

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



**The South
African arms
dealer selling
peace in
Ukraine**

Inside:

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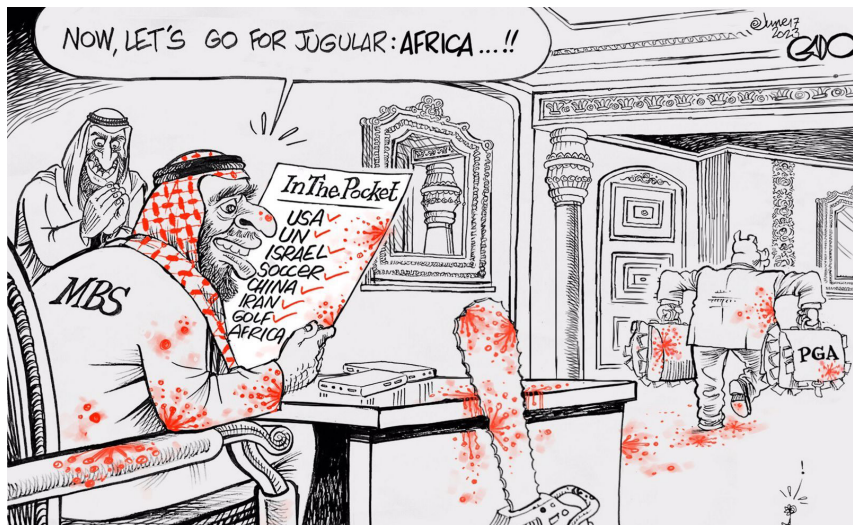
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Cover: Four African presidents are on a peace mission in Ukraine and Russia. We wish them luck. But we also want to know why Ivor Ichikowitz, a controversial South African arms dealer, is playing such a prominent role behind the scenes. (p10)

Correction: We made a mistake in Issue 128, in the story headlined “Kagame’s big soldier shuffle triggers alarm as neighbours batten down the hatches.” We identified Mubarak Muganga as the Rwandan army’s new chief of staff, when he is the new defence staff chief. Vincent Nyakarundi is the army’s new chief of staff. It is Nyakarundi, not Muganga, who is from the army’s intelligence division and spent many of the past 15 years working on diplomatic missions in the United States.



ANGOLA

‘Mistakes were made’ in fuel subsidy fiasco that sparked violence

Angolan authorities have enlisted religious leaders, trade unionists and journalists to help sell the public on the withdrawal of fuel subsidies, which led to protests where five people died. Early this month, as agreed with the IMF in 2018, Africa’s second biggest oil producer started phasing out the subsidies. That triggered a 100% increase in pump price for petrol. The government did a poor job distributing fuel cards to groups it meant to exempt from the price hike, like taxi drivers, prompting transportation cost hikes and protests.

EGYPT

Justice system takes life for a life it did not bother to protect

For governments, retributive justice is easier than prevention. On Wednesday, Egyptian authorities executed Mohamed Adel for stabbing to death fellow student Nayera Ashraf. She had rejected his amorous advances. She had also reported receiving death threats but didn’t get protection. The United Nations says nearly eight million women in Egypt suffer some form of violence each year. Egypt also ranks fourth in the world for the number of prisoners executed each year, according to Amnesty International. In 2022, 24 executions were recorded.

TOGO

Tanked by global woe

The gap between Togo imports and exports was 24% wider last year than in 2021, *Togo First* reports. While Togo sold more last year, it spent even more importing oil, as well as everything else. And it cost more to sell anything as Russia's war in Ukraine caused supply-chain chokeholds that drove up freight and insurance costs on shipping goods.

SPORTS

Al Ahly takes crown

Egyptian men's football club, Al Ahly, won the CAF Champions League for a record 11th time, winning \$4-million in prize money. It's been winning since 1982. The second most successful team, fellow Egyptian club Zamalek, has five championships. North African men's basketball clubs are also dominating the nascent Basketball Africa League.



GEOPOLITICS

Dems, GOP unite to punish South Africa

In a rare occurrence of bipartisanship, senators from the United States's two main parties asked President Biden to

prevent South Africa from hosting this year's summit for AGOA, the US-Africa trade framework that gives countries lower tariffs to access the American market. This follows allegations that a Russian ship last year picked up weapons in South Africa, which maintains it is neutral on the issue of Russia's war on Ukraine.

NIGERIA**Extreme weather kills another 100**

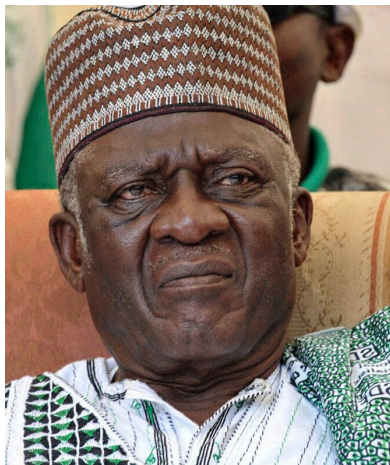
Last weekend, a party travelled 74km to attend a wedding. It rained heavily in the area of Niger State where the wedding was. So, on the way back, they had to resort to going on a boat on the Niger River. In the early hours of Monday morning, the boat rammed into a tree, which had been ripped out of the soil by the rains. The vessel capsized and although 144 people were rescued, more than 100 passengers drowned.

