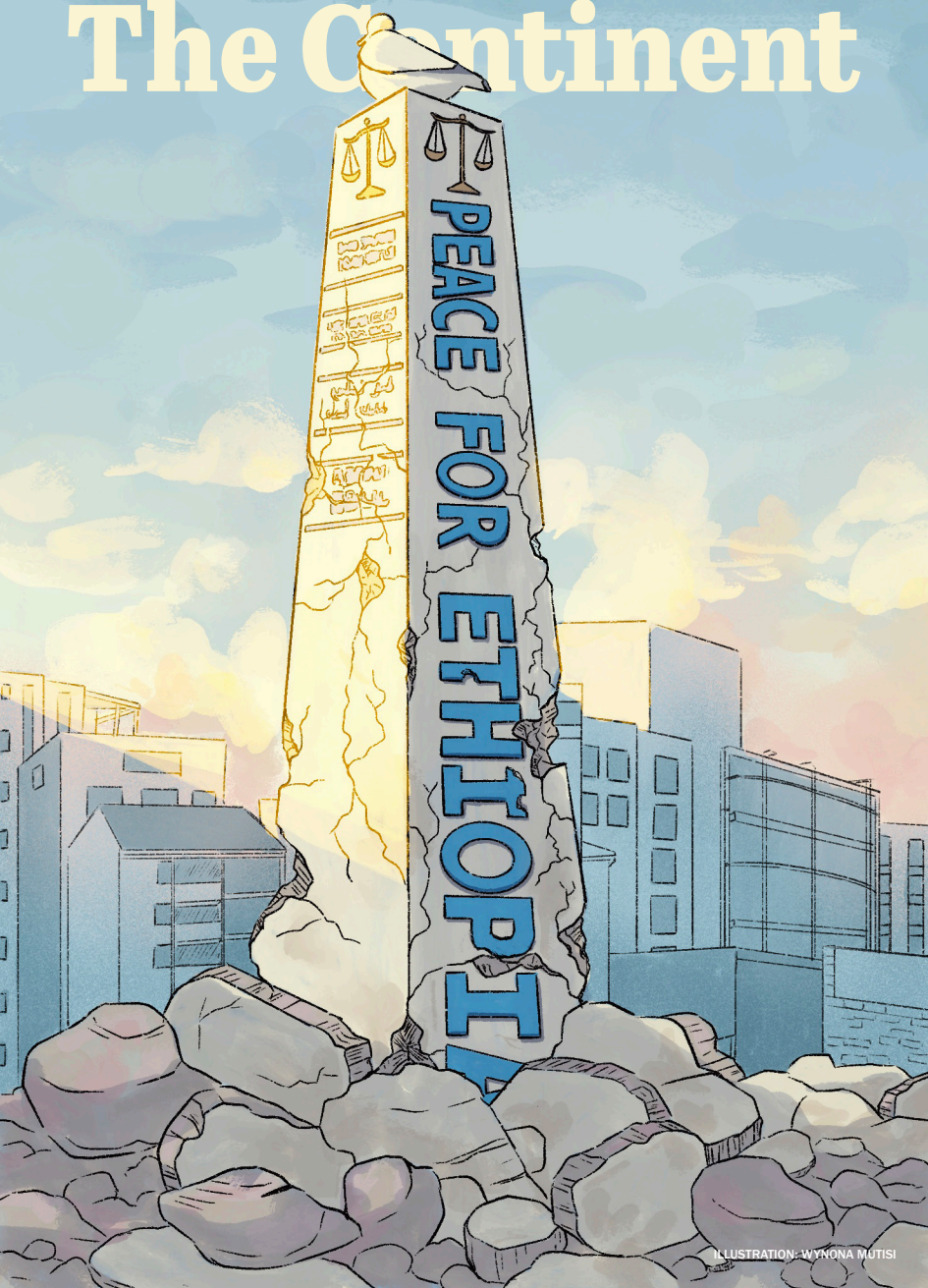


The Continent





COVER: Our cover illustration is of the Peace Monument in Wello Sefer, Addis Ababa. But the peace it celebrates is crumbling. Four years after the Pretoria Agreement ended a devastating war in Tigray, in Ethiopia's north, fighting has resumed. The deal stopped the active fighting without settling disputes over territory or Tigray's place in the country's political system. Peace depended on rival groups putting down their guns when each increasingly believed it was too dangerous to go first. During the uneasy truce, Tigray became politically isolated; its leadership fractured; and the alliance between Addis Ababa, Amhara forces, and Eritrea fell apart. Former enemies are now finding common cause against former allies. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. The country is at war again, for the second time since he was awarded that prize. (p13)

Inside

- 7 Sierra Leone:** Dutch fugitive in Freetown has EU threatening funding cuts
- 9 Burkina Faso:** New gold refinery promises all the good things
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- 18 China-Africa:** The silk route trade mostly runs in one direction
- 21 Photos:** If you could write a letter to nature, what would you say?
- 28 Quiz:** There's a place that will make you go "waw!"



Africans of the Year:

Welcome to the last season of 2026!
We are back after a short break of touching so much grass.

