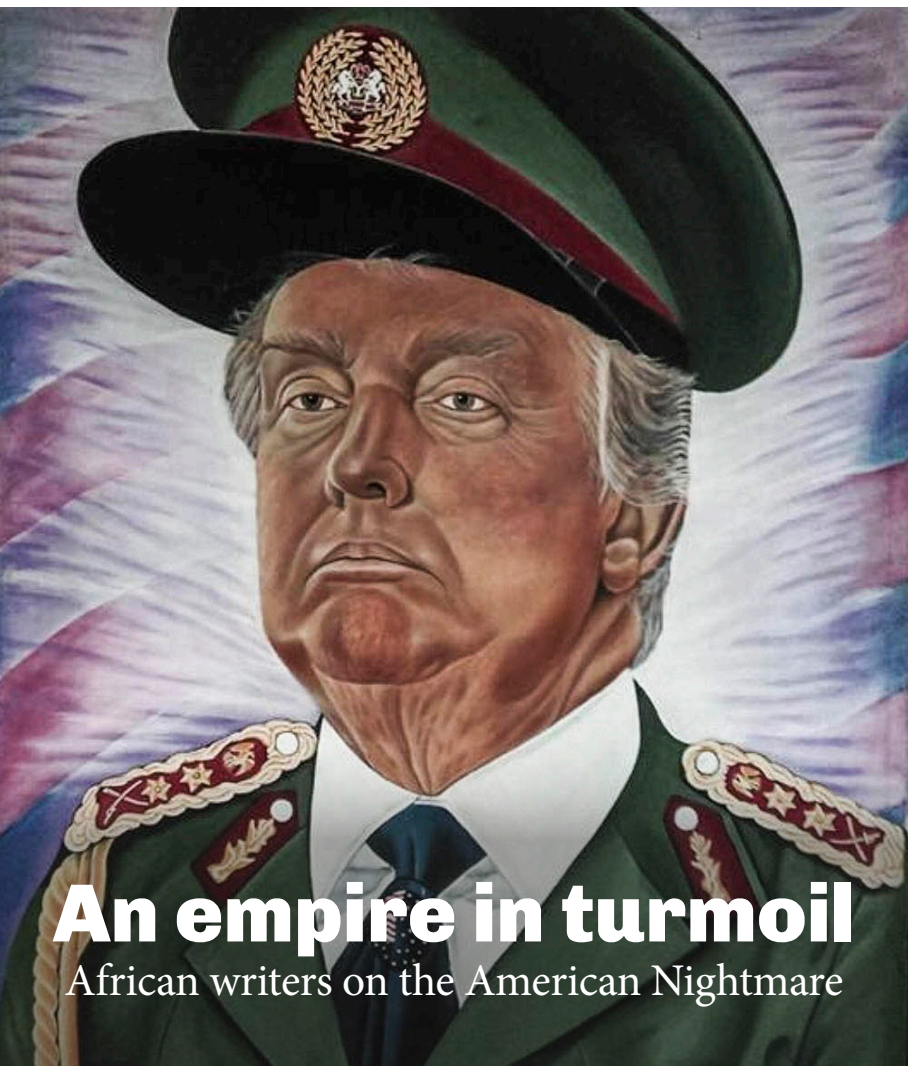


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The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



An empire in turmoil

African writers on the American Nightmare

Are we numb?

Africans need to tell our own stories. This philosophy is the reason *The Continent* exists.

But we also need to tell other people's stories. That's why, for this special edition, we have commissioned African writers and journalists based in the United States to describe the turmoil the land of the free is currently experiencing – and to explain why it's happening.

For once, we are the foreign correspondents, reporting on unrest and upheaval in a strange, faraway land.

And what a strange land it is. To see a nation state founded on the principle of democracy (for some, at least) use violence against peaceful protesters is a jarring reminder that America's government does not itself subscribe to the democratic values it so loudly advocates abroad. To see military vehicles and plumes of tear gas outside the White House is brutal confirmation that not everyone is entitled to the American dream.

Yet there is something inspiring, too, in witnessing millions of Americans rise up to demand change; to demand better. They are not yet numb to the police brutality, as routine as it has become; they are not prepared to shrug

their shoulders and accept systemic discrimination as a fact of life.

As we witness America's turmoil, we should take a long, hard look at ourselves. At least 18 Kenyan citizens have been shot dead by police officers so far this year. In Nigeria, a human rights

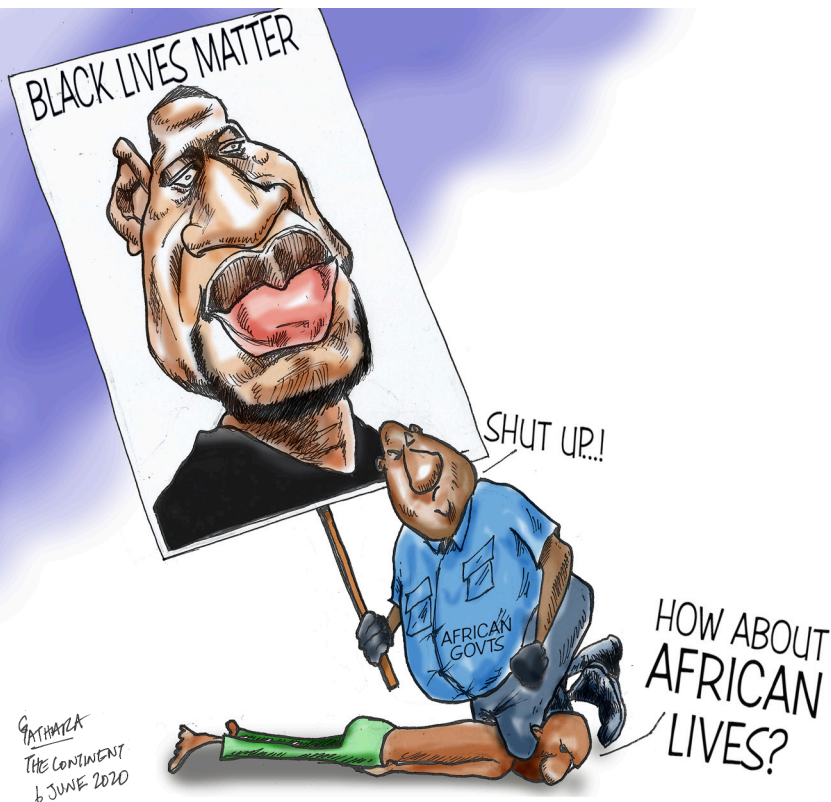
As we witness America's turmoil, we should take a hard look at ourselves

