The Continent



The flight path of an alleged arms shipment

ILLUSTRATION: WYNONA MUTISI



COVER: Sudan's war is drawing in more African countries. The arrest of Malawi's former military chief for alleged arms-smuggling offers a rare glimpse into the networks that keep African wars supplied. *The Continent* traced the aircraft named in his charge sheet, uncovering flights along two principal routes: Mombasa to Lilongwe and Lilongwe to N'Djamena, with the Malawian capital serving as the central transit hub. Prosecutors say the aircraft was involved in moving weapons destined for Sudan – United Nations investigators have separately documented Chad's role as a supply corridor for Sudan's Rapid Support Forces. Experts say Malawi had long been vulnerable to exploitation as a transit point for illicit cargo. But the alleged involvement of a high-ranking Malawian military official in Sudan's war threatens Lilongwe's international standing and foreign relations (p11).

Inside

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The Big Annual Survey™

We publish this newspaper each week so you can learn what's happening on this continent, and share that in conversations with other humans. To do it better, we do this big listening exercise each year (yes, American midterm buzzwords have infected our brains too). Tell us what *The Continent* means to you, does for you, why you share it, and what we can do better. In doing that you'll be taking part in one of the most-answered surveys in all of journalism. There are also some illustrations. And a photo with a couch in it.



THE WEEK IN BRIEF

MADAGASCAR

The friend of my enemy is already my frenemy

The United States has "warned" Madagascar against deepening military ties with Russia. US Africa Command's Lieutenant-General John Brennan cautioned against importing the "Sahel model" to the island. Russia has supplied Madagascar with weapons and instructors since the Malagasy army seized power in 2025. Brennan also warned Mozambique against following suit, apparently reserving for the US the right to decide which foreign powers African governments should partner with.

DRC

Felix puts another cat among the pigeons

Congolese opposition figures and activists have condemned a new law that will make it easier to hold referendums on constitutional matters. The changes are seen as part of a bid by President Felix Tshisekedi to cling to power. Meanwhile, ex-president Joseph Kabila vowed to "put an end to tyranny". Last month, Kabila was named head of a new politico-military outfit that has taken over from the rebel March 23 Movement in eastern DRC.



Anything to declare: *Police took the drugs, resealed the crates, and followed their path.*

GHANA

Cocaine coconuts? Bit on the nose

Spanish authorities have arrested two suspects linked to 2.6-tonnes of cocaine concealed in a shipment of coconuts from Ghana, *Modern Ghana* reports. The drugs were discovered in two containers in which Spanish customs officers found cocaine packages hidden beneath false compartments. Rather than seize the container, investigators removed the cocaine, resealed the cargo, and monitored its movements. Two trucks collected the containers and drove to a warehouse in Almería, where officers arrested the alleged importer and the person supervising the unloading.



UGANDA

Earnest send-him-away: The son's also risible

Senior figures in Uganda's ruling party have pushed back against President Yoweri Museveni's plans to position his son, army chief Muhoozi Kainerugaba, as his successor, *AFP* reports. A vote at an executive committee meeting was abandoned after members raised concerns about Kainerugaba's behaviour, threatening social-media posts, and mistreatment of political opponents. Some urged Museveni to move his son into a civilian role; others suggested the president, who has ruled since 1986, should seek another term in 2031.

SOUTH SUDAN

Deadly sins of omission

South Sudanese authorities and United Nations peacekeepers failed to act on warnings of a March massacre that killed more than 200 people, Amnesty International said on Thursday. On 1 March, at least 1,000 armed men attacked Abiemnom County, near Sudan, killing children among their victims. The government and UN mission had received warnings two weeks in advance that fighters in the region were preparing an attack. The massacre is one of the largest mass killings in the country since 2020, Amnesty says.



PHOTO: MUDJOURNAL.ORG

Surprise! *Simbarashe Kundizeza did not use artificial intelligence to write his short story.*

WRITING

But will *The Atlantic* use AI to write its apology?

The Caine Prize for African Writing has found no evidence Zimbabwean writer Simbarashe Kundizeza used generative AI to write his winning short story. That means Kundizeza is confirmed as the winner of this year's £10,000 ($13,000) award. Journalist Vauhini Vara said in an article published in *The Atlantic* that she had run the story through AI-detection software Pangram, which concluded the short story was entirely AI-generated. After a detailed investigation, the Caine Prize's board of trustees says the story was human-written after all.

MALAWI

Protests planned as taps and patience run dry

Malawians are planning countrywide protests next week over economic hardship and deteriorating public services, the *Nyasa Times* reports. Organisers want the government to address fuel shortages, scarce foreign currency, power cuts, medicine shortages in public hospitals, and unreliable water supply. They are also demanding the resignation of the ministers of finance, health, and energy, whom they hold accountable for these failures. The protests will test the government's response to mounting public frustration.

