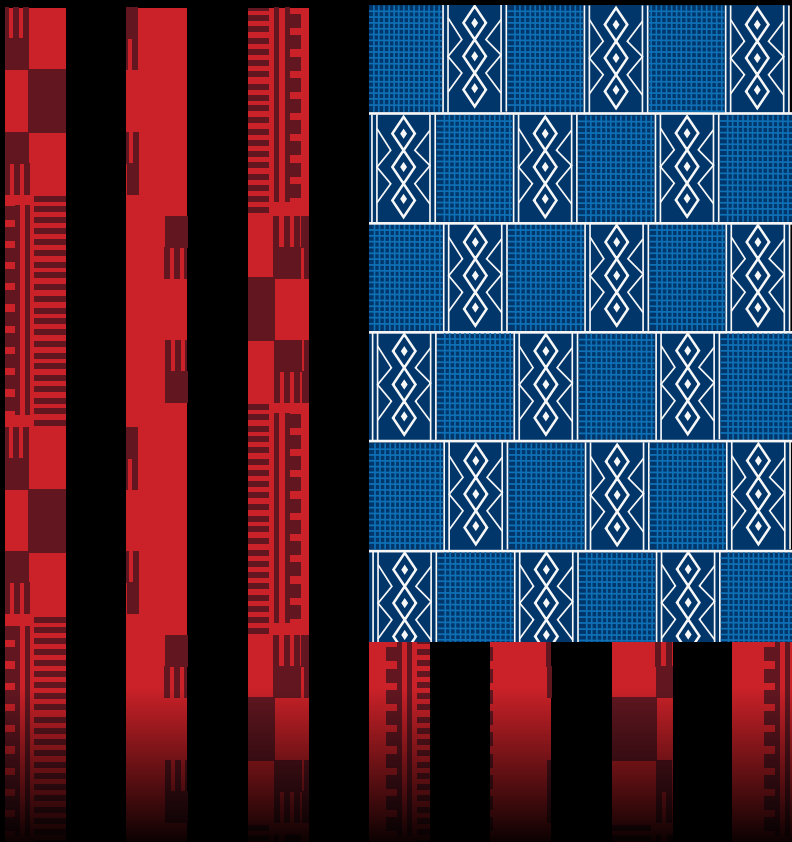


**African journalism. OCTOBER 2 2021 | ISSUE 62**

with Mail & Guardian

# The Continent



**African ... American**  
*And the spaces between*

Graphic: Ashleigh Swaile



**COVER:** When the American preacher and activist **Dexter Strong** travelled to Kenya recently, he was hoping for a “black break”, where he could forget about the racial injustices that are impossible to escape at home. He didn’t get one. No one gets a black break. In a series of letters, Strong and Kenyan journalist **Christine Mungai** look at who exactly qualifies as a *mzungu* and what it means to be an African-American in Africa. (p12)

## Inside:

- **Cop26:** Covid injustice could derail the climate talks (p8)
- **Welcome, Cleopatra:** Meet Uganda’s first official transgender citizen (p9)
- They were meant to tackle Ebola. Instead they **raped and abused** (p11)
- **Review:** Netflix’s Cape Town-set *Blood and Water* is back for

season 2 (p20)

- How well do you know the continent? Take the **quiz** (p25)
- **Twice is nice:** How long should African presidents stay in office? (p24)
- **Burundi:** New president, same old horror story (p26)
- Seize the climate opportunities, writes **Saliem Fakir** (p28)
- **Continental Drift:** “The name’s ~~Bond~~ Biya. Paul Biya.” (p30)



## Write for us

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

# The week in numbers

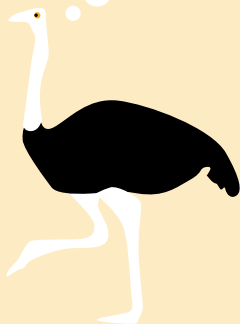
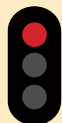
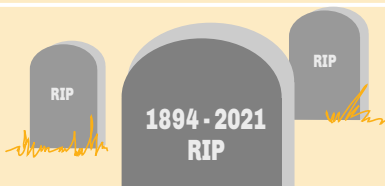
**7** ... UN officials kicked out of Ethiopia for "meddling"



**\$500-million**

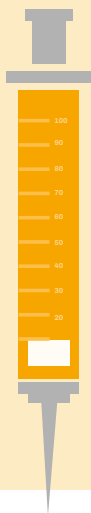
... South Korean credit support for liquid natural gas projects in Mozambique

**127** ... the age of the world's oldest man, who died in Eritrea



**1**

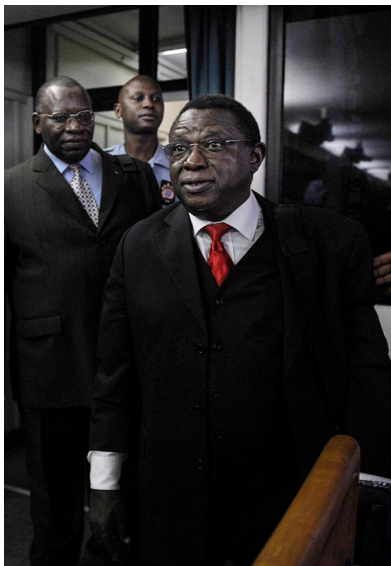
... wandering ostrich causing havoc in Cape Town traffic



**15**

... out of 54 African states have vaccinated at least 10% of population



**GUINEA**

## Military barred from elections

Members of the Guinean military will not be permitted to stand as candidates in the next local or national elections, the leaders of the recent coup said this week. The length of the transition to elections will be determined in conjunction with an 81-member transitional national council. The junta, led by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, deposed president Alpha Condé early last month. Doumbouya will be president during the transition period, with a government composed of a civilian prime minister and cabinet, none of whom may be a candidate in the elections. It is unclear if the electoral ban applies to Doumbouya himself.

**RWANDA**

## Bad man dies

A former Rwandan army colonel, widely regarded as the architect of the 1994 genocide, died in a hospital in Mali last weekend. Theoneste Bagosora was head of military and political affairs and took a leadership role when Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana died in a plane crash. A million people were killed in the genocide. Bagosora was serving a prison sentence after being found guilty of crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Bagosora, 80, had been sentenced to life imprisonment in 2008, but on appeal his sentence was reduced to 35 years in prison.

**RACISM**

## Italy jails astute Good Samaritan

An Italian court has sentenced the former mayor of Riace to 13 years in jail. His crime was aiding “illegal immigration”, by allowing people to move into abandoned homes and ensuring they could remain. In addition to providing refuge to refugees, the move is credited with saving Riace from collapse, after its population had fallen from 2,000 to 400.

