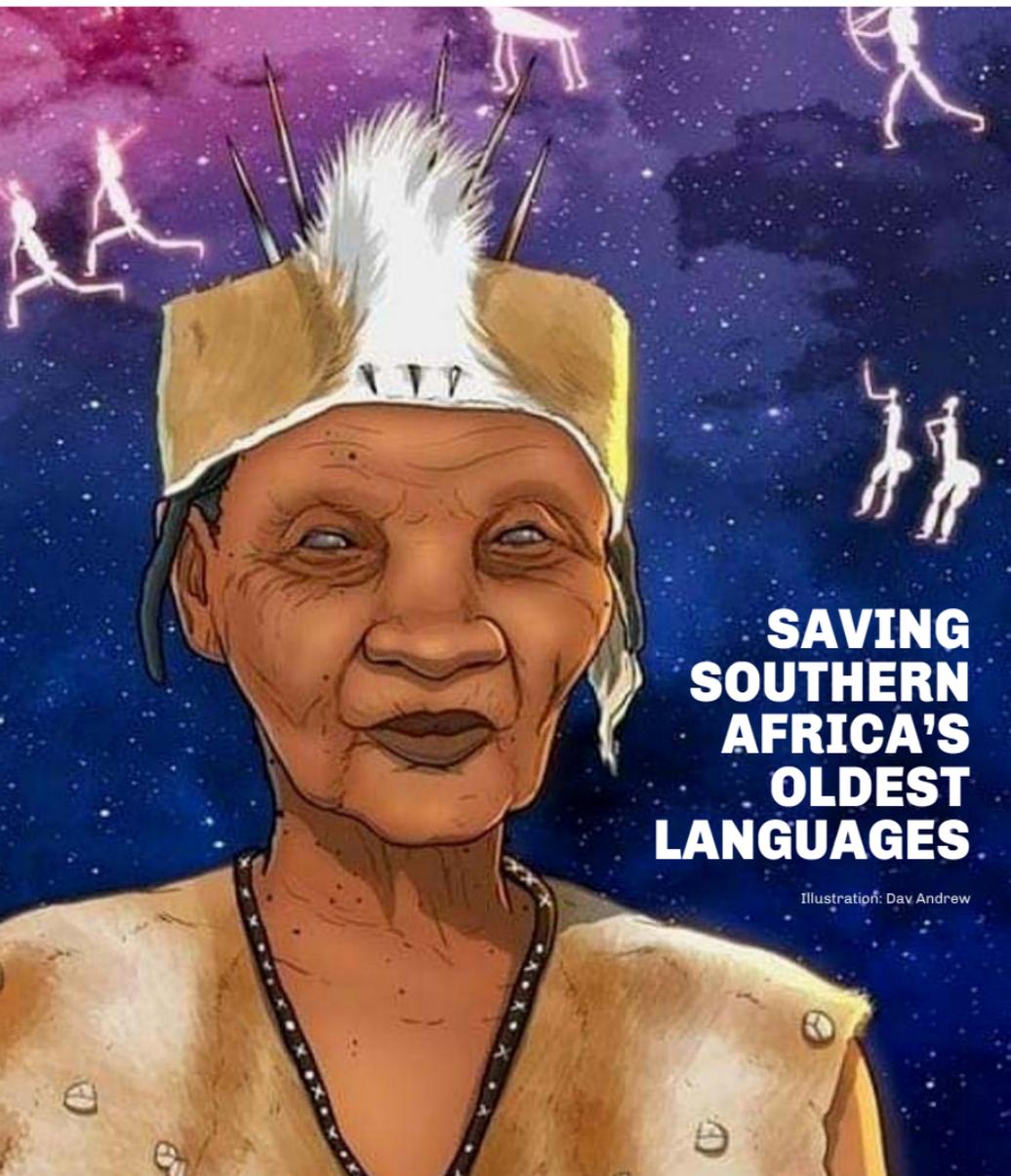


African journalism. July 18 2020

ISSUE  
NO. 14

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



**SAVING  
SOUTHERN  
AFRICA'S  
OLDEST  
LANGUAGES**

Illustration: Dav Andrew

# We'll be back after this short break...

**T**he Continent is a labour of love from a tiny team. Thank you for reading, and for sharing it with your friends, family and colleagues. We could never have reached so many people on our own.

For our own mental and physical health – it turns out that our newsroom is not immune to the pandemic – we are taking a two week hiatus. Issue 15 will be published on August 8, and it will be a good one: we've got a big investigation coming, in partnership with the Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting. Make sure you don't miss it: subscribe by sending us a message on WhatsApp (+27 73 805 6068) or email [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za).

**VOWEL MARKERS**

A	𐀀	𐀁	𐀂	E	𐀃	𐀄	𐀅
E	𐀆	𐀇	𐀈	I	𐀉	𐀊	𐀋
O	𐀌	𐀍	𐀎	O	𐀏	𐀐	𐀑
I	𐀒	𐀓	𐀔	U	𐀕	𐀖	𐀗
U	𐀘	𐀙	𐀚	N / M	𐀛	𐀜	𐀝

**NUMBERS**

0	𐀞	𐀟	𐀠	𐀡
5	𐀢	𐀣	𐀤	𐀥
10	𐀦	𐀧	𐀨	𐀩
100K	𐀪	𐀫	𐀬	𐀭
1	𐀮	𐀯	𐀰	𐀱
6	𐀲	𐀳	𐀴	𐀵
20	𐀶	𐀷	𐀸	𐀹
1M	𐀺	𐀻	𐀼	𐀽
100	𐀾	𐀿	𐁀	𐁁
1B	𐁂	𐁃	𐁄	𐁅
3	𐁆	𐁇	𐁈	𐁉
8	𐁊	𐁋	𐁌	𐁍
1000	𐁎	𐁏	𐁐	𐁑
4	𐁒	𐁓	𐁔	𐁕
9	𐁖	𐁗	𐁘	𐁙
10K	𐁚	𐁛	𐁜	𐁝

**CONSONANT BODIES**

𐁞	𐁟	𐁠	𐁡	𐁢	𐁣	𐁤	𐁥
MM	GB	KP	B	P	BY	M	
𐁦	G/V	G	N/L/Y	GW	K	KW	N
𐁧	R/H	D	L/R	Y/H	R	Y	L
𐁨	F/H/SH	CH	NN	S/SH	J	B/V	
𐁩	S	T	F/P	F	Z	B/W	S/T
𐁪	F/V	Y/GH	R/F	W	W/GH	NY	NW

