

The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



Graphic: John McCann

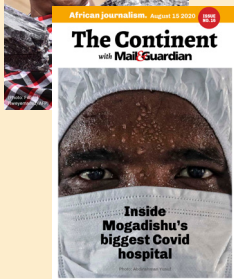
**Rwanda jails
another critic**



A pencil sketch of the late Chadwick Boseman, by Zimbabwean artist Shanfield Moyo (IG: @mcleish_sm_art).

Inside:

- **COVER STORY: Hotel Rwanda** – You can check out, but you can never leave (p9)
- **The messy politics of Didier Drogba** and his bid to lead the Ivorian Football Federation (p8)
- **Why President Yoweri Museveni** lost his sense of humour (p13)
- There's been a **spate of kidnappings in Mozambique** (p22)
- **How Chadwick Boseman inspired** Africa's first professional skeleton racer (p25)
- **PLUS:** Akon, Continental Drift and the Big Pan-African Quiz



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

We've got some good news: despite being less than six months old, *The Continent* is already up for an award. We are a finalist in the "Best News Website or Mobile Service" category of the prestigious African Digital Media Awards 2020. The prizes are given out by the World Association of Newspapers at a ceremony next week – wish us luck! This would not have been possible without the incredible support of our readers from all over the world (as of this week, *The Continent* is distributed in 81 different countries).

The Week in Numbers

5

The number of gorillas born in just six weeks at the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda. It's officially a baby boom, say the wildlife service: just three infants were born in the whole of 2019. About 400 mountain gorillas live in Bwindi, which is 40% of the total gorilla population.

174,978

The number of African students who will be studying at universities in China in 2021, according to new projections from Development Reimagined, a consultancy firm. That's 54% more than in France, which is Africa's second-favourite tertiary education destination. China is set to offer 12,000 academic scholarships to African students next year.

2-million

The number of loaves of bread produced per day at a new government-run bakery in Addis Ababa. The government plans to distribute free bread to all residents of the city to celebrate Ethiopian New Year on September 11.

151.56 naira

The price per litre of petrol in Nigeria following a price hike this week – the third increase in three months. "It is like adding salt to injury," said the Nigeria Labour Congress. Despite being the largest oil producer in Africa, Nigeria imports all its petrol.

(Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP)



\$100-million

The amount by which the United States has reduced its aid to Ethiopia. This is in response to Ethiopia's decision to begin unilaterally filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, over the objection of downstream nations Egypt – a key US ally – and Sudan.

Senegal



‘Real-life Wakanda’

The Senegalese rapper Aliaume Thiam, better known as Akon, has unveiled his blueprint for Akon City, claiming that construction will begin next year on the \$6-billion project.

There will be houses, hotels, offices, malls and music studios in the futuristic development, to be built over what is now a coastal village not far from Dakar.

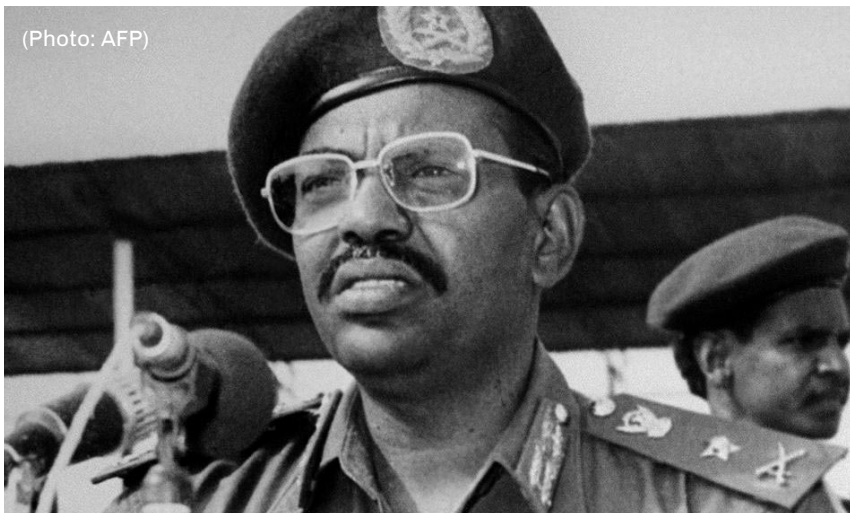
Akon claims that a third of the funding

has already been secured, but would not reveal who the investors are.

He said the project will provide jobs for Senegalese people, and is designed to provide an alternate home for African-Americans who feel persecuted in the United States. “The system back home [in the US] treats them unfairly in so many different ways that you can never imagine,” he said. ■

Sudan

(Photo: AFP)



Finally, Bashir gets his day in court

In March 2009, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir became the first sitting head of state to be indicted by the International Criminal Court. He was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, in connection with atrocities committed when his soldiers attempted to wipe out political opposition – and associated ethnic groups – in Darfur.

He never faced trial at The Hague, successfully mobilising other African leaders to defend him on the international

stage.

But now, a year after being deposed by the Sudanese revolution, he finds himself behind bars – and in the courtroom. This week, his trial began in Khartoum, in connection with crimes committed during the 1989 coup which brought him to power (he is pictured here just a week after seizing the presidency).

This is not yet justice for Darfur, or for the many people who were persecuted and oppressed during his long rule. But it's a start. ■

Kenya

US 'chemistry' with Kenya is turning into trash-talk

Refiloe Seiboko

Plastics, and plastic waste in particular, are a worldwide problem. Non-biodegradable plastic products clog up streets and bodies of water, and pollute natural ecosystems. Environmental activists have urged people to use less plastic, or avoid it completely wherever possible.

Plastics also contribute to global warming: after all, plastics are made from hydrocarbons that can drastically alter the atmosphere.

But Africa's efforts to reduce plastic face a powerful threat, according to a recent report in the *New York Times*. It revealed that with the petrochemical industry under threat due to falling oil prices, the world's biggest chemical and fossil fuel producers want to flood African markets with cheap plastic products.

Their first target is Kenya, one of the continent's strongest economies. Lobbyists are already at work, trying to persuade the country to loosen its tight

restrictions on plastics.

