

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



**The cost of oil's collapse**

Graphic: Ashleigh Swaile



**COVER STORY: Falling off the oil cliff.** Africa's petro states, like Angola and Nigeria, need a high oil price to invest in public services. Their leaders also need that money to stay in power. But the world is rapidly changing and oil is being phased out, with a predicted price of just \$35 a barrel by the 2030s. At that point, a country like Nigeria could lose a third of its annual budget – and it's only going to get worse.

## Inside:

- **Egypt takes inaugural Basketball Africa League:** Zamalek has a history of winning in football. Now the club has expanded into basketball and taken the title in a tournament hosted in Rwanda (p11).
- **Punches in the Pan-African Parliament:** Seventeen years in, it doesn't have a headquarters. It has no power. But its president can live a life of largesse and do so with impunity. No wonder people are fighting for the job (p14).
- **Electric racing hits Senegal:** Extreme E, a new motorsport focused on sustainability, equality and climate change arrived in the old home of the Dakar Rally (p16).
- **Protecting our past and future:** Just four of South Africa's 4,000 national heritage sites are sacred sites. One woman is trying to change that (p22).
- **Look to our oceans, or else:** Ethiopia's former prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, writes in *The Continent* that we face catastrophe if we don't look after the world's oceans (p24).
- **Our quiz:** Which tower is considered the tallest structure in Egypt and North Africa? No, it's not the pyramids! (p26).

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**Correction:** Last week (*Issue 47, page 6*), we wrote that Mali gained independence in 1968. That was a typo. Mali gained independence from France in 1960.

# The week in numbers



**500,000**

... people without water in Goma after the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in the DRC

**5-15**

... centimetres of snow expected over parts of Lesotho and parts of South Africa as part of the season's first snowfall



**2.7-million**

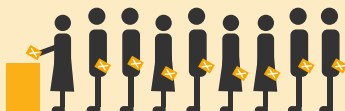
...tonnes of maize in Zimbabwe's bumper crop, the highest yield in 20 years

**80%**

... of livestock in Tigray has been stolen or slaughtered during the conflict in the wartorn Ethiopian province

**1,065,847**

... registered voters in local elections in the self-declared, internationally unrecognised Republic of Somaliland



## WEST AFRICA

# Nigeria announces Twitter ban ... on Twitter

Nigeria's federal government announced on Friday evening that it had suspended the activities of Twitter in the country.

The announcement came after the social media company deleted President Muhammadu Buhari's tweet earlier this week in which he threatened to punish pro-Biafra groups blamed for escalating violence in the southeast.

Twitter said the tweet violated its "abusive behaviour" policy, leading to a 12-hour suspension of Buhari's account. It's unclear when the suspension will go into effect given the order was announced by the ministry of information – on its own Twitter account.



**Fed Min of Info & Cu**  @FMICNigeria · 2h

Replying to @FMICNigeria

The Federal Government has suspended, indefinitely, the operations of the microblogging and social networking service, Twitter, in Nigeria.



**Fed Min of Info & Cu**  @FMICNigeria · 2h

The Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, announced the suspension in a statement issued in Abuja on Friday, citing the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence.

## EAST AFRICA

# Who tried to murder Uganda's former chief of police?

Katumba Wamala, Uganda's minister of transport and former police chief, survived an assassination attempt in the Kampala on Tuesday that killed his 26-year-old daughter and driver. Four assailants shot at their vehicle in

the upscale neighbourhood of Kisasi. President Yoweri Museveni said authorities "already have clues to those killers" in the incident. There is no clarity yet as to the motives of the attackers, despite feverish speculation in Kampala.



## NORTH AFRICA

# UK, France told to clean up their mess

One of the leading candidates in Libya's upcoming presidential election has said that the United Kingdom and France are responsible for precipitating the ongoing Libyan civil war – and that they have an obligation to solve the conflict. “I think that, in fact, Europe is morally and legally responsible for everything that’s happened as of 2011 and especially the UK and France,” said Fathi Bashagha, the former interior minister. France, the UK and the US intervened militarily to oust the dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 – against the advice of the African Union – plunging the country into a conflict from which it has yet to recover.

## SPORT

# Olympic medallist calls for third category for athletes

Margaret Wambui, the Kenyan runner who won bronze in the 800m event at the Rio 2016 Games, has suggested that World Athletics introduce a third category for athletes with high levels of testosterone.

“It would be good if a third category for athletes with high testosterone was introduced – because it is wrong to stop people from using their talents,” she told the BBC in an interview.

The 25-year-old, like other athletes with differences of sexual development (DSD), has been forbidden from contesting any distance between 400m and one mile in the female category unless she reduces her testosterone levels. But medical treatment options are controversial, with side effects ranging from increased risk of depression, to liver injury and hepatitis.

Wambui has been ruled out of the Tokyo Games due to the restrictions, alongside gold and silver medallists South Africa's Caster Semenya and Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba, although Niyonsaba will compete in the 5,000m event.

## CENTRAL AFRICA

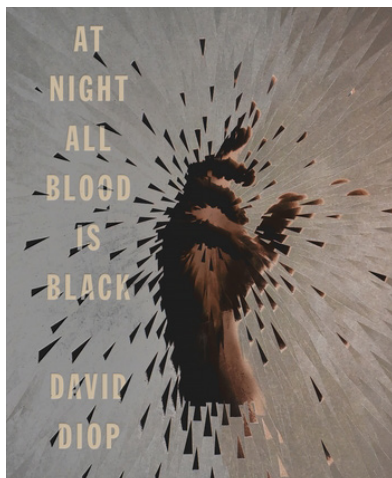
# Chad, CAR to investigate deaths

Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) have agreed to set up an independent commission to investigate an incident at a shared border post in which at least six Chadian soldiers were killed by CAR forces. Chad's defence ministry on Sunday said that Central African troops had attacked a Chadian military post, killed one soldier, and kidnapped and executed five others. CAR authorities said a firefight had broken out by mistake as their soldiers pursued a rebel group near the Chadian border, resulting in the deaths of troops on both sides.

