

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent

An illustration showing several hands of various skin tones holding smartphones. Each phone screen displays a green hash symbol (#). The background is a solid blue color. The hands are rendered in shades of orange, brown, and tan, with simple line art for fingers and palms. The smartphones are black with white outlines and green hash symbols on their screens.

**Gaming  
the  
algorithm:**  
The propagandist's  
guide

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi



**COVER: Twitter's propaganda wars.** Hashtags are the weapon of choice for internet-savvy 21st-century propagandists, who know exactly how to manipulate and massage social media algorithms for their own dubious ends. But we know a few their dirty tricks – and, after reading this story, so will you (p14)

## Inside:

- **Movie night** in Mogadishu (p8)
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**Correction:** In last week's Afrobarometer page we made some critical errors, with numbers on the graph corresponding to the wrong data. We fixed it, and all downloadable versions of Issue 60 now have the updated graph. We also worked out why we made the errors, so that we don't let it happen again. Zoom in for the updated page.



## Write for us

We want more travel pages. Tell us about your city or favourite town on the continent. Ping an email to [thecontinent@mg.co.za](mailto:thecontinent@mg.co.za)

# The week in numbers

## 35<sup>th</sup>

... Sevens rugby gold medal for South Africa's Blitzbokke



## £500,000

... the going price for access to Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, according to a series of damning investigations in the British press this month

## 2000+

... the seven-day average of Covid-19 deaths in the US this week, despite the country having more vaccines than it can use

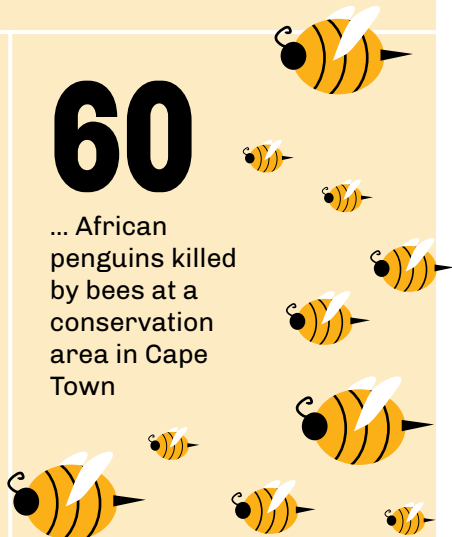


## £19,000

... deducted from the salaries of Al Ahly players and staff after losing the Egyptian Super Cup

## 60

... African penguins killed by bees at a conservation area in Cape Town





**Ted on arrival: Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue suits up for his 41st birthday in 2013, when he still had all his loot.**

## EQUATORIAL GUINEA

### Paying back the money – one tiny prick at a time

Millions of dollars seized from Equatorial Guinea's Vice-President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue will be spent on vaccines in his home country, US authorities have decided. The money comes from the sale of seized assets in the US, like a mansion and Michael Jackson memorabilia. He is the son of longtime president Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo who has ruled for over four decades. Its wealth has gone to the president's family and friends – with little left over to invest in vital things like vaccines.

## UGANDA

### No vaccines, and a total lack of class

Ugandan schools will not open until January next year, when the government expects that 10% of the population will be vaccinated against Covid-19. Meanwhile, despite having a surplus of hoarded vaccines, countries in the global north are struggling to convince the last third of their populations to get a jab – and are even considering using their extra doses for “booster shots” for their already-vaccinated populations.

## COVID

### African lives matter

UN Secretary General António Guterres wasn't sparing anyone's feelings when he addressed the General Assembly this week, talking about the over 90% of Africans who haven't been vaccinated: “It is an obscenity. We passed the science test. But we are getting an F in ethics.” The United Kingdom, meanwhile, has refused to recognise any vaccines administered in Africa – even ones that it has sent. Is something other than science informing this approach?



## CULTURE

# Another film falls foul of homophobic censors

Kenya's film board has banned *I am Samuel*, a film about a gay couple in the country, for being "an affront" to the part of the constitution "which recognises the family as the basic unit of society and defines marriage as between two persons of the opposite gender". "Once again, the Kenyan government has disparaged its LGBT citizens by banning a documentary that aims to humanise an ordinary Kenyan gay couple," said Human Rights Watch.

## ALGERIA

# Sky's the limit for Moroccan planes

Algeria has banned Moroccan flights from its airspace, as relations between the two nations take another turn for the worse. Algeria cut off diplomatic relations with Morocco last month. The dispute is linked to long-running tensions over Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara, which is opposed by Algeria. Moroccan aviation authorities said however that the flight ban would have little impact, as affected flights would be able to reroute over the Mediterranean.

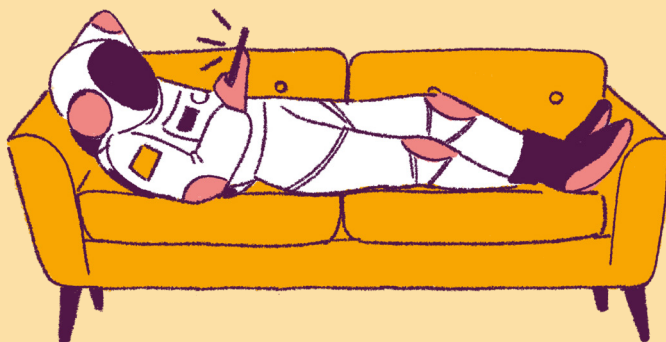
## ENERGY

# China says no to foreign coal

In big news for our continued existence, China's President Xi Jinping this week announced his country will not be financing new coal-fired power plants overseas. Globally, this will mean a reduction in planned power plants the equivalent of all of South Africa's emissions (Africa's largest polluter). Shares in Mozambique's planned Ncondezi plant collapsed on the news. In South Africa, protests against the state's continued bet on selling and burning coal entered yet another year. Tellingly, China said nothing about plans for *domestic* coal plants.