In Africa's war against plastics, Kenya has led the way in recent years. It banned plastic bags in 2017, and this year banned all single-use plastics in protected areas. But as it seeks to negotiate a new trade deal with the United States, it is coming under enormous pressure from the petrochemical industry to roll back these progressive measures.

If the petrochemical industry gets its way, it can capitalise on the country's growing economy and import-export infrastructure, which would all but guarantee a huge growth in the one-way plastics trade between the US and Kenya; and, subsequently, from Kenya to the rest of the continent.

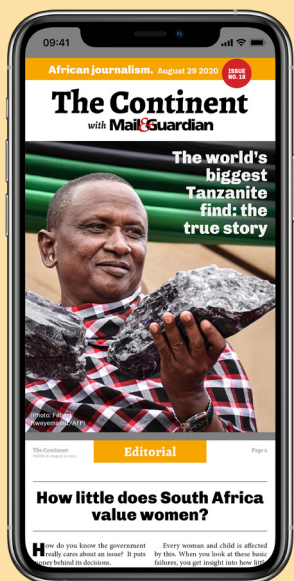
This would, effectively, turn the continent into a dumping ground for fossil fuels from other countries. ■



Wasteland: The Dandora rubbish dump in Nairobi (Photo: Jan Hettfleisch/Getty)

FREE DELIVERY EVERY SATURDAY

The Continent is a weekly newspaper designed to be read and shared on WhatsApp. It showcases the best of African journalism. And it's free.



Get your copy delivered to your phone or inbox every Saturday. And if you like what you read, forward it to your friends, family and colleagues – not indiscriminately, but only with people who might appreciate it.



HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Email: TheContinent@mg.co.za with 'SUBSCRIBE' in the subject box

WhatsApp: Save +27 73 805 6068 on your phone, and send us a message saying 'NEWS'

Share real news.

The Continent
with MailGuardian

Côte d'Ivoire

Does Didier Drogba deserve to lead the Ivorian Football Federation?

ANALYSIS

Daniel Ekonde

For those unfamiliar with the local football scene, Didier Drogba appears to be a shoo-in for president of the Ivorian Football Federation. He's the national team's leading goalscorer, a former captain, and a legend of the game.

Yet his first attempt at the presidency ended in failure in late August.

Mamadou Gaye, a prominent football journalist, explained why. According to Gaye, the iconic Chelsea star has not watched the national team in a single live match since his retirement in 2014. Nor has he watched any Ivorian league matches. "Suddenly you want to be a president of something you don't know about," tweeted Gaye.

His main opponent is the federation's current vice-president, Sory Diabaté. Diabaté is well-versed in the local game, and enjoys the support of the top clubs and the referees' association. He has a reputation for helping former footballers find work after retirement.

But now Drogba may get another chance. Concerned that the electoral process was not free and fair, the sport's global governing body FIFA has ordered that the electoral process be halted – and may even require a re-run.

Drogba does have one constituency in his favour: the fans. He played more than 100 times for Côte d'Ivoire, and scored 65 goals, between 2002 and 2014. Some analysts say he also helped prevent a civil war in 2005, by galvanising his teammates and begging for unity after qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

According to Gaye, Drogba has not watched the national team in a single live match since his retirement in 2014

If he is to succeed in his ambition to lead his country's football association, he will have to once again unify the country behind him. ■

Daniel Ekonde is a Cameroonian sports writer

The hero of *Hotel Rwanda* is behind bars

This is a brazen warning to the president's critics

Simon Allison

Like it or not, Hollywood has the power to define African countries to the rest of the world. For older generations, the continent was synonymous with the colonial tropes on display in *Zulu* and *Out of Africa*. More recently, *The Last King of Scotland* – about Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, from the perspective of a white doctor – reinforced all those negative stereotypes about African strongmen, while *Madagascar* suggested that only animals roam this land.

Hotel Rwanda was a little different. Although the movie depicted the Rwandan genocide in harrowing, heart-stopping detail, an African was allowed to be the hero of this movie (even though he was played by an African-American).

Don Cheadle portrayed Paul Rusesabagina, the acting manager of the stately Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali. As the violence unfolded around him, Rusesabagina – in real life as in the movie – used his position to shelter more than a thousand Tutsi civilians in the hotel, saving their lives in the process.

The movie turned Rusesabagina into the most famous Rwandan outside of



Jailed: Paul Rusesabagina was charged with terrorism-related offences in Kigali. (Photo: Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post/Getty Images)

Rwanda, and an international hero. He became a symbol of humanity amidst the unthinkable brutality of the genocide; and of hope for the new Rwanda which would emerge from the ashes.

And indeed, a new Rwanda did emerge from those ashes. Its renaissance was and is led by President Paul Kagame, under whose stewardship this tiny landlocked nation has become one of the safest and fastest-developing countries on the



Hollywood: Paul Rusesabagina and Don Cheadle on the set of *Hotel Rwanda*

continent. But real life is not a movie script, and heroes don't last forever.

Take Rusesabagina. He didn't stay for long in the new Rwanda, becoming a vocal critic of the government and seeking exile abroad in 1996. He became a Belgian citizen, and obtained a green card allowing him to live and work in the United States. From there, his critiques of the government became more and more strident, and he aligned himself with increasingly radical opposition movements.

Central to Rusesabagina's grievances is the Rwandan government's failure to account for its own atrocities: the massacres committed by Kagame's rebel troops as they swept in to end the genocide; and, subsequently, the massacres by Rwandan soldiers of Hutu civilians who fled into the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Most controversially, Rusesabagina allied himself with the National

Liberation Front, the armed wing of an exiled political party that has called for the overthrow of Kagame's government. This is a call that Rusesabagina appeared to echo in a 2018 video clip that is being circulated widely by Rwandan government supporters on social media: "I plead that our youth ... launches against the Kagame army in order to free the Rwandan people."

This is not language to which President Kagame takes kindly. Despite his status as a darling of the international development world – he counts Tony Blair and Bill Clinton among his friends – Kagame has consistently and brutally clamped down on critics and opponents.

