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The Continent



GHANA'S QUEER COMMUNITY FOUND A SPACE.

Then came the backlash.

Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

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COVER: The words “freedom and justice” are emblazoned on the arch of Accra's famous Black Star Gate – the spiritual home of the modern Ghanaian state. But the country's LGBTQI+ community is now asking: freedom and justice for whom? They have been subjected to a vicious, hate-filled disinformation campaign, which could lead to the passing of one of the most homophobic laws in the world. In a special investigation, *The Continent* looks at who is driving this campaign – and their right-wing American partners (p11).

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KENYA

Donated medication and supplies stolen

More than \$87,000 worth of tuberculosis drugs, over 900,000 mosquito nets and more than 1,000,000 condoms apparently went missing from the warehouse of the The Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (Kemsa). The United Nations Global Fund to fight HIV, malaria and tuberculosis said it believed the items were stolen to be sold on the black market. It also accused Kemsa of having “over-quoted the value of medicines” by \$5.6-million and inflating some drugs by 100% of their value. The authority’s board has denied the claims.

SUDAN

Do as we say, but not as we do

A Sudanese military court has sentenced six top officers to jail for orchestrating a coup attempt in July 2019 – three months after a popular revolt removed Sudan’s longtime autocrat, Omar al-Bashir in a coup of their own. The junta which is now in charge says the conspirators sought to sabotage a power-sharing agreement between the generals and the pro-democracy movement. However, in October 2021, the generals overthrew that same power-sharing agreement and have continued to shoot at protestors who are unhappy with their own coup.

SOMALILAND

Bihi presses case for independence

President Muse Bihi Abdi, the leader of Somaliland, is on a 10-day tour of the United States in the territory's continued bid for international recognition. Somaliland formed part of the original post-independence union of Somalia, but broke away in 1991 after coming under sustained attack from the central government in Mogadishu. It has since maintained its own independent government, currency and security system, but isn't recognised internationally as an independent nation – something that it is desperate to change.



See us: Muse Bihi Abdi is seeking support in the US. Photo: Twitter_musebihi

GHANA - UK

Boasiako 'serious' about Chelsea bid

Ghanaian businessman and politician Bernard Antwi Boasiako says he has made a \$3.1-billion bid for English football club Chelsea, which is being offloaded by Roman Abramovich amid sanctions against Russian oligarchs. "Chelsea has a lasting legacy in Africa. Players like Didier Drogba and Michael Essien are legends," Boasiako said. Some Ghanaians did not believe him, to which he responded: "Do you see me as a joke person? So is money supposed to be given, owned by angels or ghosts?"

UGANDA

Journalists arrested for Museveni book

Nine journalists were arrested in Kampala for working with writer and human rights activist, Norman Tumuhimbise, who has been promoting his upcoming book *The Liars and Complices*, said to be critical of President Yoweri Museveni. Two were charged with "offensive communication". Police spokesperson, Fred Enanga, said the police "received a complaint that the group was involved in offensive communications and promoting hate speech".

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Photo: Twitter/
bismackbiyombo

DRC

In service of hope

Bismack Biyombo, a basketball player for the Phoenix Suns in the NBA, will donate his season's salary to his home country of the Democratic Republic of Congo to build a hospital that will honour his late father, Francis. This season he will reportedly earn \$1.3-million. "I thought we were doing enough by refurbishing hospitals and clinics but I think it's time we go a little bigger by building something that will service people, hopefully for generations," he said.

FOOD SECURITY

\$1bn for grain pain

The African Development Bank said this week that it plans to raise a billion dollars to help African countries affected by the impact that the war in Ukraine is having on grain prices. Russia and Ukraine are both major suppliers of maize, wheat and soya beans. The money will help make the continent more food secure in the long term. This means trials of crops that are better suited to a changing climate, in the form of droughts and floods.

SOUTH AFRICA

'Meta must cough up for WhatsApp'

South Africa's competition watchdog is gunning for WhatsApp and parent company Meta, over allegations it is abusing its dominance. In July 2020, Meta decided to remove a South African citizen-government chat application from its WhatsApp interface for businesses. The country's Competition Commission has referred the matter to a tribunal, asking that the US social media giant be given the "maximum penalty" – a fine of 10% of its local turnover. There are also increasing calls in the company's home country to break up its monopoly, similar to the calls that saw Microsoft weakened two decades ago.

South Africa

City asks white lobby group to send in the drones

An illegal strike in Pretoria this week was met with a new method of surveillance – drones supplied and flown by people from a private lobby group.

