

# The Continent



EXCLUSIVE:

**How to  
rig your  
neighbour's  
election**



**COVER** The rumours seemed too crazy to be true. Surely Zanu-PF, Zimbabwe's ruling party, was not really encouraging its supporters to vote in Mozambique's presidential election? Surely they were not issuing fake Mozambican IDs to help them do so? But when reporters went undercover to investigate, they too were given an opportunity to participate in cross-border electoral fraud – and they were not the only ones (p7). Also in this special edition: Travel with us to the streets of Addis Ababa, which are changing so furiously that even our resident photographer can't keep up. Read on page 29.

# This is a very special edition

Welcome to the 200th issue of *The Continent*. We are marking this momentous occasion with messages from our editor-in-chief (p23) and publisher (p26). But this is not really about us: the only reason we are here today, five years after launching in the middle of a pandemic, is because of you. By reading this newspaper every week, you are choosing journalism over fake news and noise. You are disproving the doubters – there were many – who said there was no audience for high-quality African journalism. And, by sharing this publication, you are helping us to create a revolutionary new model for journalism – one not beholden to algorithms, AI or political interests. So, this week, we celebrate you, in your own words, and in your own happy places (p14).

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# THE WEEK IN BRIEF



**Taking atoll:** *Chagos's Diego Garcia island will remain under UK-US military control.*

## MAURITIUS

### The sun finally sets on the British Empire

The UK has signed a £3.4-billion agreement to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, after a challenge by Chagossian activists failed. Britain retains a 99-year lease on the largest island, to operate a US-UK military base. With territories circling the world, the UK could once say that the sun never sets on the British Empire. Without the Chagos Islands, and for the first time in two centuries: no more.

## MALI

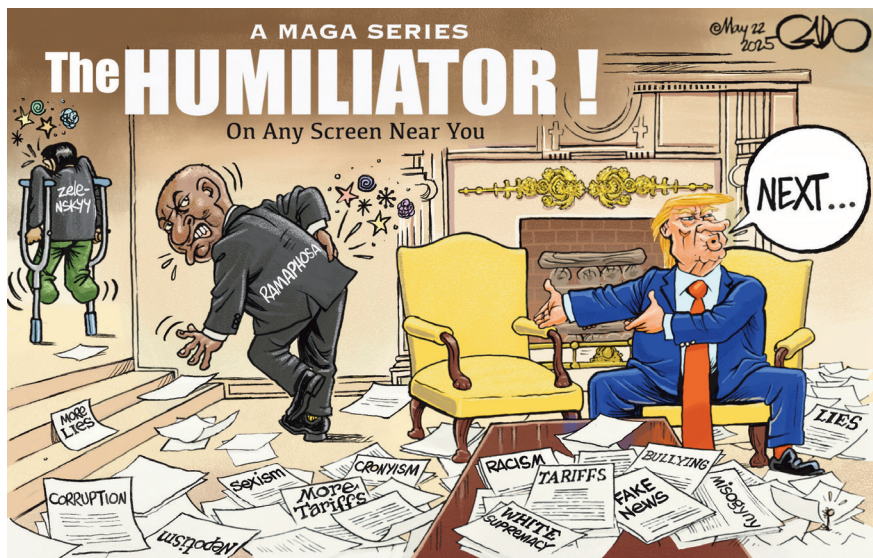
### Army to 'independently' probe its own massacre

After rare public pushback, the Malian army said it would investigate the killing of 22 Fulani men whose bodies were found in shallow graves on the banks of River Niger. A sole survivor told Human Rights Watch that Malian soldiers slit the men's throats on 12 May, the day they were arrested from a market in central Mali. "A military investigation of an alleged massacre by soldiers raises grave concerns that the inquiry will not be independent or impartial," Human Rights Watch said.

## JAPAN

### Minister says sorry and resigns – wait, what?

Japan's farming minister Taku Eto has resigned over bragging that he has never had to buy rice. Speaking at a weekend fundraiser, Eto joked that gifts from supporters had kept his rice pantry full, a remark that did not sit well with voters who are already fuming over record-high rice prices driven by poor harvests and higher demand from a boom in tourism. Facing backlash, Eto apologised, said the comment was "extremely inappropriate" and stepped down. Uh. Does this work for jollof, too?



## DEBT

## IMF-backed austerity salts workers' wounds

Public spending cuts across six African countries have slashed health and education workers' incomes by as much as 50% over five years, leaving many unable to meet basic needs, ActionAid reports. In a new study, 97% of healthcare workers surveyed in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, and Nigeria said that on their current wages they could not afford basic essentials such as food and rent. The report lays the blame with the International Monetary Fund, saying its advice to cut public spending to repay foreign debt is devastating already fragile public services.

## TRAVEL

## Africans pay Europe millions to reject them

European countries took nearly \$70-million from Africans for visa applications that they then rejected in 2024. Global rejection rates are highest for African countries, reaching up to 50% in Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria. "The poorest countries in the world pay the richest countries money for *not* getting visas," Marta Foresti, founder the Lago Collective, a London-based organisation that tracks visa data, told *CNN*. She added that this shows "inbuilt discrimination and bias" in the system, where the poorer the applicant's country, the more likely it is that their visa will be denied.



## TANZANIA

## African guests count as 'foreign meddlers' now

Tanzanian authorities deported several Kenyan and Ugandan lawyers and activists who travelled to observe the first court appearance of opposition leader Tundu Lissu on treason charges. Most were deported shortly after arrival but two, Kenya's Boniface Mwangi and Uganda's Agather Atuhaire, were detained incommunicado for four days. They were later dumped at the land borders with Kenya and Uganda. President Samia Suluhu Hassan, under fire for rising authoritarianism, accused the group of meddling in Tanzania's affairs.

