

African journalism. August 22 2020

**ISSUE
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The Continent

with **Mail & Guardian**

**Why do
presidents
cling to
power?**

We asked them.

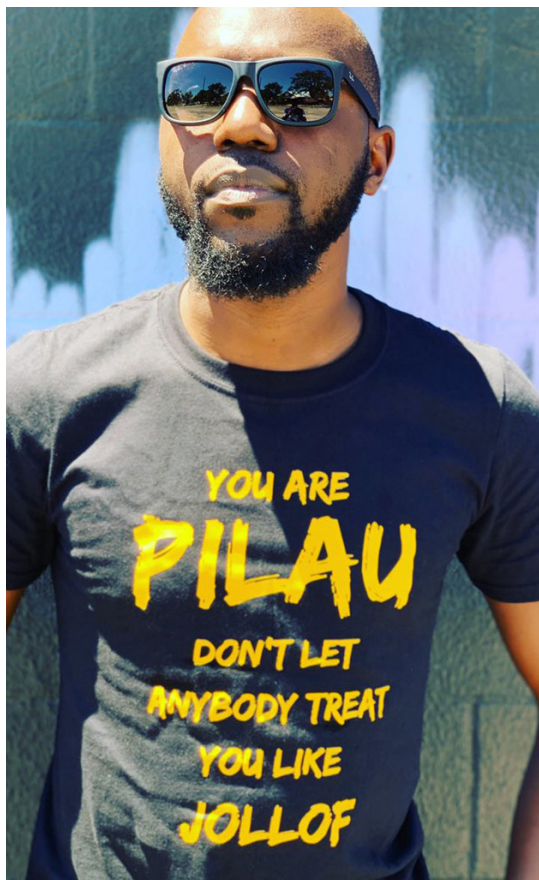


Photo: Paul Botes/M&G

Return of the rice wars:

West African countries have spent decades arguing over who makes the best jollof rice. But there's nothing like a common enemy to bring disparate viewpoints together. Enter pilau, the ubiquitous east African dish that is making its own strong play to be considered the continent's favourite rice-based meal – as advocated here, in no uncertain terms, by the BBC's US correspondent **Larry Madowo** (photo by Charles Madowo).

Madowo's social media post drew exclamations of shock and outrage, even from his colleagues: “*reported for hate speech*” tweeted fellow BBC journalist Yemisi Adegoke. Although *The Continent* has strong feelings on this subject, in the interests of editorial impartiality we shall keep these to ourselves.



Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** It's not easy being president. So why would anyone want the job, let alone keep it? (p20)
- **Review:** A new documentary profiles Boniface Mwangi – but his wife is the real star (p14)
- **Taste of home:** Kenyans in the US turn to farming (p17)
- **China vs. America:** Should Africa pick sides? (p32)
- **Football:** The Cameroonian president's broken promise (p34)

In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani

Equatorial Guinea

When one door closes another opens. So it is said. Many of us count ourselves lucky if we get a window.

For a select few, however, life seems to be one big revolving door. Consider Equatorial Guinea, where the entire cabinet saw themselves out, led by Prime Minister Francisco Pascual Obama Asue after criticism from President Obiang Nguema regarding the economic situation in the country.

An honourable move by Asue, taking responsibility like that — and he was certainly rewarded for it four days later, when he was sworn in as prime minister again, along with certain other returning faces, including Nguema's son as minister of hydrocarbons. (“Don't worry dad, oil be back!”)

Mali

Sometimes a door opens, sometimes soldiers come along to bash it down. Like in Mali, where President Ibrahim Keita was taken into military custody.

A coup is a raucous affair, so no wonder everyone is in high dudgeon. ECOWAS is spamming the neighbourhood WhatsApp group like crazy, the United Nations is slipping stern notes through the letterbox, and even the African Union



His coup runneth over: President Ibrahim Keita was overthrown by the military (Photo: Ludovic Marin/POOL/AFP)

has marched up the driveway with its hair freshly did, demanding to speak to Mali's parents.

In fact, within hours the AU had “strongly condemned” the goings on and “rejected any attempt at the unconstitutional change of government”. Quite a feat considering the weeks it took to say anything about Zimbabwe.

Hey you, AU, is your job to protect people from authoritarian regimes or to protect authoritarian regimes from their people?

Mauritania and Malawi

You never know when opportunity will come knocking. Or when the knocking will turn out to be quite inopportune, as former Mauritanian president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz discovered when

authorities came to question him about the misappropriation of certain public property. He tried a bit of the old “Do you know who I am?” but, alas, investigators knew exactly who he was. Annoyingly, they also seemed to know what he might have been up to.

Empathising with him, no doubt, is the recently unresigned Peter Mutharika of Malawi, some of whose assets appear to have been frozen as authorities carry out corruption investigations.

Zimbabwe

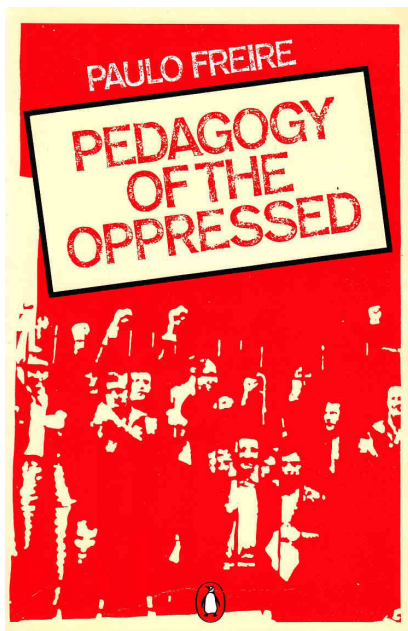
Zealously standing guard at the doors of justice, we find the courts of Zimbabwe. Earlier this week they barred lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa from representing journalist Hopewell Chin’ono, accusing her of “scandalising the court” by framing his arrest as an abduction, which “portrayed a biased justice system, and the world was invited to an outrage over abuse of human rights”.