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

# SA's red meat red-flagged

Botswana has banned the import of all South African red meat after an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province. This is the first outbreak since 2019 and has not yet affected other provinces. Namibia is expected to follow Botswana's lead. The full extent of the outbreak is still being investigated.



## ARTS

# Laurels for Senegalese soldier story

French writer David Diop won the international Booker prize for books translated into English this week. *At Night All Blood is Black* is a book set during World War I. Diop was born to a French mother and Senegalese father in France but grew up in Senegal. On winning the prize, Diop said: "It's very interesting and gratifying for me. This really shows that literature has no borders." The author, whose novel concerns two Senegalese soldiers who fought for France during the war was inspired by his Senegalese great-grandfather who fought for France. The book was originally published in 2018.

# Mali

## AU benches Mali military until 2022 elections

**M**ali has been suspended from the African Union with immediate effect following a second coup in nine months. This means the country cannot participate in any union activities.

The Pan-African body warned that the military must “urgently and unconditionally return to the barracks” and threatened “targeted sanctions and other punitive measures” if this did not happen.

In its statement on Tuesday, the AU’s Peace and Security Council said this would continue “until normal constitutional order has been restored in the country”. After last year’s coup, elections were promised for the end of February 2022.

The announcement follows the suspension of Mali from ECOWAS, the west African regional bloc, after an emergency meeting last weekend. It will last until February 2022, when Mali’s interim leaders were meant to hand over power to an elected civilian government.

Colonel Assimi Goïta, who has declared himself the president of Mali, was at the ECOWAS meeting.

As *The Continent* reported last week, Goïta is a special forces commander renowned for his quiet and calm demeanor. Joining the army in 2002, he rose through the ranks with a reputation for bravery and an ability to inspire trust. In 2018 he was appointed commander of the Battalion Autonomes des Forces Spéciales, a US-trained special forces unit. This gave him the position from which to launch his first coup, last August.

### The African Union has threatened sanctions

In that coup he appointed Bah N’Daw – a close ally and fellow military officer – as interim president. That relationship soured and collapsed when N’Daw announced a cabinet reshuffle last month, sidelining much of the military.

Goïta and the army responded by detaining N’Daw and his civilian prime minister and declaring himself president.

The AU suspension highlights a lack of consistency in its sanctions. It hasn’t suspended Chad, even though the elevation of Mahamat Déby to de-facto president after his father’s death was unconstitutional. ■

# Africa

## What happens when 30% of your national budget disappears in a decade?

**As oil demand shrinks and prices collapse, Africa's petro states – the likes of Angola, Nigeria, Egypt and Equatorial Guinea – will be left with massive holes in their budgets.**

### Sipho Kings

**T**he price of oil is expected to halve to \$35 a barrel by the 2030s.

At this price point, a country like Nigeria loses a third of its entire government revenue. The impact is similarly dramatic for Angola, where ageing offshore oil rigs bring in 75% of government revenues and make up 90% of exports. For Egypt, oil is 10% of government revenue with the number climbing to 78% in South Sudan and 80% in Equatorial Guinea.

A collapse in the oil price will be cataclysmic – and it is going to happen.

The International Energy Agency, once seen as a lobby for fossil fuels, now says the price of oil will halve from \$70 a barrel. This will drop the income per person from oil in petro states from \$1,800 to \$450.

Number crunching by *Carbon Brief*,

which specialises in energy and climate forecasts, says \$40 a barrel would cost petro states a combined \$9-trillion in lost income.

Gulf States, like Qatar, are planning for this by diversifying their economies and building up massive cash reserves. Even Saudi Arabia, where it costs just \$6 to get each barrel out of the ground, has had to make cuts: VAT was tripled to 15% last year to increase government revenue.

Half of Africa's states sell some sort of petrochemical.

And the Covid-19 pandemic has given a taste of what is to come. A year ago, oil prices briefly collapsed to \$25 and less a barrel. In Angola, the finance minister was forced to cut some department budgets by a third. The country's sovereign wealth fund, meant to invest oil income to ensure stability in the future, handed over \$1.5-billion to plug immediate gaps. Nigeria, reeling





**Fuel's errand: Shell's Bonga oil plant in the Gulf of Guinea. A court has ruled Shell must cut emissions in the Netherlands by 45% in nine years. Photo: Shell, 2015**

from a 2015 oil crash which kicked off its first recession in 25 years, further cut spending.

History holds similar lessons. The oil shocks of the 1970s collapsed the economies of newly independent African states. Instead of investing in social services – hospitals, schools and public spaces – they were forced by the International Monetary Fund to adopt the now infamous structural adjustment programmes. Young democracies gave way to monocultures and dictatorships.

Now the World Bank talks about countries like Nigeria and Angola by saying they need to “reduce dependency and diversify their economy”.

But oil and gas are still seen as a quick-fix for countries with resources. That income is also critical to leaders who need to lubricate their patronage networks to stay in office.

**The average income per person from oil in petro states will drop from \$1,800 to \$450. The drop will cost petro states a combined \$9-trillion in lost income.**

In Mozambique, the allure of natural gas profits saw the government bet

everything on income from new gas fields in its north. In ignoring the people who lived near that natural resource, the decision kicked off an insurgency which has become so dangerous that French oil giant Total was recently forced to halt operations.