body recorded the extrajudicial killing of 18 people in just two weeks in April. Ethiopian security forces were accused last month of burning homes to the ground, summarily executing civilians and raping women. And in South Africa, with its long history of violent reprisals to protect capital, soldiers were exonerated after a beating left Collins Khosa dead.

As we watch America rise up, we need to ask ourselves: are we numb? ■



Cover art: US President Donald Trump wearing a Nigerian army dress uniform, painted by Lagos-based artist Sunday Joseph a.k.a. Sunshine.



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In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

Kenya

This week African Union Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat stood tall, condemning “the murder of George Floyd that occurred in the United States of America at the hands of law enforcement officers”. But Faki has been less enthusiastic in condemning the police brutality taking place closer to home.

This week in Kenya, the Independent-Medico Legal Unit in Nairobi said it had recorded 56 cases of human rights violations by law enforcement officers in Kenya since the curfew was imposed on March 27. Of these, 18 involved civilians who died from gunshot wounds. Police spokesperson Charles Owino said that policemen involved in these incidents were “probably young and drunk from the little power they have” – his actual words - and that civilians should avoid provoking them.

At least there is not complete impunity. Authorities said this week that a police officer has been charged with the murder of 13-year-old Yassin Moyo, who was shot dead while standing on the balcony of his home in Huruma, Nairobi in March.

The Gambia and Zimbabwe

Last week, police in America killed

Momodou Lemin Sisay, the son of a former Gambian diplomat. Now the Gambia has called on US authorities to carry out a “credible investigation” into his death.

Police claim the 39-year-old Sisay pointed a gun at them when they pulled him over in the southern state of Georgia, but his family are demanding an independent autopsy and investigation.

Meanwhile, US National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien stirred the transatlantic pot when he included Zimbabwe among foreign adversaries who were “exploiting unrest in America”. This led Zimbabwe to summon the US ambassador for an explanation. After this meeting, Ambassador Brian Nichols said the US had vowed to deliver justice for George Floyd, but urged Zimbabwe to “end state sponsored violence”.

It certainly takes stones to address your host like that. Too bad about the glass house.

Senegal, Tunisia, Equatorial Guinea and Mauritius

This week brought protests in Senegal as people took to the streets of Dakar, Touba and Kaolack over strict coronavirus restrictions that they say are affecting their livelihoods. The country was also set to reopen schools this week,



Distinctive style: South Sudan's President Salva Kiir in his trademark Stetson. The hat was a gift from former US President George W Bush (Photo: Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah for Reuters)

but called off plans after teachers tested positive for the coronavirus.

Tunisia's economy has also been hit hard, particularly by the virus's impact on tourism. It has now lifted its travel ban and says borders will reopen on June 27.

Mauritius, meanwhile, is lifting curfew and reopening shops and restaurants – though protective measures must still be followed. The island nation has not recorded any new cases in over a month.

Taking a leaf from Burundi's book, Equatorial Guinea has now also expelled a representative of the World Health Organisation, Dr Triphonie Nkurunziza, accusing her of "falsifying the country's Covid-19 numbers" (see page 9).

Anyone looking for a pattern in all this will be disappointed. Even as it responds to the pandemic, Africa is still

not a country.

Burundi

The obvious and the inevitable are not meant to count as breaking news, yet here we are. Burundi's Constitutional Court has upheld the "flawless" victory of ruling party candidate Evariste Ndayishimiye in the country's general elections – despite vociferous complaints from the opposition.

Will the new president follow his predecessor's precedent and ghost the AU and the East African Community? Will he adopt his own distinctive look, like South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and his ubiquitous cowboy hat?

Or will he let the hundreds of thousands of Burundians who have been exiled due to political violence come home in safety? Now that would be breaking news. ■

The Week in Numbers

\$2.2-million

The amount of money that Madagascar's education minister Rijasoa Andriamanana planned to spend on sweets. The sweets – three per child – were meant to mask the bitter taste of Covid-Organics, a herbal remedy that Madagascar's president claims can cure Covid-19 (there is no evidence for this claim). The minister was sacked after her plan was made public.

182%

The increase in levels of air pollution in Nairobi from 1974 to 2018. That's according to a new study – 'Visibility as a proxy for air quality in East Africa' – published in April. Air pollution levels in Kampala increased by 162% over the same period, and in Addis Ababa by 62%.



(Photo: Brent Stirton for Getty Images)

475,000

The number of hectares of rainforest lost in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019 – the second highest annual loss on record. According to the World Resources Institute, at current rates of deforestation there will be no more primary forests in the country by the end of the century.

14 months

The length of time that rebel general Khalifa Hafta laid siege to Tripoli, Libya's capital. His forces were finally driven out this week by troops aligned with the United Nations-backed government of national accord – with a little help from their ally Turkey, who offered strong military support.