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**REPARATIONS**

# Ramaphosa pushes for slavery compensation

South African president Cyril Ramaphosa brought up the issue of reparations for slavery in his address to the UN's General Assembly this week. The countries that would need to pay up are also those that need to pay for all the damage being caused by all the heat they pumped into the atmosphere and have. So no holding out hope then.

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**COLONIALISM**

# Bring back our bronzes

With Nigeria preparing to ask the British Museum to return the Benin Bronzes (which were stolen), Britain's culture secretary asked in an interview: "Where do you draw the line with this?" Because "the collections of our great national institutions have been developed over many centuries, many times in questionable circumstances". To translate the language of obfuscation: What the UK is saying is that if you steal enough for long enough, and build your nation out of that theft, you shouldn't be held to account. Other museums, including in the US and Germany, have started returning the bronzes in their collection.

**CENTRAL AFRICA**

# Paris bans pop star

Paris police have banned DRC musician Werrason from performing in the city this weekend. The police cite his closeness to the central African country's current President Felix Tshisekedi as having the potential to ignite simmering tensions in the diaspora in France. Werrason was also close to former president Joseph Kabila.

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**FOOTBALL**

# Et tu, Eto'o?

Legendary footballer Samuel Eto'o has declared his candidacy for president of the Cameroonian Football Federation. He's vowed to clean up the organisation, which has been bedevilled by graft and opportunism in recent years.



## CINEMA

# A night at the movies in Mogadishu

**S**omalia is crazy about movies, with a particular affection for Bollywood classics. But there has not been a functioning cinema in the capital, Mogadishu, for the past 30 years, thanks to civil war and what feels like a never-ending political crisis.

The country is still in crisis mode. Currently, the president and prime minister are barely speaking to each other, while a majority of the country is still controlled by militant group Al Shabab.

But there is some good news – or, at least, a little escapism. On Wednesday, dozens of people crowded into the National Theatre for the first movie screening since 1991. On the bill were two short films by Somali director Ibrahim CM: *Hoos*, a horror flick, and *Date from*



Photos: AFP

*Hell*. Tickets cost about \$10 – not bad for a once-in-three-decades experience. ■





Photo: Segun Ogunfeyitimi, Gallo Images

## The times, they are a-changin'

South Africa's women's national football team, Banyana Banyana, defeated Nigeria's Super Falcons 4-2 this week to emerge winners of the inaugural Aisha Buhari Cup in Lagos. Although it was just a friendly, South Africa's unexpected victory could prove seminal in the battle for supremacy in women's football on the continent. Nigeria have dominated the landscape, winning nine of 11 Confederation of African Football women's championships, including in 2018, when they defeated South Africa on penalties. Now coach Desiree Ellis's young charges have exacted a modicum of revenge that could signal a changing of the guard in African women's football. ■

# Rwanda

## **Hotel Rwanda hero gets 25 years behind bars**

**Paul Rusesabagina – credited with saving hundreds of lives during the Rwandan genocide – was this week found guilty of terrorism, after being ‘tricked’ into custody by the Kagame regime**

**Simon Allison**

**T**wenty-one people were found guilty of terrorism in a Kigali courtroom on Monday, in connection with a series of alleged terrorist attacks in southern Rwanda in which nine people were killed.

Among them was Paul Rusesabagina, the real-life hero of the film *Hotel Rwanda*, who is credited with saving hundreds of lives during the Rwandan genocide. The 67-year-old was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Rusesabagina was a leader in

exile of a banned opposition party, whose armed wing is accused of carrying out the attacks.

He did not return from exile voluntarily: when he boarded a private plane from Dubai to Kigali last year, he was under the impression it was going somewhere else. “The security threat posed by Rusesabagina’s MRCD-FLN militia was serious enough for Rwandan law enforcement to issue an arrest warrant and trick him into coming to Rwanda so that he could be arrested and tried in a court of law for terror offences,” Rwandan government spokesperson Yolande Makolo confirmed to *The Continent*.

Rusesabagina’s conviction has once again put Rwanda’s human rights record in the international spotlight. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned the verdict and the trial as unfair and politically motivated.

“The Rwandan authorities have the right to prosecute genuine security offences, but they have undermined their case every step of the way, starting with the manner in which they unlawfully detained Paul Rusesabagina, through multiple violations of the right to a fair trial,” said Human Rights Watch’s Lewis Mudge. “Unsurprisingly, we saw once again that the Rwanda courts are overpowered by political influence.”



Graphic: JOHN McCANN

Rusesabagina's daughter, Carine Kanimba, told *The Continent* from Brussels that the family does not accept the verdict or the legitimacy of the court.

"The verdict means nothing," she said. "My father is a political prisoner. He must be released now."