Listen, when it comes to being outraged, that ship sailed long ago, crashed into an iceberg and sank.

Mind you, five people have just been acquitted of “plotting civil disobedience” after they were “caught” with a copy of the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Brazilian author Paulo Freire. Dare we hope that the tide is turning?

Cameroon

A horrifying video from Cameroon has been circulating showing a group of men – separatist fighters, seemingly – beheading a woman as she begs for mercy.



Revolutionary reading: The book Zimbabwe's government would prefer you didn't read

As if having vicious killers on their doorstep were not traumatic enough, people in the troubled south-west and north-west of the country then suffered the military's response: breaking down doors and arresting people en masse.

Thoughts and prayers will be of little consolation to anyone affected by such violence.

Could we all do a little better than that, maybe, by opening our doors and stepping out into common ground? Where our differences are cause not for fear and hatred, but for understanding, respect and for celebration. ■

The Week in Numbers

611

The number of violent attacks on frontline healthcare workers between February and July, worldwide. "It's a byproduct of the new, novel, infectious disease – there's a lot of fear," said Sean Christie, a spokesperson for MSF in South Africa.

US\$42,000

The amount Uganda must pay to the families of Jennifer Anguko and Sylvia Nalubowa, both of whom died from preventable causes while pregnant. The country's Constitutional Court ruled on Wednesday that the state violated the women's right to health by failing to provide basic maternal healthcare. The ruling ends a nine-year battle by the pair's families and activists. It also requires government to equip all health facilities to provide adequate maternal healthcare in the next two years.



(Photo: Horoya AC)

+224 622 42 01 89

The number to call if you know the whereabouts of the bag containing the passports of all the players and technical staff of Horoya AC, Guinea's top football team. There's a reward. The bag was last seen in an unlocked car in Conakry. The footballers are due to play Pyramids FC in the semifinal of the Caf Confederations Cup in Morocco in September – if they can get there.

54.5°C

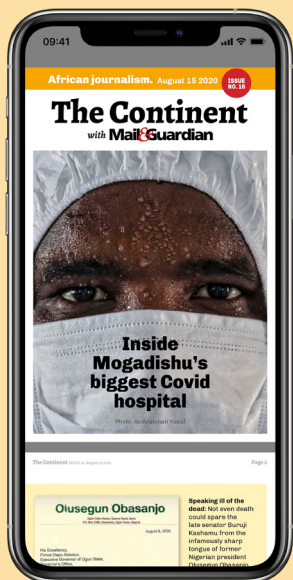
The temperature in Death Valley National Park in California on August 16. Pending verification, this will be the highest temperature ever reliably measured on Earth. California may seem far away, but that doesn't matter – rising temperatures will affect us all.

5 months

The length of South Africa's ban on tobacco products, which was lifted this week. The ban was intended to prevent respiratory problems associated with Covid-19, but few smokers were deterred, thanks to a thriving (albeit expensive) black market.

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Nigeria

(Photo: @rejoice_emanuel/Twitter)



Crushed Rock, Nigeria's quaint quarry

Abuja is Nigeria's capital, the country's administrative and political centrepiece, and boasts a rather large monolith protruding from the city's skyline. Lately, however, people have been flocking to a different feature on the outskirts of the city: a Crushed Rock, if you will.

The abandoned quarry is located outside of the neighbourhood of Mpape, which appropriately means "rock", and recently became an overnight tourist and social media sensation. It was even

reported on the BBC. Understandably, considering the picturesque scene found there, with lush green hills and a lake formed when an aquifer fractured. Local experts have advised against hiking in the area but musicians, DJs and even food vendors have been spotted at the site.

Thrillseekers have also been warned against taking a plunge into the water from the quarried cliffs: some say dangerous machinery lurks at the bottom of the lake – abandoned, but deadly to divers. ■

Zimbabwe

Church vs. State

Kudzai Mashininga

From their pulpits in Catholic churches across the country last Sunday, priests read out an extraordinary “pastoral letter” signed by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

“Fear runs down the spine of many of our people today,” the letter read. “Is this the Zimbabwe we want?”

The letter went on to detail the multilayered crises facing the country right now: the economic collapse, the deepening poverty, the chronic food insecurity, the rampant corruption and the heavy-handed crackdown against all forms of opposition.

The bishops were unequivocal in assigning blame: “We feel that the government is focused on things other than national democratic priorities. This amounts to dereliction of duty.”

Although only about 10% of Zimbabweans identify as Catholic, the Church has always wielded an outsize influence in the political sphere (former president Robert Mugabe was Catholic).

The letter, therefore, represented an unprecedented attack on President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s administration,



Divine displeasure: Zimbabwe's Catholic bishops have sharply criticised the government (Photo: Dan Kitwood/Getty)

which promptly responded in kind.

An apoplectic Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa targeted the Archbishop of Harare, Robert Christopher Ndlovu, saying that the cleric suffered from “nauseating mental amnesia” and was “evil” and “a coward”.

She added: “[The letter’s] evil message reeks with all the vices that have perennially hobbled the progress of Africa. It trumpets petty tribal feuds and narrow regionalist agendas so that it can sow seeds of internecine strife as a prelude to national disintegration.”

President Mnangagwa has summoned the Vatican’s envoy to Zimbabwe, Archbishop Paolo Rudelli, to explain whether Zimbabwe’s bishops are supported by the Pope.

Rudelli, meanwhile, visited the Archbishop of Harare on Sunday in a show of solidarity, according to *Vatican News*. ■

South Africa

(Photo: Delwyn Verasamy)



Sewage threatens the Cradle of Humankind

Up the hill from the Percy Stewart Waste Water Treatment Works in Mogale City, Gauteng, is a special manhole into which dump trucks unload human waste collected from septic tanks.

The water from Percy Stewart ends up running through the Cradle of Humankind, a Unesco world heritage site.