MUSIC**African music performances get their own Grammys category**

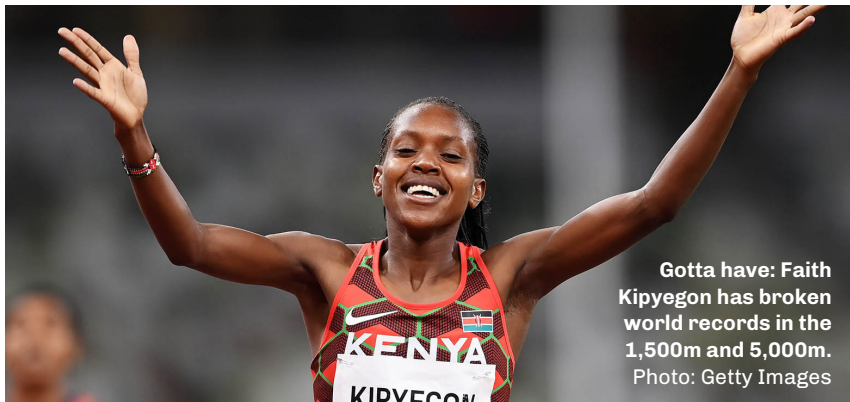
Next year, “recordings that utilise unique local expressions from across the African continent” will vie for Grammys in their own category, rather than the nebulous “global music”. The United States Recording Academy announced the “Best African Music Performance” category along with two new others this week. Many African artists, including Tems, Burna Boy, Zakes Bantwini, Nomcebo Zikode, and Wouter Kellerman, have won Grammys in recent years, as US fans embraced Afrobeats and related sounds.

CAMEROON**Opposition stalwart John Fru Ndi dies**

The founding champion of Cameroon’s multiparty politics died this week aged 81. John Fru Ndi, once a successful businessman who owned bookshops and farms, founded Cameroon’s first opposition party, the Social Democratic Front, in 1990. Two years later, he ran against Paul Biya in an election that was declared for the latter despite being widely seen as having been won by Fru Ndi. He remained a major opposition figure until his death, running against Biya two more times. He was among the very few prominent Cameroonians who dared to criticise Biya, who has been in power for 41 years ... so far.



Rest in power: John Fru Ndi, constant thorn in President Paul Biya’s side.



Gotta have: Faith Kipyegon has broken world records in the 1,500m and 5,000m. Photo: Getty Images

SPORTS

An astonishing 12 days for Kipyegon

On 2 June, in Italy, runner Faith Kipyegon broke the world record for the 1,500m. A

week later, in France, she broke another world record, for the 5,000m – running it in just 14:05:20. Five days later, and back home in Kenya, President William Ruto pledged to give her \$36,000 for the 1,500m record and a house worth \$43,000 for the 5,000m record.

DRC

Mass graves tied to M23 rebels revealed

Human Rights Watch this week revealed the locations of 14 mass graves in the Congolese village of Kishishe, thought to be created by the M23 rebel group. In November 2022, the United Nations revealed that 131 civilians were killed when the group attacked Kishishe and Bambo villages in the North Kivu Province of eastern DRC. M23 controlled the area until this April. Human Rights Watch believes there are more mass graves than it has identified.

ERITREA

Asmara loosens up, rejoins the bloc party

Eritrea doesn't play well with its neighbours. It's the only state that hasn't joined the African Continental Free Trade Agreement. In 2007, it quit the East African-based Intergovernmental Authority on Development after the bloc appointed Kenya to oversee the resolution of an Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. But, on Monday, Eritrea's information minister, Yemane Meskel, tweeted that the country was back in the East African bloc.

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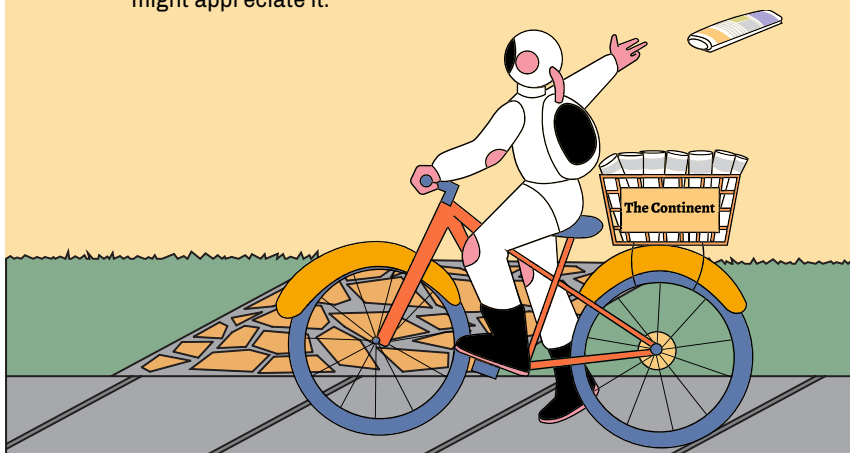
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Tunisia

Kaïs Saïed is becoming Europe's chief gatekeeper – for a fee

Tunisia's economy is rapidly deteriorating, but a proposed migration deal with the European Union could help the northern nation avert economic collapse – and keep its racist president in power.

Kiri Rupiah

In return for stemming what Europe calls a migration crisis, Tunisia has been promised over \$1-billion in financial assistance by the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the prime ministers of Italy and the Netherlands.

Von der Leyen said the European Union is ready to support Tunisia with financial assistance in exchange for better border control and measures

against human smuggling “as soon as the necessary agreement is found”.

Speaking in Tunis on Monday, she said: “We both have a vast interest in breaking the cynical business model of smugglers and traffickers.”

For border management, search and rescue, and returning migrants, Von der Leyen said the EU would provide Tunisia with more than \$100-million this year.

Tunisia's President Kaïs Saïed rejected criticisms that his government was acting as a “border guard” for Europe. Earlier this year, Saïed made headlines for scapegoating black people for his country's woes. According to Saïed, the problem was neither his country's shambolic economy and chronic unemployment, nor his own efforts to consolidate power, which critics describe as a lurch towards authoritarianism.

