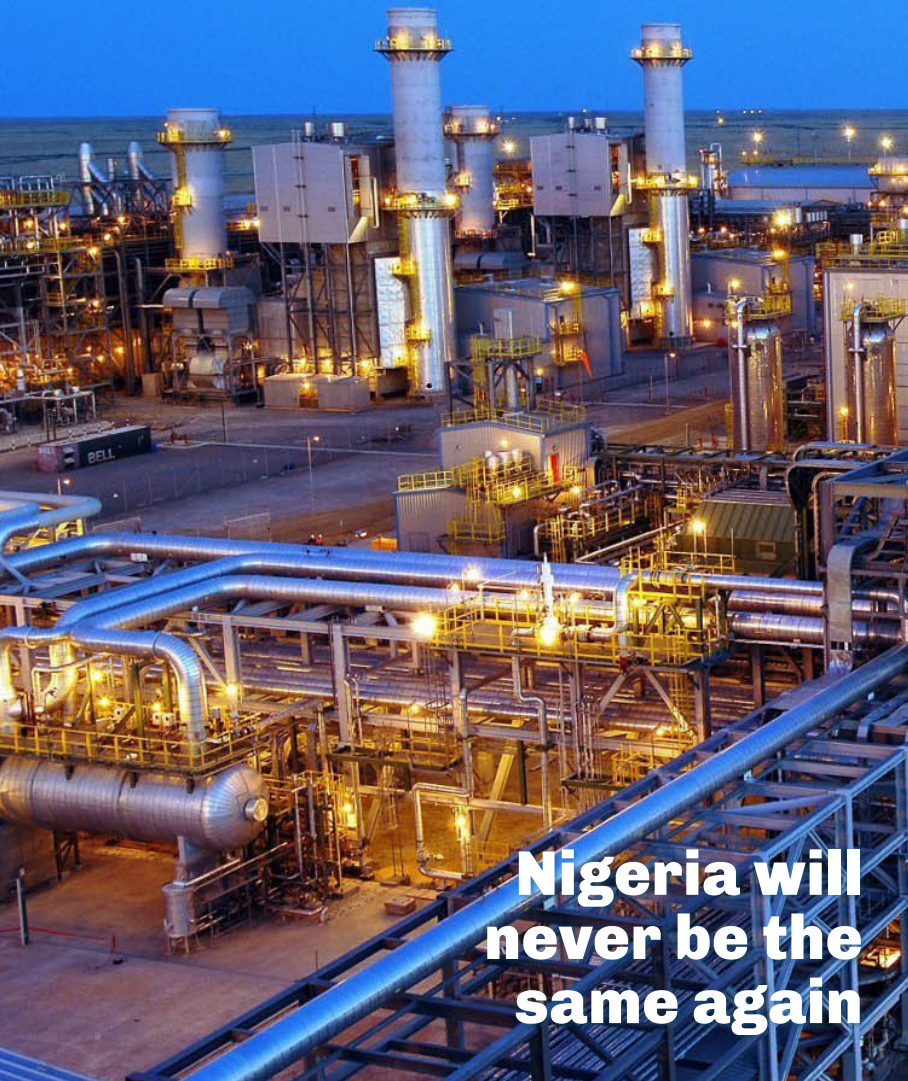


African journalism. 27 MAY 2023 | ISSUE 126

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



**Nigeria will
never be the
same again**



Cover: Africa's richest man has just opened Africa's largest oil refinery in Africa's biggest economy. Whichever way you look at it, this is a big deal – and potentially transformative for the economies of both Nigeria and the region, as economist Carlos Lopes explains (p14). But let's not get ahead of ourselves: there is still plenty that could go wrong (p12).

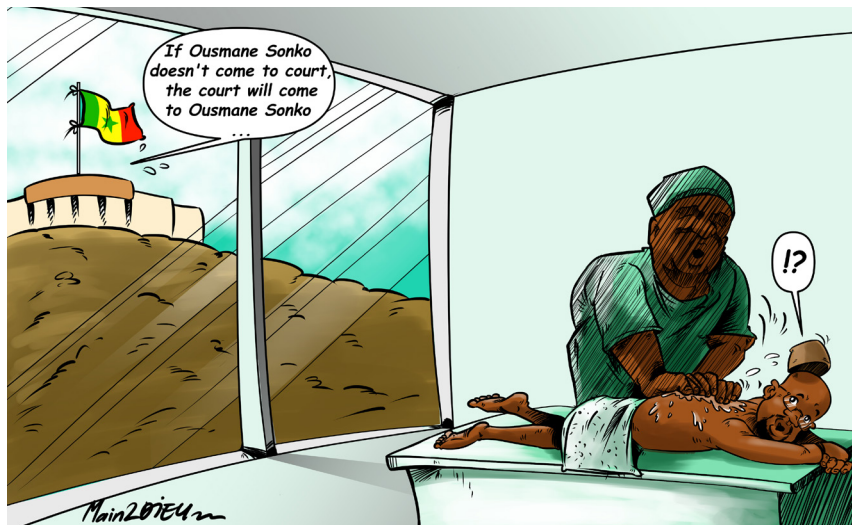
Inside:

