

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



Call me by my name

Thandiwe Newton
on reclaiming
her identity

Inside:

- In the dark shadow of a civil war, **Ethiopia had an election** (p9)
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Cover story: Last month, Hollywood star Thandiwe Newton was on the cover of *British Vogue*. This month, she's on the cover of *The Continent*. In an exclusive interview with journalist **Violet Gonda** (p15), Newton speaks about the importance of spelling her name right – it's really not that hard – and political violence in Zimbabwe (as well her love of sadza!).

The photograph for the cover image was supplied by Newton herself. Because this is a story about owning one's own identity, we thought it was only fair to let her choose.



Not yet Uhuru

Correction: Last week, in our obituary for Kenneth Kaunda, we listed one 'Uhuru Kenyatta' as one of this continent's liberation leaders. We were referring, of course, to Jomo Kenyatta. We apologise for the error (this is the trouble with dynastic politics: it is sometimes difficult to distinguish father from son!).

The week in numbers

10

... the number of babies actually recorded as born to a South African woman, after a dubious journalist claimed that she had given birth to decuplets



\$3.6-billion

... the value of bitcoin that vanished in a heist orchestrated by two South African brothers

5

... the number of Africans included in a new Reuters list of top 1,000 climate scientists



20

... the number of Ugandan MPs and Parliamentary staff who tested positive for Covid-19 this month

17

... the number of Kenyan soldiers who died in a helicopter crash just outside of Nairobi



Reunited and it feels so good: Cyril Ramaphosa with his device

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The president's missing iPad

South Africa has a reputation for being a dangerous country – and even the president is not immune, apparently. “I’m waiting for my iPad. Somebody stole my iPad. Somebody decided that they want to dispossess me of my iPad, so I want that,” President Cyril Ramaphosa told waiting journalists, looking a little flustered, shortly before a major speech this week. The panic didn’t last long – the iPad was found in the possession of an innocent aide – but has nonetheless sparked a flurry of concern over the fate of the ‘First iPad’, and official updates from government spokespeople on the whereabouts of the device. In a country where Ramaphosa’s ruling party is a major source of theft, people were quick to point out that at least the president is experiencing what is normal for everyone else.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

A military intervention in Mozambique?

The Southern African Development Community has taken a step towards a military intervention force to Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado province, heads of state decided on Wednesday. The agreement now paves the way for the bloc to decide what such a force would look like, what its mission would be and who would pay for it. SADC, as ever, moves so very slowly. Mozambican forces, supported by mercenaries, have been unable to quell the Islamist insurgency in the region, which began in 2017.

AFRICA

Africa not using scarce vaccines

Much has been written about the lack of vaccines available for African countries as the third wave of the pandemic sweeps through the continent. But lesser known is that twenty-three African countries have used less than half of the doses they have received so far, according to the World Health Organization. Only seven countries have already used 100% of their doses; another seven have administered over 80%.

CENTRAL AFRICA

\$17-million for Gabon's rainforests

With 90% of its landmass covered in rainforests, Gabon is crucial for global efforts to keep carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Trees are really good at doing this. One practical solution has been for countries and companies to pay countries to not cut down their rainforests. Gabon will get a total of \$150-million from the UN-backed Central African Rainforest Initiative. In this way they still get an income, from parts of the world that have already wiped out their natural environment, that can then go to development. The fear in Gabon, however, is that all this money is destined for the coffers of the ruling elite.

EAST AFRICA

Somalia's missing recruits

Somalia's government has convened a panel of inquiry to investigate the whereabouts of an unspecified number of army trainees who have gone missing. The trainees had been despatched for military training in nearby Eritrea, but relatives of the missing men fear that they have been drawn into the ongoing war in Ethiopia's Tigray province.



Ugly incident: Pretty Yende was detained at the airport in Paris. Photo: Christophe Archambault/AFP

MUSIC

Opera star alleges racial profiling

When South African opera singer Pretty Yende arrived in Paris – where she is due to star in a production of *La Sonnambula* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées – she was expecting a warm welcome. Instead, she was “stripped and searched like a criminal” at Charles de Gaulle Airport, in what she claims is a case of “outrageous racial discrimination”. French authorities say that she was detained for “verification” purposes that have nothing to do with her skin colour. They also say she had no visa when she arrived.

NORTH-WEST AFRICA**Mauritanian president jailed**

The former president of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, was jailed on Tuesday night after failing to comply with the conditions of his house arrest. Abdel Aziz is facing charges of corruption, money laundering and illicit enrichment, and was under house arrest while the trial was taking place. Assets belonging to him worth \$114-million have been seized. Abdel Aziz, who was in power from 2009 to 2019, denies the charges, and his lawyers say he should be granted immunity from prosecution.

EAST AFRICA**Air strikes obliterate Tigrayan market**

Ethiopia's air force allegedly bombed a market in the Tigrayan town of Togoga on Tuesday, leaving dozens of people killed and injured, including children. Reuters reports that at least 43 civilians were killed. The Ethiopian government says the air strikes were aimed at neutralising "terrorists" – referring to fighters aligned with the rebel Tigrayan People's Liberation Front – and denied targeting the market. Ethiopia's civil war against the Tigrayan leadership is in its eighth month.



Convicted: The ex-PM says the charges are politically motivated.