**NUMBER MARKERS**

2	𐁫	𐁬	𐁭	𐁮
3	𐁯	𐁰	𐁱	𐁲
4	𐁳	𐁴	𐁵	𐁶
5	𐁷	𐁸	𐁹	𐁺
6	𐁻	𐁼	𐁽	𐁾
7	𐁿	𐂀	𐂁	𐂂
8	𐂃	𐂄	𐂅	𐂆
9	𐂇	𐂈	𐂉	𐂊

**Rewriting language:** Lotanna Igwe-Odunze, a Nigerian artist and writer, has invented a new writing system for Ìgbò. She calls it *Ídébé*. Ìgbò is usually written using Latin characters, but they do not allow for tone or the full range of Ìgbò sounds. "Our language will never truly flourish until we write and read widely in Ìgbò," Igwe-Odunze said. "Rather than having individual letters which are then combined to spell words like in English, *Ídébé* represents all the possible sounds in Ìgbò as already combined characters for each syllable the way it sounds."

## Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** There are only two speakers of the N|uu language still alive. We meet one of them (p11)
- **Ethiopia:** After the internet blackout, horrific details of violence emerge (p17)
- **Djibouti's First Lady of Film** on making her own stories (p21)
- **Inside SA's school of coffins** (p24)

# In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

## Côte d'Ivoire and Togo

This continent of ours is the Netflix of geopolitics. There's something for everyone, but sometimes there's so much of everything that we feel like switching off altogether. Then a week passes, and Africa asks: "Are you still watching?"

We're watching. Côte d'Ivoire has our attention, for one. Last week, Amadou Gon Coulibaly passed away. He wasn't just the country's prime minister, he was also the ruling party's candidate for the upcoming presidential election.

President Alassane Ouattara paid tribute, describing him as "my youngest brother, my son and my closest partner". Not to mention his hand-picked successor, leaving a gap not just in Ouattara's heart but also in his plans for an extended franchise. Despite his grief, the president may now have "no choice" but to renew himself for a third season.

What will the party decide? Will the Constitution allow another term? Will he get one anyway?

We *are* watching. But haven't we seen it all before?

## Mali

Just as you catch up on an interesting show, rumours swirl that it's getting the chop. Which brings us to Mali, where

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's presidency is at risk of cancellation after a month of protests led by opposition coalition M5-RFP.

In response a Save Keita campaign has been launched, led by the man himself, who has offered to meet with the opposition, dissolve the constitutional court, and form a new "inclusive government". And he's had his son resign as head of parliament's defence committee. He's doing so much! Except for, you know, taking the hint and stepping down.

## Uganda

The best shows don't wait to be cancelled, they finish on their own terms. Always leave them wanting more, right? They can't ask any more from the former leader of Uganda's opposition, Winnie Kiiza. She announced this week that she would not seek re-election in upcoming parliamentary elections, bringing to a close her 22-years in politics. Tip of the hat, ma'am. That run was hella long.

The country also gave us a "Next Time in Uganda" preview, after 32 people were arrested for violating curfew and social distancing guidelines, and were all forced into a tiny jail cell. With no hope of social distancing. They say hindsight is 2020. But we've also seen enough of this year to



**Stepping down: Veteran Ugandan opposition leader Winnie Kiiza has retired from elective politics** (Photo: Sumy Sadurni/AFP via Getty)

know what happens next.

### **Kenya and Zimbabwe**

Everyone loves a medical drama to binge on, but not like this.

Nurses in Zimbabwe have been protesting over unpaid Covid-19 allowances, and demanding that their salaries be paid in US dollars. And now doctors have also issued a strike notice, demanding their grievances be heard, and also that their salaries be paid in US dollars. Furthermore they want Covid-19 testing to be available at all hospitals, where proper supplies of PPE must be made available.

In Kenya this week the funeral of Doreen Adisa Lugaliki was held. She was

the first doctor to die from Covid-19 in the country. It was also reported that at least 41 employees at Pumwani Maternity Hospital in Nairobi have tested positive for the virus. In response the ministry of health said that the government would “ensure infected healthcare workers receive the best treatment”. What they failed to mention was that the state wouldn’t be paying for it.

Which has finally snapped us back to reality.

This isn’t a TV show. Our healthcare workers aren’t fictional characters, and you can’t just conjure up a happy ending for them out of thin air. These are real people. They have real lives. And they deserve more. ■

# The Week in Numbers

## 5

The number of Kenyan governors who have installed ICU beds at their private residences, just in case they contract Covid-19 and require medical assistance. This is

according to a report in *People Daily*. Kenya has 518 ICU beds, according to the Kenya Healthcare Federation and Critical Care Society, but not all are functional.

## 8

The number of candidates in the running to replace Roberto Azevedo as head of the World Trade Organization. There are three Africans among them: former Nigerian finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; Hamid Mamdouh, an Egyptian diplomat; and Amina Mohamed, the former chair of the WTO General Council from Kenya. Interviews began this week.

## 4%

The total land area of Bauchi State in Nigeria that Fulani groups have demanded be given to them by the government. This is to allow Fulani cattle herders to move their cattle across the state without coming into conflict with farmers and landowners. This has been an increasing problem in recent years. Bauchi State is examining different ways to ease tensions.



## \$12-million

The value of compensation awarded by a Kenyan court to the Owino Uhuru community in Mombasa county. The community suffered from lead poisoning from a battery smelting plant located nearby. The class action lawsuit was spearheaded by Phyllis Omido (pictured), a resident, whose baby son was diagnosed with lead poisoning.

## \$16-billion

The amount of funding raised by French oil firm Total SA for its liquified natural gas project in Mozambique.

This is one of the biggest single foreign direct investments into Africa in history, and comes despite massive

security challenges: Cabo Delgado, where Total intends to build an onshore plant, is in the midst of an insurgency.

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# South Africa

## The job loss pandemic

**At least 3-million South Africans are out of work**

**Sarah Smit**

**A**bout 3-million South Africans have lost their jobs during the country's nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19. An additional 1.5-million workers have lost their incomes as a result of the lockdown.