Just ask Victoire Ingabire, who was locked up in 2012 after setting up her own political party and vocally criticising the president; or Faustin Nyamwasa, one of Kagame's top lieutenants who turned against him and narrowly survived an assassination attempt in South Africa in

2010.

You can't ask Patrick Karegeya, Kagame's ex-spy chief who was murdered in his Johannesburg hotel room by a hit squad that South African prosecutors say is linked to the Rwandan government; or Kizito Mihigo, the popular singer who dared to question the official narrative of the Rwandan genocide, who was jailed on terrorism charges in 2014.

In February this year, Mihigo was found dead in his cell. Rwandan officials say he committed suicide, but human rights groups have cast doubt on this version of events.

Now Rusesabagina joins the list of critics who have been muzzled by Kagame's government. On Monday, he was paraded in a courtroom in Kigali, flanked by armed policemen, and charged with inciting terrorism.

His family doesn't know how he got there – fearing for his safety, Rusesabagina has not been home in years. They believe that he was kidnapped from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and illegally renditioned to Rwanda. Rwandan authorities claim to have had “international co-operation” in making the arrest. The UAE has denied any knowledge of the matter, except to confirm that Rusesabagina had, last Thursday, boarded a private jet bound from Dubai to Kigali.

The family – and his eponymous charitable foundation – claim that Rusesabagina was a man of peace, and dismiss the government's allegations out of hand. They claim that the 2018 video clip in which he appears to call for a revolt

was manufactured by pro-Kagame forces.

Their denials are unlikely to carry much weight in the Kigali courtroom where he will be tried; over the years, question marks have repeatedly been raised – by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, amongst others – about the judiciary's ability to deliver a fair trial to government critics.

So far, Belgium and the US have appeared reluctant to come to Rusesabagina's support. In a statement, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy merely asked Rwanda to “provide a fair and transparent legal process for Mr Rusesabagina”.

Once again, Paul Rusesabagina finds that he has become a symbol. Or, more accurately, a warning. The message to opponents of Kagame's regime cannot be any clearer, or more chilling: dissent will not be tolerated. Fame will not protect you. Distance will not protect you. And, with the rest of the world consumed by their own problems, few will speak out in your defence. ■



Iron fist: Paul Kagame has delivered economic growth to Rwanda, but brooks no dissent. (Photo: Thierry Roge-Pool/Photonews/Getty)

What is it really like to leave your country behind?

A new podcast explores the intimate, often hidden consequences of conflict on people and families

Samira Sawlani

What is it really like to lose a country to conflict? What are the realities of starting over? How do you live in a system that continuously dehumanises you? How does it feel to carry loss around with you, while trying to put yourself together?

These are just some of the questions explored in *On Things We Left Behind*, a new podcast created by UK-based Somali-Canadian sisters Surer Mohamed and Saredo Qassim. Last year the podcast won LaunchPod, the UK's first ever talent podcast competition, in recognition of its "personal and in-depth look into the lives of those who were made to start all over".

The series begins with an episode featuring their father, Qassim Mohamed Abdi. He was a Mogadishu-based pilot for

Somali Airlines, preparing a home for his new wife, when the civil war broke out. "The whole world collapsed," he said.

The couple escaped to Canada. Qassim tried to resume his career as a pilot, but had to navigate a bureaucratic quagmire while his wife gave birth to two daughters, all the while imagining how much easier it would have been if they were surrounded by family back in Mogadishu.

The sisters are adamant that this is not a podcast about war stories.

Instead, it is about how people rebuild themselves after their lives have been irrevocably changed; about how families, despite being torn apart, find ways to stay connected; about living in neighbourhoods you are unfamiliar with and sending your children to schools that you have never heard of. ■



On Things We Left Behind is available wherever you listen to podcasts

Poking fun at Museveni is no joke

ANALYSIS

Eric Mwine-Mugaju

With their blue flowing robes and exaggerated collars, you might mistake them for members of an obscure religious group. And if you can't speak Luganda, you might think they are televangelists, delivering rousing sermons and leading raucous sing-alongs like seasoned pentacostal pastors.

But their wide-brimmed sisal hats – and their mischievous looks – give them away. Meet Bizonto, a Ugandan comedy group infamous for poking fun at President Yoweri Museveni and the ruling elite.

In Luganda, bizonto means “deranged” but these four comedians – Julius Sserwanja-Kidomoole, Mbabaali Maliseri, Ssaabakaaki Peter and Gold Ki Matono – are anything but. Their satirical sketches highlight absurd realities, and they are masterful in their use of insinuation. Through comedy, they expose how the government has captured the state apparatus and fortified Museveni's long rule (34 years and counting).

But making fun of Museveni is no laughing matter. On July 23, the four men were arrested and charged with promoting sectarianism. This prompted calls to #FreeBizonto, and a strong show of online support. They were later released without charge, and continue to post videos that are politically sensitive – and potentially disruptive.

Presidential elections are set for early 2021. Citing the Covid-19 pandemic, the state has banned all physical campaigning. But Bizonto's use of radio and the internet means they reach voters all across the country. And their claim of being “crazy” only adds to their credibility: in Uganda, there's a long history of “mad” people speaking truth to power.

In the absence of political rallies, in the country's closed-off political space, laughter is all that is left for Ugandans.



Fire and wide-brimstone: Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni



The very irreverent: Bizonto's humour has upset the ruling establishment

Jokes are a place of refuge: in humour, things that cannot be said in public can be intimated; monsters can be exposed; guards can be dropped. Only in jest can you tell the emperor that he is not wearing any clothes.

The choice of priest-like garments gives the jokes even more gravitas. In Uganda, church leaders are mostly apolitical – historically, when the church has spoken out, it has faced persecution. (It is a different story in other African countries. In Zimbabwe, church leaders are speaking out against President Emmerson Mnangagwa's regime. In Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the church has played a crucial role in monitoring recent elections.)

Political opposition leaders also face persecution. Bobi Wine, perhaps the most serious challenger to Museveni in next

year's election, was charged last year with treason, and assaulted while in detention. Opposition supporters can expect to be beaten or teargassed for demonstrating in support of their candidate.

