

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



A pan-African history of flags

How red, green and gold came
to define a continent

Not all the dead are saints

Wafa wanaka is a Shona expression. It means, loosely, that all the dead are saints. The closest equivalent in English is the aphorism, “Do not speak ill of the dead”.

There are good reasons why cultures the world over choose to treat their deceased with reverence. To spare the feelings of the family, perhaps; or to prevent the actions of the departed from returning to haunt the living.

But in recent weeks, no one has been taking this injunction very seriously. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, some parts of the world are now reconsidering their monuments – and their history.

The statue of a slave trader in Bristol was torn down by an angry crowd and dumped into a harbour. In Belgium, protesters have given the Belgian government an ultimatum to remove all busts and statues of King Leopold II – the monarch who orchestrated the deaths of 10-million Congolese in the early 20th century (see page 13).

In Kentucky, the hand was chopped off a statue of Louis XVI, the French king who oversaw one of the most brutal slavocracies that the world has ever seen.

Not all the dead are saints. But

why did we have to wait centuries to acknowledge this self-evident truth?

This week, Burundi’s President Pierre Nkurunziza died in office (see

Why did we have to wait centuries to acknowledge this self-evident truth?

our obituary on page 15). The crimes committed under his rule have been well documented – the rapes, the torture, the murders. He oversaw a reign of terror so violent that more than 400,000 citizens, from a population of just 11-million, were forced to flee the country.

He was no saint – and we will not wait centuries to say so. ■



Cover photograph: The imperial colours of Ethiopia’s Emperor Haile Selassie – pictured here in an official ceremony in 1966 – inspired the flag design of 23 African countries. Full story on page 17 (Photo: Mondadori via Getty Images)



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In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

Madagascar and Chad

Madagascar's minister of education has flunked out of cabinet: Rijasoa Andriamanana was relieved of her position after spending \$2.2-million on sweets for school children, to encourage them to take the government's Covid-19 herbal remedy. It is proving, for some, to be a bitter pill to swallow.

Instead of a spoonful of sugar to help this particular medicine go down, *The Continent* recommends a large pinch of salt – something that must be in short supply in Chad, which has just ordered a second consignment of Madagascar's artemisia-based Covid-Organics remedy.

No word on whether it also got a discount deal on any huge stashes of surplus sweets, but Chad is probably too busy giving its army leaders their marching orders to indulge a sweet tooth: General Ahmat Koussou Moursaal was relieved of duty after accusing President Idriss Déby of neglecting troops and victims of former dictator Hissène Habré.

Seems General Moursaal forgot that one is not supposed to bite the hand that feeds you sweets.

Ethiopia

Burundi went ahead with elections



Stranded: Ethiopian domestic workers in Beirut have been abandoned by their employers and now by their embassy too (Photo: Marwan Naamani via Getty Images)

in the middle of the pandemic, and Guinea got to vote in a controversial constitutional referendum, but Ethiopia has decided it won't send its own citizens to the polls in August after all.

Parliament has voted to keep Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in office for now, and not everyone is okay with that. Opposition politician Keria Ibrahim resigned as speaker of the upper house in protest, saying delaying the election

was in violation of the constitution.

While those tensions simmer at home, circumstances are growing more distressing abroad: growing numbers of Ethiopians working as domestic workers in Lebanon are seeking refuge at the consulate there, after being turned out into the street by employers hit by the country's economic crisis. But it seems the Ethiopian consulate is not opening its doors. So the women are sleeping rough on its doorstep, and have effectively been abandoned.

Meanwhile Abiy Ahmed's 2019 Nobel peace prize continues to gather dust.

Tanzania, Djibouti, Mali and Senegal

President John Magufuli has thanked the people of Tanzania for eradicating Covid-19 using the power of prayer. He has provided no evidence to support this claim – and urged people to continue taking precautions, just in case.

In other countries, though, protest is proving more popular than prayer. Huge crowds came out in the Malian capital of Bamako, for instance, demanding the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who they accuse of failing to manage the country's economy and security situation.

In Djibouti, demonstrations began following the circulation of a video clip featuring pilot Fouad Youssuf Ali, who said he had been tortured by authorities after being arrested, supposedly for treason.

And in Senegal, youthful protesters took to the streets, angry over Covid-19 lockdown measures they say are crushing their economic prospects. And instead of responding with force, the government...*checks notes*...eased some of the measures. Maybe there's something to this people power thing after all.