## BORDERS

## Island spat 'solved' by applying colonial maths

The International Court of Justice ruled for Equatorial Guinea in a five-decade dispute with Gabon over three islands located in potentially oil-rich waters. Both countries produce oil but Equatorial Guinea's reserves – which were less than half of Gabon's to start with – have shrunk significantly, prompting US oil giant ExxonMobil to leave. The ICJ relied on a 1900 treaty dividing up French and Spanish colonial assets to rule for Equatorial Guinea. Gabon now has to remove its troops from the islands in question: Conga, Mbanié and Cocoteros.

## NIGERIA

## Cannes finally nods to Nollywood

Despite its booming Nollywood film industry, Nigeria has only just had its first film ever selected for the official Cannes Film Festival lineup. Directed by Akinola Davies Jr, and written by his brother Wale Davies, *My Father's Shadow* is a semi-autobiographical story that follows a father and his two children during the political unrest of 1993 in Lagos, exploring themes of masculinity and family. To mark the occasion, Nigeria also launched its first national pavilion at Cannes' international village this year, *The Guardian* reports.



PHOTO: MY FATHER'S SHADOW FILM STILL



PHOTO: THOMAS SAMSON/AFP

*J'excuse: Agathe Habyarimana, widow of late Rwanda leader Juvenal Habyarimana.*

#### RWANDA GENOCIDE

## France gives Agathe the all-clear despite extradition attempts

French investigators have ended their probe into Agathe Habyarimana's alleged role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, saying that testimonies against her are "contradictory, inconsistent, and even false," *RFI* reports. Now 82, the widow of Rwanda's former president Juvenal Habyarimana, who has lived in France since 1998, has been under investigation since 2008. She was accused of being part of the "Akazu" – a powerful Hutu group said to have planned the mass killing of Tutsi people, an accusation she denies. France has repeatedly refused Rwandan requests to extradite her.

#### UGANDA

## Legislators sign off on civilian court martials

Parliament has reversed a progressive January ruling by Uganda's Supreme Court on trying civilians in military courts. The practice has long been used but was paused after the court ruled that such trials are illegal. This week, legislators passed a controversial amendment to the legislation that governs the national army, which brings civilians within the court martial's jurisdictions in some circumstances. Opposition figures criticise the move as anti-democratic and aimed at curtailing dissent as the country heads for elections in 2026.

#### UNITED STATES

## Trump trades migrants for chaos and contempt

The Trump administration is still deporting migrants despite court rulings against its actions. This week, a man from Myanmar was told he would be sent to South Africa, only to be rerouted hours later to South Sudan. He is one of 12 migrants from Myanmar and Vietnam expelled to Juba this week, despite a ruling by a federal judge ordering the government to keep them in custody in the US. The judge said that continuing the deportations could constitute criminal contempt, *Bloomberg* reports.

INVESTIGATION

# Exclusive: Zimbabwe's ruling party recruited people to vote – in Mozambique's election

Ahead of last year's Mozambican election, Zanu-PF dished out fake IDs to its supporters, with clear instructions to vote for the incumbents next door. But Zimbabwe's ruling party did not know some of these supporters were actually undercover reporters.



**WALTER MARWIZI AND  
GARIKAI MAFIRAKUREVA**

THE RUMOURS began in early 2024. We work as journalists in Masvingo, a province in the south-east of Zimbabwe, and we kept hearing that our own ruling party – Zanu-PF – was recruiting Zimbabweans to vote in Mozambique’s presidential elections in October.

We were sceptical. The idea that one country’s ruling party could be signing up people, in broad daylight, to meddle in a neighbour’s election seemed too outlandish to be true. It would amount to brazen electoral fraud. But, by April 2024, we had heard too many stories to ignore the possibility.

One morning in April, a Zanu-PF supporter – and one of our trusted sources – showed up at the *Masvingo Mirror’s* offices with a tip-off. He told us to visit a voter registration station in nearby Nemanwa.

That afternoon, there was a queue of hundreds at the scene – the Masvingo Rural District Council offices. The next morning one of us joined the queue, had our fingerprints and photos taken, and left with a glossy, newly-printed Mozambican voter identification card.

On another occasion in April, the other of us went to Nemanwa to register. A lady at the gate asked for names, addresses and phone numbers, and said we would be invited to Zanu-PF party meetings to receive instructions to “help Frelimo win the election”. Frelimo is Mozambique’s ruling party, which was facing stiff opposition in the upcoming election.

Inside, fingerprints and a photograph were taken, and we left, again, with a newly-printed Mozambican ID card.

Still, we were unsure whether those cards would actually allow us to vote.

There are some Mozambicans residing in Zimbabwe, and Mozambique’s electoral commission had approved 60 polling stations within Zimbabwe – as part of 602 foreign polling stations in nine countries with significant Mozambican diasporas.

“This presented us with an opportunity,” a senior Zanu-PF official told us later, speaking on condition of anonymity. “The challenge was to attract as many people to register as possible.”

On Mozambique’s voting day, 9 October 2024, Zanu-PF officials threw stones at us when they noticed us filming. But at another polling station in Nemanwa, we walked right in. There, we were given the opportunity to cast our ballot in Mozambique’s general election – no questions asked. The whole process took less than half an hour.

We have since interviewed 20 other Zimbabweans who fraudulently registered, and in some cases voted, in Mozambique’s election.

**Old buddies, new tricks**

The alliance between Zanu-PF and Mozambique’s ruling party Frelimo is one of the strongest political pacts in Africa. It dates back to the days of the liberation struggles in both countries. As the October 2024 election loomed, Frelimo felt threatened by the growth of opposition parties like Renamo and





*Clockwise from above left: Presidents Daniel Chapo and Emmerson Mnangagwa in April.*

*Mozambican voter ID cards issued to Zanu-PF supporters.*

*A presidential guard watches over Frelimo supporters in 2024.*

ABOVE RIGHT: WALTER MARWIZI & GARIKAI MAFIRAKUREVA  
LEFT: MARCO LONGARI/AFP

Podemos. It appears to have leaned into the old pact for support.

