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The Continent

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la **BIENVENUE**

au Secrétaire d'Etat

Hon. **Antony J. Blinken**



Photo: Andrew Hamik/POOL/AFP

Africa's place in the new world order

And what we can do about it

Inside:

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Cover: International tensions are rising. Fast. With Russia and China on one side and the West on the other, African countries are once again stuck in the middle, with the superpowers doing their very best to woo us – or bully us – onto their side. But having learnt a few lessons from the previous Cold War, it might not be so easy this time around (p10)

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MALI

Russia and Mali sitting in a tree, A-R-M-Y-I-N-G

Mali's relationship with Russia continues to exhibit a level of show and tell uncommon in military co-operation. This week the country's defence minister held a ceremony to show jets and helicopter gunships received from Russia. In April, the government's Twitter account posted a video showing a shipment of military equipment from Russia arriving at Modibo Keita International Airport. Both France and the European Union ended their involvement in Mali's war against militants in the Sahel, after falling out with its ruling junta.

ETHIOPIA

Sparks fly as the Renaissance Dam charges ahead

Amid protests from Egypt at the United Nations, this week Ethiopia filled the reservoir for its mega dam on the Blue Nile once more, initiating power generation from a second turbine. The dam will eventually generate electricity with 13 turbines, requiring more water to be channelled into the reservoir. Egyptian and Sudanese authorities say this may disrupt water supplies for their citizens downstream, but Ethiopia in turn has argued that it needs the electricity for its citizens – fewer than half of whom currently have access to power.



Photo: Twitter/HornimanMuseum

NIGERIA

UK museum to return stolen artefacts

The Horniman Museum in London has promised to return 72 stolen artefacts to Nigeria. They include 12 Benin bronzes and a key to a king's palace. Nigerian activists have for decades been calling for the repatriation of treasures stolen by British colonists, especially in the 1897 raid of the palace of Benin, an ancient kingdom in what is now south-western Nigeria. The museum's announcement is the first time an institution funded by the British government has agreed to let go of its ill-gotten loot.

AFRICA

Longer life – despite all the extra lions

Africans now live nearly a decade longer than they did two decades ago – the biggest increase in life expectancy across the globe, according to new data from the World Health Organisation. Meanwhile in Rwanda, lions are thriving once again, a joyful improvement from the mid 90s when poaching and other human activities in the country drove them to extinction. In 2015, Rwanda partnered with a South African organisation to introduce seven lions to its Akagera National Park. Their number has since risen to 40.

CHAD

Reconciliation starts without main rebels

Next week, the Chadian junta led by Mahamat Idriss Déby will launch a national reconciliation dialogue with representatives of 40 rebel and opposition groups. The parties signed a peace deal in Doha on Monday, after five months of mediation by the Qatar government. The country's main rebel groups, Front for Change and Concord in Chad, will however not be part of the reconciliation process, having pulled out of the peace talks just hours before the deal was signed.

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GHANA

From 'No IMF' to a \$3-billion request

Ghana's leaders, who in July reversed their position to never again seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have now doubled how much money they will request, from \$1.5-billion to \$3-billion. That's according to Bloomberg, the business news agency. A statement on the IMF's website however says it's too early to know what the eventual loan facility will look like. Representatives from the IMF visited Ghana in mid-July to start negotiations. The country's current economic challenges have driven annual inflation to nearly 30%.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Gbagbo untethered

President Alassane Ouattara has cancelled the 20-year jail sentence of his predecessor, Laurent Gbagbo, who was convicted in 2018 of stealing money from Cote d'Ivoire's central bank after he refused to concede defeat in the 2010 election. In 2020, Ouattara himself went on to contest for, and get, a third term. Ouattara has also ordered the unfreezing of bank accounts belonging to Gbagbo, who returned to the country last year after his 2019 acquittal of crimes against humanity charges at The Hague was upheld by an appeal court.



Photo: Twitter/CAF/Media

FOOTBALL

Big league gets HUGE

Patrice Motsepe, the president of the Confederation of African Football, has announced the launch of a 24-team continental super league. At the federation's general assembly in Arusha, Tanzania, he revealed each of the 24 teams would receive \$2.5-million at the start of the inaugural season of the league to help them prepare for the tournament. Prize money for the last team standing will be \$100-million, which is more than five times what the current African Champions League winners take home.

Kenya

Impatient for change

With counting still under way, the vote is evenly split between the two main candidates

On Tuesday Kenyans voted in an election cast as a choice between the establishment, in the form of Raila Odinga, and the self-styled outsider, William Ruto. As *The Continent* reported last week, this election could mark a rare time where concerns about the economy trump political loyalty for voters.

So far, the counting has unfolded slowly but peacefully. This is a country where the Supreme Court ordered the 2017 election to be run again, such was the failure of electoral systems. And where, in 2007, over a thousand died as politicians disputed that election's results.

Preliminary results appear to confirm that this is a straight contest between Ruto and Odinga, with all other candidates far behind the 50% required to take power.

If Ruto wins, it will mark a big shift in the electoral landscape of a Kenya dominated by a few dynasties since independence in 1963. Odinga is the

son of Jaramogi Odinga, onetime vice-president and longtime opposition leader. Ruto spent the last term as vice president to Uhuru Kenyatta, himself the son of Kenya's first president, Jomo.

A Ruto win meanwhile would also mean that the country does not get its first woman deputy president, as many anticipated when Martha Karua joined the Odinga ticket. ■



Photo: Twitter/WilliamsRuto



Photo: Twitter/Railaodinga

Vote of confidence: Results in Kenya's general elections have been coming in slowly but surely – and peacefully.

A radical change for Chile ... or not?

Chileans will vote on a new Constitution next month, enshrining human and environmental rights. Mining companies are not happy.