Equatorial Guinea

And, finally, there was a presidential birthday on the continent this week as President Obiang Nguema turned 78. The day featured a lovely cake adorned with (you guessed it!) a photo of himself. The real icing on top is that he's just two months away from celebrating 41 years in power. It just goes to show that anything really is possible if you just hang in there long enough – apparently you can even have your cake and eat it. ■



Cake boss: The president celebrates his own reflection (Photo: Government of Equatorial Guinea)

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The Week in Numbers

200,000

The threshold of Covid-19 cases crossed in Africa this week. Just ten countries account for 75% of these cases, according to the World Health Organisation. South Africa is the worst-affected – it alone accounts for a quarter of all cases in Africa.

9-12 months

The length of time that Ethiopia has delayed its general elections. This means that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed could have an extra year in office – or even longer if there are further delays. The parliamentarians who approved the delay said that the vote will only be rescheduled once the threat from Covid-19 has diminished.

60

The number of Facebook accounts of activists and bloggers in Tunisia that were recently deactivated without warning. Facebook claims the deactivations were due to “a technical error”, but just 14 of these accounts have been restored. Around 60% of Tunisians use the social media platform, and it is a vital advocacy tool for civil society.

40%

The percentage by which Nigeria's government proposes to slash its budget for primary healthcare. Pandemic, what pandemic? The decreased budget is supposedly due to a sharp decline in oil revenues. Nigeria currently spends less than 5% of its federal budget on health.



(Photo: Oupa Nkosi)

\$24,000

The amount of money that Tom Thabane (pictured), the former prime minister of Lesotho, and his wife allegedly paid to assassins to have his ex-wife killed in 2017. The figure comes from a police affidavit. Thabane has not yet been charged with the murder, although his current wife is already in custody and awaiting trial.

Zimbabwe

'There's nothing to see here'

Zimbabwe denies coup rumours while rounding up opposition.

Kudzai Mashininga

On Wednesday, Zimbabwe's top generals attended an extraordinary press briefing delivered by Home Affairs Minister Kazembe Kazembe. The last time so many senior uniforms had appeared before the media was to announce the toppling of Robert Mugabe during the 2017 coup.

A coup was also on the agenda this time. "Claims of a military coup ... amount to the mere agenda setting by merchants of discord amongst our people, with the support of their foreign handlers," said Kazembe. He said that certain pastors, journalists and opposition party members were working to topple President Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration, but that the government remains firmly in control of the security situation.



Hard talk: Generals address the media in 2017 during the military coup (Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP)

These claims have been accompanied this month by a flurry of arrests of perceived critics of the state. More than a dozen senior officials in the opposition Movement for Democratic Change were detained, including vice-president Tendai Biti and Joanna Mamombe, the country's youngest MP. Mamombe's arrest comes just weeks after she and two other women leaders in the party were abducted and sexually assaulted by security forces after attending a protest rally. The other two women were also arrested along with Mamombe this week.

A number of lawyers have also been detained, including three who were involved in the legal challenge against the president's 2018 election victory.

"We can't breathe," tweeted Zimbabwe opposition leader Nelson Chamisa on Sunday, echoing the last words of George Floyd, the American man killed by police in Minneapolis.

The crackdown takes place against the backdrop of a worsening economic situation, with the price of some staple goods having doubled in the last month.



Tanzania

President tightens his grip

Simon Mkina

On Wednesday, after three days of public consultation, Tanzania's parliament passed the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act Number 3 of 2020. Critics say that the controversial new laws threaten the foundations of the country's democracy.

The laws grant immunity from prosecution while in office to the president, the vice-president, the prime minister, the speaker and deputy speaker of the National Assembly, and the chief justice. Legal suits cannot now be brought against them directly, but must be brought against the Attorney-General.

They also give the president significantly more control over parliamentary business.

The new laws must be signed by the president before it comes into force.

Speaking in parliament, Attorney-General Adelardus Kilangi said that the new law was necessary to allow Tanzania's leaders to "work smoothly for the people and safeguard the status of the president".

Civil society groups and opposition parties have reacted with strong criticism.

"Contained within these amendments are proposals that fundamentally alter the fabric of our society, in particular with regards to the rule of law," said a coalition of leading civil society organisations in a joint statement. "By preventing individuals who hold these offices from being held directly accountable in a court of law, the amendments serve to erode accountability in the country."

The new laws grant immunity from prosecution while in office

Azaveli Lwaitama, a political scientist and former lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam, told the *Mail & Guardian* that the new law may concentrate too much power in the hands of the president. "The President who cannot be prosecuted and who has power to determine the business of the parliament is an imperial president and not a republican president," he said.

