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with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



**Türkiye's
great power
pretensions**

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COVER: It's not just the superpowers that are scrambling for Africa. Middle powers too have identified its vast, untapped potential – and are making their play for its future. Leading the pack is the country formerly known as Turkey (now Türkiye). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – full-time president and part-time drone salesman – is criss-crossing the continent in search of new friends and opportunities (p22). To better understand what we are dealing with, *The Continent* travelled to Syria to see how Türkiye treats its neighbours – and found some major red flags (p25).

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SOMALIA

Rising star MP killed in suicide blast

Amina Mohamed Abdi, a Somali parliamentarian and outspoken critic of the government, was on Wednesday killed by a suicide bomber in the city of Beledweyne. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack. On Twitter, Somalia's President Mohamed Farmaajo offered condolences to Abdi's family and described her as an exemplary politician. She first stood for Parliament in 2012, over objections from clan elders who found her ambition unbecoming of a woman.



Photo: Twitter/HonAminaMohamed

NIGERIA

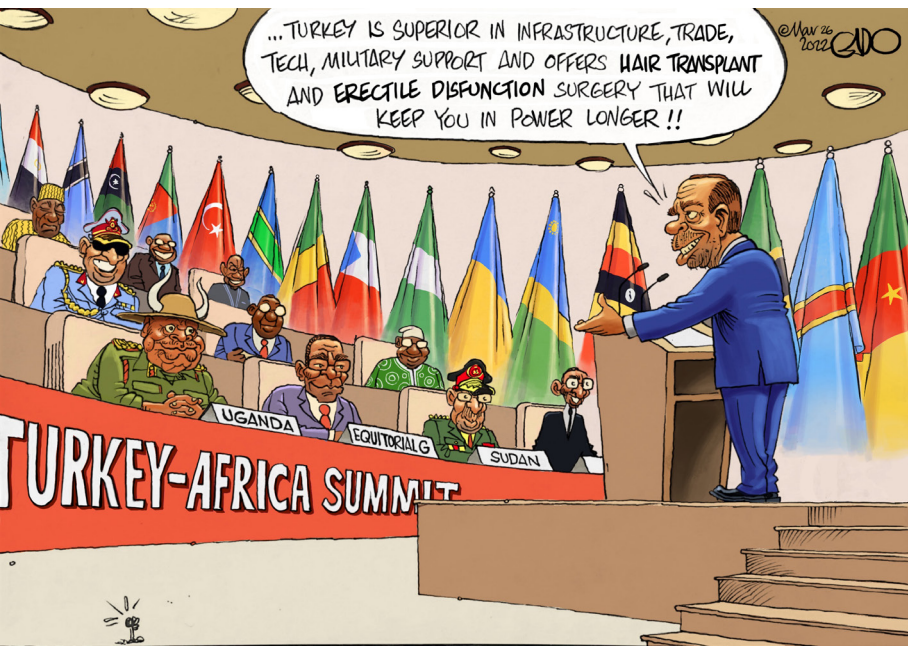
Draining the pipeline – and the economy

The Trans-Niger oil pipeline is being illegally tapped in about 150 locations. As a result, legitimate producers received as little as 5% of the oil pumped through it between October 2021 and February 2022, Bloomberg reported. Nigeria is now struggling to take advantage of the rising global oil prices because it is failing to meet its crude export quotas, even as motorists pay high prices at the pumps. Nigeria exports about 85% of its crude oil, earning about \$38-billion a year, but also spends nearly \$8-billion on importing refined petroleum.

LESOTHO

Richest Mosotho steps into politics

Ahead of the country's general elections in September, Sam Matekane, the millionaire said to be the richest businessman in Lesotho, has launched a political party: Revolution for Prosperity. His businesses include interests in real estate, farming, aviation and mining, with a stake in the lucrative Letseng diamond mine. He says that, given the politics of Lesotho, doing business in the country is akin to "a sailor cleaning the inside of a sinking boat". "If we don't take action now, our country will become a failed state," said Matekane.



SUDAN

Generals, bankers and blood money

French prosecutors are investigating BNP Paribas, a banking giant in the country, over alleged complicity in war crimes that happened in Sudan between 2002 and 2008. This follows a legal complaint filed in 2020 by nine Sudanese people who say they suffered abuses under Omar al-Bashir's rule, when BNP "was considered to be Sudan's de facto central bank," said International Federation for Human Rights, one of the organisations backing the victims.

INTERNATIONAL

'Brits better have my money'

Jamaica's government is going to remove the British queen as its head of state. The development comes as a future king of Britain (unless it becomes a proper democracy) ends his travels to Jamaica amid protests by locals who called out his family's colonial history, demanding reparations for slavery. In Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, enslaved Africans were used to grow the sugar that powered European growth in the 1600s. Jamaica is also gearing up to demand reparations.

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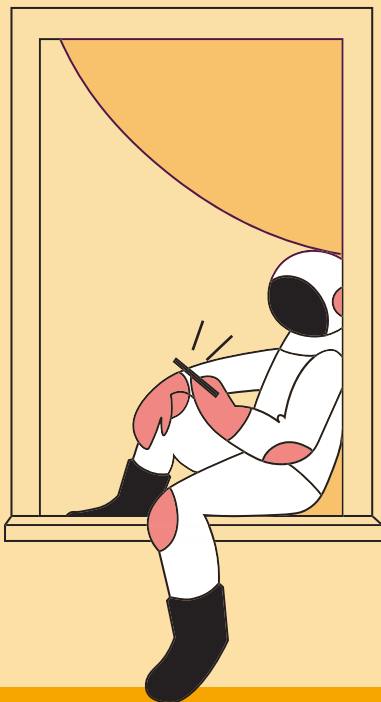
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DRC**EAC brings DRC's economy into the fold**

The Democratic Republic of Congo will on Tuesday join the East African Community. The country first applied to

join the bloc in June 2019. EAC currently includes six nations: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, with a combined gross domestic product of \$194-billion. With a GDP of about \$50-billion, the DRC will be the third largest economy in the bloc, after Kenya and Tanzania.

**EGYPT****The price of war is bread, and the price of bread just went up**

Egypt has officially capped the price of commercially marketed bread at 11.5 Egyptian pounds (\$0.62) a kilogram, as Russia's war in Ukraine blocks its wheat imports. Egypt imports about 60% of the wheat it needs, and 80% of that comes from Russia and Ukraine. Many African countries are facing surges in the price of wheat. In Cameroon, it went from about \$35 for a 50kg bag of wheat flour to as much as \$60.