KENYA

Countdown to Ebola-free status kicks off

Kenya has discharged its last Ebola patient, triggering a 42-day countdown to being declared free of the disease on 23 December, Health Minister Aden Duale said on Wednesday. Kenya recorded nine infections after its first case was confirmed on 6 October, involving a traveller returning from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Seven patients recovered and two died. All identified contacts have completed quarantine. The DRC outbreak continues to worsen, with over 11,000 cases and 5,387 deaths since May.



Tree-ring circus: *Logs suggest the CAR is more at risk of deforestation than regulators believe.*

CAR

Wagner knocks on wood in its afterlife

Investigative group *The Sentry* is calling for tougher scrutiny of timber exports from the Central African Republic, citing corruption, weak oversight, and links to sanctioned actors. The country is classified as low-risk for deforestation by European Union rules. *The Sentry* wants it upgraded to medium-risk. It has urged the EU, Britain, and US to investigate firms linked to Russia's Wagner Group. The US sanctioned Wagner-affiliated timber company Bois Rouge in 2024 for alleged illicit exploitation of CAR's natural resources.



The (SUB)TEXT

CHRISTINE MUNGAI

This year's COP in Antalya, Türkiye looks set to break attendance records, with about 100,000 delegates. But the host city appears overwhelmed. The conference opened with chaotic accreditation queues of up to five hours. Meanwhile, trams struggled with the crowds, shuttle buses were packed or broke down, and 45-minute journeys turned into hours-long ordeals. Some delegations reportedly paid for private transport to reach meetings on time. Others – particularly those from the Global South – ended up missing crucial opening negotiations, putting them at a disadvantage from the get-go. Delegates had gathered to negotiate climate finance and the inequalities that determine who can afford to adapt to a warming world. Yet right outside the negotiating rooms, those with money could buy their way past the chaos, whereas those without it were left stranded. The negotiations hadn't even started and the divide delegates had gathered to discuss was already on display. ■

NEWS

NAMIBIA

Let it slide? Standards slip when there's oil greasing the wheels

Dangote's latest energy megaproject lacks environmental permits and locks countries into power that pollutes.

TRACY TAFIRENYIKA IN WINDHOEK

NIGERIAN billionaire Aliko Dangote has broken ground on a $2.5-billion petrol and diesel storage project alongside Namibian President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah.

Dangote's pitch is to turn the coastal Namibian town of Walvis Bay into a fuel-logistics hub.

It will hold 600-million litres of fuel from Dangote's refinery in Nigeria. A 1,700km pipeline will supply Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, with potential extensions to Malawi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

But the ceremony took place before the required environmental clearances were approved.

Environmental ministry spokesperson Vilho Angula told *The Continent* that land zoning clearance had been applied for, but applications for tanks and pipelines have not been submitted.

Angula said the project has "a lot of phases", each requiring clearance, adding that the ministry had "started engagements" on the required steps.

Environmental and political analysts have raised concerns that the president is kickstarting and endorsing the project without environmental approval.

"Developers are welcome to celebrate investment and announce their intentions, but they must not create the impression that a project is approved when important regulatory processes are still outstanding," political analyst Ndumba Kamwanyah told *The Continent*.

Petrol and diesel are also polluting fuels, with countries meeting this week in climate negotiations in Türkiye aimed at keeping the world habitable.

Energy expert Harald Schütt described the project as economically and environmentally outdated and hazardous, instead calling for investment in renewable-energy resources.

"If diesel consumption is expected to peak in about 2030, it is questionable whether Dangote will have recovered his massive investment by then," Schütt said. ■

KENYA-ETHIOPIA



PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AFP

Refuge: *Displaced Ethiopians queue for relief supplies on the Kenyan side of the border town of Moyale.*

Out of the frying pan and into the fire

MUKANZI MUSANGA IN NAIROBI

MORE THAN 50,000 Ethiopians who fled violent clashes to seek refuge in northern Kenya are facing severe hunger, according to a report by the International Organisation for Migration.

Intercommunal clashes broke out last month in Ethiopia over a territorial dispute between Ethiopia's Oromia and Somali regional states, forcing families to flee to the border town of Moyale, Kenya.

The migration organisation said the town lacked access to basic resources to shoulder the additional burden and that aid was required "to reach both these displaced families and the communities that have opened their homes to them".

Rights activist Walid Sketty called for international collaboration to care for the displaced, particularly as the region's semi-arid climate makes conditions harsh for those without proper shelter. Some refugees are staying with family, but others are sheltering in schools or sleeping in the open. ■

NIGERIA

Election season brings back routine violence

As Nigerians prepare to go to the polls, politically charged attacks are gathering pace.

YUSUF OMOTAYO IN LAGOS

LAST Saturday, suspected thugs attacked a political rally in southern Nigeria. One person was killed and five were injured.

The latest incident is one of three recorded cases of political violence in November alone, a situation that experts have described as entrenched in Nigeria's political history.

A report by the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room notes a rising trend of political violence. From January to October 2026, 70 cases of election-related attacks were recorded across 19 states, with 27 deaths.

Previously, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project counted 109 election-related deaths in the build-up to the 2023 general elections.

Presidential candidates and their political parties routinely sign accords committing to peaceful elections, but these have done little to stop the violence.