Most residents interviewed in Dar es Salaam were unaware of the legislative changes taking place in the capital Dodoma. Live broadcasts of parliament were halted when Magufuli came to power in 2016. ■



Identity politics: the uninvited guests at a Black Panther family reunion
(Photo: Chip Somodevilla via Getty)

Photo story

Kente stop, won't stop

Kiri Rupiah

On June 8, a small group of lawmakers with the Democratic Party in the USA donned stoles made of kente fabric before kneeling on the floor of the US Capitol for nearly nine minutes. Among them was House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Pelosi was born on a Tuesday in 1940. Had her birthplace been in Ghana, her name would be Abena – the name traditionally given to Ghanaian women born on Tuesday – and perhaps then she would have understood the significance of the cloth. The gesture by Abena Pelosi and others was meant to show solidarity for George Floyd and his harrowing death, as they unveiled their proposed police reform legislation. The move drew widespread criticism from observers who felt they had used the traditional West African textile as a political prop.

In addition to the cloth, the act of kneeling, especially given the manner of Floyd's death, was especially tone deaf.

Our advice: Make laws, not fashion statements. ■

After ousting a dictator, Sudanese revolutionaries turn their attention to Covid-19

Mark Weston

Although few countries in the world were well prepared for the coronavirus, Sudan was less prepared than most. Its government spends less than \$100 per capita every year on healthcare. It has 10 times fewer doctors per person and eight times fewer nurses than Italy and Spain. In the whole country there are fewer than 200 intensive care beds for a population of 42-million people.

But Sudan has one thing that doesn't appear on World Health Organisation databases and that most countries don't have – neighbourhood resistance committees. There are hundreds of these committees around the country, typically made up of around 40 volunteers ranging in age from 17 to 70, although most are in their 20s. They came to prominence in early 2019 during the country's revolution, when they organised local protest marches against the 30-year rule of dictator Omar al-Bashir – marches which ultimately led to Bashir's ouster.

The coronavirus pandemic came at a bad time for Sudan's fragile transition. The health impacts are a test of the competence of the civilian-run ministry of health but the virus's

economic impacts could be an even greater threat. With inflation already running at over 80% and the value of the Sudanese pound plummeting against the dollar, curfews have brought a halt to an economy that was in dire need of a boost.

Sudan's government spends less than \$100 per capita every year on healthcare. There are fewer than 200 intensive care beds for a population of 42-million people

Rising bread and fuel prices were the spark for the uprising against al-Bashir, and many Sudanese are worried that if the economic misery intensifies, the risk of a coup by military members of the government or by one of the country's many armed groups will increase.

The neighbourhood resistance committees see themselves as the guardians of the revolution, and to help the democratic process to stay on track, they have mucked in to combat the pandemic. They are helping to

distribute hand sanitiser; sterilising markets, mosques and bus stands; enforcing social distance in queues outside bakeries; and educating people – using face-to-face sessions, social media and street graffiti – about how to prevent infection.

One young resistor is Hadara (it's not considered safe to publish their full names). He and his peers have been making hand sanitisers, using alcohol that is sometimes used for making illegal liquor in a country where the manufacture and consumption of alcohol is prohibited. "The health infrastructure is hugely depleted," Hadara said. "If Covid-19 explodes in Sudan I'm afraid the health sector won't be able to cope. We try to help them because we want the revolutionary government to succeed."

The neighbourhood resistance committees see themselves as the guardians of the revolution, and have mucked in to combat the pandemic

The committees are also helping to mitigate the economic impacts of the disease by distributing bread, sugar and cooking gas to those confined to their homes, and delivering food to street children. They are also helping to identify the poorest families in each neighbourhood — those whose survival



Revolutionary zeal: Sudanese volunteers clean a street in Khartoum, next to Covid-19-themed graffiti (Photo: Ashraf Shazly/AFP)

depends on daily income — so that they can receive help from the government.

Although their work is making a difference, some resistance committee members are keen to get back to more traditional revolutionary activities. "It shouldn't be up to resistance committees to deliver coronavirus services. But because the government hasn't been able to carry out its duties at the local level, we have no choice but to get involved," said a resistance committee volunteer. ■

*Mark Weston is a consultant and writer based in Khartoum. He is the author of the travel memoir *The Ringtone and the Drum*. An extended version of this piece was first broadcast as a radio feature on BBC Radio 4's *From Our Own Correspondent**



The stain of history

Simon Allison

In Belgium, statues and busts of King Léopold II are being daubed with red paint by protesters who think that the Belgian monarch should be vilified, not celebrated. At least one statue of the king – in the city of Antwerp – has already been taken down by local authorities.

The notorious king claimed the entirety of what is today the Democratic Republic of Congo as his personal property, despite never setting foot there. An estimated ten million Congolese were killed during his ruthless, merciless rule, which was designed only to extract maximum profit for Belgium – no matter what the

cost in black lives.