The sewage inlet has been neglected by

authorities and can't handle the volume of waste dumped there. Animal carcasses lie rotting beside the sewer shaft, with skulls and horns scattered about as clouds of flies swarm over pools of effluent.

Unesco has given the government until December 1 to provide an updated report on the state of conservation of the property. ■

Uganda

Turmoil flares as royal heirs roil holy soil

Andrew Arinaitwe

The spire, topped with a gold cross, is all that remains of St Peter's Church in Ndeeba, a suburb of Kampala.

Earlier this month, in the darkness of a Sunday night, the building was demolished – the latest, irrevocable chapter in an ugly land dispute that has left even Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni in shock.

"This incident saddens me, and I give the church assurances that those complicit

will be punished," Museveni said as he visited the site.

The Continent attended a makeshift prayer service amidst the rubble there last Sunday. The congregation was angry.

"In our olden days, in times of war, we ran to seek refuge in churches and places of worship," said 87-year-old Grace Namatovu, who has been attending church at St Peter's since it was built in 1981. "But now this generation breaks down the only place of escape."

Evelyn Kulabako Nachwa, a member of the Buganda royal family, was the original owner of the land. She donated it to the church. When she died in 2001, her children went to court to claim it back. They want to develop it. After a lengthy legal battle, a high court judge this year said the land did not belong to the church, and gave permission for it to be demolished.

"It took years to build and within hours every brick was on the floor," said a private security guard who watches over a neighbouring plot. He witnessed the demolition.

As Uganda gears up for the 2021 elections, the fate of St Peter's has become a political issue, and is intertwined with longstanding debates about land use in rapidly expanding Kampala.

President Museveni has promised to rebuild the church – no matter what the courts might say. ■



Jerichoed: All that is left of St Peter's Church (Photo: Kelvin Kavuma/M&G)

Mali

(Photo: AFP)



In photos: Soldiers turn on Mali's president

On August 18, chaotic reports began to trickle out of Mali. What began as unrest and disquiet at a military base in Kati, outside the capital Bamako, turned into a mutiny and then a full-blown military coup. By the end of the day, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita had been arrested, and soldiers were parading through Bamako to a hero's welcome (above and next page) from thousands of cheering protesters. This is Mali's fourth coup since gaining independence from France in 1960.

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Our July 11 issue examined the growing political unrest in Mali, and profiled the Imam leading the popular protests

Is Mali on the brink of a revolution?

Government rocked by massive protests



(Photo: Anadolu Agency)



(Photo: AFP)



Annie Risemberg/AFP

The next day, President Keita formally announced his resignation in a statement broadcast live on state television (left). He didn't sound happy about it. "If today, certain elements of our armed forces want this to end through their intervention, do I really have a choice?"

Speaking for the military – who swiftly baptised themselves as the National Committee for the Salvation of the People – Ismail Wague (left) promised to organise elections and hand over power to a civilian government. "We are not holding on to power but we are holding on to the stability of the country. With you, standing as one, we can restore this country to its former greatness," said Wague, who is the deputy chief of staff of Mali's air force.

(Photo: Michelle Cattani/AFP)



Mali's political crisis has been brewing for several months. Massive protests (above), led by Imam Mahmoud Dicko (right) had left President Keita's authority hanging by a thread. Ultimately, it didn't take much to bring it crashing down. But it is far from clear whether the military intends to deliver the kind of change that civilian protesters have been demanding – or even if they can hold on to power.

Regional bloc Ecowas and the African Union have condemned the coup, and West African leaders are reportedly planning to fly into Bamako and demand President Keita's reinstatement as leader.

Meanwhile, the country is still grappling with a worsening economic crisis and a deteriorating security situation – neither of which will be improved by ongoing instability in the capital. ■



(Photo: Michelle Cattani/AFP)

In *Softie*, politics takes a personal toll on Boniface Mwangi – and his family

Simon Allison

In the living room of their Nairobi home, with children's toys strewn across the floor, Boniface Mwangi's young daughter asks him: "Where are you going?"

As he walks out the door, the award-winning photojournalist-turned-activist-turned-politician tells her: "I'm going to topple the government."

Softie is not exactly what it says on the poster. It's meant to be a film that documents Boniface's audacious 2017 bid to run for parliamentary office, as an independent, in his Starehe constituency. It is that: we see him leading protests, getting arrested, handing out flyers on public buses and repeatedly declining – looking a little more crestfallen each time – to hand out cash to demanding voters. His rival has no such qualms.

This is a compelling look at the inner workings of an independent political



campaign, and it's just as fraught as you would imagine: the scene where campaign manager Khadija Mohamed tells an unnamed caller, with a smile on her face, that her husband will "literally crush your balls and then cut them and feed them to the dogs" is a highlight.

But this is not really a film about politics. It's about love, and family, and the extraordinary personal sacrifice that it takes to fight a system that is designed to crush you.

On the way to yet another campaign event, Boniface and his wife Njeri Mwangi are talking about priorities. She tells him: "I have given my eldest, and my youngest, and my middle one, my life. So maybe now you give your children your life. Then, after that, you can give the



Rough road: Campaigning in Kenya is fraught with peril, challenging Boniface Mwangi's commitment to his family, and to his conscience (Photo: LBx Africa)

country what is left. Instead of giving your children what is left.”

Boniface replies: “Country comes first, because when you fight for your country, your kids benefit.”

Not long afterwards, at the launch of Boniface's book, someone slips a letter to Njeri. It's a death threat. She and the children go into exile in the United States for eight months, only returning days before the vote. Boniface keeps campaigning, and the video calls between husband and wife grow more and more strained.

“I don't want to die,” Boniface explains, “but if I die and it changes a few things....”

Njeri interrupts. “But what if it doesn't?”

A life of activism puts an immense pressure on personal relationships, and often creates both emotional and physical distances between loved ones.

Zimbabwean activist Evan Mawarire's family also went into exile in the United States, for their own safety. Angolan investigative journalist Rafael Marques de Morais was denied a visa to visit his son in Canada because he was facing “criminal charges” at home – even though these charges were trumped up by an authoritarian regime to silence him.