Photo: AFP

WEST AFRICA**Soro sentenced in absentia**

Guillaume Soro, the former Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire, has been sentenced to life in prison by an Ivorian court after being found guilty of "undermining state security". Soro was not present for the judgment – he is in exile in Europe. Soro was accused of plotting a coup in 2019 against his former ally, President Alassane Ouattara.

SOUTHERN AFRICA**Madagascar on brink of famine**

Southern Madagascar is experiencing its worst drought in more than 40 years, causing widespread hunger and "famine-like" conditions, according to the World Food Programme (WFP). 'Urgent assistance is needed', it warned.

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South Africa

Gasping for air

Oxygen is a crucial weapon in the fight against Covid-19. South Africa's supplies are holding steady – but only just.

Kiri Rupiah in Johannesburg

More than a month since phase two of South Africa's vaccination campaign began, oxygen supplies in Gauteng, its economic hub and most populous province, remain stable – despite being battered by a third wave of the coronavirus, with more than 10,000 new cases recorded on just a single day this week.

On Monday, the Gauteng health department said Afrox, its oxygen supplier, had “assured security of oxygen supply for our hospitals at the moment”.

As hospitals – already near capacity – deal with an increasing number of positive Covid-19 cases, medical oxygen suppliers have also seen an up-to-fourfold increase in demand for their products.

The combination of high and rising oxygen needs in tandem with low vaccination rates leaves nations, especially in Africa, extremely vulnerable. In South

Africa, fewer than one in 10 people has received a dose of a vaccine.

Many countries are trying to avoid the situation that began to unfold in India earlier this year. The country's second wave was characterised by daily deaths in the thousands with an oxygen shortage contributing to the toll.

Oxygen is one of the only treatments for severe Covid-19 infections. Without it, suffocation is a possibility. According to an analysis by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 19 countries around the world – including South Africa – need more than 50,000 cubic metres a day for coronavirus patients. That need grew exponentially between mid-March and mid-May 2021.

In the early panic and confusion of the pandemic, oxygen supply was frequently overlooked. According to medical journal *The Lancet*, the issue with oxygen supply in Africa is more to do with delayed delivery and limited storage capabilities (mostly storage in cylinders) than issues with manufacturing. In fact, almost all African countries have oxygen manufacturing plants or can source it from private sector providers.

The World Health Organisation, UNICEF, and other UN agencies have partnered to provide financial support to countries that require more oxygen. ■

Ethiopia

Election goes ahead – finally

But the vote is overshadowed by the war in Tigray and opposition boycotts

Samuel Getachew in Addis Ababa

On Monday, Ethiopians voted in a general election that will decide who leads the country for the next five years.

Results are yet to be announced, although the ruling Prosperity Party – which before the vote held all 547 parliamentary seats – is expected to win comfortably, given the fragmented nature of the opposition. The election has been heralded by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed as the country's first-ever free and fair vote.

The election was supposed to have been held last year, but it was postponed due to the pandemic, as well as the ongoing conflict between the country's federal government and local leaders in Tigray, a northern province. The war has so far claimed thousands of lives, and displaced millions more.

But there was no voting in Tigray's 38 polling districts. In total, one-fifth of the country's 547 voting districts remained

closed due to the war, insecurity or logistical problems.

More than 38-million people were registered to vote for their federal, regional and local council representatives.

In the capital Addis Ababa, where the Prime Minister enjoys considerable support, citizens waited for hours to cast their votes, pushing the election commission to extend the voting deadline by three hours.

“Since there was a long queue, I went back and forth until the crowd subdued. I ultimately waited for four hours to vote and I was elated. This was a historic day for us and to have been part of such democratic renewal, even knowing its shortcomings, this is the experience of a lifetime,” said 31-year-old Meswaet Tsige.

With some opposition leaders boycotting the election, particularly in Oromia, there was a fear that violence and disruptions would occur. On the day, opposition parties claimed that they had been restricted from observing the vote in the Amhara, Afar and Southern regions; over 400 complaints were filed with the electoral board.

Adem K. Abebe, a program officer at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, said that this week's vote, while imperfect, is a step in the right direction.

“For large parts of the country, the



Frontrunner: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is almost certain to secure another term. Photo: Eduardo Soteras / AFP

elections are seen as an unprecedented opportunity...But there is also a sense not only that the elections leave a lot to be desired, but also that the country needs more elections,” he said. “The major stains on the elections remain Tigray and Oromia. And finding negotiated solutions to these, including possibly repeat elections in Oromia, could provide a helpful pathway forward.”

Yakob Kebede, 68, was the first in line to vote in Addis Ababa’s Merkato area – the biggest open market in the country. He arrived just after 4AM and brought his grandson, a 16-year-old high school student, to share the milestone experience with him.

“I have lived in the era of four governments, starting from the Emperor Haile Selassie years, the brutal Derg, TPLF [Tigray People’s Liberation Front]

and now Abiy. I have never been given a chance to vote and this is my first time voting,” he said.

He continued: “Abiy is not perfect but we are comparing him to his contemporaries. He brought peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, brought the Nobel Peace Prize home and led environmental initiatives building parks and planting billions of trees, and made us the envy of the continent. Despite the lack of security and violence that has grappled our country, he is good and he is patriotic.”

“He is young. Give him a chance,” shouted Yakob’s friend, third in line, while wearing a partisan T-shirt belonging to the party of the 44-year-old Prime Minister.