AIRPORTS**Top 10 airports in Africa ranked – by a bunch of Brits**

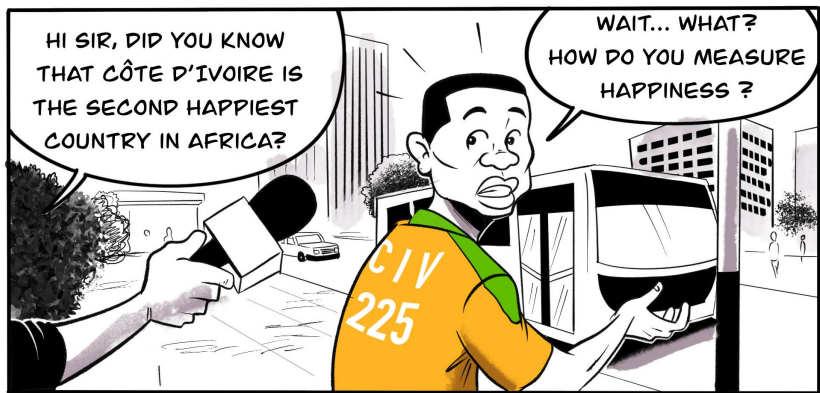
UK-based consultancy Skytrax has released a list of the world's best airports. In Africa, five of the top 10 are in South Africa: Cape Town (1), King Shaka (2), OR Tambo (3), Dawid Stuurman (9) and Bram Fischer (10). Morocco has two: Mohammed V (6) and Marrakech Menara (5). Rwanda's Kigali is ranked eighth, Ethiopia's Bole seventh and Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam in Mauritius came fourth.

Happiness is... what?

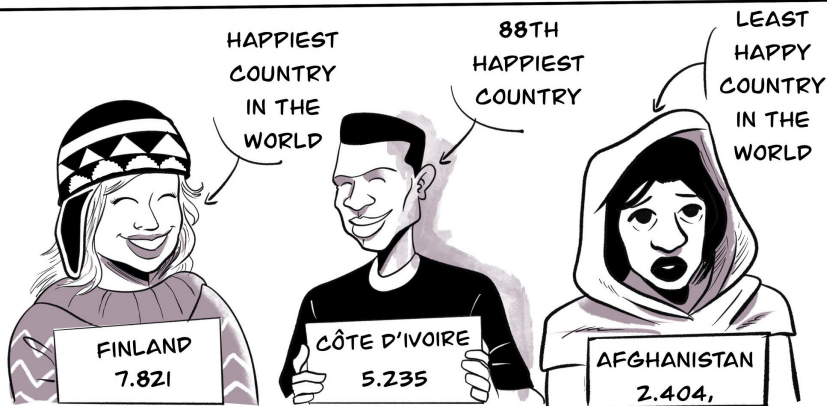
According to the World Happiness Report, released by the United Nations, Côte d'Ivoire is the second-happiest country in Africa (behind Mauritius). Reading between the lines of the report, you're most at risk of being

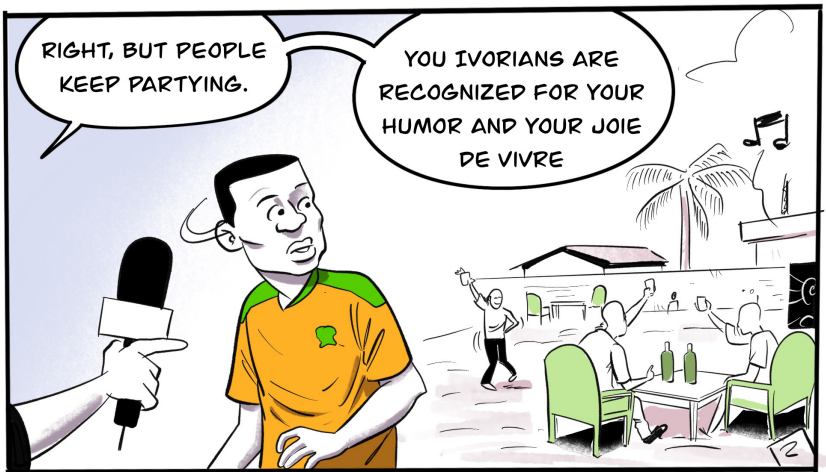
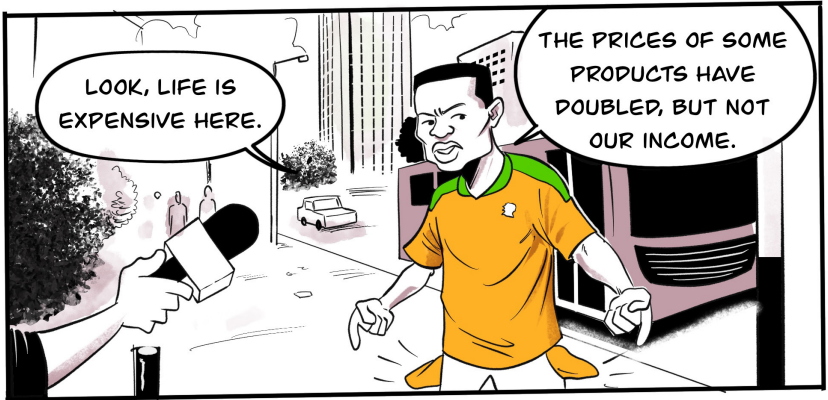
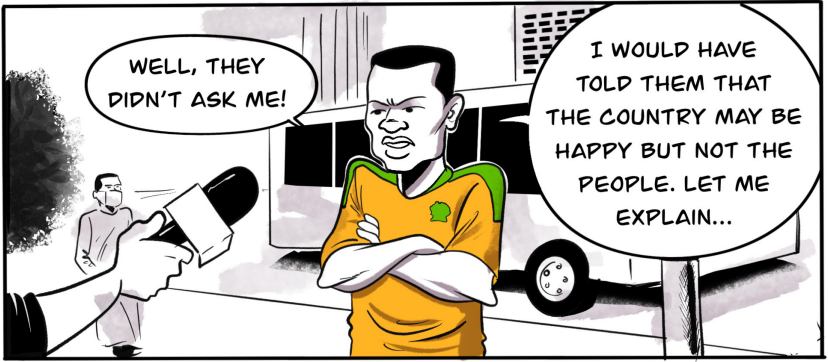
happy if you're white, Western and rich: all top 10 countries fit this description. As for the citizens of Côte d'Ivoire, news of their happiness came as a bit of a surprise.