Instead, Tunisia's greatest threat came from a “criminal arrangement” to “change the demographic composition of Tunisia” by flooding the country with refugees and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. His comments echoed the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, popular among far-right and white supremacist movements in the Global North.

Africans from south of the Sahara have suffered violence as a result. The EU funding would allow Saïed to solidify his power and continue his policies. ■

Tanzania

State battles to sell citizens on new deal with Dubai

Leaked ports plan shows country giving away much more than it would gain

Simon Mkina in Dar es Salaam

Parliament last week approved the government's plan to get DP World to run Tanzania's main port. The company, owned by the Emirate of Dubai, would lease seven of the 11 berths at the port of Dar es Salaam – according to the works and transport minister.

But the details of the agreement, originally signed last October, were leaked earlier this month. And they point to a more extensive arrangement. *The Continent* has seen a copy of the agreement, which envisions a much wider operation – including management of “sea and lake ports, special economic zones, logistics parks and trade corridors”.

The gap between what the government officials say the partnership is about – and what the leaked documents show – has

set off a storm in Tanzania. Tundu Lissu, deputy chairman of the main opposition party Chadema, has called it the “worst deal in Tanzania's history”.

A senior ruling party member speaking anonymously to *The Continent* said the framework, which does not include an end date, “needs a lot of amendments” before any ports can be contracted out.

Despite these and other concerns, some journalists and members of Parliament who recently visited Dubai to see DP World at work are writing lengthy articles on how good the company is at running ports. A few have allegedly gone as far as buying social media adverts and TV spots in what appears to be a campaign.

Tundu Lissu has called it the 'worst deal in Tanzania's history'.

Tanzania wants its ports to compete with neighbours like Kenya, so it can be a hub for trade with central and eastern Africa. DP World is expected to invest at least \$500-million. But first Tanzania has to convince its own people that this is a good deal.

And that convincing isn't helped by the poor mining deals that former president John Magufuli then had to go and pull the country out of, at considerable reputational cost. ■

Africa-Ukraine



Odd man out: African presidents, and an arms dealer. Photo: President Yoweri Museveni

The arms dealer behind the African peace mission to Ukraine

A weapons manufacturer on a peace mission.
What could possibly go wrong?

Simon Allison

Yoweri Museveni, infamously, manages his own Twitter account. Uganda's 78-year-old president knows how to craft a viral tweet, but he does make the occasional mistake.

On 5 June, Museveni met on Zoom with six fellow African presidents.

They were discussing their proposed mission to mediate Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine. Also present, officially, was Jean-Yves Ollivier, a controversial French businessman who is claiming the credit for organising the African peace mission ("I will play Kissinger," he told the *Financial Times*, referring to the notorious US diplomat who has been implicated in

multiple alleged war crimes).

After the Zoom call, Museveni tweeted a screenshot of the video gathering. There, sharing Ollivier's screen, was a middle-aged, greying white man, whose involvement had not previously been made public – and for good reason.

The man, whose name is Ivor Ichikowitz, owns one of the largest arms manufacturers on the African continent.

Ichikowitz's Paramount Group sells weaponised drones, infantry combat vehicles, naval patrol ships and fighter jets, among other weapons systems.

Its clients include dictatorial regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan and the Republic of Congo. The group has been implicated in multiple corruption allegations – most notably in Malawi, where a scandal over a \$145-million contract to supply patrol boats helped to bring down the government of former president Joyce Banda. Ichikowitz denies any wrongdoing, and says that neither he nor his company has ever been formally charged with corruption.

Ichikowitz's Paramount Group sells drones, infantry combat vehicles, naval patrol ships and fighter jets, among other weapons systems.

The murky nature of Ichikowitz's involvement was highlighted when *The Continent* requested comment from a spokesperson for South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who is ostensibly leading the African peace mission, and

was present on the Zoom call. "It's the first time I hear of Ivor's involvement," Vincent Magwenya told *The Continent*. "I'm not certain as to what will be Ivor's role."

Ichikowitz is a major donor to the African National Congress, Ramaphosa's political party.

Ichikowitz and Ollivier's Brazzaville Foundation did not respond to *The Continent's* requests to answer questions for this story. But Ollivier, in private correspondence seen by *The Continent*, said of the arms dealer's role in the peace mission: "Mr Ichikowitz is for a long time a friend of the Brazzaville Foundation. In the present initiative, Mr Ichikowitz [has] offered pro bono resources, contacts, access and advice. He was officially [thanked] by the six heads of state during the 5 June Summit meeting for his contribution."

Kremlin connections

The stated intention of the African peace mission is to end the war in Ukraine, which escalated when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. But the mission is not off to an auspicious start.

By the time the delegation disembarked at the Kyiv train station on Friday morning, three presidents had already dropped out (Egypt's Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, the Republic of Congo's Denis Sassou Nguesso and Museveni).

Ramaphosa was travelling with a reduced security detail after the bulk of his security was grounded at the airport in Warsaw. Polish police said they did not have the appropriate authorisations for their weapons. This claim is disputed

by the South African government, who said Poland was trying to “sabotage” the mission.

On arrival in Kyiv, the presidents – Ramaphosa, Azali Assoumani of the Comoros, Macky Sall of Senegal and Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia – were greeted by the sound of air-raid sirens and explosions. These were caused by a Russian missile attack, which may lead to awkward questions on Saturday, when the African leaders are due to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St Petersburg. As their timeline was public, Russian authorities would have been well aware of the presence of four African presidents during the missile strike.