At the time of writing, Rusesabagina's family had not yet been able to speak to him about the verdict. The only contact they have with him is a five-minute telephone call each week, which they assume is monitored by authorities.

"We can feel the tension; he is not at ease. We are so afraid of what might happen to him as soon as we hang up. It's super short. We speak super fast, to give him as much information as possible," said Kanimba. "They try to limit what he knows because they know that info allows him to make smart decisions about how to defend himself."

Kanimba claimed that she and other family members had been subjected to Rwandan government surveillance in the wake of her father's arrest. According to

Amnesty International, her phone had been infected with Pegasus spyware since January this year (Pegasus is powerful software that allows governments to access all data on an infected mobile device). "There are no reasons to spy on me other than this is what a dictatorship does," Kanimba said. "They had access to my location, my GPS, my photos, my calendars, my Instagram, my Twitter, my Gmail. They also listened in to meetings."

The Rwandan government spokesperson denied these allegations. "These are bogus claims. Rwanda does not have or use this software. And as you know, it is technically impossible to attribute an infection to any country, or even to confirm what the infection is: you can't tell it's Pegasus versus something else. Those making these allegations, like Carine Kanimba, are simply seeking attention, riding on the ongoing campaign to promote disinformation about Rwanda."

Rusesabagina has 30 days to appeal the verdict. ■

# Sudan

## Khartoum foils coup attempt

**As crazy as it sounds, there are still people hankering after the bad old days of deposed dictator Omar al-Bashir**

**S**udanese officials said this week that they had foiled an attempted coup led by allies of the deposed former dictator Omar al-Bashir. The country's ruling council and military remain in control, the officials said.

The attempted coup marks another stop on Sudan's bumpy ride to democracy after the popular uprising and subsequent military takeover that ended Bashir's three-decade rule in 2019. Bashir remains in custody in Khartoum and will face trial at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, where he faces charges including genocide and crimes against humanity for his role in the Darfur conflict in the 2000s.

The head of Sudan's transitional government – an 11-member body known as the Sovereignty Council – did not say how the attempt was foiled or if there were any casualties. But the military said it had arrested 21 officers and was

searching for others who were involved.

The coup plotters were said to have tried to take over a number of key institutions in Omdurman, across the Nile from the capital Khartoum, including a state media building where a statement was due to be read. It was not clear what the statement contained.

Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said it was an “orchestrated coup by factions inside and outside the armed forces... This is an extension of the attempts by remnants since the fall of the former regime to abort the civilian democratic transition.”

Another test for Sudan's nascent democracy is to come in November when leadership of the Sovereignty Council is expected to be passed from the military to Hamdok, a civilian.

**Bashir remains in custody in Khartoum and will face trial at the ICC in the Hague, where he faces charges including genocide and crimes against humanity for his role in the Darfur conflict in the 2000s.**

Hamdok survived an assassination attempt last year when gunfire struck his convoy as he traveled to work in Khartoum. ■

# Ethiopia

## Tigrayans are starving to death

**The famine that was feared has come to pass, and aid just isn't getting in**

**T**here are fears of food shortages and hunger in Ethiopia's conflict-hit Tigray region, nearly three months after the United Nations warned that 400,000 people had "crossed the threshold into famine". Conditions in Ethiopia's northernmost region have deteriorated sharply since then, as "a de facto blockade of humanitarian aid" prevents food and medical supplies from reaching the region, according to the UN.

The Ethiopian federal government has denied blocking humanitarian aid.

New reporting from assorted media outlets this week paints a grim picture of civilian life in Tigray, where a 10-month war between the region's army and the national army has displaced nearly two million people and left thousands dead. Children and their parents are said to be going days without food, with mothers feeding leaves to their children just to survive. Others are eating nothing but bread and salt.



**Small mercies: A rare aid convoy arrives in Tigray on September 20. Photo: WFP**

Dr Hayelom Kebede, research director of Ayder Referral Hospital in Tigray's capital Mekele, told AFP that "people are just dying. With starvation, the bad thing is you will see people in the throes of death, but they will not die immediately. It takes time, after their body is weakened and weakened and weakened. It's more horrific than bullet deaths."

Tigrayan forces retook the region in June and the federal government declared a unilateral ceasefire, ostensibly on humanitarian grounds. But the region is now more cut-off than ever. There is no electricity, telecommunication lines or banking services.

The Abiy Ahmed-led government in Ethiopia denies there's hunger in the region and blames the Tigrayan leadership for the insecurity leading to the delayed delivery of aid. ■

# How to game Twitter's algorithm – and hoodwink journalists

**By manipulating Twitter's algorithm, it is possible to convince newsrooms looking for a topical story that something is news when it isn't, to dangerous effect**

**Tessa Knight**

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***Editor's note:** We all know that social media is not the real world. In theory, anyway. But sometimes, in the face of coordinated disinformation campaigns, it can be difficult to understand the difference. This story outlines some of the tactics used by unscrupulous politicians and lobbyists to manipulate the conversation on Twitter. As social media users, we all need to know how this works so that we don't get fooled.*

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**I**n March 2020 Bill Gates trended on Twitter in South Africa, after claims that he wanted to test his vaccine on Africans began circulating. People were outraged, and the claims made their way into conventional media.

A few days later, prominent South African news organisation News24 retracted a story headlined “Bill Gates confident a potential coronavirus vaccine will work in Africa, but Twitter does not think so”, and issued an apology to the Bill

and Melinda Gates Foundation.