For Njeri Mwangi – who, for all Boniface's abundant charisma, is the real star of this show – there is no adulation or awards to compensate for, or even to recognise her sacrifice. “I don't struggle



Evening the odds: *Softie* is about love and family, and extraordinary personal sacrifice (Photo: LBx Africa)

with being a mother. Being Boni's wife, that's hard. Because then I am his wife. People don't see me for me. They don't know me. It's like I don't have my dreams, my ambitions."

As the election draws near, Boniface and his team are filmed setting out for

a rally on a fleet of branded yellow motorcycles, weaving at dusk through Nairobi traffic as Sauti Sol's *Tujiangalie* provides a suitably epic soundtrack. This is the drama, the grand theatre, that makes Kenyan politics – all politics – so compelling, and in *Softie* there's no shortage of it.

But the film's genius lies in the quiet moments; in the compelling intimacy of a young couple trying to reconcile raising a family with living their ideals, even as the world seems to conspire against them. ■

Softie will be screened at the Durban Film Festival and the Encounters Film Festival, ahead of a US premiere on October 12. It was directed by Sam Soko and produced by Soko and Toni Kamau. After winning the World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Award for Editing at the Sundance Film Festival, it is now eligible for Oscars consideration



Play it again: Director Sam Soko (fourth from the left) and his fellow producers at the *Softie*'s premier at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival (Photo: LBx Africa)

They came for the American Dream, but the land still beckoned

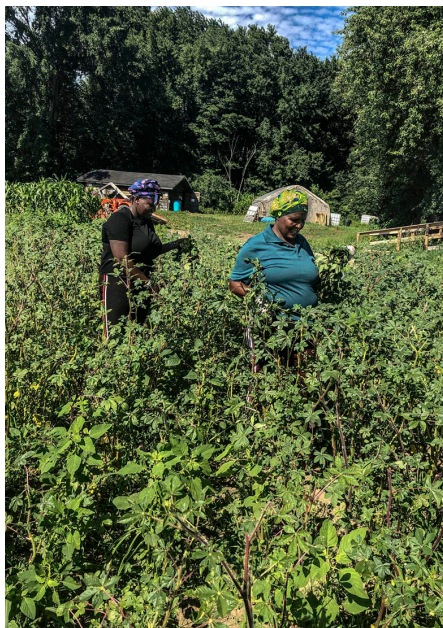
Kenyan farmers have carved their own niche into America's agricultural landscape

Jakki Kerubo

The land in front of me, with fewer than 20 baby corn and coriander plants, looked more like a community garden than a farm. I had driven three hours from New York to Massachusetts to buy Kenyan vegetables from Henrietta Moraa Nyaigoti, and prayed I would not be disappointed.

I didn't realise yet the wealth of vegetation I was about to be exposed to; I was simply sitting in a driveway. My city life, where after-hour cocktails were the height of connection, had made me forget my culture. Of course I would be invited into the family home first, before heading out to the farm.

I met Henrietta in a Facebook group for Kenyan gardeners in the United States. I did not garden or farm. In fact, my plants



Diasflora: Ninety-two percent of Flats Mentor Farm's farmers are from African countries (Photo: supplied)

constantly died thanks to the lack of light in my apartment. A well-meaning friend added me to the group, and it opened my eyes to how many Kenyans were committed to growing our indigenous and mainstream crops, both for subsistence and for commercial purposes.

In the group, recipes and pest-fighting strategies are traded, along with best practices for canning and drying for the winter months. Sales referrals are generously shared. Farming was not an option when many in the group first



Harvest home: In addition to managusa and chinsaga, Henrietta Nyaigoti grows beetroot, Brazilian eggplant, mint and more on her farm (Photo: supplied)

migrated to the US. Education, specifically one that offered a path to a high-paying white collar job, was the dream.

Many Kenyans in the group had worked double shifts and gone to school to get coveted degrees, and had relatives bring dried indigenous produce from home, or bought some, like pumpkin leaves, from the Amish and Chinese in Pennsylvania. Now, growing their own produce for their families and for their communities is something they balance with their day jobs.

Someone tagged Henrietta when I posted about wanting to buy chinsaga, or African spider wisp, for a taste of home. I was nostalgic.

Two other Kenyan women who had driven an hour from Boston to also buy fresh produce pulled into the driveway,

too. Together, our masks on, we drove 10 minutes to the farm I'd seen on Henrietta's Facebook Lives.

Henrietta is one of many Africans who farm on Massachusetts Mentor Flat Farms. She never imagined this was a path she would take. Her mother, a teacher, had leased the land to farm to feed her family, hoping her children would join her and make it a family bonding time.

Henrietta had other goals. She wanted to study psychology and hang out with the cool kids. Gardening with her mother in the wee hours of the morning was not on her vision board, though she certainly enjoyed the kunde (cowpea leaves), chinsaga, terere (amaranth), and managusa (African nightshade) her mother harvested for them to eat every day.

Once, when her mother had worked double shifts and was exhausted, Henrietta volunteered to help her to harvest. It was only after working that whole morning in the fierce sun, back strained, sweat dripping down her face and chest, that she appreciated what her mother endured to put food on the table. Exhausted, she collapsed on her bed when they returned home.

"My mom had been doing this for 15 years!" Henrietta said. "I started to appreciate what I took for granted. She was overworked and the food was for the family."

Farming became a family Sunday ritual, while the rest of the week was spent completing her psychology degree. In 2012, with her financial savvy and digital marketing expertise, she convinced her mother, who had been giving away whatever the family could not eat themselves to friends and family, to consider the cost of her labour and go commercial.

The Flats Mentor Farm is located on a 70-acre river bottom parcel of land in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Founded in 1984, it provides the space and infrastructure for small immigrant and refugee farmers to get started.