The revelation of Ichikowitz’s role, and his potential commercial interest, is likely to further complicate the negotiations. It is not known whether Paramount Group is selling weapons to either side in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, although at least one piece of military equipment produced by Paramount – a Marauder-type armoured vehicle – has been spotted with Russian forces on the front line, according to news website *Defence Web*.

Ichikowitz is known to be connected to at least one major oligarch who is close to Putin. Both Ichikowitz and the Brazzaville Foundation’s Ollivier spoke at the 2019 edition of the Rhodes Forum, described by some as “Putin’s Davos”. The Rhodes Forum is organised by Vladimir Yakunin, a former KGB officer who later served as the president of Russian Railways. He has been under United States sanctions since 2014 due to his support for Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Australian sanctions on



Bygones: President Cyril Ramaphosa and Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Photo: Sergei Chirikov/AFP/Getty Images

Yakunin describe him as “a close personal and financial associate of Vladimir Putin”.

Despite this, in 2020, the Brazzaville Foundation – of whom Ichikowitz has been an enthusiastic supporter and funder – announced a formal partnership with Yakunin’s think tank, the Dialogue of Civilizations, saying they “share many of the same objectives”. It has since said that this partnership “was never implemented”.

Ollivier’s ties to Russia are even closer, having served as an advisor to the state-owned nuclear energy company, Rosatom. This is the same energy company that was embroiled in a massive corruption scandal in South Africa under Ramaphosa’s predecessor, Jacob Zuma – a scandal that in part paved the way for Ramaphosa to take power.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, declined to comment specifically on the role of Ichikowitz and Ollivier. He told *The Continent*: “When anyone in the world comes up with initiatives that ‘we will talk to Ukraine and Russia and settle everything’, we politely advise: if you want to actually help, and not pretend to mediate, so as not to take a position, focus on specific actions.” ■

Sierra Leoneans are seeking economic solutions

Whoever wins next week's presidential election in Sierra Leone faces a tall and urgent order: fixing the economy and feeding the people.

In a country where almost half the population is malnourished and two-thirds live on less than \$1.25 a day, the most important problems people want their government to address are economic management (48%) and food shortages (46%), according to Afrobarometer's most recent survey.

On both counts, citizens see their government as failing: Very few think it is doing an acceptable job of keeping prices stable (8%), narrowing income gaps (21%), creating jobs (28%), improving

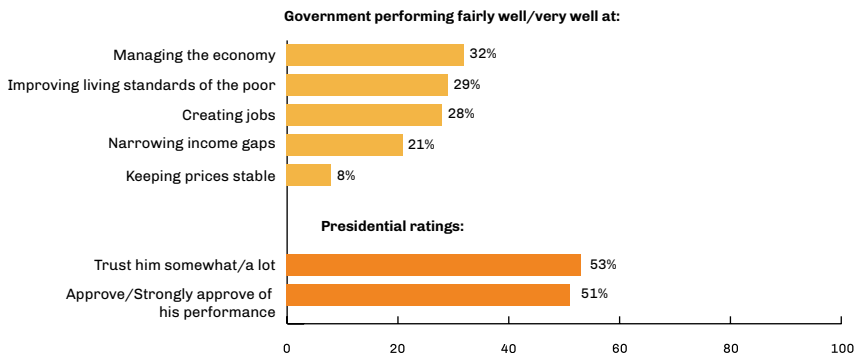
living standards of the poor (29%), and managing the economy (32%).

The government gets passing marks on other issues, including fighting corruption (58%), improving health services (58%), and reducing crime (63%).

And President Julius Maada Bio, who is seeking a second term against challenger Samura Kamara, still enjoys slightly favourable ratings: 53% say they trust him "somewhat" or "a lot," and 51% approve of his performance in office.

As of June-July 2022, Bio held a seven-point lead over Kamara (36% vs 29%), but 30% of respondents didn't know or wouldn't say how they would vote – and a lot may have changed in the year since. ■

Setting the stage: Sierra Leone presidential election | 2022



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



PHOTO ESSAY

Behind Peter Magubane's lens

A new exhibition honours one of South Africa's most celebrated photographers

Oupa Nkosi

When South Africa's apartheid government tried to make the Afrikaans language compulsory in schools, students in Soweto revolted. On a cold Wednesday morning in 1976, more than 10,000 learners took to the streets in protest. They were met by heavily armed police, who fired tear gas and then live ammunition at the defenceless children.

At least 176 people were killed, and more than a thousand injured. It is remembered as a seminal moment in the fight against apartheid.

In 1995, the anniversary of the uprising on 16 June was commemorated for the first time as Youth Day by South Africa's new, democratic state. It remains a public holiday to this day.

In 1976, Peter Magubane was there. The photographer had already

spent years documenting the apartheid government's brutality, and had paid a heavy price.

In 1969, he had been arrested, tortured, and then kept in solitary confinement for 586 days. His Soweto home was burned to the ground – police were hoping to destroy his negatives. In 1976, the year of the uprising, his nose was broken with a truncheon in Alexandra township, when he refused to expose his negatives to light while covering yet another incident of police violence. Later, in 1985, while covering the funeral of a slain student, he would be shot 17 times with buckshot and rubber bullets.

On the day of the Soweto uprising, Magubane had to convince some protesters, reluctant to appear on camera,

to let him do his work. “A struggle without documentation is no struggle,” he told them. His images were ultimately reproduced the world over.

This year, Magubane turned 91 and his life's work was honoured by the department of sports, arts and culture. This coincided with the award of an honorary doctorate from the University of Pretoria – his ninth – and an exhibition of his work that spans the six decades between 1955 and 2015.

It includes images from the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955, the Women's March in 1956, the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the inquest into Steve Biko's death in 1977, the States of Emergency imposed in the 1980s and 1990s, and Nelson Mandela's release from



prison in 1990.