Another statue to fall over the past week was that of Edward Colston, a notorious slave trader, whose likeness stood in the British port city of Bristol for more than a century – the same port from which he ran his slaving empire. Colston oversaw the shipment of 84,500 enslaved men and women to Europe and America. Most were from west Africa, and a quarter died in the squalid holds of Colston's ships. His statue was torn down by protesters on Sunday, and unceremoniously dumped into the harbour.

As Black Lives Matter protests gather momentum around the world – sparked by the brutal killing of George Floyd by American police – expect more monuments to racism to meet a similar fate. ■

Illustration: John McCann

Samuel Ajiekah Abwue, aka Samuel Wazizi, 1984 – 2019

Remembering the Cameroonian journalist who died in police custody

Daniel Ekonde

The last time journalist Tah Jarvis Mai heard from his friend and colleague Samuel Wazizi was in early August 2019, when Wazizi wrote him a message saying he had been arrested.

Mai told the *Mail & Guardian* he raced to the police precinct in Buea where he was being held, but could not bail him out immediately. He never saw his friend again.

On August 17, Wazizi would die in government custody – but the government refused to acknowledge anything was wrong. His death was only confirmed last week.

“We are still shocked that authorities disappeared Wazizi and then covered up his death for 10 months,” said Felix Agbor Nkongho, the president of the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa.

Before his death, Samuel Wazizi worked for a local TV station in Buea, the capital of Cameroon’s English-speaking south-west region.

Mai worked with Wazizi for three years, and witnessed him “working

tirelessly” to put together his popular show *Hala ya Matter*, which focused on societal issues and captivated audiences in Buea.

Ngando Boris, a regular viewer, believes Wazizi touched on issues people felt were ignored, also noting that people wanted to hear Wazizi “talk the news in Pidgin, not English”.

“I always increased the volume because he talked about things around us.”

“He had a slot on his programme *E Don Happen* – that was the most interesting part of the show. That’s where I always increased the volume because it talked about things around us, things affecting us,” he said.

Mai remembers Wazizi as a consummate professional who was dynamic in his work. “He was a very energetic and hard-working man – he wasn’t just a presenter.” ■

Pierre Nkurunziza, 1964 – 2020

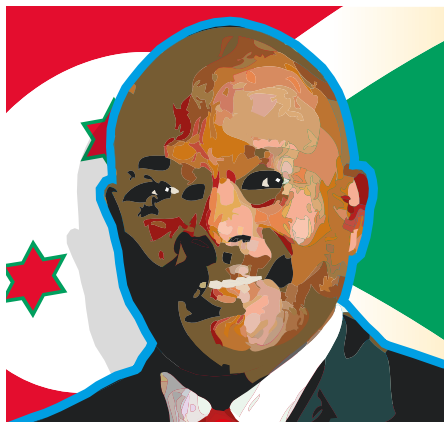
Burundi's president put politics before the pandemic. Now he's dead

Simon Allison

On Saturday afternoon, Pierre Nkurunziza was attending a volleyball match. Shortly afterwards, Burundi's famously all-action president – a regular on the football pitch, and so fond of athletic wear that he voted last month in an Adidas tracksuit – started to feel unwell. He was rushed to Fiftieth Anniversary Hospital in Karuzi.

On Sunday, according to a government statement, he started to feel better. He received visitors at the hospital. But the next day, on Monday morning, he had a heart attack, after which his condition declined rapidly. Despite hours of frantic medical treatment, doctors were unable to revive him.

This is not how Nkurunziza planned to depart the presidency. In fact, he did not want to go at all. After fiddling the rules to give himself another term in 2015, he forced through constitutional amendments in 2018 that would have allowed him to stay on even longer. To do



so, he had unleashed a wave of violence across the country, empowering and arming youth militias affiliated with the ruling party to torture, rape and kill on his behalf.

Hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled their country. Most remain refugees.

But in a twist that appeared to take Nkurunziza by surprise, extreme violence does not earn people's trust and respect – or their votes. So unpopular had he become that the generals and senior officials in his party laid down the law earlier this year. They told him that they could not risk him running again for president, because he would lose.

This must have come as a blow to Nkurunziza's famously fragile ego (three schoolgirls were once detained for doodling on a picture of the president's face in their school books; two football administrators were once charged with "conspiracy against the president" after

he suffered some tough tackles in a friendly match).

With few other options, the president reluctantly agreed to step down from office, but he did take steps to ensure an opulent and influential post-presidency. He secured for himself the title of “Paramount Leader, Champion of Patriotism and Leadership Core”, along with a golden handshake in excess of half a million dollars. The state would also pay him a salary for the rest of his life and give him a luxury villa.