Results are expected in the next couple of days. ■

Côte d'Ivoire

Laurent Gbagbo's first week home

Laurent Gbagbo returned to a Côte d'Ivoire that looks very different to the one he left behind, in handcuffs, a decade ago – and no one is quite sure where he fits in.

Leanne de Bassompierre in Abidjan

Odette Djago, a teacher and devoted Laurent Gbagbo supporter – adorned in traditional fabric plastered with Gbagbo's face – arrived at Abidjan's Félix Houphouët-Boigny airport on Thursday 17 June at least eight hours before the former Ivorian president's scheduled arrival in the country, after his acquittal on war crimes charges at the International Criminal Court.

When the Brussels Airlines flight landed at 4.15PM, the 40-year-old was beside herself with emotion. "Gbagbo is our pride and we are nothing without him," said Djago, tears streaming down her face and eyes fixated on the plane

that had just landed. There was some initial confusion as to whether he had in fact arrived, as the plane was branded Eurowings, but that was quickly cleared up and hundreds of people started chanting "Gbagbo ayoka" or "Gbagbo welcome" in his native Bété.

Cellphone videos captured by airport staff and fellow passengers started circulating on social media almost instantaneously, including the apparent cold shoulder given to his estranged wife Simone, whom he had asked not to come to the airport. She left with their daughters shortly after his arrival with his other wife, Nadiana Bamba, whom he married by Muslim rites in 2001. Days after his arrival back in Côte d'Ivoire he filed for divorce from Simone.

He's been living with Bamba, affectionately known as Nady, in Belgium since his acquittal on 15 January 2019. He was awaiting the outcome of the prosecutor's appeal of that judgment, which was eventually upheld by The Hague-based court on 31 March 2021, paving the way for his return. Gbagbo may still face jail time at home, however, after being tried and sentenced in absentia for looting the local branch of the Central Bank of West African States.

Triumphant welcome

Crowds mobbed the car he was transported in from the tarmac to

the presidential pavilion, which the government had made available for his arrival. Earlier, police fired teargas to disperse scores of other eager supporters who had tried to gain access through the back of the airport complex. They then lined the main boulevard leading to the airport, giving him a hero's welcome as his convoy powered through the Abidjan evening traffic to his party's headquarters where he would speak in public for the first time.

The economic capital of the world's top cocoa producer has had quite the face lift since the 76-year-old was arrested following a brief civil war, which was precipitated by his refusal to concede defeat to incumbent president Alassane Ouattara. At least 3,000 people were left dead or missing in that conflict, which rights groups say nobody has been held to account for.

"In terms of infrastructure a lot has been done, but when a country has come

17 JUIN: LAURENT GBAGBO EN ROUTE POUR SON QG



'Driver, are you sure this is the right way?': Abidjan has changed dramatically in the decade since Gbagbo was last here. Cartoon: Roland Polman

Jubilant: Supporters of former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo react as his plane lands in Abidjan. Photo: John Wessels/AFP



out of a serious crisis, the first thing that has to be addressed is the social distortion,” said Gbagbo’s spokesperson, Katinan Koné, in an interview with *The Continent* this week. “The impression we have is that Ouattara has worked a lot, not for the Ivorians, but for the foreign people,” he said.

In his first address to jubilant supporters at his Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) party headquarters, Gbagbo said he’s “glad to return to Côte d’Ivoire and Africa” after a decade in exile, referring to himself as a “soldier” who has returned.

“What he’s saying, to his allies and to his adversaries, is that ‘I’m not here to rest, I’m not here to retire, I’m here to fight as a politician,’” Kone said.

“He said that what he discovered when he was in jail, was that ‘I don’t only belong to Côte d’Ivoire, but to Africa,’ meaning

he’s come back with a new vision of pan-Africanism and unless we build a strong Africa, we won’t be able to face all the challenges we have”.

The pro-Gbagbo faction of the FPI (there are also factions aligned with Simone Gbagbo and former prime minister Pascal Affi N’Guessan) had boycotted every vote since his arrest, but participated in legislative elections on 6 March 2021.

Gbagbo’s return remains a critical test of stability for the west African nation and one of the world’s fastest growing economies in recent years. He’s expected to return to his native Mama in south-central Côte d’Ivoire before he plans to address the nation – meaning that anxious Ivorians will have to keep waiting to find out what his next steps will be. ■



Mother Nature – Kidjo’s celebration of Africa

Sipho Kings

It’s March 2018 and Angélique Kidjo is faced with an audience of pale New Englanders at Harvard University’s main theatre. The natives of this part of the United States have stubbornly stuck to their puritanical roots, despite the influx of people from around the world. Fun in public is unacceptable.

Kidjo though is a force of nature and leaves nothing behind when performing.

The host has introduced her as ‘mama Africa’, a potential *faux pas* given that this title belongs to the late Miriam Makeba.

Kidjo seems undeterred and wraps her vocal cords around *pata pata*, pausing briefly to talk about Makeba. She then leaves the stage, swaying between the wooden bench rows of the two-storey theatre.

A few people whistle and ululate. There are some Africans in the house. But the rest stay stubbornly still, rigor mortis gripping the sellout crowd. Kidjo tries to exhort a greater response and finds an old man to pull upright. His hips start creaking from side to side as she helps him warm to the moment.

His first smile breaks the New England spell and suddenly everyone is standing, swaying and singing. The old man ends up on stage, doing the hitherto unthinkable and having fun in public.

Kidjo is nothing if not a powerful singer and leader.