It's that time of the year when we are working on finding the most interesting Africans doing the coolest and most important things. This year, we're inviting you, our readers, to nominate someone you think is worthy. You can do so by filling this simple and painless [form](#).

THE WEEK IN BRIEF

KENYA

Ebola breaks in – but it hasn't broken out?

The health ministry has confirmed Kenya's first-ever Ebola death: a Kenyan who lived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The patient fell ill a month ago, was treated in the DRC, and travelled by road to Kampala before flying into Nairobi last week. Health authorities are racing to trace over 50 contacts and 10 people have already been quarantined. His journey raises serious questions about border screening procedures. Kenya health ministry insists that, technically, there is no Ebola outbreak in the country.

MOROCCO

Elon's cure for receding airlines is taking off

Royal Air Maroc has signed a deal with Elon Musk's SpaceX to install the Starlink internet service aboard 41 aircraft, making it the first African carrier to do so, *Business Insider Africa* reports. Chief exec Hamid Addou said the installation will begin early next year. The agreement is part of a wider programme comprising fleet renewal, cabin improvements, and passenger services. Neither the airline nor SpaceX disclosed the value of the contract.



Separation anxieties: Soldiers from the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad ride a motorbike through Kidal, Mali.

MALI

A holly victory in a ghost town

The Malian army and its Russian allies entered the strategic northern city of Kidal on Tuesday without resistance after a tactical withdrawal by Tuareg separatists. This is five months after government forces were driven out, *RFI* reports. The city had fallen in late April during a co-ordinated offensive by Tuareg separatists and Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists. Mali's defence minister was killed during that violence. Tuesday's recapture represents a major political and military victory for Mali's transitional authorities, even though the city itself remains largely deserted.



ZAMBIA

We're into conscious uncoupling

Foreign minister Mulambo Haimbe announced Zambia is negotiating a new mineral agreement with the United States after uncoupling it from a \$1.5-billion health package. Speaking at the health pact's signing ceremony, Haimbe stated terms for the mineral deal remain under negotiation and declined to provide additional details, *Reuters* reports. Earlier in the year, Zambia resisted a proposal that made health sector funding contingent on granting the US expanded access to its mineral resources. The minister did not specify which minerals are included in the new talks.

EGYPT

Whose story will you believe?

Prosecutors in Cairo have accused six journalists from the independent fact-checking platform *Matsadaash* (Arabic for “don’t believe it”) of terrorism-related offences. The charges allege they worked for the banned Muslim Brotherhood and accepted foreign funding to spread “false news”, undermine state institutions, and incite demonstrations, according to the *Associated Press*. The newsroom frequently fact-checks statements by state officials. Defence lawyers reported the journalists were tortured after their arrests. The interior ministry has denied this claim.

BURKINA FASO

Traoré believes the ball is in his court

President Ibrahim Traoré has hinted his government could intervene in the country's football federation, despite the risk of attracting Fifa sanctions by doing so. "Our football is sick. We are going to find the remedy," he said this week, *RMC Sport* reports. His remarks followed a chaotic international friendly against Argentina. Burkina Faso lost 7-0 after a cancelled flight to Buenos Aires led several players to decline to travel under the revised arrangements. The Burkina side ultimately fielded a largely U-23 squad.

NOBEL PRIZE

Pillay peace prize is a poke in the eye for US

South African jurist Navi Pillay was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday, recognised for "promoting peace and international law". Pillay has a long and illustrious career in human-rights law, from defending apartheid struggle activists to serving on the International Criminal Court. Most recently, she chaired the United Nations commission that ruled Israel has committed genocide in Gaza. Her win could be seen as a tacit endorsement of South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, which has drawn the ire of the United States.



Let them eat cake: Happy birthday, here is a cake made out of money. It is very delicious.

GHANA

'Money bouquets need to stop being a thing'

Authorities in Ghana have arrested seven people for making "money bouquets" out of cedi banknotes, the *BBC* reports. The Bank of Ghana warned the practice violates laws against currency misuse, stating the currency must be treated with "respect". Money bouquets and cakes decorated with currency are popular gifts for weddings, birthdays, and graduations, but their use has prompted similar warnings from central bankers across Africa, including in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Botswana.

DJIBOUTI

Red Sea crossings go both ways

People are crossing the narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait in both directions, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says. Nearly 4,000 refugees have recently fled Yemen, many by fishing boats across the strait. They are seeking refuge in Djibouti amid renewed fighting between Saudi-backed forces and Houthi rebels. Meanwhile, the IOM has recorded more than 20,000 journeys from Ethiopia since early last month, as migrants travel through Djibouti towards Yemen, hoping to find work in the Gulf.

BUSINESS

Dangote greases wheels, gets Africa nice and oily

Dangote Petroleum Refinery is offering nearly 20% of its initial public offering to East African investors, an allocation worth up to \$300.4-million, according to *Bloomberg*. Its crude-processing facility in Nigeria is the largest on the continent. The refinery's IPO secured approval from Kenya's Capital Markets Authority for a short-form prospectus, enabling local participation in the \$1.6-billion offering. Uganda has similarly opened its market, allowing the distribution of Dangote Refinery securities to local investors.

