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The Continent

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**Inside the
illicit trade in
West Africa's
oldest artworks**

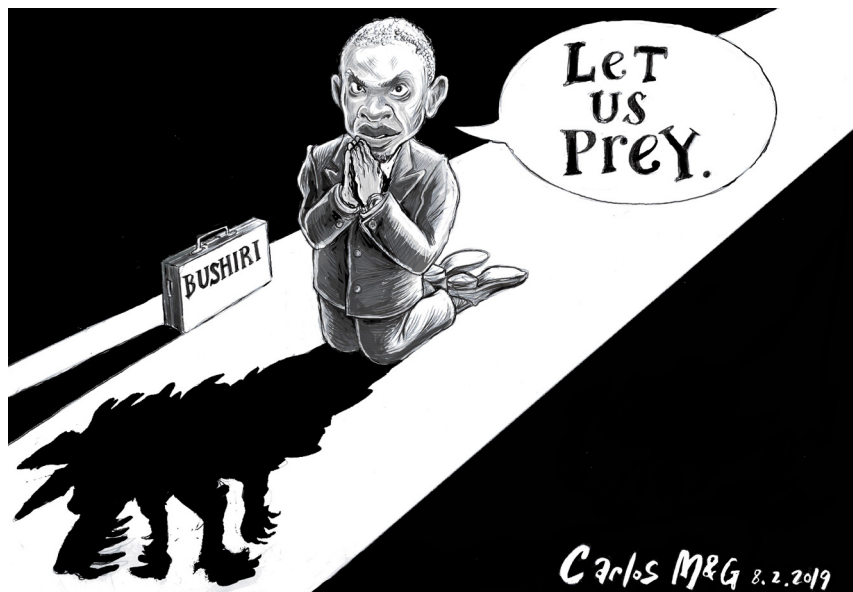
(Photo: Lutz Mücke)

THE ART THIEVES EDITION

This week's cover story reads like an action thriller. We travel from Abuja to Paris, from the Nok Valley to New Haven, on the trail of the underground dealers who are – quite literally – selling off Nigeria's history (p14). Then we meet the Congolese man on a mission to reclaim stolen African artworks from European museums – even if he has to steal them back (p22).

Inside:

- **Nigeria:** The state strikes back – with live ammunition (p8, p10)
- **Mozambique:** The miracle baby born on a boat (p11)
- **The virtual world of *Fortnite*** systematically disadvantages Africans (p26)
- **Kenya,** coffee and organised crime (p29)



The unholy trinity: The self-proclaimed prophet Shepherd Bushiri appeared in court in the South African capital Pretoria on Friday, along with his wife Ntlokwana and one other member of the Enlightened Christian Gathering church. The trio have been accused of money laundering, theft and fraud. Bushiri is reputed to be Africa's richest religious figure, with an estimated net worth of \$150-million.

The Week in Numbers

100,000

The number of people who may have been exposed to lead poisoning in Kabwe, Zambia, due to their proximity to an abandoned lead mine. This week, a class action lawsuit was launched against a subsidiary of AngloAmerican, the former mine owners, to claim compensation.

1

The number of Kenyan shillings – equivalent to less than 1 US cent – awarded by a court as compensation to Kenya's former Youth and Gender Principal Secretary Lillian Omollo, after she was found to have been unfairly dismissed. The court justified the paltry amount by pointing to the 33-million shillings (\$300,000) of 'unexplained wealth' in Omollo's bank account.

1.8-billion

The number of trees in West Africa's Sahel and Sahara deserts. The count comes from a new survey produced by coupling detailed satellite imagery with computer deep learning techniques, which – for the first time – allowed trees to be counted individually. The number is hundreds of millions higher than previous estimates.



Oasis: There are more trees in the Sahel and Sahara deserts than had previously been imagined. (Photo: Fadel Senna/AFP)

236,0000

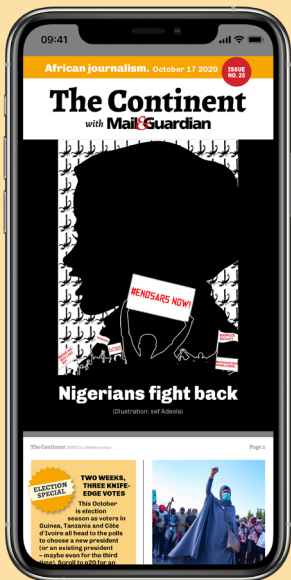
The number of newborns who died in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019 due to household air pollution, according to the State of Global Air report. Over the past decade, a growing body of scientific evidence from multiple countries has shown that women who are chronically exposed to particulate air pollution are more likely to have babies who are born too small or too early.

1,300

The number of prisoners freed after an attack on the Kangbaya Central Prison in Beni in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Only about 100 prisoners remain behind bars. Authorities accused the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamist militant group, of carrying out that attack.

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Guinea

After the vote, a new cycle of violence begins

Sidy Yansané

Given the tensions leading up to Sunday's presidential vote in Guinea, its violent aftermath was perhaps inevitable.

On Monday, the post-election crisis kicked off when opposition leader Cellou Diallo declared himself the winner with 53% of the vote, according to his own count. Although the Independent National Electoral Commission is the only body empowered to release results, Diallo believes that it remains subservient to the presidency of Alpha Condé, who is vying for a highly contentious third term.

The electoral authorities issued a stern warning to Diallo, but opposition supporters had already taken to the streets. The official results released so far show Condé in the lead.

Across the country, violence has broken out between the police and opposition supporters. At least 22

people have been killed, according to the opposition. Route le Prince, a major thoroughfare that runs through Diallo's stronghold in Conakry, has become the scene of repeated clashes.

Gunfire echoes across the capital, and most people are staying at home until the violence passes. Businesses are shuttered. Diallo says that he is "sequestered" at his own house, under the watchful eye of state security.

The Guinean diaspora, which is largely anti-government, is making its voice heard abroad. Protesters gathered in front of the Guinean embassies in Dakar, Paris and New York, while the one in London was ransacked.

Opposition leader Cellou Diallo declared himself the winner with 53% of the vote ... according to his own count

For both sides, the current strategy is risky, said Guinean philosopher Amadou Sadjo Barry. But in the absence of a credible electoral commission, choices are limited. "For now, the solution on both sides is limited to violent protests for one and state repression for the other." ■

Zimbabwe

Defiant women are jailed, raped and tortured

Kudzai Mashininga

Chikurubi is Zimbabwe's most notorious prison. Its reputation is well founded, says Sitabile Dewa. She would know: she spent weeks there after being arrested in May last year on charges of attempting to overthrow President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government.

Dewa, a gender justice activist, says more than 20 people are squeezed into a cell, sharing one toilet that does not flush. There's no running water. The diet is poor and the prison clinic has no medicine, not even for mild ailments. There is no pre- and post-natal care for pregnant women or nursing mothers and their babies.

"The place is not fit for human habitation," she says.

More than a year after Dewa was charged, the state dropped the case against her in August this year, citing a lack of evidence. But her ordeal did not end there. Ever since her arrest, she has been followed and unknown vehicles park outside her house.

Her experience is far from unique. "The past two years alone have been dramatic and very difficult for women human rights defenders and activists," says Dewa, who serves as the executive director of the Women's Academy For Leadership and Political Excellence.