This is evident in the Beninese’s latest album, *Mother Nature*, and her 15th in a five decade career.

There are collaborations, with the likes of Burna Boy, showing Kidjo’s ability to call anyone to work with her, and a tackling of issues from climate change to police violence. Nigeria features heavily. But little of her home continent is left out.

Despite its blunt assessment of failings, *Mother Nature* is a celebration of this continent and those who will inherit it – its youth. “Do Yourself” is a case in point, with the enduring line: “I’ve been on my knees but I don’t need help”.

In its complexity it shows all of us how we can talk about Africa. ■

Photo: Axelle/
Bauer-Griffin/
FilmMagic/Getty



T•H•A•N•D•I•W•E

*Earlier this year, Thandiwe Newton took her name back. “That’s my name. It’s always been my name. I’m taking back what’s mine,” said the British actress, who has spent most of her career going by Thandie Newton – a name that was easier for western audiences to pronounce. In an exclusive interview, the award-winning movie star – known for her roles in Westworld, Line of Duty, Star Wars, Mission Impossible 2 and Crash – speaks to journalist **Violet Gonda** about her southern African roots, racism in Hollywood and the political crisis in Zimbabwe.*

Violet: First, let's clear something up. Where is Thandiwe from? I understand that both Zambia and Zimbabwe are claiming you.

Thandiwe: Well, let me explain. My mother is from Zimbabwe, she originates from Zhombe, and my mother and father met in Lusaka. My father was a laboratory technician, and my mother was a midwife. They met, fell in love and they were married there, and I was born on a trip back to London soon after they were married. Then they returned to Lusaka where my sister and brother were born. My sister unfortunately didn't make it, but my brother did and we continued to live in Zambia for a few years until Herbert Chitepo [the Zimbabwean liberation leader] was assassinated. He was a friend of my family's, and there was a lot of unrest. They didn't want to leave but they decided they would leave for a short while

and unfortunately, they never returned to Zambia – we settled in England after that.

What challenges have you faced as a woman of colour in the movie industry?

Whatever difficulties and challenges there are, I have faced them ... thankfully, I didn't internalise shame around the colour of my skin. I did not. If I realised that someone was treating me in a disrespectful way and it was to do with the colour of my skin, I would immediately disregard that person, because I felt that they were my subordinate in terms of just their mental capacity. Because race, if you just consider it for any degree of time, is a complete fabrication which is a hangover from colonialism as a way of making the colonialists and the colonised as different to each other as possible – so that it could justify brutal behaviour and the kind of



Photo: Anne-Christine Poujoulat/AFP via Getty

master-servant mentality. And we are not in that, we are no longer masters and servants in this world, right? So why are we still using these terms which were only relevant at a time when you had masters and servants?

Have things improved over the course of your career?

When I first started out, people of colour on screen – it was a drought. A drought of good material for people, a drought of scripts, roles, my goodness. Now It's amazing! Incredible. I can't keep up with all the incredible actors. I could name all the black actors when I started out, practically, you know, the mainstream. Now it's incredible, it's extraordinary, this explosion of talent and desire for stories for the stories of African Americans, right. And I want to see that from African filmmakers. And we have them, they are there.

Changing your name from Thandiwe to Thandie, was that just a clerical error or a race thing to confirm with society? Why is reclaiming your name important, and why now?

I'm not changing my name. I'm restoring it ... I've met people who don't even know what their name is because of their westernised name. Of course they will make their name their own but if you think of how effective a tool that is for erasing the culture where you come from to even take your name away. And for me, it happened very easily and simply.

I was very shy about my name when I



Breakthrough : Thandiwe Newton and actors Noah Taylor and Nicole Kidman on the set of *Flirting*. Photos: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

was a child because it was so different to everyone else's. People called me Thandie not Thandiwe because it was such a mouthful, also because Thandie people



Action: Newton on the set of *Westworld*.
Photo: HBO

pronounced wrongly. They'd say Thandie [with the 'th' pronounced as in thunder] all the time or they would just say it wrong which was just so punishing for me. Talk about being an outsider anyway. And so people would call me Thandie. And as I got older and more confident I would insist on Thandiwe. It's such a beautiful name, it means beloved. It speaks to me about my mother's family and Shona, even though it's not a Shona word it's actually from Zulu, the word, which is also incredibly romantic and gorgeous, and it kept me attached to my history.

So I was still Thandiwe to a few and then I remember when I made my first movie I was sixteen years old. It was in Australia, it was a complete fluke. I wasn't planning on being an actress at all, I was a dancer and studying hard to be accepted into life. And I did this movie and it was in Australia and the director

had named this character a Hebrew name, even though it was an African. I realise now in retrospect that he knew so little about modern Africa it's almost pathetic. But he knew I was called Thandiwe and he was like, "Oh God what a beautiful name, and it's also authentic!", so in order to make his character and his writing more authentic he took my name and he called the character Thandiwe. I was so flattered...So he used my name but then in the credits to the movie they used my name that everyone called me which was Thandie, you know, which was easy. So that stuck forevermore. My name was no longer Thandiwe, it was Thandie.

For years and years I was worried that if I reverted to Thandiwe I would lose all my fans who only know me as Thandie. But now, as a grown woman, I mean, you get to an age where I don't need to have this fame around me. People are gonna find my work ... Look, if I'm gonna be called Thandiwe in my movies I wanna be called Thandiwe in my life. And that's all I really want – to be called Thandiwe in my life.