JOINING the DOTS

CHRISTINE MUNGAI

ZIMBABWEAN businessman Wicknell Chivayo, killed in a helicopter crash on 30 September, leaves an

extraordinary presidential photo album. He cheerfully posed with Nigeria's Bola Tinubu, Tanzania's Samia Suluhu Hassan, Malawi's Peter Mutharika, Mozambique's Daniel Chapo, and Zambia's Hakainde Hichilema. He met South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa at the farm of Zimbabwe's Emmerson Mnangagwa and attended the engagement of Kenya's William Ruto's daughter. Look closer at the company

he kept. Mutharika's 2019 election was annulled; Ruto won in 2022 by just 1.64 percentage points; Chapo's 2025 victory sparked widespread protests; Suluhu's 2025 election was followed by deadly violence; and Hichilema's 2026 re-election faced allegations of repression and irregularities. These leaders have different politics, and photographs prove neither influence nor wrongdoing. But what Chivayo's friends have in common is a shared political ecosystem: strong executives, contested or uneven electoral competition, limited transparency about who gets presidential access, and a porous boundary between public authority and private wealth. ■

NEWS

SIERRA LEONE

No aid for abetting, threatens EU

Brussels says Sierra Leone must hand over a convicted drug kingpin – or else.

ERIC KAWA IN FREETOWN

THE EUROPEAN Union has withheld budgetary support worth €18-million (\$21-million) from Sierra Leone, which could affect funding for running the country's healthcare and infrastructure.

Dutch justice minister David van Weel told *De Telegraaf* newspaper that the freeze is meant to pressure Freetown into arresting and extraditing Jos Leijdekkers. The latter is a Dutch drug kingpin

convicted multiple times for cocaine trafficking, violent crimes, and money-laundering. He has been sentenced in absentia in the Netherlands and Belgium to decades in prison.

A *Reuters* investigation revealed that Leijdekkers has been living in Sierra Leone since 2024, using an alias. However, Freetown claims it does not know his whereabouts. Authorities have previously said the person identified in the country was one Umar Sheriff. Sierra Leone insists it is committed to “international co-operation against transnational organised crime”.

Freetown denies that the funding has been suspended and instead describes it as “a delay”. It claims the disbursements have been rescheduled to the 2027 and 2028 budget years.

Economist Dr Mohamed Ibrahim Justice Ganawah told *The Continent* the immediate financial impact should be manageable if the funding is deferred rather than cancelled. The government could bridge the gap through spending adjustments or domestic financing, he said, noting that Sierra Leone is already dealing with tight fiscal conditions.

Political commentator Victor Moinina said ordinary citizens would fare the worst if external support were disrupted. He urged the government to use diplomatic channels to resolve Leijdekkers's extradition. ■



Flown Dutchman: The government denies the person in this Facebook clip is the wanted fugitive.

SENEGAL

Wading through a race against time

BORSO TALL IN DAKAR

“A DEAD Monday. Everything collapsed.” This is how resident Lamine Dieng describes the recent torrential rains in Senegal, which have led to heavy flooding. Five people have died and infrastructure has been destroyed.

The rain began last Friday and continued into this week, heavily affecting the capital, Dakar. Floodwater rose to nearly 1.82m high in some areas, destroying homes and other buildings.

Prime Minister Ahmadou Al Aminou Lô acknowledged that drainage systems

had been overwhelmed and announced a \$1.5-million emergency response plan.

Dakar is racing against time to implement this plan, with the city set to host the Youth Olympics from 31 October. But weather forecasts predict more storms throughout the month.

Climate researcher El Hadji Malik Sylla says the capital is paying for rapid, unplanned expansion. During exceptionally heavy rainy seasons, he said, the water simply reclaims its territory within the wetland basins in which new buildings have been constructed without due consideration. ■



Now we wade:
Heavy rains
inundated Senegal
at the weekend,
flooding streets
in Dakar.

PHOTO: SEYLOU/AFP

BURKINA FASO

Beneficiation is worth the wait in gold

A new refinery follows a growing trend to process minerals before exporting them – and reap the rewards.

LAMINE TRAORÉ IN OUAGADOUGOU

IN A PUSH towards economic sovereignty, Burkina Faso opened its first gold refinery, Raffinor-BF, in the capital Ouagadougou last week. President Ibrahim Traoré described it as a move “from extraction to control”.

Burkina Faso is one of Africa’s top gold producers. In the past, it shipped raw doré bars to international refining hubs, where they were purified into 24-karat investment-grade bars. The new refinery has a processing capacity of 146 tonnes, which is expected to increase to 515 tonnes. The country produced 94 tonnes of gold from its mines last year.

Political analyst Karim Diallo said the project has the potential to generate state revenue and create jobs. “This is an enterprise destined to grow and enable Burkina Faso to achieve self-sufficiency...



PHOTO: PRÉSIDENCE DU FASO

We must hope that the results live up to the promise,” he told *The Continent*.