3

The number of South Sudanese vice-presidents who have tested positive for Covid-19. Second Vice-President James Wani Igga confirmed this week that he had the virus, joining First Vice-President Riek Machar and Fifth Vice-President Hussein Abdelbagi in the sick bay. Fortunately the third and fourth vice-presidents are still available for official duties.

RE-INVENTING THE NEWSPAPER

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Nigeria

Classrooms silenced by Covid-19

Oluwatosin Adeshokan

In Lagos, Toyin Akinsanya, a mechanic, reckons his sons have played more than a thousand football matches since schools were closed over coronavirus fears in March.

Defying lockdown and social distancing rules, Akinsanya's three sons and several other boys in and around the city have turned to the streets to play football and form amateur tournaments.

"They shut down the schools since the beginning of March, I don't have a smartphone and there is no way they can continue their studies," he says.

Nigeria has the highest rate of extreme poverty in the world. Coupled with an epileptic power supply and high internet costs in the country, this means almost all the students in Nigeria right now are not in school.

Individual state governments had announced plans to televise classes but Akinsanya explains that he only gets five hours of electricity or less a day, with

some of it coming in the middle of the night.

The country's academic calendar is already in disarray and Akinsanya's oldest son does not know if he will be able to go to university at all this year.

"The leadership of the country has historically never been ready for a problem like a widespread pandemic. Funding for education is extremely low and ... just before the lockdown order was announced, the lecturers at universities in the country were on strike," political scientist Ebuwa Osarenren explains.

This is a sentiment shared by Blessing Tarfa, a vice principal at an Abuja secondary school. "A lot of Nigerian students will unfortunately be set back, possibly for years. Not everybody has access to the technology or infrastructure needed to sufficiently home-school themselves," she tells *The Continent*.

For parents like Akinsanya, Nigeria's inability to plan for the future hits extremely close to home. While dealing with the low standards and quality of education in a world that is rapidly advancing without Nigeria, they fear their children might be globally uncompetitive in the longer term. ■

Equatorial Guinea

WHO official sent packing

Simon Allison

The government of Equatorial Guinea last week expelled the World Health Organisation's country representative after accusing her of falsifying Covid-19 statistics.

In a speech before the Senate in the capital Malabo, Prime Minister Pascual Obama Asue said that Dr Triphonie Nkurunziza was guilty of "falsifying the data of people contaminated" by Covid-19. "We don't have a problem with the WHO, we have a problem with the WHO's representative in Malabo," he said.

The latest official data, as of June 1, shows that Equatorial Guinea has 1,306 recorded cases of Covid-19, including 12 deaths.

In response, the WHO issued a statement saying that "there has been a misunderstanding over data, which WHO offered to clarify. WHO wishes to state that Dr Nkurunziza did not falsify Covid-19 figures."

Although the exact nature of the misunderstanding is not known, the figures do show that Equatorial Guinea – with a population of just 1.3-million – has one of the highest rates of infection in

West Africa. "By population we estimate it to be one of the severely affected countries in terms of the number of cases," the WHO's regional director for Africa, Matshidiso Moeti, told reporters in a press conference.

Equatorial Guinea has become the second African country to kick out the WHO's representative, after Burundi. It was also the first African country to receive a shipment of Covid-Organics, the controversial and untested herbal remedy that has been touted as a Covid-19 cure by Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina.

AFP reported that, despite the dispute, Nkurunziza remains in Equatorial Guinea for the time being. "There are no flights enabling her to leave," a source told the wire service. ■



Not welcome: Dr Triphonie Nkurunziza has been told to leave Malabo, the capital city (Photo: supplied)

Kenya

Kenya bans donkey abattoirs – with unintended consequences

Caroline Chebet

John Nduhiu, a donkey farmer from Kamere village in Nakuru, Kenya had always valued his herd of over 20 donkeys. On a normal day, he would hire out most of his donkeys to local farmers to generate a daily income. It was a modest but reliable investment.

But in 2016 everything changed. That's when the first licensed donkey abattoir opened, and suddenly donkeys became a hot commodity – too hot, from Nduhiu's perspective. "Some of my donkeys were stolen and the trend could not stop, even after reporting to the authorities," he told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Donkey theft has become all too common in East Africa and beyond. Their value has soared thanks to huge demand from China, where donkey hides are an important ingredient in



Life line: Kenya banned the commercial slaughter of donkeys after the donkey population began to dwindle (Photo: Tony Karuma for AFP)

traditional medicine. The country uses up to 4.8-million donkeys every year.

Kenya banned the commercial slaughter and export of donkeys in March this year, following pressure from farming communities. That's good news for Nduhiu, but not such good news for donkey farmers in neighbouring countries.

"The ban of the donkey export trade in Kenya is a major step. However, that does not mean that Africa is free. It means that pressure is mounting in Tanzania's slaughterhouses as they are operating," said Fred Ochieng, the CEO of Brooke East Africa, another animal welfare charity.

Ugandan farmers are also suffering. "We no longer leave our donkeys out at night. We have opted to keep them in our houses for safety. Losing a donkey means you have to carry the load, and replacing them is too expensive since prices have doubled with the demand," said Angela Adome, from Kotido district in Uganda. ■



Raising a black son in America

For now, my 13-year-old son is still cute. But soon he will be perceived as threatening. **Ifrah Udgoon**

As a Somali immigrant to America, I am expected to be grateful. But have I sold my soul to the devil? The soil here is saturated with the blood of black people. Slavery, Jim Crow and police brutality have ensured black people know pain and loss intimately.

Black mothers see their children in Trayvon Martin, buying candy for his little brother when he was killed by George Zimmerman. The police let Zimmerman go home after questioning him. After being acquitted by a jury of his peers, he posted pictures of

Trayvon's dead body on the internet.