In recent months you have become very vocal about the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. What triggered this?

What triggered it? The violence. The violence triggered it. I've known about the violence surrounding political issues for a long time. I'll tell you what it was. It's partly to do with the pandemic. The fact that people were being forced to wear masks and it felt to me that it wasn't the whole story, it was a cover for something

more, it wasn't the whole story. Using the pandemic as a way of controlling people.

When I first went to Cambridge, all those years ago, I had a reading list and the top of the reading list for an anthropology student was Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*. I read that book thirty years ago and it changed my life. It connected me to Zimbabwe in a new way because it was a modern telling of modern women, modern family. So when I saw that Tsitsi had been arrested when she was on a peaceful demonstration and put into prison, I was like "What? What's happening?" and that's when I just couldn't turn away. I wanted to help Tsitsi first.

... And then journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, and then the three girls, Joanna Mamombe and co., who were abducted and who were found weeks later dumped on the side of the road, who had experienced concussions and had very hazy memories of what happened. [Opposition MP Joanna Mamombe and opposition activists Cecilia Chimbori and Netsai Marova were abducted by state security forces in May last year and subjected to torture, humiliation and repeated sexual assaults].

I've worked for 20 years in the field as a human rights activist focusing on women and girls and we believe women, we start there! We start from that place. Why would someone talk about something as shameful as being abducted and sexually abused? Who wants that as an identity? I tell you what – No you don't. I was sexually abused. It's really hard to talk about it. The only reason I talked about it is because I

didn't want it to happen to other people. It's a sacrifice on my part because you become... it's like you're stained, right? You are an example of the bad things that can happen, so keep the bad things away. So I would even be dismissed by people, other women, you know, other actresses in my field. So you believe women, that's where we start.

I've worked for 20 years in the field as a human rights activist focusing on women and girls and we believe women, we start there!

What do you miss about Zimbabwe? Can you cook sadza?

No, my mum is sweet. She cooks for me because she doesn't want me to get burnt because every woman has got that big old hot bubble slap on the skin. I know how to do it, I do, but Mum always does it [laughs]. My mum lives up the road from me ... she comes with the full sadza, relish, greens. I did the greens in peanut butter. But yeah, we all sit together and eat from the centre. Yeah, it's magical. And of course I've got this view of Zimbabwe because it's romanticised, massively, but what's wrong with that? I know it's very different from when I was 17 and back there 30 years ago. It's very different. ■

Violet Gonda's full interview with Thandiwe is available on bit.ly/ThandiweNewton

THE QUIZ

- 1_** Nairobi was founded in 1899. True or false?
- 2_** In Southern African parlance, what is a roadrunner?
- 3_** Kenneth Kaunda stopped drinking alcohol, tea and coffee in protest against British colonialism. In what year did he take his last cup of tea?
- 4_** In which month will Zambia hold elections?
- 5_** True or false: Julius Nyerere was the first prime minister of Tanganyika and Tanzania's first president.
- 6_** What is the name of the Covid-19 variant South Africa identified in December 2020?

- 7_** Roch Marc Christian Kaboré is the president of which country?
- 8_** What is the second largest tropical rainforest in the world? (pictured)
- 9_** Which singer famously sang The Click Song and Pata Pata in the 1960s?
- 10_** What is the name of the continent's highest waterfall?

How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"I clearly read every page of *The Continent* every week."



How (not) to come to terms with genocide

Germany has offered Namibia 1.1-billion euros as a “gesture of recognition” for the genocide its colonial troops committed

Henning Melber

In mid-2015, a spokesperson for Germany’s Foreign Ministry acknowledged that the warfare by colonial troops in South West Africa – modern-day Namibia – between 1904 and 1908 resulted in genocide.

It was an overdue but unique admission.

Called the German-Namibian War by the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama, the peoples killed for resisting German rule, the extermination strategy (which also affected the Damara and San) had lasting demographic and socio-economic impacts, and left festering wounds.

Namibian independence in 1990 did not close the colonial chapter. Its legacy remains part of the present, not least in the ownership of land by white (often German-speaking) farmers, and a privileged German-speaking minority determined to protect its wealth. Reconciliation was misunderstood as a transfer of political power to the former liberation movement SWAPO while maintaining the socio-economic status

quo, under which a new black elite joined the old white elite in one of the world’s most unequal societies.

Following Germany’s official acknowledgement, government-appointed special envoys began negotiations in late 2015. But major agencies of the Ovaherero and Nama tribes were denied the degree of participation they had expected. Their reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 with the vote of both states, bore no fruit. This framework entitles indigenous people to full participation in any affairs affecting them.

Without adequate representation, relevant agencies of the Ovaherero and Nama from Namibia and in the diaspora took the German government to a New York Court. Their case was rejected in 2019, and the appeal finally dismissed in May this year – just days before the special envoys paraphrased an agreement in Berlin after nine rounds of negotiations.

While the German admission was a significant first step by a former colonial power, it carefully avoided

any far-reaching precedents. The term “genocide” was accepted only in moral and political terms, designed to avoid legal implications. Reparations were categorically dismissed. As a “gesture of recognition”, Germany agreed to pay 1.1-billion euros (\$1.3-billion) over 30 years to existing aid programmes.

German foreign aid in the 31 years since Namibian independence amounts to roughly the same figure.