In South Africa, the state has been at loggerheads with unions over public sector wage increases: last year the government reversed its position after initially promising above-inflation increases.

Municipal workers subsequently embarked on an unprotected strike, demanding better wages. And, with ever-increasing inflation, protesters stepped out into the streets of the capital, bringing a degree of unruliness with them. In stepped AfriForum, a lobby group mostly for white, Afrikaans interests in South Africa. Because this segment of the population retains great wealth, it is well funded. Though it started with most of its power in the trade union movement, it has since grown into other areas of influence. The group said it was approached by a member of the city's

mayoral committee for public safety, who asked for the group's "air wing" to send drones "to provide time-sensitive information ... regarding protesters' location and activities".

South Africa has a history of private groups taking on the role of policing. Security companies, which have more employees than the national police service, forcefully remove people from neighbourhoods if they are deemed undesirable. The companies also use passive video surveillance to track people's movements.

South Africa has a history of private groups taking on the role of policing

They have been accused of racially profiling people, and their attempts to not appear *overtly* racist by referring to black people as "bravos" have filtered down into the (poorly) coded racism of suburban neighbourhood watch groups.

Pretoria is run by the Democratic Alliance, the country's main opposition party. A right-of-centre party, it had its first black leader in the 2010s, before he was scapegoated for poor performance in national elections. A white man is now in charge, and it has since seen an exodus of black talent and support. ■



Léo Doctors' Housing,
photo courtesy of
Francis Kéré

PHOTO ESSAY

Burkinabè wins architecture's biggest prize

Francis Kéré has won the Pritzker Architecture Prize, one of the world's most prestigious awards for his profession. The judges said his work “provides a narrative in which architecture can become a source of continued and lasting happiness and joy”.

He is the first African, and first black person, to win the award.

The architect was born in Gando in Burkina Faso. After school there, he took a flight to Germany on a carpentry scholarship, attending secondary school at night. In 1995, he was awarded a scholarship to attend Berlin's technical university, graduating with an advanced degree in architecture in 2004. Before

this, though, he had already set up a scholarship – “Schulbausteine für Gando e.V.”, or “school building blocks for Gando”.

His first building was a school in Gando, with subsequent projects around Africa and the rest of the world. He has been commissioned to design the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, to replace the previous version that was destroyed in 2014.

Much of his work carries with it the ways of design of his home country, and region. It is mainly for his work in Gando – from the initial school to extensions that has seen its student population grow from 140 to 700 – that Kéré won. ■



Gando Primary School, photo courtesy of Erik-Jan Owerkerk



Benin National Assembly, rendering courtesy of Kéré Architecture



Burkina Faso National Assembly, rendering courtesy of Kéré Architecture



Xylem, photo courtesy of Iwan Baan



Benin National Assembly, rendering courtesy of Kéré Architecture



Lycée Schorge Secondary School, photo courtesy of Francis Kéré

Photo: Dibyangshu
Sarkar/AFP



The journalists driving Ghana's anti-queer agenda

Some local journalists – inspired by an ultra-conservative American group – started a campaign that could lead to one of the world's harshest homophobic laws.

Lydia Namubiru in Accra

When Ako* heard that a LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community centre was going to open in Accra, the first thing she did was get herself a date. And then matching outfits. Hailing an Uber on the day of the opening, she entered the words “LGBT community centre” and there it was! In a city of grand mosques and mega churches, there was a tiny point on the map

recognising that she exists and deserves care.

The opening event was as high as she has ever felt. “For the first time, I didn’t have to pretend about who I am,” she says.

But a couple of days later friends were frantically calling and texting. Was she safe? Her pictures were on TV. Someone said they saw a poster in her neighbourhood castigating gay people. Did she need them to come

over and escort her whenever she needed to leave the apartment? She called her dad, who already was aware that she is queer, to warn him, in case something happened to her.

Foreign diplomats who attended the opening ceremony shared pictures on social media. Media picked them up. And now her face, mercifully half covered by a mask, was

showing up on TV stations, in broadcasts that expressed shock and outrage that LGBTQI+ people exist in Ghana and deigned to open a centre through which to support each other.

They called for the closing of this centre and it eventually was raided by Ghana police and closed.

Ako* recounts this story a year later, in late February 2022, at a small gathering for LGBTQI+ people. One of those gathered in the humid Accra evening says there has been “a whole year of hate and violence, especially on the airwaves.”

That same evening, in another part of the capital, someone is celebrating their role in that media storm.