Tamir Rice was only 12, a year younger than my own son, when he was shot by a policeman. He was playing with a toy gun.

Black moms know it doesn't matter whether their kids are innocent. Emmett Till was killed because a white woman accused him of grabbing her. The two white men who murdered him were acquitted by an all-white, all-male jury and could never be retried. His accuser later admitted she fabricated that story. He was 14, just a year older than my son.

I was born in Somalia. My son is a black boy, growing taller by the day. Soon he will go from being seen as cute to being seen as threatening. My heart breaks for his innocence.

I came to the US as a child, fleeing the civil war more than 20 years ago – negligible compared to the 400 years black Americans have been here, treated first as property, then as second-class citizens. But I share the anxieties of all black mothers.

I can't breathe.

I constantly worry about my black son. My black son who is growing out his afro, his crown and glory. My black son whose roaring laughter fills up our home with warmth and love. My black son who wants to get a master's degree because he saw his mother work so hard for hers. My black son who promises to take care of me when he's older. My black son who I've named Qalbi (my heart) DeeQ (complete) because he completes my heart.

It wasn't too long ago when I had to tell him about Trayvon, about Tamir, and others. And, now, George Floyd. The list is so long. Each discussion feels like a betrayal, as though I am cutting short his childhood. Knowing George called out for his mother sends chills down my spine.

Tamir Rice was only 12, a year younger than my own son, when he was shot by a policeman. He was playing with a toy gun.

Black mothers live with this dread and helplessness. We. Can't. Breathe.

In George, we see our children. We see ourselves. George Floyd is us, and Derek Chauvin's knee is the oppressive racist system that built this country on the blood, sweat, and tears of black people – while denying us life, liberty and our own pursuit of happiness.

We want to see our children grow, realise their dreams, have families of their own. So we drill them on how to behave when confronted with police, fearing this may not be enough to save them from a racism intent on killing them anyway.

We hold our breath each time they walk out the door, and we pray they come back to us safe and sound.

But while they are away, we can't breathe. ■

Ifrah Udgoon is a high-school science teacher based in Columbus, Ohio in the United States

Nollywood's original megahit is back with a vengeance

Timileyin Omilana

The 1992 movie *Living in Bondage* is widely credited with giving birth to Nollywood – now a multi-billion dollar industry. Even though its production values were low, the melodramatic supernatural thriller released on VHS tapes was a smash hit.

Nearly three decades later, Nollywood made a sequel. *Living In Bondage: Breaking Free* pays homage to the 1992 classic by taking on the same themes, but with a modern twist.

The film is a two-part drama-thriller written by Kenneth Nnebue and Okechukwu Ogunjio, centred on greed, wealth, power and the occult. It is told through the story of a young man desperate for wealth, and willing to do anything to get it.

The film opens with an aerial shot of a car driving through a winding bush path, against the sonic backdrop of a little girl singing a spooky Igbo folk song. When the car stops, the driver and his daughter get out. He tells her to close her eyes. When she does, he decapitates her.

Although the film takes advantage of the original's steamroller status, it does well not to rely on it. And while some roles are retained from the original, they



mainly serve the purpose of connecting the two films. Strong performances and chemistry between the leading characters also lift the story arc when it seems to amble along.

Another thing that *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* shares with the original is its commercial appeal: released in November last year, it quickly became one of the highest-grossing Nollywood films of all time. As of last month, it is available to stream on Netflix. ■

Living In Bondage: Breaking Free is streaming on Netflix

America's 'Black Mecca' rallies against racist police brutality

Atlanta is at the heart of black America. It is also at the centre of the resistance.

Chika Oduah in Atlanta



Black Lives Matter: Protesters demonstrate peacefully in Atlanta, known as a site of revolt during the Civil Rights Movement

(Photo: Chika Oduah)

On Wednesday afternoon, a crowd gathers on a street corner in Atlanta, adjacent to the CNN headquarters. They are there to kick off the city's sixth day of protests against the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African-American man who died after being choked by white police officers on May 25 in the midwestern city of Minneapolis. He was 46 years old.

The crowd is diverse – young and old, from different economic and ethnic backgrounds. They're carrying placards bearing phrases like "Fuck the Police" and "No Justice, No Peace".

National Guard officers stand in front of street barricades, watching

the crowd move down the road. A few days before, the state governor had authorised 1,500 members of the National Guard – a unit of part-time soldiers in the US military – to safeguard the city after protests took a violent turn. The CNN centre suffered damage when rioters broke glass windows and vandalised the iconic CNN logo.

On May 30, city mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, the second black woman to hold the position, made an impassioned televised plea for the rioting to stop. Today, the protesters seem determined to conduct peaceful rallies.

“I love when we keep it peaceful,” says Quintavious Rhodes. “Keep it family.”

The 21-year-old Atlanta native and single father told the *Mail & Guardian* that he’s protesting to call for an end to racism, so that his one-year-old daughter can live in a better America. He points to the damage at the CNN building and says: “This is not what we stand for. CNN is one of the biggest tourist attractions in Atlanta. We want this to be a safe city.”

Atlanta has long been a cultural, political and economic hub for African-Americans, and was a rallying site for activists during the Civil Rights Movement

The demonstrators carry placards and march past some of the city’s landmarks: the World of Coca-Cola museum; the Centennial Olympic Park; the Atlanta University Centre, the largest black academic community in the US, where four historically black colleges and universities stand side-by-side. The

childhood home where Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr. was born is just around the corner.

Celebrated as a “Black Mecca”, Atlanta has long been a cultural, political and economic hub for African-Americans. It was a rallying site for activists during America’s 1954-1968 Civil Rights Movement, and has one of the largest African-American urban populations in the United States (about 50% of Atlanta’s residents are African-American).