Further north, Total and its Chinese counterpart Cnooc Ltd. have signed an agreement with Uganda and Tanzania to drill oil in the former and ship it from the latter, through a 1,440-kilometre pipeline.

Outside Lagos, Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote, is investing over \$12-billion in what would be Africa's largest refinery. Its stated goal is to meet all of the country's demand for refined petrochemical products – a big change in a country so used to shipping crude oil overseas and paying more to import back the refined product.

Projects like these are becoming increasingly difficult to fund, which is one of the reasons that oil demand is projected to collapse. Dangote's refinery is getting over \$3-billion from a consortium of banks. This is funding that was wrapped up before the move away from financing of fossil fuels.

Now, big banks are moving away from investing in fossil fuels. The threat of so-called "stranded assets", where a bank invests in a project that can then not pay back that debt, is increasing. This has also influenced the world's biggest stock markets.

And last month a Dutch court ruled that Shell must cut its emissions by 45% in nine years. The court ruled on the

basis that global heating causes natural disasters and generally degrades the human rights of people. Companies and governments that push that warming are therefore committing human rights abuses.

Shell can appeal but the order is immediately enforceable. The ruling is not unusual and comes amid a flurry of similar judgments in the last few years, particularly in countries where big corporate polluters are based. Another sign of the trend away from fossil fuels is that, this week, three seats on the ExxonMobil board were taken over by climate activists.

And all major polluting countries have now committed to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, with big drops by 2030.

**Big banks are moving away from investing in fossil fuels. The threat of "stranded assets", where a bank invests in a project that can then not pay back that debt, is increasing.**

Reducing coal and oil use is the quickest way for all these groups to reduce their emissions. Although this is a clear win for people in the long term, it spells disaster for the budgets of Africa's petro states – and, unless something changes quickly, for the short term for people who live there. ■



Allez hoop:  
Zamalek  
prevailed  
against US  
Monastir.

Photo:  
Muzogeye  
Plaisir,  
Anadolu  
Agency

## BAL crowns its first champs

Refiloe Seiboko

**T**he Basketball Africa League's inaugural season wrapped up on Sunday after two weeks of game action at the Kigali Arena in Rwanda's capital.

The league implemented the "bubble" setup that the NBA used in the United States last year of one venue for games, practices and hotels, as well as constant Covid-19 testing.

Over the two-week period of the BAL, players, coaches, broadcasters and league personnel were tested daily, tallying up more than 18,000 tests throughout the tournament. No person tested positive.

The clean coronavirus sheet was threatened early on in the tournament, however, when the league postponed a game between Madagascar's Groupement

Sportif des Pétroliers and Egypt's Zamalek due to "health and safety protocols".

In the arena, masked and socially distanced fans cheered on the teams and DJs played music simulating games fans expect from the NBA level. Musicians, celebrities, influencers, American executives, politicians and former players featured on the big screens.

The Rwandan fans' presence might have been the catalyst to propel their hometown Patriots: They had not been expected to go particularly far, and even featured among their ranks an American rapper who had no prior league experience.

But the Patriots ended up punching above their weight, securing a berth in the semifinal and eventually finishing in fourth place after the third-place decider

on the day of the final.

By comparison, some favoured teams had relatively disappointing showings – including Nigeria’s Rivers Hoopers, who failed to qualify for the quarterfinals despite a history of strong competition.

Likewise Senegal’s AS Douanes, Morocco’s AS Salé and Cameroon’s Forces Armées et Police found themselves unable to go the distance thanks in part to young, inexperienced players and long competitive downtime due to the pandemic.

The final turned out to be a north African headliner, featuring Union Sportive Monastirienne of Tunisia and Zamalek of Egypt. Monastir being in the final was no surprise, as many had expected them to win the tournament. As it progressed, Zamalek showed themselves to be the strongest contenders, securing a 76-63 win.

The energetic team had an impressive showing, proving tenacious early in the game, tying up the game and eventually taking the lead over their favoured opposition.

Throughout their games the team played a fast-paced but organised style with pyrotechnics from 18-year-old star Mohab Yasser and Walter Hodge (who would later be named the league’s first Most Valuable Player).

After the game, Monastir’s head coach Mounir Ben Slimen took responsibility for the loss and apologised to the Tunisian fans.

Speaking to how he thought the game played out, he told *The Continent*: “In other games we scored from the bench



**Net win: Egypt’s Zamalek celebrate after winning the Basketball Africa League final against US Monastir in Rwanda.** Photo: Muzogeye Plaisir/ Anadolu Agency via AFP

60-45 points ... tonight that was the difference: they scored 45 from [the] bench ... They were more successful on their try and we were not. It’s as simple as that. We missed easy baskets and the pressure was on us more. They played very good.”

Zamalek’s head coach, Agustí Julbe, spoke to the togetherness of his team and how no player put themselves above the other and how that helped their efforts.

He told *The Continent*: “It’s been an amazing experience. From day one in quarantine we knew how to live through it, get together being separated, being isolated in our rooms but we were getting along through online sessions and that was the building of what led us.” ■

# After Covid, we will need to build back better

**As economies recover, governments need to rethink how they invest in crucial resources.**

**Sophie Mbugua in Nairobi**

**A**frican countries are spending \$335-billion a year on the impact of natural disasters. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, this means 5% of the continent's gross domestic product is being lost. That will only increase due to climate change and as development destroys the ecosystems, like wetlands, that used to absorb disasters.

There is little money for communities to build back after these disasters. So one shock follows another until they have little resilience.

Covid-19 might be an opportunity to change this. The boom that inevitably follows recession means there is a chance for governments to rethink how they invest.