That Magubane's work can be publicly displayed and celebrated is a reminder of how far South Africa has come.

"It's crazy for me to think that once upon a time gathering in this room like this, experiencing this type of work all together, using the same facilities and entrances, even eating the same food, drinking the same drinks from the same table was once a complete impossibility," said Lungile Magubane, his granddaughter. "So let us revel in this reality that was once a pipe dream for freedom fighters like my grandfather."

Siphiwe Sibeko, an international news agency photographer, recalls how Magubane's photographs inspired him to become a photographer. "I could see



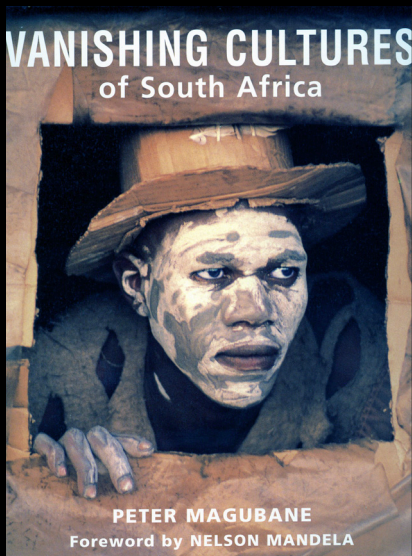


his byline and that triggered an interest in wanting to do what he was doing,” he said. As he was learning, he would visit Magubane’s home in the Johannesburg suburb of Melville to ask for advice and assistance.

At 91, Magubane now relies on his family’s care, but continues to work on new books – he has already published 23 – as well as reprints of old ones.

“We must never give up,” he told *The Continent*. “Hope takes us forward and makes us change things for the better.”

Magubane said that he hopes his photographs “will inspire future generations of South Africans, Africans and the world to continue to fight for justice and equality” ■



In praise of matooke

Judith Otieno

Imoved to Kampala from Addis Ababa to be with my family when I was 11 years old. My father was a diplomat, and he chose to settle in Uganda.

I remember the first time I tasted matooke, in a Kampala downtown restaurant. It was tantalising. I was wowed. Today, a dish of matooke and meat soup is still my favourite, and one that I cook often for my friends and family.

Matooke is a type of banana – known formally as the East African Highland banana – that grows in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and parts of Tanzania. Like plantains, they are picked while the skin is still green, and can be ground into a meal or served whole.

In Uganda, the matooke fruit is peeled carefully, using a knife, and then wrapped in banana leaves. Then it is steamed in a cooking pot, with the banana stalks used to keep the fruit above the water. It is usually flavoured simply with tomatoes, turmeric and salt, or added to stews as a filling carb. It is typically served with a sauce made of vegetables, ground peanuts, or meat, and served on a fresh banana leaf.



Photo: Bunkonge/Wikimedia

The best way to experience Kampala is to request a dish of matooke. Then you will understand what the the Ugandan palate is all about. ■



Last week we sampled mabele from Southern Africa, this week it is matooke from East Africa. We want to hear about your favourite food and what makes it so special. Let us know by sending an email to letters@thecontinent.org. \$100 for the winning letter.

The ungovernable Esther Kazungu

We all know that our politicians are ridiculous,
but sometimes we need to be reminded
... by a social media star



Photo: Pau Shinski

Samira Sawlani

When Esther Kazungu quit her job in 2020 to become a full-time content creator, there was no back-up plan.

This leap of faith, combined with an enviable work ethic, has paid off.

The multitasking comedian and activist from Nairobi, Kenya has taken social media by storm, boasting a combined following of over 300,000

across TikTok, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Kazungu is known for her eclectic and relatable content, but it is her hilarious skits of parliamentary sessions in South Africa, many of which have gone viral, that confirmed her superstar status.

Growing up, Kazungu dreamed of being an entertainment news presenter or radio host. But when she realised that dream – getting a job as a video journalist at a big media house after her degree

from Moi University – she realised that she wanted more. “I would wake up in the morning and think, I cannot do this forever. This cannot be it,” she told *The Continent* in an interview.

It didn’t help that she was earning less than a male colleague. So, in 2020, when she was asked to take a pay cut because of the pandemic, she decided it was now or never – and became a full-time content creator.

Giving up the security of a job and a salary seemed like a crazy decision, as many people were quick to tell her. But Kazungu knew what she was doing. She had already enjoyed some success on social media, but she noticed that the really successful creators were the ones who gave it their full attention.

To the naysayers, she would cite the example of American YouTuber Liza Koshy – who created one of the fastest-growing YouTube channels of all time, raking in millions of dollars in the process – as an inspiration.

When pressed for a Kenyan example, she would respond: “I’m going to be the first one!”

Realpolitiktok

After the initial rush of excitement, reality began to bite. Engagement dwindled, as did her income. She started to think she had made a terrible mistake, but she kept showing up. “I told myself this is the only plan, so just keep creating and posting, it may take years.”

She did not have to wait that long. One day, she woke up feeling dejected and frustrated. “I spent the day in tears.” The



Continental: Creator Esther Kazungu has nothing less than global stardom in her sights. Photo: Supplied

very next day, she had a novel idea.

TikTok was filled with videos of people imitating film scenes and music videos. Why not do the same for the most dramatic content of all – politics? And where better to start than South Africa’s uptight yet ungovernable Parliament, already made infamous by comedian Trevor Noah’s frequent barbs?

The more she researched, the more material she found of South African parliamentarians behaving badly. She had struck comedy gold.

She recorded her first video and posted it with trepidation, and no expectations.