"We have witnessed the arbitrary arrests, torture, assault, abduction, sexual abuse and harassment of women leaders such as Rita Nyampinga, Farirai Gumbonzvanda, Noxolo Maphosa, Nancy Njenge, Namatai Kwekweza, Joana Mamombe, Netsai Marova and Cecilia Chimbi by suspected state security agents. The Covid-19 pandemic has also not made life easier for women as the government has taken advantage of the restrictions to clamp down on women who dare challenge the abuses and state excesses."

Kwekweza, 21, echoes Dewa's



Free-ish: A prisoner carries her belongings out of of Chikurubi Prison.
(Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP)

experience. She, too, is no stranger to the inside of a jail cell, after being arrested for participating in protests against proposed constitutional amendments.

“I have been jailed twice before, and can say the cells at Harare Central are in a dilapidated state. I speak for detained women candidly by saying that they, too, are people and have rights. Women cannot be put in cold cells with flea-infested blankets, concrete bunk beds with no mattress, filthy toilets with no toilet paper or sanitary pads and pad disposal containers.

“The worst part is that we were all made to take off our shoes and I remember vividly another woman from Mbare having to walk barefoot on a wet floor during a cold July night to go to the toilet. These experiences are a form of torture and must never happen to detained women.”

She says the state is using heavy-handed methods to intimidate and punish young women. “Rape, physical assault and prisons have been weaponised against young female activists for issues like protesting [against] hunger, corruption, constitutional amendments,” says Kwekweza.

Opposition targeted

Women leaders of opposition political parties and unions have been also targeted. In May, Joana Mamombe – at 27, Zimbabwe’s youngest MP – was arrested for attending a protest during the Covid-19 lockdown, along with youth leaders Netsai Marova and Cecilia Chimhiri.

All are members of the Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance, the official opposition.

Before the women could be booked, they were abducted from the police station by unidentified armed men. They were beaten and sexually assaulted before being dumped on the side of the road the next day.

Instead of investigating their complaints – and despite their visible injuries – the police instead charged the three women with fabricating allegations.

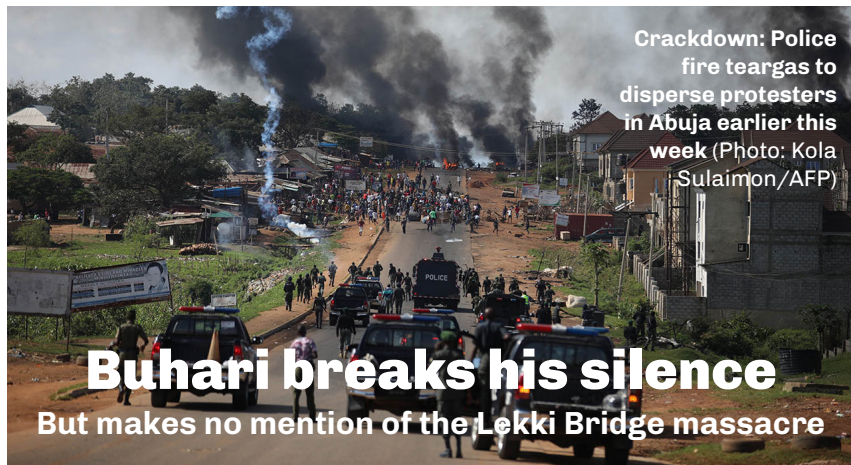
Last month, Mamombe was detained at Chikurubi prison on the orders of a magistrate who said she must be locked up pending a mental examination. On October 7, a judge ordered her release, describing her detention as irrational.

Njenge, the 22-year-old gender secretary of the Zimbabwe National Students Union, says she has been followed and harassed for months by unidentified men she believes are state agents. She was arrested on September 14 for allegedly participating in an illegal gathering and tested positive for Covid-19 shortly after being released.

The targeting of women activists and leaders takes place against the backdrop of a crackdown on all forms of opposition to the government.

After its meeting in July, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights said it was “alarmed by the arbitrary arrests and detention of journalists and women human rights defenders, including a member of Parliament, who were also allegedly subjected to torture, rape and physical assault”. ■

Nigeria



Crackdown: Police fire teargas to disperse protesters in Abuja earlier this week (Photo: Kola Sulaimon/AFP)

Buhari breaks his silence

But makes no mention of the Lekki Bridge massacre

Tolu Olasoji

On Thursday evening, after nine days of silence – nine days in which tens of thousands of Nigerians took to the streets to protest police brutality; nine days in which dozens of Nigerians were killed – President Muhammadu Buhari finally addressed the nation.

But instead of delivering reform, he called for business as usual. Instead of mourning the dead, he ignored the massacre of a dozen people at Lekki Bridge toll gate in Lagos on Tuesday.

That incident, which was livestreamed and broadcast around the world, put Nigeria's political crisis at the centre of the international news agenda. Protesters had been out in force that day, and were

defying a 4pm curfew imposed by Lagos Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who said that the protests had been hijacked by “thugs and miscreants”. That evening, heavily armed security operatives sealed off Lekki Bridge, and opened fire on the crowd. At least 12 people were killed.

The Nigerian army has denied claims they were involved in the shooting, labelling news reports suggesting the contrary as “fake” and images as “photoshopped”.

According to Amnesty International, at least 38 people were killed in Nigeria that day. 69 people have lost their lives since the protests began earlier this month, according to the government.

The protesters were calling for an end to the notorious Special Anti-Robbery


1,993 Inmates Freed in Edo Jailbreak, Says FG
 W. A. Oluwalana
 Oyoilbonke Emphasizes Provision for Police Security Victims in 2021 Budget



Death at Dusk for Young #EndSARS Protesters

Nigerians mourn

secure the gates!



Oyeedira's patriotism, selflessness distinguished her among the crowd, says Afe
 Nigeria's economy lost N700bn in 12 days - LCCI
 US shuts Lagos consulate over EndSARS protest

NIGERIAN TRIBUNE

October 24, 2020

Outrage over shootings as Lekki tollgate turns bloody

Security operatives fire live bullets as EndSARS protesters run
 Many killed in Ibeju, Lagos, Jos
 Police stations, vehicles burnt
 Lagos, Ekiti, Plateau, Oyo, Ondo declare curfew
 Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun shut schools
 Foreign airlines cancel flights into Lagos Airport

RCP condemns development of auto-kill public officers nationwide
 Senate asks Buhari to address nation
 We are committed to implementing demands, ITU tells parliament



EndSARS: I won't sign-off 2021 budget without compensation for victims - Gbajabiamla

The Guardian
 Consciousness. Nurtured by Truth

Wednesday, October 21, 2020



More deaths nationwide, curfew in nine states

Lagos, Edo face PCS Protest; Oyo, Ondo in lockdown - Soldiers ready protesters in Lekki
 US shuts down consulate in Lagos - Protester mourns late activist
 Senate asks Buhari to speak to Nigerians - RCP condemns auto-kill police
 Curfew now in nine states, NIB warns

NEWS
 SENATE ASKS Buhari to address nation
 RCP CONDEMNS auto-kill police officers nationwide
 US SHUTS down consulate in Lagos
 OYO, ONDO, EKITI, OGUN SHUT schools
 FOREIGN AIRLINES cancel flights into Lagos Airport
 END SARS: I won't sign-off 2021 budget without compensation for victims - Gbajabiamla

Squad, the elite police unit notorious for harassing, intimidating, extorting, assaulting and even killing civilians, especially young people. But more broadly than that they have been demanding an end to police brutality, and calling for widespread reforms in the security sector.