Political scientist Dr Maureen Fubara believes raising the costs of political violence by prosecution and blacklisting offenders can help to reduce or end it.

"The real question should be: Why would politicians want to prevent a culture that helps them to achieve their political goals? And the simple answer is: they wouldn't," she told *The Continent*.

Fubara hopes for less violence in 2027 but recognises some battleground states or those experiencing leadership transitions may see more of the conflict observed in previous elections.

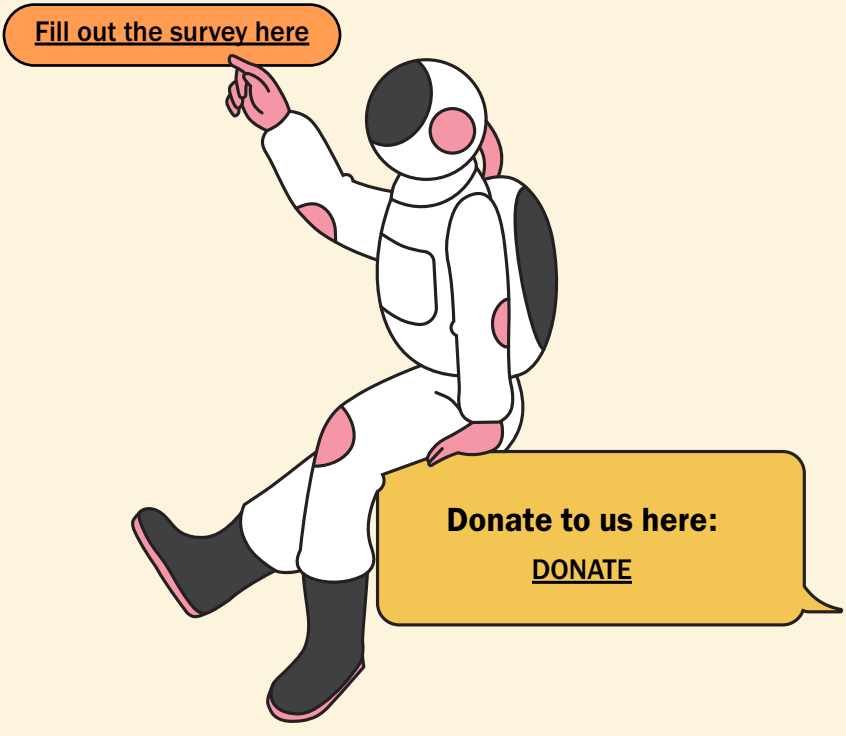
Fubara also expects a "high incidence of electoral fraud and intimidation" because of the incumbent's influence over electoral institutions. ■



PHOTO: LIGHT ORIYE TAMUNOTONYE/AFP

Club together: *APC supporters march and dance during a presidential campaign rally in Kaduna.*

The Big Annual Survey™



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INVESTIGATION

How weapons fly under the radar

Malawi's ex-army chief has a case to answer for allegedly smuggling arms to Sudan. *The Continent* traced the aircraft named in his charge sheet and found records documenting its repeated flights from Kenya, through Malawi, to Chad.



Flight Path of Aircraft SU-SKG

1. **CAIRO (CAI)** to **MOMBASA (MBA)**
   July 5, 2025: Initial arrival
2. **MOMBASA (MBA)** to **LILONGWE (LLW)**
   At least five round trips in the following week
3. **LILONGWE (LLW)** to **N'DJAMENA (NDJ)**
   July 17 - July 26, 2025: Eleven recorded flights
4. **N'DJAMENA (NDJ)** to **CAIRO (CAI)**
   July 30, 2025: Return trip

MAP: YEMSRACH YETNEBERK

JACK MCBRAMS IN LILONGWE

LAST month, Malawi's former military commander, retired General Paul Valentino Phiri, was arrested in Lilongwe by the country's Anti-Corruption Bureau.

A five-count charge sheet accuses him of abusing his office, breaching procurement rules, and dealing in terrorist property in connection with an alleged weapons-smuggling operation destined for Sudan.

One detail in the charges explicitly names a cargo aircraft with the registration number SU-SKG. Prosecutors allege that in 2025 Phiri instructed subordinate officers to clear the aircraft, presenting it as carrying military equipment belonging to the Malawi Defence Force. In fact, neither the aircraft – nor the cargo – belonged to the Malawian military.

The Continent traced the aircraft's journeys using historical flight records. They show repeated flights between Mombasa, Kenya and Lilongwe, followed by sustained flights between Lilongwe and N'Djamena, Chad.

The charge sheet identifies neither the original supplier, the quantity of equipment, nor the Sudanese rebel faction allegedly intended to receive it. However, UN investigators have flagged Chad as a conduit for weapons reaching Sudanese paramilitary rebel group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The flight data adds independent evidence to allegations first reported in July by Malawi's Platform for Investigative Journalism. That investigation states



Loose Cannon: *General Paul Phiri of Malawi's Defence Force.* PHOTO: SPC. BRIDGET PITTMAN-BLACKWELL

the country's anti-corruption bureau received information based on intelligence gathered by the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

That information described heavy weapons, possibly including missiles, arriving by cargo aircraft before being briefly offloaded in Lilongwe and then being sent to Chad and onwards to Sudan. At the time, the investigative journalists had not seen the complaint or the alleged CIA intelligence report.