It went viral. She hasn’t stopped going

**Movie-ing on up:
Esther Kazungu in
the 2021 Kenyan
film *Wembe Squad*.**

Photo: Grey Were



viral since then, attracting fans including actress Pearl Thusi and the South African opposition lawmaker Mbuyiseni Ndlozi – who himself is occasionally lampooned in her skits. With the online attention has come deals with big brands like Safaricom, Gilbey’s Gin and CeraVe skincare.

Shoot for the stars

To Kazungu’s surprise, she has found that even as she pokes fun at politicians – and she has cast her net wider in recent months, doing hilarious impersonations of lawmakers in other countries including Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda – she is sometimes enraged by them.

“I would speak to young Kenyans on social media and discover that we all had the same questions. For years the government has been taking loans and the question is, where is this money going?”

She has channelled some of this frustration into her videos, which for a content creator comes with considerable

risk – partisan audiences may be alienated, while companies tend to shy away from anything remotely controversial. At the same time, her authenticity is what makes her videos so relatable. “Ultimately what I’m saying is, yes I will make fun of you in these videos, and we can all laugh, but, when necessary, I’ll also call you out.”

‘What I’m saying is, yes, I will make fun of you in these videos, and we can all laugh – but, when necessary, I’ll also call you out.’

And that, perhaps, is the secret to her success, and explains her ability to transcend borders and nationalities, and appeal to viewers everywhere – something that had been her aim from the start. “I just want to be a global star,” she said. As far as we are concerned, she is already there. ■

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

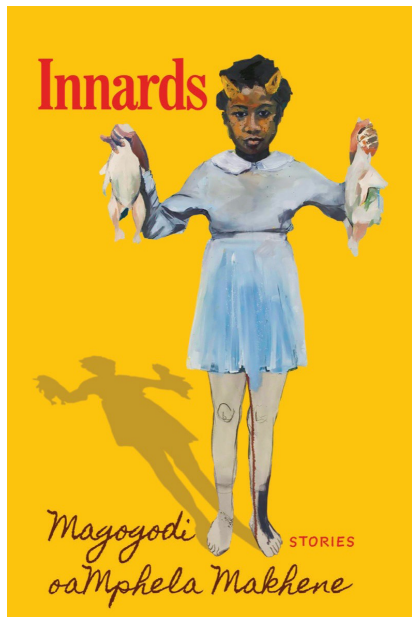
8-10

"If you lose your space on the runway are you a receding airline?"



- 1_** Krio is a recognised national language in which country?
- 2_** Henri Konan Bédié was the president of which country from 1993 to 1999?
- 3_** What is Côte d'Ivoire's economic capital?
- 4_** What is Côte d'Ivoire's political capital?
- 5_** French footballer N'Golo Kanté was born to parents from which country?
- 6_** True or false: Darfur is a region in South Sudan.
- 7_** Which team just won the CAF Champions League?
- 8_** Who is the president of Lesotho?
- 9_** What was the original name of Ethiopian Airlines?
- 10_** In which country are the Kasubi Tombs (pictured above) located?

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



Visceral tales from the south

Stories that spill from the gut are a grim delicacy for people on the periphery

Jacqueline Nyathi

Innards are sometimes considered food of the poor, but in southern Africa they are a delicacy. This is what this collection is: the author exposing and giving voice to society's insides, and also – when you're not thinking too deeply about it

– delivering juicy, tasty morsels of story.

There's a touch of fever dream to the stories collected in *Innards*. Many are told in a stream of consciousness: the characters relating, remembering, rambling. Some narrators are unreliable, humans hit hard by poverty, trauma, war, oppression – from apartheid, and otherwise. Other characters recur, or are referenced in linked stories. One narrator is a house, becoming a character in a different story. Stories narrated in dialect by children are particularly wonderful.

Magogodi oaMphela Makhene lays bare the ugly, steaming viscera of lives in this collection. There is little that is pretty or light. This is the grim stuff that most people would rather not see, the stuff we try to get away from. It's the plumbing, the sewers, the gritty and grimy parts of life.

And yet, such grimness has the unmistakable ring of reality. The big woman with a get-rich-quick scheme in the township turns out to be beholden to even bigger people. The fake freedom fighter turns into a fake PhD. An irascible old patriarch dies at the age of 106, causing ripples in many lives. People are displaced. Children die.

While *Innards* is quite unsettling, it is because the prose draws you into its maw, threatening to swallow you. This collection is grounded in place: the South Africa at the edges of what many of us see.

OaMphela Makhene is a fantastic writer, one gifted with the power of making words sing. *Innards* disturbs and delights in equal measure. ■

Lesotho

Village of the dammed: Basotho folk left high and dry

The new Polihali dam means that even more water will flow across the border to South Africa – but few benefits flow to the people being forced from their land in the construction process.

Majara Molupe in Polihali

In Polihali, 291km outside Lesotho's capital Maseru, a dam that will transfer large volumes of water to South Africa is being built. But swathes of Basotho say they are paying a heavy price for this South African privilege.

When South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa and Lesotho's king, Letsie III, went to Polihali to launch the dam's construction in late May, locals brought protest placards to the occasion, but the army confiscated them, they say.

The Polihali dam is being built by a consortium of two Chinese companies, one South African company and one company from Lesotho. The project, worth 7.8-billion maloti (\$420-million), is funded by the South African government. It will generate electricity for Lesotho and transfer water to Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province, which already imports much of its water from Lesotho.

The new dam falls under the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority – the LHDA – which oversaw the construction of the Katse and Mohale dams, which also serve South Africa's water needs. The Lesotho government earned 1.4-billion maloti (about \$75-million) in royalties from South Africa for these water transfers last year alone, and stands to earn more once Polihali is completed in 2027.

But, as construction of the latest dam kicks off, many grievances from local communities remain unresolved.