Sipho Kings

Chile mines more copper than the next three biggest producers combined. It has the world's second-biggest reserves of lithium. These exports are critical to building the millions of wind turbines, solar panels and other energy sources that are powering a global shift from fossil fuel to renewable energy. Copper alone makes up 60% of exports. But few in Chile profit from this wealth.

The current constitution enshrines the rights of companies. It was drawn up during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, who came to power in a coup in 1973 with American backing. Under his leadership, Chile became a poster child for neoliberalism — stripping the state of capacity and giving corporations the power. He left in 1990 and the country has since swung right and left.

In 2019 people took to the streets of the South American country, demanding a new constitution to undo the structural inequality built into the old one. They elected a panel of 154 people to hand over a draft in a year. It has since been handed over to the new left-wing president and, at

35, the youngest in Chile's history.

It proposes a bigger state, which oversees basic services, like healthcare, education and water. Indigenous people would have more rights. And the environment would get its own rights (in the current best standard, set by South Africa's Constitution, people have the right to a clean environment but the environment itself has no rights).

Copper alone makes up 60% of exports. But few in Chile profit from this wealth.

Mining companies are angry and have lobbied hard to water down the proposed constitution. Their lobbying is global — the *Wall Street Journal* ran a comment piece on the constitution titled "Chile's suicide mission". The companies warn that any attempt to make their operations, sometimes done in the boundary of already receding glaciers, more sustainable would mean less mining. And that means fewer resources for things like wind turbines.

Polls show less than half of people plan to vote yes to the new constitution. ■

Deadly protests leave Sierra Leone in shock

Cost of living has increased by 40% in recent months

Ibrahim Barrie

Sierra Leone declared a nationwide curfew on 10 August, citing the protests there that have led to the deaths of civilians and police officers, and the torching of police stations in Freetown.

While the government has blamed the violence on political agitators and anonymous agents provocateurs, it is economic hardship that is fuelling protesters' rage: the cost of living has increased by more than 40% in recent months, driven by the global inflation crisis. Protesters have demanded the government urgently cuts waste and intervenes in the economy.

The state's response to the economic crisis – and the political crisis it has sparked in turn – has so far been ineffective.

After the latest clashes President Julius Maada Bio, who was on a private visit to the United Kingdom at the time, has done little more than to say a full investigation would be conducted into the events of 10 August.

The country's minister of information, in an interview with the BBC's Umaru Fofana, blamed "self-seeking politicians" and "self-seeking faceless firebrands" for

the trouble, and said the military had been called in to help police quell the situation.

The main opposition, All People's Congress, also condemned the violence, saying: "Citizens have a constitutional right to engage in peaceful protests; done within the confines of and with respect for the law."

The state's response to the economic crisis has been ineffective.

With the political establishment either supporting or tolerating a heavy-handed state response, Sierra Leone risks further alienating – and aggravating – its citizenry, who already reeling from the economic pain.

The government and people of Sierra Leone are still recovering from a brutal civil war that offered harsh lessons in the consequences of choosing confrontation over consensus. It seems, however, that there is still much to learn. ■



Ibrahim Barrie teaches Public Policy at the University of Makeni. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



Latest US strategy highlights Africa's place in the new world order

No matter what anyone says to the contrary, African states are once again caught in the middle

NEWS ANALYSIS
Simon Allison

Under the harsh, uncompromising glare of superpower realpolitik, the African continent is apparently only significant for three reasons. These are helpfully outlined, in a blue highlights box, at the front of the United States' shiny new "Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa", which was released this week by its secretary of state, Anthony Blinken.

First, Africa's people: Africans will be 25% of the world's population by 2050. In other words, they are the future workforce of a world where the populations of so many countries are ageing fast.

Second, Africa's geography: The continent is home to 30% of the world's critical minerals, and its second-largest rainforest. There can be no sustainable future without access to those minerals, many of which are crucial to renewable energy technologies. Similarly, the health

of the planet depends on the Congo rainforest remaining undeveloped.

Third, African countries are the largest voting bloc in the United Nations, accounting for some 28% of the vote.

In this context, Blinken's itinerary on his whistlestop three-nation tour of Africa makes a lot of sense.

First, he arrived in South Africa, which is the continent's most influential state in the global diplomatic world. This is largely thanks to its membership of influential global international blocs such as the G20 and BRICS. For better or worse, it is often left to South African diplomats to articulate a common African position on the world stage.

Then he visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, the primary custodian of the rainforest and the minerals which lie beneath it, and the continent's fourth-most populous nation. A dangerous conflict is intensifying in the east of the country – a conflict that could scupper both trade and conservation in the region.

Finally, he stopped in Rwanda, which has been implicated by the United Nations in stirring up that conflict (it strongly denies this claim).

In its strategic objectives, Blinken's Africa trip echoed that of his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov last month, who visited the DRC's neighbours, the Republic of Congo and Uganda, before heading to Ethiopia, Africa's diplomatic capital – the African Union is headquartered here – and the continent's second-most populous nation. There, the Russian embassy hosted a meeting of African ambassadors where Lavrov



Opening act: Russia's Sergei Lavrov toured African states in July. Photo: Willy Kurniawan/AFP/Getty Images

sought to defend Russia's unilateral invasion of Ukraine, and blame western sanctions for the global grain shortages which are hitting African countries especially hard.

Lavrov also visited Egypt, which receives 80% of its wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine.

Murithi Mutiga, the International Crisis Group's Program Director for Africa, told *The Continent*: "Both foreign ministers will reflect on their visits with satisfaction. Lavrov obviously exploited old networks and ties that Moscow enjoys with the continent. He received a generally warm welcome. And Blinken was also very nuanced and careful in

his approach, and so did not attract any blowback.”

