

The Continent



Aid is dead. Grandma is not.



COVER Well before US President Donald Trump and former buddy-in-chief Elon Musk fed USAID into the wood chipper, advanced economies had been retreating from aid or relabelling domestic spending as foreign assistance. With the dramatic retreat of the United States, which until recently gave nearly 30% of global aid, some African leaders approved emergency budgets. But they didn't, and won't, make up for lost dollars. The time is now for local funding ideas that go deeper, further and last longer. Absurdly rich people aren't being asked to do more. Instead, some are suggesting that we use the billions 'idling' in pension funds. That's a slippery slope, best travelled slow and with firm guardrails, experts say. (P10)

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We'll be right back:

The next issue of this newspaper will come to your inbox on 26 July. We are taking a few weeks to be human, test our sexy shirts a bit more before you can get one, do some planning work – and watch Wafcon. Be good, play nicely, and we'll see you soon.

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THE WEEK IN BRIEF

KENYA

Kipyegon tests the limit

Faith Kipyegon fell short of running one mile in under four minutes this week – but still broke her own world record, clocking 4:06.42 in Nike's Breaking4 event in Paris on Thursday. The limit-pushing challenge was modelled after Eliud Kipchoge's Ineos 1:59 feat, when he became the first person to run a marathon in less than two hours. Neither was an official race because the athletes use pacemakers and advanced gear on these challenges. They are nonetheless landmark moments in pushing human limits.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Exam ends in fatal panic

At least 29 pupils were killed and 260 injured in a stampede at a school in Bangui. An electrical transformer exploded at Barthélemy Boganda High School, where over 5,000 pupils from multiple schools had gathered to take their final exams. The explosion caused panic and a rush to escape, *Reuters* reports. Authorities said the transformer blew after power was restored following a blackout. The education ministry has launched an investigation into the incident.



PHOTO: NBA AFRICA/X

Tower power: Khaman Maluach is NBA Academy Africa's highest-drafted player.

SOUTH SUDAN/UGANDA

NBA wins the lottery

At just 18, Khaman Maluach has been drafted into the NBA by the Phoenix Suns. Born in South Sudan and raised in Uganda after his family fled war, he started playing basketball at 13 after attending a local championship organised by South Sudan's basketball great Luol Deng. Since then, he's become the youngest player at both the 2023 FIBA World Cup and the Paris Olympics. A standout at NBA Academy Africa, Maluach is now its highest-drafted player.

NEW YORK

Ugandan ‘earthquake’ rocks New York City

Political outsider Zohran Mamdani is poised to become the Democratic nominee for New York mayor after delivering what the *BBC* describes as “a stunning political upset”, defeating his main rival Andrew Cuomo, who previously served as state governor. The 33-year-old democratic socialist was born in Uganda, spent part of his childhood in South Africa, and is the son of filmmaker Mira Nair and renowned Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani. His manifesto includes free public buses, universal childcare, freezing rent in subsidised units, and city-run grocery stores – partly paid for by new taxes on the rich.

TOGO

Protesters demand Gnassingbé’s exit

Security forces in Togo used tear gas to disperse hundreds of protesters who blocked roads in the capital, Lomé, on Thursday, demanding President Faure Gnassingbé’s resignation. Demonstrators set up barricades, burned tyres, and threw projectiles, prompting arrests in the opposition stronghold of Be, *Al Jazeera* reports. Businesses shut down amid heavy police presence. The unrest follows constitutional changes that could extend Gnassingbé’s rule indefinitely. Civil society groups and influencers had called for nationwide protests from 26-28 June, after a government clampdown earlier this month.

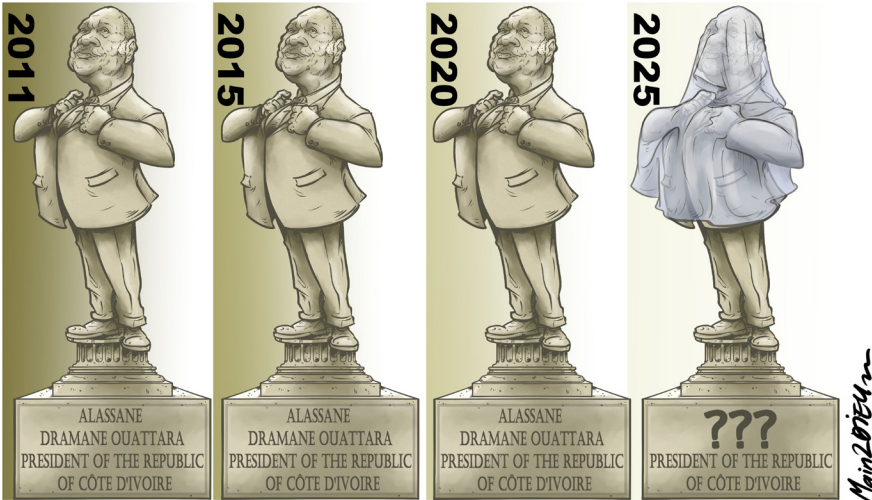




PHOTO: GUILLEM SARTORIO/AFP

Redocked: Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza in court.

RWANDA

Kagame's judges jail Ingabire yet again

Rwandan opposition figure Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza remains in detention following her arrest last week, after a court instructed prosecutors to bring charges against her by 7 July. The judges were dissatisfied that she was not included in a trial of nine people for “forming or joining a criminal organisation”, her unregistered Dalfa-Umurinzi party. Ingabire was imprisoned for eight years on a 15-year sentence for alleged links to armed groups and released on condition that she could not leave Rwanda, a restriction that was set to expire in October.

SOUTH AFRICA

Borrowing big to get trains back on track

The World Bank has approved a \$1.5-billion loan to help South Africa upgrade its transport infrastructure while shifting to a low-carbon economy, *Moneyweb* reports. The funding comes a month after South Africa unveiled a master plan to overhaul its rail network – Africa’s most extensive – which has been hobbled by age and mismanagement, pushing users to roads even for moving export goods like coal. In March, the government invited bids from private operators for rail tracks owned and operated by Transnet, the state transport company.