Politics in the pandemic

The elections came and went on May 20. Nkurunziza’s successor Evariste Ndayishimiye – who, like Nkurunziza, came to prominence during Burundi’s civil war and is also fond of a tracksuit – won in a vote that was marred by accusations of irregularities. But the Constitutional Court on Thursday upheld the presidential election result. Nkurunziza was due to hand over power in August.

While Nkurunziza and his allies were playing politics, Burundi was thrust into another crisis – the Covid-19 pandemic. Unwilling to let the coronavirus interfere with the political transition, Nkurunziza’s administration chose to ignore the problem. It did not introduce any form of physical distancing. Political rallies continued, as did sports matches. The government even expelled the World Health Organisation after it questioned official statistics, which at the time claimed that there had been just a few dozen

confirmed cases of the virus. There are now 83, according to the official tally. Health workers in Burundi say that infection rates are far higher.

The first lady’s health status has fuelled speculation that Nkurunziza also had Covid-19. This has been reported as fact, but has not been verified by the government

One of those confirmed cases is Denise Bucumi Nkurunziza, the president’s wife. She was airlifted to Kenya last week for treatment, accompanied by three bodyguards who had also tested positive.

The first lady’s status has fuelled speculation that Nkurunziza also had Covid-19. This has been reported as fact by some local media outlets, but has not been verified, and the government’s statement made no reference to the coronavirus.

Burundi has lost its Paramount Leader, Champion of Patriotism and Leadership Core. But perhaps it has gained an opportunity to finally react seriously to Covid-19; and, in Nkurunziza’s absence, a chance to overturn the rotten and violent political system over which he presided. ■

Illustration: John McCann

Red, green and gold

The remarkable history of pan-African flags – and the woman who inspired them. **Shola Lawal**



A casual glance at the flags of Africa makes it seem as if dozens of other countries hired a single, lazy designer who, instead of coming up with a bespoke flag for each nation, simply arranged the same few colours in slightly different shapes and configurations.

Guinea: vertical stripes in red, gold and green. Mali: vertical stripes in green, gold and red. Senegal: identical to Mali, just with a green star in the middle. Ghana: like Senegal, but the star is black and the stripes are horizontal. Guinea-Bissau and Benin: almost identical blocks of red, gold and green, except the colours are in a different order and Guinea-Bissau sports a black star like Ghana.

And on it goes. The red, gold and green motif repeats itself on the national flag of at least 23 African countries. But this is no coincidence – nor is it the work of a lazy designer.

Instead, the flags represent an intentional show of support and solidarity from when, in the 1960s, dizzying waves of nationalism swept across the continent and countries yanked their freedom from colonial Europe.



Theodosiah Okoh (left) never got the credit she deserved for designing Ghana's famous flag, which has become central to the identity of both the country (right) and the continent (Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images)

The colours of an African empire

Red. Yellow. Green. The colours – both a reminder for countries whose independence was slow to come that they were not alone, and a warning to the colonisers that their oppressive systems would be conquered in their entirety – were borrowed from Ethiopia's 123-year-old banner.

Imperial Ethiopia, whose armies made short work of encroaching Italian troops, was one of only two African nations, along with Liberia, never colonised (save for a short Italian occupation). Nationalist leaders saw the country as a beacon of hope. The Ethiopian court's tricolour flag was originally inspired by the rainbow, according to historian Whitney Smith.

The same colours would be appropriated by Rastafarianism, the religion which accords divine status to Emperor Haile Selassie.

Ghana was the first country to pick up on Ethiopia's colour scheme. Kwame Nkrumah, the country's first president and liberation leader, is often given credit for the design. But it was, in fact, a 35-year-old artist and sportswoman named Theodosiah Okoh who came up with it, after answering a national call for new flag ideas.

Ghana's new leadership wanted something symbolically appropriate to replace the flag of the Gold Coast colony – a blue ensign featuring an

Independence Day: The British royal standard is lowered, and the flag of Ghana raised, at a ceremony in Accra marking Ghana's independence in 1957. The new flag replaced the Gold Coast flag (below)



elephant, a palm tree and a too-red sunset below Britain's Union Jack. Harcourt Fuller, a history professor at Georgia State University notes that "the position of the Gold Coast below the Union Jack may have reflected its lower status as a colony of a superior imperial power".

Okoh's design was a comprehensive rejection of the old flag. Red was for the blood spilt in the struggle for independence. Yellow for the vast reserves of gold and minerals in Ghana – and reminiscent of the lustrous banners of the ancient Ashanti Empire, that featured a golden stool set in black. Green for the land; for the bounties of its harvest. On the yellow middle stripe, Okoh placed a black star.