This story is a perfect illustration of how social media algorithms can be manipulated to trick users, readers and newsrooms.

The controversy was originally posted on Facebook, not Twitter, in French rather than English, and originated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, not South Africa.

The post started with a group of Facebook pages as part of a co-ordinated attempt to promote a local Congolese politician. They were later removed. The content claimed that controversial French physician Didier Raoult had warned Africans not to accept a vaccine from Bill Gates (Raoult's employer denied he authored the claim, and Facebook later labelled the post as containing false information after AFP debunked it.)

The Congolese Facebook posts were shared tens of thousands of times, and subsequently picked up by clickbait websites and auto-translated into English. A link to the translated version on a clickbait website named *EN24.news*

was shared by US politician Cynthia McKinney on Twitter on March 29. Two days later the anonymous South African Twitter account known as *@LandNoli* retweeted McKinney's link to the auto-translated disinformation piece by *EN24*.

Anti-Gates sentiment quickly started trending on South African Twitter. When President Cyril Ramaphosa posted a link to an interview Gates did with *The Daily Show* host Trevor Noah on April 4, this sentiment flared up even more: Responses to Ramaphosa's tweet were flooded with anti-vaccine and anti-Gates narratives.

Prominent anonymous accounts used the tweet as evidence that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was meddling in South Africa's health system. This tweet and the anti-Gates sentiment that had already been circulating on Twitter were the source of the now-retracted News24 story, according to editor-in-chief Adriaan Basson.

**The Congolese Facebook posts were shared tens of thousands of times, picked up by clickbait websites and auto-translated into English. A link to the translated version was shared by US politician Cynthia McKinney on Twitter on March 29**

Although the story was retracted and the narrative quickly investigated by News24, this case is a prime example of how disinformation can jump from social media platforms to traditional media,

with potentially dangerous side-effects.

A closer look at what happened during the two weeks of Gates-related confusion showed that there were no bots influencing the conversation.

Rather, anonymous influencers with hundreds of thousands of followers spread reactionary disinformation that was picked up by local media on the lookout for trends – and trending hashtags.

But hashtags can be artificially manipulated. Two of the most widespread ways of doing this are early morning hashtagging and click-to-tweet campaigns.

### **Early morning hashtagging**

An easy way to manipulate Twitter's algorithms is to start a hashtag campaign early in the morning. Twitter will list a hashtag as trending if it is tweeted multiple times, particularly if it is tweeted by a significant number of accounts, and if the hashtag makes up a significant proportion or percentage of recent tweets.

Because there is less activity when a country's users are asleep, a hashtag needs a lot less engagement to reach the threshold required for the algorithm to mark it as trending. There are also fewer accounts available to counter the hashtag and the narrative being spread.

Malicious actors can purchase accounts to amplify a hashtag in the early morning. This makes the hashtag's narrative appear to have grassroots support, when in reality bad actors have worked to game Twitter's algorithm to push a specific agenda.

One of the primary issues with early

morning hashtagging is the impact it can have on local media. Journalists may check their phones in the morning and notice that an inflammatory political hashtag is trending at 6am, even though it was only tweeted a few hundred times by a small number of accounts.

As a result, journalists might think the hashtag has more legitimate support than it actually does, and a narrative with very little actual support can subsequently find its way into the news cycle. After being amplified by local media it is likely to be picked up organically by legitimate social media accounts and maintain its trending status.

### Click-to-tweet campaigns

Websites with pre-written tweets that allow social media users to share content with one click are referred to as click-to-tweet campaigns. Pre-written tweets are often utilised by activists and social justice groups to build support around pre-determined hashtags and connect with high profile social media accounts.

Recently, members of the Ethiopian diaspora have utilised click-to-tweet campaigns to raise awareness about the conflict in Tigray.

Multiple websites, both supporting the government and opposing the conflict, were created within weeks after fighting broke out last year.

These websites organise dedicated click-to-tweet campaigns with the goal of getting hashtags to trend.

Trending topics in Ethiopia on February 24, 2021, were all from different click-to-tweet campaigns.

The websites have tutorials in Amharic and Tigrinya explaining how to set up Twitter accounts specifically to share the pre-written hashtags.

As a result, a significant number of accounts promoting the hashtags were created after conflict broke out in November 2020.

**From the outside, many of the accounts appeared fake – they had little to no personal information, were following no other accounts and had no followers, and only posted pre-written hashtags**

From the outside many of the accounts appeared fake – they had little to no personal information, were following no other accounts and had no followers, and only posted pre-written hashtags.

Accounts created to amplify pre-written hashtags from click-to-tweet campaigns also appeared to be fake.

Despite this, the campaigns were often successful – the hashtags frequently trended in Ethiopia and even other parts of the world, and by tagging journalists and news organisations the campaigns were able to reach a wider audience.

Although Twitter is not as popular as Facebook on the continent, these examples show how easily it can be used to manipulate local media. ■



# Africa's big ask at the Glasgow climate change conference

**Africa did not cause global warming. The continent is responsible for just 4% of global emissions. Yet we will pay the price, with estimates suggesting that it will cost developing countries at least \$500-billion every year to cope with climate change. But where is the money coming from?**

**Sophie Mbugua**

**I**n the picturesque Cabo Verde islands, which will be among the hardest hit African countries as global temperatures increase, policymakers and scientists from across Africa gathered this month to hammer out a unified African position on climate change.