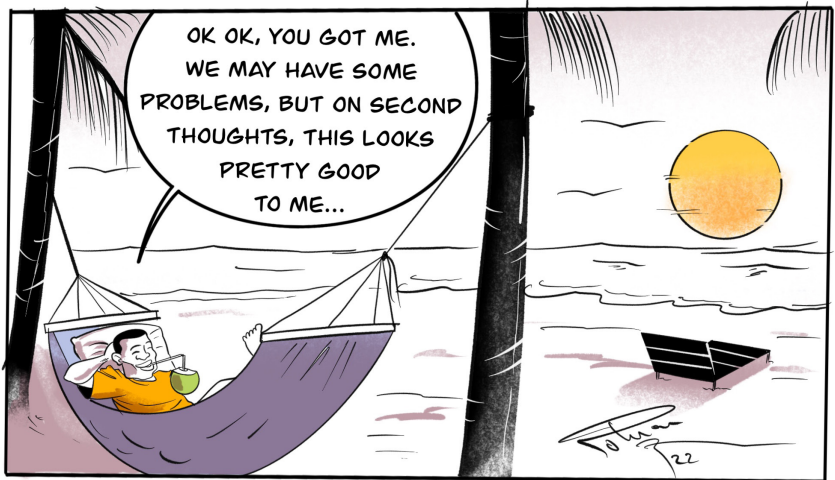
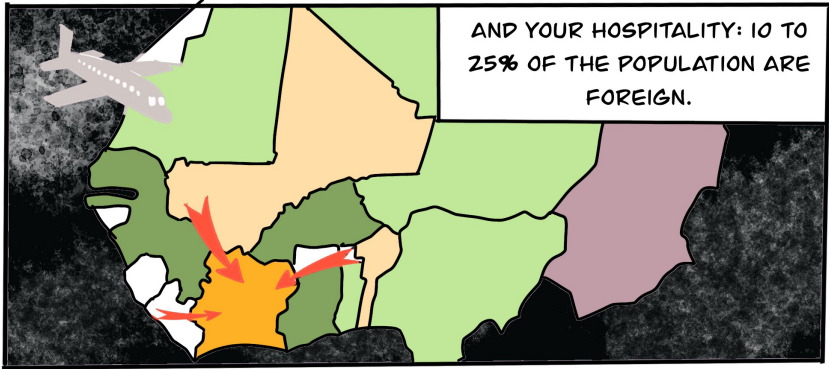
Drawn by Roland Polman in Abidjan



YOU ASK PEOPLE: ON A SCALE OF 0 TO 10, HOW WOULD YOU EVALUATE YOUR OWN LIFE? ABOUT 1000 PEOPLE IN EVERY COUNTRY ANSWERED.







South Sudan

The horrific war on women

Please note: This article contains distressing details about rape and gender-based violence

South Sudan gained its independence in 2011. In the decade after, a civil war tore the country apart. During this, hundreds of thousands of women and girls were raped, enslaved and killed by armed men.

These are just some of the findings of the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. Established in 2016, its job is to document what is happening, suggest things that can be done to ensure that the situation does not get worse, and feed that information into a proposed court. Its particular focus is sexual and gender-based violence.

After two years of interviews, it found that: "Women's bodies have been systematically used to achieve military or political objectives and are considered as the spoils of war".

The majority of documented rapes were perpetrated by armed men against women and girls. They range from "multiple armed perpetrators raping multiple women" to "individual women

being gang-raped by multiple men".

Rapes tended to happen during attacks on communities, or when women and girls were doing essential work, like fetching water, outside of their villages. When women walked in groups for safety, they would be attacked by armed groups of men, who would threaten to kill them if they resisted.

The commission documented many cases where women and girls died while being raped or trying to escape rape. Others were captured and used as sex slaves, giving birth to children and being put to forced labour in military camps.

Women's bodies are considered the spoils of war

The commission found universal culpability, with violence meted out by all sides in the swirling conflict in South Sudan, with battles between the government and rebels, between warring factions, and between communities. This has continued despite a 2020 peace deal.

With the state taking little action, the commission has recommended that the African Union push the government to take action.

It also noted that African heads of state had a "positive masculinity" meeting in Kinshasa last year, where they committed to tackling gender-based violence. ■

Western Sahara

Spain shafts Western Sahara to win back Morocco's favour

Relations between the two traditional allies soured in the late 2010s but their recent reconciliation has serious implications for Morocco's neighbours, especially the Sahrawis of the Western Sahara.

David Soler

Last Friday evening, the Moroccan royal palace publicised a letter in which Spain said it supported Morocco's desire to make Western Sahara its province as "the most serious, realistic and credible" path to solving the 46-year-old conflict in the region. Many Sahrawi, the people of Western Sahara, consider their land an independent nation.

But Rabat insists it is part of Morocco.

Spain controlled Western Sahara until 1976, after which both Morocco and Mauritania claimed it as their own. Mauritania later dropped its claim.

The letter published by Rabat suggests Spain is backing away from a 1991 United Nations proposal to let the Sahrawis decide their status through a referendum. Spain had traditionally supported this proposal. For the past 30 years, international effort to resolve the conflict has revolved around getting the territory and conflicting parties

ready for such a referendum.

Spain's foreign affairs minister, José Manuel Albares, said the latest development opens a "new stage" for his country's relations with Morocco, which have been strained for years. The unexpected decision has on the other hand opened a crisis with Algeria, the main gas supplier to Spain.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said the latest development opens a "new stage" for his country's relations with Morocco

Traditionally an ally of the Sahrawi, Algeria has recalled its ambassador in Madrid after calling the Spanish move a "historic treason". The Algerian city of Tindouf is home to nearly 175,000 Sahrawi refugees and is the base of operations of the Frente Polisario, Western Sahara's

liberation movement.

The European country needs Algerian gas more than ever, as Europe looks at alternatives to Russian gas to avoid funding the invasion of Ukraine. Spain's about-turn on Western Sahara may reduce gas flow from Algeria, exacerbating the looming energetic crisis, but at the same time, the Spanish government's gamble appears to be that by buying more gas as promised, Algerians will look away.

In Spain everyone's question is: "Why now?" But, ultimately, Spain is only mending fences with an old friend with whom it shares the tendency to claim autonomous lands. Spain and Morocco are led by royal houses that enjoyed close ties for decades before Spain's prime minister Pedro Sánchez – who came into power in 2018 – soured the relations when he didn't go to see Morocco's King Mohamed VI. For decades, Rabat had enjoyed the symbolic privilege that it was the destination of the first foreign official visit by every new Spanish leader.

Spain's gamble appears to be that by buying more gas as promised, Algerians will look away

Morocco's expansionist claims over waters around the Spanish Canary Islands soured the relationship further. As did the 2020 claim by the Moroccan prime minister that Ceuta and Melilla, two cities on African soil that Spain considers its autonomous regions, are "as Moroccan as Western Sahara".

The diplomatic row took another turn

in April 2021 when Spain secretly granted hospital access to Brahim Gali, the leader of the Sahrawi liberation movement that most strongly opposes Morocco's claim to the territory. Gali was suffering from Covid-19. The Spanish foreign minister, at the time, Arancha González-Laya, smuggled him into Spain under the fake name of "Mohamed Benbatouch".

When the news broke out, Morocco recalled its ambassador in Madrid. Rabat then apparently looked the other way when a month later, an unprecedented 8,000 migrants crossed to Ceuta, by swimming from the Moroccan border. The strained relations led Madrid to remove Laya as foreign minister and replace her with Albares in July 2021. His main mission has been to improve relations with Morocco, a vital ally for border control and trade.

In the meantime, relations between Morocco and Algeria were worsening. In August, Algiers severed bilateral ties with Rabat over the Western Sahara dispute and concerns that Morocco was pursuing hegemony over the region.