"I added the black star for the colour of the black people," Okoh said in a 2013 interview.

Erased from history

As African colonies liberated themselves, one after the other, they were inspired by independent Ghana's new flag. First Guinea, then Cameroon, Senegal, Togo and the Republic of Rwanda took the colours. Mali, the Republic of Congo and the Republic of Dahomey (now Benin) followed. The colours became synonymous with the wave of pan-Africanism that was sweeping the continent – a connection so powerful that the colours are even featured on more recent flags, such as that of post-apartheid South Africa.

This symbolism has its roots in Okoh's design. Unfortunately, there is little documentation of her flag design process. It is perhaps why her contributions appear to have been underplayed and subtly erased over the years.

Also, Ghana's flag has another popular origin story.

In the 1930s, when Nkrumah was studying in the United States, he met and was greatly influenced by Marcus Garvey – one of the intellectual architects of pan-African thought.

Garvey convened the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914 and took for its banners the colours red, black and green – another modification of Ethiopia's flag. In 1919, he founded the Black Star Line, a shipping venture that would transport African-Americans to Africa and fulfil his dream of a connected black nation. The Black Star Line's emblem was a red banner with a five-pointed black star at its centre.

“The flag of Ghana was announced to the world on 10 October 1956, and was, as we all know it today, resplendent in its Ethiopian colours emblazoned in the Black Star which Nkrumah had borrowed from Garvey,” wrote William Crampton, a prominent British vexillologist.

But Nkrumah could not have borrowed the black star, because Nkrumah did not design the flag. The detail in Okoh's design may have prompted Nkrumah's approval, but that's about it.

Flag designers are often left unrecognised. Nigeria's flag designer Taiwo Akinkunmi was compensated at independence but lived in poverty for years until Sunday Olawale Olaniran, a researcher, found him and brought his plight to the limelight. Okoh was never even informed that her design had been selected – she found out when she saw images of her flag being hoisted during Ghana's independence day



Visionary: Marcus Garvey is considered to be a founding father of pan-Africanism
(Photo: MPI/Getty Images)



Patriot games:
Supporters of
Ghana's Black
Stars football
teams at a 2013
Africa Cup of
Nations match
in South Africa
(Photo: Stephane
De Sakutin/
Getty Images)

ceremonies. There were no approval letters, no official emissaries, no attribution, nothing.

An enduring symbol

Okoh died in 2015. At her funeral, Okoh's coffin was wrapped in the very emblem she created 58 years before.

"She was a huge inspiration to me as an artist," wrote Ian Jones-Quartey, a Cartoon Network producer and Okoh's grandson. "Her presence in our family made the path of art viable and even honourable. I don't think I could be doing the work I do now without her." Jones-Quartey, creator of the popular animated series *Steven Universe*, based the character of Nanefua Pizza – the sweater-loving, dog-fearing, matriarch of a Ghanaian family business – on his grandmother.

Even in death, Okoh's Black Star lives on. It is reborn every time the Black Stars – the national football team – take to the pitch; and every time Ghana's national anthem is sung. The third stanza reads: *Raise high the flag of Ghana/ And one with Africa advance/ Black Star of hope and honour/ To all who thirst for liberty/ Where the banner of Ghana freely flies/ May the way to freedom truly lie.*

These words may have been written for Ghana, but they apply equally to the other 20-plus African countries whose flags are inspired by Okoh's design. Red, green and gold is not just a pretty colour scheme. It is solidarity. ■

NAME THAT PAN-AFRICAN FLAG

The flags of at least 23 African countries are inspired by the same colour palette. Can you identify them?



How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS'
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we will send you the
answers immediately.

0-8

"These all
look the same
to me."

9-15

"I think every
flag is unique and
beautiful."

16+

"I bleed red,
green and
gold."

A microscopic malaria breakthrough – with huge implications

Simon Allison

Kenya's Mwea district is popular with people who study mosquitos. It's a rice growing area, and rice requires constant irrigation, so conditions are perfect for mosquitos to breed and survive.

"It's one area where we can reliably get mosquitos all year round," said Jeremy Herren, a scientist at the Nairobi-based International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology.

Despite the high density of mosquitos in Mwea, malaria rates in the area are relatively low. It's a paradox that has puzzled entomologists, but Herren and his small team think they may have solved the mystery. If they are right, the implications could be enormous.

Despite the high density of mosquitos in Mwea, malaria rates are low

When the researchers studied the microbes that live inside the gut of the mosquitos in the area, one microbe in particular stood out. It's called Microsporidia MB. On further

examination, the team realised that mosquitos carrying Microsporidia MB did not become infected with Plasmodium – the parasite that causes malaria in humans.