- **Deep roots:** Sierra Leone loses its iconic tree (p8)
- **New deal:** DRC president talks terms in Beijing (p9)
- **Sudan:** The war hits home with a vengeance (p10)
- **Mozambique:** Images of insurgency (p15)
- **Delicious and nutritious:** Mopane worm stew (p20)
- **Ancient tales, new treatments:** Netflix takes on African folklore (p21)

■ **Spare the child:** Just three countries think corporal punishment is never justified (p24)

SUBSCRIBE

Get the latest edition of *The Continent*, plus every back issue (all 125 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.



ALGERIA

The pandemic's over so protests are back – as are their haters

Karim Tabbou, a prominent leader of the Hirak protest movement was arrested on Tuesday. The movement was instrumental in 2019 in ending Abdelaziz Bouteflika's 20-year rule. It is now the focus of what many see as targeted repression, with hundreds arrested. Following a pandemic lull, both Hirak and its repression are gathering steam. Tabbou, whose arrest appears to have been triggered by a complaint from the president of Algeria's National Council for Human Rights, is the ninth Hirak activist to be arrested this month.

CHINA

Insecure hackers target Kenya's default settings

For three years, Chinese hackers targeted servers and information systems belonging to the Kenyan government, according to a *Reuters* investigation. The hackers appear to have been looking for intelligence on Kenya's risk of defaulting on its Chinese loans, which amount to over \$9-billion. The hackers reportedly targeted the president's office, finance ministry and at least one spy agency, and stole some documents. The Chinese government denied any connection to the hackers. Kenyan authorities said the hacking attempts were not successful.

CAPITALISM

Chevron's big green laundering scheme is giving liar liar

This week, the *Guardian* newspaper revealed that 93% of the carbon offsets bought and counted by Chevron, an oil company which made 35.5-billion in profits last year, were junk. That is, while the company invested in “green projects” like forests or hydropower dams to ostensibly cancel out the emissions of its (still expanding) fossil fuel empire, independent assessments found that most of those projects would not in any way stop the world heating. Business as usual, then.

PIRACY

Seafarers free after weeks of Gulf of Guinea captivity

The Russian captain of a supermax ship that was boarded by pirates in early May and his two Georgian deputies were released this week. The attack happened while the ship was in the Gulf of Guinea, which is increasingly seen as the new hotspot for piracy. The vessel made stops in Nigeria's Lagos and Port Harcourt ports and was waiting off the coast of Gabon for its next stop, when its crew noticed that the three were missing and reported them as kidnapped.



Photo: Getty Images

COLONIALISM

Ethiopian prince's remains to stay in UK

Buckingham Palace in the UK will not return the remains of Ethiopian prince Alemayehu, despite pleas from his family's descendants, saying that it is keen to “preserve the dignity of the deceased”. All but him. The palace told the *BBC* that getting to Alemayehu's remains would disturb “the resting place of a substantial number of others in the vicinity.” British soldiers took Prince Alemayehu and his mother, alongside looted items like dresses, jewellery and manuscripts, from the palace of his father, Emperor Tewodros II, in 1868. Britain's current government would have deported him to Rwanda for not coming to the country “legally”.

MOZAMBIQUE

Maputo locks down beaches to get a grip on grievous crimes

Rapists are why residents of Maputo cannot have good things. Authorities in the Mozambican capital have imposed a 7pm to 5am curfew on its beaches, following a spike in rapes, murders and other violent crime reported to be happening there. They also plan to set up a dedicated police post on the city's most popular public beach: Costa do Sol. Any events happening at the beach within the curfew hours will now require police permission.

LABOUR

Slavery is thriving in Eritrea, Mauritania and North Korea

A survey on global slavery by Walk Free, a human rights group, found North Korea, Eritrea and Mauritania as the top three countries with “forced labour, forced or servile marriages, debt bondage, forced commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, the sale and exploitation of children, among other slavery-like practices.” It said 50-million people lived in these conditions in 2021, 10-million more than five years before.



Deadly: Corruption means people cannot expect clean water. Photo: M Spatari/AFP/Getty

PUBLIC HEALTH

South Africa joins cholera hall of shame

Authorities in Africa's most unequal country confirmed that at least 17 people from Hammanskraal, a low income area

near the capital, have died of cholera. Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have seen outbreaks over the past year. In this case, poor management and corruption in sanitation infrastructure was blamed for the outbreak of the water-borne disease.



Captured: Fulgence Kayishema is charged with overseeing the Nyange massacre of 2,000 Tutsi refugees.