Last week's agreement between Morocco and Spain has yet to be confirmed or explained by Spanish prime minister Pedro. It has only been publicised by Morocco. But Albares defending it suggests Spain may have received Moroccan assurance on border control and acquiescence to its claims over Ceuta, Melilla and the waters of the Canary Islands. ■

David Soler is the editor-in-chief of Spanish media site África Mundi

South Africa

Court orders state to act on air pollution

Power utility Eskom has been ignoring air pollution laws. Hundreds are dying as a result. But now the government has been ordered to clean up its act.

Some 600 people a year die as a result of air pollution in Mpumalanga province, the heart of South Africa's coal industry. Massive coal deposits mean many mines have been built, along with a dozen big power plants and the industry that they power. It is an industrial complex built by the apartheid government in order to escape sanctions, so the country could continue its racist policies.

Black people were forced to live downwind of these plants, with their homes and lungs coated in toxic fumes. These range from sulphur dioxide to mercury and fine dust particles, which can cause cancer, strokes and heart attacks. Tens of thousands get sick each year, with children unable to compete in sports because of debilitating asthma.

Little has changed since democratic

elections in 1994.

This reality was meant to change a decade ago, when new laws came into effect that imposed absolute limits on how much pollution is allowed from industries. But the major polluters have been given repeated exemptions, thanks to their "warnings" that this would lead to even more power cuts in the country and force them to fire their workers.

So, in 2019, civil society groups took the state to court to enforce its own laws. The state's defence appeared to be that the deaths caused by pollution were an acceptable price to pay for power plants to keep operating. The court did not agree.

South Africa's power plants could be cleaner, but corruption has all but broken the state utility.

Major polluters have been given repeated exemptions, thanks to their threats to switch off power

At best, half of the national coal power fleet works. Yet its pollution still makes South Africa the 12th biggest carbon polluter on the planet.

Last week, the court ordered the state to improve air quality. It said the state had breached the Constitution and gave it 12 months to enforce existing laws, and penalise polluters.

The state will likely appeal. ■

Zimbabwe

New party courts fed-up older voters

On Saturday, 10% of Zimbabwe's parliamentary seats are up for grabs in by-elections. This is a crucial test for the country's newly-rebranded opposition, especially with a presidential election scheduled for next year. Key to the opposition's fortunes is the voting behaviour of rural and older voters, who typically favour the ruling party. This time, things are looking a little different.

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

Mucharipa Chihwa was at the rally for opposition leader Nelson Chamisa in Kwekwe town on 27 February, when a 16-member gang violently descended on the crowd, killing one and injuring many others. The 80-year-old's resolve to support Zimbabwe's opposition leader was unshaken by that taste of violence.

"I love this child Chamisa more than my own last-born son," she says. "I have suffered all these years under the leadership of Zanu-PF. I want him to lead us and take us out of this misery."

The senior citizens of Zimbabwe have historically voted for Zimbabwe's ruling

party, Zanu-PF, "particularly because it participated in the liberation war struggle," says Claris Madhuku, a political analyst and director of Platform for Youth Development Trust, a pro-democracy group in Manicaland Province.

Grandmothers like Chihwa are among a considerable number of senior citizens who are now switching their allegiance from the ruling party to the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), the new opposition party led by 44-year-old Chamisa.

"CCC is harvesting rural supporters and amongst them aged citizens who are divorcing themselves from backing the ruling Zanu-PF party," says Madhuku. "These are desperate people who have for years supported the ruling party but now are fed up with poverty and suffering."

In power for 42 years, Zanu-PF did deliver independence from British settler colonialism. But it also oversaw the country's economic ruin. More than 90% of the country's citizens have faced unemployment, according to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. Many senior citizens saw the value of their savings and pensions nosedive in successive economic crises in 1992, 1997 and 2007/08.

Simanga Gumbo, an 81-year-old retired teacher in the Midlands province who lives off his monthly pension pay-out, says: "Everything I earn is meaningless in

the face of growing inflation.”

He hopes that Chamisa will become president and “bring something better for the few days I have left to live”.

Breaking new ground

It’s not just the senior citizen bloc that Zanu-PF may be losing. It also appears to be losing ground with rural voters, another core constituency for the ruling party. “More than 60% of our new supporters are from the rural areas. A mix of both the old and the youths,” Ostallos Siziba, CCC’s deputy spokesperson, told *The Continent*.

Patson Mudzamiri, a 72-year-old voter in Masvingo Province affirms that, saying “all the villagers, young and old, no longer want anything to do with Zanu-PF”.

Marylyn Gwangwawa, a 28-year-old in Mashonaland, echoes this sentiment. The unemployed nurse was part of a crowd that thronged the opposition CCC rally in Marondera town this month, facing off against cops who blocked it from going ahead.

“We used to be afraid, as young people, to support any opposition in my village,” Gwangwawa says. “But poverty has left us without choice but to rally behind Chamisa, hoping that he will set us free from the poverty showered on us by Zanu-PF”.

Zanu-PF did not respond to requests for comment.

Economic hardship is not the only reason why people are turning away from the ruling party. Many blame it for the violence that is all too common in Zimbabwe’s political life. Recounting



Photo: Zinyange Auntony/AFP

the violence that was visited on crowds at recent opposition rallies, Gumbo says: “That is one other reason I have since stopped sympathising with Zanu-PF: it’s a violent party. Chamisa preaches peace and gives many like me hope.”

Like most long ruling parties across Africa, Zanu-PF is least popular with urban voters, and that doesn’t seem to be changing in its favour. But can Zanu-PF actually be dislodged?

The by-elections this Saturday will go a long way towards answering this question. Some 28 parliamentary seats and 105 council seats must be filled, after falling vacant due to a combination of recalls, death and dismissals.

This is CCC’s first electoral test since its official launch earlier this year, after Chamisa gave up the battle for control of the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, which has been Zimbabwe’s largest opposition party for several decades.

It will also offer a crucial clue as to the party’s chances in the 2023 presidential vote – by which time there will be even more pensioners to court. ■

South Africa

‘I signed up for slavery’, says striking Uber driver

Drivers for Uber and other e-hailing companies went on strike in South Africa, demanding basic rights from companies that are repeatedly condemned for abusing their workers.

Kiri Rupiah in Johannesburg

E-hailing drivers in South Africa embarked on a three-day strike this week in protest against an industry that they say is unregulated and opens them up to exploitation. Drivers working for Uber, Bolt and DiDi want the government to intervene in both the classification and regulation of the e-hailing industry, and improve conditions of employment.

Uber calls the drivers “partner-drivers”. Legally, this means that they are self-employed, independent contractors. If it called them employees, it would have to give them more rights. And it would

have to pay them a salary. Right now, drivers earn depending on how much driving they do.


But Uber does take its cut of 25% of these earnings (it’s 26% at Bolt). The company says this is to cover the cost of running the app that connects customers to cars. Drivers also have to pay for a \$17 vehicle inspection every six months. They then need to pay for an annual background check. And they have to pay for passenger liability insurance, data for the apps, and airtime. All of these are very expensive in South Africa.

The biggest cost is their vehicle, with Uber demanding a certain size and age of sedan. In a country with inflated vehicle prices, this locks the drivers into working until they can pay off their loans.