In the middle

America’s new Africa strategy represents a break from the past – on paper, at least. It acknowledges that “some of our longstanding approaches have become insufficient to meet new challenges in a more contested and competitive world”.

It also promises to supplement its relentless focus on counter-terrorism – which has not delivered a safer continent, it acknowledges – with more focus on governance, trade and development.

Blinken sought to downplay concerns that the war in Ukraine, and the subsequent rise in tensions between the United States and Europe on one side, and Russia and China on the other, signalled the start of a new Cold War. “Time and again, they [African countries] have been told to pick a side in great power contests that feel far removed from the daily struggles of their people. The United States will not dictate Africa’s choices,” said Blinken in a lecture at the University of Pretoria. “Neither should anyone else.”

As laudable as these words sound, some US policies suggest the opposite. Earlier this month, for example, another senior US official, ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said that any African countries that bought Russian oil in violation of US-imposed sanctions “stand the chance of having actions taken against them”.

Naledi Pandor, South Africa’s foreign minister and Blinken’s host in Pretoria, staked out her country’s position in no

uncertain terms: “One thing I definitely dislike is being told, ‘Either you choose this or else.’ When a minister speaks to me like that, which Secretary Blinken has never done but some have, I definitely will not be bullied in that way, nor would I expect any other African country worth its salt to agree to be treated [this way].”

The instinct is that when these big powers are clashing, the continent could have a lot to lose and little to gain by being openly aligned

The spectre of a new Cold War looms large over African decision-makers. “Few African countries were left unaffected by the last Cold War,” said Crisis Group’s Murithi. “Where it was cold in developed countries, it was hot in many developing countries. The instinct is that when these big powers are clashing, the continent could have a lot to lose and little to gain by being openly aligned.”

Outgunned

But for all Pandor’s bravado, and for all America’s talk of “affirming African agency”, the sheer power imbalance between the superpowers and the continent mean that Africans may not get that much of a say in their own destiny – especially in times of global crisis.

This was most obvious during the pandemic, when the developing world’s efforts to waive vaccine patents – led by



Quick pick-me-up: Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov enjoys a fresh cuppa with Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen in Addis Ababa in July.

South Africa and India – were ruthlessly shut down by western nations. And in the rich world's refusal to act on the climate crisis.

It is a reality also backed up in research released this week by the Institute for Security Studies's African Futures programme. The think tank observed that, on various indices of global power, the entire African continent accounts for only between 3% and 6% of global power – leaving it outgunned, both literally and metaphorically, by everyone else.

"Africa has effectively been instrumentalised in global power competition since independence," the research concluded. This "limited agency" was "hardly surprising" given that Africa as a whole comprises just 3% of the world economy, and will only grow to 5% by 2043 thanks to its population growth.

In this context, it is even more important that African states avoid getting dragged into other nations' conflicts, argues David Kode, the head of advocacy at Civicus, a global civil society alliance. And there are signs that, this time around, the superpowers will not have it all their own way. "There are growing anti-western sentiments in parts of Africa, including the Sahel, and areas of Southern Africa."

A similar concern is growing over Russia's support of dictatorships in Guinea, Sudan, the Central African Republic and other countries, he said.

"What African states need to do is learn the lessons from the Cold War, as they were used as proxies, and adopt an even-handed stance in their international engagement in line with [their own] principles on democracy, the rule of law and human rights." ■



When West Africa meets the Middle East, music is made magical

Angélique Kidjo and Ibrahim Maalouf revisit the Queen of Sheba's lore

Wilfred Okiche

Angélique Kidjo and French-Lebanese trumpeter/composer Ibrahim Maalouf have been making music together for some time now.

The five-time Grammy-winning Beninoise singer has frequently called upon Maalouf as a guest while on the road. At her sold-out, one-night-only concert at Carnegie Hall last November, Kidjo and

Maalouf teased material they described as a meeting point between their respective cultures. Following through, the duo now presents their seven-track concept album, *Queen of Sheba*.

The legend of the Queen of Sheba is claimed by several cultures even though her provenance is disputed. Her journey to Jerusalem to test the wisdom of King Solomon is documented in the Bible, the Qur'an, the Talmud and in Ethiopian literature. The Yorubas claim her, too.

Upon meeting Solomon, Queen Makeda of Sheba challenges him with riddles to gauge the extent of his famed wisdom. For the album, an exquisite and adventurous amalgamation of sounds and influences, Maalouf composes the music while Kidjo supplies lyrics – in Yoruba, no less – around seven of these riddles.

Even though both Solomon and his guest are both royalty, there is a disturbing element to their relationship, and Kidjo's lyrics acknowledge this imbalance of power. This is, after all, a Black woman 30 centuries ago, away from her home, supplicating herself before this “most powerful of men”.

The songs reveal the queen's state of mind as she questions, flatters and impresses her host, leading to intimacy and, in turn, a child.

The songs on *Queen of Sheba* are mostly splendid, but the album's centrepiece has to be *Omije*, a seven-minute plus tour de force that highlights the undeniable strengths of both performers.

Would recommend. ■

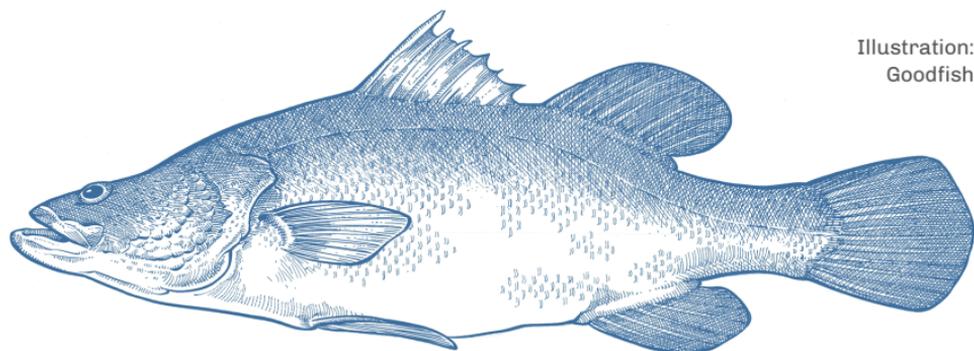


Illustration:
Goodfish

The rise and fall of the Nile perch

First, this giant fish was a god. Then a colonial invader. Later, an economic miracle. Now the self-decolonising Nile perch is a massive problem for Lake Victoria.