The local refinery is also intended to curb gold smuggling, which is often controlled by local armed groups. A study by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative estimates that up to one-third of Burkina Faso’s gold is smuggled out of the country every year. A key route is through Togo, which has a low export tax, where it is melted, refined, and re-exported. Much of that gold ends up in the United Arab Emirates.

Mining expert Ag Ibrahim Mohamed said the refinery’s success will be dependent on factors like energy availability and local skills.

Burkina Faso joins several African countries embracing mineral nationalism by reducing the export of raw materials and increasing the production and export of beneficiated goods. Guinea and Ghana have restricted gold exports and Nigeria’s new refinery has increased its refined-fuel exports. ■

Reading is resistance



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TANZANIA

Hell and high water: Ready or not, here comes the rain

As East Africa battens down its hatches and prepares to ride out El Niño, families worry about more than the weather.

KIZITO MAKOYE IN DAR ES SALAAM

THE PREDICTED rains have begun in Tanzania with more downpours expected as El Niño escalates. The United Nations forecast that the weather phenomenon, which began in mid-2026 and is expected to peak between October and December, could be among the strongest on record.

For Tanzanians like John Nchala, the flood is not the only worry. He also has to think about how to survive economically – during the rains and in their aftermath.

The El Niño conditions begin thousands of miles away in the Pacific. As the ocean warms, global wind patterns are disrupted, forcing the western Indian Ocean, off the coast of Tanzania, to heat rapidly. A massive amount of water

evaporates then blows into East Africa, where it hits land and falls as heavy rain.

The country's Meteorological Authority warned that El Niño rains begin this month and will persist until January 2027.

This is Nchala's second El Niño. He remembers all too well how the 1997 rains hit his home village of Ifakara, where floods kept his classmates out of school. At home, his family, like many others, struggled to put food on the table.

Now an adult, married with four children, Nchala lives in Sinza, in the capital Dar es Salaam. He is worried about his carpentry business and the safety of his family.

The government has set aside 10-billion Tanzanian shillings (\$3.8-million) in its 2026/27 budget for the country's response plans, but residents are concerned about how well the country is truly prepared for the hardships El Niño will bring.

In Sinza, authorities have designated evacuation routes and drawn up emergency plans ahead of the rains, but no drills have been conducted.

According to ward councillor Raphael Owino, the plan identifies two temporary shelters with capacity for 300 people. Nchala has not seen an evacuation map, however. He plans to take his family along the main road to a nearby primary school, although he does not know



Cubit cuts: John Nchala and fellow carpenters prepare wood panels ahead of the rains. PHOTO: KIZITO MAKOYE

whether it is a designated shelter or how to get there if the road floods.

In the neighbourhood, which is densely populated and where drains are clogged, floods often damage infrastructure, disrupt work, contaminate drinking water, and trigger disease outbreaks.

Where drains are clogged, floods often damage infrastructure, disrupt work, contaminate drinking water, and trigger disease outbreaks.

Romanus Opiyo, an urbanisation expert at the Stockholm Environment Institute, says floods don't just kill people, displace families and damage houses. They also cause "loss of employment and disruption of livelihoods".

Last month, the prime minister's office issued directives to identify flood-risk areas, prepare emergency shelters, clear drains, and ready rescue equipment.

Residents are not convinced. "They told us to prepare for heavy rain, but they don't tell us how to rescue our young children from floods," says Mwantumu Mazimbu, a Sinza resident.

A week without work could leave Nchala short of 350,000 Tanzanian shillings in take-home earnings. A drain runs beside his workshop. If it overflows, water could enter through the open sides and soak stored timber.

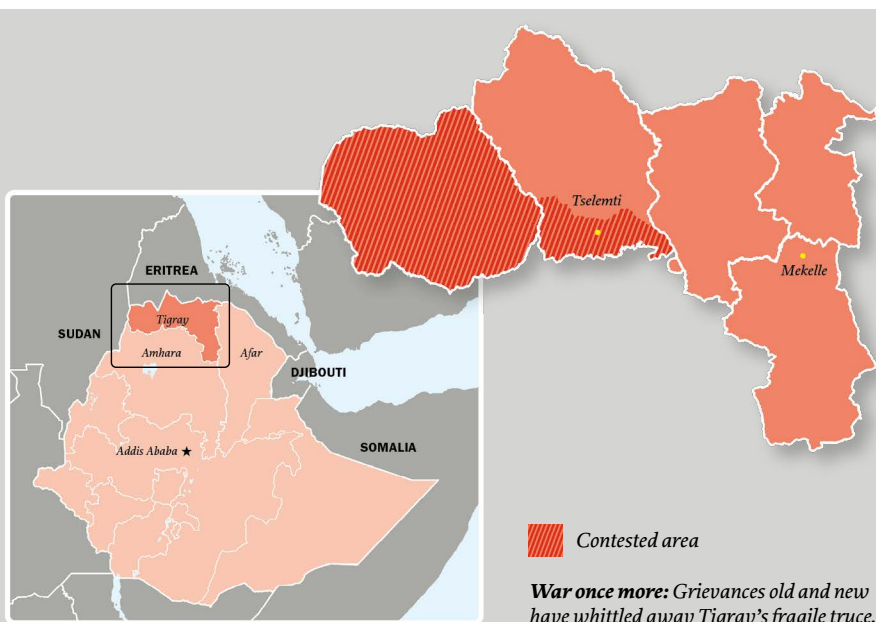
He worries about the damage the rains will do to his stock, and about how flooded infrastructure will delay orders. Most of all, he worries that he will be unable to take care of his children.