As part of the strike, drivers marched to the country’s capital city Pretoria to present a list of their complaints to the department of trade, industry and competition.

One of these drivers, Tiger Nkoe, has been driving since 2019. He joined Uber because he couldn’t get a job after graduating with a diploma in accounting from a university in Johannesburg. Driving was a means to make a living while he looked for a job in his field.

He said: “I thought things would be better but no, things are not well because I signed up for slavery.” He added that clients that he talks to are aware of the

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a light blue surgical face mask and a red jacket, sitting in the driver's seat of a car at night. The car's interior is dimly lit, and the background shows a blurred city street with lights and traffic.

Taken for a ride: E-hailing drivers say the industry has trapped them in debt. Photo: Uber_RSA

issues he and others are facing but “to them as long as they are saving, they don’t care”.

Nkoe and other drivers told *The Continent* that their earnings ended up being below South Africa’s minimum wage, which recently increased to \$1.57 an hour. And they can’t get out because their cars are now worth less than the amount remaining on their car loans.

Nkoe queried the fee taken by Uber: “What is the 25% service fee doing for us as the drivers? Nothing whatsoever.”

Another driver, who asked for his name to be withheld, said his main concern was for the safety of drivers and riders, claiming that there has been an increase in bogus accounts, run by people who want to get into an Uber and then rob the drivers.

United States-based Uber has been in South Africa since 2013, while Estonia’s Bolt, which previously traded as Taxify, began operating in South Africa in 2015.

DiDi Chuxing, from China, launched in South Africa in 2021.

The strike is similar to a series of general strikes in March 2019 by Lyft and Uber drivers in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco in the US. The demonstrations were to protest low wages, long hours, abysmal working conditions, and a lack of benefits.

Last year, two law firms announced that they would file a class action suit on behalf of South African drivers against the company, for them to be recognised as employees.

In a statement to *The Continent*, Kagiso Khaole, who heads up Mobility Operations for Sub-Saharan Africa at Uber, said the company was taking the concerns of drivers seriously and working to address the issues.

“Our commitment to drivers is to continuously find ways of maximising their earning potential while meeting the needs of the riders.” ■

South Africa

Silicon Valley may be down but it sure ain't out

NEWS ANALYSIS

Timi Odueso

It's been a bad month for Big Tech in South Africa. First, regulators proposed that WhatsApp cough up 10% of its revenues, for breaching competition laws. Then Amazon's plans for African expansion were put on hold when a court ruled it could not build a massive new warehouse on indigenous land in Cape Town. Finally, Uber and other e-hailing apps were hit by a nationwide strike by drivers demanding better wages.

What is happening in South Africa plays into a larger conversation about how more and more African countries are creating regulations that guide tech companies operating within their regions.

From Kenya to Nigeria and South Africa, we're seeing governments on the continent – most of which are still saddled with archaic laws that are having to govern a very modern industry – are finally waking up to the impact of tech on the economy.

To be clear, what is waking them up is not the human impact, but rather the financial one.

That's why it is the law reforms that tax the tech space that are progressing more quickly – along with the ones that protect governments from criticism – not the ones that seek fairer regulation or that protect their citizens.

In Ghana, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, governments are creating laws that are making it more difficult to use mobile money, while Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda are imposing increasing regulations on social media.

In doing so, African governments are just catching up with other parts of the world. In India, for example, new restrictions make it easier for the government to order Twitter and Facebook to remove content it does not like, while the European Union is making it harder and harder for Meta to harvest data without users' consent.

While tech companies may not like the new rules, don't expect a slowdown in investor confidence.

The truth, of which the Silicon Valley giants are acutely aware, is that Africa remains a huge and mostly untapped market, and the potential rewards still outweigh the risks and red tape. ■



Extravagant, elitist ... and enjoyable?

Young, Famous & African won't challenge anyone's perceptions of Africa – but it is a whole lot of fun

Dika Ofoma

In the first episode of *Young, Famous & African*, South African actress Khanyi Mbau attempts to give the show a higher purpose. She hosts a ball and tells her guests – all of whom, like her, are beautiful and fabulously rich – that it's time that young Africans started to challenge the stereotypes of Africa. This seems to be the show's aim, too – to expose the world to a side of the continent that the rest of the world hardly sees.

Africa is not “the third world the world thinks we are,” she says.

Mbau is not wrong. With its private planes, sprawling mansions and designer outfits, this series – mostly set in Johannesburg's Sandton suburb, which tags itself as Africa's richest square mile – is about as far from “poverty porn” as it is possible to get.

The only trouble is that this version of Africa, accessible only to the elite of the elite, is equally foreign to the rest of us on the continent.

When the show isn't arguing about what Africa is, it is letting us into the private lives of the celebrity cast, which includes Tanzanian superstar musician Diamond Platnumz and Nigerian actor Annie Idibia. They are all willing to confront and revisit past traumas on camera for our entertainment (encouraged, no doubt, by a hefty Netflix cheque). Yes, these squabbles feel scripted at times, but that is not necessarily a bad thing: the storylines are much better constructed than previous African Netflix Originals, and more compelling for it.

The only trouble is that this version of Africa, accessible only to the elite of the elite, is equally foreign to the rest of us on the continent.

Like all reality shows, *Young, Famous & African* is little more than a gathering of superficial characters for the purposes of cheap escapism. Like the best reality shows, it is wildly entertaining. ■

Making a royal hash of it



Photo: Twitter/
KensingtonRoyal



Photo: Twitter/
advocatesnetja



Photo: Twitter/
advocatesnetja

England's duke and duchess of Cambridge arrived in Jamaica as part of their Caribbean tour, which began on 19 March.

They are visiting Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas. Officially, the trip is meant to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, celebrating 70 years on the throne. Unofficially, observers say that the royal couple have been tasked with persuading the Caribbean island nations to keep Queen Elizabeth II as their head of state – and not to follow the example of Barbados, which transitioned to a republic last November.

Things did not go according to plan.

The charm offensive became more offensive than charming when the pair

were met with protests in Jamaica, the largest English-speaking country in the Caribbean.

Just one day later, the Jamaican government began the process of ditching the queen, amid a popular campaign demanding that Britain pay reparations for its brutal colonial history.

While acknowledging his country's role in the enslavement of African people, Prince William – whose family are perhaps the world's highest-profile beneficiaries of slavery and human-trafficking – stopped short of making the apology campaigners demanded, instead expressing profound sorrow for the “appalling atrocity of slavery” during an address to Jamaica's prime minister. ■



Photo: Twitter/
advocatesnetja



Photo: Twitter/
advocatesnetja



Photo: Twitter/
KensingtonRoyal

Türkiye's big push

Turks are no strangers to Africa. Historically, the Ottoman Empire built strong ties with emirs and empires across the continent, in today's Ethiopia, South Africa, Nigeria, Morocco and Niger. Now the country formerly known as Turkey is back – with a new name, new drones and massive new infrastructure.

Mucahid Durmaz

Senegal's President Macky Sall set the ball rolling for his close friend, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in a ceremonial kickoff in Dakar's new national stadium last month.