Buhari, in a speech broadcast on national television from State House in Abuja, said that he was speaking after “having heard from many concerned Nigerians and having concluded a meeting with all the security chiefs”.

In his address, he made no mention of Tuesday’s events, and called on “youths to discontinue the street protests and constructively engage [the] government in finding solutions”. He urged them to “resist the temptation of being used by some subversive elements to cause chaos with the aim of truncating our nascent democracy”.

He continued: “For you to do otherwise will amount to undermining national security and the law and order situation. Under no circumstances will this be tolerated. Your voice has been heard loud

and clear and we are responding.”

Buhari also promised salary increases for police and paramilitary services, and lauded the steps his government has taken to alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

The speech was widely criticised by supporters of the protest movement. “All I saw was blame. Nothing is ever Buhari’s fault. #EndSARS is the fault of #LazyNigerianYouths, and not a president that has refused to try rogue cops,” said author Rene Omokri. “Buhari is a poster boy for the saying that when you are lame, you love to blame.”

In the wake of Buhari’s speech, the Feminist Coalition – a newly formed group that champions equality for women in Nigeria, and which has been at the forefront of the protests – said it would halt all protest-related activities, and would not accept further donations, as its priority is the safety and welfare of Nigerian youth.

“Following the President’s address, we hereby encourage all young Nigerians to stay safe, stay home and observe mandated curfews in your state,” the group said. ■

Nigeria is remembering that it always kills its people

ANALYSIS

Chude Jideonwo

Nigeria has always killed its citizens. It killed them in the infamous pogroms against the Igbo people in the 1960s in Northern Nigeria, and it slaughtered them in the hundreds of thousands (or millions, by some accounts) in the Biafran War that continues to haunt our national imagination.

Democracy didn't rid Nigeria of its hunger for blood. From 1999, Nigeria has killed citizens everywhere in response to public protest

It killed them in protests during and against military rule in the 1970s long before I was born, and killed them again in the 1980s when I was just a child. It killed them in the 1990s when citizens dared to step into the streets to demand the announcement of the winner of the historic June 12 elections, and killed them again in my teens, during the presidency of General Sani Abacha.

Democracy didn't rid Nigeria of its hunger for blood. From 1999, Nigeria has killed citizens everywhere from Odi, Bayelsa – where thousands of lives were snuffed out in what is now known as the Odi Massacre – to Maiduguri in Borno.

In response to public protest, it kills people.

In response to criminals and domestic terrorists, it kills people – collateral damage during blunt, disorganised battles against better equipped enemies. And it kills people through sheer incompetence and corruption.

The Nigerian security forces are experts at murdering Nigerians. So much so that have become accustomed to their efficiency. Accustomed to seeing hundreds killed for peaceful self-determination protests. Accustomed to the number of people killed or tortured by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. Accustomed to seeing the bodycount rise in the ongoing onslaught by security forces since we started these #EndSARS protests two weeks ago.

So accustomed to them are we that they don't even bother to hide their face in shame. They simply kill us.

But now a new generation is waking up to our shameful national secret: Nigeria kills its people. Nigeria has always killed its people. And if we do not radically change our country, Nigeria – from president to president, in an unbroken chain – will continue to kill its people. ■

Chude Jideonwo the co-founder of Joy, Inc. and StateCraft, Inc. and co-author of How to Win Elections in Africa. This op-ed has been edited for length.

Mozambique

The baby born on a boat

Luis Nhachote

Muaziza Nfalume was heavily pregnant when she boarded the homemade wooden boat, crowding in with more than a dozen other people from her village. Pangane is in Macomia District, in the northern Cabo Delgado province which has been hit by a devastating insurgency that appears to be growing in intensity.

Like the others from her village, and like thousands more from Macomia, Nfalume was fleeing the violence, hoping to find safety – and make a new life for herself and her infant – in Pemba, the provincial capital.

That new life started just a little earlier than expected. Baby Awa was delivered on the boat before it got to Pemba. On arrival, mother and baby were transferred to the provincial hospital, and they are both in good health.

The news of Baby Awa's near-miraculous birth was greeted with joy across the country, which has grown weary of all the bad news coming from the north. Mozambique has a habit of finding pockets of joy in the midst of crises. In 2000, during the floods, Baby Rosita was



New life: Baby Awa's birth was near-miraculous. (Photo: Sheila Chambal)



born on the highest branches of a tree, and had to be rescued by a helicopter crew. In 2019, Baby Sara was born in a mango tree during the ravages of Cyclone Idai. Both became powerful symbols of hope amidst despair.

Some 35 boats have arrived in Pemba in recent days, after fighting between the insurgents – whose identity and motives remain murky – and government forces intensified. Although the situation remains bleak, Baby Awa is a reminder that maybe it does not have to be. ■

Zanzibar's vote has already been rigged in favour of the ruling party

*On Wednesday next week, Tanzanians will choose their next president. Incumbent John Magufuli is expected to face fierce competition from Chadema parliamentarian Tundu Lissu, who has been endorsed by the major opposition parties. Because Tanzania is a political union between the mainland and the island of Zanzibar, Zanzibaris will vote for their own president and ruling party. Magufuli's ally and current minister of defence Hussein Mwinyi is up against the ACT-Wazalendo's **Seif Sharif Hamad**. In an exclusive op-ed, Hamad argues the playing field is far from level – but that he has not given up hope.*

Next week, citizens of the semi-autonomous state of Zanzibar will head to the polls to elect local government councillors, members of the Zanzibar house of representatives, and a new president. Our election will run alongside the Tanzanian general election on the same day.

Elections on our islands have always been vigorously contested.

Unfortunately, though, the democratic will of the majority has consistently been disrespected. For five successive elections, the current ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has conspired with the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC), under the direction of the Union government, to maintain its illegitimate grip on power.

Most recently in 2015, ZEC annulled the election results which reflected

a decisive loss for the CCM. Citing “irregularities”, they arranged a bogus rerun in 2016 which we as the opposition boycotted, not wanting to legitimise a tick-the-box exercise designed to keep a corrupt, incompetent government in power.

This year, however, the patience of our people has run out. Zanzibar will turn out in force on October 28 to vote for a new president, and the majority will demand that the true result be respected. If ZEC tries to meddle with the results and repeat the events of 2015, the consequences for our archipelago, the United Republic of Tanzania and the broader region will be disastrous.

Already, it could be argued that the election in Zanzibar is not free and fair. It is estimated that almost 120,000 voters on the islands were unable to register due

to being prevented from obtaining their Zanzibar IDs, a document necessary to be able to vote. A significant number of the voters removed from the roll or prevented from registering are located in Pemba, a stronghold of ACT-Wazalendo.

Most recently, the ZEC has provided 566,352 as the total figure of the registered voters. These figures are different from the data we collected at the polling stations through our agents which show that the total number of registered voters is 448,533. So the difference between the actual registered voters and the ZEC figures is 117,830.