"If I can't work, where will the money for their food come from?" ■

ANALYSIS

How Tigray's peace deal came undone

The deal that ended Ethiopia's devastating civil war depended on enemies disarming and negotiating a shared future. Neither side budged. *The Continent* reconstructs how the peace failed.



SIYANNE MEKONNEN

THE WARNING signs have been building for months. In January, Tigrayan fighters moved into Tselemti, a district held by Amhara militias and Ethiopian federal forces since the 2020-2022 war. Flights

to Mekelle, Tigray's capital, were briefly suspended as federal forces moved heavy armour and artillery towards the region.

That district was at the centre of one of the disputes left unresolved by the 2022 Pretoria Agreement. This is the peace deal that formally ended the fighting and

set out terms for disarmament and the restoration of federal authority in Tigray.

By August, the standoff had become an armed confrontation. Tigrayan and federal forces clashed along the Ethiopia-Sudan border. And an alleged government airstrike on a residential compound in Tigray wounded 13 civilians, including seven children, according to Human Rights Watch.

"We saw multiple aerial strikes before fighting broke in September, but residents were accustomed to persistent tension, so movement and daily activities were not significantly impacted," said a lecturer at Mekelle University who spoke to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity.

Then, in September, Tigrayan forces seized Mekelle airport. The fragile truce

had tipped back into all-out war.

The African Union-brokered Pretoria Agreement ended a devastating two-year war in November 2022. High estimates state 600,000 people were killed – making it one of the deadliest wars in Africa in this century. That war pitted the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) against the Ethiopian federal forces and Amhara militias supported by Eritrean troops.

But the agreement left some of the conflict's most difficult questions unresolved. Who would control the contested areas in Western Tigray, claimed both by the TPLF and neighbouring Amhara? When could displaced Tigrayans return to their homes? How could Tigrayan forces disarm while their rival Eritrean and Amhara forces remained in and around



PHOTO: AFP

The taking of Mekelle: Pro-government forces patrol the streets of Mekelle on 4 October while Ethiopian federal and allied forces enter the Tigray capital, now largely abandoned by the region's rebel authorities.

the region? And how would Tigray be brought back into Ethiopia's political system?

The security-bargain jams

Only 63,000 of 274,000 registered Tigrayan fighters completed demobilisation before the programme collapsed. Amhara militias remained in contested Western Tigray and Eritrean troops pulled back, but remained around disputed border areas.

The peace depended on each side following steps it increasingly saw as too risky to take first.

For Tigrayan forces, putting down their weapons while former enemies remained armed nearby carried an obvious risk. But Tigray remaining heavily armed gave its rivals their own reason not to disarm.



PHOTO: AFP

Out to scout: A member of the pro-government Tigray Peace Force patrols Mekelle on 3 October.

The territorial dispute reinforced the deadlock. Displaced Tigrayans could not return while contested areas remained under Amhara control, but their return was difficult to negotiate without first resolving who controlled the territory.

Meanwhile, the stalled peace was deepening divisions within Tigray's leadership over how closely to work with Addis Ababa. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed appointed former TPLF spokesperson Getachew Reda to lead the interim administration, as required by the peace deal.

Getachew prioritised co-operation with the federal government in order to secure resources and advance the peace process. His rivals accused him of conceding too much while Tigray's territorial and security disputes remained unresolved. Reda was subsequently ousted by Debretsion Gebremichael in October 2024.

To add to the TPLF's crisis, the National Election Board of Ethiopia officially deregistered the party on 13 May 2025. The board stated the TPLF had failed to hold a general assembly and ignored repeated warnings to comply with electoral and administrative requirements.

The 2021 national elections were held during the war and Tigray did not have a single delegate in Ethiopia's lower or upper house of Parliament. The region then missed out on yet another election in June 2026.

From friends to enemies

Meanwhile, the alliances of the previous

war were tearing apart. Amhara forces and Eritrea had fought alongside the federal government against the TPLF. Neither was party to the Pretoria talks and, in the years that then followed, both fell out with Addis Ababa for reasons of their own.