Thousands of fans joined them waving Senegal's green, yellow and red flags at the event, which came just a few weeks after Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations.

Built by a Turkish firm at a cost of \$270-million, the 50,000-seat national stadium will host international events including the Summer Youth Olympics in 2026. The grand opening was part of Erdoğan's visit, which included a business forum and the opening of a new Turkish embassy in Dakar.

It was Erdoğan's fifth visit to Senegal in the past four years.

Before Senegal, Erdoğan visited the Democratic Republic of Congo. His meeting there with President Felix Tshisekedi was the third between the two leaders in the past six months, and they signed seven agreements, including a deal

for Türkiye (the country's new name since January this year) to construct the new Kinshasa Financial Centre, and a pact on defence co-operation.

Hailing the "win-win" deals and Erdoğan's "historic" visit in a press conference, the Congolese president said he had asked Türkiye to assist Kinshasa in its fight against militant groups in the eastern Congo. (Tshisekedi was aware, no doubt, of the impact that Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones have reportedly had in the civil war in Ethiopia, where they apparently turned the conflict decisively in the government's favour.)

The Turkish model

Erdoğan's emphasis on African relations is nothing new. He describes Türkiye as an Afro-Eurasian state, and has visited 30 African countries since taking power – more than any other non-African leader.

"We will continue to enhance our relations with African countries on the basis of sincerity and solidarity," Erdoğan said during a joint press conference with his Senegalese counterpart, Sall.



Drum solo:
Türkiye
President
Recep Tayyip
Erdoğan in
Tanzania. He
has visited
30 African
countries since
taking power.
 Photo: AFP

There is more to it than that, of course.

Over the past two decades, Türkiye has presented itself to African nations as a non-Western partner with a strong infrastructure and military – a friendlier alternative to the traditional western powers and newcomers like China, Russia, Brazil and India.

Ankara declared 2005 the “Year of Africa” and was given observer status in the African Union the same year. The Union later declared Türkiye a strategic partner in 2008.

Since then the partnership has grown exponentially. Türkiye has 43 embassies operating on the continent, up from just 12 in 2009. Türkiye’s flag carrier flies to 60 destinations across Africa. And Türkiye’s development agency, TIKA, has 30 co-ordination centres across the continent.

Economically, Ankara’s trade volume with African countries has skyrocketed to \$35-billion in 2021 from \$5.4-billion in 2003. Turkish investments have exceeded \$6-billion as Turkish companies have

undertaken around 1,700 projects worth about \$78-billion on the continent, according to the government. This growing trade with Africa is especially important given Türkiye’s economic crisis at home, with inflation reaching 36% year-on-year.

The Turkish business model is considered fast, practical and impactful. And Turkish products are favoured by African consumers as they are cheaper than European products but higher quality than Chinese equivalents, said Alioune Aboutalib Lo, a Senegalese researcher at Istanbul Medeniyet University.

“Türkiye and especially Turkish firms gained a good reputation during these last years in Africa. That enhances the confidence the countries have in their relations with them,” Lo told *The Continent*.

Droning on

There is no doubt, however, that Türkiye’s growing soft power in Africa comes with

hard edges.

As the fast-blossoming relationship evolved, security has become a key component of Türkiye's engagement with the continent.

Türkiye opened its largest military base abroad in Somalia in 2017, and has trained thousands of Somali security forces in the fight against Al Shabab. Ankara's military support to the Libyan government has been vital in repelling warlord Khalifa Haftar's forces.

"Many African governments which battle insurgencies or simply want to improve their military capabilities have looked up to Türkiye's growing local defence industry. That's partly because of the fact that Turkish military products are cheaper compared to Western-produced, but fewer preconditions are attached", said Serhat Orakci, an Istanbul-based political analyst.

Türkiye has reportedly sold its infamous Bayraktar TB2 drones to Morocco, Tunisia and Ethiopia, with Angola and Nigeria also considering acquiring them.

"Everywhere I go in Africa, everyone asks about drones," Erdoğan boasted after his three-nation Africa tour last October.

Official data doesn't break down the details of military sales to individual countries, only giving the total sales amount for each month.

Turkish defence and aviation exports to Ethiopia rose to \$94.6-million between January and November 2021 from around \$235,000 in the same period in 2020, according to the Turkish Exporters Assembly. Sales to Angola, Chad and

Morocco experienced similar jumps.

Despite these impressive statistics, context matters. When it comes to influence and importance on the African continent, Ankara is still a long way behind the United States, China and European powers.

Ultimately, however, this may work in its favour. In West Africa, for example, where relations with former colonial power France are coming under increasing scrutiny, Türkiye's anti-colonial and anti-Western rhetoric has received a particularly warm welcome – and its drones and infrastructure contracts don't hurt either. ■

Soft lines and soft influence

The fountain of youth can apparently be found in Türkiye – for the right price. It is now a reputable destination for accessible cosmetic surgery, with hair transplants and dental transplants being popular procedures. In addition to other factors like easy visas and cheap travel costs, Türkiye boasts a wealth of experienced and talented surgeons.

There is a growing client base of well-heeled Africans getting nipped and tucked while on shopping jaunts. Already used to navigating the intricacies of medical tourism, more and more Africans are jetting off to Istanbul, Ankara and Antalya and returning with bigger boobs, slimmer waists and restored hairlines.

Türkiye's actions in Syria raise red flags

It has presented itself to African allies as a friendly alternative to malicious superpowers but, closer to home, Türkiye's military intervention and alleged human rights abuses in Syria are of real concern

Sam Mednick in Tal Tamr

Syria's 10-year-long conflict, which began with a brutal government crackdown on peaceful protests, has morphed into an uneasy stalemate. While most of the country is controlled by Damascus, pockets of conflict continue with nations vying for power in what's turned into a proxy war between Russia, Iran, the United States and Türkiye, each backing armed groups and competing for influence.

In May last year, *The Continent* visited Tal Tamr and Qamishli in the conflict-riddled northeast, an area that Türkiye invaded several years ago, subsequently backing militias to maintain control of

large swaths of territory. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the reason was to create a so-called "safe zone", to run 30km deep, in order to rid the area of Kurdish fighters and support the return of more than three and a half million Syrian refugees living in neighbouring Türkiye. Türkiye currently hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world.

But the safe zone is not safe for everyone.

The Turkish-backed rebels have been accused of widespread human rights violations. These abuses are worse than those of any other armed group in the country, except the Islamic State, said Mizgeen Hasen, head of the Center for Research and Protection of Women's Rights in Syria, a local advocacy group. Between 2018 and December 2020, the organisation documented 400 cases of kidnappings, rape, killing and abuse of women in Turkish-held territory in the north, she said.

Türkiye itself has been implicated in human rights abuses.

In northeast Syria, more than 60 Syrians were illegally transferred to Türkiye to face trial between October and December 2019, according to Human Rights Watch. The practice is likely ongoing, said the group.