"There are institutional barriers to land access. It's hard for immigrants who are not white and named Smith to own land," said Maria Moreira, who founded the farm. "My family migrated from Portugal in the 1960s and it was extremely difficult to purchase land if you hadn't already owned land. It's still hard today."

Like Henrietta, the other farmers

at Flats Mentor Farm produce ethnic specialty crops, supplying wholesale and retail markets throughout New England, including more than 40 farmers' markets.

The farm has over 300 farmers: nine in 10 of them are from across Africa, and more than three in five are women.

The farm was like a furnace when we arrived, the greenery a mirage under the harsh light. In the greenhouses, I immediately smelled the managous and chinsagas, suddenly missing my childhood produce-washing and cooking on Sundays with my mother.

Back at Henrietta's home, her sister, Violet Guto, had cooked a hearty Kenyan meal of ugali and chinsaga, accompanied with milk cultured in a gourd, for all six of us. We mused about the wealth and benefits of African delicacies, and how we completely lacked the marketing abilities to make our food mainstream, like Koreans did with Kimchi and Russians with Kefir.

Henrietta grows Brazilian eggplant, kale, collard greens, zucchini, cucumbers, beet root, radish, mint, amaranth, and herbs for the local supermarkets and the Kenyan foods for her long list of customers, which now included me.

Driving home with three boxes of goods, the smell of fresh mint wafting through the car, I dreamed about all the ways I'd cook up my riches. Maybe I could replace broccoli rabe with the bitter managu in my pasta. Perhaps chinsaga could make a good massaged salad with a red wine dressing.

Selfishly, I hoped that our foods remained a secret. ■

Power corrupts. But how?

We speak to four former heads of state about what being president is actually like

Simon Allison, Dhashen Moodley and Kiri Rupiah



For decades, African politics has been synonymous – not always fairly – with presidents overstaying their welcome. We're all too familiar with the dictators, and the strongmen (and yes, it's always men). The constitutional coups. The third terms, and the fourth terms, and the fifth and sixth and seventh.

Yes, we're looking at you, Paul Biya. Yoweri Museveni. Teodoro Obiang. Denis Sassou Nguesso. Idriss Deby. Isaias Afwerki. Paul Kagame. Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. Faure Gnassingbé. And those are just the presidents who are *currently* overstaying their welcome. Others had to be removed by force; or until death qualified them for the Great Presidential Palace in the Sky.

This is a curious phenomenon. From the outside, being president does not look like much fun. The pressure is constant. The workload is

never manageable. Your every action is scrutinised and critiqued, and it is impossible to please everybody. When you get things wrong, people die. Everybody wants a piece of you, and your days are filled with long and boring meetings. When the late Robert Mugabe would fall asleep at international conferences, he was widely ridiculed, but have you ever tried to stay awake for an entire African Union summit?

Being president is never an easy job. So why does anyone want to do it? And why do they want to keep doing it?

Drunk on power

In the luxurious private plane terminal of Johannesburg's Lanseria Airport, Ian Khama, the former president of Botswana, is defending his legacy. When he left office in 2018, he carefully hand-picked his successor. But the new man in charge has turned against him, and Khama has flown in for the morning to set the record straight. He's got a list of talking points, and we dutifully take notes, but we're more interested in discussing with him about what being a head of state is actually like.

So, it turns out, is he.

He puts down his list, suddenly energised, and starts explaining. "I didn't enjoy politics," he said. "Everybody's problems were put on you. It was a burden that you felt. And no matter who I met, where I met them, even if it was with family and you thought you were just having a family gathering, people would raise some issue that was going on."

He said he always carried a small notebook around with him, and he would jot down the problem and try to attend to it when he got back to his office. "So you were constantly aware that people had expectations of you to deliver."



The post-presidential blues: Ian Khama's hand-picked successor turned against him (photo: supplied)

Khama was always an unusual president. He had a reputation for being aloof and austere, and he rarely attended any international conferences or summits. But after eight years of observing his counterparts, he understands the seductive power of the trappings of office: the hotels, the private jets, the bodyguards, the fawning hangers-on. He calls it, with a note of contempt, being drunk on power.

“Once you are there, and you’re in power, all the attention you get, all the benefits and everything – human reaction is you get used to it.”

“Once you are there, and you’re in power, all the attention you get, all the benefits and everything – human reaction is you get used to it. And you cannot start to imagine yourself out of office and just being a normal citizen like everyone else, when you’ve been fussed over for several years. And that has been the problem for this continent.” Khama singles out Mugabe and deposed Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir for criticism, as well as Cameroon’s Paul Biya, whom he describes as “well past his sell-by date”.

Nor is he impressed with the Germany Chancellor, who has been in office since 2005.

“Angela Merkel, I’ve always had a lot of respect for her, but when she stood the last time, I just said to myself, ‘But isn’t it too much?’”

The quiet moments

Joyce Banda, speaking from her home in Lilongwe a few months prior to this year’s election, vividly remembers the moment she knew she was going to become the president of Malawi.

The circumstances were traumatic. President Bingu wa Mutharika had just died in office. As Vice-President, Banda was the constitutionally-designated successor. But at the time, Bingu’s brother was scheming to take control, so no one told Banda that the president was dead. They even flew his corpse to South Africa



A heavy responsibility: Joyce Banda at her inauguration in 2012
(Photo: Stephane de Sakutin/AFP)

to receive “medical attention” in an effort to keep up the ruse.

Eventually the commander of Malawi’s army had to intervene. He sent troops to surround Banda’s house, and she wasn’t sure at first if they were there to help her or to hurt her. Fortunately for Banda – and Malawi – the soldiers were on her side.

“You have to imagine, psychologically I have not prepared myself,” she says. “The reality dawns on me. To be a president, to have a nation to lead, is like having something you are carrying on your head. For me, it is every single Malawian in my hands. Their well-being, their fate, their lives.”

Overnight, her life changed irrevocably. Banda wanted to keep an open door policy, but it became impossible. “My husband had to remind me all the time, you are going to get overwhelmed. You can’t be so open.” At one point, her son removed the SIM card from her phone, just so it would stop ringing for a little while.