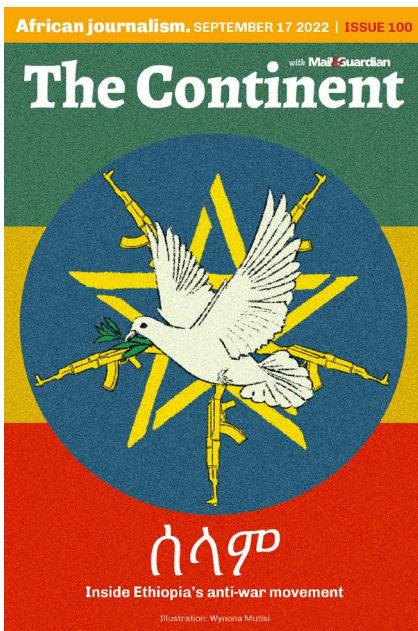
In 2023, Amhara fighters turned their guns on the federal government after it ordered regional and paramilitary forces to integrate into federal security structures. Amhara fighters saw the move as leaving them vulnerable while Tigray's army remained largely intact.

Eritrea's relationship with Addis Ababa also deteriorated amid Abiy's ambitions to secure access to the Red Sea. Ethiopia lost its coastline when Eritrea became independent in 1993.

Those fractures created space for former enemies – and other opponents of Addis Ababa – to find common ground across the old battle lines.

Three days before Tigrayan forces seized Mekelle airport on 23 September, seven armed opposition groups – including the TPLF, the Amhara Fano National Movement, and the Oromo Liberation Army – announced an alliance seeking to remove the federal government and establish a transitional government. Addis Ababa accused Eritrea of backing the alliance, which Eritrea denies.

By the time the fragile peace tipped back into war, the political landscape had been radically reordered. Former enemies were finding common cause and former allies now faced each other across the battlefield.



Fighting for peace: Almost exactly four years ago, *The Continent* reported on “Ethiopia’s new pacifists” and the emerging anti-war movement in response to the fighting between the Ethiopian government and Tigray’s regional leadership. In 2026, war has broken out once again.

For civilians, the collapse of the peace has brought the swift return of conditions familiar from the previous war.

“The shortage of fuel, medicine, and clean water is as bad as before the war restarted,” the university lecturer in Mekelle told *The Continent*, adding that petrol had reached as high as 1,000 birr (\$6.13) a litre.

As federal forces advanced on Mekelle, residents stocked up on cash and basic goods while markets, transport, and communications were disrupted.

An aid worker who requested anonymity told *The Continent* that after federal forces captured Mekelle on 3 October, city residents feared reprisals against those suspected to be TPLF supporters.

And the fighting is no longer confined to Tigray. Heavy clashes continue in neighbouring Amhara and Afar; meanwhile, a drone attack was reported on a military headquarters in Addis Ababa on 1 October.

Ethiopia's relations with neighbouring Eritrea – its ally in the last war – have sharply deteriorated. The two countries severed diplomatic ties last week.

This battlefield is particularly dangerous in a Horn of Africa already crowded with numerous conflicts and rivalries. Sudan is at war, Somalia remains unstable, and tensions over Red Sea access and the Nile have drawn countries across the region into

competing alliances.

“What makes the conflict so difficult to contain is the historic animosity between Ethiopia and Eritrea, coupled with the overlapping regional instabilities and foreign influences driving these neighbours into conflict,” Cameron Hudson, an independent analyst focused on African peace, security and governance told *The Continent*. “They didn’t need a push to return to war, but they are getting it.”

However for Tigrayans, the immediate fear is more familiar. Their plea: “Please don’t make civilians pay the price in another war – not again.” ■

Siyanne Mekonnen is an independent journalist and former editor-in-chief of the *Addis Standard* magazine



Grievous harm: Family members wait with a young girl after an operation to amputate her leg, at a Mekelle hospital. She was injured by heavy artillery when fighting between rebel and federal forces broke out on 23 September.

PHOTO: AFP

FEATURE

The Silk Route's a one-way road

African traders use Chinese apps and finely tuned logistics to move goods home with ease. Beijing says it wants more trade moving the other way – but our infrastructure just isn't there yet.

ALEXANDRIA WILLIAMS IN YIWU

Yiwu in eastern China, 300km southwest of Shanghai, is known as the world's largest wholesale market for small consumer goods. You can find everything from homeware and kitchenware to toys, clothes, and fashion accessories.

Here, among the tens of thousands of stalls, traders from across Africa move through the aisles with a phone in each hand. One connects them to home. The other runs the Chinese apps that make business here possible.

There is no single app for transactions. Instead, the traders have created a patchwork of solutions for themselves.

Abdirahim Said, 23, from Somalia, uses Yiwugo, the market's wholesale sourcing app, not to trade, but as a product directory. He searches for goods on Yiwugo, contacts vendors on WeChat, then meets them in person to buy.

Ibrahim Lawal, a Cameroonian trader who has lived in Yiwu for five years, pays suppliers through WeChat and then books a truck on HuoLala – an app for trucks on demand usually used for household moves – to carry the goods to his warehouse.

John*, from Nigeria, does things differently. He doesn't use Yiwugo to source goods because he has direct relationships with vendors. And his



Silk stocking:
An aerial view of just one section of the sprawling Yiwu International Trade Market in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in eastern China.

PHOTO: NG HAN GUAN/AP

trading group has its own trucks to ferry goods to the port of Ningbo. His biggest obstacle is language. Rather than hire an interpreter, he uses \$440 AI translation earbuds: he wears one earbud and his negotiating partner the other.