Mark Weston

Near the town of Esna in Egypt lies a cemetery that contains nothing but fish. Elsewhere in ancient Egypt, the Nile perch was a popular fish for traders. But at Esna its consumption was forbidden – instead, dead fish were embalmed with salted mud, wrapped in linen and buried in individual graves.

The veneration of the perch came from its association with the goddess Neith, who according to Egyptian mythology assumed the form of a fish while she and the ram-headed god Khnum came together to create the world. Khnum was also the god of the Nile's then-unknown source.

Two thousand years would pass between the death of the last pharaoh and the perch's first appearance at the great river's starting point.

Its arrival in Lake Victoria was the result not of some sacred ritual but of a colonial gamble – near-bankrupt British imperialists in East Africa who were in need of a quick win.

The Nile perch is a fast-swimming predator that can grow to two metres in length. The colonisers hypothesised that introducing it into Africa's largest lake would turn “worthless” native fish stock – which the perch would eat – into a popular product for regional markets that would help balance the books.

In 1954, against the advice of scientists

who warned of the risks a voracious new species might pose to a complex tropical ecosystem, a fisheries officer was ordered to deposit into the shallows a bucketful of juvenile perch.

Within a decade, the British had been evicted from East Africa and their decision – which never benefited them – forgotten. Nile perch would not appear in fishermen's nets until the 1970s. But when it did, it sparked a boom that would transform the lake's economy.

By the mid-1980s, Tanzanian fishermen were netting 80,000 tons of perch per year, and 200,000 tons a decade later. Their counterparts in Kenya and Uganda, the other lakeshore countries, also found their nets bulging with fleshy giants. Demand soared not only in regional but also in international markets.

With help from aid agencies, fish processing factories were built around the lakeshore, their produce exported to Asia, the Middle East and Europe. In what had once been one of East Africa's poorest regions, the perch created a quarter of a million jobs. New schools were built, new industries sprang up, foreign exchange poured in. The perch was once again revered on the Nile, where the species was gratefully dubbed "The Saviour Fish".

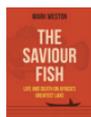
But the boom couldn't last. So many fishermen descended on the lake that the perch came under unsustainable pressure. Two thousand new fishing boats were launched onto the lake every year, using ever more efficient motors and nets. Pollution – from the new industries, from sewage produced by the burgeoning human population that had come to take

advantage of the bonanza, and from the farms that fed that population – turned swathes of the lake into dead zones. Deforestation cleared the effluents' path to the shallows, which are the Nile perch's prime breeding ground.

Stocks of perch in Lake Victoria have declined by three-quarters since their peak. The average weight of those caught has shrunk by four-fifths. Many of the processing factories have closed. Of the lake's native fish, meanwhile, more than 200 species have gone extinct.

Few of the 25-million people who rely on the lake have not been affected. Fishing crews that once made \$50 a night are now lucky to make five. Net menders, boat builders and those who fillet, dry, smoke or trade the fish have seen their earnings dry up. The dearth of cash is crippling the shops, markets, bars and other small businesses that depend on the fishermen's custom. Billions of dollars in export revenues have been lost.

To reverse the slide, the lakeshore governments have banned trawling and other harmful fishing techniques. No consideration has been given to the needs or opinions of fishermen, however, so illegal fishing continues. "The politicians tell us we shouldn't fish like this," laments a fisherman on Ukerewe, the lake's largest island, "but there are no companies to work for and no government jobs. What else can we do?" ■



Mark Weston is the author of *The Saviour Fish: Life and Death on Africa's Greatest Lake*

Yes, Somalia needs more aid – but only if it is managed properly

I have lived through multiple famines. Despite decades of our leaders asking for foreign aid, in our name, little has changed. They profit, we struggle. This has to change.

Liban Mahamed in Mogadishu

It is a hot Sunday afternoon, and I still haven't had lunch. Rice with banana is my usual lunch, but I will skip it today – I have to save up for breakfasts and dinner. The price of a plate of rice has gone up 50%, from \$1 to \$1.50. It is now too expensive to have every day.

All over the world, the cost of food is rising rapidly. It's worse in Somalia, which is also suffering through another major drought – the worst in 40 years, more severe even than the one in 2011, where 250,000 people and millions of animals perished.

The price of one kilogram of rice has more than doubled, from 70 cents to \$1.80. Three litres of cooking oil is now \$9, up from \$5.

I can still afford some meals. Not everyone can. The hunger crisis has already claimed the lives of dozens of people, including children. Aid agencies are once again appealing for funds to address the crisis.

When Jan Egeland, the head of the

Norwegian Refugee Council, visited Somalia in June, he said "it's painfully clear the world is failing this country". He called for donors to give enough dollars so that aid agencies could tackle the drought before widespread famine sets in

Egeland is right. Somalia needs more aid. But the aid will only be effective if it is managed properly.

Ever since I was born – I am 22 years old – it has felt like my country has been on the brink of drought-induced famine. Hundreds of thousands of people and animals have perished in these droughts, and this is despite the country receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid.

That's because, all too often, this aid does not get to where it is needed most. It has been mismanaged by successive governments. Our biggest problem is not the ill-meaning foreigner but the tie-wearing politician who is in this just to enrich himself.