Broadcasting hate

Isaac Boamah Darko is head of a local group that calls itself Journalists Against LGBT. He was perhaps the most prominent media figure in the campaign against Ghana’s queer community. After the LGBTQI+ Centre opened, he went on a media blitz, appearing on a host of local TV stations to argue that that homosexuality is sinful and un-African.

This year, he commemorated his moments in the national spotlight with glossy posters in a reel on his WhatsApp status. “A year today,” he captions it.

Darko had been preparing for just such a moment. His Journalists Against LGBT group boasts some 300 members, he says. *The Continent* could not independently verify this number.

The journalists, Darko says, “periodically meet and organise sensitisation workshops for members” to remind each other that “the

They called for the closing of this centre and it eventually was raided by Ghana police and closed.

Christ-likeness in us should be shown in our day to day activities”. These range from their work on radio to television and print.

Affail Monney, president of the Ghana Journalists Association, says a lot of journalists on the airwaves have taken explicitly anti-gay positions. He adds that stories on local stations are “so slanted” but “there have not been any attempts to sanction journalists who have openly declared their stance against LGBTI people”.

The Journalist Association’s code of ethics forbids journalists from producing any “material that has the potential to lead to hatred, ridicule or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age, education, religion, gender, ethnicity, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.”

Foreign influence

Darko is also a member of “The Coalition” – the more informal name for the National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values. It seems to be the country’s foremost organised group of anti-gay campaigners.

In 2019, the year that Darko joined, “The Coalition” partnered with one of the biggest networks of ultra-conservative campaigners in the western world: the World Congress of Families.

Together, they hosted a conference in Accra at which delegates spent considerable time denigrating LGBTIQ+ people and calling on each other to declare Ghana “a no go area for the LGBT agenda.” Darko tells *The Continent* that it was through the church that he was introduced to the coalition, but then corrects himself to say; “As a journalist, I don’t need anyone to introduce me to anything. I do my own research.”

The World Congress of Families was founded by US religious conservatives and right-wing Russians in the 1990s. They focus on sexuality and reproductive health culture wars, on issues like same sex relationships (strongly opposed to), marriage (only between a man a woman) and abortion (under no circumstances). Theirs is a narrative underpinned by the idea that the only proper families are those in the heterosexual Christian nuclear arrangement and everyone should be



American influence:
The ultra-conservative World Congress of Families partnered with a Ghanaian group of anti-gay campaigners. Photo: Filippo Monteforte/AFP

compelled to form one of those.

In a 2020 newsletter to members, the network boasted that: “We successfully brought together lawmakers and provided guidance and research to help defeat a pro-abortion bill in Malawi.” As with other campaigns by similar organisations across the continent, this work includes placing misinformation in front of people.

To see how widespread misinformation has been in Ghana in the last year, *The Continent* reviewed 138 instances of misleading, wrong or hate inciting reports. They were logged by local researchers commissioned by openDemocracy, an UK-based independent media outlet. They are only a sample of what is still available online and don’t include offline broadcasts or print content.

About 44% of the reports were published by Ghanaian news sites, as opposed to unregulated social media users.

Facing such a large onslaught of misinformation, Accra’s small LGBTQI+ community was outgunned. Its members watched as lies were told about the damage of being anything but heterosexual.

To see how widespread misinformation has been in Ghana, *The Continent* reviewed 138 instances of misleading or hate inciting reports. This is only a sample of what is still available online

The response culminated in a proposed anti-LGBTQI+ bill that is so far reaching, Human Rights Watch said it “beggars belief”.

If passed into law, it would require anyone who knows an LGBTQI+ person to report them to the police. Identifying as one would attract a 3-5 year sentence and people may be compelled to undergo so called ‘conversion therapy’. It’s a 6-10 year sentence for anything considered promotion of LGBTQI+ rights. Parents of intersex children would have legal right to subject them to so called ‘corrective surgery’.

Journalism as a weapon of hate

Darko’s campaigning has been relentless. For example, on one occasion in April 2021, he called into a local radio station to say: “We will expose and show where the gays and lesbians live; 98% of Ghanaians are against it and if Ghanaians want to beat them, so be it.”

He tells *The Continent* that, along with other members of the Journalists Against LGBT group, they “move from community to community, especially in Accra, educating them about Ghanaian proper family values so that they will accept that our forefathers, our mothers, toiled for this

land, and they didn't practice homosexuality.”

The reality is that a very many African societies were not prescriptive about gender until Christianity and colonialism arrived.

In a Ghana where journalists can be tightly regulated, this spreading of misinformation could be tackled.