The biggest fight promises to be over compensation for land. *The Continent* has learnt that LHDA workers gathered locals and solicited their views on fair compensation, only to ignore their recommendations.

In the talks with LHDA, community members called for compensation that would span their lifetime, or be fixed at between 70 and 99 years, according to



Bridge too far:
Concept art for the
Lesotho Highlands
Water Project.

Lebohang Lengoasa, a representative of Polihali residents. Lengoasa said the demand was based on the fact that the dam will deprive Basotho highlanders of access to their lands for traditional economic activities, including farming and rearing animals, for the rest of their lives.

To their chagrin, LHDA offered compensation covering barely half that.

“We have reached a ceiling of 50 years. This is what was applied in phase I of the project,” LHDA’s Polihali operations manager Gerard Mokone told *The Continent*. Phase I was completed 20 years ago. He said that while it is true that the affected communities expressed different opinions concerning the compensation policy, the project was not obliged to take them on.

Lengoasa said that LHDA’s unilateral decision “has seriously irked us”, and according to Mothusi Seqhee, the national coordinator of the non-profit

organisation Sold – Survivors of Lesotho Dams – the matter may go to court as his organisation is teaming up with others to sue LHDA.

Land compensation is not the only aspect of the dam’s construction that has aggrieved local Basotho communities.

Bataung Makhakhe, a parliamentarian representing the area, said that people’s animals were already being impounded if they crossed into the construction area, and their owners were being heavily fined.

Lengoasa also said gender and anti-local discrimination was at play in the recruitment and compensation for people working on the dam, with very few local women being hired and local workers being paid less than foreign colleagues.

Policy, Environmental Justice and Water Resources Advocacy’s Lenka Thamae said his organisation is pushing LHDA to offer local communities 20% of the money paid by South Africa for water. ■

The secretive colonial tribunal crushing Africa's reforms

To understand why it is so hard for African states to make sound environmental policy, we must understand the enormous influence of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes

Charles Ebikeme

Somewhere in a nondescript hotel conference room a company is suing a sovereign nation. Arbitrators sit at one end, claimants to the right and respondents to the left. At the end of the private hearing it will be these three arbitrators who rule on the outcomes of the case. More often than not, the country ends up paying the company. The details of the settlement are often kept secret, but still enforceable by international law.

This is the Investor-State Dispute settlement system, a state-neutral international body whose primary goal is to provide a forum for the resolution of foreign investment disputes. Simply put, a private company can take a country to court to protect investments it has made in that country.

Under current international investment law, foreign investments in fossil fuel projects are granted special protection and access to this settlement system. Through it, investors can bring claims to international tribunals

regarding regulatory measures adopted by a host state that they allege breach their “investment privileges” – or, more plainly, their right to make money.

The fossil fuel industry – the most significant contributor to climate change – has relied heavily on the dispute settlement system to protect its investments.

According to a 2021 report by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, there has been an uptick in the number of arbitrations initiated by fossil fuel companies to counteract specific climate measures that countries are trying to introduce, such as the phasing out of fossil fuels.

Because of the secrecy around these disputes, the exact extent of claims is unknown, and there may be many cases that have yet to come to light in which the threat of arbitration has been used to stall action on climate change.

What is known, however, is that the majority of known fossil fuel cases are decided in favour of fossil fuel investors. The average amount awarded in fossil

fuel cases is over \$600-million, which is almost five times the amount awarded in non-fossil fuel cases.

A colonial hangover

The system is yet another vestige of colonialism, designed to protect the interest of companies in the Global North that invested in newly independent post-colonial countries.

At the time the prevailing belief was that private companies would encourage and accelerate economic development in poorer countries. As such, a system would need to be in place to lessen the anxieties of foreign investors – and protect them from any sudden changes in policy or regulation.

In the 1960s, groups of wealthy bankers, as well as executives from the biggest fossil fuel companies of the time, such as Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Rio Tinto, and Standard Oil, pushed for the protection of their assets abroad under international law. This ultimately contributed to the creation of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.

Over the 52-year history of this dispute tribunal, there have been 149 cases against African states or agencies out of the total number of 672 cases filed before May 2018.

Despite these negotiations happening behind closed doors, in the end, most countries comply and pay when a judgment is made against them. Emilia Onyema, a professor in international commercial law, who often sits as an arbitrator in these tribunals, says there is

a reason for this. Specifically: The threat of “reputational damage, pressure from the World Bank” along with “political and diplomatic pressure to pay up”.

However, this is not just a problem in the Global South. Countries like Italy and Canada are now being impacted by the system. In 2016, after Italy banned oil drilling off its coast, British oil company Rockhopper launched a legal claim against the country, citing and claiming damages of \$275-million based on expected future profits from an oilfield off the Adriatic coast. In November 2022, the settlement found in favour of the fossil fuel company, awarding it 185-million euros in damages.

The settlement found in favour of the fossil fuel company, awarding it €185-million in damages

Such litigation, threatened or otherwise, is also thought to have a “regulatory chilling” effect on countries’ climate change ambitions. According to an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, there is incompatibility between protecting fossil fuel investments and decarbonisation.

In a recent study, researchers estimated that countries could face up to \$340-billion in financial and legal risk from cancelling fossil fuel projects covered by dispute settlement clauses. In light of such threats, Africa risks being shut out of the green revolution. ■

Charles Ebikeme is a science writer.

On reflection, it hasn't been the *best* week ever. Not for South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, we suspect, who gathered up a bunch of our faves from across the continent and zooted off to Ukraine to go sort out the whole being-invaded-by-Russia thing once and for all.

No sooner had they arrived in Kyiv than their friends in the Kremlin starting sending over a slew of cruise missiles to welcome the African delegation to the Ukrainian capital. Vlad, darling, really now. A nice bottle of vodka would have been just fine.