According to a United Nations report, up to half of all aid sent to Somalia was routinely diverted. During the 2016-2017



Death sentence: In the 2011 drought, 250,000 people died and millions of animals perished in Somalia. This drought is worse.
Photo: ICRC

drought, over a billion dollars was given. That's a lot of money. Money to create sustainable projects.

But nothing changed. Instead of pursuing sustainable models that would enable the poor to lift themselves up from poverty, our leaders will keep asking for more aid in our names with little to no transparency.

And the aid agencies, NGOs and international agencies continue with business as usual. They are aiding our politician's corruption. Transparency International has repeatedly named Somalia as the most corrupt nation in the world – so there is no excuse.

Now, Somalia is on the brink. And I am not arguing for less aid; I want more aid for us. But I also want accountability for us from the international donors and our leaders.

For far too long, we have been hostage to what has arguably become a business model that exploits our people's struggles. We can no longer be silent about it. The current foreign aid model in Somalia is

not empowering people at all; it's making the rich only richer and the poor stay poor.

What we need is accountability, allied to strong and uncorrupted institutions that are capable of fighting corruption. We are not yet there.

In May, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud came back to power for the second time since 2012, promising to tackle the current drought crisis. He appointed a special envoy to coordinate humanitarian responses, which is a good sign. But it is not enough. Hassan has been in power before, and little changed. This time, he has to redeem himself.

A food-sufficient Somalia where no one has to die of hunger must be the priority for our leaders. And this will only be possible through good governance, not through foreign aid and tribal-based politics. ■

Liban Mahamed is a Somali freelance writer and journalist.

If you can't trust your religious leader ...

One reason why bogus pastors and false prophets make headlines is that most of us trust our religious leaders.

According to Afrobarometer surveys in 34 African countries in 2019/2021, religious leaders are more widely trusted and less widely seen as corrupt than any other public figures or institutions the surveys asked about.

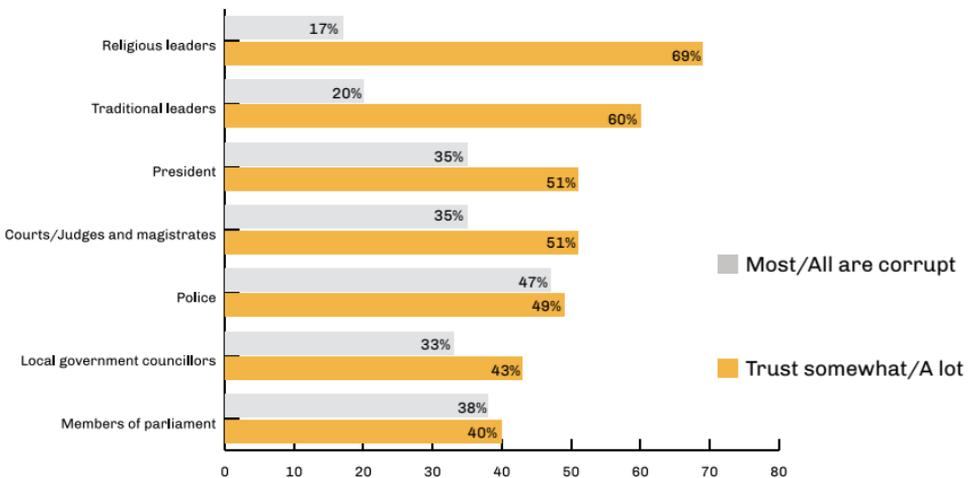
More than two thirds (69%) of Africans say they trust religious leaders “somewhat” or “a lot,” placing them well ahead of traditional leaders (60%), the courts (51%), the president (51%), and the police (49%).

And just 17% of Africans think that “most” or “all” religious leaders are corrupt

– less than half as many as see widespread corruption in the presidency (35%), the courts (35%), Parliament (38%), and the police (47%). (Many people (43%) do think that “some” religious leaders are corrupt.)

But fair warning to religious leaders everywhere: These positive perceptions are not immutable. In South Africa, where a stream of faith-related scandals has led even the president to call for curbing abuses, trust in religious leaders has dropped by 21 percentage points since 2015, to the lowest level (42%) among the 34 surveyed countries, while perceptions that most/all religious leaders are corrupt have risen by 11 points, to one of the highest levels (31%).

Popular trust and perceived corruption: Key public officials | 34 countries | 2019/2021



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.



Always burning: A Gauteng resident armed with a machete skirts a fire started during a protest against 'zama zamas'. (Photo: Phill Magakoe/ AFP)

Afrophobia is the fire that is leaving South Africa's reputation in ashes

Politicians have weaponised the despair that their corruption and ineptitude has created, leading to waves of violence against fellow Africans

Andile Zulu

On 28 July in the mining city of Krugersdorp on the western border of Johannesburg, artists filming a gospel music video on a mining site were attacked. Heavily armed men robbed the crew, held them hostage for four hours and raped eight women. The police reportedly only arrived an hour after the attackers had left.

Residents have for years warned that illegal miners, often operating within national syndicates with ties to transnational crime, are terrorising their communities. Little has happened. Frustrated and sparked by the attack, thousands took matters into their own hands. With golf clubs, machetes and hammers, they went searching for “zama zamas”, a popular term for illegal artisanal miners.

These miners are often, but not exclusively, migrants from other parts of Africa.

In a South Africa where authorities all too easily turn to afrophobia instead of acting on systemic issues, such as gender based violence, organised crime or ineffective policing, the response to the Krugersdorp attacks was predictable. The next day, the police themselves reportedly targeted undocumented migrants in sweeping raids, arresting 130 people.

To angry community members, this was a clear sign that the state was also pointing fingers at foreigners.