RWANDA

Genocide suspect arrested after 22 years on the run

One of the world's most wanted genocide suspects was arrested in South Africa, 22 years after he was charged. Fulgence Kayishema is accused of planning and taking part in the massacre of 2,000 Rwandan Tutsis in Nyange Catholic Church, "including by procuring and distributing petrol to burn down the church with the refugees inside," prosecutors say. After Nyange, killing Tutsi refugees in churches became a feature of the genocide.

SEYCHELLES

Tourists gobbling up too much paradise

The island nation is heaving under the strain that tourists put on local infrastructure. The *Seychelles News Agency* reports that following a tourism capacity study, Vice-President Ahmed Afif said that compared with residents at home, tourists in hotels use way more electricity and water, and produce a lot more waste. "Our capacity to provide electricity is reaching its limit," he said. The government has now extended its 2021 moratorium on new tourism accommodations until December 2023.

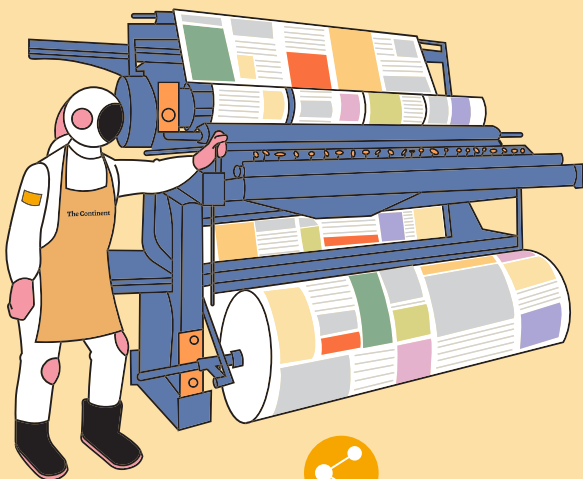
SOMALIA-PUNTLAND

Another step toward true independence

On Thursday, Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland held its first statewide local elections in nearly five decades. The region declared autonomy but not independence from the Somali federal government during the 1999 civil war. Rich in oil, it largely runs its own affairs and started its march towards universal suffrage democracy in 2021 with preliminary elections in three districts. Thursday's polls across Puntland's 37 districts, set the region apart from the rest of Somalia where the last time "one person one vote" elections were held was in 1969.

FIGHT FAKE NEWS WITH REAL NEWS.

Disinformation is often shared on closed networks like WhatsApp. That's why *The Continent* exists. Help us fight fake news by subscribing to high quality journalism, and share that instead.



HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Email: Read@thecontinent.org with 'SUBSCRIBE' in the subject box

WhatsApp/Signal: Save +27 73 805 6068 on your phone, and send us a message saying 'NEWS'



Get your copy delivered to your phone or inbox every Saturday. And if you like what you read, forward it to your friends, family and colleagues – not indiscriminately, but only with people who might appreciate it.

Share real news.

with Mail Guardian
The Continent

Sierra Leone

Photo: Kristoffer Halse



The fall of the legendary Cotton Tree

A storm destroyed Freetown's most recognisable landmark

Abdul Brima in Freetown

Freetown was founded in 1792 by people who had been enslaved in America. It was built around a towering cotton tree, which has remained at the heart of both city and nation ever since.

The 70m-high tree was a symbol of freedom from slavery, and is so integral to Sierra Leone's national identity that it features on the 10-Leone bank note.

On Wednesday night, after standing tall for an estimated 400 years, the Cotton Tree fell over. It was unable to withstand one final torrential downpour.

"A great loss to the nation," commented the president, Julius Maada Bio.

It is also, perhaps, a loss for the president himself: he is contesting a presidential election next month, and some observers saw the loss of this national landmark as symbolic of his chances.

While tributes and memories of the iconic tree poured in from all over the country, not everyone was mourning its loss. Francis Mambu, a hugely popular pastor at the Faith Healing Bible Church, has long been calling for the tree to be cut down, saying that it is used for witchcraft and occult practices.

Sierra Leone's environmentalists say that the tree's collapse should be a wake up call for the urgency of the threat posed by climate change to Freetown, a densely-populated coastal city which is at high risk of further flooding and landslides.

President Bio has promised to fill the gap in Freetown's skyline – a bewildering sight for residents – with a monument of equal significance. ■

DRC

The president goes bargaining in Beijing

Tshisekedi inherited a flawed minerals deal with China. A reset could help his country – as well as his own reelection bid

Late on Wednesday evening, President Félix Tshisekedi flew into Beijing for a state visit to China. There he was fêted by his counterpart, Xi Jinping, at a lavish banquet. But then things got serious.

In 2008 Tshisekedi's predecessor, Joseph Kabila, negotiated a controversial mining deal with a consortium of Chinese companies – and now Tshisekedi is trying to fix it.

The terms of the deal gave the Chinese companies 68% of Sicominex, which holds lucrative copper and cobalt mining rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The rest of Sicominex is owned by the Congolese state-owned mining company.

In return for this stake, the Chinese consortium was supposed to invest \$6.2-billion into the country. This included \$3-billion earmarked for

roads, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure.