Luther Anukur, the International Union for Conservation of Nature regional director for East and Southern Africa, told *The Continent* that the growth spurt is a chance to build back in a sustainable way. Where in the past infrastructure was built over nature and engineering trumped natural solutions, this needed to change.

One example is mangroves, which grow in shallow coastal waters and slow down heavy seas that would otherwise destroy villages and crops. Along the western Indian Ocean, a million hectares of mangrove provide free ecosystem services but they are under constant pressure because the work they do is not valued.

Crucially, Anukur noted that development that focused on nature tended to include communities and extended their participation in the politics of their futures.

Jean-Paul Adam, director for technology, climate change and natural resources at the UN economic commission, says this kind of recovery would allow countries to also solve existing societal challenges, biodiversity loss and climate change.

The UN's environment agency says the world needs to invest over \$8-trillion in nature between now and 2050. This will allow countries to tackle the interlinked climate, biodiversity and land degradation crises. ■

**The boom that inevitably follows recession is a chance to tackle the world's interlinked crises in a sustainable way.**



# What is the point of the Pan-African Parliament?

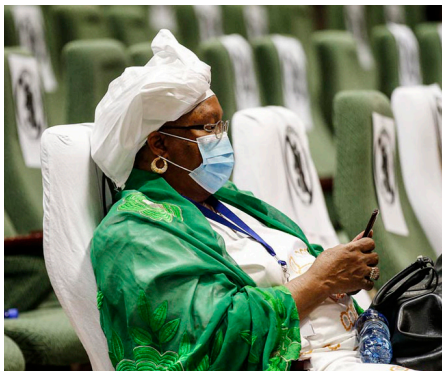
**After years of searching for some kind of purpose, the beleaguered institution is finally in the spotlight – for all the wrong reasons.**

**Simon Allison**

**I**t is easy to forget that the Pan-African Parliament exists. Since its inaugural session in March 2004, the institution that was intended to be Africa's highest legislative authority has struggled for impact and relevance. And judging by the sparse attendance at its parliamentary sessions, held several times a year, that forgetfulness extends to its own members.

The parliament doesn't even have permanent headquarters. After 17 years, it is still operating in a converted conference venue in Midrand, a nondescript South African commuter town.

Perhaps the problem is that it has no real power. It is meant to be the legislative body of the African Union. But its decisions are "consultative" and "advisory". They are easily and regularly brushed aside by the heads of state who



**Phoning it in: A delegate passes the time during one of the less violent moments at the summit this week.** Photo: AFP

really control the union. Or perhaps it is that its members, while drawn from across the continent, are not elected by the people they are supposed to be serving. Instead they are appointed by their own national legislatures, meaning they answer not to citizens but to governments – few of whom have any genuine interest in citizen oversight.

This week, however, there was finally some activity for long-term watchers of the legislature – at least for those of us who had not already fallen asleep.

Something actually happened!

There were scuffles. There were shoves. There were insults and punches – and even a death threat. "I'll kill you outside. Outside this meeting, I will kill you," shouted South Africa's Julius Malema at Mali's Ali Koné (Malema, reverting to that classic playground excuse, said that Koné had threatened him first).

Suddenly, and for the first time, the eyes of the continent are on the Pan-African Parliament.

Even AU Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat was moved to comment: “The shocking scenes of violence at the Pan African Parliament today tarnish the image of this honourable institution.”

This is a man who rarely indulges in condemnation, despite the best efforts of, say, the survivors of sexual harassment within his own organisation; or the victims of the ongoing atrocities being committed in Tigray.

### **No power, but plenty of privilege**

What could possibly have got tensions running so high? It was not anything to do with improving governance or fighting corruption or holding our leaders accountable. Instead, the parliamentarians were squabbling amongst themselves over who gets to preside over their chambers.

At stake is the position of president of the Pan-African Parliament, which was occupied until earlier this year by one Roger Nkodo Dang, who certainly appeared to enjoy his six years in the job. And why not, when much of it was spent in a suite at Johannesburg’s ultra-luxurious Michelangelo Hotel – with another eight rooms booked for his retinue, all paid for by African taxpayers.

Dang was driven around town in a Mercedes-Benz ML sport utility vehicle, after rejecting as substandard the Mercedes-Benz E-class that was initially allocated to him.

When he finally did move out of the hotel, he occupied a residence in an

exclusive housing estate in Pretoria that cost nearly \$6,000 a month and came with two full-time chefs and two cleaners, all on the AU payroll.

It is not just the luxuries that make the job so attractive – it is also the near-total lack of accountability.

When staffers accused Dang of sexual harassment, bullying and nepotism in 2019, the Pan-African Parliament voted in secret to bury these allegations. This was against the recommendation of an internal inquiry, which found there was “good reason” to conduct a full investigation. The vote was only revealed to the public – whom the Pan-African Parliament is supposed to serve – after several whistleblowers raised the alarm to the South African newspaper, *Mail & Guardian*.

Southern Africa, supported by North Africa, is pushing for its candidate (Zimbabwe’s Chief Fortune Charumbira) to be installed as Dang’s successor, saying the position should be rotated through the regions; while the West African bloc, supported by East and Central Africa, wants direct elections which will likely result in another West African candidate (Mali’s Haïdara Aïchata Cissé).

This, then, is the dream job that fuelled the fighting in Midrand this week: lots of luxury, little responsibility, total impunity. No wonder that the (dis)honourable members want it for themselves – no matter what the cost to the parliament’s reputation, and their own dignity. ■

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*With additional reporting by Mako Muzenda.*



Photo: Colin McMaster/McKlein

## FEATURE

# Motorsport electrifies its need for speed

**The Extreme E series is all charged up and ready to ride.**

**B**acked by green industrial concerns and famous racing drivers like Sir Lewis Hamilton, organisers say the Extreme E off-road series is using electric-engined motorsport both to educate the public and drive research in the industry (While also giving racers a chance to race).