The blurring of boundaries between the ruling party and the state – and between the civilian government and the opposition – has been a hallmark of Museveni's governing style.

Even in this election, he is able to use the power of his presidential office to conduct de facto campaign events in rural areas, on the pretext of opening a clinic or a school.

And that is Bizonto's genius: using comedy, they take a page from the president's playbook by blurring the boundaries between their jokes and Uganda's absurd reality.

All you can do is laugh. ■

Victoria Rubadiri

This week, Kenyan broadcaster Victoria Rubadiri won the Komla Dumor Award, the prestigious BBC prize that honours rising stars in African journalism. Rubadiri is a prime-time presenter on Citizen TV. She spoke to *The Continent*.



I was so overwhelmed to receive this award. I followed Komla Dumor's career all the way from his days in Ghana to becoming a news anchor and reporter on BBC. Seeing what he did, he set the standard of African journalism on the global stage.

Both my parents were in media.

I grew up in the Trans World radio compound in Nairobi. My first voice-over was when I was five years old. So it's not that unusual that I became a journalist. I love what I do.

My advice to young journalists?

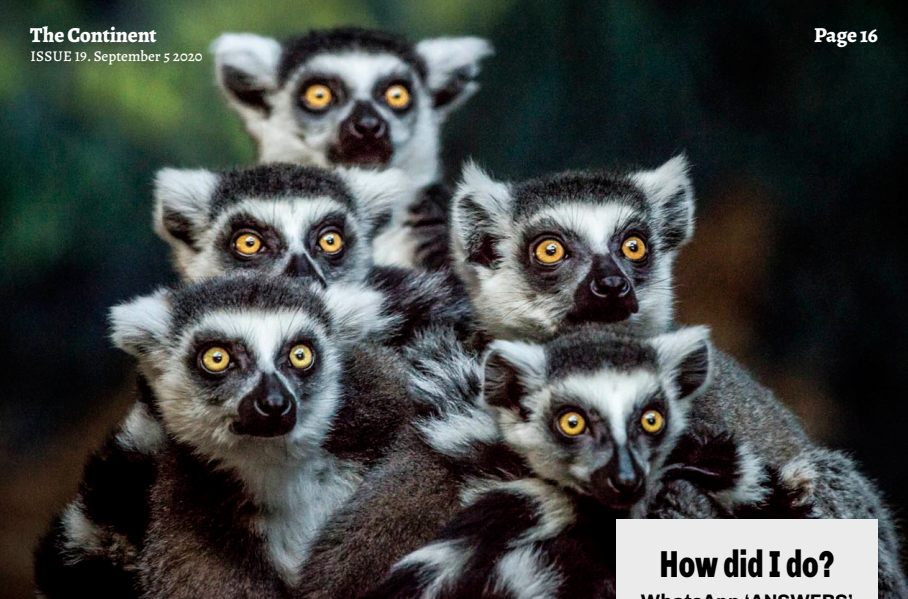
Always stay curious. Keep asking questions about the world around you. Never take things wholesale. Good reporters constantly ask why, and dig deeper. Never really "arrive". You'll be no value to anyone once you feel like you've learnt everything.

The pandemic has hit us hard.

It's difficult running a newsroom, it's a very cost-intensive operation. And yet our role is so important. People need information more than ever during the pandemic. They want to know how to keep themselves safe. We also need to keep our governments accountable.

I'm reading *The Africans* by David Lamb.

It's a history book, taking you back through various African leaders, and their decisions that are still having an impact today. Really, Africa hasn't changed that much in terms of leadership style. It's a challenge to us to demand more.



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

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

1. When is Africa Day celebrated?
2. Macky Sall is the president of which country?
3. Who is the Côte d'Ivoire football team's all-time leading goalscorer?
4. People from Nigeria are Nigerian. What do we call people from Burkina Faso?
5. Lake Kariba is the largest man-made lake in the world, by volume. True or false?
6. Funje is a porridge made from cassava flour, popular in which country?
7. What is Tunisia's official language?
8. True or false? Tanzanite is only found in Tanzania.
9. Makossa is a popular musical style from which country?
10. Lemurs are native to which country?
11. Malabo is the capital of which country?
12. Which Zimbabwean writer wrote *The House of Hunger*?

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

"What matters is not to know the world but to change it."

Frantz Fanon

Kenyan cops cash in on Covid-19 arrests

From personal experience, it is clear that due process is not being followed

Muthoni Gitonga

On August 26 at 7.10am, I was arrested and became a guest of the Kenyan state for about an hour.

I was picked up outside our estate gate as I was about to begin my weekly run. I didn't have my mask on, because it worsens clouding on my spectacles and makes it hard to breathe. Usually, I either wear a mask or tuck it into my running pants, but I didn't have one that day.

I pleaded with the police officers that I was not in anyone's way, and running is a solo effort; but accepted that I had indeed committed an offence by not having a mask on me.

"Madam, enter into this van otherwise we will embarrass you," a policeman said, and I quickly complied.

Upon arrival at the police station, we followed an impressive Covid-19 protocol – never mind that we'd come from an overly packed police van with no social distancing. We washed our hands with water and soap and had our temperatures taken. By then, I had used my bandana to shield myself.

In Kenya, not wearing a mask in

public carries a penalty of 20,000 Kenyan shillings (\$185) or six months' imprisonment. Since the onset of Covid-19, the state has used police to enforce health regulations, which has not been going especially well.

A recent report by Watchdog Mzalendo reported that almost half of the participants they interviewed had been harassed, arrested or beaten by police enforcing curfews and other measures introduced to curb the spread of coronavirus. The Independent Police Oversight Authority says at least 87 complaints have been filed against officers since the introduction of the dawn-to-dusk curfew.