In February, a report by the DRC's chief inspector of finance said that only \$822-million has been invested into infrastructure, while \$10-billion of minerals has been mined. Sicominex has dismissed this report as "full of prejudice".

Ahead of Tshisekedi's visit, another government report was leaked to Reuters, which gives an idea of what the president will be demanding in Beijing. It says that the DRC wants an additional \$3-billion for infrastructure, plus 70% of the Sicominex joint venture. It says that the copper and cobalt rights in question are worth \$90.9-billion, far more than was accounted for in the initial deal.

The Chinese state, which is under pressure from its geopolitical peers to reduce the carbon emissions of its giant economy, needs cobalt to make electric car batteries that will replace dirt diesel and petrol engines. It gets about 60% of its cobalt from the DRC, so it has a lot of skin in the Sicominex game.

Tshisekedi's political future is also at stake, with presidential elections slated for December. At the very least, he will want Sicominex to quickly release more of the infrastructure money originally built into the deal, so that he has some roads, schools and hospitals to launch on his campaign trail. ■

Sudan



Gutted: Businesses and homes have been torn apart in Sudan's capital.

Photo: AFP via Getty Images

Fighting hits home

First, they took away people's dreams of democracy and peace. Now the men with guns are coming for their homes.

Liban Mahamad

Over the past month there have been several attempts at a ceasefire between the warring armies in Sudan – with little success. But reports from Khartoum, Omdurman, El Geneina and Nyala suggest that the latest ceasefire,

which came into force on Monday, is tentatively holding. It was brokered by the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The conflict began in mid-April, with Sudan's armed forces fighting against a paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), for control of the state. At least 865 people have been killed, with



**Close to home:
A blast rocks
Khartoum as rival
factions clash in
Sudan.** Photo: AFP
via Getty Images

thousands injured and hundreds of thousands internally displaced or forced to flee the country.

For those who chose to stay, the violence is not just confined to the contested streets of the capital and other major cities, where most of the fighting has taken place. It is increasingly entering people's homes and businesses, too, with reports of widespread looting and destruction of property.

When the fighting broke out, Omar Naser, a Khartoum-based artist, spent days locked inside his house with his family. Then the fighters arrived. "It was in the middle of intense fighting in Khartoum, and one night, our door was knocked out and we were told to leave," he told *The Continent*. He has subsequently sought refuge in neighbouring Egypt.

Naser said that the fighters came from the paramilitary RSF, and his story is all too common.

Another resident, Hanin Omer, said that in her neighbourhood of the

capital, RSF fighters were systematically looting and occupying homes. She and some family members left before they arrived – leaving her father and brother to guard the property. "We left my father and brothers behind in the care and protection of God," said Hanin. "This was the worst thing to happen since the beginning of this war."

The RSF deny allegations of looting, claiming that people wear their uniforms to steal and make them look bad.

In El Geneina in Darfur province, the fighting has precipitated general lawlessness. "We are attacked everywhere by gangs and thieves," said resident Rahman Adil. His uncle was shot dead by unidentified gunmen. "I hold Hemedti and Burhan responsible."

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, is the leader of the RSF, while General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is in charge of the armed forces. Neither has so far shown significant willingness to end the fighting. ■

Nigeria

New refinery may transform economy – if it gets enough oil

Africa's largest refinery could fundamentally alter Nigeria's economic landscape. But when it comes to oil projects, the country already boasts a herd of white elephants

Adebayo Abdulrahman and Ope Adetayo in Lagos

Commissioning Africa's largest refinery was supposed to have been one of the first ribbon cuttings of Muhammadu Buhari's presidency. Instead, it was his last. Not that the seven-year delay dulled the festive air in Lagos as the \$19-billion project by the continent's richest man, Aliko Dangote, was declared open for business on Monday.

At the ceremony, Buhari described the refinery – the largest and most modern in Africa – as a significant milestone for the country.

If everything goes according to plan, it

could be economically transformative for Nigeria. With the capacity to produce over 100-million litres a day, the new refinery could meet all of Nigeria's domestic need for refined petroleum products, which the national oil company puts at 68-million litres a day. That will mean petrol for cars, diesel for generators, kerosene for cooking, and fertiliser won't have to be imported.

This would keep a lot of money in the domestic economy, and allow Nigeria to start exporting refined petroleum.

In 2022 alone – despite being Africa's largest producer of crude oil – the country spent \$23-billion on petroleum imports, according to the Central Bank. It is Africa's largest importer of refined petroleum products.

This paradox has long hamstrung the Nigerian economy. Given its abundant



Big bet: Nigeria's massive Dangote oil refinery is finally open for business.

Photo: Tom Saater/Bloomberg/Getty

oil resources, fuel should not be a scarce commodity, or subject to major price hikes; and the government should not have to spend \$861-million per month on subsidies to keep pump prices down.