GREECE

Extra ships sent to join EU anti-migrant armada

Greece will deploy two frigates and a support vessel to the waters off Libya’s coast to deter migrants from heading towards the islands of Crete and Gavdos, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis says. According to *Reuters*, the move responds to a surge in sea arrivals from northeastern Libya, including over 800 migrants since 19 June. Greece has been a gateway to the European Union for migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia since 2015 when nearly a million people landed on its islands.

MUSEUM OF STOLEN HISTORY

The Netherlands returns looted Benin Bronzes

The Dutch State Collection has returned 119 Benin Bronzes looted from Nigeria in the 19th century by British soldiers. Oba Ewuare II, whose Benin Kingdom ancestors owned the artefacts, called the return a “divine intervention”. Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums hailed it as the largest single repatriation to date. Dutch officials pledged further restitutions, *AP* reports. Royal regalia, plaques, and figures were taken in 1897 when British forces sacked



PHOTO: TOYIN ADEODUN/AFP

Headed back: Bronzes from the collection being returned to Nigeria by the Netherlands.

the Benin Kingdom in the south of present-day Nigeria.

ERITREA

Special rapporteur is a real pain in the Asmara

Eritrea has filed a motion at the United Nations to cancel the mandate of the special rapporteur monitoring human rights in the country, a role created in 2012. It is currently held by Sudanese lawyer Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, whose May report to the UN described the human rights situation in Eritrea as “critical”, citing enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and the country’s mandatory military service for all men. Critics of Asmara’s motion, which is likely to be voted on next month, say cancelling the role would set a precedent for impunity.

NIGERIA

King seeks to block Shell exit ‘til it pays up

Bubaraye Dakolo, the monarch of Nigeria’s Ekpetiama Kingdom, is the latest figure in the Niger Delta to sue Shell over environmental damage. With a lawsuit filed in Yenagoa, Dakolo wants to block the petro giant’s divestment from the region until it has decommissioned obsolete infrastructure and compensated the Ekpetiama people with \$12-billion for harm from oil spills. Separately, a London court ruled on preliminary claims by the Bille and Ogale communities against Shell, which will go to full trial in March 2027.

NEWS

KENYA

Sexual violence added to brutal crackdown on Nairobi dissent

Protesters thought they'd won change a year ago. Little has happened, so they took to the streets again. To be met with bullets, barbed wire and rape.

CHRISTINE MUNGAI IN NAIROBI

WEDNESDAY marked a year since young Kenyans led protests that shook the ruling establishment. Sixty people died. Concessions were promised. But little changed. Instead, people kept vanishing. Two weeks ago it was Albert Ojwang, a teacher and critic of the state, who was killed in police custody. So thousands once again took to the streets.

The state responded with violence, again. A ring of barbed razor wire around Parliament and water cannons worked in concert with armed police. At least 16 people were killed, with 400 injured and 83 protesters requiring specialised care for serious wounds.

Those numbers come from a

coalition of human rights organisations monitoring the demonstrations. The state tried to shut down any evidence of the day. The Communications Authority ordered media houses to stop live broadcasts of the protests and, when some defied the order, officials drove to broadcast masts to shut them down.

On Tuesday, *The Standard* newspaper revealed a covert, co-ordinated operation to not only suppress the protests violently but also to rob demonstrators of their phones, deliberately targeting the ability to document state abuse.

And, for the first time, what seems to be organised sexual violence was applied. Ten cases of sexual assault – all of them gang rapes – have been documented by Usikimye, a Nairobi-based organisation that responds to sexual and gender-based violence. “This is something we’ve not seen during the protests before,” Njeri Migwi, co-founder and executive director of Usikimye, told *The Continent*. “Some of these women report being suddenly surrounded by goons in the CBD; others were pulled off bodabodas on their way home. It’s terrifying.”

“I’m heartbroken. We can’t be fighting for freedom during the day and against rapists at night,” she added. “The assaults were organised violence. The intention is clearly to make women afraid to come out and protest – and a protest without women isn’t an organic one.” ■

MOZAMBIQUE

Child abductions raise alarm in Cabo Delgado

KIRI RUPIAH AND LUIS NHACHOTE

Islamic State Mozambique Province, an arm of al-Shabaab, is increasingly kidnapping children in northern Mozambique, Human Rights Watch reports.

In interviews with nine people, including journalists, civil society activists and a United Nations official in restive gas-rich Cabo Delgado, the watchdog body learned of multiple recent child abductions.

Four boys and three girls taken from Mumu; six from Chibau; one from Ntotwe; and eight near Magaia village, among other incidents between January and May. One local activist said that “120 or more children have been abducted” across the Cabo Delgado province recently.

The fighters conscript the abducted boys into military roles ranging from transporting goods to surveillance and active combat, and force the girls into sex slavery.

The UN Children’s Fund says kidnappings have been rising since 2017 in Cabo Delgado. But official response has fallen short of the urgency and

seriousness the issue needs, analysts say.

“As with so many things about this conflict, the government demonstrates an entrenched reticence,” Crisis Group’s Piers Pigou told *The Continent*. “I have not seen any specific programming around children press-ganged into insurgent activities.”

Child conscription, an international war crime, is not a novel practice in Mozambique. In the post-independence civil war (1977-1992), between 8,000 and 10,000 children were forced into the conflict as soldiers.

In Cabo Delgado, at least 117 schools have closed, particularly in the districts of Macomia and Quissanga. Those still open are overcrowded. “It’s real chaos,” Adao Saranga, a teacher in Quissanga, told *The Continent*. “The classrooms are full with local pupils and children from displaced families.”