Months before the election, Daniel Chapo, the Frelimo candidate – he is now the president – travelled to Harare and met President Emmerson Mnangagwa and top Zanu-PF officials.

“We know Zanu-PF is experienced in terms of elections. We want that campaign spirit in Mozambique,” Chapo said during the June 2024 visit.

But, as our reporting shows, Zanu-PF’s electoral support to Frelimo had been going on for months prior. This support extended well beyond transferring the

“campaign spirit” to Mozambique.

The testimonies of those 20 Zimbabweans we spoke to – all fraudulently registered as Mozambican voters – confirm that the party undertook a co-ordinated campaign to mobilise voters in support of Frelimo.

“I joined those who voted because I saw it as a chance to prove that I’m a loyal cadre, and to try and save my house,” said GZ. He lives in a former mining compound from which he can be evicted at the whim of Zimbabwe’s government. Another person, SZ, said he heard about the registration drive

through party channels and participated because he believed it was his duty to serve the party.

SZ said he also voted in the 2019 Mozambican election and therefore saw last year's mobilisation drive as routine. He was not the only one to say this.

GM, another repeat voter, said that after the 2019 Mozambican election, Frelimo organised trips for its Zimbabwean supporters to shop in Chimoio, a major market, for second-hand clothing in Mozambique. "The trip was profitable. We brought back second-hand clothing for resale. I hoped this time we could go again," GM said.

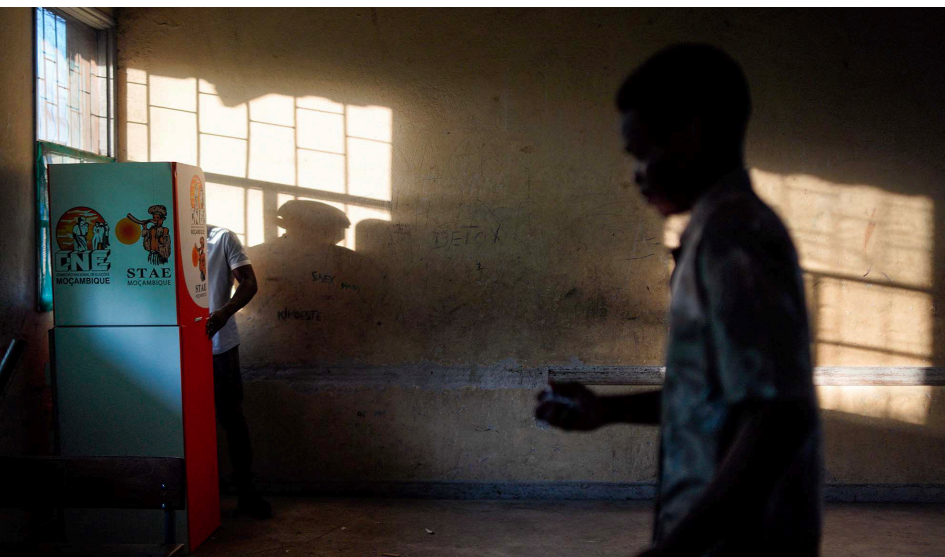
The expectation of trade opportunities was a recurring rationale.

EM, a 28-year-old who works in Mutare's banana plantations, had

long dreamed of becoming a cross-border trader, but the steep price of a Zimbabwean passport had kept them from that dream. When they heard that one could get a Mozambican identity card in exchange for voting for Frelimo, they jumped at the opportunity.

"They took my fingerprints and photo and I waited briefly before I got a Mozambican card," they said. The card said that they were born in Manica, Mozambique. EM did not mind that it was not true because now they could travel freely to Mozambique.

LK told us that she had never been to Mozambique, but also registered due to the promise of free passage to Mozambique to buy goods for resale in Zimbabwe. So she voted, hoping that she would be able to become a vendor.



**Poll positioning:** Officials set up a voting booth in Beira, Mozambique.

PHOTO: ZINYANGE AUNTONY/AFP

“I’m not Mozambican, and I was not doing it to help Mozambique. I know that Mozambique, especially Frelimo, helped Zimbabwe during the liberation struggle, but that’s not why I voted,” she said.

Similarly, SN was thrilled that her voter ID card could give free passage to buy goods in Mozambique.

In contrast, DM, whose mother is Mozambican, felt he had some right to vote and was being helpful to Mozambique. “When my colleagues in Zanu PF approached me to participate in the Mozambican elections, I felt it was a chance to help my mother’s country. I didn’t expect anything in return,” he said.

### **Fait accompli**

Stories like DM’s are what Zanu-PF has used to justify the registration drive – when they have acknowledged it at all. When the *Masvingo Mirror* first reported on this issue late last year, Zanu-PF spokesperson Chris Mutsvangwa said these people were in fact dual citizens of both Mozambique and Zimbabwe, who had been given an opportunity to exercise their political rights.

He now says the matter is moot.

“The Mozambican election is over. President Chapo is now recognised by the international community. Recently President Trump even gave him \$4.5-billion. So, it won’t matter now whether they had dual citizenship or not. Why do you always look in the rear view mirror? Try to look in front of you,” Mutsvangwa told us last month, before dropping the phone call.

Farai Marapira, who heads Zanu-PF communications at national level, refuted the allegations, saying that Mutsvangwa must have misunderstood our questions.

Frelimo spokesperson Pedro Guileche told *The Continent* that these allegations are “truly fake”, adding that: “Frelimo still has the wider range of Mozambican people voting and supporting our party and consequently our President Daniel Chapo, from Rovuma to Maputo.”

While our reporting provides rare proof of the fraud, allegations have long been rife that the 2024 Mozambican election was rigged. The heavily contested result triggered three months of nationwide demonstrations by opposition supporters. According to local activists, at least 300 people were killed by security forces, and 10 times more were injured.

Negotiations to move the country forward continue. President Chapo met his main challenger, the opposition leader Venâncio Mondlane, for the second time this week.

