. About a third turned to their families after being attacked.

Sixty-five percent of those who were married stayed with their abuser.

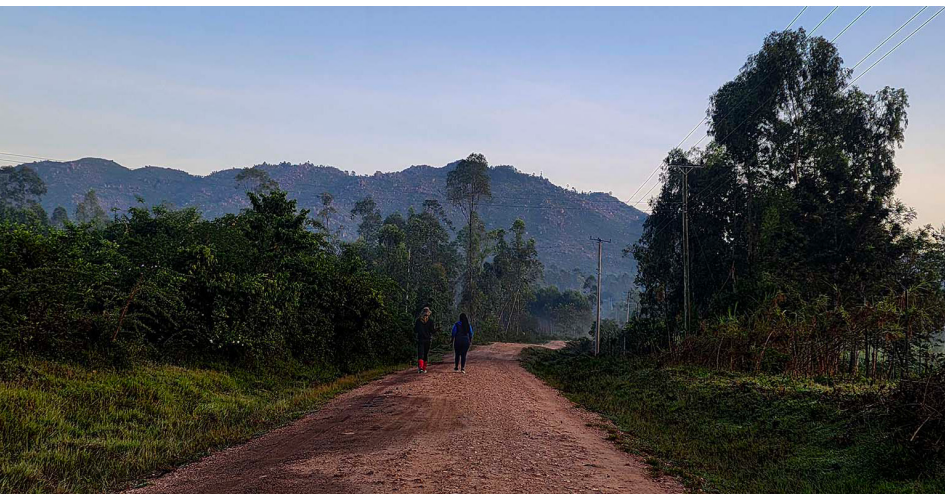
Although such statistics could suggest that women “accept” the reality, Shousha and Taha found the survivors live with physical pain, ongoing infections, anxiety, depression, self-blame, and marital resentment.

Publishing their findings in the *Journal of Family Violence* in May, the scholars recommend explicitly naming and criminalising marital rape as a starting point. Egyptian feminist groups have already begun pushing for that, says Amal Fahmy of the Tadwein Centre for Gender Studies, but she acknowledges it will be an uphill battle. “We fought a similar battle over the term ‘harassment,’ which was previously dismissed as mere ‘flirting,’” Fahmy says. “The battle for recognition of marital rape as a serious crime has only just begun.” ■

* Names have been changed to protect privacy.

This article is published in collaboration with Egab

TRAVEL



Maragoli Hills: Beautiful and brutal

**Climbing one of the hills was a good idea in theory.
It turned out I had no idea what I'd signed up for.**

WORDS: CHRISTINE MUNGAI

PHOTOS: ANTHONY AKIVEMBE

THE MARAGOLI landscape in western Kenya is unmistakable for its gigantic granite boulders rising out of hillsides and farmland. The massive stone outcrops are formed from some of the planet's oldest rocks. Over millenia, the softer layers of rock have eroded into soil, leaving these scattered ancient giants. It's like seeing the Earth's bones poke through its surface.

We drive past these intriguing rocks

every time my family travels to my husband's rural home, Maragoli. This time, we decided to get up close and booked a local hotel whose staff organised a sunrise hike to the summit of one of the Maragoli Hills. I confidently told the front-office staff to make sure our guide arrived at 6am. My husband – who was assuming photography duties – and I were ready on time and happily set off.

Within minutes, our confidence had evaporated. The climb was brutally steep – a nearly 250m elevation gain. That's



The Maragoli boulders are granite – a very hard rock threaded with veins of shiny quartz that also appear as glassy crystals. Granite is extremely hard but it has joints that crack easily. These cracks provide entry points for water, air, and weak acids from soil.

equivalent to climbing an 80-storey building.

But we were outdoors, on uneven terrain, and without handrails – gripping the boulders themselves to haul our bodies from one ledge to the next. My thighs felt permanently locked in a squat. At several points I was practically on all fours. There was a defined trail but

following it required sheer upper-body strength.

After more than an hour of scrambling over gigantic boulders, we came to a village of about 15 homes perched on a small plateau near the summit, surrounded by plots of maize, beans, and millet. Our guide, Tom, explained that the nearest school is at the base of

the hill, exactly where we had begun our climb. Children here make this ascent and descent every single day, he said nonchalantly, as I gasped for breath.

The nearest school is at the base of the hill, where we had begun. Children here make this ascent and descent every day.

The descent was no easier. The boulders weather into a loose, sandy soil that makes slipping a hazard with every

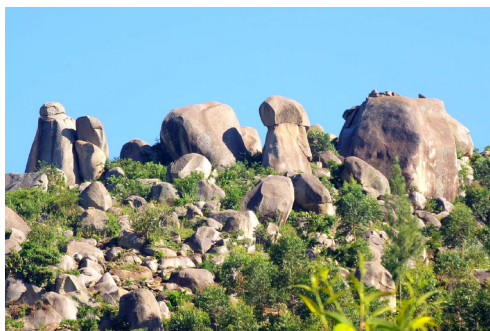
step. We had to inch cautiously down the inclined slabs of rock – some with dangerously exposed jagged veins of quartz. What I had confidently assumed would be a two-hour outing stretched into five gruelling hours.