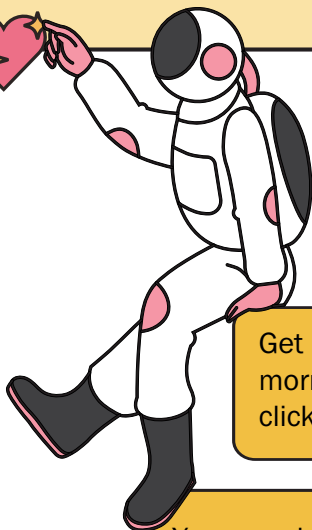
The rise in child abductions is part of a surge in attacks by Islamic State-linked insurgents, which analysts say is tied to recent losses in Somalia. With less funding coming in, the group has turned to looting, extortion, and now, recruiting child soldiers. ■

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ANALYSIS

How to fund African development – and how not to

Aid is dead. Grandma is not. But taking her pension to build a road might kill her.

LYDIA NAMUBIRU

ON MONDAY, when world leaders meet in Seville, Spain for the fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, it will be summer outside but winter in the room, particularly for delegates from aid-

dependent economies. “The world as we know it has changed – for aid, trade and development,” as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the chairperson of the World Trade Organisation, put it early this month.

The United States, which used to fund nearly 30% of global aid, is withholding assistance that is potentially worth

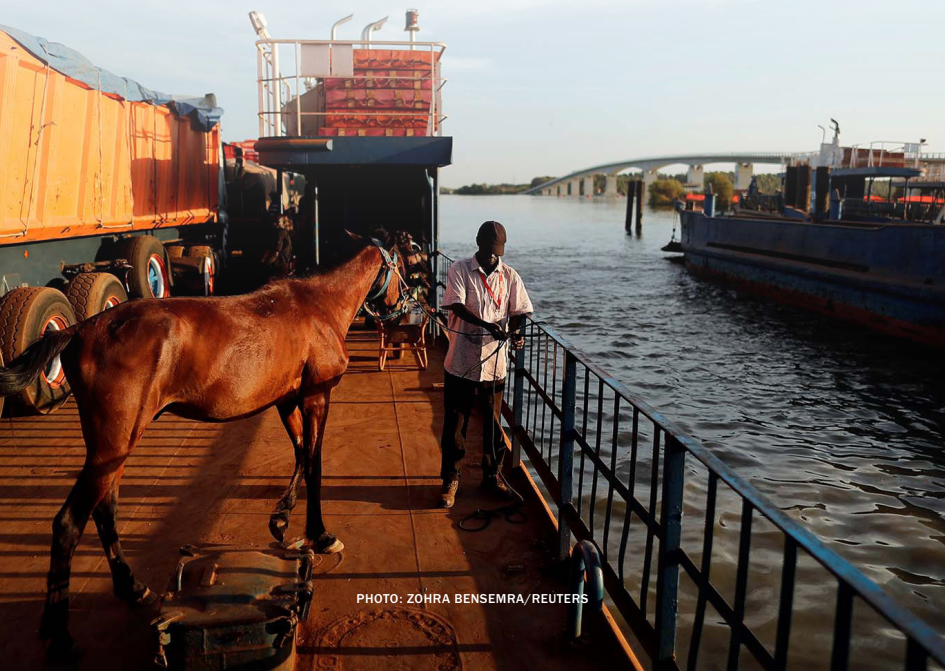


PHOTO: ZOHRA BENSEMRA/REUTERS

in excess of \$8-billion. Meanwhile, member states of the European Union have reduced their official development assistance by 8.6%.

And not all of that goes to where it is needed most, anyway: about 13% of the money labelled foreign aid last year by members of the Development Aid Committee, a collective of some of the world's largest aid providers, was actually domestic spending on refugees. This shrinking and relabelling is unlikely to stop now, as world politics takes a sharp turn inward and away from multilateralism.

"It may not be the end of aid but it certainly is the end of the sums and quantities we've been used to. It may come back but not for a very, very long time – and probably with new governance mechanisms," said renowned Cameroonian economist Vera Songwe in an interview with *The Continent*.

"We've transitioned into a transactional world, which signals to Africa that we need to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps," Ghana's President John Mahama said at the annual meetings of the African Development Bank (AfDB), where delegates learned that the US was reconsidering its \$555-million commitment to the lender.

Raiding retirement

What are these bootstraps? For some, the lowest hanging fruit is workers' savings – in the form of pension funds.

"Pension funds are underused in financing Africa's infrastructure," says

a mid-May op-ed in *Devex*, a trade publication of the aid industry. "Billions in domestic capital to drive Africa's development idling in pension funds," says a post published on the AfDB website in late May.

"African pension funds stand at almost \$220-billion and represent the largest source of investable capital," says the *Funding the Africa we want* report, published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, in early June.

Changing AfDB's governance rules to bring in capital from non-traditional sources "could open the way for African pension funds to get more involved" in the Africa Development Fund, which lends to governments at low or no interest, a fellow at the Atlantic Council told *African Business* magazine last week.

"Pension funds are underused in financing Africa's infrastructure" says an op-ed in *Devex*, a trade publication of the aid industry.

Muted in this fast rolling conversation is the fact that the public goods for which aid was used – like healthcare, education and infrastructure – are not known for their profitability. Pension funds, meanwhile, are supposed to protect their members' savings while keeping up with inflation. Pension funds cannot afford to lose money.