In an interview with *The Continent* earlier this year, Mondlane maintained that the election was rigged – describing Chapo as an “appointed” president, rather than elected. As our reporting proves, he may have a point. ■

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# **The Continent** ***Merch Alert!***

*The Continent* is partnering with Republic of Africa to create beautiful clothes for you to wear out and about.

Their Accra-based team is all about making African excellence something we should come to expect – and we couldn't agree more. We're stitching up the final threads and making sure everything works. Then ... we launch!



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# The Continent

## In 160 countries and counting

Albania	Bangladesh	Burundi	Comoros	Ecuador	Ocean	Haiti
Algeria	Belgium	Cambodia	Congo	Egypt	Gabon	Hong Kong, China
American Samoa	Benin	Cameroon	Costa Rica	Equatorial Guinea	Gambia	Hungary
Angola	Bermuda	Canada	Croatia	Eritrea	Georgia	Iceland
Argentina	Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba	Cape Verde	Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	India
Aruba	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Cayman Islands	Czechia	Ethiopia	Ghana	Indonesia
Australia		Central African Rep.	Côte d'Ivoire	Fiji	Gibraltar	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Austria	Botswana	Chad	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	Finland	Greece	Iraq
Azerbaijan	Brazil	Chile	Denmark	France	Greenland	Ireland
Bahamas	Bulgaria	China	Djibouti	French Dep. and Territories in the Indian	Guinea	Israel
Bahrain	Burkina Faso	Colombia	Dominica		Guinea-Bissau	Italy



ILLUSTRATION: YEMSRACH YETNEBERK

Jamaica	Lithuania	Mozambique	Peru	Sierra Leone	Taiwan, China	United Kingdom
Japan	Luxembourg	Myanmar	Philippines	Singapore	Tanzania	United States
Jordan	Macao, China	Namibia	Poland	Slovakia	Thailand	Uruguay
Kazakhstan	Madagascar	Nepal	Portugal	Slovenia	The Republic of North Macedonia	Vanuatu
Kenya	Malawi	Netherlands	Puerto Rico	Somalia	Timor-Leste	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Korea (Rep. of)	Malaysia	New Zealand	Qatar	South Africa	Togo	Vietnam
Kuwait	Mali	Niger	Romania	South Sudan	Trinidad and Tobago	Zambia
Kyrgyzstan	Malta	Nigeria	Rwanda	Spain	Tunisia	Zimbabwe
Latvia	Mauritania	Norway	São Tomé and Príncipe	Sri Lanka	Türkiye	
Lebanon	Mauritius	Oman	Saudi Arabia	Sudan	Uganda	
Lesotho	Mexico	Pakistan	Senegal	Swaziland	Ukraine	
Liberia	Mongolia	Panama	Serbia	Sweden	United Arab Emirates	
Libya	Morocco	Paraguay	Seychelles	Switzerland		

Map based on the Equal Earth map projection, jointly developed by Bojan Šavrič (Esri), Tom Patterson (US National Park Service), and Bernhard Jenny (Monash University). Map shows countries where The Continent has active subscribers.

## FEATURE

# Your happy places

*The Continent* is what it is because people are deliberately sharing the newspaper with others. No algorithms. No corporation deciding who gets to see what. In January we asked you, our readers, to help us get to 5,000 more subscribers. We're now at 31,000, with subscribers in every single country in Africa. As a thank you we are dedicating this edition to you. The next few pages are highlights from the nearly 400 of you who told us where you go to find beauty and peace in the world.

Pongwe-Jambiani-Makunduchi-Kizimkazi coastline. The beaches are rocky as hell, and you may hit an urchin or two. There's barely any sand here. But man, right time, high tide? This is heaven. This is where I go to find God.



PHOTO: WWW.ERICLAFORQUE.COM

My late grandmother's sewing machine chair in Bafoussam, Cameroon.

Blue Heron and Maua Villa in Arusha, Tanzania.



ILLUSTRATION: JRPENCIL KING

Cape McLearn, Lake Malawi.

Sitting on the verandah patio with my two dogs by my feet, listening to the wind blowing the leaves in the trees.

The concert. Really, anywhere.... But on a special night at the Hollywood Bowl. When you finally get to see that one artist you've been waiting to get to your city for months, maybe years. You waited all day ... possibly a week for this one moment.

Of all the places I've loved, none compare to my bed on a cool evening after I've changed the sheets. It's me, my blanket and my pink stuffed elephant, Coco, against the world.

My church. The place is just remarkable. It was built in the early seventies by Franciscan Friars and is modelled on St Anthony of Padua Church in Padua, Italy. It is a place of solace and rest when I feel that I need to run away from the earthly problems of life.

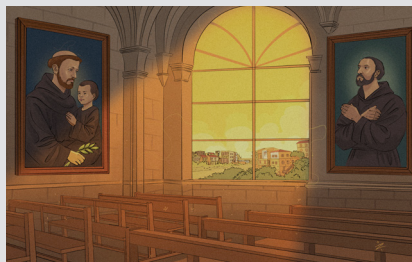


ILLUSTRATION: EDJON MUSAVILI

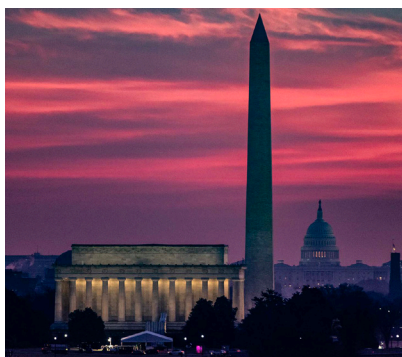


PHOTO: SAMUEL CORUM / GETTY IMAGES

My apartment building's rooftop is my go-to relaxing spot. With a pool, lounge area, and sweeping views of DC, it's the perfect place to unwind. I can see the Washington Monument, the Capitol, the Potomac, and planes landing at DCA. Thanks to city height restrictions, nothing blocks the view. It's peaceful, open, and always impressive.