Five races will be held across four

continents, with nine teams already taking part in this inaugural season.

These races are taking place in parts of the world that have already been hit hard by climate change, the organisers say, to encourage viewers to engage with this reality. After each race, a chosen environmental issue is then given attention and long-term support to





Photo: Charly Lopez

address it. Last weekend's race outside Dakar in Senegal, for example, focused on the importance of mangroves, and also on the damage being done to this ecosystem.

Each team also has to have a man and a woman driver, who swap seats halfway

through each race.

The series will be moving around the world on the vessel St Helena, which used to be the cargo liner that took people and goods from South Africa to its namesake island in the South Atlantic ocean. ■



**Watt's up, Dakar:**  
An electric speedster races along the Senegal course. Photo: Andrew Ferraro/Motorsport Images

# Voice of America is airing Ethiopian propaganda, staffers claim

**The US state broadcaster's coverage of the war in Tigray appears to be slanted in favour of the government.**

**Zecharias Zelalem**

**T**he US state-funded broadcaster Voice of America has been accused of whitewashing atrocities and airing propaganda in favour of the Ethiopian government during the course of the brutal civil war being waged in that country's northern Tigray region.

An analysis by *The Continent* of hundreds of internal memos, and interviews with around a dozen former and currently employed members of the VOA's Horn of Africa division, reveal serious pro-government biases in how the broadcaster frames the conflict, and in the stories and viewpoints it chooses to air.

These biases mean that the VOA's coverage remains largely favourable for Ethiopia's Nobel Peace Prize-winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, whose security forces stand accused of massacres and ethnic cleansing.

Among journalists interviewed is Jason Patinkin, who served as an international broadcaster in the Africa division's English to Africa service. Jason worked

as a reporter, host, producer and editor of content for the network's radio, television and web audiences.

"The VOA's coverage writ large shows that the organisation has taken a side in Ethiopia's Tigray war. Every level of the VOA hierarchy knows about the bias, in part because I've raised it at every level, yet so far management has failed to put a stop to it," he said.

In a short response, VOA told the *The Continent*: "VOA does its best to cover the situation in Ethiopia fairly and accurately. There are strong feelings in the region about the conflict, and we hear from partisans of all sides. Our goal is objective journalism."

It wouldn't comment on specific allegations and said: "When we receive complaints, we investigate and take actions, if necessary, against journalists whose coverage has violated our principles of producing accurate, balanced and comprehensive reporting, with this or any other story."

With a global reach including millions of people from countries that censor the

news, the VOA – with a budget topping \$250-million – broadcasts content in 47 languages, with over a thousand journalists serving audiences around the world.

Among this massive array of talent are journalists tasked with producing content for the VOA's Horn of Africa service. Over a dozen of the division's reporters and stringers are based in Ethiopia, and more work remotely from Washington DC for the network's Amharic, Tigrigna and Afaan Oromo language desks, while contributing English language stories as well. A household name in Ethiopia since the establishment of the Horn of Africa service in 1982, the VOA's audio broadcasts enjoy a sizeable reach of over 11-million listeners weekly.

### Selective coverage

For months, the Ethiopian government waged what it termed a “law enforcement operation,” in Tigray under a communications blackout, with journalists and aid workers prohibited from entering the region. Ethiopian forces were sent into the region to oust the Tigrayan regional government on 4 November, backed by troops from neighbouring Eritrea.

Eventually, through the accumulation of accounts, the use of satellite imagery and footage smuggled out of the region, journalists, despite the lack of access, began to piece together a grim picture of a civil war with punitive atrocities meted out against the region's inhabitants with alarming regularity.

But not VOA's Horn of Africa division.

The network's coverage has been noticeably selective. Atrocities committed in the war by state forces appear to get little to no coverage, whereas those that appear to have been committed by the Tigrayan rebels, such as the horrific killings in Mai Kadra in November last year, received extensive coverage.

## **The network's coverage has been noticeably selective. Atrocities committed by Ethiopian state forces appear to get little to no coverage.**

In addition, VOA journalists were instructed not to use the terms “civil war” or “war” to refer to the conflict in Tigray (*The Continent*, along with Reuters, CNN and most other major media outlets, describes the conflict as a war).

Instead, the Horn of Africa division, in particular it's Amharic language desk, adopted the phrase “law enforcement operation” – the Ethiopian government's terminology.

“Honestly, using the term is a disgrace to the profession,” one VOA employee told *The Continent*. “It eats at you knowing that others believe you are complicit in a coverup of the truth... We are investing loads of money and manpower into producing pro-war propaganda.” ■

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*This investigation has been edited for length. The full-length version, with a lot more details, is available on the Mail & Guardian website.*

# Ethiopia's elections are a bad idea. Here's why.

**A sham vote will only increase internal tensions.**

**Nic Cheeseaman and  
Yohannes Woldemariam**

**E**lections are a major feature of any successful democracy. But when elections are held under the wrong conditions – when voters cannot genuinely exercise their democratic rights and the process is fundamentally flawed – they can have a negative effect.

Ethiopia's general elections, now scheduled for 21 June after repeated postponements, fall into this category. Despite ongoing civil conflict in the Tigray region, widespread instability, and calls for national dialogue ahead of the elections, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is pressing ahead.

Abiy hopes that a resounding victory – there is no way he can lose – will make him look like a democratic leader in charge of a united country. But sham elections will do nothing to bring the country back together.