"We need to be honest. Pension funds can't go to just any type of infrastructure asset. Building a road is not going to

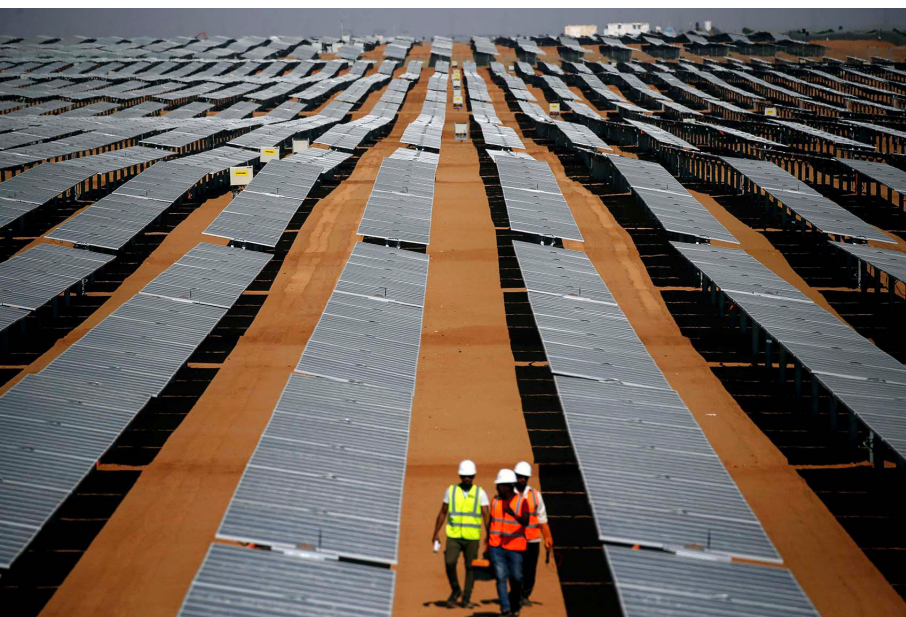
work for a pension fund,” says Heike Harmgart, managing director for sub-Saharan Africa at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Africa’s pension savings are already thin: according to a United Nations study, less than 10% of African workers are covered by pension schemes. And, as talk of “idling” billions suggests, taking money from pension schemes directly into public projects would be a dramatic change in how fund managers keep and build worker’s savings. It would require entirely new regulations that aren’t being proposed at the same speed.

“Let’s remember that pensions are individual citizens’ resources and so not free resources for use. If we are going to

use them for development, then we have to make sure that the systems within which we are using them are robust,” says Songwe. “You don’t want somebody who has spent 40 years of their life working and saving to not have their resources when they need them because they have been poorly spent, or through weak governance processes were used for investments that are not able to pay a return.”

That’s not to dismiss the option. But proponents of the idea would have to allow for time for writing new rules that safeguard workers as investors in public projects, and for the sector to create options that are nearly as safe as the treasury bills that pension funds favour.



Light the way: Photovoltaic solar panels at the Benban plant in Aswan, Egypt.

PHOTO: AMR ABDALLAH DALSH

Some projects are starting to figure out what the latter could look like. The Benban Solar Park in Egypt was built with money from development banks, but issued a post-construction bond to raise operational funding. With a long-term agreement from the government to buy its electricity, pension funds bought in. “We need to create more things like that. We have to restructure it in such a way that you are not putting too much risk on pension funds,” says Hargmat.

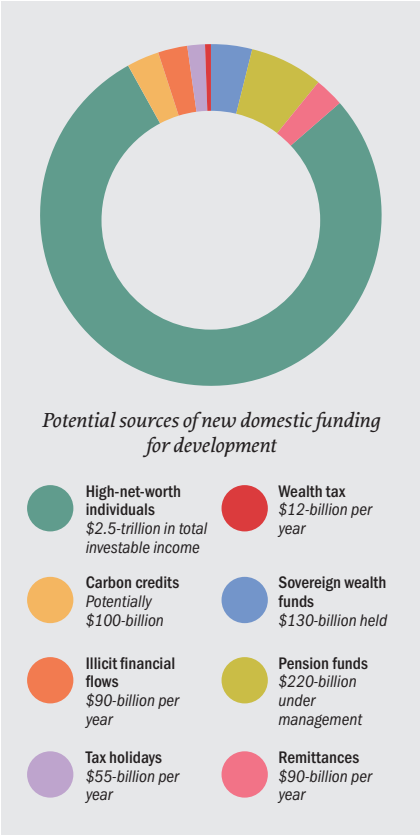
Tax the rich

There are other ways that governments can raise money for development, even in a “post-aid” world: plugging holes like illicit financial flows; runaway debt service; under-taxing the wealthy; taxing only a small portion of residents; and the flight of local capital to friendlier places.

By some estimates, African billionaires and millionaires (who are expected to number more than 223,000 individuals by 2030), already have \$2.5-trillion in investable income. That is far more than is held by pension funds. According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation report, a special tax on some of their assets – those valued at more than \$5-million – could generate \$12-billion a year.

Successfully pushing for debt relief at the multilateral level could also retain some of the \$103-billion flowing out of Africa every year that goes to pay lenders. Ending tax holidays at home could save up to \$55-billion, and tackling capital flight would retain up to \$90-billion a year, the report says.

There are more pots to tap. Carbon



markets could earn Africa \$100-billion by 2050, and national sovereign wealth funds are holding \$130-billion that could be invested in these projects.

Whichever route is taken, the money will only meet the gap if national leaders tighten how efficiently it’s used, says Songwe. “If you need 100 dollars to build a power plant, and the next person needs 10, then 90 have been wasted. We must do more to manage our resources.” ■



SERIES

Mayfair, where peace is woven of people, place and purpose

WORDS AND PHOTOS: DELWYN VERASAMY

A COMPACT, constantly evolving district that's home to over 30 nationalities, Mayfair is one of Jo'burg's most fascinating neighbourhoods. Once a quiet residential suburb, it has transformed into a hub for people who have come here from other African countries and South Asia. Somali and

Oromo communities have been setting down roots since the early 1990s.

Walking through Mayfair, the senses are immediately stirred – the adhan, or call to prayer, echoing from mosques just streets apart; the aroma of frankincense, coffee and freshly baked breads drifting through doorways; the murmur of Arabic, Amharic, and Swahili in the air. Dozens of spaza

shops, restaurants, and coffee houses line the streets, building a hyperlocal economy sustained by entrepreneurial spirit and communal interdependence.