## NIGERIA

## Government kills more of its own citizens

In the name of the “war on terror”, Nigeria keeps killing its own people. On Sunday the air force killed at least 20 fishermen in Kwatar Daban Masara in Lake Chad, which straddles Nigeria and neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon. A military spokesman denied they were civilians, insisting those killed were terrorists masquerading as fishermen. The botched strike comes just two weeks after another military strike killed at least 12 people in a community in Yobe. The air force initially denied any involvement before offering a mea culpa just hours later. Not that there is any accountability.

## THE DRC

## ‘Problematic’ Chinese mining deal investigated

The Democratic Republic of Congo is reviewing a \$6.2-billion minerals-for-infrastructure deal with China that has been the subject of growing criticism since president Felix Tshikedi came into office three years ago. The contract, signed in 2008, promised a \$3.2-billion investment by China in a copper-cobalt mine and another \$3-billion worth of infrastructure projects, all paid for by mining revenue. More than a decade later, less than a third of the infrastructure funding has been disbursed, and the mining project has only received about three-quarters of the promised investment, according to the government.

## AVIATION

## Out of the fire, into flying Pan-African

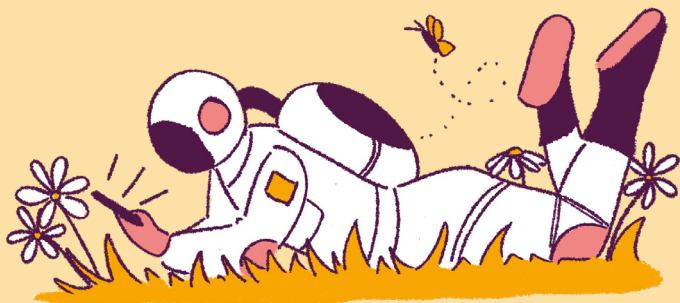
South African Airways and Kenya Airways have signed a memorandum of understanding with the long-term goal of creating a pan-African carrier. Both airlines have been bedevilled by financial and administrative woes in recent years; SAA only took to the skies last week after being grounded for over a year due to bankruptcy proceedings.



**Winging it: Kenya Airways is thinking of teaming up with South African Airways.**

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**Burden of Prof: Tunisia's new prime minister, Najla Bouden Romdhane.**

## TUNISIA

# President names new PM

Tunisian President Kais Saied has chosen Najla Bouden Romdhane, a little-known professor of geophysics with little government experience, to be the country's new prime minister. He has tasked her with forming a new government amid a mounting crisis set off by his seizure of powers deemed a coup by his critics. Bouden is Tunisia's first woman prime minister. President Saied is facing domestic and international pressure following his decision in July to dismiss the former prime minister, suspend parliament and assume executive authority. Last week he suspended most of the constitution and began ruling by decree for an indeterminate period.

## NIGERIA

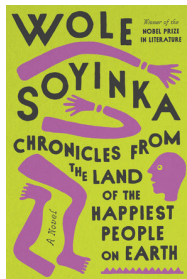
# Twitter ban lifted (except not really)

In a speech marking independence day, President Muhammadu Buhari said the country's ban on Twitter would be lifted. In early June, his government banned Nigerians from using the platform after it censured his account for tweeting hate speech. Buhari said people could use it for "business and positive engagements". Because telling people how to use social media has worked so well in the past. Not that access was actually restored: Buhari said Twitter still has to meet certain conditions.

## BOOKS

# Wole or won't he? Soyinka just did.

Acclaimed Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist Wole Soyinka released his third novel – and his first in nearly 50 years – this week, to glowing reviews from critics. *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth* is a story about corruption in a country that bears an uncanny resemblance to the Nobel laureate's own.



# South Africa

## How Covid-19 could collapse climate talks

**Sipho Kings**

**T**his year's key climate negotiations, COP26, happen at the end of this month in the United Kingdom. Since Brexit, that country is desperate for a showpiece to prove that there is such a thing as "Global Britain".

The stakes are high. Research by the United Nations showed last month that global temperatures are on course to rise to a deadly 2.7°C higher than pre-industrial levels. The talks are key to pushing countries to be more ambitious in the measures they are taking to prevent that from happening. Developing countries are also asking where the \$100-billion a year is that they were promised by rich countries to adapt to this heating.

But success at COP is now up against the reality of how Britain and its peers have treated the rest of the world. The latest chapter is Covid-19. Wealthy countries raced to lock down as many vaccines as possible. Despite having

money on the table, African countries and their peers were locked out and people are dying as a result. Those purposefully excluded countries are angry.

Covid-19 has shown that when a crisis unfolds, selfishness prevails. In a century where global heating has already led to innumerable crises, this has wider ramifications. It is particularly significant because climate negotiations, like COP26, are based on every country in the world working together to tackle the most complicated challenge in human history.

Britain has kept a swathe of African countries on its Covid "red list", forcing expensive and time-consuming quarantines – even if delegates are vaccinated, seeing as the UK does not recognise a vaccination if it was administered in an African country.

This week, South Africa's chief diplomatic spokesperson floated the idea on Twitter of affected countries rejecting this unequal treatment and not going to the negotiations. South Africa is a key bridge in climate negotiations, a driver of the continent's climate diplomacy. In the event of such a boycott, COP26 would likely fail.

Delegates who do have to quarantine will need to start travelling to Britain in the next few weeks. If COP26 fails, the next one will be hosted on African soil. ■



# Uganda

## Meet the first transgender citizen of the republic

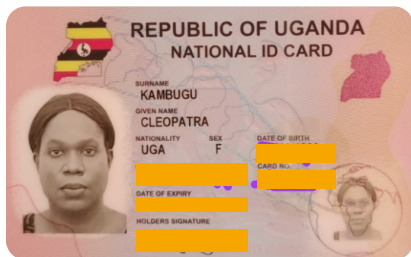
**Cleopatra Kambugu is the first Ugandan whose transition has been recognised by the state**

**W**hen Cleopatra Kambugu received the notification that her new ID card was ready, she wasn't sure exactly what it would say. Then she went to collect it, and there it was: the letter "F".

"It's a huge milestone," she told *The Continent*, speaking from Kampala. "It's not my win, it's the community's win."

Kambugu has been fighting for trans rights for years. Her own transition and the discrimination she faced because of it were the subject of the award-winning documentary *The Pearl of Africa*.

Part of her transition involved getting officialdom to recognise her identity in her official documents, without which it can be difficult for trans people to access public services. Kambugu demanded to speak to the top officials in the citizenship and passport office – and, to her surprise,



she found them more understanding than she had expected. "The government knows about us," she said. "All that hard work of changing people's minds, it feels like people are starting to understand."