Big promises

Consumers are unlikely to notice any immediate benefits. The Dangote refinery is expected to buy Nigeria's crude oil for the same price that it would be sold overseas. Olaniyi Ogunleye of Carbon Limits Nigeria, a Lagos-based energy consulting company, said the difference this makes at the pump might be negligible.

There are also structural problems to overcome. The Nigerian government, which owns a 20% stake in the Dangote refinery, owns four other refineries – all of which are in disuse. And problems start well before the refinery stage. “The oil and gas industry is suffering from business climate hostilities,” explained Zakka Bala, an oil and gas expert.

Just getting oil out of the ground is hard. Production is below one million barrels a day. The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission says that's less than half of what the country could produce. And conservative estimates are that 200,000 barrels of oil a day are lost in theft, broken pipelines, vandalism and corruption.

Despite this reality, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation has promised Dangote's new refinery 300,000 barrels a day.

Osato Guobadia, Founder of Enej Insights, told *The Continent* that getting that oil to the refinery is the “biggest

challenge” – and that failure to do so “can kill the entire project and would be horrible for Nigeria”.

The optimistic and perhaps neo-liberal bet is that private business will fare a lot better than the parastatals. “Hopefully, with the entry of Dangote, we will be setting a new pace,” said Guobadia.

Carbon cost

At climate negotiations in 2021, Buhari committed Nigeria to zero overall carbon emissions by 2060, and to reduce emissions by at least 20% by 2030. A major part of this would be in building wind, solar and gas generation across the country, which has not happened. Instead, projects like the Dangote refinery would increase carbon emissions, as well as local air pollution. And Nigeria is already 1.6°C hotter thanks to a heating world and is heating faster than the global average, with catastrophic flooding and heatwaves linked to that heating.

Nigeria is 1.6°C hotter thanks to a heating world and is heating faster than the global average

Nonetheless, on the global scale, Nigeria's current emissions are negligible. Research by non-profit publication *Carbon Brief* found that a fridge in a home in the United States uses up to five times more electricity than the per person electricity use in Nigeria – including use by industry. Nigeria and its nearly 200-million people are responsible for less than 1% of global carbon emissions. ■

'Africa's most significant project since the Suez Canal'

To understand why Dangote's newly-opened oil refinery is such a significant infrastructure project for Nigeria – and Africa – *The Continent* spoke to economist **Carlos Lopes**, the former head of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Economic revolution

"The refinery completely changes the macroeconomics of the country," said Lopes. Nigeria used to export the crude oil it found in the ground, then import the fuel needed to run the country. This never made much economic sense – not only are the imports expensive, it means no jobs or value chains are created within the country. The refinery changes this, and it will create entirely new local industries in petrochemicals and fertilisers. This should generate lots more jobs, as well as extra tax revenue for the government.

Winners – and losers

Even though it is incredibly inefficient, there are a lot of people who benefit from Nigeria's current economic model – and many are powerful and politically connected. This is especially true for beneficiaries of the \$861-million per month currently paid in fuel subsidies. "You can no longer justify the subsidies. In the process you disrupt the intermediaries and corrupt practices that exist."

Africa can fund its infrastructure

According to the Dangote Group, 70% of the funding for the new refinery came from African sources, including the African Finance Corporation, the African Development Bank, and the United Bank of Africa. Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, put billions of his own dollars into the project. "This is really very unique, you don't have projects of this size anywhere in Africa, that are actually led by African investment, not even in South Africa which is the largest capital market."

Nigeria will benefit within a year

Even if the refinery starts slow, as is expected, this will precipitate huge policy changes. "One change I think will happen fast is further liberalisation of power and distribution, and that will have a major multiplier effect in Nigeria's economy." Regionally, impact will be felt more slowly, and much will depend on the completion of other ambitious projects, such as the Abidjan-Lagos highway, and a potential gas pipeline to Morocco or Algeria. ■

PHOTO ESSAY

Displaced life in Cabo Delgado

*A bitter insurgency in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province has left 4,000 people dead and more than a million people displaced over the past five years. The area is home to untapped gas reserves worth billions of dollars – an opportunity local politicians and multinational corporations are desperate to exploit. The Mozambicans who first took up arms were driven by perceptions that they were excluded from such opportunities and broader national development. Foreign marauding militants and national armies have since joined the theatre of war. Photojournalist **Francesco Bellina** travelled to Cabo Delgado this year to document the people and places caught between all these interests.*



A child plays in front of an old, almost destroyed tent in Marrupa camp which, according to the International Organisation for Migration, has some 750 households with about 2,250 displaced people.



Abel Valente Pakalamuka Nambili was displaced from Macomia in Cabo Delgado. He now lives in the Marocane resettlement village in Chiùre District, nearly 200km away from home.



Residents of Meculane camp return home across the fields. According to the International Organisation for Migration, the 128-acre camp has about 950 households, an average of seven households per acre.



Amissi Amissi, a former fisherman from the north, forced to flee with his 11 children, now lives in Marocane resettlement village camp. Away from the sea, he has had to learn to farm to survive.