This is according to the findings from the National Income Dynamics Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (Nids-Cram), released on Wednesday. Researchers surveyed 7,000 workers in South Africa to compile the study, which can be considered the most nationally representative survey that currently exists.

The survey found that already precarious workers – including young people, informal workers and women – were hardest hit by the economic crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the findings, the rates of net job loss are much higher for manual labourers (-24%) compared to professionals (-5%); for those with verbal

contracts (-22%) compared to those with written contracts (-8%); for women (-26%) compared to men (-11%); and for those with matric or less (-23%) compared to those with a tertiary education (-10%).

This is in line with global trends on employment in the wake of the pandemic.

Studies by the International Labour Organisation show that informal, young and women workers have been disproportionately affected by the lockdown measures around the world.

### **This is in line with global trends on unemployment in the wake of Covid-19**

The Nids-Cram survey also found that of those workers who remained employed during the lockdown, but who lost their incomes, only 20% of them received support through government relief programmes, which have been beset with technical glitches and delays.

The Nids-Cram survey found that 47% of households reported they ran out of money to buy food in April. One in five (22%) respondents said someone in their household went hungry in the last week. Moreover, in households with children, 8% reported frequent child hunger lasting three or more days in the last week. ■

# Zimbabwe



(Photo: F1 pool/  
DPPI/AFP)

## Taking the chequered flag

### PHOTO STORY Kiri Rupiah

**I**n any index of countries listed in alphabetical order, Zimbabwe comes last. But on Sunday, the country was in pole position thanks to Stephanie Travers. She achieved a significant milestone in Formula 1 history by becoming the first black woman to stand on the podium in 70 years of the world championship.

Travers was selected by the team to receive the constructors' trophy on their behalf after Lewis Hamilton claimed a convincing victory in the Styrian Grand

Prix at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg, Austria. Living in the UK since 2004, Travers is a Petronas Trackside Fluid Engineer for Mercedes AMG. The 25-year-old Zimbabwean chemical engineer joined the team in 2019 following a rigorous five-stage selection process which saw her beating out over 7,000 applicants for the job.

There is no shortage of talent, only opportunity as evidenced by how long it took to get her on the podium. Though we are elated for her momentous accomplishment, we have to ask: why did it take so long? ■

# Mali

## Imam Dicko calls for calm

Mohamed Salaha

**M**ali's President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) has managed to cling on to power, despite weeks of increasingly fierce popular protests against his government. These culminated last Friday in enormous demonstrations in Bamako, the capital, in which several government buildings – including the state broadcaster – were occupied by protesters, who called for IBK to resign.

At least 10 people were killed in clashes between protesters and security forces.

Tensions eased on Sunday after Imam Mahmoud Dicko, who has led the protests alongside opposition groups and civil society coalitions, appealed for calm. Speaking to his supporters, he said: "Do not provoke anyone. Do not attack anyone... Before that, do not set fire to petrol stations or this district. Calm down, please! Calm down!"

He added later: "We can really find and obtain everything we want through patience and good behaviour."

President Keïta has taken some steps this week to appease the opposition to his rule. He has disbanded the Constitutional Court, which had become a lightning

rod for criticism after delivering verdicts which appeared to favour the president. His son, Karim Keïta, resigned as chair of the National Assembly's defence committee, saying that he did not want to be an "obstacle to dialogue between Malians".

And, on Wednesday, 20 opposition leaders who had been arrested over the weekend were released from detention.

**"We can really find and obtain everything we want through patience and good behaviour"**

Dicko and his supporters have criticised Keïta's administration for failing to turn around the struggling economy, and for the deteriorating security situation in the north and central parts of the country.

"If I am on the street, it is to denounce the poor management of our resources, and to tell the leaders that they are not there to live like royalty at our expense," said Oumou Tounkara Kalil, a 44-year-old private sector employee who has participated in the protests against IBK.

"The President of the Republic uses contempt as a mode of governance. He totally despises the people. His style of operating is like that of the caravan that passes by as the dogs bark," Kalil told the *Mail & Guardian*, referring to an Arabic



**Demanding change: Protesters gather outside the Salam Mosque in Badalabougou, Bamako**  
(Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP)

proverb relating to leaders ignoring criticism against them.

## **Dicko and his supporters have criticised Keïta's government for failing to turn around the struggling economy**

Lazare Tembely, the youth president of the Convergence of Republican Forces, a civil society group, said that although the protesters make some valid points, their tactics cross a line: “Forcing a president and his regime to resign is a coup by any other name. We believe it is unacceptable for a democratically elected regime to be challenged in this way on the street.”

Dr Kalidou Sidibé, a political analyst, said that the ongoing conflict is at the root

of the current political crisis. “It’s all linked to the difficult security context that the country is going through, which started in 2012. Eight years later, despite the efforts of the international community and the various commitments of civil society and political parties, Mali has still not really begun the process of exiting the conflict,” he said.

“The more there are delays, the more there are massacres and killings going on, the more the political situation in the capital becomes difficult. This is how you have to look at the current situation.”

A delegation from the Economic Community of West African States, led by former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan, arrived in Bamako on Wednesday, to mediate between the government and the political opposition in an effort to defuse tensions. ■



**Sisters in conversation:**  
Katrina Esau and Griet  
Seekoei share a joke  
(Photo: James Oatway/  
Sunday Times/Gallo)

## Saving southern Africa's oldest languages

**Language and identity are inextricably interlinked. So what happens when a language dies, or is suppressed?**

**Simon Allison and Refiloe Seiboko**

**W**hen Katrina Esau spoke to her older sister, Griet Seekoei, they spoke in N|uu. It is a language that only they – and their brother, Simon Sauls – could understand.

“Griet was a wonderful person,” Esau recalls. “Strict, but wonderful.” Ouma Griet, as she was known, died in May aged 87. Now there are just two remaining speakers of N|uu.

“It makes me very sad. No language is more important than another language,” Esau told the *Mail & Guardian*, speaking from her home in Upington in South Africa’s Northern Cape province.

## **!Honkia. Gla kye !aba? (N|uu for Hello. How are you?)**

The decline of N|uu dates all the way back to 1652, when the first Europeans arrived by ship at the Cape of Good Hope. They spoke only Dutch, and made little effort to assimilate with the thriving, complex Khoikhoi and San communities who were already living in the area. Instead, it was the locals – who themselves spoke a variety of tongues, including N|uu and Khoekhoegowab – who initiated communication.