As if that wasn't enough, the planeful of journalists Ramaphosa was bringing along for the ride – after all, what's a peace parade without some proper paparazzi – was detained for a bajillion hours during their layover in Poland. They're still there as I write, poor souls. Strength, comrades and, hey, at least you're not having missiles shot at you.

The Polish authorities also seem to have confiscated a small private army that Ramaphosa apparently tried to bring along in his hand luggage, even though he swore he picked them up at the duty-free.

Oh, is that all, you might say. That's just

the normal border-control experience for any African daring to travel abroad, after all. But no, there's more: over in the United States, American lawmakers are really quite cross about South Africa's supposedly non-aligned BFF-ness with Russia, and want to move their big fancy and upcoming African trade summit to a different country.

Peace sells, but who's buying it?



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

You know who wasn't along for the ride to Kyiv? None other than M7 himself. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni was *meant* to be there and though we're not sure whether he got cold feet exactly, but he did hand in a sick note from his doctor excusing him from the field trip because he'd tested positive for Covid.

Fear not, dear reader! M7 appears to be hanging in

there for now. Although first lady and minister for education Janet Museveni took to social media to thank everyone for their prayers while warning that "the enemy" was "still trying to harm the servant of God".

Amen, sister! We're definitely against that sort of enemy, the kind who refuses to wear a mask and then goes around sneezing on our presidents.

The polls are at it again

Over in Kenya, the National Assembly held a vote on the highly controversial Finance Bill 2023, which last week a group of protestors had taken to the streets over. If passed, the bill would lead to a rise in a range of taxes that many people, including the “hustlers” who voted for “head hustler” Billy Ruto, are Very Not Pleased About. The bill will now move to the next stage of the legislative process

In the latest episode of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*, we head over to Mali, where a constitutional referendum will be held this weekend, under the very careful watch of the Ur-Coupdashian himself, Colonel Assimi Goïta.

The vote is seen as a key step on the road to elections, something regional blocs have been demanding for a while – for our dear leaders there is nothing worse than knowing their neighbours have let the military into the driver’s seat, lest their own army uncles start getting ideas.

One aspect of the reforms that has people talking is that they will let anyone run for the presidency – which would also apply to a certain interim coup president.

Still, even if the fair-er is in question, Mali’s eventual elections do sound like they might be free-er. More free than in, say, Zimbabwe, where anyone who fancies being president in August will have to cough up a whopping \$20,000 just to get their name on the ballot, while aspiring MPs will need \$1,000 to pay to play.

This week marked two months since the war in Sudan began. Despite stories of heroism, community and kindness, the



Flex: Hustler-in-chief William Ruto is testing out his presidential tax muscles.

reality is more horror is unfolding. The UN says 2.1-million people have been displaced, while 67% of hospitals near conflict zones are out of service.

This week the governor of West Darfur, Khamis Abakar, gave an interview in which he accused members of the RSF paramilitary of killing civilians in Geneina in the “ongoing genocide in the region”.

Hours later, he too was dead.

People have lost homes, livelihoods and loved ones as shaky ceasefires fail to hold and warring parties stick to their guns, quite literally, making peace elusive.

And as the world fails Sudan, and as we watch each shocking news report blur into the next, we are reminded of the words of Sudanese-American poet, Safia Elhillo:

I don't know if I'll ever go home again. I don't know who I've seen for the last time ...

I am somewhere above the room, watching my new aches, watching the news as if I am reading it in a novel ...

& in my dreams I am fleeing a war, in my dreams I am touching the faces of my friends, we are each one of us touching, & even in the dream we are afraid. ■

'Free, fair' talk is cheap, let's see some walk

Sierra Leone faces a trust deficit ahead of elections

Marcella Samba-Sesay

On 24 June, Sierra Leone will hold its fifth multiparty elections following a period of civil conflict. The country has made impressive strides since then, swimming against the global tide of rising authoritarianism and experiencing two transfers of power (in 2007 and 2018). It is important not to overlook the challenges that remain, however.

The 2023 general elections will be held against a backdrop of compromised institutions, a challenging landscape for civil society and media, and political violence – issues that threaten to undermine both democratic consolidation and state building.

The path to the polls has been rough. Anti-government protests last year led to the deaths of over 20 protesters and six police officers.

The political landscape has also become more polarised, with growing tensions between the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party and the opposition All People's Congress (APC).

In turn, this has exacerbated concerns

that key steps in the process have been mishandled.

Opposition parties, civil society groups and international organisations called into question the 2021 Mid-term Population and Housing Census – branding it unreliable – putting the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone (ECSL) in a difficult situation. Although the commission released the Final Voter Register to stakeholders, the APC believes it should be in a more detailed format.

Against this background, the decision to suddenly change the electoral system, from the first-past-the-post “Westminster” model to a system of party list proportional representation, was highly controversial.

The change was approved by the Supreme Court, but remains controversial as it happened too late in the cycle to allow for effective civic education, and some fear that not understanding the system makes it harder to detect electoral fraud.

To prevent rising political distrust, it is critical that the ECSL, the main political parties and the Sierra Leone police not only talk a good democratic game over the coming weeks, but also start to “walk the talk”. ■

Marcella Samba-Sesay is the Executive Director of the Campaign for Good

Governance and the chairperson of National Election Watch in Sierra Leone. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



THE BIG PICTURE

High society: Maasai gathered for the inaugural Maasai cultural festival in Sekenani, Kenya last week. Next door in Tanzania, the state has forcibly evicted Maasai from their land to make way for a trophy-hunting game reserve, according to Human Rights Watch.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP via Getty Images



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