Although she is celebrating now, she says there are more battles to be fought. "When you present yourself as a trans person in the public, you get policed – are you women *enough*? It helps that I do pass, and I've had surgery. What if you don't pass?" And, she argues, there are still only two gender categories in Uganda – male and female – which excludes the intersex and non-binary community. ■

# Zambia

## It's a new day, so why are women protesting?

**Zambia has a longstanding reputation for being a safe, peaceful country – except if you're a woman.**

### ANALYSIS

**Samira Sawlani**

**I**n Zambia, after the inauguration of new president Hakainde Hichilema last month, more than a thousand people took to the streets of Lusaka to protest violence against women in Zambia, holding placards that read: “My clothes are not my consent”; “Speak your mind even if your voice shakes”; and “Don’t tell me how to dress, tell them not to rape”.

The march was led by women and was intended to remind the new administration that protecting Zambian women should be at the top of the agenda.

Zambia is not an easy place to be a woman. Seventeen percent of women in Zambia have experienced sexual violence, according to Oxford Policy Management,



Photo:  
Maingaila

and the country faces some of the highest rates of reported gender-based violence in the world.

“In Zambia we report 18,000 cases of sexual gender-based violence every year, meanwhile over 80% of SGBV cases go unreported,” said Ann Holland, the co-founder of Sistah Sistah, an NGO whose work focuses on sexual gender-based violence and reproductive health rights. Sistah Sistah organised the Lusaka protest.

“Our elected officials do nothing. Our systems don’t work, from our police, hospitals and courts. Zambia can boast about how peaceful it is, but it can’t hide the stench of rapists and the fear women live with,” said Holland.

The majority of protesters were from Generation Z (the demographic born between 1997 and 2012). In Zambia, where half the electorate is under the age of 40, this is especially significant. Having played a part in bringing Hichilema to power through the ballot box, this generation now wants to see the change they voted for. Is the new president listening? ■

# DRC

## Dozens sexually abused by aid workers

**Aid workers used the lure of jobs to sexually exploit vulnerable women**

**A**t least 80 aid workers responding to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo were involved in sexual exploitation and abuse. Twenty-one of the 83 worked for the WHO.

This is according to the findings of a commission set up last year after an investigation done by the Thomson Reuters Foundation and the New Humanitarian. In that journalism, some 50 women claimed to have been coerced into sex in return for work.

This was during the 2018 to 2020 Ebola outbreak in the country.

The abuse happened at UN organisations like WHO, UNICEF and the International Organisation for Migration. It also happened at aid organisations like Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, World Vision and ALIMA. The latter groups said they either had investigated, or would

investigate, the claims.

The abused were either promised jobs or promised that they would keep their jobs. In interviews, journalists also spoke to people who had lost their jobs when they refused.

The commission found in a 35 page report that many of the men refused to use condoms and 29 women became pregnant, with some being forced by the men to have abortions.

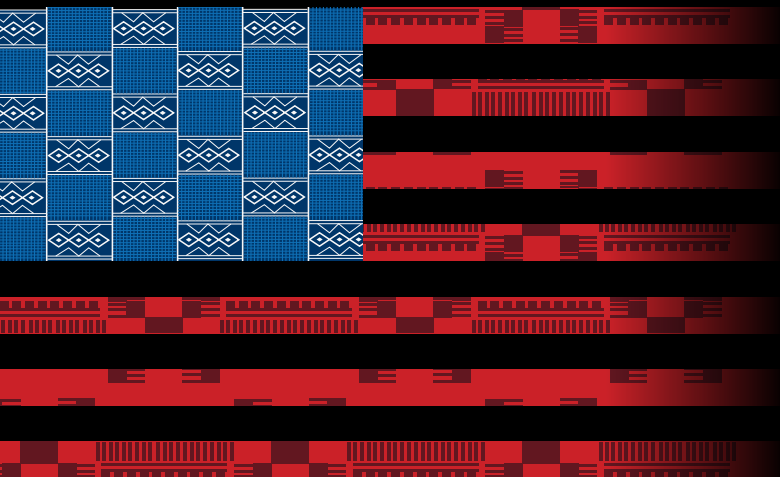
Where the names are known, people have been banned from working from the WHO, while four have had their contracts terminated, according to the health body. It said cases would be referred to the DRC and countries that had sent aid workers so that they could decide what action to take.

**Women became pregnant: some were forced by their abusers to have abortions**

The WHO's director-general, Tedros Ghebreyesus, said at the release of the findings that it made for "harrowing reading".

He added: "I'm sorry for what was done to you by people who are employed by WHO to serve and protect you. It is my top priority that the perpetrators are not excused, but held to account."

The Ebola outbreak, which ended last year, killed 2,200 people and is the second-worst on record. ■



## African ... American

*What lies between the ellipses? In a series of letters, Kenyan journalist and writer **Christine Mungai** talks to American preacher and activist **Dexter Strong** about his visit to her country. They look at the universal difficulty of being black in a world designed to benefit whiteness, the experience of being African-American in Africa, and the Africa that no longer exists (despite tourists perpetually searching for it).*

Dear Christine,

I'm sorry we did not have a chance to catch up when my wife and I were in Kenya. I would like to debrief my experiences with you. Kenya was fantastic and complicated. Although I found my stay rejuvenating, while in Kenya I found myself pushed towards a more nuanced understanding of my own Black identity, especially in the global sense.

For most of my life, I have lived in Alabama, a place marred by its racist history. Here, racial hierarchy is an organizing principle. Black communities and schools are frequently resource-starved. Blackness is criminalized. Our labor and creativity is plundered by ruling classes.

Every day, Black people navigate a political and economic structure consolidated against us, a society threatened by our very existence.

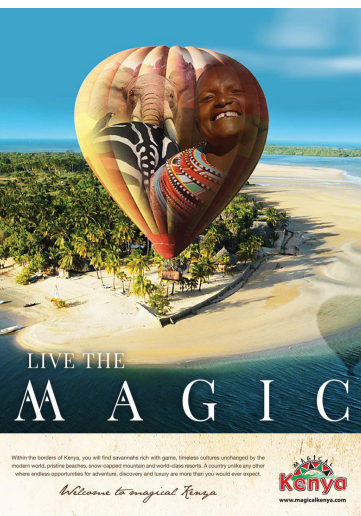
Alabama, like most of America, cannot imagine itself without racial hierarchies shaping the arrangement of power. Despite our professed exceptionality, I am not convinced that America even wants to become a place where justice and equality thrive. Rather than relinquish our sense of innocence, as Dr Eddie Glaude suggests, we attempt to transform our moral failures into “examples of inherent goodness.”