Scapegoat for poverty & politics

Although they deny it, the rhetoric and actions of politicians in the past five years have primed portions of the South African public for mass violence against African and Asian migrants.

According to a 2018 Pew Research Centre survey, 61% of South Africans believe immigrants are “more to blame for crime than any other group” and 62% of South Africans believe immigrants “are a burden because they take our jobs and social benefits”. The Institute for Security Studies, which monitors and studies public violence, recorded over 250 xenophobic attacks since 2013.

Politicians have taken advantage of dire economic circumstances. The World Bank estimates that 55.5% of South Africa’s population are living below the upper-bound poverty line. This means approximately 30-million people are living on \$83 a month, 13.8-million of whom are food insecure and earn less

than \$40 a month. Some 7.9-million South Africans are unemployed.

This perpetual financial insecurity is grossly aggravated by the gutting of social services after 27 years of disastrous governance by the ruling African National Congress. Democratic South Africa is technically a social state, where vulnerable people are shielded from economic storms. National government provides healthcare, water, electricity and public housing. At a local level this extends to policing, the maintenance of public infrastructure and efforts to stimulate the economy.

But years of systemic corruption, incompetence and financial mismanagement have weakened the state, leaving it unable to fulfill some of these most basic mandates. And nearly 50% of the population rely on some form of social welfare programme for their individual or family wellbeing.

Years of systemic corruption and incompetence have weakened the state, leaving it unable to fulfil some of these most basic mandates.

Hospitals are overcrowded and understaffed. Schools are drastically under-resourced. Urban homelessness has soared. The police services are overwhelmed by crime and lack the skills, resources and political leadership to do their job properly. The majority of South Africa’s municipalities are reportedly on the verge of collapse.



Scapegoats: Politicians are redirecting the anger of struggling South Africans towards people from other African countries.

Photo: Guillem Sartorio/AFP

Increasingly, citizens do not trust the government to improve their socio-economic prospects. It meets their protests for clean drinking water, toxic waste removal or safe public housing with rubber bullets, smoke grenades and hollow promises by politicians. It is within this context of destitution, mass unemployment, inept governance and state dysfunction that xenophobia, specifically afrophobia, flourishes.

Grabbing power at any cost

Stirring the pot are politicians and opportunists from across the political landscape, who are normalising afrophobia in service of their own advancement.

On the streets of South Africa's major cities such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Gqberha and Durban, this expresses itself in populist rhetoric. Vigilante groups instigate the looting of migrant-owned businesses, call for violence against

undocumented migrants, and directly harass migrants by demanding they reveal their immigration documents. They then make media appearances, propagating the notion that migrants are devious outsiders taking jobs, abusing social services and driving up crime in poor communities. The leaders of Operation Dudula, the most recent and prominent group to follow this path, wrap their work in reactionary rhetoric, saying it is much-needed patriotism which will retake the country from selfish political elites and the growing "horde" of "illegal" foreigners. They continue to be given space on media platforms to propagate this hate.

These street vigilantes work in harmony with online movements – such as #PutSouthAfricansFirst – and political parties, such as the Patriotic Alliance. Ahead of last year's local government elections, the former mayor of Johannesburg, Herman Mashaba,

launched his own party, ActionSA. A free-market fundamentalist, his core economic ideas are unpopular in the context of South Africa's socioeconomic ills – so he has wrapped his campaign in anti-migrant rhetoric instead.

It is working. The party is growing and challenging its larger peers across the country. Not that they needed convincing: In 2018 the official opposition, the right-of-centre Democratic Alliance launched a campaign to “secure our borders” and eradicate illegal immigration. Its rhetoric since then has flirted with outright fascism even as its share of the vote has steadily dwindled.

In 2018 the official opposition launched a campaign to ‘secure our borders’ and eradicate illegal immigration. Its rhetoric since then has strayed fascist as its share of the vote has dwindled.

The ruling ANC retains its official position of maintaining peaceful, cooperative relations with other African nations and advancing a human rights approach to immigration. Its home affairs ministry has, however, decayed to a point where legal migration to South Africa is near-impossible. And the discrepancy between what the ANC says and the actions of its members is all too apparent – prominent leaders will happily engage in afrophobic bigotry when questioned on its bad policy choices and sloppy

governance.

When xenophobic violence broke out across townships in Johannesburg in 2015, claiming the lives of six people including a one-month-old child, government ministers Nomvula Mokonyane and Lindiwe Zulu complained that there were too many migrants dominating local business, especially the informal sector.

Home Affairs minister Aaron Mokoaleli himself pits migrants against native born citizens by claiming that xenophobic violence results from South Africans and migrants competing over “limited” resources.

In 2017, Lieutenant General Deliwe de Lange, the former provincial commissioner of the police service, claimed that 60% of suspects arrested for violent crimes in the province were illegal immigrants. Such claims, according to analysts at the Institute for Security Studies, are rarely supported by evidence.

What they do is create an environment where foreigners are the scapegoat for a society under enormous pressure, led by politicians failing to provide any leadership. And that leads to violence. It means the scenes that played out in Krugersdorp late last month are unlikely to change anytime soon.

Challenging afrophobia requires building a broad political movement, centred primarily on the needs of South Africa's working class and poor and imbued with progressive values. Until such a mass movement is built, hyper-nationalists, proto-fascists and cynical politicians will continue to put the lives of immigrants in danger. ■

Republic of Congo

The future of climate refugees is a present threat

Brazzaville's nearly two million residents live to the rhythm of natural disasters that are creating a generation of climate refugees for whom the state has nothing to offer.

**Adiela Boussougou Kassa
in Brazzaville**

Madzou, like many of his neighbours, does not look forward to the rainy season. Living in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, means facing regular natural disasters. Heavy rain drives erosion and leaves houses buried in mud, or sweeps them away. The father of 12 says he lost his house in a recent downpour.