Autshumato, the chief of the Goringhaicona, taught himself Dutch and worked as a translator between the white people and the indigenous community; his niece, Krotoa, became Jan van Riebeeck's personal translator. Between them they lay the foundations for a new language, Afrikaans, based on Dutch but borrowing heavily from indigenous words and grammar.

Over the centuries, this language – along with English, another import – became a tool of oppression against South Africa's Khoikhoi and San communities. Indigenous languages were marginalised, their speakers discriminated against, while Afrikaans was enforced as the language of education, government and work.

## **Over the centuries, Afrikaans – along with English – became a tool of oppression against South Africa's Khoikhoi and San communities**

Esau herself has spoken previously about her upbringing on a white-owned farm in the Northern Cape. Although N|uu was the language she spoke at home with her parents, the farmer threatened to shoot them if they were caught speaking it in public.

Slowly, the language disappeared from Esau's everyday life. Afrikaans dominated.

Even when South Africa threw off white rule in 1994, little changed. The new South Africa recognises 11 official languages, but N|uu is not among them. Nor is Khoekhoegowab, which although still endangered is much more widely spoken. This omission is painful, said Esau.

Esau runs a small school from her home in Upington to teach N|uu to younger generations. For her efforts in keeping the language alive, she was awarded the Order of the Baobab by former president Jacob Zuma in 2014. "We will lose knowledge if the language dies out. That is why I teach N|uu to children in the area," she said.

## **Kakapusa (Khoekhoegowab for Erasure)**

N|uu is not dead yet, and the younger generation won't let it die without



Praise singer: Bradley van Sitters ushers in the president ahead of the 2019 State of the Union address (Photo: Brenton Geach/Gallo)

a fight. Claudia du Plessis is Esau's granddaughter. She is learning to speak the language. "I did not hear it [growing up]. The whites told my grandmother not to speak N|uu because it was an 'ugly language.'

"My grandmother speaks it with me, and I'm reading books about it. I can write it well, but the language is very difficult to speak. But when you get it right, then you get it right."

Along with Deidre Jantjies and Nadine Cloete, Du Plessis is making a film about the N|uu-speaking community's practices around menstruation, showing how the taboos that exist today around a woman's body were never part of indigenous culture. This is an example of the kind of knowledge that could die out along with a language.

Katrina Esau is a consultant on the film, to make sure the actors get the words and pronunciation right. She is not a stickler, encouraging them to "introduce our own flavour", especially when it comes to writing: "The writing was invented by the colonists. Ouma [Katrina] said to write it like you understand it," Du Plessis said.

Also fighting to keep an indigenous language alive is Toroxa Breda. When he was born, his mother called him Denver. She was Khoikhoi, but gave him a name that would help him to fit in. He grew up in Cape Town, speaking Afrikaans, and identified as "coloured" – a racial classification officially defined by the apartheid government as a person of mixed European and African ancestry. For decades, Khoikhoi and San people have been subsumed into this classification – and, all too often, erased by it.

“When you’ve grown up on the Cape Flats with this coloured identity, I wonder what does this mean, who am I connected to? What connects me to these people, to this land, to Africa? I only speak the language of my former colonisers, [so] who am I?”

**“When you’ve grown up on the Cape Flats with this coloured identity, I wonder what does this mean, who am I connected to?”**

Breda began to answer that question for himself. But Khoikhoi language and culture is so marginalised that it was not easy to find the information he was looking for; sometimes, he could trace his own roots only by searching for colonial slurs like “hottentot” and “bushman”.

He began to teach himself Khoekhoegowab. It is a slow but rewarding process. “It’s only when you hear the sounds of your ancestors on your tongue that you feel a sense of belonging and the sense of being an African,” he said. “Whilst my tongue was rooted in Europe, which is Afrikaans and English, I could never feel African.”

Nor could he connect this identity with his given name. “I realised I needed to decolonise the name. There was no Denver in our community. That is a coloniser name. I gave myself the name Toroxa. That means fighting spirit.”

**||Hui !Gaeb (Khoekhoegowab for *Veiled in Clouds*)**

While N|uu may be at imminent risk of extinction, there are still more than 200,000 speakers of Khoekhoegowab – mostly in southern Namibia, where it is often called Nama. Dr Levi Namaseb, a linguistics professor, has been teaching Khoekhoegowab at the University of Namibia for 35 years.

It is, he says, a remarkable, unique language; the variety of clicks used as consonants in Khoekhoegowab and its dialects are not found in any other language, except when they have been borrowed (the clicks in Xhosa, for example, come from Khoekhoegowab). “It’s fascinating how far human nature can go in order to create communication,” he said.

Namaseb believes that human dignity and language are inextricably linked. “You lose your dignity when you speak the foreigner’s language,” he said.

He thinks that the government – both in South Africa and Namibia – needs to play a much more active role in protecting indigenous languages. “You need the hands of the government in order to bring down our language or bring it up.”

South Africa’s government is paying some attention. Typically, before

the president delivers the annual state of the nation address, he is ushered into the National Assembly by an imbongi – a poet who sings the president’s praises, usually in Xhosa or Zulu. In 2019, Cyril Ramaphosa broke with tradition by asking the National Khoi and San Council to nominate a Khoekhoegowab-speaking imbongi. The chair of the council nominated Bradley van Sitters.

“He said put on your skins, make us proud, make the nation proud,” Van Sitters recalls. And so he did. On the night, ancient Khoikhoi prayers echoed off the walls of the Parliament building in Cape Town, and Van Sitter received a standing ovation.

Van Sitters grew up in Cape Town, speaking Afrikaans. But as he learnt more about his roots, he felt increasingly alienated by his mother tongue. “When I go to the Cape Flats and ask the community, ‘What language do you speak?’, they say they speak Afrikaans. So I ask them: Do you call yourself an Afrikaner? They say no, we are not Afrikaners. There’s something interesting in that. We are speaking the language, but there is a complete dissociation from the identity attached to it.”

He resolved to find his own identity by learning Khoekhoegowab. He traveled to Namibia, where the language was taught at university – Dr Namaseb was his teacher – and then focused his own research and energies on keeping the language alive. In Cape Town, he set up classes, and encouraged everyone he knew to call the city by its Khoikhoi name: ||Hui !Gaeb, meaning ‘veiled in clouds’.