“How was it?” the amused front office staff asked brightly, when we finally returned to the hotel, dusty and exhausted. They had clearly known what we were in for. I, absolutely, had not. ■

Christine Mungai is news editor at The Continent



The boulders look polished, almost as if they were shaped underwater. Our guide Tom told us that he once had a group of American tourists who insisted the whole landscape must have “just emerged from the sea”.



But this isn't the case. The smoothness of the boulders comes from chemical weathering. Rainwater in tropical regions, like here in Maragoli, is slightly acidic. When it enters the cracks, it slowly breaks down the minerals in the granite into a combination of clay and sandy soil.

The corners erode fastest, which turns sharp angular blocks into rounded giants over thousands of years. But the quartz itself is extremely durable, so it stays intact and makes the boulders endure.

The highest point of Maragoli Hills is almost 1,850m above sea level. From the top you can see Lake Victoria and the Nandi escarpment.



DATA

Unacceptable: Justifications for violence against women persist

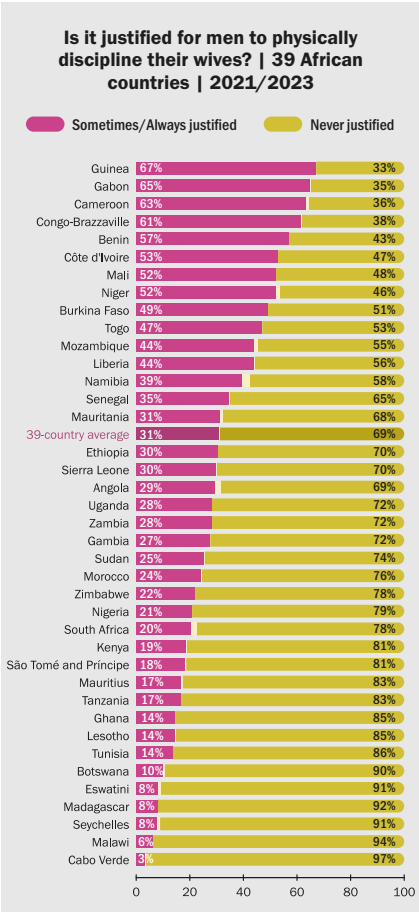
THIS WEEK is the beginning of the global campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, which runs every year from 25 November to 10 December. But maybe we need 365 days.

Why? Just ask around in Guinea, where fully two thirds (67%) of adults say a man is “sometimes” or “always” justified in using physical force to discipline his wife if she does something he doesn’t approve of. Women are just as likely as men to agree.

And Guineans are far from alone. Majorities in eight of 39 African countries surveyed between late 2021 and mid-2023 – all in francophone West or Central Africa – see wife-beating as justified.

On average across all surveyed countries, acceptance of violence against women is lower – 31% – thanks to overwhelming opposition in Cabo Verde (97%), Malawi (94%), Madagascar (92%), and other countries.

Still, wife-beating is considered acceptable in about one in three homes. That aligns closely with what happens in reality: An estimated 33% of African women aged 15-49 have experienced intimate partner violence. ■





MUSIC REVIEW

BY WILFRED OKICHE



Striking gold

Adekunle Gold's latest melds genres as only a creative shapeshifter of his calibre can.

FUJI is the album Adekunle Gold has been building up to his entire career. In this case, “fuji” works as a double entendre. The Nigerian pop star says it’s an acronym for “finding uncharted journeys inside” (don’t ask), but what Gold really wants to embody is the popular genre of Yoruba music that evolved in the sixties and soon spread across the western part of the country.

Fújì music is characterised by traditional Yoruba percussion fused

with praise-singing lyrics, Islamic chants, and call-and-response stylings. Gold borrows all of these for the overall sound of *Fuji*, but more specifically in gigantic tunes like *Many People*, *Don Corleone*, and *Oba*. In the process, he proves himself an adept student and embodiment of a culture that soundtracked his childhood years.

To the disappointment of purists, Gold hasn’t made an all-out fújì record. Even the album cover attracted criticism about his attire failing to represent the genre. Could he not dress up in more traditional regalia? Such outrage, however, fails to account for Gold’s own agency – and history. He is, after all, the once-scrawny dude who broke out with *Sade*, a localised version of a One Direction song back in 2016. And one of his biggest hits, *Ire*, lifts from Yoruba gospel artist Funmi Aragbaye.

Gold’s career has always flirted with interpolating sounds and genre without remaining fixed to any one thing. Is he a modern-day King Sunny Adé or a Davido wannabe? Perhaps both.