This is important because world leaders are gathering in November at COP26 – the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow – to figure out how to respond to this existential threat to life on Earth.

The African Group of Negotiators (AGN) on Climate Change, an alliance of African states, will represent and negotiate the continent's common agenda.

At the very top of this agenda is how to pay for all the changes we will have to make to adapt to a changing climate: from changing rainfall patterns cutting crop yields to the damage done from flood waters rushing through dense settlements,

and myriad other impacts.

Developed countries, whose enormous carbon footprint is why the world is in this crisis to begin with, have repeatedly promised to help out. At COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, they pledged to mobilise \$100-billion a year by 2020 to support vulnerable developing countries in tackling climate change and its impacts. This commitment was reaffirmed at COP21 in Paris in 2015.

But the money never arrived.

**Developed countries, whose enormous carbon footprint is why the world is in this crisis to begin with, have repeatedly promised to help out. But the money never arrived.**

“The promise has not materialised, and even if it were to materialise, the \$100-billion per year would still be grossly



**Talk is cheap: In 2009, wealthy nations pledged billions to help Africa adapt to the climate change they caused. We're still waiting.** Photo: Tolga Akmen / AFP

inadequate,” says a statement adopted by African delegates in Cabo Verde.

That’s why the AGN will be demanding that COP26 delivers on this promise. In fact, the negotiators are going even further, arguing that at least 50% of all available climate funds should go towards climate change adaptation in Africa.

Home to 17% of the global population, Africa contributes less than 4% of global emissions. Already Africa is experiencing warming of 1.8°C, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

This is costing the continent between 3% and 9% of annual GDP as countries are forced to pay for adaptation measures themselves, the AGN’s research has shown.

## The funding gap

There are other barriers that prevent African countries from accessing the funds necessary to finance adaptation measures. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit local economies hard. “Africa is facing

a nearly \$500-billion gap to finance its recovery [from Covid-19],” said Linus Mofor of the Africa Climate Policy Centre. This places a huge additional burden on African treasuries, which are already overstretched.

Meanwhile, most African countries find it difficult if not impossible to access private climate financing (which makes up 56% of all climate financing).

“Private sector funding flows where there is a security of investment, high returns and where the market is structured appropriately to allow them to invest,” explained Jean-Paul Adam, the director for Technology, Climate Change, and Natural Resources at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Other public funds are not necessarily tailored towards the needs of African countries.

The \$8.85-billion Green Climate Fund, for example, has until recently been skewed towards financing climate mitigation efforts – in other words, projects that reduce carbon emissions – rather than climate adaptation measures, which help countries deal with the impact of a changing climate.

Given that Africa’s carbon emissions are already so low, it is in the adaptation category that the continent needs help.

“Africa presents unique challenges, but also unique opportunities for climate resilience,” concluded Adam. “The challenge lies in ensuring that investments needed for growth and development gaps can happen and do so fast enough to leave no one behind. We need the resources upfront.” ■

## Let cooler heads prevail



**Cool storey:** Scientists in Saudi Arabia have demonstrated an inexpensive heat absorption system that could cool buildings without using electricity. Photo: KAUST

**A** 2020 study by Cornell University showed that the perfect indoor temperature for work or classroom productivity is a relatively balmy 25°C. As many on the continent will attest, that's a fair few degrees cooler than citizens of African countries might be used to.

Where air-conditioning is possible, it makes things worse: emissions from air conditioning alone will lead to a 0.5°C rise in global temperatures, according to the World Economic Forum. New cooling technology is needed not just to prevent further warming but to simply survive the heating that has already taken place. It must clean, cheap, and, above all, cool.

Two new prototypes show promise. One is an "ultrawhite" paint developed by researchers at Purdue University that reflects up to 98.1% of sunlight and

infrared heat, which they say could cool a building better than air-conditioning.

Another is a "passive no-electricity and sustainable cooling on-demand system" detailed this week in the journal *Energy & Environmental Science* by researchers in Saudi Arabia. It uses salt as a heat sink to both cool an area and store the energy absorbed for later use. Their lab work shows it can lower temperatures in a space by as much as 10°C.

Neither tech has progressed beyond proof-of-concept. But if world leaders meeting at COP26 in November are serious about mitigating the effects of global heating, they will prioritise not just the development of such low-cost tech, but its speedy incorporation into urban planning, infrastructure roll-out, and the hustle and bustle of everyday life. ■

# Mozambique



Photo: Luis Nhachote

## ‘We just want to go home’

*The violent insurgency in Mozambique’s northern Cabo Delgado province has forced more than 800,000 people to leave their homes. Of these, around 6,000 are now housed in Corrane camp in Nampula province. Despite the trauma caused by the sound of guns, persecution and murder, they are trying to forget the past and rebuild their lives.*

*The Continent visited the camp to hear their stories.*

### Luis Nhachote in Corrane

**O**n May 20, 2020, Awa Bacar awoke with a start in the village of Namoto, north-eastern Cabo Delgado. Insurgents who have been terrorising the province since 2017 had arrived, and she was in the ninth month of her pregnancy.

“The shooting started at dawn,” she says. As she and the community fled,

Bacar’s labour pains started. “I had to stop in the middle of the road – I gave birth right there”.