When he spoke to his mother about it, she said that she remembered her grandmother speaking Khoikhoi, with other elders, under a tree, but that the younger generations never learned. This was the first he had heard about the Khoikhoi roots of his own family. By rediscovering his language, Van Sitters was rediscovering his identity.

“The genius of people, their secrets, their oral traditions, are all intermingled into the nature of the language. There are so many layers within the language itself. It’s intergenerational truth that is being passed on, through the medium of language. We’ve lost that connection, having gone through slavery, oppression. Language was my means to make that connection again,” he said. ■




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**Cover Art:** Dav Andrew is a Cape Town-based illustrator and designer known for his Afrofuturist drawings. He was inspired to draw Ouma Griet Seekoei after her death in May, noting that she was “a language activist, fighting for government to recognize her endangered language and help it survive”.

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

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



(Photo: DEA / V. Giannella / De Agostini / Getty Images)

- 1.** Who is Malawi's new president?
- 2.** What is the capital of Angola?
- 3.** The tallest building in Africa is in which city?
- 4.** The Ashanti Empire was based in which modern-day country?
- 5.** The currency of South Sudan is the shilling or the pound?
- 6.** In which country are you most likely to eat a Rolex?
- 7.** What is the largest country in Africa by area?
- 8.** Which Kenyan novelist wrote *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*?
- 9.** What country's name means 'Lion Mountains'?
- 10.** Which club won the most recent African Champions League?
- 11.** From Addis Ababa, it is possible to catch a train to which other country?
- 12.** Mosi-oa-Tunya – the Smoke that Thunders – is better known as what?

## 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**

"My mind is already decolonised."



From the ashes:  
Buildings in  
Shashamane were  
set on fire during the  
violence (Photo: AFP)

## ‘My son died the worst kind of death’: Horrific details of the violent unrest in Ethiopia

Eyewitness accounts emerge of the violence that left 239 people dead after the assassination of singer Hachalu Hundessa

**Zecharias Zelalem**

Two weeks ago, *The Continent* reported on the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa. The celebrated singer was a politically significant figure to the historically marginalised Oromo community, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, and his death sparked protests, riots and brutal killings across the country.

Since then, an internet blackout

imposed by Ethiopia’s government ensured few details of the violence have emerged publicly. All the government has confirmed is that 239 people were killed during a week of violence and more than 3,500 were injured.

However, the *Mail & Guardian* was able to speak to relatives of the deceased who gave eyewitness accounts of what happened.

“They were merciless: they killed my son in the most disgusting way possible,”

**Survivor: A victim of recent unrest in the town of Kokosa. He was allegedly shot at by security forces** (Photo: AFP)



said Dereje Feleke, a resident of Dera, a small town of 17,000 inhabitants in Oromia Region, southwest of Addis Ababa. “What did we do to deserve this?”

According to Dereje, on the night of June 28, hundreds of young Oromo men armed with clubs and machetes targeted ethnic minorities in Dera. They roamed from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, stopping at the homes of people like Dereje, who is of ethnic Amhara ancestry.

The assailants targeted Dereje’s son Mersha, 28. He was dragged outside, stabbed multiple times and finally beheaded by members of the jeering mob. Dereje managed to escape with the help of neighbours, but witnessed his son’s killing.

Mersha’s body was left in the street and the house was burnt down. The engineer and Arba Minch University graduate had recently applied for a job with Ethiopian Airlines.

Seven people were killed in Dera that night.

Dereja spoke to the *M&G* from Dera’s

Medhanealem Church, which is currently sheltering about 50 people who were made homeless in the violence.

As the killers proceeded from house to house, ethnic Amhara residents fled to the homes of their Oromo neighbours, who were able to offer protection. Dereje went into hiding until the next morning, when displaced and newly homeless survivors made their way to the refuge of the church compound.

**According to Dereje, on the night of June 28, hundreds of young Oromo men armed with clubs and machetes targeted ethnic minorities in Dera**

Residents of Dera who spoke to the *M&G* claimed that the regional Oromia Special Police Force did not intervene to stop the violence. According to another survivor, at least 150 members of the force

were housed at Dera's stadium, minutes away, as the carnage unfolded.

Oromia regional state security chief, Colonel Abebe Geresu, did not answer phone calls or text messages from the *M&G* asking for a response to these claims. A spokesperson for the Ethiopian military also failed to respond to requests for comment.

According to the government, at least three members of the Oromia Special Police Force were killed during the unrest, although the location and manner of these deaths have not been confirmed.

In the absence of the police, the quick thinking of ethnic Oromo residents in Dera who acted to shelter their neighbours likely saved many lives, although more than 60 homes were burnt down.

**“This isn’t us,” said one man, an ethnic Oromo resident of Dera. “They’ve lived with us for decades, but someone out there is trying to pit us against each other”**

Back in Dera, residents have continued to support displaced people by bringing food and clothing to the church. “This isn’t us,” said one such man, an ethnic Oromo resident of Dera, who was visiting displaced people at the church. “They’ve lived with us for decades, but someone out there is trying to pit us against each other.”

Similar scenes were replicated in other towns and cities in the region. In Addis Ababa – which is entirely surrounded by the Oromia region – violence targeted ethnic Oromos, with scores displaced from their homes. Footage emerged on social media showing what appeared to be clashes between police and large groups of young men in the capital, some of whom hurled rocks or brandished clubs or sticks.

### **Government response**

In response to the unrest, the Ethiopian government has arrested more than 3,500 people, including Jawar Mohammed, a prominent Oromo opposition leader; and Eskinder Nega, a journalist and activist who has previously compared the organised groupings of Oromo youth – known as the Queero – with the Interahamwe, the youth militia that participated in the Rwandan genocide.

It has also accused three men of planning and executing Hachalu's murder, and has arrested two of them. All three are accused of belonging to a splinter faction of the Oromo Liberation Front, a once-banned political organisation that advocates for greater Oromo representation in government.

The attorney general revealed little about the nature of the killings earlier this month. But as calm is slowly being restored, more details are emerging.

Some of the violence was committed by the state itself, according to witnesses. In Negele Sigalo, a village about 175km south of Addis Ababa, there was no protest activity, according to residents.