My wife and I, like many Black Americans, long to experience places where just being Black does not get you harrassed or ignored or scapegoated or arrested or killed. That place is not yet America. We needed a “Black Break” and Kenya felt like the perfect place to take one.

When we arrived at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, the first thing I noticed were the “Magical Kenya” posters. There was plenty of magic to be found in the diverse cultural traditions, geography, and people but I also detected some of white supremacy’s cheap tricks, tricks that I know all too well.

When I saw building projects led by multinational construction companies in Kenya, I thought about gentrification and Black displacement back home. We were travelling alongside missionaries headed to church plants in Kenya, which reminded me of how Evangelical Christianity is often a Trojan horse for racism and bigotry in my home state of Alabama. I wondered what the missionaries’ theology had to say about the West’s continued oppression of Africa? I also noticed many nonprofit agencies operating in areas of intense poverty in Kenya. While they were tutoring kids or approving micro-loans, I wondered if they were also lobbying their home countries to end unfair trade practices, currency manipulation, and labor exploitation?

Thinking about this made me consider this, which is why I’m writing to you to help me think through: there is nowhere in the world where one can take a “Black



**Give us a break: Behind friendly marketing lies an all too familiar and insidious apparatus.**

break”, even in Africa. The supposed sovereignty of African nations, like former Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah notes, does not prevent Western nations from attempting to “direct economic systems and thus [Africa’s] political policy ... from the outside.”

I look forward to your reply as I try to make sense of all this.

Your friend,  
Dexter

\*\*\*

Dear Dexter,

**I** received your email just as I was re-reading James Baldwin’s essay, ‘Stranger in the Village’, which he wrote in 1953 as he lived, briefly, in a remote village high up in the Swiss Alps. Baldwin writes of his strangeness to these villagers who had probably never seen a Black man before. He is infinitely more generous to their ignorance than I would be, as they sneak up on him and gingerly put their fingers in his hair as if expecting an electric shock, or put their hand on his, astonished that the colour on his skin doesn’t rub off. Baldwin sees in their uninvited touches “genuine wonder and in which there was certainly no element of intentional unkindness,” but then, “there was yet no suggestion that I was human: I was simply a living wonder”.

A living wonder sounds like a good thing, until you consider what brutal histories that incredulity conceals, what crimes it rationalises, what callousness it abets. Baldwin, in his ever-piercing way, perceives that his strangeness to them can never be replicated if these parochial Swiss folk were to travel themselves, no matter where they go in the world. In other words, and I’m quoting Baldwin – “these people cannot be, from the point of view of power, strangers anywhere in the world; they have made the modern world, in effect, even if they do not know it”.

I’ve been thinking about this essay as I read your letter to me, in which you expressed how this trip to Kenya shaped your perception of your own Blackness, or perhaps offered a different backdrop against which to see your Blackness, and the questions of race and power more broadly. You write



**Another country: American Writer James Baldwin in Paris.** Photo: S Bassouls/Sygma via Getty Images

*of your desire to take a “Black break”, to be in a place where the colour of your skin did not “stamp you from the beginning” – to borrow from Ibram X Kendi. But you found that Kenya, too, is marked in its own way by whiteness, by the living histories and legacies of colonialism.*

*Ultimately, there is nowhere in the world that you can take a “Black break”, and this is what I see Baldwin getting at in his essay. Taking a “Black break” is fundamentally impossible in a world that has been constructed by whiteness. For this reason, white folk are never strangers in the world in the same way that he is a stranger to them. And so traveling for Black people is fraught in a way that can never be fully true for white people.*

*What I’d like to hear more about is the question of your citizenship, your Americanness. The passport that you carry affords you power as you travel in ways that, I expect, are jarring with your own experience as being Black in America, in the South, in Alabama. Would you say this is a fair way of putting the dissonance that I imagine you must feel as you travel outside of the US? I’d love to hear more about this.*

*With love,  
Christine*

\*\*\*

Dear Christine,

**Y**es, being in Kenya forced me to reckon with both the pains and privileges of my Black American identity. I have a literate understanding of neo-colonialism, but being in Africa helped me understand its impact more clearly.

My wife and I were anxious to venture beyond the experiences typically curated for Western travelers. A friend we made in Diani recommended that we take a boat tour of the mouth of the Kongo River.

Our boat guide, David, was great. He was kind and eager to share. As we passed by several luxury homes on the beachfront, he explained how they were nearly all owned by German expatriates, and that Diani became a Western tourist destination only after Germans commercialized the area. We were surprised to learn that another coastal city, Malindi, was so saturated with Italian expatriates that it is known by some as “Little Italy.”

We drifted down the river and took turns sharing our varied but connected experiences. As we chatted, David introduced us to the Swahili term “mzungu”. He defined it as the word used to describe Westerners



**Shoulder to shoulder: Martin Luther King leads a march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama in 1965. Photo: W Lovelace/Getty**

and White people, particularly those who native Kenyans view as invasive and potentially harmful. Then I asked if there was a word Kenyans would use to describe Black Americans like my wife and I. He responded, “mzungu” with an awkward smile. I knew what he meant. Our somewhat middle-class American incomes afforded us opportunities for ease and access far beyond the reach of people like our boat guide. Back home, Black people struggle for a share of America’s prosperity.

Although stark racial inequities persist, hard-won civil rights victories have created entry ways for social and economic inclusion, on some level, for people like me. In many ways, my proximity to America’s power and capital have helped me to secure a comfortable life. I am afflicted by Blackness yet advantaged by Americanness.

Being in a Black country, surrounded by Black people and Black cultural traditions filled my heart. But dissonance is the best way to describe my feelings. I felt more American in Kenya than I am allowed to feel at home.

Best,  
Dexter

\*\*\*

*Dear Dexter,*

**Y**ou’re always finding me in the middle of reading! This time, I was reading my dear friend, Kenyan scholar Keguro Macharia, as I reflected on what you put across in your previous email – that strangeness of being a “mzungu”, and yet at the same time, not.