Children play with kites in a field in Chuire district's Meculane.



Climate change makes bad things worse: a flooded school in the provincial capital Pemba.



A mural in the provincial capital Pemba.

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

"If I had a spare grand I'd base myself in a crater lake resort."



1_ What day is celebrated across the continent on 25 May?

2_ This year, 25 May marked 60 years of which institution?

3_ Ganga Talao is a crater lake in Mauritius (pictured). What is the other name for it?

4_ Grand-Bassam is a resort town near which Ivorian city?

5_ Who is Africa's richest person, who built the continent's largest oil refinery?

6_ The International Monetary Fund approved a \$3.5-billion aid package to which country this week?

7_ True or false: Chad's currency is the Chadian dollar.

8_ Who wrote the 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*?

9_ True or false: Cabo Delgado is a province in Angola.

10_ On 6 March 1971, Tina Turner performed at the independence day celebrations of which country?

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

In praise of mopane worms

Thandeka Angela Sibanda

The first time I saw live mopane worms was during a fifth-grade school trip to Rifa conservation camp, on the banks of the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe. They were green and black and crawled accordion-like on the leaves of the woodland trees.

They looked nothing like the mopane worms that my aunt would prepare for us at home: dried, salted and smothered in tomato and onion relish, served alongside muriwo (leafy greens) and steaming sadza (that's ugali to the Kenyans, nsima to the Malawians and pap to the South Africans).

Later, at a university in South Africa where I was studying to become a dietitian, we learned about the importance of indigenous foods in a healthy and balanced diet. Mopane worms elicited mixed responses from my classmates. "Yoh, I'd give anything for mopane worms for dinner tonight!" said some. "Why would anyone eat insects and worms?" asked others.

The answer to that last question is straightforward: mopane worms are really good for you.

Nutritionally, mopane worms – which



Early bird special: Eating a caterpillar giving you butterflies in your stomach?

are technically not really worms but rather edible caterpillars – are an outstanding source of protein, micronutrients, including calcium, iron and zinc, and provide fibre and unsaturated fats, which can reduce cholesterol and help to form insulin, among other vital hormones.

They are called amacimbi in IsiNdebele or madora in Shona, and are widely consumed in Zimbabwe's rural areas. They are washed, gutted and sorted before being preserved in the sun with salt – which, crucially, means they can be stored and eaten all year round.

Shallow-fry them in oil for a delicious afternoon snack, or cook them in peanut sauce for a more substantial meal. Either way, you won't go hungry. ■



Last week we sampled a classic kota in Soweto, this week it is mopane worms with relish. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know at letters@thecontinent.org. \$100 for the winning letter.



Photo: Still
from *Anyango
and the Ogre*

Folklore for the 21st Century

A new Netflix anthology pairs young filmmakers with old folktales and familiar tropes

Wilfred Okiche

In 2021, in partnership with Unesco, Netflix launched a continent-wide competition that invited up and coming filmmakers to pitch ideas for short films influenced by African folktales common to their communities. Six projects were eventually selected from about 2,000 entries. This is part of Netflix's strategic thinking around developing the next generation of African filmmaking talent.

The selected filmmakers – from Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda – were paired with experienced producers from their regions as well as external mentors to advise them. They each were handed \$25,000 in cash prizes, plus a decent budget to execute their projects in their local languages. The six short films were released as an anthology series titled *African Folktales, Reimagined* in April.

Encompassing various genres and

themes, the short stories that make up the anthology are indeed proof that the future of filmmaking on the continent is bright. In letting the filmmakers' respective voices shine through, the shorts also make the case for mentorship and peer support as crucial to maintaining sustainable film communities.

Most, if not all the films are female-centred and highlight various faces of the African girl child. While this hard focus is well intentioned, it also leaves the project vulnerable to criticism. The stories are built around thematic concerns that are unable to imagine the female form outside of the usual sociopolitical issues. At least two of the stories deal with domestic violence, with Voline Ogutu's *Anyango and the Ogre* (Kenya) coming off more inventive but also more literal than the inscrutable and, frankly, uninteresting *MaMlambo* (South Africa) directed by Gcobisa Yako.

Walt Mzengi Corey's *Katope* (Tanzania) is a lovingly rendered tragedy about a child manifested from muddy earth who must sacrifice herself in order to end the chronic drought that afflicts her village. And even the anthology's crown jewel, *Enmity Djinn* (Mauritania), executed with dazzling visual flair by Mohamed Echkoua, has a matriarchal figure who devotes a good portion of her onscreen time to shielding her family from evil in the form of a marauding djinn summoned by a malicious neighbour.