Phiri's charge sheet now provides the missing details. Prosecutors say he facilitated an end-user certificate dated 18 June 2025, falsely presenting the Malawian military as the intended recipient of arms actually destined for Sudanese rebels.

They also accuse him of procuring the



In plain sight: *Sky Vision SU-SKG at Cairo International Airport.* PHOTO: KATO AKIRA/ FLYTEAM.JP

equipment outside legal procedures, concealing property received from Kenya at the Malawi Air cargo warehouse, and then arranging its removal to Chad. He is the only person named on the charge sheet.

A flurry of flights

The aircraft identified in aviation records, SU-SKG, is an Airbus A321-200 freighter operated by Egypt-based Sky Vision Airlines. On its website the airline says it is a charter company serving corporate clients, government delegations, and private customers, and also offers specialised cargo shipments.

Tracking data obtained by *The Continent* from FlightRadar24 contains 33 flight records, 32 ground stops and about 13,000 aircraft position reports covering 4 July to 14 August 2025.

The aircraft arrived in Mombasa from Cairo on 5 July, remaining grounded for more than four days. In the week that followed, it made at least five round trips between Mombasa and Lilongwe.

Then its route shifted. Between 17 and 26 July, the aircraft made 11 recorded flight trips between Lilongwe and N'Djamena, Chad. It returned to Cairo on 30 July.

Together, these records establish the repeated use of the two air corridors described in the criminal allegations: Kenya to Malawi, then Malawi to Chad.

Although flight tracking cannot identify the cargo aboard or prove the weapons reached Sudan, Phiri's charge sheet explicitly alleges that military equipment aboard this specific aircraft was concealed in Lilongwe and arrangements made to move it to Chad

– a transit route for arms entering Sudan into RSF-controlled territory.

Mombasa is significant in the data because Kenya, too, has previously been implicated in facilitating weapons transfer to the RSF. A *Bellingcat* and *Daily Nation* investigation in June 2025 identified ammunition crates bearing Kenyan military procurement markings at an RSF weapons depot in Khartoum, although Nairobi denies involvement.

Earlier that year, RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, travelled to Nairobi on a high-profile visit hosted by Kenyan President William Ruto, raising questions about the relationship between the Ruto administration and the RSF. The Kenyan government defended hosting Hemedti, stating his trip was aimed at promoting peace and dialogue in Sudan's conflict.

The Continent asked Sky Vision, the operators of the SU-SKG aircraft about its July 2025 flights between Kenya, Malawi, and Chad; who chartered the aircraft; and what it carried. The airline had not responded by the time of publication.

A vulnerable transit point

Aviation expert Sean Mendis told *The Continent* Malawi had long been vulnerable to exploitation as a transit point for illicit cargo.

"I am absolutely not surprised. Malawi has been used for trans-shipment cover for a long time," he said. "Jurisdictions like Malawi with poor regulatory oversight are ripe to be exploited for illicit cargo trans-shipments like arms trading."

Mendis also questioned the commercial rationale for the repeated cargo flights between Lilongwe and N'Djamena. "Any route that doesn't have consistently operated flights is irregular by definition," he said, adding there were no significant documented trade links between the two countries that would readily explain such traffic.

Wilson Khembo, a security and terrorism expert and former lieutenant in the Malawi Defence Force, said Phiri's case had wider geopolitical implications – it could affect Malawian military's reputation and foreign relations, as well as undermine confidence in the country's security institutions.

"Jurisdictions like Malawi with poor regulatory oversight are ripe to be exploited."

"If convicted of smuggling arms to non-state armed groups, having committed the offence as the commander of the MDF, the repercussions would extend beyond the individual suspect," Khembo said.

Phiri did not respond to questions about his alleged role in procuring the military equipment. His lawyer, Powell Nkutabasa, confirmed the charges concern misuse of office, procurement violations, and dealing in terrorist property.

Air Cargo Malawi chief executive Eunice Napolo said the company was unable to comment because the matter was now before the courts. ■

FEATURE

Tanzania's butterfly effect beats charcoal most days

Rearing the beautiful insects pays some farmers more than producing charcoal once did. But in Zanzibar, they are only worth what the island's butterfly centre can afford to buy.



PHOTO: KIZITO MAKOYE

Net profit: *Salma Maulid Ali switched from charcoal production to butterfly farming.*

KIZITO MAKOYE IN PETE

EVERY morning, Salma Maulid Ali checks her mesh enclosure to inspect the caterpillars feeding on the leaves inside. When the leaves have been eaten almost down to the stalk; she replaces them with fresh foliage.

When the caterpillars become pupae, Ali keeps some to mature into breeding adults and prepares the rest for sale. The journey from egg to sellable pupa takes about three to four weeks, depending on the species.