Her daughter, Acha Ibrahim, turned one in May this year in the Corrane camp for displaced people, in Nampula province, which borders Cabo Delgado to the south. Acha is healthy and doing well – but she has not yet met her father, who is in Mueda, a town in Cabo Delgado that

is also home to many people displaced by the war in the province.

Corrane camp was opened on November 5 2020, 60 kilometres from the city of Nampula, and has grown to house around 6,000 people, spread across 1441 families. New people arrive every day.

They live in tents donated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to Mozambique's National Institute of Disaster Management. The camp is in an isolated and arid area, with only four sources of water for the growing population.

It lies in the middle of three communities. Alberto Alexandre Lauia, administrator of the local area, said locals and the new arrivals live in harmony – “There are no conflicts.”

Twelve hundred displaced school-age children attend local schools; and 56 babies have so far been born in Corrane, since November.

## The nightmares

Ernesto Jacob, 70, and his wife Magreta Vintane, 60, left everything behind in the village of Muengue in the district of Mocímboa da Praia. “The Al-Shabab arrived at night and set fire to our village, we could only escape with the clothes on our back,” they said, using the common local term for the insurgent group. They fled to Corrane. “We aren’t contemplating ever going back, after what we saw.”

Armando Januario Pine, 36 years old and the head of a family of four, does intend to return to his home, in the town of Mocímboa da Praia, when peace is restored. “I hope to return once I know

there is security,” he said.

Mozambican and Rwandan government forces retook the town in August 2021 after a year under insurgent control. But Pine needs more certainty; “We want to know if after the Rwandans leave there will be security.”

**“The Al-Shabab set fire to our village; we could only escape with the clothes on our back. We aren’t contemplating ever going back.”**

Though a long way from the gunfire, life in Corrane comes with its own challenges. In Mocímboa da Praia, Pine was a security guard on a monthly salary of just over six thousand meticaís (almost \$100), as well as practising agriculture.

Life in the camp is very different.

The National Institute of Disaster Management’s representative in Nampula Province, Alberto Jamal, confirmed that the refugees at Corrane receive insufficient food. Just four water fountains is also not enough. The access road for entry is precarious and slippery during the rainy season. Few of the residents have access to electricity. There is no market, although mobile money services do reach the camp. The few products available for sale are sold on makeshift stalls under cashew trees. And in addition to the physical hardships and the lack of employment opportunities, displaced people need psychosocial support.

“I just want to go home,” said Pine. “Life is difficult here.” ■

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Huff and puff pastry

*Last week, a debate played out in the pages of The Continent about the merits – or lack thereof – of the humble pie. Should adult Africans really be eating pies? Do we need to decolonise the pastry? Turns out that our newsroom is not alone in having strong thoughts on this crusty subject. Here's a selection from your MANY responses.*

I really wish you could taste a Surrey Pie from Zimbabwe. The meat will make you want to sacrifice your uterus, the gravy will leave you warm and tingly (the good kind, not the STI kind) and the crust is so flaky, you won't show up for an event you said you'd attend. Who cares if the colonists came with it? They took some of our stuff. The pie stays.  
**Hope Mabasa, Zimbabwe**

The pie must die, no more eating humble pie, we do not need a piece of the pie... I am not talking about the mathematical number. But I guess all my writing is like a pie in the sky but me I no longer want a finger in that pie.  
**Peter Denk, Namibia**

Did Julius Nyerere fight for a pie? Pie eaters should grow up.  
**Shepherd Mazhindu**

As adulthood stares at us, we all learn to let go of some enjoyments to prevent the emergence of diseases which may occur from the consumption of junk... but as for me, still in my growing years, I doubt if there is any homily that can rescind my decision to eat pies.  
**Emmanuel Momoh, Nigeria**

The last time I voraciously ate pies was during my days as an exchange student at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. I did not necessarily eat them because I liked them; I ate them because they were the cheapest meal I could afford. However, considering that I am now struggling with my waistline years after I overindulged on those pies, perhaps they are unsuitable for adult Africans after all.  
**Joshua Kembero Ogega, Hong Kong**



Would you like to respond to a story that appeared in *The Continent*? We welcome all feedback and critique – but please do remember to play nicely. Email us at [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org). All submissions must be under 100 words and will be moderated by the editorial team.

# Make your own World Cup-worthy pie

**I**n 2010, ahead of the FIFA World Cup, beloved South African chef Lesego Semanya created a culinary masterpiece that was named the official tournament pie for visiting British fans. It was based on the flavours of the kota, a classic South African street food: usually a quarter (“kota”) loaf of bread, hollowed out and stuffed with layers of meat, cheese and sauce.