For those with money, the solution is simple: move away. But Madzou can't afford to leave with his children. "I am retired," he says. "I have nowhere to take them."

His situation is far from unique. People tell *The Continent* that the government has failed to help.

Paul Okana, a district chief, is blunt: "The government has abandoned us." Without help from the state, he says, the community collects money to build defences to slow down erosion, and to help people after floods. "Unfortunately, it is not enough."

In March, three people died in flooding in the Manianga district. Because Brazzaville is wrapped along one side of the Congo River – in view of the DRC capital Kinshasa – there is little space to move that is out of reach of floodwaters. In some cases, families have taken to living in large dugout canoes.

Madzou's Djiri district is one of the hardest hit in the city. Its municipal councillor, Lavy Sekangué, agrees with the sentiment that the state is not doing enough. "The government cannot abandon us. A father never abandons his children. We have a fight and we must do it all with our means." But he still expects that the state will "come to our aid".

A chronic problem

For millions of people around the world, the constant pressure of disasters, like those faced by people in Djiri, eventually forces them to leave. They then become climate refugees, a term coined in 1985 by UN Environment Programme expert

Essam El-Hinnawi to describe people who have been “forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption”.

While the term is being used increasingly on the world stage as floods, droughts and dramatic changes force people to move, it is rarely invoked by leaders in the Congo Basin. Critics dismiss ministries in charge of environmental issues as vehicles designed to glean aid from rich countries at international climate summits.

Over several months, *The Continent* has spoken to people affected by natural disasters, who don't know where to turn when they are displaced. The failure of the state means that avenue is closed off – a failure that means there is then little pressure on government to tackle flooding and provide assistance to communities.

Climate meets graft

In 2019, more than 100,000 people were left displaced by flooding in northern Congo. The government appealed for international assistance and the World Food Program provided aid.

In January 2020, just before the Covid pandemic, citizen journalists revealed that the corniche of Brazzaville was crumbling because of heavy rain. This cement wall holds back the giant Congo River. It was opened for public use in 2016, just before the presidential election that led to the re-election of Denis Sassou Nguesso. By 2020 it was crumbling into the river.

The government was quick to distance itself from accusations of graft and cutting



Muddying waters: Floods in the Congo basin are driving displacement as their frequency and intensity increases.

corners, instead blaming climate change and illegal homes. Residents however were quick to return the conversation to corruption and shortcuts in construction, which meant infrastructure has not been able to handle climate change.

According to the World Meteorological Organisation's State of the Global Climate Report, ecological disasters have caused more than 23-million people a year to relocate over the past decade. The majority of these have been within their own countries. The World Bank projects that climate change will drive 143-million people in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia alone to leave their homes by 2050. Many come from poor regions that have contributed little to global warming — and rich countries refuse to pay for this damage, while also making it harder for people to move around the world.

In Brazzaville, it means people remain reliant on their own communities as the state joins other countries in abrogating its duty to its citizens. ■

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

"Knowledge is a fluid concept. After a few drinks, even more so."

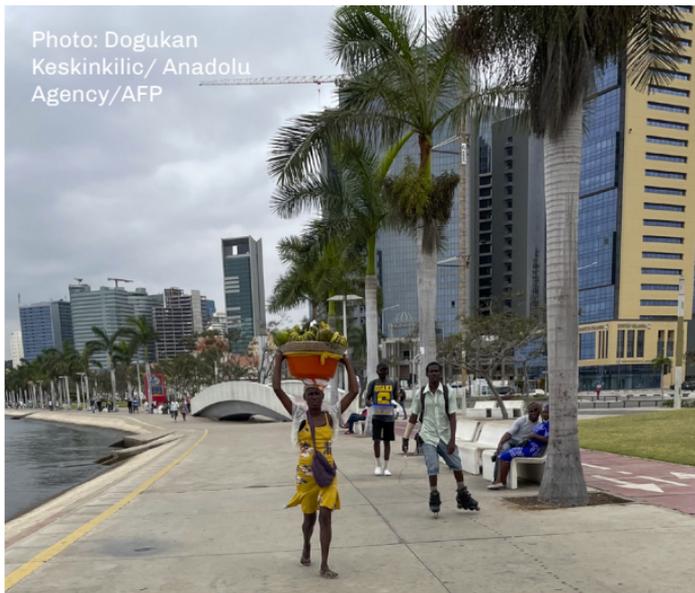


Photo: Dogukan Keskinilic/ Anadolu Agency/AFP

- 1_** What is the Ethiopian name for the Queen of Sheba?
- 2_** What is Angola's largest city?
- 3_** Kenya's general elections had two frontrunners. Which candidate was the former prime minister?
- 4_** Which candidate was the deputy president?
- 5_** Another African country will hold general elections on 24 August. Which country is that?
- 6_** Who is the president of the Confederation of African Football?
- 7_** Which year did the Rwandan genocide take place?
- 8_** Which country is home to the largest population of lions?
- 9_** Which international organisation's acronym is "IMF"?
- 10_** Did Nigeria gain independence in 1960 or 1963?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za



Photo: Tobi Adépoju/
Gallo Images

How Banyana learned their lesson and schooled their foes

Under master technician Desiree Ellis, South Africa's national women's football team finally added a continental trophy. This is how they did it.

Luke Feltham in Johannesburg

South Africa went into last month's Women's Africa Cup of Nations ranked third on the continent. They emerged with a trophy, the title of continental champions and a jump to 54 in the world rankings.

Their coach, Desiree Ellis, was quick to praise her predecessor. "We cannot forget what other coaches that came before us,

especially Vera Pauw, put into the team," she said last week. "There is so much I learnt from her."