We are of the belief that this figure of 117,830 are the “ghost voters” that the ruling establishment hope to turn out.

In 2015, the election results – which reflected a decisive loss for the ruling party – were annulled. Citing “irregularities”, the electoral commission arranged a bogus rerun in 2016

In addition, ZEC has engaged in gerrymandering, reducing the number of constituencies from 54 to 50. The reduction has impacted upon opposition strongholds, particularly in Unguja, and was pushed through hurriedly, without due process.

On top of this, 11 of our candidates for the House of Representatives have been disqualified from running for office



In violet, inviolate: Seif Sharif Hamad campaigns in Pemba (Photo: supplied)

on spurious and ridiculous grounds. Despite lawful, accurate appeals, ZEC refused to reinstate our candidates, going against both the law and the Constitution. Effectively, ZEC allowed themselves to oust 11 ACT candidates for CCM before the official campaign began.

Despite these attempts to rig the election before a vote has been cast, and despite the violence and intimidation faced by our candidates, members and supporters, we remain resolute in our belief that October 28 remains a chance for the voice of the Zanzibar people to be heard. The central questions remaining, however, are whether that voice will be respected and whether the decision of the majority will be enforced.

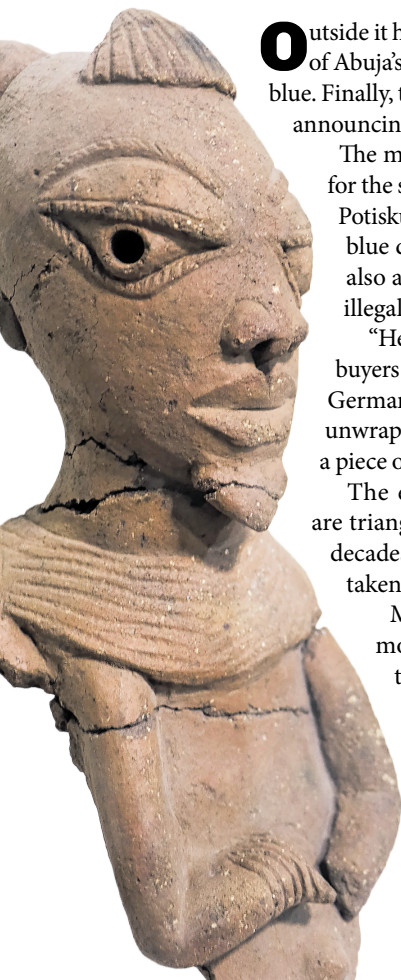
Zanzibar matters. We cannot and should not be ignored. Let's avert a tragedy and ensure the eyes of the world are focused on our islands on 28 October 2020. ■

Seif Sharif Hamad is the chairperson of ACT-Wazalendo and its candidate for president of Zanzibar. He served as the first vice-president of Zanzibar between 2010 and 2015.

The archaeology thieves

How ancient Nigerian artefacts end up in Western museums and galleries

Lutz Mükke & Adie Vanessa Offiong



Outside it has become night. In front of the windows of Abuja's grandest hotel, the pool shines turquoise blue. Finally, the phone rings. It is the hotel's front desk, announcing a guest.

The man who comes into the room, hours late for the scheduled appointment, is named Umaru Potiskum. He is an art dealer. He's wearing a dark blue dashiki and is full of self-confidence, but also a little suspicious. His is an underground, illegal business, after all.

"Here I have met many customers," he says – buyers from Belgium, France, Spain, England and Germany. He shows us what he's selling, carefully unwrapping two delicate terracotta statues from a piece of cloth.

The eyes gazing out from the ancient clay are triangular, typical of Nok figurines. Over the decades, thousands of these figurines have been taken out of Nigeria.

Many are on display in some of the world's most prestigious art galleries, including at the Louvre in Paris and Yale University. Many more are no longer displayed, however, because their provenance is questionable.

Anyone who wants to understand what drives this multimillion-dollar global trade must go searching: in Abuja and Paris, in Frankfurt and New Haven. But the first stop is the Nok Valley.



Hard Nok life: Villagers are paid a pittance for the terracotta heads, which are then resold overseas for a small fortune. (Photos: Lutz Mücke & Adie Offiang)

A cradle of civilisation

One hundred and fifty kilometres northeast of Abuja, a reddish-brown bush track winds through the lush green of the Nok Valley, towards a village.

It was here, in 1928, that a foreign miner supposedly discovered the first antique terracotta figure: a monkey head, 10cm high. As archaeologists dug further, they discovered the remnants of an ancient culture, which, as per convention, they named after the surrounding area: Nok.

From around 1500BC – at the same time that ancient Greece was flourishing, the Mayan civilisation was developing and Egyptian pharaohs were ruthlessly expanding their empire – a highly-developed society was spreading across the valley, encompassing an area the size of Portugal. It is the earliest known civilization in West Africa, according to *Archaeology* magazine.

Between the years of 900BCE and 300BCE, the Nok produced a staggering number of striking clay figurines, including elaborately stylised people, animals and fantasy creatures, adorned with ornaments, jewellery and symbols. Thousands of these figurines have been dug up.



Today, it is getting harder and harder to find any more of them – making the figurines all the more valuable.

The thirsty dealer

At the Abuja hotel, Potiskum takes another drink and starts talking numbers. His two figurines – a man's head and a larger statue of a woman – are more than 2000 years old, he claims, and any laboratory analysis will prove it.

He charges €2,000 for the man's head, and claims that it can be sold to buyers overseas for 10 times that amount. The female figurine goes for considerably more.

These sums would seem astronomical to residents in the Nok Valley, some of whom help to find and dig up the terracottas. They are paid €5 a day, at most; many earn just €1 a day.

But that's how it works, explains Nigeria's Minister for Information and Culture Alhaji Lai Mohammed. Nigerian middlemen buy the Nok terracottas at source for a pittance, and then sell them on for a fortune.

"We have not yet done enough to stop our own people and to convince them to protect their own cultural heritage," he said.

Given the lack of alternative employment opportunities, the state has found this trade nearly impossible to control – much to the minister's frustration. "These works define our history. They define who we are. Those who sell our cultural heritage abroad are harming Nigeria," he said.

This is hardly a new phenomenon. When it comes to the Nok terracottas, for decades both the physical statues and the knowledge that surround them have been packaged and exported for the benefit of foreigners.

It began with a British archaeologist named Bernhard Fagg, who happened to be a close colleague of Potiskum's father. Fagg, who worked in the colonial administration in Nigeria from the 1940s to the 1960s, was responsible for telling the Western academic world about the newly discovered Nok culture, astonishing them in the process.

The very existence of these artefacts challenged the racist notions that were prevalent at the time: that Africa was the "heart of darkness"; a land without history.

Today, in academic circles, Fagg is still seen as the great pioneer of Nok studies, or even the "discoverer" of Nok culture.

And in the Nok Valley, in the village of the same name, the house where Fagg once lived is still standing. Sometimes tourists even come to look at it. But if they want to hear nice things about Fagg, they had better not ask



Who's there: The hut where notorious British archaeologist Bernhard Fagg held court. Below: Nok, Nok Valley, dead ahead.



Beno Adamu, the village chief.