The fund will go to development projects – land reform, water supply, etc. – in seven of the 14 Namibian regions where Ovaherero and Nama residents form ethnic minorities.

But there is considerable opposition to the size of the fund and how it is to be disbursed. As Ian Khama, the former President of Botswana stressed, descendants in the diaspora, including the thousands in neighbouring countries, are excluded from the fund.

For many, the fixed amount, declared as the non-negotiable final sum, adds insult to injury. To put it into perspective: German private donations and official humanitarian aid in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami come to an equivalent figure. And while some 50-million euros (\$59-million) has been earmarked for a foundation to promote German-Namibian reconciliation, including cultural projects and youth exchange programmes, it is painfully insufficient.

Germany has spent more money when it wanted to. The Central Berlin Holocaust memorial was constructed for 28-million euros on a property worth

40-million euros; another 60-million was set aside as annual maintenance costs for the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Castle. The museum, which displays many cultural artefacts looted during Germany’s colonial days, is a 700-million euro monument to imperialism.

While seeking to justify the agreement, Namibian Vice President Nangolo Mbumba and Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila were clearly frustrated over the limitations of the deal. A first debate in the National Assembly erupted in turmoil. The ratification of the agreement between the two foreign ministers planned for June in Windhoek has been postponed. The Covid-19 pandemic spiralling locally out of control has added to the disruption of the schedule: Among the victims has been the Ovaherero Paramount Chief Vekuii Rukoro, the most vocal critic of the negotiations; and Namibia’s special envoy Dr Zed Ngavirue.

Once signed, the German President is supposed to ask for an apology to be accepted in the Namibian Parliament. But the majority of the descendants are not represented there. Opposition parties have already signalled that the solemn act might be disrupted. It clearly takes more to heal colonial wounds and promote reconciliation than the largely symbolic, piecemeal compromise agreed. ■

Henning Melber is the director emeritus of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and a member of Swapo, Namibia’s ruling party, since 1974.

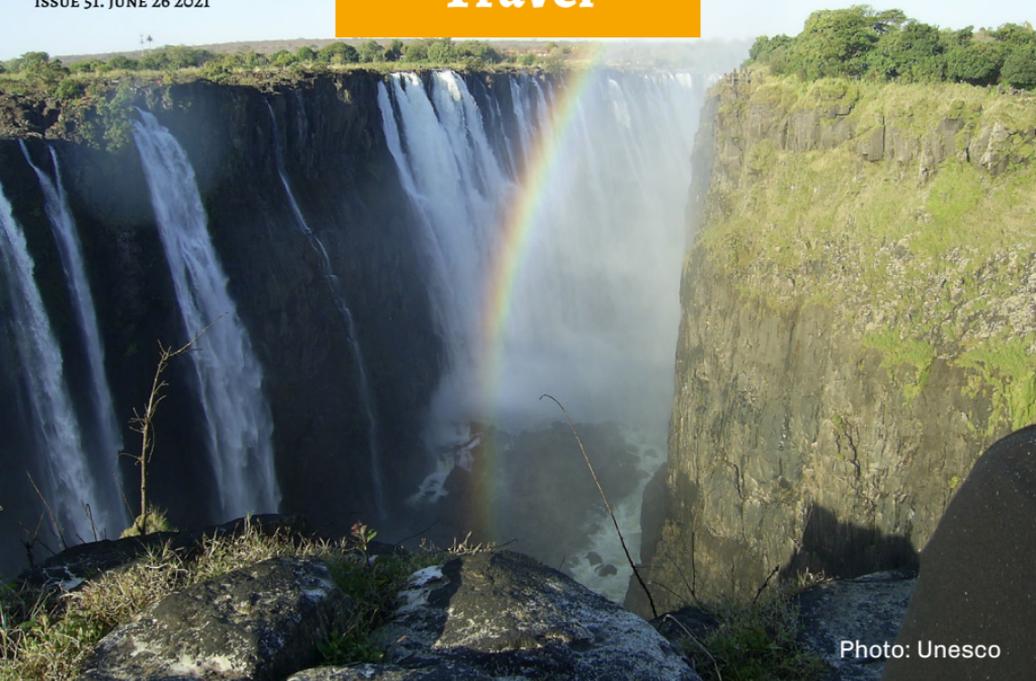


Photo: Unesco

Victoria Falls rises again

One of Africa's top tourist attractions has a strategy to encourage travellers to return: mass vaccination.

Refiloe Seiboko in Victoria Falls

The Mosi oa Tunya waterfall – ‘the smoke that thunders’ – is one of the seven natural wonders of the world.

The falls are located on the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, between the cities of Livingstone and Victoria Falls, both of which have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting

decline in tourism.

Victoria Falls, a quaint but majestically beautiful town, is almost completely reliant on tourism for its survival. It is trying to entice travellers back by rolling out a vaccination program designed to minimise the risk of infection.

This has worked, according to local authorities, who claim that Victoria Falls is the only city in the world to reach herd immunity with 76% of its population vaccinated.

The Zimbabwean government began rollout of the Sinopharm vaccine earlier this year, and made Victoria Falls a priority. “Our government has been very forward thinking. They had Victoria Falls and tourism as a whole as part of the first priority in phase one...and we managed to in a month achieve herd immunity,”

Shelley Cox, crisis communications coordinator for tourism initiative We Are Victoria Falls, told *The Continent*.