She worked long hours into the night, trying to clear her intray before it all started again the next day. There was little time for family life. Moments with her husband – himself a very senior judge and politician – had to be stolen at the end of each busy day, and even then there were few casual conversations. “Our quiet time was about work. We talked, but we talked state.”

At one point, her son removed the SIM card from her phone, just so it would stop ringing for a little while.

Banda believes that there are two types of people that become president: those who want to serve, and those who want to get power. She puts herself, and many of her women colleagues, in the first category. “The other group will be about themselves. How many cars do I have? How big is my motorcade? How much money is allocated to my State House? What I am saying is, when you get into that office for power, you will definitely get corrupted. It will corrupt you absolutely.”

Catherine Samba-Panza, the former interim president of the Central African Republic, agrees. In a telephone call from Bangui, she says that the presidency is full of temptations that must be resisted, but that not everyone can do so – it comes down to each individual’s moral fiber, their own ethical principles. Some people will do whatever they can to stay there.

So when the temptations felt overwhelming, and she needed to resist them, Samba-Panza thought of one particular leader: “Me, I think of Mandela often. Mandela spent 27 years in prison and still only did one five-year term as president. It’s extraordinary.”



Resisting the temptations of power: Catherine Samba-Panza inside Bangui's Presidential Palace (Photo: Sia Kambou/AFP)

No other choice

When it comes to understanding the attraction of high office, Khama, Banda and Samba-Panza are perhaps not the most representative sample. Each came to office constitutionally, and none tried to extend or manipulate term limits.

Pierre Buyoya is a little different – and so is his perspective on this subject. He became president of Burundi in 1987 after seizing power in a military coup. He kept power for six years, until he was kicked out at the ballot box. The man who replaced him was assassinated just after being sworn in. Some of Buyoya's opponents claim they he played a role in the murder.

Buyoya returned to power in 1996 in a second military coup. He was also a major player in Burundi's long-running civil war, and forces under his command were repeatedly implicated in serious human rights violations. One of the conditions of the peace agreement which ended the civil war was that Buyoya had to step down. In 2003, he did – reluctantly.

Ian Khama talked about other leaders getting drunk on power. Joyce Banda spoke of power corrupting absolutely. But for Buyoya, the problem is not too much power, but too little. "You see in Africa, the most difficult thing is [the president] has a lot of responsibility, a lot of challenges, but sometimes even if you have the power you feel powerless. Especially when it comes to doing things in the economic area. This has been my frustration with power."

In his post-presidency, Buyoya reinvented himself as an elder

statesman. He is now the African Union's Special Envoy to Mali and the Sahel – which has also informed his perspective on the subject of power. He was in Bamako when we spoke to him in early January, attending negotiations between the government and armed groups

“Of course leaving power is somehow dangerous. You go, you take responsibility, you think you’ve made progress, but people are still trying to harm you.”

When Buyoya looks at leaders who linger in office, he does not see power, or strength. He sees weakness. He sees leaders who stay not because they want to – but because they have no other choice.

“Of course leaving power is somehow dangerous. You go, you take responsibility, you think you’ve made real progress, but some years later people are still trying to harm you. It was happening to me in 2003. I was accused of plotting, and put on trial. This is the political risk.”

It’s a risk to which Ian Khama might relate – he has been accused of fraud by his hand-picked successor (he denies any wrongdoing). And Joyce Banda spent three years in self-imposed exile after her successor – the late Bingu wa Mutharika’s brother, Peter Mutharika, who eventually did make it into State House – accused her of money laundering and abusing her offices (she denies any wrongdoing).

Buyoya concludes: “It’s the one thing I regret, in Africa especially, there is no respect for former leaders in some countries, especially my own country. I think it’s a factor that some presidents don’t want to leave because they fear they will be harmed by leaders that follow.” ■



Strength and weakness: Pierre Buyoya in 2001, towards the end of his second term in office (Photo: Pedro Ugarte/AFP)



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

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

(Photo: Comité Technique/Sven Oehm)

1. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the president of which country from 2006 to 2018?
2. Asmara is the capital of which country?
3. Who was the emperor of Ethiopia who helped to found the organisation that is now known as the African Union?
4. Which country recently rejected Germany's €10-million offer of reparations?
5. Kirundi is a language native to which country?
6. The Indomitable Lions are the football team of which country?
7. Which city is Togo's capital? (It's also the country's largest.)
8. In which country would you visit the Ennedi Plateau (pictured)?
9. True or false: The poet Warsan Shire was born in Kenya to Somali parents.
10. *Grazing in the Grass* is a song by which South African jazz musician?
11. The national bird of both Namibia and Zambia is the African fish eagle. True or false?
12. Kinshasa is located alongside which river, which also happens to be Africa's second longest?

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

"All Burna Boy's songs are actually about me."

Covid-19 puts Sierra Leone's expectant mothers at further risk

Abdul Brima

Binta Kamara is a nurse at the Kabala Government Hospital in northern Sierra Leone, where she says maternity patient turnout is becoming a problem – not too many, but rather too few. “Patients are refusing to come to hospital. We used to get close to 100% turnout, but now, we’re struggling to hit 50%.”

Misinformation plays a significant role in this, Kamara says. “There is lots of information flowing on social media and much of it is fake news.”

Sierra Leone has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios in the world and remains one of the riskiest places to give birth. Close to 3,000 mothers lose their lives due to pregnancy or childbirth every year, according to the World Health Organisation. There is only one nurse or midwife for every 10,000 people.

This is not just a Sierra Leonean problem: in Nigeria, profound levels of fear coupled with misinformation on social media have left many suspicious

of health centres. More people now have less access to health facilities in a country where the doctor to patient ratio wobbles at about 1:2,500.