The 75-year-old chief's memories and knowledge differ greatly from the versions in the history books. He dismisses the notion that the Nok terracottas were "discovered" by foreigners.

"We, Ham people here in Nok, look back at a long, long history and have always known these terracottas. Our grandfathers told us about them." The Ham people had them in their shrines, houses and even out in the fields as scarecrows – long before Fagg "discovered" them.

Adamu met Fagg a few times, when he was a young boy. He remembers: "Fagg asked the people to bring their terracottas to his house. Which they did. Then he told them that the pieces would be worthless. They never saw their terracottas again. They were already packed."

Adamu speaks openly about what many people in the village think: "Many people came here, selfish, and used us as cheap labour. Then they disappeared and nobody supported us in our development. Not even our own government. We have not really benefited from our great heritage."

'Don't worry, I know a guy'

Almost every Nok terracotta excavated over the last 50 years has left Nigeria for the international art market. When talking to local government officials in Kaduna State, where the Nok Valley is situated, it becomes clear that there are few systems in place to keep them in the country.

In the hotel room, Potiskum boasts: "Don't worry, export is no problem. Wherever I have to deliver, I deliver. I just need the address."

He knows the customs people; border guards in Lagos; an international shipping company that helps him. And the export papers? "I can get everything," he promises.

The art dealer is getting a little more relaxed. He is talking up his credentials, and mentions “my friends Peter Breunig and Nicole Rupp”.

Breunig and Rupp are two German archaeology professors from Frankfurt’s Goethe University. Between 2005 and 2020 they led an excavation project in Nigeria, which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). But while digging for ancient history, the project opened up new wounds.

Enter the Germans

It’s hot in Abuja: 42°C, and the air conditioners are working hard. On the second floor of an office tower in Utako, Zachary Gundu enters the meeting room. Gundu is a professor of archaeology at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. He is a prominent academic; among other positions, he was on the council of the World Archaeological Congress.

Everyone knows that archaeologists in Nigeria urgently need international involvement and academic co-operation, he says.

But he is not at all happy with how the German team went about it. They did not want to work with Nigerian researchers at the universities in Zaria and Jos, he said. Eventually, “they had to be forced” to work together.

It was only in 2012 that local researchers could become involved in the German project. But even then, according to Gundu, Nigerian professors were given “no significant work”. Even more shocking to Gundu is that the German team seemed happy to work with illegal diggers and criminal art dealers.

Gundu is not alone in his criticism, which has been echoed by other Nigerian archaeologists. He added: “Africa is often misused as a laboratory where European scientists just walk in, experiment and collect data with which they can verify their ideas about the continent.”



Bad apfels: Professor Zachary Gundu says German academics preferred to work with illegal diggers and art smugglers.

And then these scientists – people like Breunig – are considered to be the global experts on Africa. “He’s now regarded worldwide as the Nok expert,” Gundu said.

His fierce criticism of the Frankfurt project got Gundu into trouble. He received anonymous threats. Did the professor anger powerful opponents in the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM)? Was he targeted by the “dealers’ cartel”, as he suspects? There are lots of suspicions and rumours.

But the situation became even more dangerous for Breunig, the German professor. On the morning of 22 February 2017, he was working with his German team and about 80 local employees at an excavation site near the village of Janjala. Suddenly, some men with Kalashnikovs appeared. They kidnapped Breunig and one other German man, Johannes Behringer, and demanded a ransom of 60-million naira (\$160 000 in that year) for their release. They were released three days later. Police deny that a ransom was paid.

The German team immediately withdrew from the Nok territory. Their research station there – complete with colourful round houses, a big generator and a fish pool – was left orphaned, until it was handed over to the NCMM in January 2020.



Digging up difficult history

Breunig, who is 68 years old, sits in his big, light office in the main building of the Goethe University. The professor has an excellent view over the Frankfurt skyline. Many things are clearer now.

There is no doubt that he has secured himself a place in the modern history books of the Nok civilisation. His research has added greatly to what we know about the ancient society.

His headline conclusion, after

Partly thankful: Goethe University's Peter Breunig says authorities discouraged collaboration.

15 years of research, was that there is no evidence that proves the existence of a spectacular Nok Kingdom. He found no palaces as evidence for such a kingdom.

Instead, Breunig believes the Nok lived in “small, mobile farmer groups”. He thinks the terracottas are somehow related to graves, although no bones were found. Perhaps the acidity in the earth had decomposed everything.

Breunig is “partly thankful” to his Nigerian colleague Gundu for his sharp criticism. Without it, the universities in Jos and Zaria would never have been involved at all.

At the beginning of the project the NCMM was against any collaboration with local universities – probably because it wanted to install its own people on the project, Breunig speculates.

He said that each find was carefully documented and, as agreed, returned to Nigeria after the research in Germany was concluded. In total, his project excavated 100 large terracottas and 3 000 smaller fragments, all of which were later sent to the National Museum in Kaduna.

Breunig knows exactly who Potiskum is. In fact, he is “very grateful” to the art dealer, and says that without his support the team would have found far fewer artefacts.

But he says Potiskum did not stay with the project for long, because he found far more lucrative opportunities in trading antiques.

It is clear that the line between archeologist and looter is thin, and that the two professions in some ways depend upon each other. Both are looking at what each other is digging up, and whoever wins the race to excavate a precious artefact determines its destiny.

Some end up in the well-guarded hiding places of collectors, and others in small exhibits in Kaduna. Then there are the figurines that end up in the most visited museums in the world.

Smugglers' charter

It is a six-hour flight from Abuja to Paris, to visit the Louvre Museum. Ten million people visit the Louvre every year. Here, in the Pavillon des Sessions, two Nok terracottas are displayed. They are as impressive as they are scandalous.

According to Trafficking Culture, an international consortium that analyses illegally acquired art, French officials purchased the works in 1998 from a Belgian dealer for a moderate 2.5-million francs (about \$450 000 today). Immediately afterwards, Nigeria's military government demanded their return, claiming they were illegally removed from the country.

But the French president at the time, Jacques Chirac, was having none of it. He considered himself to be a great lover of African art, and was in the process of setting up a modern ethnographic museum in Paris that would bear his own name: the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac.

(It is from this very museum that Congolese activist Emery Diyabanza removed a 19th century Chadian funeral staff earlier this year, exclaiming as he did so that he had “come to claim back the stolen property of Africa, property that was stolen under colonialism”).

Chirac is said to have spoken personally with the then newly elected Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, and they made a deal. France would recognise Nigeria as the rightful owner of the Nok sculptures. In return, Nigeria would loan the terracottas for 25 years to France, with the option to extend.

Folarin Shyllon, a law professor at the University of Ibadan, called the contracts a “totally unfair smuggler’s charter” that effectively granted carte blanche for the looting of Nigerian cultural treasures.

Today things are a little different in France, at least superficially. In 2018, President Emmanuel Macron’s government released a report that argued that unlawfully acquired cultural property must be returned to its lawful owners.

The market reacted swiftly: that year, auction houses sold 40% less in the “Tribal Art Market” category than in the year before. But it is still possible to purchase Nok terracottas in Paris. In fact, it is easy.