An escalatory cycle of violence

Adel Haji Hasan fled to Kurdish-controlled Qamishli from Ras al-Ain, a town under the control of Turkish-backed rebels, known as the Syrian



Red Carpet: Türkiye's President Erdoğan is welcomed by Angola's João Lourenço in Luanda. Photo: AFP

National Army (SNA). He said he had been detained by the rebels, and thought he was going to die. He described being beaten with cables, sticks and psychologically tortured in a makeshift prison.

“Life stopped,” said the 46-year-old Hasan. “I was thinking about my kids and my family, expecting to never see them again.” He said his family was forced to pay \$10,000 in ransom for his release.

Hasan's account was not unique. According to people who have fled the SNA-controlled areas, the Turkish-backed rebels are torturing, disappearing and killing civilians trying to return, as well as occupying the houses of those who fled. Many residents say they have been detained and held for ransom, while the few who have remained are terrified to communicate with relatives outside for fear of retaliation.

Syria analysts say it's in Türkiye's interest to address the human rights abuses being committed by the rebels

it supports, as the violations are having severe consequences on civilians, and are “fueling an escalatory cycle of violence with Kurdish-led forces”, said Dareen Khalifa, senior analyst at the International Crisis Group. “The human rights violations there are going to be a long term political and humanitarian problem,” she said.

The Turkish government has called the claims “baseless” and said it has a clear and strict policy regarding war crimes, Dr Ravza Kavakci Kan, a parliamentarian and member of Türkiye's ruling party, told *The Continent* that war crimes of any group need to be investigated and go through due process according to international law.

She also noted Türkiye's role in helping Syrians by “keeping its borders open to those who had to leave their homes”.

Kan said that it is Kurdish forces who are committing human rights abuses, and blamed Nato allies, particularly the US, for supporting “terrorist organisations”. ■

To protect or to prey?

The police are supposed to protect people and their property. But do they? Afrobarometer surveys in 34 African countries show that a majority (58%) of Africans say their governments are doing a poor job of reducing crime. Worse: Many see the police as being part of the problem.

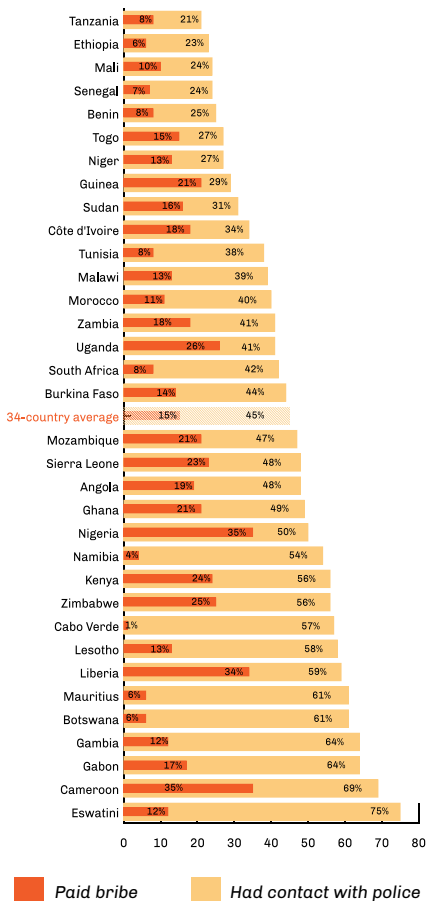
Almost half (47%) of adults say “most” or “all” police are corrupt – the worst rating among key state institutions.

For ordinary citizens, this presents an everyday threat. Almost half (45%) report having had direct contact with police in just the past year. Among those who had encountered police, one in three had to pay a bribe to get help or avoid problems.

Contact with police varies widely by country, from just 21% of Tanzanians to a remarkable 75% of Eswatini.

But less contact doesn't necessarily mean less police predation. In Eswatini, about one in every six who had contact with police (or 12% of all respondents) report having to pay a bribe. In Nigeria, where 50% had contact, a whopping seven in 10 of these paid a bribe.

Police contact and bribery in past 12 months | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



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 +/- two to three percentage points.

Ghana

Ailing economy puts president under pressure

Talk of coups has dominated the headlines in West Africa recently – and even Ghana, the region's model democracy, is not immune.

Francis Kokutse in Accra

As chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, is holding the whip against coup leaders in the region. The community is demanding a return to democracy in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Each of those countries has recently gone through a coup.

But in Akufo-Addo's own backyard, as economic hardships bite, some people have started fearing a coup against his elected government.

In a 28 February lecture, the dean of the

faculty of law at the University of Ghana, Professor Raymond Atuguba, said: "We do not want a coup in this country. Yet I fear that if we do not act quickly, we may have one on our hands very soon."

Sammy Gyamfi, the spokesperson of the country's main opposition party, echoed the same fear when talking to *The Continent*: "We need to be careful and quickly nip in the bud the factors that usually lead to coups."

He cited poverty, widening inequality, and ballooning youth unemployment as the factors that could potentially drive a coup in Ghana.

Oliver Barker-Vormawor, the popular convenor of the #FixTheCountry protest movement, was far less circumspect than those two men. In a Facebook post in early February, the social activist said that if the government went ahead to impose a controversial levy on electronic transactions, he would cause the coup.

He was arrested for treason on 14 of February. Last week he was released, to great fanfare. This week the president himself felt worried enough to talk down worries about a coup. He was quoted in local media saying people wrongly saw a coup as a "panacea to our problem".

Akufo-Addo added: "Coups have never been and will never be durable solutions to the political, economic, and security challenges confronting our nations and continents."



Going, going:
Ghana's recent economic woes have sparked discontent that some analysts and leaders fear is encouraging 'coup fever'.

Photo: Nipah Dennis / AFP

At the root of Akufo-Addo's troubles is Ghana's poor economic performance in recent months. This includes sharp price increases, unemployment, waning international confidence in its economy, and one of the world's worst performing national currencies.

Data from the Ghana Statistical Service show that the price of electricity, gas and other fuels increased by 29% from December 2021 to January 2022. Transport costs went up by 17%. These jumps contributed to 12.5% inflation in December and 14% in January.

For the average Ghanaian, life has become significantly more expensive.

Adding fuel to the fire, Fitch, the credit ratings agency, downgraded Ghana to B- from B, citing the country's ballooning debt. The Statistical Service says that national debt stands at 85% of GDP.

In a speech last week, the president defended his government, saying: "These are global phenomena... Ghana is not the only country faced with extraordinary increases in global freight rates, stringent

inflationary pressures, dramatically rising fuel prices, unprecedented volatility in stock markets, and tighter global financing conditions."

Other observers have said the growing talk of coups is indicative of politicians manoeuvring ahead of the 2024 elections.

Senyo Hosi, the chief executive of the Chamber of Bulk Oil Distributors, told *The Continent* that politicians in Ghana run the risk of taking people's concerns for granted.

"In the neighbouring countries where these coups have been successful, it was the youth that hailed it. The hopelessness we see with our youth in the country is a recipe for disaster – because 70% of them are unemployed."