But, in an interview with *The Continent*, Yaw Boadu-Ayebofoh, head of the National Media Commission, says “we advise people to tone down” but “at the end of the day LGBTQI is unlawful in Ghana” and that “no journalist has ever been neutral”.

He suggests that by declaring their anti-LGBTQI+ stance, the journalists provide a remedy for their slanted reports. “You cannot deny them if that's the position they want to take except that you advise that people who listen to them must not take whatever they hear as the truth because they have taken a position on the matter.”

Words drive violence

LGBTQI+ and human rights activists disagree. They say that people do take what journalists say as the truth, and that these misleading and false reports can incite real violence.

In a December case that is still in court, a local chief near Timber Market in Accra allegedly mobilised seven men and instructed them to attack three women he pronounced as engaging in lesbian behaviour at their residence.

The men reportedly gang raped the women.

In October, in Tamale, the main city in northern Ghana, residents rounded up four men for allegedly being gay, and beat them up before presenting them to a local chief who had them sent to police and then jail. The “homosexuality” case against them was dismissed in February but their assault by the vigilantes was not probed.

So far, Ghana's regulators and law enforcement authorities have failed to take any action against the journalists spreading disinformation. This is in stark contrast to their energetic response to quell criticism of people in power. For example, in early February, Kwabena Bobie Ansah, a presenter on Accra FM, was charged with “publication of false news and offensive conduct” after he said the country's first lady, Rebecca Akufo-Addo, fraudulently obtained state land for private use.

But when it comes to the rights of those without power in society, journalists are permitted to abuse their position – and the consequences will be felt by Ghana's LGBTQI+ community for years to come, especially if the anti-LGBTQI+ bill becomes law. ■

We're tolerant, except ...?

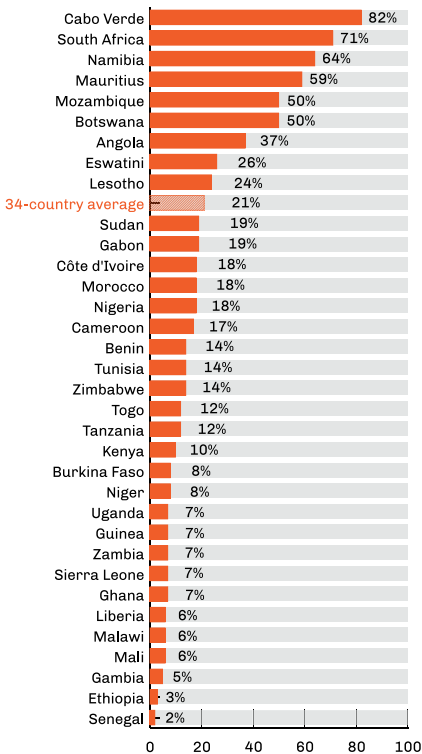
As we saw a few weeks ago, Africans overwhelmingly express tolerant attitudes toward people of different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. But there's a blind spot: Only 21% of adults express tolerance for people of different sexual orientations.

In 34 African countries, Afrobarometer asked respondents whether they would like, dislike, or not care if they had neighbours who were "homosexual" – a widely recognised and translatable term that can serve as a proxy for sexual difference. We interpret responses of "would strongly like," "would somewhat like," and "would not care" as tolerant.

The blind spot isn't really continental: In six countries, at least half of all citizens have no problem with LGBTQ+ neighbours, ranging up to 64% in Namibia, 71% in South Africa, and 82% in Cabo Verde.

The overall average hasn't budged since we started asking this question in 2014/2015. But tolerance is slightly higher among young people (23% of 18- to 35-year-olds, vs. 18%-20% of older cohorts), as well as among citizens with higher education (29%) and urban

Tolerant toward people of different sexual orientations | 34 African countries | 2019/2021



residents (27%).

So maybe there's hope, even if Senegal (2% tolerant), Ethiopia (3%), and many others have a very long way to go.

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.

The Polo pony's forgotten apartheid history

Not all golf shirts are created equal

Kiri Rupiah

It's one of the world's most recognisable brands. The image of a polo player riding a noble steed is iconic, and much-copied. And in most of the world, authentic Polo apparel is produced by the fashion house Ralph Lauren, and the horse and rider face to the left.