“Tribal Art” stores in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district display them openly, with prices ranging from €4 000 to €20 000. Some are sold without export certificates or proof of provenance, and without scientific analyses to date them.

And if you can’t get to Paris, you can also buy them online (at one point the Barakat Gallery website was selling a Nok sculpture for €225 000).

One gallery owner said that the terracottas are only going to become more valuable in the coming decades as the history of Nok becomes more familiar to a wider audience.

This is good news for Umaru Potiskum.

As he leaves the Abuja hotel, he makes one last promise, telling us that, in future, he can acquire even more than just antique Nok terracottas: centuries-old Ajami scripts, millenia-old Calabar ceramics. Anything. No problem, he says – and disappears into the night. ■



Counterpoint:
Museums are little
more than evidence
lockers for stolen
property. (Photo:
Franck Fife/AFP)

The ‘thief’ who stole his heritage back, and changed Europe’s story about itself

Samira Sawlani

Visit almost any museum in Europe and you would be forgiven for thinking you had stumbled on a crime scene.

On display behind glass cabinets, sometimes cordoned off by stanchions and velvet ropes, other times by security officers, are artefacts and artworks brought over during the colonial era. Most of them stolen: the spoils of war and looting.

Many were acquired through violence. Some were sacred items used in rites of

worship, now plinthed and framed for museum visitors who believe themselves cultured and virtuous for choosing to gasp and gawk at stolen property instead of, say, having an ice cream in the park outside.

Conversations about the repatriation of cultural artefacts have been taking place, of late. Particularly after French President Emmanuel Macron commissioned a report from art historian Bénédicte Savoy and economist Felwine Sarr, who concluded that artefacts stolen during the colonial era should indeed be repatriated.

It prompted the country's National Assembly to vote in favour of returning 26 items looted from Benin, and also a sword said to have belonged to a leader of an empire based in what is now Senegal.

It's a significant development, but an isolated one: progress in France and other former colonial powers has been slow.

To be sure, "conversations" about repatriation are taking place, but very little actual repatriation is being undertaken by the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland, Belgium or the Netherlands.

Some argue that many institutions and governments, far from repudiating the paternalistic attitudes of their former colonial incarnations and offering redress, are re-dressing the matter as a public relations issue, to be dealt with using lip service, image management, and of course some earnest commitments to give this whole mess a really good think.

Enter Diyabanza

Earlier this year, Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza visited the Quai Branly museum in Paris along with four other members of Unité Dignité Courage. UDC is a pan-African movement and Diyabanza is its spokesperson, though of late he tends to prefer action to speaking.

At the museum, the 41-year-old activist picked up an artefact on display – a funerary post taken from what is now Chad – and prepared to leave the premises. Streaming the entire "operation" live on social media, he announced that they were "taking the artefact home". Before he could get too far, however, the group intercepted by security officers and they were arrested.

It's not quite the scene from the beginning of Marvel's *Black Panther*, where Michael B Jordan's "villain" Erik Killmonger liberates a Wakandan artefact from a museum — but it's not far off.

Diyabanza and his comrades appeared in court on October 14, where he was charged with aggravated theft and received a suspended fine of €1,000, which he plans to appeal. Two more court dates remain – in July, he was arrested in Marseille as he attempted to remove an artefact from the Musée des Arts Africains, Océaniens, Amériidiens. Undeterred, he walked into the Afrika Museum in The Netherlands in September and picked up a Congolese statue. Speaking into the camera, he said that he paid €15 to enter the museum, yet everything in it belonged to Africans and that the aim of the activists was to "take back everything stolen by the Europeans".

Born in Kinshasa, Diyabanza was educated on political and cultural issues early on. "I am a member of the Ntumba Mvemba clan. From an early age I learnt about European colonialism, our history and our culture."

He was told stories about how colonial forces were responsible for the looting of items belonging to his ancestors, and about the violence they unleashed on the region as a whole. This is why these museum acts are not mere publicity stunts, he says, and certainly are not crimes to him. They form part of a greater quest.

"I am leading the fight for the liberation of Africa, freedom from all forms of domination; enslavement, exploitation, hegemony and oppression in the financial, political, military, cultural and economic



Righteous path: Emery Diyabanza has vowed to reclaim Africa's stolen heritage. (Photo: Florent Bardos)

spheres. The UDC stands for African nationalism, which opposes all thoughts and ideas that are a result of colonialism; we want to see African wealth belong and be returned to Africans, and part of this is our cultural heritage, much of which sits in those museums.”

The cultural heritage to which he refers goes beyond artefacts: the UDC manifesto calls for African unity to be built upon the memory of “glorious and heroic acts committed by our ancestors”, something which is often forgotten, erased or undermined in mainstream Western education in particular.

It is not only colonialism they reject but also “oppression, exploitation and dictatorship,” Diyabanza says. “My hope is for a free and sovereign Africa, one built by us, not the one created in Berlin in 1884 [at the West Africa Conference which formalised the rules of engagement for Europe’s so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’].”

Diyabanza, who divides his time between Paris and the Togolese capital Lomé, leans into the romance of his activism. Asked if he is concerned about

court sanctions, he says he is prepared for anything, adding: “throughout history, particularly in imperialist and repressive countries we have seen freedom fighters be sent to jail and face harassment, therefore I am not afraid”.

“I act for the dignity of my people, I think about the way my ancestors died as they fought against slavery and colonialism and it serves as a reminder that when we lead a fight for freedom and dignity the collective takes precedence, you as an individual have to do what is right for the wider community”.

It is perhaps not surprising that he lists among his heroes the likes of Steve Biko, Patrice Lumumba and Marcus Garvey. “They promoted peace and respect between people; they stood for Africans and asserted our identity. Above all I admire all those who fight for freedom and human dignity,” he says.

If authorities thought three arrests would scare Diyabanza off, it appears they were mistaken: the day after his court appearance in Paris, he took to social media and called upon the “Black, African and Pan-African diaspora” to join and “build with us an indestructible cultural shield to put an end to the process of the spoliation of our works of art and of our cultural, economic and social heritage locked up in the West”.

“The demand is simple: restitution of all artefacts, now and unconditionally. I am determined to lead this fight, therefore wherever our cultural heritage is, I will travel there.”

Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza – coming to a museum near you. ■



(Photo: Colin Defosse/AFP)

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

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

1. What is Mozambique's official language?
2. Kenya's international airport is named after President Uhuru Kenyatta. True or false?
3. Which country is holding presidential elections on October 28?
4. Beyoncé's hit song *Already* features which Ghanaian artist?
5. What is Cameroon's capital city (pictured)?
6. Which of the following is not an example of traditional African material or clothing: Bogolanfini, boubou or babushka?
7. Which Nigerian writer won the Nobel Prize for

- Literature in 1986 and is famous for plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman*?
8. A country in North Africa is called République tunisienne in French. What is it called in English?
 9. True or false: Burkina Faso is not a landlocked country.
 10. Which legendary Malian artist is famous for the song *Africa*?
 11. Zambia is named after which river, which is the continent's fourth-largest river?
 12. Which South African national team is named after a type of antelope?

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

"Knowledge is its own reward. Wisdom remembers to invoice."

Epic fail: How *Fortnite* sidelines African gamers

Eyaaz Matwadia

Fortnite by Epic Games is the globe's biggest battle royale game, with about 350-million players worldwide. Players drop from the air onto an island and fight to the "death", and the winner is the last player standing.