This self-sacrificial expectation runs through at least half of the stories, reinforcing a certain stereotype that is

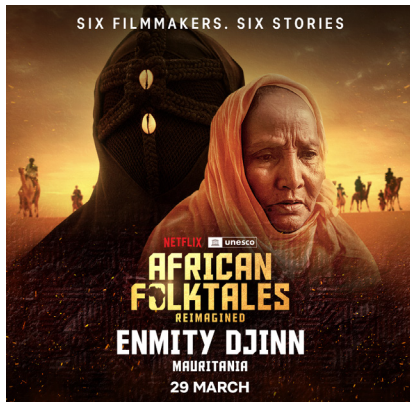


Photo:
Still from
*Katera of the
Punishment
Island*



often expected of the girl child or woman in several communities.

Sometimes there is some attempt to subvert this.

Loukman Ali's *Katera of the Punishment Island* (Uganda) starts out as one of those cautionary tales weaponised to shame young girls away from promiscuity. Girls who become pregnant out of wedlock – but not their male partners – are ostracised, sent to an abandoned island. But Ali, who is the most established of the filmmakers on the project, invokes his love for kinetic action scenes to unspool a cluttered revenge western fantasy.

Korede Azeez's *Halima's Choice* is set in the future but tells a tale as old as time, a young woman being forced to marry a much older man in a village in Nigeria's north. Even in the future, old habits die hard, apparently. But the spunky heroine chooses herself, empowered as she is after a chance encounter with a mysterious



stranger who may or may not be on a data-mining mission.

Some of the stories are quite familiar, others not so much and the *African Folktales, Reimagined* project could serve as an opportunity to preserve oral traditions by transitioning them from one medium to another. Netflix might be on to something. ■

Spare the rod, spare the child?

The World Health Organisation says corporal punishment of children has “no positive outcomes,” harms their development, and should be abolished. (And “positive parenting” advocates note that the proverbial shepherd used his rod to gently guide his sheep, not to hit them.)

In a majority of African households, parents appear to disagree. Across 36 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2021/2022, six in 10 adults (61%) say parents are “sometimes” or “always” justified in using physical force to discipline their children. Only 38% say corporal punishment is “never” justified.

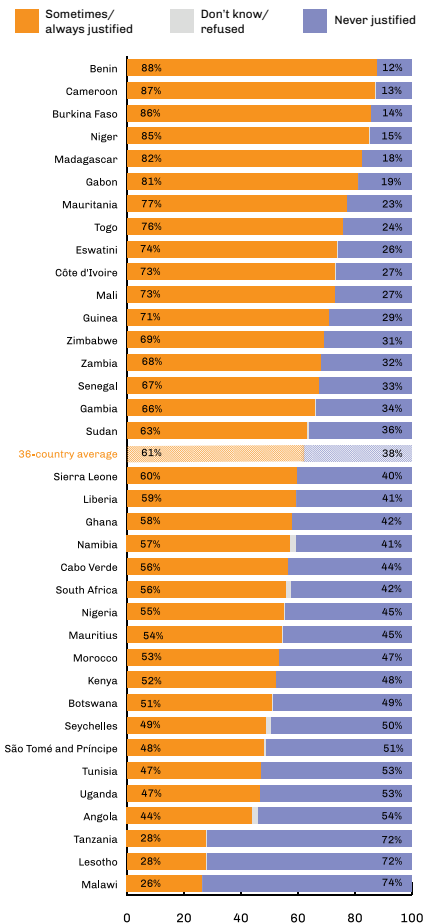
Majorities endorse the practice in 28 of the 36 countries, nearly nine in 10 in Benin (88%), Cameroon (87%), Burkina Faso (86%), and Niger (85%). Among respondents aged 18-25, 60% endorse it.

Malawi, Lesotho, and Tanzania stand out for their opposition to using physical force to discipline their children: 72%-74% consider it “never justified.”

Opposition to it is stronger among adults with at least primary schooling (40%-41%) than among those with no formal education (29%).

Happy Global Day of Parents on 1 June! 🇳🇮

Should parents use physical force to discipline children? | 36 African countries | 2021/2022



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

Well dear reader, an exciting week is ahead for film-fin fans everywhere as *The Little Mermaid* starring Halle Bailey is set to be released – in spite of the racist sputtering of bioscopic bigots who cannot countenance the existence of a black mermaid because *everyone* knows mermaids are supposed to be just as white as Jesus himself. A Reggae karaoke crab and a talking fish are apparently totally realistic, but a black mermaid? Beyond the pale!

Listen. Africans know all about fairy tales, okay? We hear them from our leaders all the time. Some are even real-life Cinderellas, working day and night scrubbing floors, walls and official records while their evil stepmothers and stepsisters appear in the form of human rights activists and journalists.

Of course, we have a few sleeping beauties among us, able to magically fall asleep during even the most momentous occasions.

And best believe more than a few have dipped into their nation's bottomless bag of treasure to pay for a magic carpet ride to Aladdin's neck of the woods.

So don't talk to us about how fairy tales

are meant to go. We know exactly how much salt we need to pinch. Especially when it comes to the Happily Ever After.

Reality plays different. In reality, the underdog doesn't go to the palace and smooch the prince. They get fed to the dragon.