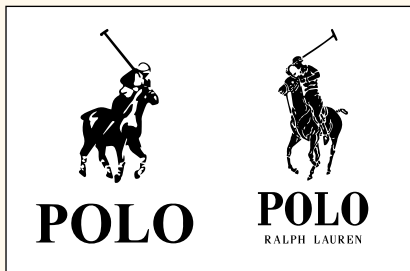
In South Africa, however, it's a little different. Due to an ugly quirk of history, most of South Africa's polo shirts are manufactured by a company called Polo South Africa.

Their logo looks almost identical – except it faces the other direction.

That's because in the late 1970s, as Ralph Lauren was growing its brand, the international boycott movement against the racist apartheid regime in South Africa was gathering momentum. It became difficult for an American company to set up shop in the country.

Taking advantage of the gap in the market, the famous horse motif was quickly trademarked by a local entity – Polo South Africa, under the auspices of the LA Group – and most consumers never spotted the difference.

To this day, you can't *legally* buy Ralph Lauren Polo shirts in South Africa.



Shirt happens: Is the Polo saga just a horse-drawn miscarriage of justice?

Naturally, this has been the subject of extensive litigation – apartheid has been over for nearly three decades, after all. But a decision last month in the country's Supreme Court of Appeal narrowly affirmed Polo South Africa's right to keep using the logo.

Supreme Court of Appeal narrowly affirmed Polo South Africa's right to keep using the logo.

In it, the court said that “it matters not” whether consumers thought they were actually buying the Ralph Lauren product. In other words: Before you slip into your favourite Polo shirt, it is up to you to check which way the pony is facing. ■

The war in Ethiopia is not over yet – and the atrocities are mounting

A viral video of a man being burned alive should shock the world into action

Rashid Abdi

The video of a Tigrayan man being torched by men in uniform, then thrown into a smouldering pyre and literally “cooked” has stunned Ethiopians and shocked the world. The blackened pit shows other human remains, suggesting he could be one of a number of prisoners executed in similar fashion.

The macabre spectacle would not have been known about were it not for the ghoulish fantasy of one solitary soldier and his desire to show off his “war trophy”. His colleagues partake in this dark ritual while making tasteless cannibalistic jokes. “His grilled flesh would be good to eat with injera,” says one of them. “With bread!” retort the rest, amid guffaws and further insults.

The sheer barbarism and atavism of

this latest atrocity speaks to the nihilism and dehumanisation that now disfigures all involved in this conflict – combatants and non-combatants alike. Implicated in the massacre are federal units supported by a motley collection of ethnic forces: the Amhara Fano militia, special forces from the Gambela, Sidama and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region. The Fano, in particular, have been among the most vicious and prolific perpetrators of rights abuses.

The incident, which occurred in Metekel, Beni-Shangul Gumuz state, has been widely condemned. The state-funded Ethiopian Human Rights Commission termed it an act of extra-judicial killing. A senior official from the commission told the BBC a joint security team arrested 11 men – nine of them Tigrayans – and seized radio communication sets, cash and weapons. The men were apparently on a covert mission, he said.

Other media reports suggested the men were from a commando unit of the Tigray Defence Forces sent to blow up the Grand Renaissance Dam. The claim is outlandish, not least because there is no overt hostility to the dam in Tigray and the president of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) – Debretsion Gebremichael – was actually intimately involved in the early stages of the project.

The “human flesh barbecue” horror is part of a long chain of documented atrocities in the 15-month-old conflict, with all parties to the conflict complicit. The pattern of mass killings was



Waiting for justice: There has been little accountability from the government of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed
 Photo: Eduardo Soteras/AFP

established barely weeks after the start of the war in November 2020. Eritrean troops killed hundreds of civilians in the town of Axum in what Amnesty International called the single worst documented atrocity of the war.

In March 2021, Ethiopian troops and militias rounded up close to 30 civilians from the town of Mahbere Deگو, marched them to a cliff near Aksum, shot them and pushed them over the cliff to a bed of rocks below. In August 2021, dozens of bodies washed up on Tekeze River, near the Sudanese border. Most bore multiple gunshot wounds and had their hands tied behind their backs. They were all Tigrayans.

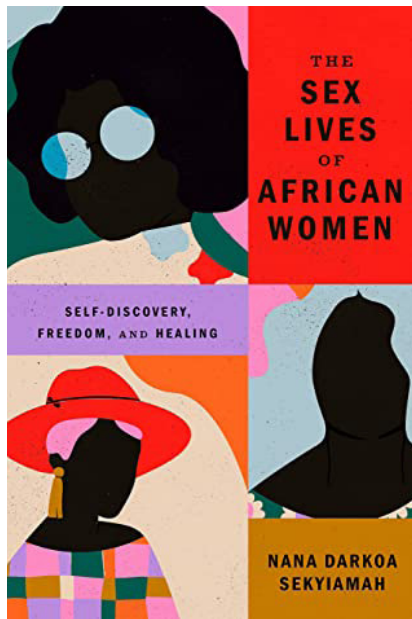
The Ethiopian state outsourced the war to ethnic militias and turned the conflict into a violent ethnic grudge match. Incendiary rhetoric and hate speech by politicians against Tigrayans, the collapse of the professional army and its chain of command, the absence of any meaningful system of accountability, all contribute

to a culture of impunity that embolden combatants to commit mass atrocities.