That duality immediately brings to mind the phenomenon of “double consciousness”, that W.E.B. Du Bois so eloquently described in *The Souls of Black Folk*. There are many ways we can parse that phenomenon here, but I’d like to do it here in a way that is situated in our real lives today; a way



*that sits with, and works through, the brutal histories that we have all lived through as Black people both in Africa and the Afro-diaspora.*

*I'd like to push back somewhat on you being described as a "mzungu", or at least complicate it a little. To put it plainly, Dexter, as much as it hurts to be described as a "mzungu", to me this is only a result of your relative proximity to whiteness and capital, as an American. But in my view there is no inherent or neat distinction between Africans and African-Americans, in terms of some essential identity.*

*To exist as Black in this world today is to grapple with disruption and suture, with the ever-living histories of slavery and colonialism, all the time, and this is as true for you and your wife as it is for David, your tour guide. All three of you have been shaped by the forces of racialisation such that it is impossible, in my mind, to say that this or that one is "African", and another "mzungu". As Macharia writes: "Africa does not – cannot – escape this (new) worlding. Blackness names, in part, the suture between Africa and Afro-diaspora."*

*This is not to say that all Black people are the same, or all Black identities are the same. But I wish those in the African diaspora – and even those on the continent – could realise that the "original" Africa is no longer there, even as you came over, and loved being in this Black country. As Stuart Hall argues, history is irreversible, who we are as Africans today is who we have become through contact with the historical forces that have shown up on our shores, in our lands, and on our screens. What resonates with me more is, how are we working across differences to imagine a better, more just world?*

*I wonder, how does this reframe the "mzungu" comment for you?*

*Yours,  
Christine*

\*\*\*

Dear Christine,

**Y**eah, being called "mzungu" by our boat guide was initially jarring but it also made me reflect on how our identities, and thus our destinies, are sutured together. And this time you caught me in the middle of reading! I have been revisiting Toni Morrison's essay "*Can We Find Paradise on Earth?*".

Morrison describes an interesting aspect of America's post-Civil War

era in her essay. Relatively wealthy Black people ventured to America's western territories to claim land and establish their own towns. Advertisements in "Coloured" newspapers depicted almost utopian, promised lands, communities determined and sustained totally by Black people. However, headlines included a "clear admonition: Come Prepared or Not At All". The formerly enslaved or the impoverished were not welcome to these new Black settlements. Morrison's description of Black boomtowns exemplifies a perennial dilemma facing Black people, especially Black Americans: Do we want to eradicate oppression or do we just want our turn at the top?

Many of the West's moral frameworks proceed from the premise that exploitative relationships are inevitable, maybe even necessary to keep societies functioning and stable. Within these frameworks, it is impossible to imagine how our various legislative bodies, institutions, and cultural traditions might empower widespread compassion and prosperity. When conceptualizing happiness and possibility within this value system, Black people risk, to paraphrase Morrison, replicating the very white racism we abhor.

I think what David really wanted to know was if our vision of happiness necessitated his exclusion. Were we willing to leverage our privilege against people like him, like the white folks who show up as tourists, missionaries, non-profit do-gooders, and investors – folks who casually inflict harm while insisting they mean none? His patience and candidness about our differences made it possible for us to see each other more clearly and find authentic solidarity.

Back home, many Americans are united by shared myths oriented around racial worth, and America's exceptionality and innocence. I think for David, "mzungu" is a category that can include Black people who are conduits for oppressive white rulership. Had our proximity to Whiteness and capital caused us to buy into its myths? Whose story did I believe? Whose historical project was I obliged to?

How we relate ourselves to the historical forces that invade our space and psyche will determine how we make sense of our social present. By "suturing" together our histories as racialized people, not only can we cultivate shared identity but also a shared vision for the future. By discarding moral frameworks imposed on us by white supremacy, we can reimagine what is morally possible and create societies that do not tolerate poverty or exploitation. Maybe this is how we prevent, to borrow words from the late Binyavanga Wainaina, the powerful from manipulating identity for political or economic gain.

Black Americans anxious for respite sometimes imagine places like Kenya in the same ways that Black newspapers advertised post-Civil War Black boomtowns: Black utopias unencumbered by White supremacy. The truth is always more complicated.

This is the first time I have authentically felt African... American!

Yours,  
Dexter

\*\*\*

Dear Dexter,

*I think we have so much more to say, but I want to end where you end, with those ellipses between “African... American”. Those three dots for me are both a break and a seam, a fracture and a suture. Two years ago when we first met in your hometown of Huntsville, Alabama – I don’t know if you remember – I was on my version of a Black trip, to the American South. I wasn’t looking for a “Black experience” as such; I had come to simply exist in that fracture and seam between Africa and America.*

*In those ellipses I found, in the words of Stuart Hall, that the past continues to speak to us. But the past never addresses us as a true, fixed “past”, it is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth,” says Hall, and that to find ourselves in that inherent instability requires us to position ourselves in the story of history, rather than to find ourselves in some fixed identity. I want to position myself on the side of justice and truth-telling – and I know you will do the same.*

*Please let me know the next time you are “these sides”!*

Your friend,  
Christine ■

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Christine Mungai is a writer and journalist in Nairobi, Kenya. She was a 2018 Nieman Fellow at Harvard. Dexter Strong is a preacher and activist living in the US. His interests include politics, religion, and becoming an outdoor grill master.

Let us know what you think about the complicated, sensitive issues raised in this story by sending a letter to the editor at [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org) (or by writing directly to our WhatsApp line). All submissions must be under 100 words and will be moderated by the editorial team. Remember to play nicely!



# 'Blood and Water' stirs the pot to thicken the plot

The first season – only the second Netflix original series to be produced in Africa – was a smash hit. Does season two live up to the hype?

**Dika Ofoma**

**T**he summer holiday is over and we are back at Parkhurst, the prestigious South African college in Cape Town, and to the mystery surrounding the long-lost sister of our protagonist Puleng (Ama Qamata). Last season ended with a cliffhanger: Puleng revealed to her schoolmate Fikile (Khosi Ngema) that she suspects that Fikile is actually her older sister Phumele, who was abducted at birth 17 years ago. In season two, we finally see how Fikile takes this momentous news – and it's not what we expected.

And so Puleng's investigation continues. She must substantiate her conjectures. Her search for answers pits her against dangerous human traffickers and puts her at odds with family and friends. She retreats even more from her family and her budding relationship with KB (Thabang Molaba) suffers.

Fikile, too, starts asking questions about her own past – along the way uncovering more secrets, more twists, and even more unanswered questions.

The acting in this season has improved and characters are more fleshed out. The conceited kids of Parkhurst have more about them. Chris (Arno Greef), especially, gets to shine in this: Time and again we see him empathising with his friends – and being protective of them.

Despite its many plot complications, *Blood and Water* remains a satisfying watch, along the lines of other Netflix teen series like *Elite*. But this season is not quite as thrilling as its predecessor, and its focus on the glitz and glamour of the characters' lives can be hard to relate to, unlike MTV's *Shuga: Down South*, the sexual health advocacy series, which is more representative and more reflective about issues facing Africa's young demographic. ■

# A forbidden romance in 1950s Zanzibar

Seth Onyango

Last week, *Vuta N'kuvute* made history as the first Tanzanian feature film ever to screen at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

Released in KiSwahili, *Vuta N'kuvute* (loosely translated as “Tug of War”) tells the story of a young couple in Zanzibar whose romance blossoms amid a political revolt in the dying days of British imperial rule. The script is an adaptation of the Shafi Adam Shafi novel of the same name, written in KiSwahili and, to date, never translated.