Like in Senegal this week, where Ousmane Sonko's trial got under way.

Earlier this year the opposition figure was handed a suspended six-month sentence after he was found guilty in a defamation case involving the country's Tourism Minister Mame Mbaye Niang.

Now he is on trial accused of sexually assaulting a massage therapist in 2021. Proceedings were meant to begin weeks ago but were put on hold after Sonko's supporters

took to the streets in protest. Things kicked off this week though, with the prosecution calling for a 10-year jail sentence.

Rape and sexual assault charges should always be taken seriously. *Always*. So the wheels of justice must turn as they should – though we would be naive if we neglected to pay attention to who is driving the car of justice.

Once upon a crime



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

Sonko and his supporters say the allegations against him are politically motivated because if found guilty he would be prevented from standing for president in the 2024 elections.

The polls have been a talking point in the country because President Macky Sall, who is currently in his second term, has refused to rule out running for a third term, which Senegal's Constitution expressly forbids, claiming instead that his first term didn't really count.

Yes reader, you've all heard this one before; a land far, far, away, man becomes president, falls in love with power, decides he is the fairest of them all, meets a genie who gives him three wishes, finds a constitutional loophole to run for a third term, goes from beauty to beast, and lives happily ever after!

The lost prince

In the olden days fairy tales taught us that true-born kings and queens are good, kind, honest, noble and true. These days we have the Daily Mail for that sort of nonsense. But it helps explain why Queen Victoria is said to have rescued a young prince instead of kidnapping him and holding him hostage.

This week the *BBC* reported that Buckingham Palace has refused a request to repatriate the remains of an Ethiopian royal, Prince Alemayehu, who was "taken" (that word is doing a lot of heavy lifting) to the United Kingdom in the 19th century, where he died at just 18 years old.

Vicky, first of her name, arranged for him to be buried at Windsor Castle. His



What the dinglehopper?! Halle Bailey is making waves as *The Little Mermaid*.

descendants and Ethiopian authorities have since called for his remains to be repatriated, but the current royal gaggle have said, awfully sorry but he's in with a bunch of other folks, and it just wouldn't do to disturb their rest.

This is the same lot who recently had to dig up one of their own ex-kings after realising they'd built a car park on top of him. True story.

Grimm reality

Conflict in Sudan has now entered its fifth week and if anything it's getting worse – especially considering that humanitarian aid is not reaching victims of the violence.

The Red Cross says only a fifth of medical facilities in Khartoum are able to function, while UNHCR says over 300,000 people have fled Sudan and crossed over to neighbouring countries.

Once upon a time fairy tales were dark stories, filled not with the songs of princesses but with cautionary lessons for surviving a violent world. Somewhere along the line we turned that darkness and violence into light and joy.

We need to learn how to do that again.

Hype train: How to turn popularity into power

Opposition leaders on the rise will continue to fall short. Unless structures are strengthened and the ambitions of the old guard reduced

Mbulle-Nziege Leonard

Nigeria's 2023 presidential election saw genuine excitement that "third force" candidate Peter Obi could win. Despite having served as governor of Anambra State, he branded himself as an anti-establishment politician who would address deep-seated societal frustrations. Obi's candidacy for the Labour Party, which had never held power, reinforced the sense that he would bring change.

A strong grassroots and social media campaign thrust Obi to prominence, and he led many opinion polls heading into the election. Despite this, he came in third behind the winner Bola Tinubu and former vice-president Atiku Abubakar.

Why is it so hard for the likes of Obi and other opposition leaders in Africa to turn popularity into power?

Perhaps the most obvious factor is the combination of weak infrastructure and strong regimes. Tinubu is one of Nigeria's foremost political "godfathers". He built or inherited personal networks and party structures that let him mobilise across the country. Obi and the Labour Party struggled to replicate their reach. He was also unable to deploy party agents to protect the vote, leaving his campaign vulnerable to electoral manipulation.

In Uganda and Zimbabwe, opposition leaders Bobi Wine and Nelson Chamisa have struggled to build nationwide networks and to insulate their movements from repression and rigging. Senegal's Ousmane Sonko, who finished third in the 2019 contest, has faced a litany of court cases that could prevent him from standing in 2024. A similar story can be told about Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire.

Additionally, established opposition leaders have in some cases blocked the path for new and potentially more successful leaders – Kenya's Raila Odinga has lost five consecutive presidential elections, and may stand again.

Turning popularity into power requires building stronger structures, but also sacrificing personal ambition to foster more vibrant and united opposition movements. ■



Mbulle-Nziege Leonard is a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Dry run: A wave of searing heat has been devastating Mutan in Senegal since April, often rising above 48°C in the shade. It means Fulani pastoralists need more water for their livestock, there's less water to go around, and that what little there is costs so very much more.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images



The Continent is published by the Adamela Trust, a not-for-profit organisation that is dedicated to fostering quality journalism. It upholds strict editorial standards. For queries and complaints, or to make a donation, please contact read@thecontinent.org