But the technological infrastructure that underpins the game means that African players are disadvantaged before the virtual battle even begins.

Fortnite hosts a number of servers in regions such as Europe, North America, Brazil, Asia, Oceania and the Middle East. There are none on this continent. This means that it takes slightly longer for African players to react to events in the game, giving their opponents a significant advantage.

This lag is called "ping", and is measured in milliseconds. The higher the ping, the greater the disadvantage. That's a real problem in competitive games, some of which come with hefty prize money.

Tristan van der Walt, one of South



Africa's finest *Fortnite* players, who represents multi-gaming organisation ATK, finished 19th on the Fortnite Champions Series back in August while playing on the Middle Eastern Server.

Doing that required the use of special software and setting up a virtual private network to lower their ping to the server. Their ping still sat at between 120ms and 170ms. Without their tweaks, they would have been facing an unplayable 300ms.

Since its 2017 release globally, African players have been asking Epic Games to create local servers. They have been ignored. #AfricanFortniteServers recently trended on Twitter for the umpteenth time, after Amazon had announced its first web services in Africa.

This means that the infrastructure is available for African servers to be created – and there is a platform to host them from, but still, there has been no comment from Epic Games. ■

Hope you've packed 'cos y'all be tripping

Samira Sawlani

Remember holidays? Not the staycations forced on us by 2020, but actual holidays where you get to leave the house for more than a minute? Maybe it's a pandemic pipe dream, but we could all use a break.

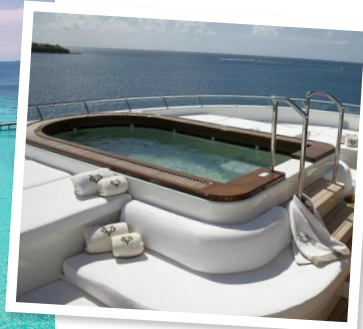
This year has been rough, after all. This *week* has been rough. So let's follow our dreams and see where they take us.

How about the Maldives? That's where they took Teodorin Obiang, the "prince of Malabo". He's the vice-president of Equatorial Guinea, but if you're the actual president of Equatorial Guinea you might know him better as "son".

Prince Teddy stepped out from Papa Obiang's shadow to take in some sun on a luxury private island in the Maldives, where he and his multimillion-dollar yacht have dropped anchor for a working holiday.

Vicarious vacation

We say "working", but it's for his side-hustle as an Instagram influencer. This important job involves letting people at home live their own dreams through him, and take their minds off their dire economic crisis. We bet they are just



Unequatorial Guinea: Vice-President Teodorin Obiang, son of President Teodoro Obiang, sailed his yacht Ebony Shine to the ultra-luxurious \$35,000-a-night Four Seasons private island at Voavah in the Maldives.

thrilled by the steady flow of videos of the fabulous time he's having at the \$35,000-a-night resort on the island.

Working holidays aren't ideal, but they do help with cabin fever. A delegation from the International Criminal Court got to stretch their legs in Sudan, at talks about transferring suspected ne'er-do-wells to The Hague, such as former president Omar al-Bashir, wanted for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

The Hague is quite the hot ticket right now. It's also on the itinerary for Rwandan genocide suspect Felicien Kabuga, for example, after a UN judge ruled he be sent there instead of to Tanzania where he was supposed to stand trial.

East, west, home's best?

Some say the best part of a trip is coming home. Not sure that applies to the erstwhile president of Mali, Ibrahim Bouabacar Keita, back home after a quick excursion to the United Arab Emirates. But what is he returning to? No more presidential palace, that's for sure. And no more hanging out in the VIP lounge of the Ecowas country club.

On the other hand, it's also said that you can never really go home again. This is meant to be a wry reflection on how it's impossible to recapture the innocence of childhood. But we guess it applies literally to Keita. And to Burundi's Pierre Buyoya, another former prez who can't go home after being sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment, in relation to the assassination of his predecessor Melchior Ndadaye in the 1990s.

Buyoya is currently the AU's

representative to Mali and the Sahel. He has dismissed the conviction as a politically motivated sham. Still, awkward.

Then there are those who can't leave home at all, not even to nip down to the corner store for a packet of crisps. Cellou Dalein Diallo is among them. The presidential candidate for the opposition in Guinea claimed victory in Sunday's election, and promptly found his home surrounded by armed forces. Seems President Alpha Condé isn't planning on going anywhere either. His security forces certainly don't seem to think so. To underscore the point, they've killed at least 12 people, mainly young students, during post-election protests against Condé.

United in silence

Now that we think about it, are all the other leaders on the continent on holiday right now? We haven't heard a word from them about the crackdown in Guinea, and barely a peep even about Nigeria. Are they holidaying under a rock? The rest of us have certainly all seen how peaceful protesters have been gunned during the #ENDSARS demonstrations.

Ecowas and the African Union Chairperson have released statements calling for dialogue, but President Buhari's "it's not me, it's you" gaslighting has been noted, as has the silence from other leaders.

But hey, could be that they're still on holiday under that rock we mentioned. Or maybe they just don't want to rock the boat. Or yacht. Maybe they're worried that their own next holiday might be permanent. Maybe they're right. ■



A bitter fruit: A worker picks ripened coffee cherries in Kiambu County, Kenya. (Photo: Luis Tato/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

Coffee pirates are plundering Kenya's Arabica wealth

Ann Wangari

Jane Waithera* hates drinking coffee. It reminds her of the time that she was robbed. She is a farmer from Kiguoya, a village in Kenya's Murang'a County, and she used to grow coffee beans in her fields. But her produce was repeatedly stolen from the co-operative factories in which it was stored and processed, and she received no compensation.

"I eventually went home, plucked all the crop and planted maize and beans. At least then I can eat them if I don't get a ready buyer," she told the *Mail & Guardian*.

Waithera's experience is becoming all too common. Kenya's Arabica coffee beans may be among the most prized in the world, fetching premium prices at the global exchange in New York, but growing them is an increasingly dangerous business.

So far in 2020, some 467 bags of coffee – valued at \$50,000 – have already been stolen from Kenyan warehouses, according to Richard Lesiyampe, the principal secretary in the agriculture ministry; and at least 18 people have died in violent incidents thought to be related to coffee smuggling.

In most incidents, groups of up to 20 men, armed with guns and machetes, raid the factories or warehouses where the coffee is being stored, before it is sold for further processing. They target high-quality grades such as AA, AB and PB, which fetch higher prices on the black market. It is thought that these beans are usually sold on to neighbouring Tanzania or Uganda, where they are blended with cheaper beans to improve the overall quality of the blend.

“I am positive that the coffee was being transported to eastern Uganda,” said Patrick Kamau, a coffee farmer. “There are known private millers there who buy the smuggled coffee from brokers at the border. We have on various occasions raised the queries of how the stolen coffee is transported and how the traffic police are not able to vet the documents that transporters use, including the permits needed to ferry coffee.”

For the farmers, the loss is devastating. Kenyan insurers do not currently offer policies for coffee growers, which means that growers like Waithera and Kamau are left totally out of pocket when their produce disappears.