As Semanya explained in an interview at the time: “The pie was an ode to the original township kota I grew up eating. A typical kota has processed cheese, tomato sauce, mango achar, processed meat and chips. I took those elements and twisted them around and made a sun-dried tomato sauce, French-style butter-sautéed potatoes, mature cheddar, cubed sausage and chopped achar. The flavours of a kota were in the pie but it had been turned into a fine dining creation.” Tragically, Semanya passed away earlier this year at the age of 39. His flavours live on. This recipe was originally published in *Taste* magazine. ■

**Potatoes** 500g, cubed  
**Butter** 50g  
**Olive oil** 3,5 tbsp  
**Rosemary** 3 sprigs  
**Mango achar** 100g  
**Sundried tomatoes** 300g, finely chopped  
**Red wine** 1 cup  
**Sugar** 2 tsp  
**Salt and pepper** to taste  
**Russian sausages** 500g  
**Puff pastry** 550g  
**Mature cheddar** 50g, finely grated, plus extra for topping  
**Free-range egg**, 1 beaten

**1.** Cook the potatoes in summering water until tender. Drain and dry. **2.** Melt the butter in a pan. Add 1 tbsp oil and 2 rosemary sprigs. Add the potatoes and increase the heat. Fry the potatoes until golden brown. Drain and set aside to cool. **3.** Drain the achar in a sieve. Finely chop the pieces of mango. Place the sundried tomatoes in a pan with 2 tbsp oil over a medium heat. Cook until it reaches a paste consistency. Add the red wine and remaining rosemary, chopped. Reduce to a chunky sauce. Add the sugar, salt and pepper. Stir and set aside. **4.** Skin and cut the Russian sausages into large cubes. Fry in oil. Roll out the puff pastry. Grease a 25cm loaf tin with cooking spray and line with the puff pastry. **5.** Layer the bottom of the pie with the potatoes. Add the cheddar to the Russian sausages and layer on top of the potatoes. Top with more finely grated cheddar and the chopped mango. **6.** Place the tomato sauce on top and seal the pie with a layer of puff pastry. Brush with the beaten egg. **7.** Bake at 180°C until golden brown. Enjoy.



**KOTA PIE**  
Serves: 5  
Prep: 30 min  
Cooking: 45 min

## China and the US: Either, neither or both?

**A**s China and the United States battle for global influence, what's the score in Africa? Home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, Africa has attracted considerable attention and investment from China. Although the US is Africa's largest aid donor, China is the leading provider of financial support for infrastructure development.

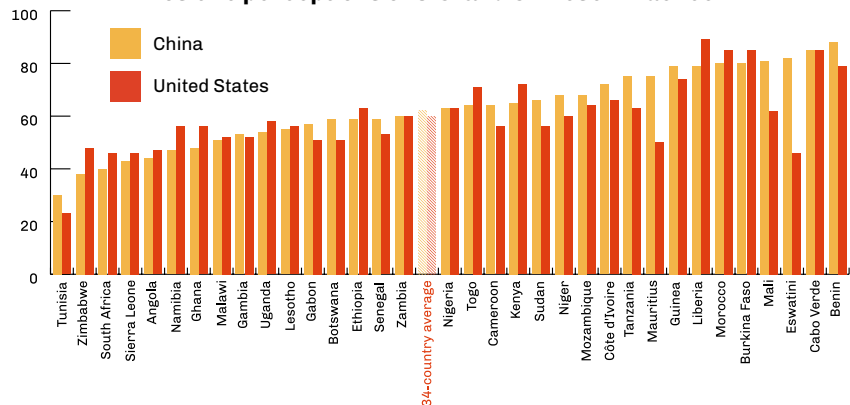
But who's winning the affections of ordinary Africans? On average across 34 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed between late 2019 and mid-2021, the two are neck and neck: 62% see China's influence as "somewhat" or "very" positive, compared to 60% for the US. Only 14% and 13%, respectively, see their influence as negative.

It also depends on whom you ask. The US has a modest edge (six to 10 percentage points) in favourable assessments in Zimbabwe, Liberia, Namibia, Ghana, Togo, South Africa, and Kenya. But EmaSwati are wildly more favourable toward the Chinese (+36 points), as are Mauritians (+25) and Malians (+19). And there is a gap of six to 12 percentage points in favour of China in 11 other countries.

In general, countries that are more positive about China are also more positive about the US. The two views are strongly and positively correlated.

In practice, then, this suggests that for many Africans, US-China "competition" may not be an either-or proposition, but a win-win.

**Positive perceptions of U.S. and Chinese influence**



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- 2 to 3 percentage points.



# THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"If you try to dam the river of truth, you must be in denial"



- 1\_** In which country is the Tekeze Dam?
- 2\_** Who is the Africa Cup of Nations top goalscorer of all time? [Hint: He's Cameroonian.]
- 3\_** What is the name of South Africa's women's national football team?
- 4\_** The team recently won the Aisha Buhari Cup. Who is Aisha Buhari?
- 5\_** Whose life was the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda* based on?
- 6\_** Abdelaziz Bouteflika passed away last week. Which country did he serve as the president of from 1999 to 2019?
- 7\_** What currency is used in Somalia?
- 8\_** True or false: Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangué is the vice president of Equatorial Guinea.
- 9\_** True or false: Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is the president of Equatorial Guinea.
- 10\_** Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the head of which global intergovernmental organisation?

## 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)

# The deliberate militarisation of politics and the rise of the shadow state

Phillan Zamchiya

The “shadow states” that have emerged across sub-Saharan Africa come in all shapes and sizes. What unites them is the presence of a group of unelected individuals capable of using their privileged access to the government to wield greater power than unelected officials – and in many cases to undermine the quality of democracy itself.

But how this is done, the structure that the shadow state takes, its key members and how damaging it is to democracy and development varies considerably. In the case of Zimbabwe, the most important player in the Shadow State is the military – and it is the continual militarisation of politics that represents the biggest barrier to economic and political revival.