**Family man: Aman Dube Ganamo was killed on July 4 by Ethiopian soldiers, according to his family** (Photo: supplied by family)

“Ours is a small peaceful village. There were never any protests or anything of that nature,” said Shubee Adam. But that didn’t stop soldiers, who were deployed to calm tensions, from using excessive force, he said. “My brother was a family man. He was sitting when one soldier clubbed him in the head, unprovoked. When Aman stood up to defend himself, another soldier shot him dead.”

Aman Dube Ganamo was a 43-year-

old father of four. According to his younger brother Shubee, he had no links to any armed groups, and supported his family through farming and running a small shop.

**“Hachalu always stood for justice ... he always wanted to do right in the eyes of the oppressed. He would have been very sad to see all this death today”**

Aman’s children, a 22-year-old daughter and three younger sons, have fled to a neighbouring town to seek refuge with relatives.

Government officials have not revealed how many people were killed by security forces. They have been reluctant to expand on the nature of the violence. One of the few indications came from the Oromia Region police commission’s Ararsa Merdasa, who said that as of July 4 some 50 civilians belonging to ethnic minorities in the region – mostly Amhara – had been killed.

Hachalu’s older brother, Habtamu Hundessa, wasn’t willing to speak about the details surrounding his brother’s death when he was contacted by the *M&G*. But he did say: “Hachalu always stood for justice. He had a stubborn character, but always wanted to do right in the eyes of the oppressed. He would have been very sad if he were around to see all this death today.” ■



Coming of age:  
Writer and director  
Lula Ali Ismail

## Meet Djibouti's First Lady of Film

Lula Ali Ismail's first feature-length film, *Dhalinyaro*, was a smash hit in her home country – and beyond

**Samira Sawlani**

Lula Ali Ismail was in her mid-30s, living in Canada with a steady job. She was at the stage of her life at which society dictates you should be settled into a traditional career path, but she is not one for being conventional.

And so, armed with little but a good story idea, she boarded a flight to her native Djibouti, ready to begin a new career.

In 2019, eight years later, the Cinewax Online African Film Festival streamed

an array of wonderful films. But there was one in particular that had everyone talking. *Dhalinyaro*, meaning “youth” in Somali, is a coming-of-age feature film set in Djibouti. It is directed by Lula Ali Ismail.

Ismail is the first woman to produce and direct a film in Djibouti, earning her the affectionate title of “Djibouti’s First Lady of Film”.

“I’m very flattered, but you never do it for the accolades. I just had a story that was haunting me; I just needed to tell it,” she said, laughing at the nickname.

## A Djiboutian story

*Dhalinyaro*'s plot centres around three teenage girls, Hibo, Asma and Deka, who are about to sit their final exams before entering university.

Three very different personalities, from very different class backgrounds, with different dreams.

Wealthy Hibo is set to go to Paris to study further. Deka, from a middle-class background, remains conflicted between going abroad and remaining in Djibouti. For Asma, with the good grades, leaving the country to continue her studies is out of reach.

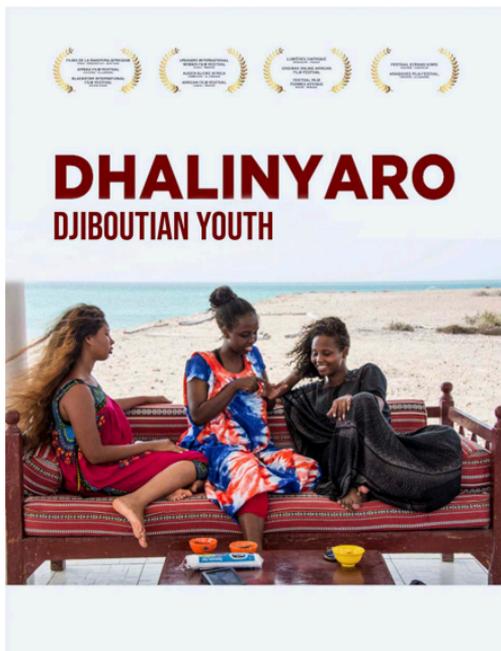
Their differences are underpinned by an enduring sisterhood, and it is impossible to not be drawn into their lives as they grapple with “what next?”, while also dealing with the trials and tribulations of love, sex and heartbreak.

Central to the story are the class differences between the girls and the choice Deka faces about studying in another country.

“I wanted to challenge this notion that you must leave Djibouti to succeed in life,” Ismail said.

**Central to the story are the class differences between the girls and the choice Deka faces about studying abroad**

With no acting agencies to call on, Ismail had to get creative when it came to casting the film. She printed out brochures and handed them out at



various high schools, calling on interested students to talk to her.

She then held two rounds of auditions, finally selecting Amina Mohamed Ali, Bilan Samir Moubus and Tousmo Mouhoumed Mohamed. “Their eagerness and maturity stood out. This was going to be a three-month shoot and I needed people that were not going to drop out. I knew I could count on these girls.”

One thing that stands out about *Dhalinyaro* is that it was not made for the Western gaze. All too often, the only stories about Djibouti that make international headlines focus on its geostrategic location on the Red Sea, and the superpowers that have built military bases there.

“This is a Djiboutian story – an African story – with universal appeal. I wanted to portray a close as possible



**Cityscape: Djibouti is not just a setting in the film; it is also a character**

image of what it's like to be a 17 or 18 year old in Djibouti, first and foremost for the people of Djibouti," said Ismaïl.

*Dhalinyaro* touches on some subjects that are not widely spoken about in Djiboutian society – such as sex, teenage pregnancies and extramarital affairs – and Ismaïl was initially nervous about how it would be received. But the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

"People want their stories told by one of them. When the film was screened in the country, the audience were happy to see streets they recognised; their day-to-day lives on the screen. And that's why I say, this is a film owned by the people of Djibouti – they made it happen."

Djibouti is Ismaïl's muse, but it is also a character in the film, visible in the clothing of the characters, the subtle references to the country's history, and the easy interchange of Somali and French.

Ismaïl's own journey into filmmaking is an inspiration in itself. Living and

working in Canada while in her mid-twenties, she wanted to do something to challenge her shyness and decided to enrol in acting classes in Montreal. That led, eventually, to small roles in TV shows – but she wanted more.

With the words of Ava DuVernay, another black filmmaker, ringing in her ears – "I'm not going to continue knocking that old door that doesn't open for me. I'm going to create my own door and walk through that" – Ismaïl decided to create her own door.