When I need to breathe, I pass by the Lagoa Azul in Guadalupe, São Tomé – a quiet coastal spot where turquoise waters lap against volcanic rocks, framed by sprawling baobabs and open savanna.

I go to my local bakery, they have the best pistachio éclairs! I eat one of those and everything is right with the world (for a moment).

In the shade under the huge mango tree near our second home in Mataya, Bagamoyo, with a good book, freshly pressed juice and my guitar. No car sounds, no rush, no dress code. And no mosquitoes until sundown.

Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe. On hot afternoons I usually go to the falls, one of the awesome phenomena to behold. Washing one with cooling sprays billowing up the blue skies.



PHOTO: DEA / V. GIANNELLA



I escape on my bike. Biking in Malawi to me is a treasure hunt. No signposts, no designated cycle paths, just endless dirt tracks with endless destinations. Sometimes you end up stuck in a maize field and sometimes you'll stumble upon stunning views, waterfalls and other such natural wonders.

I like to snoop around my own back garden to see what's decided to grow itself this year.

On moony nights, I step outside and let the world quiet down. I find a spot, it doesn't matter where, as long as it's still and close to nature. The moonlight softens everything, even my thoughts. The breeze feels cooler, the sky wider. Sometimes I just sit on a low wall or stand barefoot on the ground, looking up. It's like the night listens. No pressure, no rush. Just me, the moon, and a little peace. That's where I go when I need to breathe.

My bed after the kids have been put to sleep.

The Superdome, Dar es Salaam.

My parent's village.

My bath.

Inhambane, Mozambique.

The Bahá'í Temple in Kampala.



PHOTO: BAHAI.ORG

The football pitch.



PHOTOS: GUY PETERSON & LUIS TATO / AFP



Mountainous areas surrounding Addis Ababa such as Suba Forest, Entoto Hills, Yerer Hills, and the Gullele Botanical Garden.

West Cork, Ireland.

My balcony in Khartoum.

The ocean, in São Paulo, Brasil. My family is smiling and lounging while I'm rocking side to side in the sea feeling the sun kiss my skin.

A lower peak on the Mt. Rwenzori range.



PHOTO: KITARA FOUNDATION

Pilikwe village is nestled among gentle hills, its red earth paths now partially paved with modern bitumen. The air still hums with a quiet resilience, as elders speak of a dream once sown: self-reliance, dignity, and unity born from Tswana soil.

Richmond Park, London



PHOTO: DAN KITWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

At home watching football. Or any sport for that matter.

The sea. Which coming from a Mauritian may sound cliché. But the sea really is part of the cultural identity of practically everyone who lives in this multicultural place. There is not much that the sea cannot cure with the repetitive coming and going of waves, the sound of water meeting land, the smell of a humid and salty air. And the smile on people's faces when they experience it all.

It's wherever me and my partner get to go with our kid for a walk – whether it's in the forest or in the city, my happy place is where all our feet find their rhythm and are in no hurry to get anywhere in particular.

A local coffee shop, alfresco, watching cars and people go by, enjoying the blue sky. Also taking a long walk in one of the forests in Nairobi.



ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS SASSMAN

Bike riding with my wife, along the empty Sunday roads of Airport Residential Area, Accra.

Tokyo's Treasure Hall lawn. There's a path that cuts through one of the few forested parts of Tokyo, and in the morning you only hear the occasional caw of a crow. Exiting the forest, you're greeted with a sweeping lawn, forest on the far side, and skyscrapers towering over the trees. The perfect combination of nature and city.

Freedom Park, on Campbell Street, Lagos, Nigeria. This place used to house the Ikoyi Prisons, but now houses a park for arts and entertainment. It's serene, with masterpiece sculptures, including ones created by renowned artist/sculptor Bruce Onobrakpeya. At Freedom Park, you can always relax and enjoy live performances by artistes, listen to soulful African music and jazz, walk around, eat delicacies and have a bottle or two to drink. The best part? You can be sure to meet with creative people: filmmakers and actors or actresses, writers, journalists, poets, singers, dancers, artists and entrepreneurs in the creative industry.

I'm living in northern Germany on the flat countryside between Bremen and Hamburg. My happy place in winter is a wing chair in front of a large window where I can see our garden. In summer my happy place is a bench under two apple trees in our garden.

Thamalakane River in Maun, Botswana.



PHOTO: EDWIN REMSBURG/VW PICS/GETTY IMAGES

It is the most uncomfortably overstuffed chair that I have lined with numerous cushions to create a soft landing haven.

My restaurant – it's been my dream for many years to own one and this year I've finally been able to make it happen. It's a small space but filled with mucho character. I finish building it next week, and I hope the saying: "If you build it they will come" runs true. Well – that and a lot of sweat and hard work.

## DATA

# *The Continent* at 200: 10 reasons you are the best audience

ADAM OXFORD

THERE is a very clear memory from five years ago, of a conversation which I use to deflate my own ego whenever I get too sure of myself. I was working alongside Simon, Kiri, Sipho, Refiloe, Paul et al during those early weeks of Covid, as head of digital at our then common employer. Simon asked me what I thought about WhatsApp publishing, and the potential for a weekly digital publication distributed via instant messaging. In principle, I thought, a great idea, but went on to list all the reasons why it couldn't possibly work, since Facebook was actively closing down publishers who tried to find a way around the general awfulness of channel limits – and WhatsApp has an

especially awful interface when it comes to distributing news.

It's humbling, then, to be forgiven my wrongness and to be invited to write a column, 200 issues of *The Continent* later, about the most important factor that has made this publication such a success: You, the incredibly loyal audience that comes back and shares and supports the work of this talented team every week. My reward for being so utterly dismissive and wrong is to stare at spreadsheets of numbers from WhatsApp, Telegram, Substack and all the places *The Continent* can be found today. Fortunately, few things give me as much joy as looking for patterns in news audience data, so it's my great pleasure to share ten things that make you, *The Continent's* readers, so special. ■

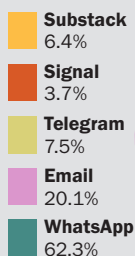
## 1. WhatsApp is the platform of popular choice

Despite the many efforts (not least by *The Continent's* team) to break the Meta messaging monopoly, WhatsApp remains the platform of choice for instant messaging across Africa. Two-thirds of you prefer to receive each issue via WhatsApp.