As Kenya celebrated 10 years since the promulgation of the new Constitution, Amnesty International's *Katiba At 10* report revealed that many Kenyans live in fear of police brutality. The report, released in conjunction with other human rights groups, including the Kenya National Commission of Human Rights, found that 49% of those interviewed had experienced some form of police brutality, and feared this more than they did poverty. A significant 68%



Police protests: Kenyans have repeatedly demanded more accountability from their police service, including in this May 4 demonstration against the shooting of Vitallis Ochilo Owino on May 4 (Photo: Luis Tato/AFP)

also noted that police officers were the greatest perpetrators of human rights violations, especially in Eastern Kenya. This is a telling note.

From my experience, it appears that police have also come to regard the Covid-19 crisis as a cash cow.

The unofficial “bond fee” in the police stations is 1,000 shillings (\$9). Some of the repeat offenders told me that “you can’t get out of here without paying the fee”. In essence, this amount is a bribe and the stations don’t hide the fact that due process is not followed in their arrests.

There have been fears from health officials that police stations are the new

ground zero for Covid-19 infections.

As prison protocols are stringent, not allowing many new prisoners in, many police stations are holding petty offenders, mainly arrested for breaking health rules. Hardly a week hardly goes by without a new outbreak of infection being reported in this or that police station.

The money being collected on the side is fueling these arrests — the sheer number of these undeclared “bond” payments at Kenya’s police stations demands attention and investigation.

If it is left unchecked, brutality will not be the only thing tainting the police force in the time of Covid-19. ■

If politics was a movie...

Samira Sawlani

Guinea

One of the casualties of lockdown has been the good old trip to the cinema. How we miss that popcorn! Some of us make do with movies on the couch instead. Others feel compelled to star in their own imaginary blockbusters.

Establishing shot: Conakry, Guinea. We zoom in to reveal Alpha Condé, president of all he surveys. In a ravishing turquoise ensemble, he addresses the nation. The suspense builds – will he run for president a third time?

Spoiler: Duh-doy.

That's the thing about blockbusters: they're fancy, they're flashy and they're predictable. Especially if the star has been allowed to rewrite the script — or, in this case, the Constitution.

Condé says he's "the candidate for the women and the youth". So he's probably keen to get the youth into the cinema and off the streets, where they have fallen into the annoying habit of protesting against him and then inexplicably dying. "It's dangerous out there, come join me inside," he was not quoted as saying.

Not for all the popcorn in the world.

Zimbabwe

The best films for popcorn are superhero films. But will we ever be ready for more



Threequel: Alpha Condé intends to stand for re-election. Again. (Photo: Lionel Flusin/Gamma-Rapho/Getty)

superheroes after losing our Wakandan king, our Black Panther, Chadwick Boseman?

As much as we mourn those we have lost, we must treasure the heroes still with us. Let's celebrate the Zimbabwean courts finally granting bail to journalist and outspoken Mnangagwa critic, Hopewell Chin'ono, and Jacob Ngarivhume, leader of Transform Zimbabwe.

Despite being kept in unsanitary conditions with little access to proper food, both men remained unbroken. Chin'ono's bail conditions forbid him from posting on Twitter. Will that keep

him quiet? Nope. “I will continue to write on Facebook,” he said.

If it's heroes you are looking for, they walk among us.

Sudan and Niger

We haven't seen a big legal drama since *A Few Good Men*. We've seen even fewer good men in our geopolitical legal dramas. But this week we did get to see Omar al-Bashir at the International Criminal Court facing charges for the coup that brought him to power in Sudan in 1989. Current address? Kober Prison.

If the directors of *Shawshank Redemption* are thinking of a sequel, they'll be watching to see if al-Bashir can dig himself out of this one.

Movies aside, Sudan deserves more than light relief. The floods there have been devastating. More than 90 people have died and tens of thousands of homes have been washed away; land and livestock destroyed.

Similar scenes in Niger, where flooding has led to dozens of deaths and the displacement of more than 220,000 people. Bitter reminders that films warning about environmental disaster

and climate change have moved from fiction into tragic reality.

Off-Continent: US and Saudi Arabia

And then we have presidents who really have been in movies. Donald Trump – star of *The Little Rascals* and *Home Alone 2* (not even joking) – has clearly retained his affinity for juvenile antics.

Under his watch, the United States has issued sanctions against International Criminal Court officials Fatou Bensouda (from the Gambia) and Phakiso Mochochoko (from Lesotho). The US accuses the ICC of “targeting America” after it authorised a probe into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. So now Trump is throwing his toys out of the cot.

In contrast to the squealing of toddlers, it's so quiet over at African Union HQ we wonder if they're filming a silent movie. After the *Sunday Telegraph* report on Saudi Arabia last week, we thought there would be *something*, at least. The UK paper exposed the horrifying conditions in which hundreds if not thousands of Africans from many different countries are being held in Saudi detention centres.

Your silence is noted, AU. ■



No Sudan moves: Omar al-Bashir finally has his day in court (Photo: Mahmoud Hjjaj/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

Mali's critical next steps

Fatima Al Ansar

Mali has been in the midst of a multidimensional political and security crisis since January 2012. This peaked in the summer of 2020, when a combination of democratic backsliding, economic decline and Covid-19 further undermined support for the government, and the June 5 Movement organised major marches in major cities.

Protesters demanded the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita for poor governance and non-transparent management of the last legislative elections. Against this background, a mutiny of soldiers evolved into a coup in which the president was forced to resign and power was seized by the National Committee for Public Safety (CNSP), headed by Colonel-Major Assimi Goita.

The coup was seen to have considerable public support but what came next was much less popular, as Goita demanded a three-year transitional government before returning power to civilian hands. The unconstitutional transfer of power was immediately condemned by the international community, in particular the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), which announced economic sanctions. Because

Mali is a landlocked country, sanctions have a profound effect and often hurt the worst off hardest. Along with continued conflict and instability, this will worsen the country's humanitarian crisis and may trigger further unrest.

So what can be done? Domestically, Mali needs a quick and inclusive transition, perhaps in the form of genuinely national convention, culminating in transparent and credible elections as soon as they can feasibly be held. As part of this process, efforts must be made to improve the management of the armed forces and to deliver effective public services to the population.