Zimbabwe’s military has played an important political role ever since the Liberation War, also known as the Rhodesian Bush War, against the white minority regime of Ian Smith.

But it increased significantly in the 2000s when economic collapse

and growing opposition left president Robert Mugabe and the ruling Zanu-PF increasingly dependent on the use of coercion to retain power.

This process reached its zenith when, after military leaders orchestrated a coup to remove Mugabe and replace him with Emmerson Mnangagwa, they demanded top positions – including the vice presidency – in return.

The consequences of this process have been dramatic. The army has grabbed farmland and diamond fields as it has grabbed power.

Military leaders have also established shell companies through which they have financially benefited from their ability to influence government policy and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. In particular, they have benefited from parallel agricultural schemes and fuel deals that have left ministers unable to account for billions of dollars of state funds.

Worse still, the army has gone beyond controlling the pillars of economic production and now also controls electoral and state power. Neither development nor free and fair elections will be possible until this process is reversed. ■

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# From hero to zero

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## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

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Growing up we all had our heroes, but who was yours, dear reader? Did you plaster your walls with photos of the great Thomas Sankara? Did you read everything ever written about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela? Did you kiss a photo of Thierry Henry every night before you went to sleep? Or maybe you learned the choreography of every Beyoncé song, dreaming of the day you too would take to the stage?

Our leaders must have had their heroes, too. Imagine young Teodoro in Equatorial Guinea hugging his copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, or Lil Yoweri admiring American chemists Ben Corson and Roger Stoughton, who discovered the riot control version of tear gas, and King Mswati III gazing admiringly at an image of Henry VIII.

As for current day role models, Mali and Guinea's coup leaders, Colonel Assimi Goita and Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, certainly appear to be inspiring a fair few people on the continent.

Not least among them admirers of Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan, where this week an attempted coup was reportedly

thwarted. Officials said the bid to overthrow the government was led by military officers and civilians aligned to the deposed dictator. More than 21 soldiers and officers have been arrested in connection with the plot, which Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said was an attempt to "destabilise the country's transition" to democracy.

### From hero to skid row

It's hard to tell if Colonel Doumbouya is looking on with disappointment or pride, considering he's almost always hiding those eyes behind big black sunglasses, suggesting his own heroes are those Hollywood celebrities who try to dodge the tabloid paparazzi by wearing oversized shades. As if their pumpkin spiced lattes and cute boots weren't a dead giveaway.

This week Doumbouya met with both President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana's President Nana-Akufo-Addo – also chairman of Ecowas – for a "frank discussion" about, among other things, what to do with Alpha Condé, who is still in military custody after the colonel's crew deposed him earlier this month.

After the meeting a military spokesperson said that although they acknowledged the Ecowas deadline to hold elections within six months, the people of Guinea would decide their own destiny. In response to Ecowas's decision



**Shady business: Colonel Doumbouya meets President Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire.** Photo: Ivorian Presidency

to impose sanctions on coup leaders – including travel bans and freezing of assets – Doumbouya's people shrugged, saying it didn't matter because they had work to do in Guinea, and anyway there was nothing in their accounts to freeze.

And, as for the man they deposed, the junta simply said he was fine where he is. Poor Alpha, not only is he locked up, but his relegation from the Premier Dictator League has decimated his fan club, and aspiring autocrats everywhere have already ripped his poster from their walls in disappointment.

### From hero to Nero

Some of us dream of meeting our heroes, but it can be awkward. Just imagine Eliud Kipchoge zooming past you as you walk home out of breath after a light jog, or bumping into Nigeria's Chef Fregz as you pick up takeaway for the sixth night in a row.

Many of the world's leaders have been hobnobbing at the United Nations this week, and while we don't know how many could rightly be called heroes (to us or to

each other) it sure got awkward between them quickly. Especially when António Guterres, the secretary general, gave wealthy nations a solid tongue-lashing over their response to the pandemic. "A majority of the wealthier world [is fully] vaccinated," he said. "[But] over 90% of Africans are still waiting for their first dose. This is a moral indictment of the state of our world. It is an obscenity. We passed the science test. But we are getting an F in ethics."

Presidents and prime ministers weren't the only ones to get an earful this week. Amnesty released a new report accusing the pharma-kings AstraZeneca, BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, Novavax and Pfizer of "fuelling an unprecedented human rights crisis through their refusal to waive intellectual property rights and share vaccine technology, with most failing to prioritise vaccine deliveries to poorer countries".

Meanwhile, the UK came in for a drubbing after releasing a list of countries whose citizens wouldn't need to quarantine upon arrival if they were fully vaccinated. Not even one African country was on this list. British diplomats limply suggested the reason for this is because "establishing a system to recognise another country's vaccines takes time".

Selfish governments, big pharma, and leaders overseeing injustice after injustice. If you were looking for heroes on the world stage, then I'm afraid you're fresh out of luck.

It's fine, we don't need to travel anyway. We've got work to do. ■

## THE BIG PICTURE

**Fog of war: Villagers walk in the gloom of Amba Giorgis, a market town in Amhara, Ethiopia. Historical tensions with nearby Tigray have played into the civil war – this month Amharan officials said rebel Tigrayans killed 120 civilians in the region, claims Tigrayan authorities emphatically deny.**

Photo: Amanuel Sileshi/AFP



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