The city proper and surrounding metropolitan area supports a thriving black middle to upper-class community, a robust hip-hop music scene and has been home to more than 60,000 black-owned businesses over the years.

That’s precisely why many residents say they feel an imperative to stand in solidarity with African-Americans across the United States to fight police brutality. The black minority population continues to face



Site of sorrow:
Tributes and messages of solidarity mark the site of George Floyd's murder (Photo: Jason Armond/ Los Angeles Times via Getty Images)

racial discrimination, systemic injustice and microaggressions.

"I think we're finally at the tipping point where we're gonna be seeing some progress," David Kruglinski, a high school chemistry teacher who has been living in Atlanta for 22 years, tells the *M&G*.

The demonstrators march north, passing by a wall where local artist Dustin Emory is painting Floyd's face on the brick exterior of a small tattoo shop. They pause to watch him work on the mural and raise their mobile phones to snap photos.

Floyd died the same day a white woman in New York City's Central Park called the police to falsely accuse a black man of threatening her and her dog. It turned out that he was out bird-watching, and had merely asked the woman to follow the park's rules and put her dog on a leash.

The killing of Floyd is the latest in a series of murders of unarmed black people in the US. In February, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was jogging in a quiet Georgia suburb when a white father-and-son duo who had been following him shot him down. In March, Breonna Taylor, 26, was killed after police officers barged into her home in Louisville, Kentucky in the middle of the night looking for drugs or money. No drugs were found in her home.

The Black Lives Matter network has been at the forefront of the outcry against police brutality. Other predominantly African-American communities have joined the swelling #JusticeforFloyd movement, including those in Detroit, Southside Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New Orleans and New York City. Though largely peaceful, the rallies have been aggressive at times, with participants and intruders attacking people and police deploying heavy-handed force.

African immigrants and first generation Americans are also reacting to the racially charged police brutality. Minnesota has a large Liberian population and they, too, have joined the protests in Minneapolis alongside Floyd's family and supporters.

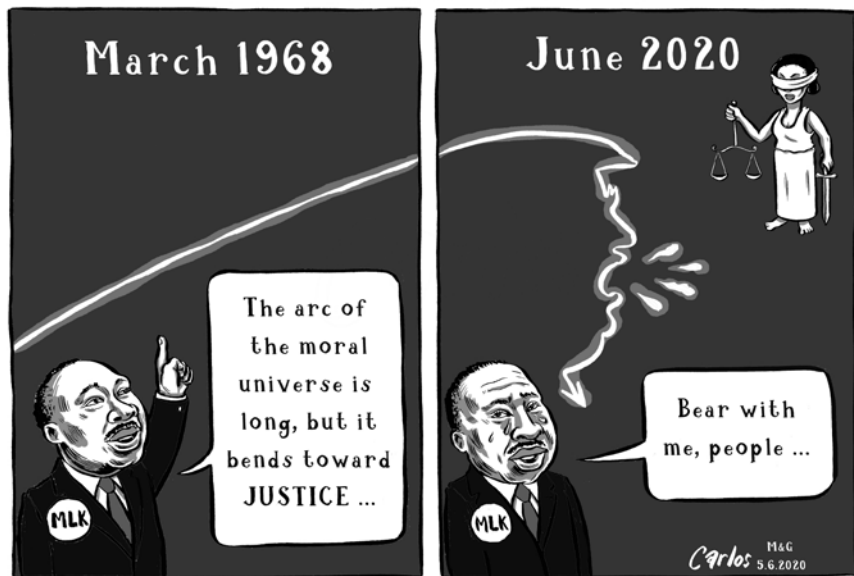
The protests currently unfolding across America are being described as unprecedented in recent times, as large numbers of white Americans – many of them chanting “Black Lives Matter” for the very first time – join what has previously been seen mostly as a “black struggle”.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has not shown any political will towards confronting police brutality, and maintains his stance as a president of “law and order”.

Back at the Atlanta demonstration, the Ebenezer Baptist Church looms over protesters. This is the church where Dr Martin Luther King Jr. pastored alongside his father. He preached there for two decades before he was assassinated.

Several days ago, a local Atlanta TV news broadcaster carried an interview with Dr King's daughter, 57-year-old Dr Bernice King. The popular Atlanta figure was asked what her father would think of today's protesters.

“I know he would be proud of them,” she said. ■



SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how well you really know our continent

Photo: Brandi Ibrao/Unsplash



1. Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway currently connects which two cities?
2. Felix Tshisekedi is the president of which country?
3. Name an African country with a spear on its flag (bonus point if you can name both).
4. The Penguin Islands can be found on the coastline of which country?
5. Where is singer and activist Youssou N'Dour from?
6. Which African Great Lake is located between Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi?
7. Which animals make up "the Big Five"?
8. Which country was founded by the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America, commonly known as the American Colonization Society?
9. Which common West and Central African staple food is the national dish of Ghana?
10. What is the currency used in Angola?
11. Dahomey is the former name of which country?
12. In football, who is Cote D'Ivoire's all-time top scorer?

How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

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

5-8

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

9-12

"I'm as Pan-African as they come."



Game on: The 'UK Tourists' practising at Everton's training ground in Liverpool
(Photo: PA Images via Getty)

Remembering the original Super Eagles

Tolu Olasoji

The first time Nigeria's men's football team played outside the country, it took them two weeks to reach their destination. They sailed from Lagos to Southampton on board the MV Apapa in August 1949, and every day the 18 players would run around the deck to keep fit.

The tour of England, to test their strength against nine English amateur clubs, started well. The opening game against Marine Crosby Football Club was scheduled for just two days after their arrival. The team wore olive green

jerseys and white shorts, and only striker Sokari Dokubu wore boots. A crowd of 6,000 watched the Nigerians – christened the UK Tourists for the tour – register a 5-2 upset.