## 2. It's also what you like to share

When we asked you to help us reach more readers in a subs drive in January, almost 4,000 new readers joined us.

SUBSCRIPTIONS





*Due to our wide geographical footprint, The Continent's newsroom is entirely virtual. But if we were to have an office, this is how illustrator Wynona Mutisi imagines it would look.*

Almost all of these via WhatsApp.

The great news is that our WhatsApp audience is still growing faster than before the campaign – but we'd love the other channels to grow more.

### **3. You lot are unnervingly loyal**

A remarkable 927 readers have been part of the WhatsApp community since we launched, and more than 3,400 of you who signed up in the first three months are still with us today. On average, a WhatsApp subscriber has been with us for over two years.

### **4. We mean, really loyal**

Only 2,821 people have cancelled their WhatsApp subscription in three years. That's a "churn" rate of around 4% a year, which would make every other news organisation in the world sick with envy if we told them.

### **5. And you come back!**

A big hello to the 394 people who have unsubscribed and come back. You are always welcome to return.

### **6. We're one hundred, every week (almost)**

This is the bicentenary celebration, but every week we welcome an average of 94 new subscribers to *The Continent* community, and that's just who we know about. The publication gets shared in ways and to audiences we have no way of seeing at all.

### **7. We're big in Botswana**

Our largest audience is in South Africa, but we reckon Botswana is the country that loves us most. There, we reach 10 readers per 100,000 people, a quite remarkable per-capita readership (and that doesn't include copies that



are shared on private channels, of course). Can you beat that? We'd really like help reaching more people in other countries, Nigeria and Ethiopia, for example, where subscriptions are just 0.42 and 0.16 per 100,000 respectively.

8. You don't rage quit

We never shy away from making our opinions on a story known, and you thank us for it. Despite taking a strong view on most subjects, we've never – yet – managed to offend enough people to see a mass cancellation of subscriptions (must try harder). The closest to an exodus was 10 Kenyans quitting on 9 March 2024, presumably because they weren't fans

of street motorsports (below, left).

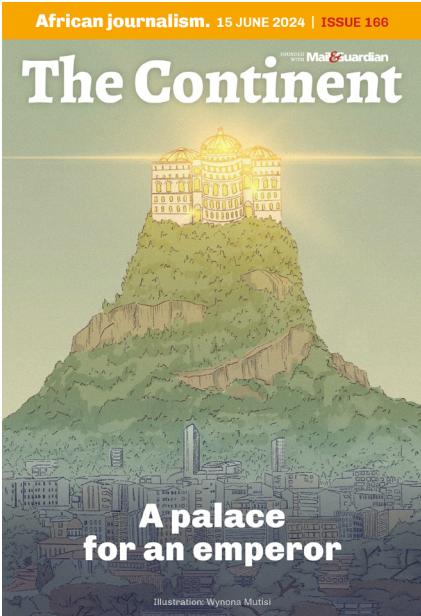
9. Not everyone stays and that's okay

We aren't for everyone, and that's just fine by us. So for those 464 people who signed up and quit in the same day: We hope you find what you are looking for.

10. You give us a big thumbs up

The most used emoji in response to an update on the [Telegram](#) channel is the thumbs up, followed by the heart. The most forwarded update there was the Season 12 closer, in which we covered Abiy Ahmed's \$10-billion grandiose palace construction (below, right). Maybe we are bigger in Ethiopia than we think?

Adam Oxford is a media consultant and director of Area of Effect. He was commissioned to analyse our subscriber data



# A bit about us ...

WE PUBLISHED the first edition of *The Continent* in April 2020, betting that people want to read quality African journalism. Learning from others, we reimagined what a newspaper looks like in the 21st century. That meant sharing it where you are – on WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram and email – and packing it with bits of African life, from big investigations to stories of everyday people navigating extraordinary circumstances.

We now have 31,000 subscribers. The typical subscriber says they forward the newspaper to four or five people: in church WhatsApp groups, work Slack channels and across Signal and Telegram. That's more than 100,000 each week getting insight from on-the-

ground reporting by our network of over 400 journalists across most of the countries on our continent.

People, not algorithms, decide who gets to read *The Continent*, and our old-school newspaper format means they get a fuller picture of their world than they would from piecemeal articles scattered across the internet.

That work has been supported by these funders over the years: Mott Foundation, 11th Hour Project, Open Society Foundations, National Endowment for Democracy, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Luminate, Ford Foundation, Fred Foundation, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, GIZ, Amplify SA and the Pulitzer Centre.

## The Continent Team



**Lydia Namubiru**  
Editor



**Christine Mungai**  
News Editor



**Refiloe Seiboko**  
Production



**Matthew du Plessis**  
Managing Editor



**Gado**  
Cartoonist



**Wynona Mutisi**  
Illustrator



**Ashleigh Swalle**  
Designer



**Yemsrach Yetneberk**  
Illustrator



**Paul Botes**  
Photography



**Sipho Kings**  
Publisher



**Dumi Sithole**  
Distribution



**Evania Chiza**  
Finance



**Simon Allison**  
Co-founder



**Kiri Rupiah**  
Communities

## EDITORIAL

# Onward to better and bigger ways to cover, and know, Africa

A newspaper is a collection of great journalists.  
We asked some of them to say nice things about us.  
And tell us how *The Continent* can keep growing.