Prime minister Abiy Ahmed and his inner circle feed the anti-Tigray frenzy. Mass arrests of Tigrayans, purges of Tigrayan public servants and the shutdown of Tigrayan-owned businesses is now routine across Ethiopia. Hate is sanctioned at the highest levels of the state. In July 2021 Abiy vowed to “remove the weed”. His spiritual advisor Deacon Daniel Kibret in September 2021 told Ethiopians the TPLF “should be erased and disappeared from historical records”. Another senior regime supporter said “the enemy does not deserve your compassion or your mercy”.

The Metekel horror ought to serve as a wake-up call. The world must end its conscious denial of the gravity of the human rights crisis in Ethiopia and hold all the belligerents accountable. ■

Rashid Abdi is the chief Horn of Africa and Gulf analyst at Sahar Research.



Beyond the bedroom

Yes, this book is about sex – but it’s about so much more than just sex

Jacqueline Nyathi

One of the most profound books I read in 2021 was Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah’s *The Sex Lives of African Women*, a wonderfully curated non-fiction collection. I picked it as my top African read of the year in *The Continent’s*

annual round-up (Issue 70, December 18, 2021).

Although sex lives are referenced in the title, sexuality of course does not exist in a vacuum, and this is necessarily a collection of stories about whole women – their lives, struggles, and dreams. It is also an interesting look into the ways women’s sexuality is mediated by their communities, partners and families.

It is also an interesting look into the ways women’s sexuality is mediated by their communities, partners and families

Sekyiamah is a Ghanaian feminist, and co-founder of the blog *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*. For this book, she spoke to women of Afro-descent from around the world. From the prologue: “Black, African and Afro-descendent women are often told that sex should only be within particular constraints ... and within certain parameters. In some countries those parameters are marriage. In other countries the law prohibits some types of sexual acts, or tries to control the choices girls and women have when they experience an unwanted pregnancy.”

The book is divided into three sections: Self-discovery, on the quest of these women to know their sexual selves; freedom, about how they found their communities; and healing, from violence

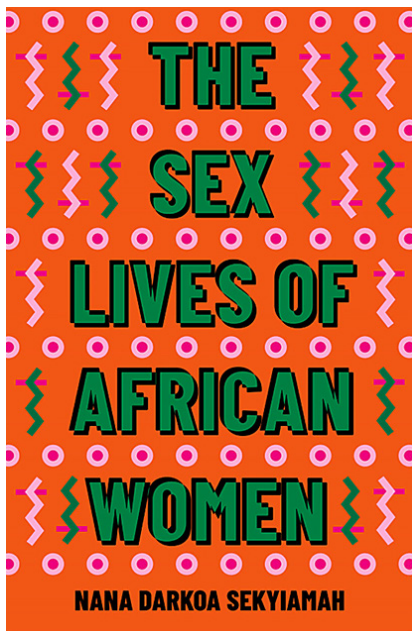
and abuse (trigger warnings here).

Among the contributors are Nura, a 42-year-old Kenyan woman in a polygamous relationship. Helen is a 39-year-old cis woman who identifies as pansexual, polyamorous and kinky. Nafi is a Fulani woman who is heterosexual, and in the middle of a divorce. Keisha is a queer pansexual woman. Elizabeth is heterosexual, and lives with a disability. Philester is a bisexual woman who is a sex worker. Kuchenga is a Black British woman who identifies as transsexual, and is who is functionally pansexual. Fatou, a Muslim, is bisexual, and lives as a polyamorous woman. Alexis, a seventy-one-year-old Afro-Caribbean queer feminist, found love in her sixties. Miss Deviant, a Black lesbian, describes her work in the sex industry, and her experiences of BDSM culture. Yami, a Canadian of Malawian heritage, identifies as a queer, pansexual, femme-of-centre person.

I was deeply moved, surprised and inspired by the diversity of voices that were represented

There are stories from Italy, Costa Rica, Egypt, Nigeria, Canada, the UK, Cameroon, the US, Ghana, São Tomé, Zimbabwe, and other places.