Recently, Unicef said that as communities remain fearful of infections, lockdowns, curfews and transport cutoffs, health service delivery around the world could be badly affected. It believes this could cause serious disruptions in medical supply chains, straining financial and human resources in countries with weak health systems. There could be as much as a 44.7% increase in deaths of children under five and a 38.6% rise in maternal deaths per month if healthcare interventions fall by 45%.

This is not just a Sierra Leonean problem: in Nigeria, profound levels of fear coupled with misinformation on social media have left many doubtful of health centres

“We must not let mothers and children become collateral damage in the fight against the virus,” said Unicef executive director Henrietta Fore. “And we must not let decades of progress on reducing preventable child and maternal deaths be lost.” ■



No embassy, no problem: Despite only limited international recognition, Western Sahara is actively engaged in diplomatic efforts (Photo: Stefano Montesi/Corbis/Getty Images)

Diplomats without an embassy

For breakaway territories, quasi-states and would-be secessionists, diplomacy is hard – but not impossible

Nick Roll

Officially, the dream of an independent Biafra ended in 1970, when the Nigerian Civil War came to an end. However, according to the United States government, Biafra still exists – at least in certain filings at the Department of Justice.

In the alphabetically ordered filings maintained under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (Fara), Biafra sits right in between Bermuda and Bolivia. But Biafra is not officially recognized as an independent country in the United States or anywhere.

But all states – whether they're widely recognized or not – as well as foreign

political parties and other entities must publicly file their contracts with American firms when those firms are hired to engage in work related to public policy or public opinion.

The Biafra filing contains a contract between the separatist group, the Indigenous People of Biafra (Ipob), and the US firm Mercury Public Affairs.

Ipob is not the only non-state, or quasi-state actor, in the filings. Joining Ipob are the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad, an alliance of Tuareg rebels in Mali, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, in Western Sahara. Both have hired Independent Diplomat, a nonprofit diplomatic advisory group. The challenges

they face are serious and long-standing, ranging from independence aspirations to the implementation of peace accords.

Strategic consulting

The Biafra contract is signed by Nnamdi Kanu, the divisive independence activist and perennial thorn in the Nigerian government's side. Kanu fled Nigeria in 2017, and his current location is unclear. The contract retains Mercury for "strategic consulting, government relations, lobbying, and media relations and management," for \$85,000 a month, according to the filing. Mercury appears to have been hired to lobby the United States to appoint a special envoy to

address violence in Nigeria.

Under the Fara filings for Mali, the Coordination of Movements of the Azawad (CMA) is listed alongside – though separately – from the Malian government. The group, a coalition of rebels from the 2012 Tuareg uprising, differs from the various Biafran movements in that it actually holds governing and military power, rather than being an independence movement.

"They're the most powerful armed group in the north," said Alex Thurston, a political science professor at the University of Cincinnati whose research focuses on the Sahel. Its role with the state is complicated – while governing its own



Exiled: Biafran leader Nnamdi Kanu (centre) is lobbying US policymakers to appoint a special envoy (Photo: Marco Longari/AFP)



Hard sell: Rebels in northern Mali have been pushing for an independent state for years (Photo: Patrick Robert/Corbis/Getty Images)

territory, the CMA also backs candidates for the Malian parliament.

The CMA's contract calls for Independent Diplomat, to "seek the views of the US Government by meeting officials and desk officers in the State Department, including at the US Mission to the UN, in order to assist the CMA in its diplomatic efforts."

More broadly, Independent Diplomat, which also has offices in Geneva and Brussels, is also retained to "support the CMA to improve its diplomatic strategy and diplomatic engagement with the international community" regarding the 2015 peace accords. It's a tall order: the CMA is not the only rebel group in Mali, where violence continues to this day; the central government was this month ousted in a coup; the CMA is itself internally divided; and the peace accords are still far from fully implemented.

Independent Diplomat also serves the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the

state proclaimed by the independence movement the Polisario Front, which does have some foreign embassies and international recognition (including from the African Union) for its claims to the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara. A ceasefire was implemented in 1991 between Morocco and the Polisario Front, which both claim the territory and both have control of parts of it. Today the movement for Sahrawi independence is primarily a legal struggle. Hence, the consultants.

Reza Afshar, executive director of Independent Diplomat, said the nonprofit represents groups and governments that don't have fully fledged foreign services or diplomatic corps, in order to ensure relevant parties get a seat at the table when decisions are being made. In Western Sahara, much of its work concerns the Sahrawi government's diplomatic interaction with the UN and the Security Council.

"Often international diplomacy revolves around states, and the state system," he said. "But in order to actually reach sustainable outcomes in diplomacy, you do also need to talk to the often-marginalized groups who may not have hitherto been formally part of the process."

And even if non-recognized states struggle to win widespread recognition, they always have each other. To the chagrin of China and Somalia, Taiwan and Somaliland established diplomatic ties in July. The US, which officially recognises neither but has historically supported Taiwan, chimed in with its support. ■

Third-term politics in Côte d'Ivoire

Mbulle-Nziege Leonard

President Alassane Ouattara has announced that he will stand as the candidate of the ruling party, the RHDP, during the October 31 presidential election. This decision was occasioned by the sudden death of former prime minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly, who Ouattara had lined up to run as his replacement. But it is still controversial, because Ouattara has already served two terms in office. So what comes next?

President Ouattara's announcement was carefully planned. In the lead-up, prominent RHDP party barons, including newly appointed prime minister Hamed Bakayoko – once tipped as a presidential candidate himself – were among the first to call for Ouattara to stand. For his part, the president has argued that the adoption of a new constitution in 2016 allows him to stand, as it cancelled the previous terms. But this is contested by opposition leaders.

The president's decision was not simply a power grab. He was also motivated by a desire to maintain party unity. Without him, the RHDP could have collapsed and lost power. The

ability of opposition parties to mount an effective challenge will also depend on unity. Sporadic protests against Ouattara's candidacy have not built into a broader movement – as in Belarus, say – and the government has effectively marginalised critical voices.