## **1. You can't hold a credible election in the midst of conflict and forced famine**

This election will take place against the backdrop of the conflict in Tigray – where government and Eritrean forces

are accused of a range of war crimes – and under a government that is actively starving a significant portion of the population.

According to the United Nations, Tigray has lost over 90% of its harvest and 80% of its livestock due to “looting, burning or destruction” – and the government is blocking essential relief shipments.

## **2. The elections will be divisive and exclusionary**

It's not just in Tigray where the threat of conflict looms large. Tensions are running high in the Afar and Somali regions, while land disputes between the new regional state of Sidama and the Oromia region are worsening.

Meanwhile, clashes between rival groups in Afar, the Somali regions, northern Showa, South Wollo and four zones in the Oromo special region, are so bad that the government has been forced to establish “command posts” in an attempt to prevent further killings.

In total, over 40 constituencies in the these regions will see elections delayed due to insecurity, in some cases by months – and no elections will take place in Tigray at all.

### **3. Many are too scared to challenge the ruling party**

In the context of deteriorating respect for civil liberties, and mass arrests that have seen many opposition figures detained without charge, government critics are naturally wary of expressing disapproval.

Moreover, the mass censorship and Soviet-esque propaganda campaign waged by the Ethiopian government as part of the Tigray conflict has demonstrated that those who contest the official narrative may be branded enemies of the state, undermining the freedom of speech needed for meaningful elections.

### **4. Some opposition groups will boycott**

Given the distrust that exists between rival parties, it is unsurprising that some of the country's opposition groups are likely to boycott the polls. Other opposition leaders are trying to contest, but can't meaningfully do so from jail.

Meanwhile, the head of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) has announced he will not participate while his allies Bekele Gerba and Jawar Mohammed remain in prison. The Oromo Liberation Front has also pulled out for similar reasons.

In the absence of a strong opposition, Abiy's victory will be overwhelming, but hollow.

### **5. The Electoral Commission isn't ready**

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has failed to prepare adequately for the election, despite numerous delays,

and so the most basic tasks – training electoral officials, distributing materials, providing Covid-19 equipment – are unlikely to be completed in time.

Voter registration is perhaps the most pressing concern. According to NEBE figures, 31.7-million people are registered, well down on the 50-million target. In turn, disorganised polls held amid allegations that the government's desperation has led it to bribe voters to register in some areas, and rig the process in others, will undermine Abiy's ability to claim a unifying mandate.

This does not mean that Ethiopia should turn its back on elections. Moving to a one-party state would further antagonise opposition parties and disaffected communities. Instead, Abiy must finally accept the need for national dialogue, provide urgent aid and assistance to Tigray, end government censorship and human rights abuses, allow opposition leaders to take part, and empower NEBE to conduct a credible voter registration process.

This may require postponing the polls again, frustrating many of those involved, but it would lead to a much better foundation on which to build a new Ethiopia.

Otherwise the elections will only serve to reinforce the growing perception that a man who won the Nobel Peace Prize has become just another brutal dictator. ■

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*Nic Cheeseman is professor in democracy at the University of Birmingham. Yohannes Woldemariam is an academic specialising in the Horn of Africa.*

## PROFILE

# Mphatheleni Makaulule



**Just four of South Africa's 4,000 national heritage sites are sacred sites. One woman is trying to change that.**

**Laura López González**

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

**I**t's early March and Mphatheleni Makaulule is standing on a deserted dirt road. It's not yet noon but the hot sun of northern Limpopo is already sending temperatures soaring. The remnants of old stone walls – ancient kraals and traditional courts – are just barely visible among the grass swaying in the hot breeze.

In the more than 2,000 years that humans have lived in this area of South Africa, this mountain has been a site of power, trade, and fierce – often bloody – colonial resistance for the Magoro clan.

But, more importantly, it is the family's *zwifho*. The creator, Nwali, bestowed upon each clan a *zwifho* – a river, forest, mountain, waterfall or lake in which their ancestral spirits rest, Makaulule explains.

The apartheid government forcibly removed the Magoro clan from the land in the mid-20th century. And although older generations continue to make what can be an hour-long trip to perform rituals at the *zwifho*, the site is vulnerable to desecration. The family has an outstanding land claim to the area. In a bid to protect the *zwifho*, in the meantime, some of the clan has turned to Makaulule.

Today, the Magoros and Makaulule are hoping a meeting with officials from the South African Heritage Resource Agency – and its local arm, the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority – can garner the site emergency protection from its latest threat: development.

The daughter of a prominent traditional healer, Makaulule followed in her father's footsteps. Her commitment to preserving indigenous knowledge and rights, including *zwifho*, is in many ways

part of his legacy. After graduating from university in 1998, Makaulule began to seek out this knowledge.

“I would take a taxi to a village I didn’t know just to see it,” she says. “I would find the children playing or women in the spring collecting water. I just made a way to connect and I would ask for the elders.”

Today, her home boasts a meticulously catalogued library of notebooks from these travels. In this way, Makaulule and her largely female-led organisation, Dzomo la Mupo, have documented at least 49 zwifho throughout Limpopo – largely without any institutional funding. And although some of these zwifho have been lost to threats like development or tourism, Dzomo la Mupo has also been able to successfully oppose coal mining in sacred areas.

Makaulule has received international acclaim for her work, and was awarded a Global Leadership Award by the International Indigenous Women’s Forum. She has also travelled the world meeting with fellow indigenous rights activists in places like Kenya and the Amazon Basin to share lessons learned.