Over four decades, Yiwu has grown from fewer than 1,000 stalls to nearly 80,000. About 3,000 African traders now live there, according to local government figures. Their fluency in this ecosystem – and the availability of technological solutions to reduce transactional frictions – explains why goods move so efficiently in one direction: from China to Africa.

Now try going the other way

The 23-storey China-Africa building is just 1km away from the market. It was opened in 2025 to expand trade in both directions. But its ninth-floor exhibition space for African goods displays only a handful of African artworks, statues, and agricultural products, in sharp contrast to Yiwu's sprawling wholesale market.

Last year, China exported \$225-billion in goods to Africa. It imported \$123-billion – a \$102-billion deficit for the continent, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

Raw materials like crude oil and unprocessed minerals account for 80% to 90% of Africa's exports to China, whereas 85% of China's exports to the continent are finished goods like machinery, electronics, and vehicles. These command a higher value than raw materials.

In May, China extended zero-tariff

measures to cover most African countries to "welcome quality products" from the country into its vast market. But tariffs are only one obstacle.

John, the trader from Nigeria, doesn't see the appeal in shifting from importing to exporting.

"I've attended a few seminars on exporting cashews, but the problem is they either go bad on getting to the Apapa port in Lagos or rot waiting to be shipped out to China," he told *The Continent*.

Paul Frimpong, founder of the Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory, an Accra-based think tank, said African countries need to build their export pipelines, infrastructure, and processing capacity to take advantage of China's market.

Ethiopia is a good example. Despite zero-tariff access for hundreds of agricultural products and a Chinese-funded railway connecting Addis Ababa to the port of Djibouti, its exports to China remain concentrated on raw products such as coffee and legumes. Its imports, meanwhile, are mostly finished goods like electronics, phones, and cars.

That trade imbalance works in China's favour, says Frimpong – including in Beijing's pursuit of strategic minerals from Africa.

From the view of the ninth floor of Yiwu's Africa-China building, a more balanced trade relationship is still largely an aspiration.

"All the business is here," said John, in the bustling market below. ■

*Name changed to protect identity

We love to hear from you

UNLESS you're a 2026 subscriber (hi!), you'll remember our most recent Big Annual Survey™, in which 1,481 of you took part. In it, we asked you to tell us about your Happy Place™. We'll be sharing a few of those responses with you this season. Look out for our mascot Astro, who's hiding somewhere in each illustration.

“The Bahá'í Temple in Kampala,”



ILLUSTRATION: KWIZ ERA

PHOTO ESSAY

When absence takes hold

WORDS AND PHOTOS: FATMA FAHMY

LAKE Qarun in Egypt's Fayoum region formed about 70,000 years ago – one of the oldest lakes in the world. Fast-forward several thousands of years to when pharaonic-era engineers developed it into a reservoir by constructing canals to increase the flow of water.

In more recent history, the lake used to provide a livelihood for the people of

Ezbet Soliman and nearby villages. It was a watery portal to love, companionship, and a whole way of life.

Over the past decades, that portal has slowly closed. When the Aswan High Dam was completed in 1970, the lake's connection to the Nile River was cut.

The resultant increased salinity, untreated sewage, and agricultural runoff, polluted the water. Fish disappeared and the shoreline receded.





It felt as if closing the portal had left the community suspended between two worlds: land that had lost its water, and souls still searching for life.

This kind of environmental exploitation leaves its deepest marks on women. They are often the first members of a community to feel the pain when nature collapses, but the last to abandon the land where they live.

In systems built on control and not care, women are left to carry the burden alone – they are the final bridge between

a crumbling land and its people. They are rarely seen as part of the solution.

But women's stories are not important only for the suffering they surface. They are a way in – to understand how people hold grief and memory through place.

At its heart, the ecofeminist visual project *When Absence Takes Hold* asks: What is our relationship with the places we've lost? How do we carry memory in our bodies, in our gestures, in the silence we inherit? If you could write a letter to nature, what would you say? ■





DATA

Child, bridled

THE THEME for this year’s International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October is “End child marriage and invest in girls’ rights”. West and Central Africa have the highest rate of child marriage in the world: 37% of girls are married before they reach adulthood.

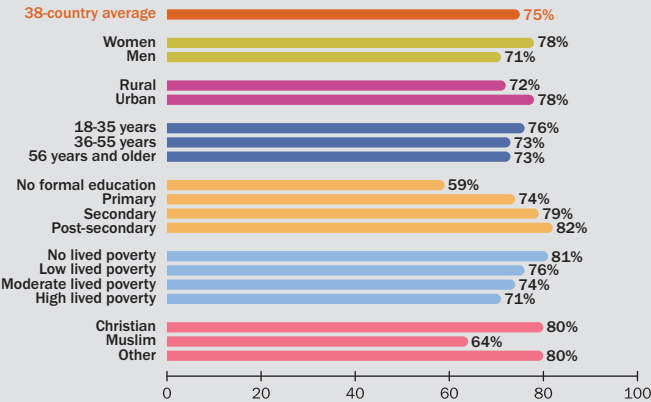
Do Africans believe women and girls have a right to decide for themselves whether and when to get married?