Although encouraging, this claim should be treated with caution: it is not yet known what proportion of a given population must be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, according to the World Health Organisation.

While Zimbabwe as a whole, like almost all African countries at the moment, is still grappling with the pandemic and its effects, Victoria Falls' inhabitants have largely been enthusiastic about getting the vaccine and have not been significantly hesitant in that regard.

Cox believes that they have been motivated by the prospect of getting back to normal, which means getting tourists back into the city. "A lot of livelihoods have been lost and unfortunately with that comes an increase in poverty levels, which results in more people turning to our natural resources to survive."

During the pandemic, the community rallied together for food drives, community cleanups and various awareness campaigns where people were given food and kept involved in the welfare of the city. "Whilst the impact has been significant, what has been hugely positive and reassuring is the community coming together," Cox said. "You've even got guides who've lost their livelihoods who've still been volunteering their time to go out in the field and assist with anti-poaching efforts because their long term livelihoods depend on the wellbeing and welfare of our wildlife."

Although the tourism industry is

still operating at only 20% of its regular capacity, things do seem to be picking up. International travel is increasing, largely from the United States, as well as with some regional travel. Matetsi Victoria Falls, a hotel, experienced almost 100% guest capacity this past week for the first time since before the pandemic and several other lodges reported increasing numbers.

"Whilst the impact has been significant, what has been hugely positive and reassuring is the community coming together."

"The beauty of Victoria Falls at the moment is that prices are far more affordable than they've ever been...most hotels are offering great SADC rates and this is giving [southern] Africans a lot more opportunity to travel to places that would've been out of your average price range previously," said Linda Balme, the senior commercial manager for Travelstart.

All over the city, residents wave to passing tourist busses and shout enthusiastically: "Welcome to Zimbabwe!" They are undeniably happy to have visitors back in their midst and as a traveller it's difficult not to feel happy to see them, strangers though they may be. ■

Travel for this report was paid for by the Africa's Eden Tourism Association



Wild food: a panacea to Niger's desertification?

In the dry south of Niger, communities are finding economic survival by harvesting the wild food that has always grown around them

Sophie Mbugua

A drought six years ago in southern Niger devastated crops. This is an area that already has little rainfall. Djamilla Yousuf tells *The Continent*: "We had no harvest that year." She lives in Dan Bouda Haoussa village, 25-kilometres from the town of Zinder, the country's third-largest.

The drought wiped out the groundnuts and millet that provide staple food, as well as some additional income when there is an excess to sell.

Yousuf, a mother of nine, says: "We did not have anything to do apart from sitting under any available shade of a tree. We sold our casserole to feed the children."

Her sister then introduced her to Sahara Sahel Foods, a food processing company buying and processing wild fruits in Zinder. The company says it was started to create local industry and also help rewild an area grappling with desertification. The idea being that cultivating wild food, instead of stripping land to farm, allows land to recover.

The company trained Yousuf in good harvesting, storage, transportation and primary processing techniques. She then started harvesting and selling naturally grown fruits and seeds like tamarind,

hanza (*Boscia senegalensis*), Marula, jojoba, desert dates, baobab, Sahel raisin, the Black prune.

“These trees have grown naturally in the bush and farmlands since time immemorial. I never thought of them as fruits and seeds that would earn me money,” explains Yousuf.

Two years after the drought that devastated her more mainstream crop, Yousuf had introduced over 40 villagers, among them youths and women now under contract to the industry.

Today she has three baobab trees planted on her four-acre farm, over 100 desert dates, over 100 Marula and jojoba trees incorporated with her millets, sorghum, and grounds.

Yousuf’s millet harvest has improved from about 125kg to about 500kg. The groundnut produce has increased fourfold from 50 to 200kg, while sorghum rose from less than 100kg to about 250kg.

Josef Garvi, the executive director at Sahara Sahel Foods, told *The Continent* the company started in 2014 and works with small rural groups and about 1,500 people. Eighty percent of the contracted are women and youths in 70 villages in the south-central and southern-eastern Niger republic.

Garvi says most of the wild food is consumed in Niger, often sold in local supermarkets and shops in the country’s major cities. Some are exported to neighboring countries like Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso and overseas like the United Kingdom, where products like the desert date oil are shipped.

The company has partnered with Rewild.Earth, a research institution that researches direct seeding and teaches fruit collectors on tree propagation techniques.

Through the various partnerships, the farmers of Zinder are also changing national laws. These now recognise the right of farmers to grow and own trees on their property, where in the past these would belong to the state. That in turn allows people to take part in a sustainable industry.

Yousuf says: “I am no longer worried about drought.” With more trees and improving soil, her other crops have shade and can grow healthier. They are also more resilient to shock. “Life at home has improved. I have bought six goats from the proceeds improving nutrition at home as my income has improved from supplementing farming millet, sorghum and grounds with trees.” ■

Burundi's peace hangs by a thread

Tensions are rising and the new government is enforcing ugly, divisive practises. A national dialogue is urgently needed – and people need to be held accountable.

Thierry Uwamahoro

1972 was tragic in Burundi. That year, a Hutu-led rebellion killed thousands of Tutsis. The repression that ensued reached genocidal proportions (the likes of which were only witnessed again in 1993). The then-President Colonel Michel Micombero, a Tutsi, admitted that upwards of 100,000 people had been killed in six weeks.