Denge (Gudrun Mwanyika) is a young freedom fighter agitating for Zanzibari independence, who falls for Yasmin (Ikhla Vora), an Indian-Zanzibari who is fleeing an arranged marriage in search of her freedom. Theirs is a forbidden love. Coupled with Denge's resistance struggles, the complications emerging from their relationship put their very survival in peril.

*Vuta N'kuvute* has secured a distribution deal with Africa's entertainment behemoth, MultiChoice, which owns DStv, meaning it will be seen



on televisions across the continent in the coming months. It is also expected to debut on the company's streaming service, Showmax.

For director Amil Shivji, the film is a chance to put African filmmaking on the international stage. That it has been shown in Toronto, where he studied filmmaking, is especially apt.

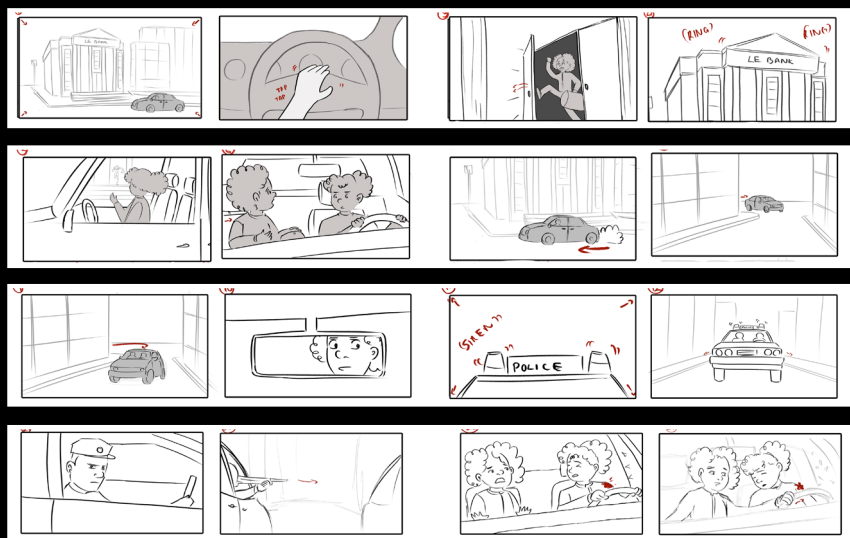
“I remember there were certain instances where we would study, week by week, different movements of cinema across the world – from Italian neorealism to Soviet montage and classical Hollywood ... and we would spend two to three weeks on each module. But cinema in Africa – as a continent – was given one class. A textbook that had 1,500 pages had one page on African cinema,” he said. ■

*Via bird, the African Stories Agency.*

## VISUAL ART

## How to tell an animated African story – according to Netflix

**In its quest for eyeballs, the streaming giant is investing in a new generation of African storytellers.**



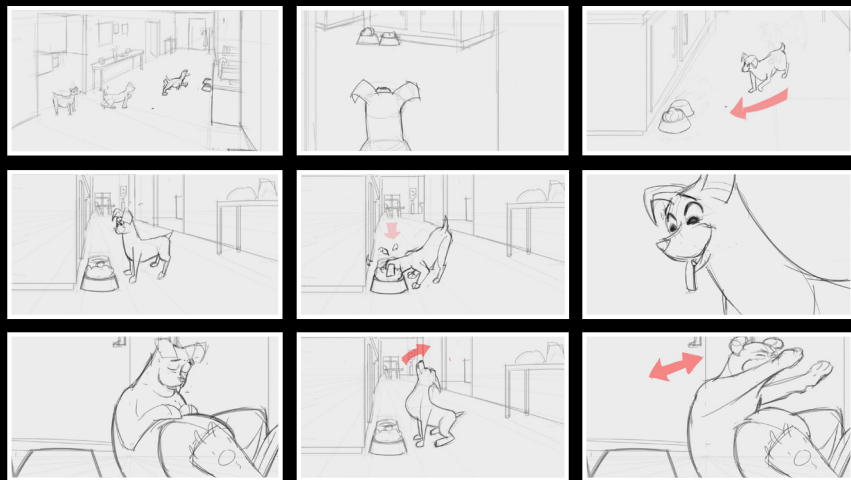
Bank Robbery: Storyboards by Folashade Adeshida from Lagos, for the Netflix Story Artists Lab.

## Wynona Mutisi

**W**ith the exponential growth of the animation industry on the continent, opportunities are springing up for African storytellers to reach an audience larger than they could ever have imagined. Not only are they finding new global platforms to tell stories that are uniquely African, but they are able to

control how their stories are told.

This is something that hasn't always been possible, mostly thanks to a lack of formal training in animation. Those of our artists who have succeeded in the industry are primarily self-taught, and while there is a growing number of institutions across the continent offering animation as a subject, Africa has had to play catch-up with the West and Asia,



Bowled over: Storyboards by Shasa Nyatanga, one of 23 shortlisted candidates.

whose own storytellers have effectively set the global standard.

Enter Netflix. Along with the Cape Town-based animation studio Triggerfish, it staged the African Story Artists Lab earlier this year. It gave 23 story artists from around the continent a deep dive into the fundamentals of storyboarding – from writing and composition to staging, acting and editing.

Storyboarding is the foundation of modern animation (and television and film-making, generally). It is essentially a sequence of drawings that break a story into key images. If you know how to work the storyboard, then you control how the story will ultimately look and feel.

To stand out globally, African storytellers are challenged with presenting the essence of what sets their view of the world apart. But what does an “African” story look like? Especially to creators (and audiences) wary of a catch-

all framing that lumps the many diverse cultural threads of a vast continent into one homogenous stereotype.

For Shasa Nyatanga, a Zimbabwean artist who completed the six-week programme, an African story “is a true reflection of its inspiration. It respects and approximates, as much as possible, the experiences, beliefs and culture of the members of an African society.”

The audience is there for it. Just look at the success of *Mama K’s Team 4*, about the adventures of four teenage spies, set in a futuristic Lusaka. It was the first African Netflix original animated series, and was produced through Triggerfish by an all-female team of writers.