Many migrants face exclusion and xenophobia in South Africa, which makes their integration into broader society difficult.

But within Mayfair, there's a distinct warmth and generosity among strangers who have learned to rely deeply on each other. At weddings, it's not uncommon to see over a thousand guests as the hosts seek to honour everyone who

contributed to a couple's journey. Here, elders still play a vital role, mediating disputes and bridging divides between South Africans and foreign-born residents.

This is not a community that is stuck in the "old ways". Once male-dominated streets now bustle with families, as women and children become increasingly visible in public life.

Mayfair remains cautious, even protective of its inner life – but for those welcomed in, it reveals a rare kind of intimacy, resilience, and humanity. ■









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

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FEATURE

Make Egypt Pharaonic Again

A growing movement would have you know: True Egypt is not African, Arab or Muslim.

SHIMAA AL-YOUSSEF IN CAIRO

AS EGYPT GRAPPLES with a worsening economic crisis, rising inflation and deepening authoritarianism, the country is witnessing the rise of a reactionary movement that seeks solace in an imagined past.

The “Children of Kemet”, a social-media fuelled current of nationalist fervour, has gained momentum by calling for a return to pharaonic identity as the singular essence of Egyptianness – rejecting both its Arab-Islamic and African historical anchors.

The movement’s name evokes ancient Egypt; “kemet” means black soil, referring to the fertile Nile valley and its rich, black soil. But today, the Children of Kemet seek to redeploy that imagery in an attempt to sever Egypt’s ties with its African and Islamic lineages.

While borrowing the language of heritage and authenticity, the movement resembles a familiar global pattern: right-wing nostalgia for civilisational greatness – where disaffected publics

retreat into sanitised versions of the Roman Empire or Viking lore, for example – and romanticising a golden age to justify exclusion in the present.

The rhetoric has found traction in a time of serious socioeconomic strain, when many Egyptians are seeking both answers and scapegoats.

“By limiting Egyptianness to pharaonic origins, they ignore subsequent historical eras shaping our national identity, which entrenches racism, discriminates between citizens, threatens national unity and undermines the notion of citizenship,” says archaeologist Mahmoud Farahat, adding that the group is engaging in a “selective reading” of the past.

The movement attempts to sever Egypt from its layered cultural and historical identities, which include not

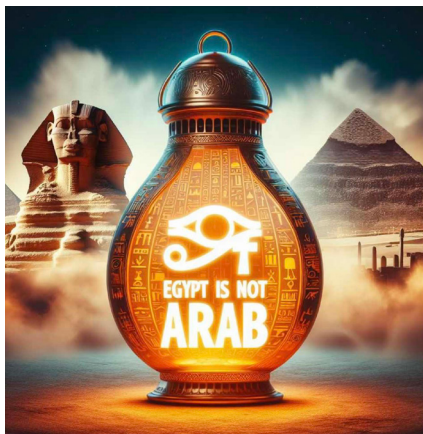


PHOTO: EGYPT IS NOT ARAB / FACEBOOK

Ampoule of denial: The Children of Kemet seek to distance Egypt from its African and Arab identities.

just pharaonic heritage but Islamic, Arab and African lineages too. Its adherents reject any framing of Egypt as “African”, and accuse other Africans – especially Sudanese and Ethiopians – of falsely laying claim to Egypt’s ancient past.

“This ‘nationalist Salafism’ is intellectually weak and harbours illusions of racial purity,” says Ahmed Sultan, a regional security and terrorism studies researcher, adding that such movements are a racialised fantasy that mirrors far-right movements elsewhere, where they become an expression of a deep crisis in societies facing socioeconomic hardships and political authoritarianism.

The movement – decentralised and unofficial – began as a Facebook page on historical information in the late 2010s by content creator Mohamed Habib. It has since splintered into various groups with hundreds of thousands of followers across platforms like X, Facebook and YouTube, under names like “KMTology”, “Egyptian Not Arab”, and “Eye of Horus”.

The group has also influenced public discourse and events in the real world. In 2023, Children of Kemet supporters sought and won the cancellation of concerts by American comedian Kevin Hart and rapper Travis Scott, accusing them of promoting “Afrocentric” and “satanic” narratives, revealing a growing power to set cultural red lines.

But the movement’s rejection of Egypt’s Arab-Islamic identity has drawn sharp criticism from religious leaders, who condemn it as a new form of “paganism” and foreign influence.

“These currents are Western and Zionist projects targeting the unity of our nation by stripping Egypt of its Islamic heritage and dismantling its collective consciousness,” says Atiya Lashin, professor of Islamic jurisprudence and a member of the Fatwa committee at Al-Azhar University.

At the same time, the Children of Kemet’s messaging has dovetailed with a growing xenophobia. Egypt now hosts nearly a million refugees, with those from Sudan and the Horn of Africa being most prominent. The movement refers to them as “Kushites”, a group that conquered Egypt in the 8th century BCE, and to Syrians and Palestinians as the “Hyksos”. Both terms are seen as highly derogatory in the local context.

Internal schisms are also emerging. Former member and visual artist Enas Al-Deeb left the group after their repeated attacks on Islam, although she says she “still agrees” with the group’s opposition to the government’s decision to accept successive waves of asylum seekers from Sudan. Other movement figures declined requests for comment.

In the end, what looks like a revival of national pride may be a symptom of contemporary despair, seeking to rewrite the present by redrawing the borders of belonging. As in other parts of the world, this nostalgia-driven ethos offers a seductive clarity amid chaos, rejecting complexity and diversity in the pursuit of a specific kind of genealogical purity. ■

This article is published in collaboration with Egab

CULTURE

Hustle up high or dance on the downlow?