The US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger briefed former US President Nixon that “Hutu rebels killed every Tutsi that they ran across ... which triggered the Tutsi decision to exterminate all Hutus with any semblance of leadership, i.e., those who could read or write.”

That decision was made by President Micombero.

Three weeks into the mass massacres, the Organization of African Unity sent

a delegation of three heads of state to Burundi. They met Micombero and, shockingly, expressed their solidarity with him.

With solidarity came impunity.

Not a single person has been held responsible for those crimes against humanity that Micombero and his lieutenants committed.

Echoes of history

1972 set in motion a series of violent political crises that Burundi is still reeling from. The 2000 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (also known as the Arusha Accord), brokered by Nelson Mandela, provided a decade-long reprieve.

But the late President Pierre Nkurunziza's quest for a third term in 2015, in contravention of that agreement, sparked another conflagration, which left thousands dead, hundreds disappeared, and many more gang-raped and tortured at the hands of Nkurunziza's forces and militia.



History repeating itself: Burundians mourn victims of political violence in 2018. Photo: AFP

Like in 1972, the world knows what is happening in Burundi.

There are hundreds of reports, from the United Nations' Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and other reputable national and international organizations, complete with dates and names of victims and suspected perpetrators.

Still, with all that information, the international community seems determined to proceed like it did in 1972: sweep it all under the rug.

To be fair, some in the international community took steps to reason with Nkurunziza at the start of the 2015 crisis. The European Union (EU) levied a few sanctions while other continental and worldly bodies issued statements to bring Burundians to a genuine dialogue "in the spirit of the Arusha Agreement."

Nkurunziza resisted these calls until his final dying breath.

A severely flawed election later, Burundi has had a new president – Evariste Ndayishimiye, Nkurunziza's anointed successor – for a year. His regime tracks his predecessor's path, relying on the same individuals, institutions, and tactics that his predecessor used to silence dissent.

To his credit, Ndayishimiye has made some concessions, such as the release of unjustly jailed journalists. These positive steps have seemed like hostage release negotiations as Ndayishimiye seeks to recover \$480 million in aid that the EU froze due to Nkurunziza and his acolytes' atrocious human rights record. Indeed, many political prisoners remain behind bars as human rights defenders continue to report cases of extrajudicial killings and

enforced disappearances.

But there has been no dialogue in the style of the Arusha Agreement, even as Burundi drifts further and further away from the spirit of the agreement. In its wreckage, the old divisive and exclusionary practices have reared their ugly heads.

Last February, Ligue Iteka, Burundi's oldest human rights organization, issued an alarming report on the state of political and ethnic exclusion. Iteka's research concluded that close to 95% of President Ndayisimiye's appointments are from his party, and the overwhelming majority are Hutus – his ethnic group.

The report highlighted, for example, that there was not a single Tutsi among intelligence services leaders in the country's 18 provinces; and that more than 80% of military commanders and provincial police commissioners are Hutus in a country where the Constitution requires Hutus and Tutsis to be equally represented in the security services – to prevent acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

These alarming levels of discrimination and the widespread impunity are some of the burning issues a renewed, sincere, and inclusive dialogue could resolve to prevent future cycles of political violence in Burundi. ■

Thierry Uwamahoro is a Burundian democracy activist, with experience designing and leading democracy-related projects for the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute in Central and West Africa.

The use and abuse of patriotism in Zimbabwe

Mantate Mlotshwa

In August 2020, the Patriot Bill was tabled in the Zimbabwean parliament. The proposal was supposedly motivated by the need to promote and guard the country's national interests, which it is argued justifies criminalising any acts and behaviors seen to be harmful to the state. These criminal acts include private correspondence with foreign governments; false statements about the Zimbabwean government, and effectively any other conduct that would be deemed to undermine the nation.

In reality, the government is seeking to introduce this legislation so that, in line with the Cyber Security and Data Protection Bill, it is better able to clamp down on its growing number of critics.

Patriotism in its most basic sense implies a sense of national pride and citizen loyalty. But patriotism in Zimbabwe has come to mean something very different, being manipulated by the ZANU-PF regime to create a distinctive "Patriotic History" that divides society up into "patriots" who support it and "sellouts" and "traitors" who don't. This

construction has been deliberately designed to delegitimise the opposition Movement of Democratic Change, which has been repeatedly accused of being a front for foreign interests. In turn, this has been used to legitimise repression of opposition supporters and structures.

The timing of the Patriotic Bill is no accident, coming at a time when the government is seeking to pass its own failings off as solely being driven by international sanctions. But there is nothing genuinely patriotic about a government seeking to regulate how citizens express themselves and live their lives in order to cover up its own corruption and preserve a false image of Zimbabwe that fits its "patriotic" understanding.

Zimbabweans love their country, and aspire to enjoy mutual prosperity and dignity – and their stories are truly patriotic because they reflect a genuine hope and belief that their country can do better.

Allowing the government to establish a monopoly on how the country can be talked about will only enable the state to further abuse its power, while moving the flag of Zimbabwe further away from being a "symbol of freedom". ■



Mantate Mlotshwa is a Zimbabwean activist, writer, poet and entrepreneur. This analysis is produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE

Hump Day: A camel vender leads his camel at the camel market in Birqash, Giza, 25 km, 16 miles north of Cairo, Egypt. Traders come from different countries including Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia to sell camels ahead of Eid al-Adha, or Feast of the Sacrifice. Photo: Fayed El-Geziry/NurPhoto via Getty Images



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