However, the opposition does look more coherent than in recent years. Former president Henri Konan Bedié will lead the opposition PDCI, having reconciled with and established a political alliance with his erstwhile foe Laurent Gbagbo – another ex-president, currently in exile in Belgium – and the hardline faction of his party. Another political heavyweight, Guillaume Soro, also exiled, but in France, has also agreed to support the PDCI if they make it to the second round.

Although Ouattara is likely to be able to manipulate the advantages of incumbency to comfortably retain power, the newfound opposition unity – and the return to prominence of divisive figures such as Bedié, Gbagbo and Soro – will lead to an increasingly polarised campaign. And that significantly increases the risk of political instability both before and after the polls. ■

Mbulle-Nziege Leonard is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Town and a research analyst at Africa Risk Consulting. This analysis is published in partnership with Democracy in Africa



A new Cold War is coming. We don't need to pick sides

Instead of taking part in yet another 'scramble for Africa', perhaps the countries on the continent should sit this one out and focus on self-development

W. Gyude Moore

As Republicans and Democrats in the United States attempt to outdo each other on who is tougher on China, it is becoming clear that Africa will be drawn into this contest.

Africa has already been positioned as a space in which China has to be “countered”. Western criticism of China’s presence in Africa is now standard. In public statements, the supposedly negative effects of China’s loans to African countries are presented as fact.

For its part, China will continue to look to Africa’s vote rich 54-country bloc for support of its actions and international legitimacy. The West too will lean on their African partners – leveraging development aid and access to their markets as a carrot and stick approach to enforcing compliance. There will be talk of China’s divergence from “shared values” and a need to protect the international system.

The discourse usually implies a certain illegitimacy to the presence of non-Western actors in Africa. In this narrative

China, and to a large extent Russia, are depicted as the bad guys; as compared to the apparently noble objectives of Western actors.

But this has hardly been Africa’s historical experience. While the West has mainly engaged Africa through a development lens, with a relatively recent and welcome focus on human rights, there has been an active European presence on the continent for centuries.

Free of any significant rivals, Europe has enjoyed unencumbered access to Africa for labour, mineral resources and agricultural products at a steep discount. Even at the formal end of colonialism, Europe and the West continued to extract from Africa through transfer pricing and one-sided, extraction-heavy mineral development agreements.

A War on Want report in 2016 showed that “101 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange – most of them British – have mining operations in 37 sub-Saharan African countries” and together “they collectively control over \$1-trillion worth of Africa’s most valuable resources.”



Despite this long history of extraction, there has never been a Western proposal for continental-scale infrastructure building equivalent to China's Belt and Road Initiative (with the ugly exception of Cecil Rhodes's racist and unrealised "civilizing" project of connecting Cape to Cairo in the 1870s).

The West could certainly afford to, if it wished: in the last eight months, Western countries have spent more than \$5-trillion to prop up their economies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. JP Morgan projects that over 14 years (2013 to 2027), China's Belt and Road Initiative will cost about \$1.2- to 1.3-trillion.

The Western argument of Chinese debt trap diplomacy, inferior loan terms, and an insidious, covert campaign to seize African national infrastructure assets rings hollow in the absence of a

like-for-like Western alternative.

Besides, until the arrival of the Chinese, the infrastructure construction space in Africa was dominated by Europeans at exorbitant rates. That has changed. In 2018, Chinese companies accounted for 62% of the market share of infrastructure construction in Africa.

There are significant constraints to the China-Africa partnership too, of course. While China has no racist colonial past in Africa, the discrimination experienced by Africans in Guangzhou during the Covid-19 outbreak there does not bode well for our long-term relationship. And the economic relationship is still lopsided in favour of China, delivering sub-optimal outcomes for Africans.

As divisions between China and the West widen, Africans will be expected to pick a side. It's unclear why we would. In the market for partners, it is vital that African countries keep their options open – and keep pressuring partners to deliver a better deal.

Ultimately, both China and the West benefit from a global system that confines Africa's role to being a source of unprocessed natural resources and a market for finished products.

Africans know that Africa has much more potential. The continent is best served by charting its own course and sitting out the coming Cold War, taking over the driver's seat of its development future and determining which partners will bring the most value. ■

W. Gyude Moore is a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development, and a former minister of public works in Liberia

(Photo:
picture
alliance/
Getty
Images)

Biya promised houses – 30 years on, they're still waiting

Daniel Ekonde

In 1990, Cameroon's Indomitable Lions became the first African team to reach the quarterfinals of the men's football World Cup, held in Italy that year. When they got home, then-President Paul Biya promised to build each member of the 22-man squad a house.

These houses have yet to be built. Three members of the original squad – Louis Paul Mfede, Benjamin Massing and Stephen Tataw – have already died.

According to Victor N'dip Akem, one of the players on the iconic team, Biya's order was manipulated by the then-minister of sports. "[President Biya] signed the decree in July that year that they should give us houses but, unfortunately for us, the minister of sports had to include names that did not participate in the World Cup," the former

defender told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Instead of 22, a total of 44 names were included, which prompted the department in charge of Cameroon's public housing to abandon the effort.

"The document disappeared, despite the president signing it," François Omam-Biyik, who scored the header in Cameroon's opening defeat against Argentina, told the *Mail & Guardian*.

In June this year, an association of the 1990 players, chaired by Bertin Ebiwellé, resuscitated the issue in a letter to the presidency.

In August, still-President Biya again decreed that 22 houses be handed over to the players. The housing ministry has said that this time each player can choose where they want their house to be built.

"I am very happy and content," said Omam-Biyik. "I am waiting to finally touch the keys to the house." ■



The Big Picture

Moroccan roller: Authorities have reimposed lockdown restrictions in Tangier, after a spike in Covid-19 infections. Civil society groups are concerned about how strictly these are being enforced, with military units patrolling the streets of the ancient coastal city. As of August 21, Morocco had reported 47,638 cases, including 775 deaths. (Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP)

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