"I could not get substantial parts in Montreal and it was disheartening, so I thought, I'm going to go home to Djibouti and make a film there in which I can act. So I decided to write a short film, which would then allow me to play a lead role."

**"People want their stories told... the audience were happy to see their lives on the screen"**

Her short film, *Laan*, directed by and starring Ismaïl, premiered at several film festivals to acclaim. "Things went so smoothly when it came to making *Laan* that I thought, why not do a feature, unaware that the two are very different. Had I known how challenging making *Dhalinyaro* would be, perhaps I would not have embarked on it," Ismaïl says.

But with the help of a talented co-writer and a strong team in support, *Dhalinyaro* was a huge success. Will there be a sequel? "In my mind we have closure – the last scene said it all." ■

# The school of coffins

In the dead centre of Boksburg, South Africa, business is is booming



Grave trade:  
Carpenters  
supplement  
their income by  
making coffins  
(Photo: Delwyn  
Verasamy)

## Lester Kiewit

**T**he economy may be contracting because of Covid-19 – but the funeral business is on the up.

And one result is that business is booming at Peter Louw’s SA Coffin Training school in Boksburg in Gauteng, South Africa.

It’s a three-person business that was set up in 2002 to make coffins and caskets. Louw, a retired carpenter, soon

realised there was an opportunity to teach others. Eighteen years later, after adding a secretary, the school is busier than ever.

“People who lost their carpentry businesses and customers because of the pandemic say they want to do something to supplement their income. But there’s also the other side, where small businesses are seeing a demand to supply communities,” Louw said.

Louw added the training centre was closed during the first two months of the

**Dead-end jobs:  
“Some people don’t  
like the funeral  
industry, but  
someone has to do  
it”** (Photo: Delwyn  
Verasamy)



lockdown. But it kept going by selling DIY training kits and instructional videos to enable would-be coffin-makers to teach themselves at home.

For a Do-It-Yourself kit costing R2,600 (\$156), trainees receive learning materials including a video and an infant coffin as an example. For R4,600 (\$276) people can attend a two-day course at the school.

Coffins that can be made and sold for R2,000 (\$120) are being sold for R20,000 (\$1,200) by undertaking businesses, he said.

Louw said demand for training is so strong that they plan to open training schools in Cape Town soon.

Covid-19-related deaths, coupled with joblessness and shrinking salaries, are taking a financial toll on families, and Louw described the inquiries he is receiving about ready-made coffins and caskets – distinguished by their tapered shape – as “frightening”.

“The demand is increasing, not just people wanting to learn how to make coffins but also families who need them.

They are desperate for quality at affordable prices. If two family members die in a short time, that’s going to cost the family a lot of money,” he said.

Louw places a premium on quality as an expression of respect for the dignity of the deceased. He estimates the cheapest, well-built coffin could cost as little as R1,200 (\$72). Some businesses now also offer sturdy cardboard coffins.

He said that most South Africans prefer the mid-range coffin as signifying a dignified send-off.

Louw said his business is “going strong”, but that he believes no one should make excessive profits with so many families grieving.

“Talking about and working with coffins puts a lot of people off; including a lot of workers,” he said. “When we’ve had to courier caskets, some employees at the freight companies don’t want to touch them.”

He added: “Some people don’t like the whole funeral industry. But, someone has to do it.” ■

# The never-ending Nigerian nightmare

**Kamaru Usman has become the dominant force in mixed martial arts**

**Tolu Olasoji**

**I**n the early hours of Sunday, Kamaru Usman faced off against Jorge Masvidal in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. The Nigerian-American mixed martial artist was the reigning world champion – the first ever from Africa – and most viewers tuning in from different time zones expected him to retain the welterweight championship belt.

These were unusual circumstances for a prize fight. Usman's opponent was supposed to be the Brazilian Gilbert Burns, but he tested positive for Covid-19. With just six days to go before the fight, the American Masvidal was called up. Masvidal had to lose nine kilograms to make the weight, and Usman had to change his game plan at the 11th hour.

“...I had to switch gears to prepare for him on six days notice,” Usman said. “I had to make a mental switch, I prepared for Gilbert and I had a completely different



gameplay.”

After striding confidently into the arena, a Nigerian flag wrapped around his shoulders, Usman dominated from the beginning. He stuck to the American like glue for much of the bout to minimise his striking effects, and delivered some offensive stomps to his feet, which raised a lot of eyebrows. He basically wrestled his way through a mixed martial arts title defence, and it worked.

Usman has made winning look so routine. So far in his Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) career, he is unbeaten in each of his 16 bouts.

After the fight, Usman compared himself with undefeated boxing legend



**Living the dream: Kamaru Usman is unbeaten in 16 professional UFC fights** (Photo: Steve Marcus/Getty)

Floyd Mayweather. “There was a time where people started hating Floyd Mayweather because he was so dominant,” said the man described by his friends and foes alike as the Nigerian Nightmare.

### Long journey

Usman’s long journey to the pinnacle of mixed martial arts began in Auchi, in the midwestern Nigerian state of Edo.

Aged eight, Usman moved with the rest of his family to join their father in Texas. He was 15 when he showed an interest in wrestling, and quickly showed huge promise.

In the summer of 2009, his father Muhammed was arrested by federal agents in Dallas, and charged with multiple counts of healthcare fraud. Eleven months later, he was handed a 15-year prison sentence and a fine of \$1.3-million. Kamaru made this revelation over a podcast with UFC commentator Joe Rogan last year, insisting his father was unjustly imprisoned.

Although Muhammed missed out on a huge chunk of his child’s life, Kamaru insists he has always been a part of it. In 2012, although apprehensive like his mother, Afishetu, Muhammed gave his son his blessing to turn professional, during a visit to his prison.

Usman is unique in that relatively few of his fights have been on pay-per-view – that’s not through any lack of commercial appeal.

His father had only seen him compete live three times, the last being a Division II national championship in 2009, in Houston. Other bouts were seen behind the bars in the company of other inmates at the Federal Correctional Institution in Seagoville, Texas, across the six available televisions, on cable – thanks to his son’s refusal to go premium.

Having served close to 10 years of the sentence, Muhammed was released on February 5 this year. Sunday was only the fourth time he’d see his son fight live.