She and Dzomo la Mupo also worked with a psychologist to produce the first-ever study in South Africa showing that the desecration of sacred sites contributes to intergenerational psychological distress, according to a study published in the *Journal of Ecopsychology* this year. Restoring these sites can be healing.

The South African constitution and other regional agreements protect the right to freedom of religion and it is possible to apply to the South African Heritage Resource Agency – through its provincial

branches – to have a zwifho protected.

“All of the zwifho we have mapped are under threat,” she says.

Lake Fundudzi, a zwifho, was declared South Africa’s first sacred heritage site in 2014. In 2018, the Limpopo department of mineral resources granted mining prospecting rights within the Lake Fundudzi heritage site. Dzomo La Mupo successfully opposed the decision.

Only four of South Africa’s roughly 4,000 national heritage sites are sacred sites – compared to almost 3,400 buildings, for instance, research in the *Journal of Ecopsychology* points out.

Back at the Magoro zwifho, South African Heritage Resource Agency officials and the family have begun to move towards the mountain to inspect the site, thankful to escape the mid-day sun – but without local officials from the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority representatives, who texted that they had somewhere else to be.

“They should have come to this,” Makaulule says, sighing. “These are important places. People can see these sacred sites as just archaeological places to dig... but it’s deeper than that. We defend them because of [their importance to our] spirituality, which cannot be replaced.”

She pauses. “There are lived connections here – and if you disconnect something from a system, it affects the system,” she says. “Our grandparents died with that pain.” ■

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*This story is part of a series of profiles on human rights defenders in the SADC region, funded by Internews.*

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# Africa must protect the high seas – before it's too late

**We must act now to secure the world's oceans as a common good.**

**Hailemariam Desalegn**

**I**f the past year has taught us anything, it is that we must not underestimate the power of the natural world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a tragedy of untold proportions, and a clarion call to us that we must work harder to protect nature and live in harmony, not at odds, with it.

For many, the notion of protecting nature in Africa conjures up visions of sweeping national parks, game reserves teeming with the Big Five and stretches of golden coastlines where turtles nest and brightly coloured fish punctuate the clear waters.

And of course, they are right, the biodiversity we are blessed with in Africa is abundant and there is much good work being done to ensure its safety and longevity.

But there is one last great wilderness which most of us will never see, and most likely have never thought much about. This great wilderness begins 200 nautical miles off our African shores, it covers half of the planet, and it is the last great global commons – the high seas.

As we celebrate World Oceans Day

on 8 June, it is vital we recognise the importance of protecting areas beyond our national jurisdiction.

Historically, a lack of clarity over who is responsible for the protection of this expanse, and limited public awareness of how vital a healthy ocean system is, has at best fueled disinterest, and at worst let a small minority exploit its resources and decimate its biodiversity.

## **Why the oceans matter to Africa**

It is thought that scientists know more about space than they do the high seas, with some estimating that we are still unaware of 91% of the living organisms that exist in this largely unexplored ecosystem.

So murky is our knowledge that even some of the species that we do know of seem almost mythical: such as the giant squid.

To date some 34,000 organisms have been discovered in our oceans that could potentially be used in medical and food developments.

So far, discoveries in the high seas have included eight marine-based drugs, five of which are cancer treatments; and the discovery of one form of alga that can be

used to fortify canola oil, an increasingly popular staple in Africa.

However, at present there is no legally binding framework in place to stop wealthier nations or private companies controlling these discoveries, patenting them, and preventing developing nations from accessing their benefits.

The same is true of fishing in the high seas. It is monopolised by less than a dozen countries with little regulation and is rarely equitably shared.

In fact, it is estimated that the worldwide value of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU) catches is between \$4.9- and \$9.5-billion, and up to 30% of IUU fishing (\$1.2-billion) occurs beyond national jurisdiction.

## **There is no framework to stop wealthier nations or private companies controlling discoveries, patenting them, and preventing developing nations from accessing their benefits.**

But more than just providing a minority with financial benefit, overfishing in the high seas has a direct impact on stocks within neighbouring nations' exclusive economic zones.

This has a disproportionate effect on developing countries where dependency on fisheries for food, livelihoods and revenues is high.

Without a strong, global, legally

binding framework not only will developing nations continue to be denied access to natural resources in the high seas, but the high seas ecosystem will continue to be drastically compromised.

The current UN High Seas Treaty under negotiation aims, for the first time, to establish guidelines “for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction”.

This would include a framework to establish a well-connected and representative network of marine protected areas; rigorous and independent environmental impact assessment of ongoing and future activities on the high seas; and clear funding mechanisms that do not marginalise the world's developing nations.

Over the next six months we have a chance to drastically change the way we engage with the high seas and all that it houses.

As Africans we owe it to ourselves and future generations to engage fully in the ongoing negotiations for a High Seas Treaty to ensure that this last great wilderness is protected and restored, and that the ocean's abundant resources are distributed equally and sustainably.

To put it simply, if we do not protect the high seas collectively and globally, the repercussions will be catastrophic – biologically, economically, and almost certainly geopolitically. ■

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*Hailemariam Desalegn is the former prime minister of Ethiopia.*

# THE QUIZ

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 got all the brains the Pan African Parliament seems to be missing."

- 1\_ Which tower is considered the tallest structure in Egypt and North Africa?
- 2\_ Bamako is the capital city of which country?
- 3\_ Which Libyan leader played a crucial role in the birth of the African Union in 2004?
- 4\_ True or false: Tripoli is the headquarters of the African Union.
- 5\_ Which country was formerly called Swaziland?
- 6\_ The bottle gourd is also known as what plant?
- 7\_ Which country is nicknamed "The Pearl of Africa"?
- 8\_ Germany recently admitted to genocide in which country?
- 9\_ Who is the president of the Republic of Congo?
- 10\_ Which country gained (de facto) independence from Ethiopia in 1991?