Suspicious

This is not a new problem. In 2011, another peak year for coffee thefts, 10 people were killed during robberies. In 2018, the Kenyan government launched a crackdown against what it described as “coffee cartels”, but the impact of this was temporary. If this year’s numbers are anything to go by, it is clear the cartels are becoming more active than ever.

Hiram Mwaniki chairs the Thangaini Coffee Co-operative Society, a consortium of eight different factories. He said he could not rule out the possibility that the thefts are an inside job, and that that the timing and manner of the raids suggests that the thieves are helped by factory officials. He has also questioned the role of the police, saying that sometimes coffee thefts are recorded incorrectly as maize thefts.

Mary Nzomo, the chair of Kenya’s Agriculture County Executive Committee, also believes officials may be involved. She said it was suspicious that the stolen coffee could be transported on Kenyan roads without the proper permits, yet still manages to escape. She said coffee warehouses and factories needed to invest in better security, and use firms with reputable credentials rather than “old and tired 67-year-old guards who are asleep half of the time”.

Some growers are already investing in better security, according to a recent report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

But this may not be good enough. It concluded: “As long as Kenyan coffee remains in high demand both globally and regionally, criminal actors will continue to carry out targeted heists in search of quick money. While this puts a severe financial strain on those who depend on coffee for their livelihood, the assertion – repeatedly made – of collusion between thieves and factory officials, and the alleged protection provided by some rogue state actors, points to a more deeply entrenched system that may prove hard to counter.” ■

Burundi arrests its last vocal MP

Fabien Banciryano was 'suicidal' when he queried the wisdom of ditching the ICC. Now he's locked up

Thierry Uwamahoro

Four years ago this month, during a plenary legislative session carried live on the national broadcaster, the president of the National Assembly in Burundi pointedly asked MP Fabien Banciryano if he was “suicidal”. The veiled threat, couched as a jest, followed Banciryano’s vehement objection to Burundi pulling out of the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court (ICC).

His objection was not driven by a belief in some fancy internationalism. He asked a rather simple question: Would quitting the ICC end the heinous crimes that had come to characterise then president Pierre Nkurunziza’s contentious third term?

Four years, a controversial election and a new head of state later, the Honourable Banciryano (who truly deserves the honorific) has been arrested, detained and subjected to degrading treatment while in detention simply because the truth-teller never yielded to fear.

He spent his legislative tenure pursuing facts and meticulously documenting cases of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and abusive detentions. At every opportunity, he doggedly asked government ministers to respond to each case he uncovered – a role other legislators seem to have delegated to exiled civil society activists.

The most admired and widely commented moment of Banciryano’s legislative career came toward the end of the 2015-2020 legislature.

In February, he offered the strongest opposition to a Bill that aimed to christen Nkurunziza the “Supreme Guide of Patriotism”. The Bill unsurprisingly passed (Nkurunziza’s party had total control of the National Assembly following the undemocratic 2015 elections.)

Banciryano, the legislator who had painstakingly documented countless



Honourable: Fabien Banciryano was penalised for confronting the government about extrajudicial killings and detentions.

politically motivated killings and enforced disappearances over five years, could not fathom why Nkurunziza would be a guide to anyone, let alone supreme, and of patriotism at that. In a calm and composed three-minute monologue

Charged with threatening state security, slander and rebellion, Banciaryanino joins a growing list of political prisoners in Burundi

that has since gone viral, Banciaryanino also questioned Nkurunziza's economic record.

After 15 years in power, the president, who died of a heart attack in June this year, left Burundi one of the most corrupt and among the three poorest countries in the world (with a meagre gross domestic product per capita of \$261 a year). Banciaryanino concluded that Nkurunziza, had failed as a head of state at best. At worst, could face prosecution. (The ICC has an open investigation into crimes committed in Burundi since 26 April 2015.)

It is because of this intervention on the "Supreme Guide of Patriotism" Bill that Banciaryanino has been languishing in the notorious Mpimba central prison in Bujumbura since earlier this month, in a violation of Burundi's Constitution and National Assembly's bylaws that stipulate that a member of the National Assembly

cannot be prosecuted for statements made during legislative debates.

In a letter that recalled his constitutional protections as a former legislator, Banciaryanino pleaded with Burundi's Independent National Human Rights Commission to intervene on his behalf.

There is little hope that the commission will act. It has shied away from human rights violations that have resulted from politically sensitive cases. In 2018, it lost its grade A independence status when "the United Nations found that it no longer fully respected its mandate as an independent institution for the protection and promotion of human rights".

Charged with threatening state security, slander and rebellion, Banciaryanino joins a growing list of political prisoners in Burundi.

He will need sustained international advocacy and solidarity if he is to ever be free again. All who believe in the sacrosanct separation of powers and the independence of the legislative branch should be outraged by his unjust detention.

The persecution of Banciaryanino is a further blow to anyone who had hoped that President Évariste Ndayishimiye's regime would usher in a new era. The same climate that made it suicidal to disagree with Nkurunziza's wishes still reigns. ■

Thierry Uwamahoro is a member of the Burundian diaspora in the United States, with a background in elections-related projects for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute

Buhari's disdain for SARS protests looks a lot like self-sabotage

Fola Aina

Tens of thousands of Nigerians have taken to the streets to protest against the controversial Special Anti-Robbery Squad, popularly known as SARS. This unit stands accused of acting with impunity and regularly committing human rights abuses. A promise to disband SARS from the inspector general of police has failed to end the protests, revealing a population that doesn't believe those in power can be trusted to reform. So what happens next?

SARS stands accused of acting with impunity and regularly committing human rights abuses

SARS has been a thorn in the side of Nigeria's vast youth population, indiscriminately arresting and detaining youths in possession of smartphones and laptops. As a result, young people have led the protests on the streets of the country's cities and on social media through hashtags such as #EndSARS and #EndSARSbrutality. But while SARS has

been the focus of the protests, it is also just the tip of the iceberg: the bigger issue is police brutality and the failure of the state to respect its citizens.

The government's pledge to disband the unit has failed to quell popular anger because such promises have been repeatedly broken. This is the fourth time that SARS has been set to be dismantled, and yet it has survived. Many young people also worry that even if SARS goes, a similar unit will emerge in its place. What is required is systematic change and more accountable security forces.

True to form, the government has responded with repression rather than reason. So far, over 25 protesters are reported to have been injured and at least 15 killed, as the state prepares to send riot police to hotspots.

This is foolhardy, because protests against SARS could quickly spill over into protests against President Muhammadu Buhari's increasingly unpopular government. To avoid escalating a potentially explosive situation, the government needs to issue a full apology to the victims of police brutality – complete with compensation – and commit to a root and branch reform of the security services, including systematic retraining and new ways for citizens to lodge complaints.

Otherwise #EndSARS could quickly turn into #EndBuhari. ■

Fola Aina is a doctoral fellow at the African Leadership Centre, King's College London. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa





The Big Picture

To the rescue: When firefighters couldn't access roads to help put out a fire that started at dusk in Nairobi and gutted shantees in the Maranatha area of the sprawling slum, residents of Kibera created a human chain and passed pails and jerrycans of water from hand to hand to try to extinguish it. About 50 families were left homeless by the blaze. (Photo: Gordwin Odhiambo/AFP)

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