For longtime observers of Ghanaian politics, all this feels like déjà vu. Akufo-Addo's father, Edward, was removed from the presidency by the military in 1972, during an economic crash. The then-finance minister was his uncle – and father of the current finance minister.

For now, though, it is still just talk. ■

The denim divide

In the same way that 'fast fashion' uses and disposes of clothing, the people who make it are too often considered disposable, and left destitute.



Cast-offs: Used clothing, made for US markets, is sold back to those who made it.
Photo: Ryan Brown

Ryan Brown in Maseru

For six years, Thato Khatleli worked in a denim factory in Maseru, Lesotho's capital, carefully checking the stitches of Levi's and Wranglers for loose threads and sharp rivets. Then Covid-19 hit, the homebound Americans who would normally buy those jeans switched to wearing sweatpants instead, and the factory was forced to close its doors.

Now, she stands near the gates of a nearby factory that is still in operation, unfurling a stack of crumpled secondhand

jackets on a rickety wooden table. It's a hot, still payday Friday in Ha Thetsane, a district of aluminium factory shells huddled on Maseru's southern edge. In a few minutes' time, workers will begin spilling out of the factory gates behind her, their pockets heavy with their monthly paychecks of 2,400 maloti – about \$150.

In the American department stores where the jeans they sew end up, that amount would buy two, maybe three pairs of Levi's.

"Those jeans aren't made for us," Khatleli says matter of factly, as she lays

out clothes that *are*. A gently used Pull & Bear windbreaker for L50 (\$3). A pillowy Gap jersey for L30. A vintage jacket for L60.

The clothing of the 21st century lives a globetrotting life. The cotton for an Adidas tracksuit may be grown in Brazil, spun and woven in China, sewn by women like Khatleli in Lesotho and then sold, worn, and donated to charity in the United States – before being resold secondhand and, eventually, tossed in a landfill in Ghana.

With the rise of so-called “fast fashion” accelerating this life cycle, no part of the world has been left untouched. But Africa’s role is particularly complex: As Western consumers buy more and more clothing – about 68 items a year, or five times as much as they bought in 1980 – African countries have become both the source of those garments and their final resting place.

Factories across the continent now produce for Western retail giants such as H&M, Mango, Zara and Levi’s. On the other end of fashion’s life cycle, meanwhile, Africa is the world’s largest market for secondhand clothes, the region tasked with disposing of the rest of the world’s castoffs.

Few places illustrate the complexity of this life cycle more starkly than the secondhand clothing markets outside the garment factories of Lesotho.

It’s a country whose exports are nearly 50% clothing – most of it bound for the US and South Africa – but whose own population relies heavily on the secondhand market.

“I do sometimes wonder where these

clothes came from and who wore them before,” says Mabakoena Ranile, who sells secondhand denim skirts and t-shirts from a small zinc shack near several factories. “I’ve seen on the news that [in countries like the US] people have so many clothes that they sometimes donate them to charity.”

But make no mistake: Ranile isn’t a recipient of this charity. The clothes she sells come to her via so-called “textile recyclers”. These are middlemen who buy whatever donations Western charity shops can’t sell – as much as 90% of what they receive – by the kilo, then sort and sell them on to traders in the Global South like Ranile. She bought these clothes, and to make a living, she must now find someone else to sell them to.

That is why she is here today, rearranging pilly H&M t-shirts made in Bangladesh, Vietnam and China so that the least blemished specimens sit on the top of the stack, enticing buyers. A sign reads “L10” – about \$0.60.

When the workday ends, commuters stream past. Many stop to flip through the piles.

A few kilometres away, in downtown Maseru, a vendor adjusts the piles of jeans hanging in her roadside stall. A customer fingers a pair of acid-washed Levi’s 501’s. They look nearly indistinguishable to pairs made down the road in Ha Thetsane. Same stitching. Same iconic leather patch – *Levi Strauss & Co., Original Riveted Quality Clothing*.

Except the origin tag is different: “100% cotton,” it reads. “Made in the USA.” ■

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

"Sometimes everything just clicks, you know?"



Photo: STR/
AFP via Getty
Images

- 1_ What is the name of the oldest and first degree-awarding educational institution, according to Unesco and Guinness World Records?
- 2_ How many official languages does Zimbabwe have?
- 3_ What is the name of South Africa's national flower?
- 4_ Which country has the largest navy on the African continent?
- 5_ Which Kenyan president established the Devil Worship Commission on 20 October 1994?
- 6_ Civil rights activist Kwame Ture was once married to which South

African songstress?

- 7_ What is the name of the stringed instrument used extensively in West Africa?
- 8_ Which African president is nicknamed Johnnie Walker?
- 9_ Which French bank is under investigation for its alleged role in mass atrocities in Sudan between 2002 and 2008?
- 10_ Which African country met WHO air quality standards in 2021?

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

Hope fades in Malawi as rot returns and allies bicker

Golden Matonga

The optimism unleashed by the election of the Tonse Alliance in Malawi in a revolution-like manner – after mass protests against president Peter Mutharika’s controversial election victory in 2019, and a rerun election that the opposition won by forming a new coalition – has now vanished. It tells us much about the dire straits the governing alliance is currently sailing through that its very existence is now in question.

Tensions among the key partners – Malawi Congress Party of President Lazarus Chakwera and the United Transformation Movement of Vice President Saulos Chilima respectively – continue to build. Although the next general elections are still three years away, in 2025, both parties appear to be more focused on those polls than the country’s needs today.

Over the past few months both parties – or, at least, some of their members – have traded accusations, amid a tug of war about how the spoils of their 2020 election victory ought to be shared.

In the meantime, the alliance has

performed poorly on service delivery.

The president’s once-celebrated oratory has been turned into the butt of jokes, with Chakwera accused of making flowery but empty speeches. His widely welcomed call to clear the “rubble of corruption”, too, is turning out to be another undelivered promise. This week, a report by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the state agency tasked with fighting graft, said corruption is actually getting worse. The public agrees.

After the administration kick-started an anti-corruption crusade in its early days, the Zuneth Sattar investigation – a probe into state capture-level corruption – revealed the extent of the rot and the limited will to deal with it. The administration has also been accused of nepotism and economic mismanagement, in a country which remains one of the world’s poorest nations.

Meanwhile, social media went into a meltdown this week when a headline on the state broadcaster announced – following the president’s return from yet another globetrotting trip, this time to Washington – that “poor countries agree to get rich”.

The “joke” was not lost on those previously promised the moon by the Tonse administration. ■

Golden Matonga is an investigative journalist at Malawi’s Platform for Investigative Journalism. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.



THE BIG PICTURE

Rhinocer-eye: The world's rhinos are under huge threat of extinction because of poaching. There are five species in the world, with the largest part of the population being in South Africa. There is only a very small population of black rhinos. This week the World Bank announced that it has set up the world's first wildlife bond – \$150-million – which will, in part, go towards conserving South Africa's black rhinos. If the initiative is successful it could be extended to Kenya's rhino population. Photo: Philippe Lopez/AFP



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