In other words: mosquitos carrying Microsporidia MB don't cause malaria.

Now Herren and his team are wondering: if they can get more Microsporidia MB into mosquito populations, can they limit the transmission of malaria?

"We think that this thing can potentially have a big impact," Herren told the *Mail & Guardian*. So far, experiments have been successfully conducted in populations of caged mosquitos. The next step is to identify a site to test their theory in nature, and to figure out the mechanics of doing so.

An estimated 435,000 deaths were caused by malaria last year, of which 93% were in Africa. Herren warned that the experiments with Microsporidia MB are no silver bullet – one microbe is not going to solve malaria on its own – but anything that may slow transmission of the disease is worth celebrating. ■

In Zambia, Covid-19 has claimed democracy, not human life

Sishuwa Sishuwa

Zambian democracy is under attack. The erosion of democratic principles started under President Michael Sata, who led the Patriotic Front to victory in 2011. This trajectory has further deteriorated under his successor, President Edgar Lungu.

In addition to successfully pressuring the Constitutional Court to allow him to run for a third term, Lungu has presided over the shutdown of the main independent newspaper, almost succeeded in muzzling civil society, and created a general climate of fear.

Amidst this changing political character of Zambia's democratic tradition, the arrival of Covid-19 proved, for the authorities, to be a blessing in disguise.

First, the pandemic has provided a lifeline to Lungu's power push ahead of the 2021 elections. As the pandemic hit, Parliament was debating a proposed constitutional amendment that would weaken democratic institutions such

as elections, the judiciary and the constitution itself. After failing to raise the two-thirds majority required to pass it, the ruling party asked the Speaker to abruptly suspend Parliament using the coronavirus as a pretext.

Second, the ruling party has pursued authoritarian repression under the guise of fighting the disease. In April, the broadcasting licence of Zambia's leading private television station was cancelled, just days after it declined a government request to broadcast Covid-19 adverts for free. Meanwhile, radio stations that host opposition figures have been violently attacked by ruling party supporters, who insist that no form of campaigning should happen until the pandemic is over.

Civil liberties have been infringed and public meetings by civil society and opposition parties are proscribed on health concerns – even though the ruling party continues to hold theirs. In the words of one government minister, “when it comes to fighting Covid-19, human rights are suspended”.

With the official death toll standing at 10, with 1,252 infections, the major casualty of the coronavirus disease in Zambia is not human life but the country's democratic tradition. ■

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'Don't shoot': The #BlackLivesMatter movement should galvanise Africans to hold their own police to account (Photo: Sean Rayford via Getty Images)

We need an outpouring of outrage about Africans killed by security forces

As Africa mourns George Floyd, we must look in the mirror and address police brutality on our own continent. Solomon Dersso

The brutal death of George Floyd, an African-American, at the hands of police in the United States, triggered widespread condemnation from African leaders, including the chair and deputy chair of the African Union Commission.

Rightly so: Floyd's dying words – "I can't breathe" – not only express the physical suffocation from the knee that

robbed him of his life as it pinned his neck to the ground, but also serves as a metaphor for black people choking under the weight of systemic racism and discrimination. This is racism and discrimination that affects people of African descent across the world, in one form or another.

This outpouring of grief and the call for justice was not limited to our

continental union and governments. People on our continent joined those mourning Floyd's death in the US in expressing their solidarity. Social media is awash with the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticeforGeorgeFloyd.

Needless to say, the expression of solidarity from the continent is also a manifestation of its attachment with Africans in the diaspora and people of African descent. It is also an acknowledgment of the interdependence of the fate of the continent with the fate of people of colour the world over.

The sanctity of human life

For us on the continent to be true to the spirit of the outrage over the heinous murder of George Floyd, we should start by looking at ourselves.

Enforcement of the Covid-19 response measures has been heavily securitised in a number of countries. The resultant heavy-handed approach of security personnel led to various violations including killings, torture and inhumane treatment, gender-based violence and various forms of assault and harassment. In some of these cases, including in Kenya and Uganda, it led to the presidents of these countries expressing regret for the violent acts of security personnel.

As the brutal killing of George Floyd triggers protests in the US and other parts of the world for what it constitutes and represents, it is incumbent on us in our respective countries to have a much-needed conversation about these

killings and other acts of violence visited on our civilian population during this Covid-19 lockdown period. These conversations should be accompanied by an outpouring of outrage.

How can we express outrage about the murder of George Floyd but remain silent on that of Tina Ezekwe in Nigeria, Yasin Hussein in Kenya, Collins Khosa in South Africa and many others on our continent who also lost their lives because of the brutal use of force by security forces? Would failing to condemn these brutalities manifest an admission that those on the receiving end of the violence don't deserve respect for the sanctity of their lives?