Internationally, Ecowas has demanded a shorter transition timetable, but talks have stalled.

Moving forward, Ecowas should work with the CNSP to support the transition programme, removing sanctions in return for a guarantee of inclusive dialogue that makes space for civil society groups and, in particular, women.

If this can be done, the National Consultation due to take place 10-12 September can move Mali towards a political consensus on the road map for democratic renewal.

If not, further instability is likely. ■

Fatima Al Ansar is a diplomat, political, international relations and gender analyst from Mali. This analysis was produced in partnership with Democracy in Africa.



Hot spot: Maputo is one of the kidnapping hotspots in the country. (Photo: Adrien Barbier/AFP)



Kidnappings shake Mozambique's business community

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime

On July 13, businessman Álvaro Massinga, speaking on behalf of Mozambique's main private business organisation, told a press conference in Maputo that "cases of kidnapping and abductions of businesspeople in our country are multiplying, which makes us think that the world of organised crime has directed its barbarous actions towards the business class".

Massinga's statement was in response to the shooting of Agostinho Vuma – a prominent businessman, governing party MP and president of the business

association – in broad daylight in the capital, two days prior. Vuma was seriously injured in the attack.

Few people expect the perpetrators to be brought to justice: Maputo, as one Mozambican commentator said on social media on the same day as Massinga's statement, "remains the capital of impunity".

Although statistics presented to the Mozambican Parliament suggest that the national rate of kidnappings has not, in fact, increased in 2020, Massinga's assertion that the business community is being targeted appears to be correct: the eight kidnappings that occurred in the first half of 2020 all involved prominent

businesspeople or their family members.

Torture

The first case of kidnapping for ransom in Mozambique was in 2008. A 55-year-old Dutch woman was held captive for 18 hours before her husband paid a \$20,000 ransom, negotiated down from \$100,000.

After that time, the number of kidnappings grew steadily, from six attacks in 2011 to 17 in 2012 and 37 in 2013, according to official statistics. Kidnapping also spread geographically, starting in Maputo and Matola (which continue to be the main focus for kidnappers), before reaching other major Mozambican cities such as Beira, Chimoio and Nampula.

After the peak in 2013 and 2014, the rate of kidnappings has since declined, ranging between 14 and 19 a year between 2015 and 2020 (measured from April to April each year). Although the figures do give an indication of prevailing trends, it is worth noting that many kidnappings may go unreported to police.

The victims are typically abducted in daylight by armed and masked men driving vehicles without licence plates. The blindfolded victims are subsequently transferred to houses, typically in suburban areas, while the kidnappers negotiate the ransom.

There have been instances of kidnappers torturing or threatening to torture their victim to encourage the immediate payment of ransoms. This was reported in the case of Manish Cantil, who was rescued by police on May 20 this year.

In earlier years, the attackers

communicated with victims' relatives, either through SMS texts or phone calls.

More recently, encrypted-messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Signal or Telegram have made it difficult for the authorities to link kidnappers to particular phones.

Insiders at banks

Typically, kidnappings in Mozambique have targeted wealthy businesspeople or their family members. People who "show ostentatious signs of wealth, such as luxury cars, gold rings or top-brand pens" can become targets, according to Rodrigo Rocha, a lawyer and legal- and political-affairs analyst.

Ransoms are negotiated according to the kidnappers' estimate of what the victim's family is able to pay, with the kidnappers sometimes gleaning inside knowledge through connections with the victim's bank.

The ransoms demanded can be substantial, as shown by the case of businessman Rizwan Adatia, who was rescued by police on May 20 this year. Benjamina Chaves, the director of National Criminal Investigation Service (Sernic) in Maputo province, told the press that the kidnappers had initially demanded \$5-million.

However, such details about a kidnapping are rare. Although at least five of the eight individuals kidnapped in Mozambique in 2020 have been subsequently released or rescued, the fate of the detainees is not always publicly known. In addition, police and victims alike are often unwilling to discuss ransom

payments publicly, and the authorities do not release much information about the arrests and prosecutions of kidnappers.

Signs of state involvement

There is evidence to suggest that state officials – including police and military officers – may be connected to some kidnappings. According to Chaves, a senior official of the municipal council of Maputo City was implicated in the kidnapping of Adatia. Sernic stated that a member of the Mozambique Armed Defence Forces was one of three people arrested on suspicion of having kidnapped Shelton Lalgy in Matola. (Lalgy was released in February after a ransom was paid.) Sernic named the officer as the main suspect in the supply of arms and ammunition used by the group in its raids.

But, according to António Frangoulis, the lawyer and former director of the police-investigations branch that preceded Sernic, those people arrested by police are usually just “small fish”, such as guards or domestic workers. “The real planners and principals of these crimes are in the offices commanding the actions and are untouchable,” he said.

There are clear signs – such as repeated failures to investigate kidnappings and prosecute the perpetrators – that the Mozambican police and associated institutions are influenced by criminal networks, including groups that carry out kidnappings.

“What we see is the criminalisation of the state in which groups of bandits have the ability to manage decisions that should be taken against them, which is



Safe: Businessman Rizwan Adatia was kidnapped in April and rescued by police on May 20

why you see this passivity and impunity towards them and their actions,” said Albert Nuvunga, head of the Mozambican think-tank Centre for Democracy and Development.

State action and inaction

At the end of 2015 – President Filipe Nyusi’s first year in office and a year in which 19 people were kidnapped – the then-interior minister, Jaime Basílio Monteiro, assured the public that the police would get the situation under control. Since then, the authorities have attempted to encourage information-sharing to help to trace the movements of kidnappers.

But in the words of Alberto Ferreira, an academic and opposition MP: “As in southern Italy where the mafiosi control political power, here too the kidnappers are in control.” Looking to the future, Ferreira warned that impunity for kidnapping groups may invite other criminal groups to move into this business. ■

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of more global and regional experts working on issues around organised crime. This report has been edited for length.