No doubt Netflix will be hoping Nyatanga and his fellow story-lab participants are already drawing up a new smash hit for them – and that they won’t take their newfound skills to local competitor Showmax instead. ■

## The third time (and fourth, and fifth) is the charm

**T**eodoro Obiang has ruled Equatorial Guinea for 42 years. Paul Biya, Denis Sassou Nguesso, and Yoweri Museveni have occupied the presidencies of Cameroon, Republic of Congo, and Uganda for 39, 37, and 35 years respectively. Maybe Africans do want their presidents to stay on forever.

Actually, they don't. It's not even close.

In every one of the 34 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed between late 2019 and mid-2021, a large majority of citizens – 76% on average – said their presidents should be limited to a maximum of two terms in office. That includes 92% in Gabon (where only death ended the 41-year rule of Omar Bongo Ondimba, soon continued by his son) and 87% in Togo (where Faure Gnassingbé has held power since 2005, following his father's 37-year rule).

No matter citizens' age, education level, or economic status, they overwhelmingly favour term limits. Even among those who approve of their current president's job performance, 74% want a two-term limit.

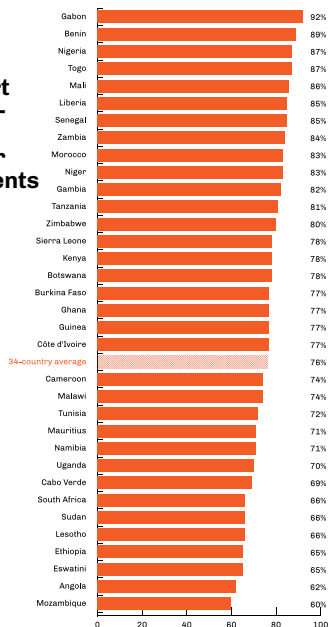
Most African countries with presidential systems do have term limits in their constitutions. But incumbents like to

fiddle with them. Since 2015, leaders of 13 African countries have managed to revise term-limit provisions in their favour. (It's not just an African predilection: Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping are good at it, too.)

It doesn't always work out as planned. Burkina Faso and Nigeria resisted leaders who wanted to change the rules. And in Guinea, Alpha Condé pushed his way to a third term (despite bloody protests and 77% support for a two-term limit), only to be ousted in a military coup.

But those are exceptions to the rule of not playing by the rules.

### Support for two-term limit for presidents



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 +/- 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

"I am the man of this quiz."



- 1\_ Who is Cameroon's president?
- 2\_ Which country uses rands as currency?
- 3\_ The Super Eagles and Super Falcons represent which country?
- 4\_ Congo Republic's flag features a gold star in the top left corner. True or false?
- 5\_ What is the capital of Benin?
- 6\_ Najla Bouden Romdhane became the prime minister of which country this week?
- 7\_ In which country can you visit the Arch of Philaeni?
- 8\_ Mansa Musa was a man of which empire?
- 9\_ What were monarchs of ancient Egypt called?
- 10\_ Where are Burkina Faso from?

## 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 [letters@thecontinent.org](mailto:letters@thecontinent.org)

# Burundi: Between grenades and a hard place

Thierry Uwamahoro

**T**here is no witty turn of phrase to introduce this. It's all-around sad. Depressing.

On the eve of President Évariste Ndayishimiye's trip to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, an unexploded bomb landed in the VIP section of the Melchior Ndadaye International Airport in Bujumbura, Burundi. Two other bombs are said to have detonated in the airport's vicinity with minimal damage.

RED-Tabara, a rebel group, claimed responsibility. A high-level army official dismissed the whole episode as "a publicity stunt by RED-Tabara".

What happened the day after President Ndayishimiye flew to New York, however, was anything but a stunt. Two grenades, launched at a bus station at peak traffic hours, killed two innocent people and left at least 104 wounded. Downtown Bujumbura, Burundi's economic capital, was sent scrambling. Burundi's social media fumed with anger. Two days earlier, grenade explosions in Gitega, the country's political capital, had killed three and wounded more than 30.

Unlike the attack at the airport, no group has claimed responsibility for the grenade attacks. From the government

to RED-Tabara and every political or civic entity in between, everyone has condemned the grenade attacks – the state and rebels have accused each other of committing these "terrorist" attacks.

Just four months ago, four grenade explosions had similarly killed two people and wounded many more, without any group claiming responsibility.

**No group has claimed responsibility for the grenade attacks in Gitega. The government and rebels have accused each other of terrorism.**

The airport shelling capped a week that was otherwise dominated by headlines that described the abhorrent human rights record of the Ndayishimiye regime.

These headlines quoted the United Nations' Commission of Inquiry on Burundi's September 2021 report.

This states: "Agents of the National Intelligence Service, placed under the direct responsibility of President Ndayishimiye, were the main perpetrators of executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture in connection with armed attacks and have continued to operate with



**Just (be)cause:  
President Évariste  
Ndayishimiye has  
laid the blame for  
the violence at the  
feet of the judiciary.**

absolute impunity.”

The report adds that “Police officers of the Rapid Mobile Intervention Group and members of the Imbonerakure [ruling party youth] were also involved in some of the cases of execution, arrest and torture.”

Paragraph 51 of the report is the grimest: “Corpses have regularly been found in public areas, including near roads and waterways. The local authorities have continued to bury them without seeking to identify the deceased or to investigate the cause of death and possible perpetrators even though most of the bodies present signs of violent death.”

Where will salvation come from? In a recent angry tirade, President Ndayishimiye told Burundi’s judges he has heard they are the ones “behind the killings in the country ... because people

are taking justice into their own hands ... People are desperate.” A judge at the meeting mustered enough courage to tell Ndayishimiye that judges weren’t blameless, but that, in their defence, they were under the influence of ruling party officials and army and police generals.

There is so much blame game, you wonder if anyone is in charge.

Whatever is happening, Burundi is losing dearly. ■

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

# As calamity approaches, opportunity beckons

**Desperate times call for desperate measures, like creating just, sustainable economic models in Africa**

**COMMENT**  
**Saliem Fakir**

**C**limate change is not just an environmental matter – it's an issue that poses a particular risk to African economies. This debate is more pertinent given the upcoming climate negotiations in Glasgow, and Africa's hosting of the next Conference of Parties.

This provides the continent with a unique opportunity to reconfigure climate diplomacy and climate debates.

In Africa, many communities continue to depend on exporting commodities, creating exclusionary and unequal economies. They also attract a certain type of political economy, which creates a self-perpetuating dynamic that does not allow true economic transformation and diversification.

For that to happen, a paradigm shift in the political landscape is required. If

not, we will witness a future crisis where the stranglehold on economic prospects continues to create a dependence on selling commodities. It will also mean that, in the long run, this does not allow for more sustainable economic models to emerge.

We should use the wealth that is generated from such commodities to support a broader balance in the economy, focusing on growing human capital and ingenuity.