Banyana Banyana's ascent to the continent's peak has been a long journey, with any number of roleplayers. But Ellis's humility belies the extent of her own efforts. Under her direction, the team has steadily edged forward, propelled by a singular vision and philosophy.

It has been built around a core group



Photo: Tobi Adepaju/
Gallo Images

of footballers. In players like Janine van Wyk, Refiloe Jane, Jermaine Seoposenwe and Thembi Kgatlana, she has players that have battled around the globe together, basking in the highs and sharing the lows. They also have extensive foreign club experience – an invaluable asset in a squad that regularly welcomes youngsters fresh out of university.

Never blessed with a deep pool of players from which to pluck, Ellis has deliberately fostered this environment of learning. An equally important compliment has been her management of expectations and objectives.

In Southern Africa, her team has responded to her demand for nothing but absolute success by winning the regional Cosafa Cup in all but one year in her six year tenure. Against teams like



Photo: Phill Magakoe/AFP

the United States, and other far better funded European teams, the approach has been more pragmatic. The coach has recognised that South Africa is not at their level of development but has always emphasised the learnings gleaned from those defeats.

That experience was clear at the Africa Cup of Nations. Before 2018 it was unthinkable that the top-ranked Super Falcons of Nigeria could be shot down, but that year Banyana came within a penalty

of doing just that. In July, they went the necessary step further and claimed the throne for themselves.

Next up is the 2023 Women's World Cup. ■



Photo: Alet Pretorius/
Gallo Images



Photo: Tobi Adepoju/
Gallo Images



Photo: Tobi Adepoju/
Gallo Images

Disaster in the making



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

It's hot. And it's dry. As you've no doubt already read in these pages this week, Somalia is suffering through a drought far worse than the one that left quarter of a million people dead in 2011. Yet somehow it's Europe that's taking up all the international drought headline space as tourists complain about not being able to lower the hotel air-conditioner setting below 27° C in Spain.

First world problems are almost endearing, sometimes. Almost. It's not like the nations of Africa are *entirely* without blemish or complaint, after all.

We have our distractions, fortunately. This week we've been glued to the current season of *Keeping Up With The Kenyans*, which has kept us guessing right up to *The Continent's* publication deadline.

For years the drama has slowly been building up, and gathering pace in the past few months. We've seen grandstanding grandfathers vie against one another for the big presidential chair – trading barbs against the backdrop of a worrying debt situation, a devastating rise in the cost of living, and, lest we forget, Kenya's own devastating drought.

It's more than enough to drive one to drink – just as long as it's not water, probably. Which explains the rise in popularity of the official and yet also entirely made up *Keeping up with the Kenyans* drinking game, which requires unofficial election monitors to down a shot every time they see:

- An article describing the contest between Deputy President William Ruto and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga as being “Hustlers v Dynasties”;
- The “International Community” releasing a patronising statement regarding the polls; or
- A candidate taking to social media to say they have won prior to the release of any official results.

Come to think of it, that actually might lead to an alcohol shortage before the end of the weekend. Approach with caution.

While it is heartening that so many came out to cast their vote, there were also many who chose not to, particularly the Gen Zs – which in itself is telling. What could it be about the main contenders in the presidential election in particular that is failing to find favour with younger Kenyans? A mystery, through and through.

But perhaps our preoccupation with who has won what election, by what margin, should give way to some reflection on who chose *not* to vote and, as importantly, why.



I've been back: Laurent Gbagbo greets supporters on his return to Côte d'Ivoire. Photo: Sia Kambou/AFP

The more things change...

Meanwhile, enjoying a rare win this week is none other than Côte d'Ivoire's erstwhile president Laurent Gbagbo. After he was voted from office in dramatic fashion in 2010, and then dragged from said office kicking and screaming, the former prez has had bad luck heaped upon him.

First he was found guilty of corruption in his own country. This earned him a 20-year prison sentence which he was sadly not able to serve due to being on trial for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Quite the pickle, you might think!

But Gbagbo's fortunes flipped, and in 2019 he found himself acquitted of these charges, and last year returned home.

Now, President Alassane Ouattara says he has pardoned Gbagbo in the "interest of social cohesion" and even ordered that his bank accounts be unfrozen. A rich powerful man pardoning another rich powerful man? What are the odds!

...the more things go insane

The junta in Mali meanwhile are perhaps causing certain Western governments to lose their minds. Colonel Assimi Goïta announced that he had held a phone call with president Putin of Russia to discuss the country's transition and complimented Russia for "respecting the sovereignty of the people of Mali".

The timing was so dramatic you could almost hear Wagnerian music welling up, because Goïta's Mos-kowtowing happened to coincide with release of the United States's new "strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa", in which it declared that China was in the region to "advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests", and accused Russia of using Africa as a playground for private military companies and "fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit".

Because *of course* the US's interests in other countries' affairs are *always* altruistic and it *always* puts human rights ahead of all else – even if its president unabashedly declared to Israel that he has their back, which impressed them so much that it was no doubt all they could think about as their military struck Gaza again this week, killing more civilians.

That's a story for another day, perhaps. Especially when civilians are dying closer to home. Like in Sierra Leone, where protests over the cost of living turned deadly after police fired at demonstrators.

As if drought, famine, flooding and other natural disasters were not bad enough, we humans seem to have a terrible knack for creating unnatural ones, too. ■

The Big Picture

Photo: Mahmoud Khaled/AFP

Sky graffiti: KAI T-50 Golden Eagle aircraft of the South Korean air force's Black Eagles aerobatic team paint the sky with smoke plumes at the Pyramids Air Show 2022 on the outskirts of the Egyptian capital, Cairo, blazing multicoloured trails above the Great Pyramid of Khufu, the Pyramid of Khafre, and the Pyramid of Menkaure at the Giza Pyramids Necropolis.



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