I was deeply moved, surprised and inspired by the diversity of voices that were represented. This is one of the book's great triumphs: women of African descent speaking relatively freely about their



sexuality, normally a subject considered taboo right across the continent (and perhaps also in the diaspora).

Reading these stories is a reminder that the sexuality of African women is far from a monolith. I had never read anything similar on African women specifically. Books like this are not at all common, and this raises questions for me about the curation of contemporary African women's voices, about who may be in control of the narrative, and about who the gatekeepers of the publishing industry might be.

This was a refreshing and emotional read, and I consider it an important step towards making our collective idea of African women multidimensional, and much more balanced. ■

Mozambique

Rwanda eyes the spoils of war

When Rwanda sent its army to help Mozambique battle the insurgency in the north, many wondered what it might be getting in return for its largesse

Luis Nhachote in Maputo

NDP, a major civil engineering group in Rwanda owned by the ruling party of President Paul Kagame, is reportedly in the running to win a big contract on Mozambique's huge liquefied natural gas project in the country's troubled north. The move has raised questions over what Rwanda, or its politicians, are getting in return for providing military assistance in Mozambique's insurgency-hit north.

Paris-based news site Africa Intelligence reported at the end of February that NPD had joined Italian, South African, and Portuguese contractors in bidding for the contract on the TotalEnergies-led project – added to the short-list at the last minute, the report said. The work would involve clearing

the site and doing structural work at the project. TotalEnergies did not respond when asked for comment by the *The Continent*.

In July last year, Rwanda deployed to Mozambique's north-eastern province of Cabo Delgado a 1,000-strong military and police force, which has since doubled in size. In the face of much speculation that the deployment was being paid for by France or French oil major TotalEnergies, which operates the gas project there, President Kagame said in an interview with state broadcaster RBA that “no one is sponsoring” the military support in Mozambique.

Maputo has since appealed to the European Union for financial support for the continuing deployment, which has been broadly successful in returning Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, the two key districts for the gas project, to government control.

“We're using our means,” Kagame said in September. “We have decent means, which we are also ready to share with friends and brothers and sisters. So there is no one who sponsored us for this.”

Rwanda's High Commission in Mozambique told *The Continent*: “The first step of help is military. Second is development for the Cabo Delgado province, with high interest from Rwandan companies.”

“Rwanda has a track record of



**Total strangers:
Rwandan
police joined
soldiers in
Cabo Delgado,
Mozambique.**
Photo: AFP

benefiting economically from its military interventions,” journalist Michela Wrong told *Zitamar*. At least part of the answer now seems apparent. NPD is a subsidiary of Crystal Ventures (CV) – which, according to Dr Phil Clark of the School of African and Oriental Studies in London, is the investment arm of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, Kagame’s ruling party.

Clark said there was “an ever-revolving door between senior Rwandan government positions and CV management ... it is entirely plausible that CV has tendered for a job on the back of the RDF’s involvement in Mozambique”.

Edson Cortez, director of the Mozambique’s Centre for Public Integrity, said the entry of NDP was a sign that “there are no free lunches.”

“It is understandable that the government of Rwanda had some kind of gains from the investments made in the security of Cabo Delgado,” he told *The Continent* – “and it may be that the form of payment arranged was this”.

“We regret,” Cortez added, “that local content is again being relegated to the background, because the work that this

company will carry out could be carried out by Mozambican companies that will pay taxes in Mozambique, and pay salaries to Mozambicans.”

According to Fidel Terrenciano, an academic and dean of the Arco Iris University based in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, the entry of the NDP company in the gas business in Palma was another step in the increasing rapprochement between Mozambique and Rwanda – but also a sign of the close relationship between Rwanda and TotalEnergies.

“From a reliability point of view, Total trusts Rwanda more, to the detriment of face-to-face negotiations with the Nyusi government,” he said. “More business will be managed by Rwandan companies in the coming years. Let’s keep our eyes open.”

Clark agrees. “With close links between Crystal Ventures and the Rwandan military, as well as the deepening economic and military ties between Rwanda and Mozambique over the last three or four years, it makes sense that CV would see vast opportunities in Mozambique,” he said. ■

How Rwanda is exporting its military-industrial complex

War is expensive. Someone has to pay.

When Rwandan President Paul Kagame visited his troops in Mozambique last year, he admitted that the intervention had been “costly”. But despite much speculation to the contrary, he insisted that Rwanda was carrying those costs itself – a remarkable feat for a nation which remains among the 25 poorest countries in the world.