Ali sells the pupae to the Zanzibar Butterfly Centre, where tourists pay to walk through butterfly-filled gardens. The centre opened in 2008 and Ali began rearing butterflies two years later.





PHOTOS ABOVE: ZANZIBAR BUTTERFLY CENTRE



Very hungry caterpillars: *Hemed Maulid Salum, a butterfly farmer in the village of Pete, on Unguja Island in Zanzibar.*

PHOTO LEFT: KIZITO MAKOYE

She estimates her average monthly profit from the pupae sales at 350,000 Tanzanian shillings ($132). Before then, Ali sold charcoal in Pete for 12 years, which brought in a profit of TSh180,000 ($68) a month after expenses.

Although about 70% to 80% of the charcoal used in Zanzibar comes from the mainland, Ali was one of the people who produced it in Pete.

"With butterflies, I can work near home," she told *The Continen*t. "I decided to change from selling charcoal because I am earning more money after expenses and still have plenty of time to do other work."

Most households in Zanzibar depend on charcoal for cooking fuel, but the islands' native forests have been severely depleted. Some local producers have now turned to cutting down mangrove forests along the coastlines or targeting local hardwood trees like mango, clove, and avocado.

The Zanzibar government has placed tight regulations on charcoal burning, but the practice continues despite the law. Although Ali has stopped producing charcoal, she still buys it for cooking, spending Tsh25,000 (nearly $10) on the fuel each month.

Butterfly farming offers an alternative source of income, but Ali has traded charcoal's relatively steady market for a business that depends on tourists. Visitors' fees account for about 75% of

the centre's annual income. Occasional conservation grants and donations make up the rest.

Albert George, the centre's manager, said it bought between 600 and 950 pupae per week from 20 active farmers in Pete, Jozani, and Muungoni, depending on demand.

"Someone can raise a good batch, but if we need fewer pupae that week, their earnings fall," George said. "We explain that before they start farming butterflies."

Over one 12-month period, her best month brought 620,000 Tanzanian shillings ($234) before expenses; her worst, just 160,000 Tanzanian shillings ($60). That month, she had to supplement her income by selling vegetables and doing farm labour.

For Hemed Maulid Salum, another farmer in Pete, butterflies are a supplementary source of income. He began rearing them in 2018.

Salum supplies about 40 pupae to the centre in a typical week. From April to September this year, his net payments per month averaged 270,000 Tanzanian shillings ($102).

"The butterflies help me to buy maize flour, beans, and provide for other family needs, including medical expenses. But when fewer pupae survive, or the centre buys less, I depend on selling vegetables and farm work," he told *The Continent*. "I would need steadier orders before relying on butterflies completely."

George acknowledges the centre needs a dependable market before taking on more farmers.

For Juma Masauni, who still produces charcoal, the reliability of the charcoal trade is reason to remain in the business. "Before I change to farming butterflies, I need to know how much the centre will buy and when the money will come," he said. ■



FEATURE

Time to bounce: Ballers look beyond Senegal

Néné Sira Diallo is proud to represent her country at the Olympics – but leaving home seems to be the only pathway to a professional career.

KATARINA HÖIJE IN DAKAR

FOR a moment, Senegal's dream of winning the Youth Olympic Games basketball final was within reach. Playing at home in Dakar, the young women's 3x3 team was level with China in the semifinal, on 19 points. Then China scored a decisive two-pointer, ending Senegal's hopes of gold.

Néné Sira Diallo and her teammates returned to face Egypt in a bronze-medal match that went down to the final seconds. This time, Senegal won.

For the young Senegalese player, representing her country in front of a home crowd was a dream fulfilled. But the road to a professional basketball career remains uncertain, even after years of hard work.

Diallo grew up surrounded by basketball. Her older brother played for Mermoz Basket Club in Dakar, where her uncle was a coach. She joined them on the court when she was eight and fell in love with the game's speed and intensity.

"At first, it was just for fun," she told *The Continent*. "Then I started taking it seriously. I was training more than the others, sometimes twice a day."



Shoot your shot: *Néné Sira Diallo sees a future for Senegalese basketballers. Unfortunately that future's not likely to be in Senegal.*

PHOTO: ARIANA SAIGH OCS

Diallo's dedication caught a coach's attention, earning her an invitation to try out for Senegal's national 3x3 team. The game is a faster, compact version of the traditional game, with three players a side, competing around a single hoop.

But talent and determination alone are rarely enough to build a career. In Senegal, young players often need an academy or manager to connect them with opportunities abroad.

Scholarships can open doors to colleges and professional clubs, but players must first find someone willing to help. Even then, a visa is not guaranteed and the costs fall on the player.

At home, the challenges begin much earlier. Dakar has impressive facilities, including the 15,000 seat Dakar Arena, but many low-division basketball teams still train in and compete on basic outdoor courts. The arena is not available for domestic championship matches.

Out of pocket

Money is another obstacle. Players often pay for their own training, equipment, and gym membership. Teams have missed matches because they couldn't afford the travel costs of away games. And attracting sponsors is difficult because domestic matches are rarely televised.