The Lagos rave scene is at a crossroads between its queer roots and the tantalising profits of mainstream appeal.

RABI MADAKI IN LAGOS

IN LAGOS, the EDM/house dance scene has grown from whispered-about queer raves to a weekend staple. What began as intimate, protective spaces for queer Nigerians are now a visible mainstream scene, with sponsorships and celebrity appearances at big venues: a video that went viral in May, of an enraptured Davido at a pop-up rave, is a case in point.

But now organisers face a dilemma: how to stay true to safeguarding judgement-free queer joy while scaling up to meet their surging popularity.

In their early days, raves like Group Therapy and Sweat It Out were underground parties that queer Nigerians went to not just to party but also to find community, love and friendship.

“The first rave I went to was the very first Group Therapy in 2022,” says Zenith, a gay student. “It was amazing. You turn left, you turn right and everybody around you is queer. People understood. It wasn’t my first time experiencing queer joy but it felt really beautiful.”

Nearly a decade after Nigeria passed

the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in 2014, it seemed like a buried piece of the country’s queer culture was resurrecting. Before the law, Lagos had a gay club scene that was legal but existed in hiding. When the law passed, queer spaces either went deeper underground – among friends only – or ceased to exist entirely as homophobic violence sharply rose. Until the rise of dance music raves.

Three years ago, the raves were a departure from regular Lagos clubs that exclusively celebrate heterosexuality. “Yes, I could go to them and have fun,” Mide, a bisexual raver, says of regular Lagos clubs. “But it would never cross my mind to dance with a guy at any of them, ’cause I know I would get stared at, kicked out or worse, beaten.”

Lately, the difference between the two seems to be diminishing, and a new wariness intrudes on the safety of these spaces. Zenith witnessed an experience illustrative of this change: a group of men cornered a woman on the dance floor, asking if she was a man or woman.

“They didn’t touch her but the fact that three or four guys could surround her and question her existence was pretty weird,” he says. As a result, he has



PHOTO: GROUP THERAPY NIGERIA

started editing his own self-expression. “I see people who don’t look like me and I start straight-acting,” he says. So far, no harm has come to him. “But I think the fact that I’m also trying to hide or control my behaviour is what helps.”

What was once a queer refuge now requires performance, calculation, and self-policing. And it is also starting to attract homophobic backlash: on 4 April, ahead of a much-anticipated Group Therapy x Boiler Room rave, a now-deleted Instagram post accused the collective of promoting “gay orgies,” tagging the police. The organisers had to put out a statement reassuring patrons that attending would still be safe.

Rave organisers remain as queer-affirming as in the beginning. But they also feel that the scene has to embrace the mainstream to pay for the logistics of putting them on.

“Let things become mainstream because at least you can make money

and balance out,” says Ayo, one of the organisers of Mainland House, a monthly rave. “If it’s not mainstream, then you only have a few people that are regular. We have that loyal following already, yeah, these people have a great experience, [but] for us, the organisers who have to run the business, it is not as sweet. The question now is: how do we find a middle ground without having to compromise on our values?” Ayo adds.

Some organisers are trying to find a middle ground by vetting entry, reducing publicity, and sharing clear codes of conduct. Bryan, a queer Nigerian who has been raving since 2022 says such efforts are “quite refreshing” but doesn’t see them as a full solution.

“It’s kind of impossible to create a very exclusive event where everyone is vetted. But raves have always been an underground culture,” says Bryan. “Even if it risks stifling your growth, you just have to control it.” ■

CULTURE

Desert distortion: the modern shape of Amazigh music

A new generation of musicians in southeastern Morocco is deftly bridging the past and present without diminishing either.



PHOTO: METEOR AIRLINES

BADR SELLAKE IN CASABLANCA

IN THE SHADOW of the Atlas Mountains, a new Moroccan sound is emerging. It both reclaims and reinvents indigenous identity.

A rising wave of young Moroccan bands – from Meteor Airlines and Jubantouja to Tasuta N-Imal, Anass Oublaïd & Raw Rhythm, and Tarwa N-Tiniri – are taking Amazigh music into uncharted territory. They blend traditional rhythms with ambient,

stoner rock, blues, and progressive fusion, turning oral traditions into sonic experiments.

The Imazighen are the indigenous people of North Africa, once labelled “Berber”, a term many reject as derogatory. Their identity is rooted in descent from the region’s pre-Arab inhabitants and the Tamazight language. Estimated to number 30–40-million across the Maghreb, most live in present-day Morocco and Algeria.

Over centuries of Arab conquest,

Ottoman rule, European colonisation, and post-independence nation-building, the Imazighen have been denied both self-determination and cultural recognition. Tamazight was systematically repressed and replaced by Arabic in public life and education.

In response, Amazigh movements emerged across the region, demanding linguistic rights, cultural visibility, and an end to marginalisation.

Today's bands are not the first wave of Amazigh musical revival. In the 1970s, bands like Ousmane and artists like Ammouri M'barek challenged taboos simply by singing in Tamazight. Back then, language itself was a battleground. Amazigh identity was seen as an ethnic threat to the national identity of Morocco. Music in Tamazight was a quiet act of resistance.

In the 2000s, acts like Saghrú Band and Hindi Zahra continued to explore fusion, though often on the fringes.

"When bands like Ousmane started making music in the 1970s, they had to assert Amazigh language and culture as something legitimate," explains Ben Jones, a PhD candidate at Georgetown University on Moroccan and North African music. "Today's artists don't have to fight that same fight."



*Above and below:
The band
Tasuta
N-Imal.*

PHOTOS:
TASUTA N-IMAL

Expanding both past and present

Now, the challenge is different: bridging the past and the present without flattening either.

"I certainly feel a kind of pressure to render our music more accessible," says singer-songwriter Anass Oublaïd. "This pressure doesn't necessarily come from institutions or venues; it can be indirect, through the expectations of the market, the reactions of certain professionals we meet during concerts, or the algorithms of digital platforms."