(Photo: Matthias
Hangst/Getty
Images)

How **Black Panther's** Chadwick Boseman inspired Africa's first skeleton racer

Tolu Olasoji

While diving headfirst on a brakeless sled, high on aerodynamics, going 80 miles per hour down PyeongChang's frozen ice track at the 2018 Winter Olympics, Akwasi Frimpong pondered the significance of Chadwick Boseman and his portrayal of the Black Panther.

"When I was competing, a lot of

people said we have our own hero. King T'Challa on ice. They talked about how important representation was," said Frimpong, in an interview with the *Mail & Guardian*.

Frimpong – only the second-ever winter Olympian from Ghana, and the first black African to do so in skeleton racing – welcomed the comparison.

Yun Sung-Bin, the athlete who went



on to win the men's skeleton event, competed in a bodysuit inspired by Iron Man. Even though Yun is South Korean, this “represented the Westerners,” said Frimpong. His suit would be different.

The 2018 winter games was something of a milestone for African athletes, who competed for the first time in the sports of bobsled and skeleton. Frimpong – who grew up as an immigrant in The Netherlands – was representing Ghana, and that was evident in his look: a kente-inspired bodysuit in yellow, green and red, which matched his sculpted physique.

It's Wakanda magic

The winter games coincided with the release of the movie *Black Panther*, which started lots of conversations

about the representation of black and African culture. Frimpong took the film's message, and adapted it for the ice.

Yun Sung-Bin, winner of the men's event, wore a bodysuit inspired by Iron Man. This, said Frimpong, “represented the Westerners.” His suit would be different

“I did understand the message of the black people and people from Africa and what they wanted to see. They were really happy that I was wearing a Ghana outfit, obviously, because I represented that, right? But I knew that after the

2018 Olympic Games, I wasn't just there anymore to represent 20-million people. I wanted to represent 1.2-billion people, and that's where the story of the Hope of a Billion comes in," he said.

The success of *Black Panther* was unanticipated. It smashed box-office records, and won big at awards. It also marked a huge culture shift, proving that a predominantly black cast could attain insurmountable heights.

Boseman was at the fore of this cultural shift. Director Ryan Coogler has revealed how much he influenced the movie, such as demanding that actors be allowed to speak in African accents. And this, in turn, influenced other black creators – including Frimpong.

After the Olympics, he commissioned designer Matt Millette and Jordon Bourgeault, an airbrush artist, to create a Black Panther-inspired suit for competition.

The suit is sleek, all-black and textured – much like the super-hero outfit worn by Boseman in the film. The helmet is modelled on King T'Challa's mask. Like Boseman's portrayal of Black Panther, Frimpong's image was rich, black and cross-cultural.

Rest in power

Chadwick Boseman passed away last Saturday, at the age of 43. It emerged that he had been battling colon cancer since 2016. Frimpong was at his training base in Utah when he heard the news.

"I was devastated all day, all night. I still am to this day," said Frimpong. "But at the same time, too, he has given me

so much strength. He has given me so much more. The fact that he was able to do that for at least four years and continue to give himself to society, to people, that shows what it means to be kind and to have compassion over judgment, love over heat and light over darkness."

Frimpong was planning to commission a new suit to compete in later this year. But he has decided to pay tribute to Boseman by continuing to slide in his Black Panther suit.

**The suit is sleek,
all-black and textured –
much like the outfit worn
by Boseman in the film.
The helmet is modelled
on King T'Challa's mask**

Currently ranked 75th in the world, Frimpong is only getting better. In February, he became the first African to win an elite-level skeleton trophy – despite arriving at the competition with a broken sled, a defective helmet and in the less than peak physical condition. He has set his sights on becoming the first African winter Olympics medallist at the 2022 games.

To achieve this, he needs a new sled, more sponsors, and access to top-end medical facilities and coaching. These are all the bare minimum for his competitors, but Frimpong has to work harder. "I have to keep pushing. Like Chadwick, I have no excuse. I have no excuse but to keep giving it my all." ■

Swiss company accused of dodging tax in Zimbabwe

The country's tax authority says ABB, one of the most profitable companies in Switzerland, avoided paying millions of dollars to the financially crippled SADC state

Tatenda Chitagu & Will Fitzgibbon

ABB, one of Switzerland's most profitable companies, tried to avoid paying millions of dollars in taxes to Zimbabwe, the country's tax authority said in court papers and other documents.

The dispute between ABB and the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (Zimra) centres on \$13.4-million in payments allegedly owed to the country, which is in the middle of a crippling economic crisis.

Details of ABB's \$13.4-million alleged tax dodge were provided to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) by a former ABB employee in Zimbabwe. The documents include court records, contracts and bank statements as well as confidential advice to ABB from tax experts.

"There is some evidence that developing countries are harder hit by multinationals' ability to shift profits" and have less capacity to enforce tax rules, said Copenhagen Business School researcher Saila Stausholm.

"Obviously it leads to revenues missing in countries where public funds are already

scarce, creating a vicious circle."

ABB provides electronics, power generators and robotics. In 2019, it reported \$28-billion in global revenue and was recently named by business magazine *Forbes* as a leading company that helps "the planet and tackle[s] society's unmet needs".

In 2010, ABB Zimbabwe Private Ltd, the Swiss multinational's local arm, won government tenders to provide power generators to one of the country's largest power stations. ABB declined to provide ICIJ with the total value of contracts signed in Zimbabwe.

In early 2014, ABB South Africa asked Deloitte to advise on the "potential tax liability" of the Zimbabwean company, according to documents obtained by ICIJ. It is unclear why ABB requested Deloitte's advice.

Deloitte's tax chief in South Africa, Musa Manyathi, examined ABB's trail of documents and work in Zimbabwe. Manyathi concluded that Zimra could argue that ABB "avoided tax in Zimbabwe by moving...profit" to South Africa. Zimra could impose further taxes and penalties,

Manyathi warned.

ABB Zimbabwe never intended to perform the contract, Manyathi wrote. The Deloitte analysis found that it had subcontracted work to a South African company under a verbal agreement. The South African company delegated work to third parties in Zimbabwe, according to Deloitte's review.

"We think that this poses a problem," Manyathi wrote.