"Most players want to earn a good salary and help their families," Diallo says. "We need bigger clubs that can take care of them and pay them well."

There are efforts to change this. The NBA's Basketball Africa League (BAL), formed in partnership with the sport's international governing body, Fiba, is working to attract investment and build stronger professional clubs.

BAL president Amadou Gallo Fall believes developing African basketball requires more than discovering gifted players. "It's not just the talent that is there, but how you nurture the talent," he said. "Africa needs to make sure that we don't only export talent, but we should also build value."

"We need bigger clubs that can take care of players – and pay them."

This task has become more difficult with the closure of the NBA's elite academy, which has been operating in Senegal since 2017. The academy had offered promising players from across the continent access to high-level coaching and education.

Now it is moving to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, as the NBA consolidates its global talent pipeline.

For Diallo the next step is likely to take her away from home. She looks up to Senegalese players Néné Awa Ndiaye and Ndioma "Didi" Kane, who built international careers after leaving, but later returned to represent Senegal.

Her manager, Amadou "Pape" Koundoul, is working to secure a college placement in Canada for her, with the United States as another possibility.

Staying in Senegal is her last resort, Diallo says. "In five years, I see myself in another country." ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Touselle turned his trade into testament

PHOTOS: JACQUES TOUSELLE

IT WAS 1970 when electricity first arrived in Mbouda, in Cameroon's western highlands. It was also the year that Jacques Touselle opened a photography studio that became part of the town's social life.

Touselle, who was born in the nearby village of Bamessingué and was trained by a Nigerian photographer, became known as the local "father of photography". People came to Studio Photo Jacques for all sorts of reasons: from standard identity photos to photoshoots documenting weddings and other celebrations.

In many instances, they also showed who they hoped to become. Touselle's clients carefully curated their appearance and identity through clothing, hair styling, accessories, and props. Occasionally, Touselle himself would be part of the scene too.



It wasn't unusual for queues of people to form outside his studio and Touselle would go through 15 rolls of film a day. For a change of scene, sometimes he would set up a makeshift backdrop at local markets for the day.

Unlike many photographers, Touselle kept about half of his negatives and prints. He stored them in cardboard boxes labelled by year. More than 40,000 negatives and thousands of prints survived, despite damage from water and humidity.

Together, they provide a fascinating visual history of Mbouda's people and trends, particularly through the 1970s and 1980s. In 2006, the British Library's

Endangered Archives Programme digitised the negatives in Yaoundé before returning them to the photographer.

Touselle died in 2017, but his portraits have since travelled internationally, and have been exhibited at the Pitt-Rivers, Fowler, and Metropolitan museums, among others.

His remarkable archive functions as a time capsule, preserving the faces of people who might otherwise have vanished from historical records. ■











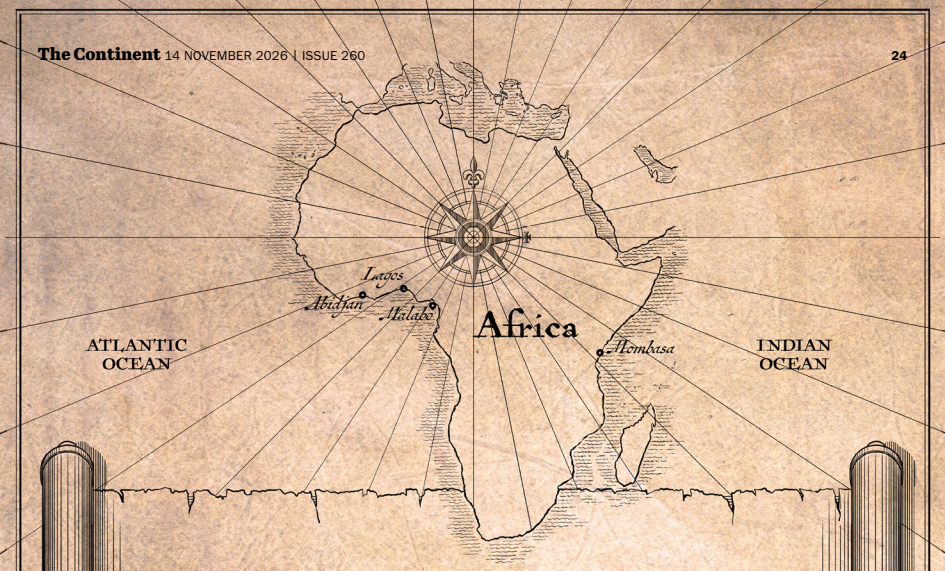












FERRY TALES

LIMITED SERIES

Curated by Gado | Story by Hadrien Degiorgi

Pinasse

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Carrying capacity:
50-80 passengers



Lagferry

Lagos, Nigeria



Likoni Ferry

Mombasa, Kenya



San Valentine Ferry

Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

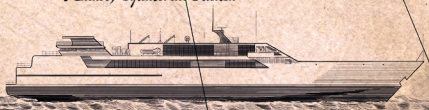


ILLUSTRATION: YEMSRACH YETNEBERK

Pick a pinasse to cross the Pearl

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

HADRIEN DEGIORGI

RESIDENTS of Abidjan make nearly 10-million journeys every day across the city. Most of these trips are on foot, particularly in low-income areas. Some people use shared informal taxis, known as woro-woros or gbakas.