In 36 of the 38 countries we surveyed in 2024/2025, majorities say they do. The two exceptions are Mauritania (45%) and Mali (35%), which fall way below the continental average of 75%.

Women are more supportive than men of making their own marriage choices (78% vs 71%). Education seems to factor: adults without formal schooling are less likely than those with a post-secondary education to endorse women’s marital autonomy (59% vs 82%). Greater wealth is also associated with higher endorsement (71% among very poor respondents vs 81% among the well-off).

Religious culture matters, too. Fewer than two-thirds (64%) of Muslims say women should make their own marriage decisions, compared to 80% of Christians and followers of other faiths. ■

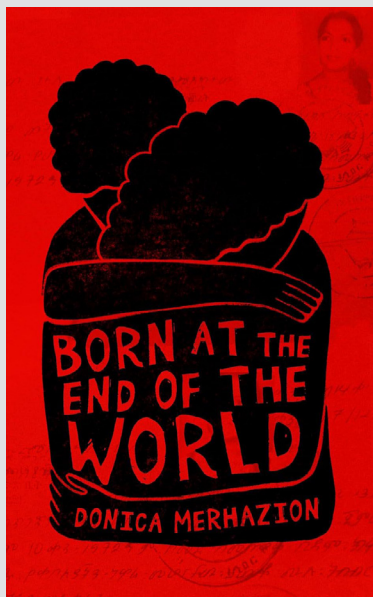
Support for women’s marriage autonomy | 38 African countries | 2024/2025





TC BOOK REVIEW

BY JACQUELINE NYATHI



History defeats itself

This Ethiopian novel
digs into the past,
but speaks to the
present moment.

CONFLICT in Ethiopia and the region goes back generations. And of course, memories of the 2020 to 2022 Tigray war are fresh, even as fighting there begins to break out again in a different form.

Donica Merhazion weaves her family's history into *Born at the End of the World*, set during a different period of conflict, during the 1960s and '70s.

The novel begins with Elen fleeing her village at 13 after her father tries to marry her off to a much older wealthy man. She goes to her aunt in Asmara who has modern views, including that children should not be married off.

Elen soon finds her feet in this new environment and stands up to her parents about not returning to the village. Instead, she finds work as a waitress and is absorbed into urban life.

Later, Elen saves enough money to set up her own business, a bar, just as Emperor Haile Selassie is overthrown and Asmara becomes restive under the Derg.

The bar becomes a place where Derg soldiers gather and where Elen can pick up gossip to pass on to Eritrea's freedom fighters. She makes herself indispensable, which attracts the attention of paranoid Derg officials.

This is also a love story, not only for a nation, but between a man and a woman. After some false starts, Elen meets the love of her life in a fellow freedom fighter and spy, Girmai.



PHOTO: CATALYST PRESS

Although the novel's point of view switches between Elen and Girmai, this is mainly Elen's story, with Girmai serving as her foil.

This is the story of the formation of a family through the life of its future matriarch. Elen is caught up in a struggle that's not, strictly speaking, hers.

She is Ethiopian, and Eritrea is her adopted country. But, partly as an accident of circumstance, partly in gratitude to the place where she finds her own freedom, and partly for her children's future, Elen wants to do what she can for Eritrea's independence.

She's arrested and becomes a victim of the brutality the Derg inflicts on ordinary citizens – known as the Red Terror.

Here Merhazion is telling the story of torture specifically against a woman and she spares us none of the details. (Like

Elen, Merhazion's mother was held in the notorious prison Alem Bekagn.)

These passages about Elen's experiences are graphic and difficult to read, but they are real things that happened to real people at the time.

It feels important not to look away from any of it.

And so this novel serves as a social, oral, and personal history of the Derg's activities against the people of Eritrea. It might make no claim to comment about current events, but remembering history may help us to identify when we're repeating it.

Elen's story is riveting and *Born at the End of the World* is a deeply stirring novel. Reading about events 60 to 70 years ago at a time when they are suddenly all-too relevant again adds an extra emotional charge. ■

The Quiz

- 1 What is the largest country in East Africa by land mass?
- 2 Who did Sierra Leone gain independence from in 1961?
- 3 On which day is Africa Day celebrated?
- 4 Mekelle is the largest city in which Ethiopian region?
- 5 What is Ghana's official language?
- 6 True or false: Malawi is a coastal country.
- 7 Ouagadougou is which country's capital?
- 8 Who is Kenya's president?
- 9 What is Madagascar's currency?
- 10 In which country is Waw an Namus (pictured) found?



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

"When experts on dormant volcanoes say they're actually history lavas, they're just being maganimous."

Big Pic

Turning tides: Boatman Yusuf Athman waits for passengers in Lamu, Kenya. The island's dhow boats, 12th-century Old Town and pristine beaches will soon have to reckon with an oil refinery, being built nearby by Nigerian tycoon Aliko Dangote.

PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP



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