At this stage, Gold is arguably an international recording artist seeking creative evolution that can satisfy a huge audience. Instead of being limited by fújì’s regional restrictions, he’s subsumed them into a progressive mix as potent as it is pleasurable. Does it have to be fújì fújì? ■

The Quiz

- 1 What is the capital of Guinea-Bissau?
- 2 True or false: The Sahara Desert is the second largest desert in the world.
- 3 What is the full name of the regional economic bloc Comesa?
- 4 How many official languages does Burundi have?
- 5 Who is Botswana's president?
- 6 In which African country is the Cristo Rei statue (*pictured*) found?
- 7 Adama, Dire Dawa and Mekelle are cities in which country?
- 8 Which country is musician King Sunny Adé from?
- 9 Who was the first African to win a Grammy Award?
- 10 Kemet is an ancient name for which present-day country?



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

"Giant religious statues are usually quite stony-faced. We should welcome friendly ones with open arms."

PHOTO: MWAYOUT

COMMENT

Our leaders must shape up or be shipped out

The people are turning to a last-resort form of citizen engagement. That's a good thing.



L. MUTHONI WANYEKI

AT ABOUT 1.5-billion people, Africans account for a fifth of all humanity. Three quarters of us are younger than 35. Our political choices will colour and shape the world's political culture going forward.

Afrobarometer surveys often find democracy is our preferred form of governance. In 2024, 66% of Africans preferred democracy to one-man rule, more than one-party rule and even to military rule, despite the fact that coups d'état seem to be back in fashion.

However, Afrobarometer cautions this preference has fallen by seven percentage points over the past decade. Support for elections specifically has gone down by eight percentage points. Political party membership is also down. These slumps make sense considering that more than a third (34%) of Africans across 39 countries feel their last elections were neither free nor fair.

What's also increasing is participation in protests. Up to 9% of people (nearly one in 10 of the 1.5-billion of us) now protest to express what they feel.

Protest is a form of citizen engagement

of last resort. Africans have plenty of reason to feel these are drastic times calling for drastic measures. Our social contract is so broken that more than a third of all Africans told Afrobarometer that they experience disrespect from public servants when seeking services like identity documents (a necessity of life), public healthcare, and assistance from the police.

Yet, the state of these public services is itself nothing worth being insulted for: 81% of Africans experienced healthcare shortages of healthcare over the previous year and 64% went with little or no food. Fifty-seven percent were short of water.

In 2025, it's just not good enough, and Africans – unlike people in other places who are scapegoating already marginalised groups like immigrants – are taking the quarrel up with the right group: our leaders.

What this change in citizen engagement tells us warrants reflection. Active citizens are telling those in public office that business as usual is no longer going to cut it. The gaps between the led and the leaders will either be closed or the leaders will simply be swept away.

Electoral processes will increasingly



Smoke and errors: Protesters gather near burning buildings in Dar es Salaam, during protests against President Samia Suluhu Hassan's re-election. Increases in civil unrest are a signal to leaders that they can't assume they can go back to business as usual.

PHOTO: AFP

be assessed less on legal and regulatory frameworks (boring) or institutional set-ups (even more boring) but on outcomes. Can viable contenders stand and get in? Are the numbers being manipulated? If so, there will be many more protest fires lit on the continent.

That outcome – burning the continent to the ground – is not inevitable.

Not if our leaders revisit the political theory of delegation. If the executive effectively delegates elections to independent electoral management bodies, that can resolve their credibility and legitimacy crises.

Effective delegation is the operative phrase. Often, technocrats get caught up in institutional design and forget about institutional delivery – what the body is meant to do and whether it is doing it. It's the reverse for the people: delivery trumps design. But our electoral bodies seemingly can't even count properly.

When elections are restored from the performative shams they have become, public servants and politicians will have to start underpromising and overdelivering, instead of the opposite. They will have to actually become the

public servants they purport to be.

They will have to use the precious resources we have – including our taxes – to provide basic public goods and services: infrastructure and security at a minimum, plus investments in healthcare and education.

A social contract credibly (re-) established can deliver modestly while building the muscle, culture and framework for even more ambitious delivery. And it can give young Africans the sense there's a path out of our perfect storm and their leaders are capable of finding it.

Young people are not “our future”: they are their own now. May the tyres they burn on the streets put a fire in the leaders' bellies.

The cherry on top is that their political choice to protest is a welcome corrective to a puzzling turn in political culture taking place elsewhere on the globe: billionaire-led fascism as a response of frustrated voters to their entrenched yet indifferent ruling class. ■

Dr L. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan political scientist

Big Pic

Lifeline: A sponge farmer in Zanzibar tends to her crops near Jambiani. Each day women enter the tide to tend their allotments after climate change and overfishing upended their former work at sea.

PHOTO: MARCO LONGARI/AFP



The Continent is a member of the Press Council of South Africa. This means we adhere to its Code of Ethics. It also means that there's an independent body you can reach out to with a complaint about our reporting. That process is on their website — www.presscouncil.org.za.

**all protocol
observed.**

publisher of The Continent and The Friday Paper

The Continent is published by All Protocol Observed, a not-for-profit based in South Africa. Our home is dedicated to creating a space for African journalists to do quality journalism, which we then get to you wherever you are. For suggestions, queries, complaints, or to make a donation, please contact us at read@thecontinent.org.