The tour ended with two wins, two draws and five losses. But it would lay the foundations for Nigeria's eventual success on the international stage, and even resulted in the first transfers of Nigerian players to European clubs, including striker Teslim "Thunder" Balogun's move to Peterborough United.

It would be more than a decade before the nickname changed. Only when Nigeria became independent in 1960 did the football team change its name to the Green Eagles, after the colour of the flag and the animal on the national crest. This evolved later into the Super Eagles of today – who may have been hard-pressed to compete with their pioneering predecessors. ■



Opening the taps: Alcohol sales resumed in South Africa on Monday

(Photo: Gianluigi Guercia for AFP)

South Africa falls off the wagon after two dry months

Amindeh Blaise Atabong

On the morning of June 1, after two months of state-mandated abstinence, the line to enter one Johannesburg liquor store stretched all the way outside and around the corner. After waiting so long, no one seemed to mind an extra few minutes.

There was cheering. There was dancing. For some, the opportunity for a few breakfast beers took priority over going to work. “I can’t take chances. I have to get my supply before the shops run out of stock,” said Mkhize Makinta.

One middle-aged man exited the store having filled an entire rucksack

and two plastic bags. Just a few metres away, he uncapped a beer bottle with his teeth and gulped down the entire contents.

Such recklessness may explain why South Africa instituted the ban in the first place. Alcohol makes people less likely to obey lockdown regulations, and also fuels domestic violence – a major concern with families forced to remain at home for prolonged periods. The ban was lifted after South Africa eased its lockdown restrictions at the beginning of this month.

Scenes like these were repeated all

across the country as boozers waited to get their fix. As one observer joked: if the government was clever, they would set up Covid-19 testing stations outside liquor stores, which would allow them to test the whole country in three days.

Some restrictions remain in place. Alcohol is only allowed to be sold from 9am to 5pm, and only in liquor stores – not in bars or restaurants.

Drinkers make a plan

South Africa is not the only African country to have instituted restrictions on the sale or consumption of alcohol. In Kenya, an overnight curfew has been repeatedly violated by patrons of bars and nightclubs. Nairobi governor Mike Sonko went even further: he included small bottles of Hennessy, a cognac, in coronavirus care packages that were delivered to residents.

When Kenya's government allowed restaurants to re-open, they put in a provision to prevent excessive alcohol consumption, insisting that customers must order a meal before being allowed to drink. No problem, said Kenya's boozers, some of whom were seen ordering one small burger and several bottles of beer – and then repeating the exercise at other restaurants in the neighborhood.

In Cameroon, the government initially said that bars and restaurants must close at 6pm while Covid-19 restrictions were in force. This posed no obstacle to serious drinkers. "Since I'm a regular customer in some bars in the neighbourhood, the owners usually

allow us to drink behind closed doors. We usually drink there without making much noise till about 10pm," said Ondoua Michelle, a Yaounde-based bricklayer and farmer.

Nigeria has yet to implement a liquor ban, but drinkers in Lagos are worried. Just in case, some are working on a plan B: Ogogoro, a potent homebrew made from fermented palm sap

The bar in question is close to a police station. Instead of enforcing the 6pm closure, officers would often stop by for a drink of their own. Given the lack of enforcement, and following a popular outcry, this restriction was soon scrapped.

Nigeria has yet to implement any kind of liquor ban, but drinkers in Lagos are already worried. Just in case, some are working on a Plan B: Ogogoro, a potent homebrew made from fermented palm sap. As one Lagosian told the *Mail & Guardian*, he just can't imagine a time when his hand would consume more alcohol than his mouth. ■

Additional reporting by Doh Bertrand in Yaounde, Segun Kasali in Lagos and Robert Kibet in Nairobi. Amindeh Blaise Atabong is a media fellow with Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation

The view from New York City

From the streets of Brooklyn, Kenyan writer **Jakki Kerubo** observes a city and a country in flux

Every evening since New York City shut down in mid-March, I timed my dog's walk in Brooklyn to coincide with the 7pm clapping for healthcare workers. Masked and gloved, I left my apartment building at 6.30pm and led my puppy, Iris, down the rows of tree-lined, million-dollar brownstones in my Park Slope neighborhood. Many residents had escaped to their second homes in the suburbs, allowing me to peer into their uncurtained homes and admire their imposing in-built bookshelves and fancy house plants, symbols of a thriving, fully gentrified locality.

As a civil servant and immigrant from Kenya, these homes were out of reach. I could afford to live here because my husband's family owned the apartment. The sidewalks were empty, even though the virus infection rate was coming down every day, and with it the sirens that had pierced all of our waking hours.

I wanted to savour these moments. Being African and accustomed to uncertainty had made me paranoid – I still worried that I'd wake up one day and there would be no running hot water for my shower. But there was an

inexplicable tension, an edge to these quiet days in a community that had more celebrity-chef restaurants than most cities in the country.

In normal times, I rarely walked around. An outsider, I'd learned to pick up the nuances of a culture. In this mostly white and progressive bubble, I knew to keep my head down and to always be aware that beyond the Grand Army Plaza roundabout was a vast number of suffering New Yorkers.

Brooklyn, we go hard

On May 25, 70 days into lockdown, stir-crazy New Yorkers spilled into the parks and sipped spicy mango margaritas and negronis on restaurant curbs. The masks were off, literally and figuratively. At that time, 98,000 people in the US had died of Covid-19 – it is 110,000 as of June 5 – and nearly half a million New Yorkers have become unemployed. But the air was thick with optimism and that particular NYC aspirational spirit.