Oublaïd doesn't feel that adapting traditional music to modern tastes is inauthentic. "Being open to influence

doesn't mean you've abandoned traditional forms."

Other cultural custodians agree. "There's continuity in how traditional rhythms are reframed with new arrangements," says Mohamed Oubenal, a researcher with the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture. "But there's also disruption – those listening to traditional forms are generally not the same as those listening to these new bands. The latter appeal mostly to young urban audiences in cities like Casablanca, Marrakesh, and even smaller ones like Tinghir."

"Amazigh language is in dialogue with other genres, achieving new forms of musicality not confined to folklore," says Smail Khaliss, bassist of Tasuta N-Imal.

For Meteor Airlines percussionist Rachid Ennassiri, touring abroad proved fusion was the right move. "It showed us how universal Amazigh music can be.

Audiences respond to its textures and spirit. And, that international exposure boosts its credibility at home, too. We want people to know this isn't a relic. It's alive, evolving, and globally relevant."

This momentum has come despite the fact that music infrastructure remains minimal in the southeast where most of these bands are based.

Rehearsal spaces, recording studios, and training centres are rare, but bands like Tasuta N-Imal and Tarwa N-Tiniri have established nonprofit initiatives offering gear and workshops to aspiring musicians in their hometowns.

As one local producer says: "The southeast may lack polished studio spaces – but it makes up for it with creativity and drive." ■

This article is published in collaboration with Egab



Left: Anass Oublaid and Raw Rhythm

PHOTO: HICHAM LAABD

DATA

Who do children belong more to?

AFRICA HAS historically been home to many matrilineal societies. How common are they today?

Between late 2021 and mid-2023, Afrobarometer surveyed 39 countries. We asked people to whom children belong more: the mother's side, the father's side, or both equally?

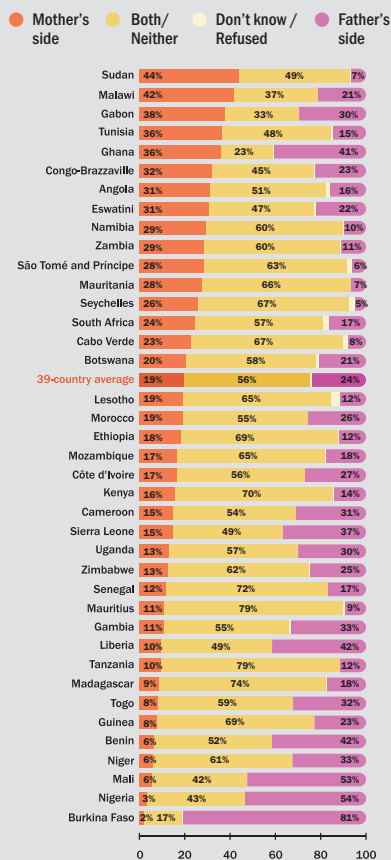
On average, a majority (56%) say children are equally their mother's and their father's or neither's. A quarter (24%) are paternally inclined while a fifth lean toward the mother (19%).

Sudan is the most pro-matrilineal society, with a gap of 37 percentage points between matrilineality and patrilineality. Pro-matrilineal gaps are large in São Tomé and Príncipe (+22 points), Tunisia (+21), Seychelles (+21), Mauritania (+21), and Malawi (+21).

Several West African countries are more patrilineal. Burkina Faso is "top of the pops": A whopping 81% of citizens say children belong more to their father's family vs a measly 2% who side with the mother. Majorities of Nigerians (54%) and Malians (53%) agree.

Africans are more likely to report belonging to the ethnic group of their father (90%) than their mother (80%). ■

Children belong to mother's side vs. father's side | 39 African countries | 2021/2023





REVIEW

WILFRED OKICHE



Tribeca lets the light in

As the world re-battens its hatches, the festival is keeping a window open.

DURING THE Covid-19 pandemic film festivals embraced virtual screenings, briefly lifting the structural and economic hurdles that had long restricted African professionals and audiences from regular participation at these gatherings.

But that democratisation was soon shut down as the world opened up again. Tribeca remains one of the few major festivals to continue supporting its virtual component.

A combination of factors such as rights ownership, piracy, sales prospects, essentialism and elitism put the focus of the other film festivals back on physical screenings. It makes Tribeca's virtual

platform, a place of discovery for new and unlikely gems, all the more precious for media who cannot always make the trek to New York City.

Despite the virtual offerings at Tribeca appearing to shrink each year, they remain robust enough to make it worth the effort.

One of the pleasant surprises of this year's Tribeca (4-15 June) was the drama *Happy Birthday* directed by Sarah Goher. An effective if low-key debut, *Happy Birthday* sharply examines the stark class and economic disparity in contemporary Egyptian society.

Eight-year-old Toha (the brilliant Doha Ramadan) comes from a fishing family and works as a maid for a wealthy Cairo family in the city.

When she forms a special bond with her employer's daughter, Toha's behaviour starts to transcend expected employer-servant boundaries. She is soon issued an unforgettable reminder that deep-rooted social hierarchies must be preserved at all costs.

Goher's film – written with her partner, Mohamed Diab – is a biting social commentary that shrewdly observes class conflict while straddling the line between the fantasies of childhood innocence and the harsh realities of the world.

Happy Birthday won two prizes: best international narrative feature, and the best screenplay in an international



Dispossession: Rodah Nafula Wekesa in a still from Zippy Kimundu's documentary *Widow Champion*.

narrative feature. Goher was also awarded the Nora Ephron Award, which honours exceptional female filmmakers.

Playing in the Viewpoints category of the festival was *Widow Champion* which follows activist Rodah Nafula Wekesa, who tells a story of gendered class disparity. Kenya is home to at least eight million widows.