Those responsible for such killings should be made to face the full force of the law. It is also incumbent on us – both as state actors with primary responsibility, and as non-state actors – to remove the institutional and historical disposition of security forces to resort to the unjustified use of force against the civilian population, particularly impoverished people, and create conditions for full adherence by state institutions with the principle of the sanctity of human life. Without these, the descent of the brutality of security forces against civilians into a major human rights crisis will not be arrested. ■

Solomon Ayele Dersso chairs the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. He is also the founding director of Amani Africa, an Addis Ababa-based continental policy research think tank

Investigation

The private plane, the minister and the \$1.3-billion scandal

Lionel Faull and Margot Gibbs

The high life: The lavishly appointed interior of the luxury jet at the heart of a massive corruption scandal (Photo: Bode Johnson's affidavit)

On the evening of Friday 29 May, a luxury private plane landed at Montréal-Trudeau International Airport in Canada. It was a Bombardier 6000 jet, with the tail number M-MYNA and a resplendent green and white livery – the colours of Nigeria's flag.

Babatunde Olabode 'Bode' Johnson, an asset recovery lawyer representing Nigeria's government, had been monitoring the plane on its journey from Dubai to Montreal, with a stop at Shannon Airport in Ireland. He sprang into action.

Johnson contacted Canadian authorities and urged them to impound the plane. The plane, he argued, rightfully belongs to the Nigerian government. "We had just a few hours to get a legal team in place on the ground there in Canada to file the injunction. It was 3am in Nigeria when I made a statement to

the judge via video link," he said.

Johnson's argument worked. The judge ordered that the plane be grounded until further notice.

A \$1.3-billion scandal

This particular plane is at the centre of one of Nigeria's biggest corruption scandals. In 1998, in the last weeks of Sani Abacha's military regime, then-oil minister Dan Etete effectively awarded the oil prospecting rights to the huge OPL-245 block to a company called Malabu Oil and Gas.

Etete secretly controlled this company.

After Abacha's sudden death, Etete retained the rights as a private citizen until he offloaded them to oil giants Shell and Eni in 2011, who paid a combined \$1.3-billion to the Nigerian government.

Investigators allege some

\$336-million then trickled down to Etete via several bank accounts, and that one of the first payments he made, \$54m, was the main installment on a luxury jet – a Bombardier 6000 with the tail number M-MYNA. He painted it in green and white.

The entire OPL-245 deal is now subject to a corruption trial in Italy, where Etete is an accused, together with alleged middlemen Eni and Shell, and several of their executives.

All parties in the Milan trial have denied the charges against them.

The Nigerian authorities have also charged Etete and several others linked to Malabu with money laundering in connection with the onward flow of funds from the OPL-245 deal.

He has denied any wrongdoing and has dismissed the allegations as “political propaganda”.

Nigeria issued an arrest warrant for him earlier this year. Authorities are understood to be seeking his extradition.

Chasing the money

Nigeria also wants to get its money back, which is where Bode Johnson and his team of asset recovery lawyers comes in. Johnson was appointed by the Nigerian government in 2016 to recover assets from the OPL245 deal. His firm stands to receive 5% of any funds that they are able to recover.

It is not yet clear, however, whether Etete is still the beneficial owner of the plane, which has a current market value of about \$20-million. It is registered to Tibit Ltd, an anonymously owned



Grounded: Private jet M-MYNA, pictured above, is at the centre of one of Nigeria's biggest corruption scandals (Photo: Gerhard Rühl via PlaneSpotters.net)

company incorporated in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). BVI records suggest that Tibit's sole director is Giuseppina Russa, who was previously an executive assistant of sales for plane manufacturer Bombardier. She is not thought to be Tibit's beneficial owner. When contacted for comment, Russa said she was not the director of Tibit, and had asked to be removed as a director a number of years ago.

Johnson said that he suspects that the jet was being flown to Montreal for a service ahead of a possible sale. For now – pending further legal developments – he has succeeded in halting any potential sale. It remains to be seen, however, whether he and Nigeria will succeed in getting any money back.

A lawyer for Tibit said they would “vigorously contest” Nigeria's legal moves. ■

This investigation has been edited for length. It was first published by Finance Uncovered and Premium Times. The full investigation is available here: <https://bit.ly/NigeriaJet>



The Big Picture

Black Lives Matter: A protester in Dakar, Senegal poses for a portrait with a handmade sign reading 'No Justice, No Peace'. The brutal killing of George Floyd by police in the USA has reverberated across the world. In Africa, solidarity marches and protests have taken place in Accra, Cape Town, Dakar, Monrovia and Johannesburg. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

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