I allowed myself to feel joyful, but kept my mask on. Walking a few blocks to the Target supermarket to scrounge for Clorox bleach wipes and hair cream, I stared at the giant-sized billboard at Barclays Center, the



'We go hard': Protesters at a Black Lives Matter march near the Barclays Center on May 29 in Brooklyn, New York (Photo: Angela Weiss for AFP)

home of the Brooklyn Nets basketball team. Kyrie Irvin and other black Nets players dominated the board, their faces powerful, their skin gleaming with sweat, in the throes of the battle to win a game. Across the advertisement was the caption "We Go Hard," from Jay Z's rap *Brooklyn, We Go Hard*. I'd seen the ad so many times, but each time, I was reminded of the jarring juxtaposition of the projected image of winning black men in America and the reality of their disenfranchisement on the ground.

When you're 'melanated', as the kids say, there's not a single day that you don't think about how the system always comes up against your blackness.

At Target, the bleach wipes shortage persisted, understandably. But I was frustrated that my local Target didn't

carry Sulfur 8 or Doo Grow, staples for a natural Afro growth. A small thing, but a reminder that I lived in a zip code that had priced out poorer black people, yet boasted many symbols of black culture.

At around 9pm New York time that night, I was putting away the dinner dishes and looking forward to watching a series. I didn't find out about George Floyd's death, which happened four hours away by plane in the mid-Western state of Minnesota, until the next day. It took me days to watch the video. It was just too painful. And over an allegedly fake \$20 bill. The entire thing mirrored Eric Garner's death, his words a complete echo. "I can't breathe."

Witnessing the sustained violence against black men in a country that for a long time lectured African dictators on

human rights and due process will never cease to be shocking.

The following day, May 26, I was relieved when the officers were fired, but it wasn't enough.

Things do fall apart

Still, the protests felt different this time around. The crowds were more diverse than ever across the nation's cities. Tear gas, rubber bullets and the threat of military intervention from the White House increased the crowds' resolve.

I admire Americans' utter belief in a system that I viewed as flawed and fragile, which said more about my African baggage than I cared to admit: I'd come to expect that things can and do fall apart.

When the protests hit New York City on May 28, the city's crises collided: the pandemic, 1.9-million unemployed, a graduating class with no prospects, cabin fever, and the gushing wound that was the sustained fraught relationship between New York's police and the black community. That night, people tried to hold onto normality, gathering on balconies to cheer for the healthcare workers, but the screams of the protesters cut through. "Stop with that stupid clapping, already," someone shouted when it began at 7pm.

Although the right to join with fellow citizens in protest or peaceful assembly is at the core of America's First Amendment, I was reluctant to join the uprising. I couldn't recall any recent ones where the police didn't turn violent and a disproportionate



History repeating itself: A 2013 protest rally in New York's Times Square after George Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges related to the killing of Trayvon Martin
(Photo: Mario Tama for Getty Images)

number of black people didn't get arrested. I lived in terror of the current administration weaponising this right to organise and using it as an excuse to deport immigrants. Yes, even those that are citizens.

These streets, they're ours

I decided to shelter in. Within a couple of hours, a video of a policeman



Brutal response: Police in Minnesota advance towards demonstrators protesting against the murder of George Floyd and the initial lack of charges laid against the officers involved
 (Photo: Scott Olson/Getty Images)

violently pushing a petite woman to the floor and others beating protesters with batons emerged on social media. A photo of the crowd, facing the “We Go Hard” billboard at Barclays Center, was splashed across newspapers. At last, the image mirrored the aches of a city hidden under the smokes and mirrors.

Each night in this past week, there have been protests, accompanied by looting in some places. Cops are employing greater force, and the mayor has imposed curfew. Sirens and chants rang through the last couple of nights as the crowds moved to Grand Army Plaza.

Even as I write this piece, on Wednesday night, protesters are marching through our street at midnight – four hours past the 8pm curfew. They are chanting, “These streets! They’re ours!” as helicopters hover above. I look at them in admiration through my

window. They might as well be telling those of us sheltered at home that we are the impostors, beneficiaries of an apparatus that was built on the blood of African-Americans and other people of colour.

I am wistful that I can’t join the crowds; ashamed and guilty that I am watching others sacrifice their time and risk harm to their bodies so that I can continue my pursuit of happiness. Instead, I donate to the bail funds and plan to join a day protest this weekend if there is one.

I know the farmer’s market will be back to Grand Army Plaza this weekend, and vine tomatoes with it. Cocktails will return, as will brunch, eventually. We will continue to hurtle towards a new normal; and we know even if the police are reformed, racism will still be with us.



Love and hate in Africa-China relations

Winnie Mitullah

Over the past decade, the growing significance of Chinese trade – and to a lesser extent aid – has shone a spotlight on Sino-African relations. China maintains that its relationship with Africa is based on partnership and South-South cooperation. But mounting debt and trade imbalances have fuelled concerns that Africa is entering into another colonial-style relationship.

These concerns are coupled with regular complaints about the treatment of workers in Chinese-owned firms, and questions about whether Chinese companies pay appropriate taxes. The mistreatment of Africans in China during the Covid-19 crisis – particularly in the southern city of Guangzhou, home to a large African population – has only exacerbated fears that the relationship is one-sided.

Sometimes, anti-Chinese sentiment has spilled over into attacks on Chinese workers in countries including Angola and Zambia.

Despite all this, survey data shows that most Africans don't mind China's presence in Africa. Afrobarometer, which regularly interviews nationally representative samples of citizens in

over 30 countries, released findings on this subject in 2016. It found that some 63% of Africans surveyed believed that China was a “somewhat” or “very” positive influence in their country (in Mali, China's approval rating was 92%).