**LYDIA NAMUBIRU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

THIS Covid baby, with our core team of 14, punches well above its weight. It has inserted African voices, realities and perspectives into global conversations – to the chagrin of vaccine hoarders, carbon cowboys and dodgy diplomats. It has told important stories that local media dare not tell for fear of the Dear Leaders in our public offices. It has showed off our continent, and our world, in all its beauty and its imperfections. And sometimes it has made you chuckle.

Personally, I am tempted to retire to a beach town and say, “I did my part in the world.” But we still have work to do.

A newspaper is made not by its editors, but rather by the people who pick up the phone to talk to doers, board buses to witness the extraordinary lives of other humans in far-flung places, pore over datasets to see patterns and outliers, or

walk the streets with a keen observer’s eye. Editors might keep the house but it’s these curious minds and brave truth tellers that give it substance, colour and character.

Over the last five years, some 415 reporters, analysts, photographers, satirists, illustrators, cartoonists and other observers of contemporary Africa – and the world – have contributed to *The Continent*. We asked a few to share what this newspaper has come to mean to them – and where they want to see it go.

The beach may beckon, but we promise to chill the retirement dreams and push our hardest towards their wildest ambitions for this newspaper.

## **Zecharias Zelalem, Ethiopia**

I’ve covered the Horn of Africa for *The Continent* since its inception. In its pages, I’ve documented major flashpoints in Ethiopia, like the outbreak of war in Tigray and the high profile murder of the singer and activist Hachalu Hundessa. But I’ve also been given ample space to tell more under-reported stories like obscure war crimes and a rare peace protest. That’s what makes it

quintessentially African for me. It's the home of critical indigenous African reporting, often complemented by eye-catching cover illustrations by in-house talents like Wynona Mutisi. That packaged PDF is a rare instance of pure, uncut African journalism that is not tampered with to accommodate foreign taste. Cheers to 200!

Having worked with some of the largest newsrooms in the world, I know that the editorial flexibility with which *The Continent* treats African stories, journalists and audiences, is tragically rare. In *The Continent*, stories from Africa don't need to highlight the new-age Russia/US or China/US divides to matter, nor do we have to introduce Eritrea as being "a country about the same size as Portugal".

*The Continent* has created an incredibly high expectation that it might meet the news void across Africa where information service is often censored and/or flooded with propaganda from authoritarian states and by foreign powers seeking influence.

Far too many of the world's major and medium powers are investing in flooding our airwaves and heads with content that may or may not align with the extremely diverse interests, values and aspirations of over a billion Africans.

The best way to combat that potentially nefarious influence would be to make high quality local journalism increasingly accessible to more people. *The Continent* should be available in French, Swahili and Arabic. A multilingual, innovative brand, immune to internet shutdowns

and website blockages, with a product deliverable via Telegram, Airdrop and even Bluetooth, can do tons to counter the impact of well-funded troll farms, algorithms and shadowy propaganda outlets working with powers in faraway capitals.

### **Jacqueline Nyathi, Zimbabwe**

Long before I wrote book reviews for *The Continent*, I was one of its biggest fans on the platform formerly known as Twitter. (There are receipts!) My favourite thing? How *The Continent* platforms and prioritises African voices – both in stories about Africa, and for news from around the world.

Although *The Continent* is – obviously – perfect as it is, it's fun to imagine the future. I'd love to see it expand: Imagine video content! Maybe a YouTube channel! Or even a podcast! I'd also love to see loads more about what life is like for us all over the continent, both in stories and pictures—and even in our many, many languages, with translation between them and/or into English. (Can you tell I've been reading Ngugi wa Thiong'o's latest book?)

### **Wilfred Okiche, International**

It is hard to believe it has been five years since *The Continent* launched, just as the world was collectively grappling with a historic pandemic. I was immediately impressed by the ambitious mission of covering Africa responsibly but also intrigued by the forward-thinking distribution strategy which embraced technology from the get-go. Beholden



to zero corporate interests, TC also *paid* their roster of contributors. I knew I had to be involved somehow.

*The Continent* made sense for me because as I found my voice as a culture critic and reporter with interests beyond my own national scene, I knew I would need a platform that would appreciate the importance of covering the cultural products and spaces that make us tick. Two hundred editions later, this mission remains as important as ever, and while TC has made a dent amidst persistent challenges, there is more to be done.

I would like to see *The Continent* deepen and expand its cultural outreach. The hyperspecific movies, music, literature, art and fashion that detail who we really are and what we think of ourselves deserve to be amplified. That way, we can better understand ourselves, the things that unite us and those that might divide us. Here's to 200 more editions – and beyond.

### **Simon Mkina, Tanzania**

What impresses me most about *The Continent* is its telling of what is happening in Africa, with deep knowledge and without bias. It treats African stories with the distinction and respect they deserve. It's bold, visually stunning, and never patronising. I'd love to see *The Continent* becoming a movement of change for Africa, and its diasporas. Establish more collaboration with grassroots reporters, more investigations that rattle cages, and maybe even audio for new audiences.

### **Brian Howard, Afrobarometer**

I think of *The Continent* as a kind of 360° searchlight that picks out facts, people, voices, angles, stories that would otherwise remain in the dark, unseen and unheard. Our missions align. That weekly spotlight on Afrobarometer survey data lets readers hear about the experiences and priorities and preferences of Africans from all walks of life and every corner of the continent. I hope that *The Continent* will grow into an institution – on solid-enough footing to keep getting better and doing more – without losing the lively touch that makes it a weekly breath of fresh air.

### **Keletso Thobega, Botswana**

Writing for *The Continent* has had a positive impact on my career. It has improved my visibility and impact as an African storyteller, and contributed to my credibility as a journalist. A cover story I did on flooding in Botswana and the adverse effects of climate change on the country was widely shared on social media, and beyond. It accurately reflected Botswana's poor preparedness for climate risks, and gave insights into how extreme weather affects communities, and into the burden African governments now have, to find the resources and capacity to mitigate these risks. In Botswana, it opened a discussion on climate vulnerability and resilience infrastructure.