Africa has the opportunity for new types of investments in energy, mobility, information highways and urban transitions. These investments are critical to ensuring Africa's labour force is better integrated within the region to foster regional economic integration, and globally to advance growth and prosperity on the African continent.

The climate debate is not simply seen as a narrow environmental issue. Including the climate agenda in economic planning could be an opportunity that encourages a new wave of technology investments and entrepreneurial activity in Africa.

Our view is that this will begin to address the historical economic imbalance and prevalent inequality, while reducing the high levels of youth unemployment, which is a major characteristic of African economies. ■

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*Saliem Fakir is the executive director of the African Climate Foundation*

# Are China and Russia damaging African democracy?

Paul Otieno Onyalo

**T**he role in Africa of authoritarian regimes such as China and Russia is both controversial and poorly understood. While simplistic takes argue that foreign powers are seeking to extend authoritarian government across the continent, the reality is that they have yet to do anything on African soil that would compare to the worst behaviour of democracies such as France, given its complicity in the Rwandan genocide.

Indeed, countries such as China and Russia are motivated by a variety of different considerations, and while most of these may be self-centred, that does not mean that they have a concerted plan to promote a specific form of authoritarianism.

It may just be that they crave stability, and are willing to work with whatever government is in power, democratic or otherwise.

To encourage fresh research to illuminate this important topic, Democracy in Africa launched a new

series this week called “Authoritarian Regimes and Africa”.

My contribution compares the impacts of China and Russia upon the process of democratisation. This approach is particularly useful because it reveals that these influential states engage in the continent in very different ways, adding nuance to our understanding.

More specifically, I argue that China tends to co-operate with the governments that it finds in place, and accommodates the status quo – as long as the status quo supports its position on the issue of Taiwan. This co-operation might extend to helping the government to do things that are bad for democracy, like censoring the media, but it rarely involves overt attempts to replace democratic governments with autocratic ones. Russia is a different story, and is more likely to encourage countries to move away from democracy, co-opting elites through a strategy that often begins with military co-operation rather than development projects.

These differences are important, because while both China and Russia pose challenges for democracy in Africa, how this happens – and therefore how it can be resisted – will vary depending on which country, and hence which model of engagement, is dominant. ■



*Paul Otieno Onyalo is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Governance Humanities and Social Science at the Pan African University.*

# The spy who vexed me



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

The new James Bond film *No Time To Die* premiered in London this week and while fans engaged in great debate over Daniel Craig's outfit (a cerise blazer? It's a YES from us!) our minds wandered a little on which of our leaders would make a good Bond. Preferably without a licence to kill.

Paul Biya would have been a shoo-in for *For Your Eyes Only*, as the only people who ever get to see the Cameroonian president are hotel staff in Switzerland.

We can certainly see Uhuru Kenyatta in *Live and Let Die*, considering his loud silences over extra-judicial killings in Kenya? Maybe Cyril Ramaphosa in *Diamonds are Forever* – or should we say platinum?

As for *Never Say Never Again*, we're blessed with more than a few candidates who would fit the bill, considering the way they treat their opposition every time an election rolls around.

We don't know if we'll ever see a woman play James Bond (Let's just create a better, badder, hotter character for a woman instead?), but this week saw Tunisia get its first woman prime minister. Her name's Bouden, Najla Bouden.

But if we're stuck with men in suits, one leader who perhaps is unlikely to be available to take over is Guinean coup leader Colonel Mamady Doumbouya.

Yes, he's shown he already knows how to take over, but he'll be much too busy with his new job as Guinea's transitional president. Also we're not sure he owns a tux, or any clothes that aren't military uniforms.

This week his ruling junta released its transition charter, which paves the way forward for Guinea to return to civilian rule. This includes organising free and fair elections and doing a little work on the constitution.

The transition process is set to include figures from political parties, trade unions and youth leaders – and 30% must be women. Interestingly, no member of the junta will be allowed to stand in the elections. However, the plan makes no mention of a timeline by which the process is to be completed and no mention of when elections are likely to be held. Quite possibly leaving some Ecowas Heads of State shaken, if not stirred.

## Ride of the Paramilitaries

Meanwhile experiencing a little *From Russia with Love* are the government in Mali, much to the chagrin of various European countries.

For weeks reports have been circulating that Bamako was set to sign a deal with

Russian private security firm Wagner in order to hire close to 1,000 paramilitaries to aid the country's battle with armed groups. The European Union have warned against the move while the United Kingdom says it is "deeply concerned" and that "Wagner does not offer long-term security answers in Africa."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denied Moscow was involved in the deal, while Mali's PM Choguel Kokalla Maiga told the UN that by reducing its number of troops in the Sahel, France was effectively abandoning the country.

Being chased, warned and pursued? We think perhaps Mali is currently the James Bond of the continent – and that's not necessarily a good thing.

For the French, the world is not enough, it seems: not only are they upsetting the Malians, but the Algerians and Moroccans too. Paris has announced it is reducing the number of visas granted to Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan nationals, claiming these countries were less than co-operative when it came to "taking back their own nationals who we cannot or do not want to keep in France", a government spokesperson was quoted as saying.

Algeria responding by summoning the French ambassador to hear its formal protest against the move, while Morocco simply denounced the decision as "unjustified".

### It's not me, it's WHO

This week a group of independent investigators commissioned by the World Health Organisation released its report on sexual abuse and exploitation allegations



**Have you seen this man? President Paul Biya is a regular sight at Swiss hotels. Not so much in Cameroon though.**

against WHO staff members working for the organisation in the DRC during the 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak.

The commission reported 83 cases of alleged sexual abuse, nine of which were rape, while others involved women being told they could only get or keep their jobs in exchange for sex. In one case mentioned in the report, a 13-year-old girl said a World Health Organisation driver offered to drop her home, instead taking her to a hotel where she was raped. It found that at least 21 of the alleged perpetrators were WHO employees.

Allegations of sexual abuse against UN agency staff and international NGOs are not new – we've seen this for years, yet here we are again. Once again organisations created and mandated to protect the most vulnerable end up being the villains themselves.

Remember *Goldfinger*? Gold or not, sometimes it feels like that's what the wider world is showing us.

So on second thought, maybe that's enough Bond for now. ■



## THE BIG PICTURE

**Pole Position:** Exiled Guinean activists return to Conakry, greeted by cheering supporters who lined the streets of the capital to welcome them home. These are strange, confusing times in the West African nation, following the military coup last month. The coup has proved popular in Conakry, even as its leader, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, defies international calls to release deposed president Alpha Condé from detention. So unloved was Condé by the end of his 11 years in power that even the inherent uncertainty of a military-led transition is seen by many as a better option. Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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