Leopoldo Parada, tax professor at the University of Leeds, said: "I haven't seen this in all my years. It's very weird to agree on that verbally. The only purpose for that I can think of would be to deliberately lose track of the contract."

He said that verbal contracts make it difficult for tax agencies to assess the true value of services and, in the case of ABB, "very easy to manipulate the amount of profits generated in South Africa".

Deloitte South Africa declined to comment, citing client confidentiality.

Deloitte's 2014 advice proved prescient. Zimbabwe's tax office audited ABB, according to court papers. Zimra estimated that ABB Zimbabwe avoided paying \$13.5-million between 2009 and 2012 by falsely claiming that the Zimbabwe contracts were cancelled and no taxes were owed to Harare. Zimra said ABB's offence was serious and added a fine of \$4.7-million.

ABB's total bill, including the value of taxes avoided and the fine, was \$18.2-million – more than Zimbabwe receives from international donors for the water and sanitation sector.

ABB appealed Zimra's audit. The

company told the Special Court for Income Tax Appeals in Harare that it originally thought it could deliver the contracts from Zimbabwe, according to court documents obtained by ICIJ, which are not public.

ABB Zimbabwe abandoned the contracts and the state's electric businesses received equipment directly from South Africa, the company argued. In court filings, the company said that consumption taxes were appropriately paid and that Zimbabwe waived customs duties.

The tax office didn't buy it. ABB's actions did not constitute fraud, Zimra acknowledged, but the company had nonetheless tried "to run away from its tax obligations". Customs duty was never waived, Zimra told the tax court.

"Given that the majority of Zimbabweans cannot access basic health care services, food, water and sanitation, especially in the context of Covid-19, this kind of money would go a long way in drawing people out of poverty," said Harare-based economist Tafadzwa Chikumbu.

ABB declined to respond to 10 questions sent by ICIJ and the Zimbabwean newspaper, *The Standard*.

"ABB cannot comment on these topics in Zimbabwe in detail but would like to underline that it acts as a responsible global corporate tax citizen in compliance with applicable tax law and regulations in all countries where it operates," the company said. ■

This story is co-published with The Standard and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

Cameroon's twin crises have fostered a surge in teen pregnancies

Regina Sondo

Rachel Tarh* is from the English-speaking north-west region of Cameroon, but now lives on the outskirts of Douala, the largest city. She and her family made their way here after their home became a battleground between separatist rebels and government forces.

When Cameroon implemented Covid-19 restrictions in March, the 17-year-old's school was shut down along with all the others. So she started working with her mother, selling meat in the market. She met a customer she liked, and one thing led to another. Now she's four months pregnant.

Her family are unhappy with her, and the father has refused to take any responsibility. It is unlikely that Tarh will return to school. "Now my parents have to worry about me and my baby."

Her story is not unique. Tarh is one of many young women whose lives have been turned upside down by not one but two crises: Covid-19 and the ongoing

conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

In Douala, the worsening economy and the closure of schools have forced many young women – already trying to recover from being displaced – to turn to sex work to make ends meet, or made them vulnerable to exploitative men.

This has led to a surge in teenage pregnancies, according to the Rahel Randy Foundation, an NGO focused on uplifting underprivileged and orphaned girls. Ten out of the 50 young women they work with have become pregnant during the pandemic. Of these, most do not have access to maternal healthcare, and suffer from familial stigma.

The worsening economy and closure of schools has forced many young women to turn to sex work

"Most parents fear to open up on or report these cases," said Randy Rahel, the head of the foundation. "This ends up affecting the girl child negatively. Many times, they drop out of school, and some end up as single child mothers who head families."

And many don't even make it that far. According to Unicef, the United Nations Children's Agency, maternal mortality in Cameroon is among the highest in the world at 596 deaths per 100,000 births. ■

*Not her real name

South Sudan in cash-crunch crisis

NEWS ANALYSIS

David Mono Danga

South Sudan's central bank announced last month that the country had nearly run out of foreign cash reserves.

Daniel Kech Pouch, the second deputy governor at the Bank of South Sudan, told reporters in Juba that there is nothing the central bank can do to stop the South Sudanese pound from depreciating further against the United States dollar.

"It's difficult for us now at this moment to stop this rapid exchange rate, because we don't have the reserves for us to intervene in the market," Pouch said. The official exchange rate is 165 South Sudanese pounds to \$1, but on the black market it can be as high as 400 South Sudanese pounds.

Pouch added that the central bank is unable to intervene and reduce the country's skyrocketing inflation rate, which now stands at 35%. He said that, although the black market is flush with US dollars, those dollars do not make their way to the central bank.

South Sudan's economy has recently

been devastated by recent floods, a drop in global oil prices and the Covid-19 pandemic. But the country's economic troubles date back to 2012, when South Sudan suspended all oil production following disputes with Sudan over processing and transit fees for exporting Juba's crude.

Ahmed Morjan, an economics lecturer at the University of Juba, said the bank's failure to secure foreign currency and boost the value of the local currency will translate into more suffering for ordinary citizens.

He said that "political instability, corruption and, most recently, Covid-19 are the reasons the central bank ran out of foreign reserves". He advised the government to immediately ask the International Monetary Fund and World Bank for a financial bailout as a short-term solution.

The central bank is in talks with representatives of the IMF, who are currently in the country to discuss how the economy can be strengthened. ■

This story was first published by South Sudan's The Insider and has been edited for length



The Big Picture

Role models: Kenyan photographer and art director Barbara Minishi takes pictures of her roommate and fashion stylist Wambui Thimba wearing a creation by a Kenyan fashion designer on the rooftop of their apartment in Nairobi, Kenya. After their scheduled work was cancelled due to the pandemic, Minishi and Thimba began showcasing different Kenyan fashion brands from their home. (Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP)

The Continent is produced with the Mail & Guardian, Africa's leading independent newspaper, and upholds the M&G's strict editorial standards. It is published by the Adamela Trust, a not-for-profit organisation founded by M&G journalists that is dedicated to fostering quality journalism. For queries and complaints, or to make a donation, please contact TheContinent@mg.co.za.