The documentary tackles the issue of the abuse and dispossession of widows by in-laws. *Widow Champion* is in keeping with director Zippy Kimundu's ongoing interest in highlighting formidable women toiling to bring change to their communities.

Wekesa is herself a widow, who suffered the same fate as the women she is advocating for, a lived experience that helps her connect with the audience too.

The film mixes Wekesa's personal, lengthy struggle to obtain the title deed

to her own late husband's property with her leadership journey.

Viewers witness her refine a leadership style to be effective in a conservative society. To appear non-threatening to the patriarchy, she settles on soft diplomacy and reconciliation, but her resolve remains unwavering and focused.

Modest and rough around the edges, *Widow Champion* often stumbles when trying to shoehorn itself into a traditional feel-good narrative. The reality of Wekesa's calling is that the struggle continues.

In Tribeca's Spotlight+ was *Wizkid: Long Live Lagos*, a documentary about the Nigerian Afrobeats superstar, directed by Karam Gill. It arrived at the festival having already secured distribution, and will stream on HBO Max later in the year. ■

The Quiz

- 1 Which country is home to Museu Nacional de Antropologia (pictured)?
- 2 Ubangi-Shari is which country's former name?
- 3 Guinean Portuguese is an official language of which country?
- 4 Is Comoros led by a president or a prime minister?
- 5 Safi Faye and Ousmane Sembène are filmmakers from which country?
- 6 Port Louis is which country's capital city?
- 7 Pointe-Noire is which country's second largest city?
- 8 Porto-Novo is which country's capital city?
- 9 How many colours are on Sierra Leone's flag?
- 10 Which country's currency is the kwanza?



HOW DID I DO?

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

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"Ngl finding extra kwanza down the back of the sofa next month would be like Kwanzaa in July."

PHOTO: MUSEUM EXPLORER

ANALYSIS

Feminist or Figurehead?

Of 54 countries in Africa, just two are led by women. Is it reasonable to expect them to champion feminist reforms?

KEVIN D. MOFOKENG

THE ASCENT of women like Tanzania's Samia Suluhu Hassan and Namibia's Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah to the highest political offices in Africa is often hailed as a victory for feminism and gender equality.

When they fail to radically transform entrenched patriarchal systems, public disappointment is swift and sharp. In power, women can either be celebrated as feminist icons or denigrated as disappointing hollow figureheads – rarely anything in between.

But what if the problem isn't them?

To demand that a woman's leadership be inherently transformative is to hold her to a gendered standard. It is not only unrealistic but fundamentally unfair in systems that remain dominated by masculine norms, militarised politics, and elite gatekeeping.

We do not expect male presidents to embody the hopes of all men, nor do we burden them with the task of dismantling systems that brought them

to power. Why do we do this to women?

Take President Suluhu. When she succeeded the late John Magufuli in 2021, many hoped for a new dawn in Tanzanian politics, one of transparency, rights-respecting governance, and feminist reform.

Initially, she lifted bans on opposition rallies and media outlets, signalling a potential shift towards openness. However, these reforms were short-lived. The arrest of opposition leader Freeman Mbowe on terrorism charges in 2021, followed by his subsequent releases and re-arrests, showed that repressive tactics would continue under her administration.

Further tainting the reformist image thrust upon her, in 2024 opposition official Ali Kibao was abducted and murdered. Last month, two activists from Kenya and Uganda were arrested, held incommunicado for days and would later emerge alleging that they were horribly tortured in detention.



PHOTO: SIMON MAINA / AFP

Veer right: Namibia's President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah is a stout ally of the Swapo patriarchy.

Local media has reported that dozens of opposition supporters have been kidnapped, assaulted or detained in recent months.

When Nandi-Ndaitwah became Namibia's first female president, it spurred talk of broken gender barriers. Yet, as analysts noted, her rise was, in part, conditioned by her conservative stance on feminist issues like reproductive rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. Many point out she has avoided progressive gender politics altogether, aligning with the patriarchal core of her party, Swapo, to stay in favour.

Meanwhile, the speaker of Uganda's parliament, Anita Among, has actively advanced anti-feminist laws, including anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation.

Wider research suggests that increasing the number of women in leadership does not automatically translate into feminist governance.

Rwanda is a textbook case: it leads the world in gender parity in parliament, but, as real power lies in the executive, this has not made it a feminist country. The only women to aspire to the presidency – Diane Rwigara and Victoire Ingabire – have already spent time in prison on spurious charges. This week, Ingabire received court summons for what she expects to be treason charges.

A 2023 IMF examination of how digital platforms have impacted people's perception of women leaders in 34 African countries found that they increased the visibility of female leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa but that did not necessarily translate into real influence.

Sellout or political survivors?

Are the women who get power in Africa's existing political structures – and fail or refuse to disrupt them – sellouts or political survivors?

As Ugandan scholar Sylvia Tamale argues, African political institutions remain structurally patriarchal, even when women are present. Being the “first woman” in the room does not dismantle the rules of the room; it often means learning to survive within them.

Women can't challenge dominant ideologies without risking political annihilation. Political structures reward conformity over conviction. We must stop expecting every woman leader to be a reformer, a radical, or a revolutionary. Sometimes, she is simply surviving. And that, in a system designed to exclude her, is already political.

We also cannot assume that every woman in power is a feminist by default.

Genuine feminist transformation requires women's influence across the political ecosystem, not just at the top. A system that doesn't antagonise feminist reform would require women leading legislative committees, local councils, and party structures where norms are negotiated and power is contested daily.

When a few women win power, they become symbols of progress. But symbols don't govern. Systems do. ■



Kevin D. Mofokeng is a Gaborone-based writer and civic leader. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

Big Pic

Revolutions: Merrymakers dance during the Sonjon Revoltiod (St John in revolt) parade in Porto Novo, Cabo Verde on 20 June. The festivities commemorate John the Baptist – and mark the summer solstice.

PHOTO: QUEILA FERNANDES/AFP



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