Muhammed was unable to watch the biggest fight of Usman’s career prior to that either on TV or in person: as the rules demand, the March 2019 title fight in which he defeated Tyron Woodley – becoming the first African-born MMA champion – was broadcast only on pay-per-view.

On the stage with him to celebrate his win was Samirah, born to Usman in 2014. With the belt strapped around his waist, mic in his left hand, he gazed admiringly at his daughter and taught her: “When you grow up I want you to remember this day, forever.”

He has given his daughter, and his fans, plenty more to remember since then. And as far as his opponents are concerned – well, the Nightmare continues. ■

# Refugees are especially vulnerable to the pandemic

Scovian Lillian

New research by the International Rescue Committee reveals that refugees and displaced people face a heightened risk of coronavirus because they live in particularly cramped and densely populated areas. For this reason, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has warned that efforts to improve sanitation and access to healthcare in refugee camps need to be stepped up. At present, 134 refugee hosting countries worldwide have reported local transmission of Covid-19.

African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, host more than their fair share of refugees, and many are struggling to respond effectively. Many camps have a shortage of masks and protective equipment, and those living outside of camps may not receive support at all. One reason for this is economic: Covid-19 has hurt African economies, reducing government revenue while forcing an increase in government spending.

But political concerns are also significant, because supporting refugees is often unpopular with local communities and because hosting refugees is bound up with complex regional politics. In Uganda, for example, the government has said that refugees must be in camps if they wish to receive state help, as non-nationals in urban areas will not have access to food aid.

Meanwhile Kenya, which hosts the fifth largest refugee population on the continent, marked World Refugee Day on June 20 by honouring the resilience of close to half a million people who have fled their homes. But just a year earlier, the Kenyan authorities sent a note to UNHCR detailing plans to close down the Dadaab refugee camp over security concerns before the decision was overturned after an international outcry.

At the time of writing, no Covid-19 cases had been recorded in Tanzanian refugee camps, 52 in Ugandan refugee settlements and eight in Kenya, at the well-known Dadaab camp which houses 218,000 people. As the number of coronavirus cases continues to rise across the continent, there is a serious risk that some refugee communities will be badly hit unless more is done. ■

*Scovian Lillian is a freelance writer and a communications and public relations professional based in Nairobi. This analysis was produced in partnership with Democracy in Africa*





(Photo: Sumy Sadurni/AFP)

# Why Uganda needs a Stella Nyanzi in Parliament

Her challenge to the country's patriarchy could bring much-needed reform

## COMMENT

**Eric Mwine-Mugaju**

**S**tella Nyanzi divides opinion: is she a relentless human rights campaigner or a vulgar and uncouth woman?

Judging by her impact, it is undoubtedly the former: if the edifice that supports patriarchal systems in Uganda shows signs

of dents and bruises, it is from Nyanzi's one-woman campaign to kick down doors – physical or otherwise – putting women at the centre of spaces from which they have been historically marginalised.

“If decent language has not been used to effect change on behalf of Ugandans, of what use is it? I would rather insult and change things, revise the balance of power, than keep quiet or be polite in ways that do not change anything,” said Nyanzi, an academic, feminist and activist at Makerere University in Kampala, after declaring her intention to run for Parliament in next year's election.

Ugandans have tried moderate, quiet candidates, but Nyanzi's outspokenness offers something different. It would be a shame if we let this opportunity pass. She says what she means and will defend it to the hilt – even if it means going to prison.

Uganda needs a politician who will challenge our comfort zone. Surely

Nalongo Dr Stella Nyanzi would unflinchingly challenge such folly if she were in Parliament.

“Nalongo” means “mother of twins”. The first twins in Buganda were recorded during the reign of the first king of Buganda, Kabaka Kintu. This was so unusual at the time, the story goes that the gods were consulted through a medium called Kaaye, who deemed that unusual things would be allowed to happen.

In the Kiganda tradition, when a woman becomes a Nalongo, this gives her licence to publicly mouth bawdy obscenities of varying shades.

### **A licence for ‘radical activism’**

Nyanzi has sometimes used this unusual licence to antagonise the ruling class through her “radical activism”. Like the anti-colonial female legend Queen Muhumuza – who antagonised the colonial rulers in 1900s East Africa – Nyanzi is a symbol of resistance against the tyranny of the current governing class, who inherited a skewed political institution left by the colonialists.

She didn’t stand idly watching the Constitution get butchered without using tools, however outrageous. She protested against numerous constitutional changes at every turn, including the removal of presidential term and age limits that have enabled President Yoweri Museveni to stay 34 years in power.

Nyanzi has spent more time in jail than Bobi Wine, the young and popular opposition leader who is planning to run against Museveni for president. Time in jail is not a qualification for political

office, of course, as four-time opposition candidate Kizza Besigye would testify – Besigye has been arrested so frequently that some people describe him as “the world’s most arrested man”.

But Nyanzi’s track record of suffering for her convictions shows that she would doubtless energise the next Parliament and expose absurdities without fear or favour.

A lot of Ugandans understandably find Nyanzi’s mode of protest – including vulgar insults and stripping to make a point – unsettling, given the influence of conservative Christianity in the country.

However, that is exactly why any Ugandan should vote for her. Taboo-breaking, unsettling protests led by women are actually common across Africa. Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan activist and Nobel Peace prize laureate, famously stripped to protest police brutality; in South Africa, women silently waved underwear in the air during a speech by President Cyril Ramaphosa in solidarity with victims of gender-based violence. Women have not been afraid to shock the public for a greater political or societal good.

In many African communities, a woman’s body is supposed to be revered. Her nakedness is seen as sacred. Wilful nudity, therefore, shocks and unnerves men. A woman undressing in protest is the signal that the authority of men is no longer recognised.

Nyanzi challenges Uganda’s patriarchy, and makes the country better as a result. ■

*Eric Mwine-Mugaju is a Ugandan journalist.*



## The Big Picture

**Cash cows:** Herders dance at a cattle camp in Madol, South Sudan. Keeping cattle is the main livelihood for South Sudanese in rural areas. But violence between communities of cattle keepers, and between cattle keepers and farmers, has spiked in recent years. Conflict and climate change have forced herders to migrate their cows to different parts of the country, into territory which is not traditionally theirs to use. Exposure to new diseases, meanwhile, has decimated cattle populations. (Photo: Alex McBride/AFP)

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