I hope that *The Continent* grows to be globally revered and the most read newspaper in Africa. ■

## EDITORIAL

# The world needs newspapers like this

**We've done the improbable in five years. In the next five we are going to build on this, empower more people with quality journalism, and do our bit to save civilisation – by newspapering.**



**SIPHO KINGS, PUBLISHER**

I HAVE low expectations for the future. That's the climate reporter in me. Too much time spent staring at projections of how the future unravels in fire and flood. Not that journalism – stuck in palliative care – is full of hope. But, I finished this week's *The Continent* team video call with a note of deep optimism: "All the cool things are happening."

Improbable, given the state of things. As our editor and contributors write in this edition, we're doing big things. We now have subscribers in every single country in Africa, and 31,000 in 160 countries. These are all people who got this newspaper because someone shared it with them. So this edition is a celebration of our community, our partners and our journalists.

Next up is the world. At the core of this project is a bet that people want to read a weekly newspaper (if it's edited ruthlessly, has the tone of a person talking to another person, looks beautiful, and gives you interesting things to talk about at a cocktail party, or down the shebeen).

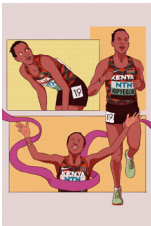
It's important to prove this model. Journalism screwed itself over by betting on Meta and its profit-over-society peers. Now, nobody trusts "the media" and everyone is going bankrupt. The next bet is on generative AI, with its inability to distinguish truth from "hallucinations" – fabrications that on the page become lies.

*The Continent* is an attempt to prove journalism can be done differently.

Expect more of this in what our team has decided to call our "serious era". We're no longer a start-up. We're going to empower more people with quality journalism. We're going to help others launch newspapers. We're going to stay sane. And we're going to prove that African excellence can set global standards. ■

# The Quiz

CELEBRATING  
**200**  
issues



**5**

How many world records does #136 cover star Faith Kipyegon hold?



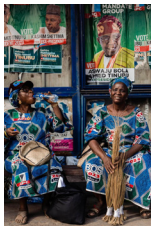
**1**

Which country's anti-war movement did we profile in #100?



**3**

What is the original name of the organisation we investigated in #122?



**6**

Which country's presidency did we cover in #164?



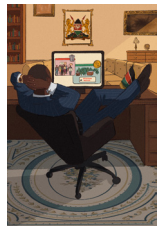
**2**

Name the former president on the left of #108.



**4**

In which country did we report an alleged criminal was hiding out, in #167?



**7**

In #149, we said Kenyans were footing the bill for whose hustle?



8

Which country's election 'almost didn't happen' in #156?



11

Which country's sprinter went 'from grass to grace' in #171?



13

Name the president of the country we said was 'brewing trouble' in #184.



9

Name the president who was 'still standing' in #163.



12

Which country's president did we suggest was MIA in #178?



14

In #175, we likened Tanzania's current president to whom?



10

Name the leader the proposed 'palace for an emperor' was being built for in #166.

## HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp  
'ANSWERS'  
to **+27 73 805 6068** and we'll send the answers to you!

0-4

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

5-9

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

10-14

"If *The Continent* is a secret agent, it's a good one - 'cos it's never blown its cover"



## SERIES

# Addis, alive and unrelenting

**WORDS AND PHOTOS: AMANUEL SILESHI**

THIS CITY is both my subject and my lifeline. I walk its streets not just to document change but also because I'm part of it. Every corner of Addis Ababa carries a personal memory, or a bigger truth that I'm still trying to understand with my camera.

Every day, Addis is moving, growing, building and erasing.

In the "corridor project" authorities embarked on the most ambitious urban renewal project in the country's history.

Photographing it feels like chasing

change that never stops. What is a big sidewalk and bicycle lane one day, is a lit up tree-lined boulevard the next day. Lights go up. Old homes vanish. New apartment blocks rise. It is overwhelming yet also full of moments that demand to be remembered.

In one poignant act of remembrance, a few artists drew graffiti on houses marked for demolition as a way to say goodbye before they disappeared.

Bucking the relentless change – for now at least – is Merkato. I often go to Min Alesh Tera (What Do You Have), one of the oldest corners of the market.

It's where the city breathes the loudest. There's chaos and colour, laughter and struggle. You can hear stories in the way traders speak, in the eyes of people searching for something they can afford. It's messy and it's real. Drawn to its honesty, I find myself returning again and again.

In the Orthodox churches, time slows down as men and women wrapped in white sing prayers that feel eternal. In the stillness of those moments, a kind of peace descends to give me room to breathe and feel Addis in a different way.

Addis weekends are alive and loud. Newlyweds pose for photos in parks. Young people shut down streets to play football. Many dream of playing in the global leagues; even if they don't make it, they will have played for passion.

Even though many of the Ethiopian residents of Addis are under constant economic pressure as the city's growth seems to outpace them, they are finding ways to enjoy it. They pose for photographs in the corridor parks and besides newly built projects, and enjoy night walks, which were rare before.

Layered, unpredictable and full of contradictions, Addis has taught me to see, to feel, to survive and to expect the unexpected. I depend on it for my stories, my voice, my sense of self.

This shapeshifting city is also the hardest place to photograph and that's exactly why I can't stop. I like the challenge. I feel somewhat responsible for telling the story of what Addis Ababa once was, what it is now, and what it's becoming. ■

















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**We Built This City** is a limited series of photo essays by *The Continent* on African cities. This season, seven photographers will each share their unique view of the city they call home, and what it means to them.

➡ **EMAIL US**

What would you like us to explore and share with the world about your city?  
Send your thoughts to [photos@thecontinent.org](mailto:photos@thecontinent.org)

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# Big Pic

**Build an arc:** A Congolese teenager laughs in the rain as she has a go on the swings while waiting for assistance at the Cishemere Transit Centre near Buganda, a commune in Burundi.

PHOTO: LUIS TATO/AFP



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

**all protocol  
observed.**

*publisher of* **The Continent**

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