However, a small proportion – about 100,000 people – use boats to cross what tourist guides like to call the "Pearl of the Lagoons"– the city's Ébrié Lagoon.

The lagoon separates Abidjan into its northern and southern municipalities. Although the two areas are connected by four bridges, the lagoon remains a major obstacle for commuting across the city.

By the 1960s, as the city grew rapidly after independence, smaller local pirogues began giving way to larger, motorised boats, known as pinasses.

The name comes from a type of small, flat-bottomed boat from southwest France, but the boats used in West Africa also drew heavily on local traditions, evolving from fishing canoes and the larger cargo vessels used along the Niger River and coastal lagoons.

A 10-minute trip across the lagoon costs from 100 to 200 CFA francs (about $0.18 to $0.35). Each boat can carry about 100 passengers. Pinasses also play a central role in transporting goods.

Since 1974, these distinctive vessels have also had to compete with public ferries. The sector was opened up to competition in 2016 and two companies now operate private ferries, whose metal hulls and well-ordered seats provide a sharp contrast with the rudimentary wooden pinasses.

Although the ferries attract thousands of daily users, their capacity remains limited compared to the roads. But there are projects in the pipeline that should help to ease congestion in Côte d'Ivoire's economic capital: a metro line is being built and is on track to begin delivering passenger services by 2029. And a new bus network, partly funded by the World Bank, will hit the roads that same year.

Such transport projects are needed now more than ever, as Abidjan's population is projected to grow from 6-million people today to 10-million people by 2050.

In the meantime, fishermen's pirogues and the pinasse ferries still crossing the Ébrié Lagoon remain one of Abidjan's iconic sights. ■

Hadrien Degiorgi is an independent reporter whose work combines writing and photography. He has been based in Côte d'Ivoire for several years



ILLUSTRATION: CHRISTIAN BASSOLE

DATA

And now for something completely different...

IT'S AFRICAN Statistics Day on Wednesday 18 November. In celebration of the power of data to inform policy makers, encourage activists, and enlighten ordinary citizens, we want to give you a behind-the-scenes peek at some of the numbers behind the numbers we share each week.

Since Afrobarometer was founded in 1999, we've conducted 311 surveys in 45 African countries in more than 10 survey rounds. Over that time, we've conducted more than 450,000 in-person interviews in about 110 languages. That means more than 75% of the continent's population is represented in our findings.

In 2025 alone, we produced nearly 200 reports, including a flagship report on citizen engagement, with 39 scorecards showing country-level findings. That same year, we taught more than 1,000 people how to use our data. Another 11,800 people used our free online data-analysis tool.

And we're not slowing down. Our round 11 surveys began earlier this year and are set to wrap up by the end of 2027, bringing more fresh insights your way. ■

Key Afrobarometer statistics | 1999-2025



The Continent **has partnered with Afrobarometer for more than six years.**

AFRO BAROMETER
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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.

REVIEW

More things change, Mara stays insane

Azzi on the Beat's electric debut album *Mara Gram* launches Lagos hyperdance music at a world that didn't even know it was ready for it.

HANNAH UGURU

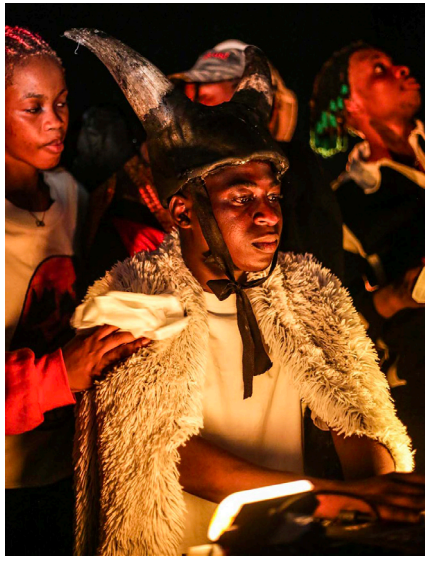


PHOTO: NYEGE NYEGE TAPES

Beat's working: *Waris Rasheed, better known as Azzi on the Beat, giving it horns.*

MARA'S breakneck rhythms were once largely confined to the carnivals and neighbourhood parties of working-class Lagos. But they're now finding audiences far beyond Nigeria.

Waris Rasheed, 21, better known as Azzi on the Beat, is among the producers taking the sound international. He began touring Europe and the Middle East as a music producer this year. Now, with his debut album *Mara Gram*, he is introducing listeners to his own interpretation of the underground dance movement.

Mara is a collision of electronic dance music and Nigerian street-pop, with percussion racing at up to 160 beats per minute, chopped-up voices, chants, and unexpected sound effects. The style, rooted in Lagos' grassroots party culture and fast-paced legwork dancing, has now spread through social media into clubs. The late dancer and TikTok creator Obi Madubogwu, also known as Odogwu Mara, was credited with coining the name, although that is disputed.