Afrobarometer is currently conducting a new round of surveys. If the preliminary results from the 2019/2020 round is anything to go by, then we can conclude that although this general pattern is holding – albeit with considerable regional variation – China is not quite as popular as before.

Opinions and perceptions can change very quickly. If China fails to help with debt relief and the restructuring of loans as the continent enters its post-Covid-19 economic slump, African governments are likely to push China to do more to live up to its stated aims of solidarity and partnership – and the country's reputation may suffer if it does not comply. ■

Winnie Mitullah is the director of the Institute for Development Studies of the University of Nairobi, an Afrobarometer partner. This column was produced in partnership with Democracy in Africa



Watch out for the surveillance state in southern Africa

Murray Hunter

There is growing concern that African governments may be spying on their citizens' communications.

The Media Policy and Democracy Project has just released a new report uncovering the extent to which laws in the region enable such abuses or guard against them. As a researcher for that report, I was horrified to see how little protection there was against government spying – but not particularly surprised.

In the majority of countries in the region, intelligence agencies don't even need a judge's permission before spying on your communication. In Mozambique and Tanzania, even an ordinary police officer can intercept your communication without a judge's permission.

Some countries, such as Malawi, don't have a law regulating the government's spying powers at all – but despite years of legal action by pro-democracy activists, the state has rolled out a controversial network-monitoring programme which



Photo: Luis Tato for AFP

Malawians have nicknamed “the Spy Machine”.

In Zimbabwe, the courts have upheld the right of police to seize a person's phone records for even minor offences – no court order required.


In Lesotho, there's been a worrying 592% increase in government seizing people's call records over four years.

Clearly, there is a need to overhaul these laws to protect people from digital spying. But even where countries have relatively good laws – like Angola – there is often a big gap between law and reality.

There is also cause for hope. In South Africa, the courts are mulling a challenge to the country's spying law, which could spark important reforms and set a new standard for laws in the region.

Understanding the make-up of surveillance laws is particularly important if countries in the region introduce digital tracking as part of their response to the global Covid19 pandemic. We need to grapple with the extent to which our governments have appropriate laws in places – and above all, respect for those laws. ■

Murray Hunter is a researcher on digital rights and author of a children's book about surveillance. The full report is available here: <https://bit.ly/SurveillanceReport>

A photograph showing a group of people, including judges and military personnel, standing in front of a military vehicle. The scene is outdoors, and the military personnel are wearing camouflage uniforms and berets. The judges are in formal attire. The military vehicle is a large, green, armored truck with a canopy.

Malawi's top judges were offered bags of cash over lunch

Malawi's democratic future hinged on their response. **Golden Matonga**

Judgement day: A Constitutional Court judge arrives, escorted by military vehicles and service people, at Lilongwe High Court ahead of the highly-charged ruling in February (Photo: Amos Gumulira for AFP)

The five judges of Malawi's constitutional court – Judge President Healy Potani and his colleagues Redson Kapindu, Ivy Kamanga, Dingiswayo Madise and Mike Tembo – were enjoying a good meal at Ufulu Gardens Hotel in Lilongwe when the call they had all dreaded came through.

It was the judge president's phone that was ringing. Silently, they glanced at each other, and nodded in agreement that he should take the call.

These details are all contained in statements given to Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau, and seen by the Platform for Investigative Journalism.

Judge President Potani had been

desperately trying to avoid taking this call, or meeting with the person on the other end of the line: Thom Mpinganjira, a wealthy businessman with close ties to the ruling party.

At the time, in October last year, the constitutional court was hearing one of the most sensitive cases in Malawi's history: a legal challenge to the result of the 2019 presidential election. The judges were worried that Mpinganjira would attempt to bribe them to rule in favour of President Peter Mutharika, who had won the controversial vote.

Potani answered the call. As he recalls the conversation: “[Mpinganjira] told me he sent a parcel to me for a project ... He



Walking for justice: Civilians in Lilongwe march against corruption after allegations of bribery were heard in court (Photo: Amos Gumulira for AFP)

said he was advised by some of the people he was working with to approach me.”

Potani was suspicious. “I was puzzled, disturbed and confused. I wanted to get more information. I told him that I was in Lilongwe and he said he would fly from Blantyre the next day to meet me to deliver the parcel. But I quickly told him not to.”

When pressed for further details, Mpinganjira allegedly told Potani that the parcel contained 100-million kwacha in cash (about \$135,000), to be divided between the five judges; and that he was delivering it on behalf of the ruling party.

The judges resolved to report the matter to the chief justice at once, and say they never accepted any money.

They returned to their lunch.

Three months later, in January 2020, Mpinganjira was arrested and charged with attempting to bribe the five Constitutional Court judges. He denies the allegations against him, and is currently out on bail. He refused to

speak to the Platform for Investigative Journalism for this story.

A month after that, in February 2020, the Constitutional Court delivered its judgment. The atmosphere in which they delivered their judgment was highly charged, amid fears of unrest: military helicopters circled the courtroom in Lilongwe, and the judges all had to wear bulletproof vests under their robes.

But the judges were undeterred. In a landmark ruling, read out by Judge President Potani, the court annulled the presidential election on the basis of serious and widespread irregularities. It is only the second African court to have overturned a presidential election result, after Kenya in 2017.

New elections are scheduled for June 23 this year. ■

This is an edited version of an investigation first published by the Platform for Investigative Journalism. The full story is available here: <https://bit.ly/MalawiJudges>



The Big Picture

Drive-in theatre: Cars are lined up in a parking lot in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, to watch a performance of a stage play called "Grip Am" (meaning Hold It in Pidgin English). Across the world, social distancing restrictions mean that people are finding new and inventive ways to socialise and celebrate arts and culture. (Photo: Kola Sulaimon for AFP)

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