## How did I do?

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

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za)

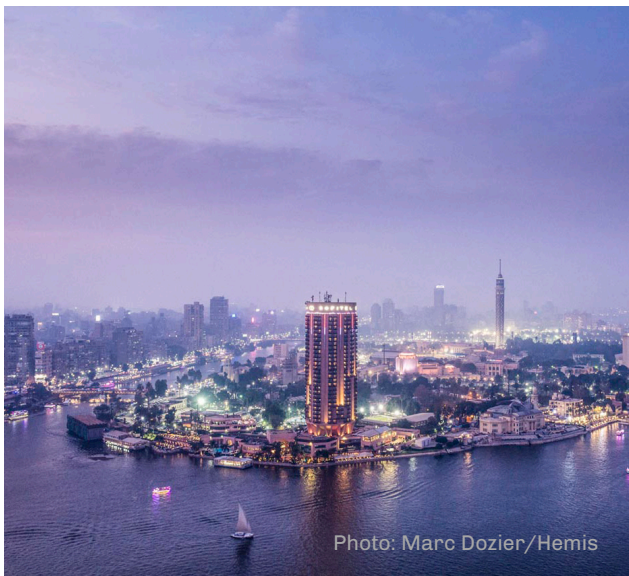


Photo: Marc Dozier/Hemis

# See me after class, please



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Getting an education in the middle of a pandemic is difficult enough. Even so, it feels like there are many unruly sorts who could stand to stay behind after class.

Unfortunately, some of our own leaders are on the list – thanks to the playground politics that plagues our powers that be.

A casual glance at some of our Pan-African bodies provides a who's who of the archetypes you'd expect of the Class of '21. The dimwitted thug who stayed back a year just so that he could carry on stealing the smaller kids' lunch/natural resources. The Queen Bee who wouldn't dream of inviting the opposition to join the 'You can't sit with us table'. The cheerleaders who keep trying to make "fetch teargas" happen. And the power-crazy prefects who like to take the school rebels out behind the bicycle shed for a spot of physical re-education.

No such rendezvous awaits Mali, alas, which has managed to get itself properly suspended – not just from ECOWAS but from the whole African Union, which somehow managed to realise two coups

in nine months is probably crossing some sort of line.

To be fair, Mali isn't playing playground politics as much as it's re-enacting *Lord of the Flies*, and its Constitutional Court judges have now given the conch to post-coup junta leader Colonel Assimi Goïta, who they say is definitely and officially president now, and also could he please stop twisting their arms up behind their backs now, if it's not too much trouble?

The African Union is not quite as convinced. Mali is now banned from taking part in any AU proceedings "until normal constitutional order has been restored in the country".

Home-schooling it is, then?

### Too cruel for school

Meanwhile, politics have given way to a full-on shouting match on the playground between the Central African Republic and Chad, after an attack on an outpost in Sourou in Chad, in which six soldiers were killed.

Chad accused the CAR of being behind the attack, branding it a "war crime" which "cannot go unpunished".

But the CAR insists its soldiers had been pursuing a rebel group and were met by an exchange of fire at the border. So it's all gone a bit "he said/she said", and delegations from both countries have met

and called for international arbitration.

At least they're asking the prefects to get involved, unlike others who think they run the whole school: last week, police in Zimbabwe arrested *New York Times* freelance reporter Jeffrey Moyo, accusing him of violating immigration laws while he obtained accreditation for two of his colleagues.

Magistrate Rachel Mukanga ruled that he was a "threat to national security" and denied him bail. We've heard of inmates running the asylum, but this is more a case of the bullies calling the shots in detention.

### Umbrage is in fashion

One of the lingering legacies of colonial schooling is the narrow-minded preoccupation with dress codes, including in Tanzania, where MP Condester Sichwale was asked to leave parliament because of her outfit.

Another parliamentarian, Hussein Amar, seems to have appointed himself head of uniform police. He had a big old go at Ms Sichwale over her yellow top and black trousers, questioning what kind of example it sets for society.

He persuaded the speaker of parliament to instruct the lawmaker to go home and get changed, thus continuing the long misogynistic tradition of men in authority policing women's bodies, their clothing and their choices. Even Hogwarts wasn't that bad, and they had Delores Umbridge.

While our leaders swing between being unruly pupils in the playground and tyrannical teachers who put entire

countries in detention (for years, in some cases), real crises are continuing across the continent.

Not least among these is the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique. Leaders from the regional Southern African Development Community held a summit last week where it was hoped that some solution or plan would be devised to address the Cabo Delgado conflict there. But it proved to be little more than a debating society event: all they managed to agree on was the need for another summit.

### **Amar Hussein had a big old go at Ms Sichwale over her yellow top and black trousers ... Even Hogwarts wasn't that bad, and they had Delores Umbridge.**

Meanwhile, according to the Institute of Migration, an estimated 64,705 people have now been displaced from the regional capital, Palma, following the 24 March attack. And more than 40% of those affected are children.

Real children, who deserve to be in a real school, learning about the world. Not being driven from it. ■

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*Samira Sawlani is a journalist and analyst with a focus on East Africa. She holds an MA in international studies and diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and previously worked in the humanitarian aid sector.*

## THE BIG PICTURE

**Power polls: Women queue to vote in Somaliland's elections at a polling station in Gabiley. More than a million voters were called to the polls on Monday in the self-proclaimed republic of Somaliland for legislative and local elections, in which the authorities intend to demonstrate their ability to organise democratic and peaceful elections in the Horn of Africa.**

Photo: Mustafa Saeed/AFP



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