Mara Gram, released this week by Uganda's Nyege Nyege Tapes, rarely pauses for breath. The album's title plays on "kilogram" – *Mara Gram* imagines measuring the music by its weight. Rasheed produced each of the album's 17 tracks himself and the result is an album that is euphoric and almost hypnotic.

Rasheed tells *The Continent* he wanted a "very heavy" project, one with the force to make listeners move. And it does. *Police Way* opens with sirens and pummelling drums, evoking the bustle

and disorder of Lagos, a manic energy infused with melody and surprise.

On *Baggy Dance Shoot Sound*, synths reminiscent of a 1990s Euro-rave meet a deep, heavily accented male voice sample, bringing the sound into contemporary Lagos. *Allah Create* weaves Indian-style chants into mara's insistent pulse and *Ghost Steps* draws on trance and ballroom.

At age five, Rasheed started out as a dancer, following his older brother Ridwan to the Footprints of David Arts Academy, a free after-school programme in Bariga, a Lagos suburb. There he learnt percussion, singing, and traditional dances from visiting teachers across Nigeria, absorbing Yoruba and Hausa musical influences.

Rasheed had a difficult childhood, but dance opened doors, allowing him to perform on big stages. For him, dance was always the future. "I never even dreamt of being a music producer or being a musician," he says.

Then, in 2023, Rasheed attended a six-month production bootcamp via YouTube. His breakout track *Mr Barry* has racked up nearly four-million Spotify streams since its release in March this year.

But movement still drives Rasheed's live performances, where he combines music production with dancing and acrobatics. "There's no dance without music," he says. "And there's no music without dance for me."

Mara's audience is growing. Its rhythms can now be heard in Rema's *Ozeba* and CKay's *African Girls*.

Rasheed's brother and manager Ridwan introduced his work to Nyege Nyege – the annual music festival held in Jinja, Uganda that celebrates underground music, particularly electronic-inspired genres. Rasheed is now preparing for his first African show outside Nigeria at the festival, which runs from 19 to 22 November.

"I would love to experience it because it's an African country," he says, eager to discover Uganda's food, culture, and music. He dreams of collaborating with Malian artist Fatoumata Diawara, whose sung phrases he sometimes turns into piano melodies, and Beninese singer Angélique Kidjo.

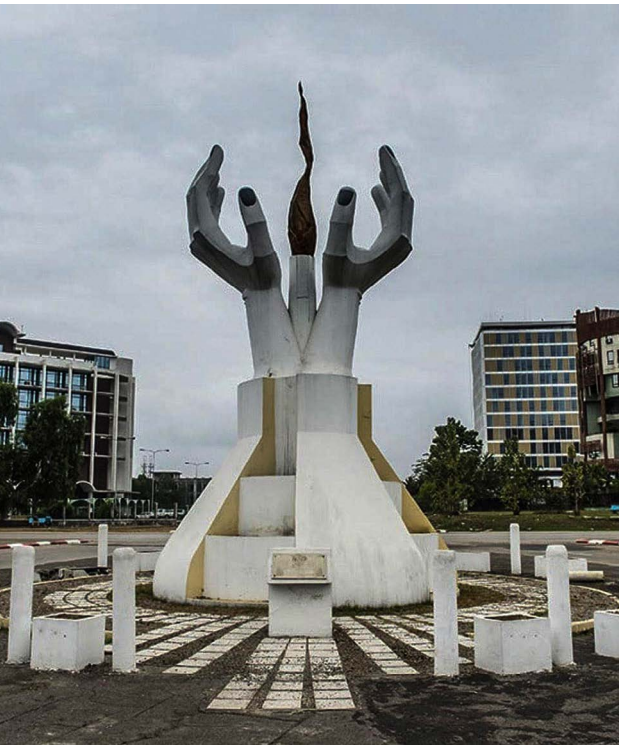
Ultimately, Rasheed wants to open an arts school like the one that nurtured him. "I want them to put my name in history," he says. ■



All in: Mara Gram *weaves breakneck Afrobeats through with Euro, Sino and Indo threads.*

The Quiz

1. In which country is the *Flame of Peace* monument (pictured) found?
2. Denis Sassou-Nguesso is the president of which country?
3. What country is the city of Giza in?
4. Who is Cameroon's president?
5. Antananarivo is which country's capital?
6. What is Ghana's currency called?
7. Kofi Annan was once the secretary-general of which international organisation?
8. Which country did former footballer Yaya Touré represent?
9. Which country did former footballer Didier Drogba represent?
10. Name the South African pop artist who released the hit *Water* in 2024.



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

"Throw your hands in the air and wave them like you just don't care [for war]." – Grandmaster Flash [probably]

Big Pic

Royal pirogue-ative: Porters in the historic centre of Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, convey the king of the Nzema people – Nanan Awoulae Désiré Amon Tanoé – via pirogue to the Abissa festival, which marks the start of their new year.

PHOTO: CHRIS BOLI/AFP



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