But now things are starting to add up: a Rwandan company with close links to the ruling party is in the running for a slice of Mozambique’s \$60-billion gas bonanza, after being added to the bidding list at the very last minute.

A similar dynamic is at play in the Central African Republic, where Rwanda maintains two separate troop deployments: 2,189 security personnel are there under the auspices of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, while another battalion – of undeclared size – has been deployed as part of a bilateral agreement with the Central African

government.

According to a recent report in *The East African*, Rwandan soldiers played a crucial role in protecting Bangui, the capital, from a rebel advance. And they provide security for the country’s president.

In return, Crystal Ventures – the same company that is bidding in Mozambique – has signed a deal to use 70,500 hectares of fertile land. Crystal Ventures is the business arm of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front.

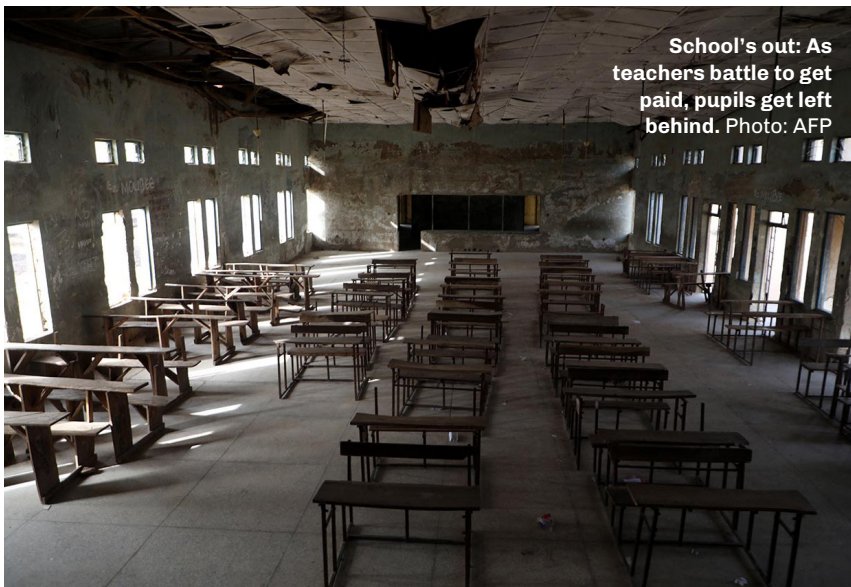
But it is in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo that Rwanda’s links between conflict and profit are most obvious – and most disturbing. In a report last year, the United Nations accused Rwanda of smuggling minerals such as gold and coltan out of the conflict-ridden eastern DRC, and then exporting them from Rwanda. If true, this would violate international regulations governing “blood minerals”. Coltan is a critical ingredient in cellphone batteries.

Rwanda’s links between conflict and profit are most obvious in the DRC

One American mining group, which pulled out of Rwanda over these concerns, estimated that 90% of all of Rwanda’s coltan exports actually originates in the DRC.

The Rwandan government dismissed these allegations as “baseless and scurrilous” – even as it reported record gold and coltan exports in 2021. ■

Nigeria



School's out: As teachers battle to get paid, pupils get left behind. Photo: AFP

Niger State's empty classrooms

As Nigerian teachers fight for a living wage, children's futures are in the balance

Justina Asishana in Minna

Nine-year-old Abdirahman* and his friends hawk water sachets at a junction in Barkin Sale, a suburb of Minna, the capital city of Niger state in Nigeria. It's 10am on a school day. They

aren't at school and haven't been at school since December, when public school teachers went on strike across the state.

The strike came after months of teachers being paid between 20% and 30% by the Niger state government, which says it is not collecting enough revenue to pay full salaries.

Abdirahman tells *The Continent* that hawking water keeps him busy, but he would rather be at school.

He is a good student. "Aunty, did you

know I came fourth in my class last term!” he says. “I can’t stay home doing nothing. I like to move around and if I sell this water, I can bring small money to the house.” On a good day, he takes home N210 (\$0.5) after selling three bags of the water sachets. When he is not too lucky, it’s half that. “My mother says she is saving the money to get me some books, pencils and shoes,” he says.

Like Abdirahman, 11-year-old Mary* is selling water. At Kure market in the same town, she carries a tray of bottled water on her head, going back and forth between the main gate, scouting for buyers.

Both Mary and Abdirahman attend public primary schools.

It is a different story for children whose parents can afford to go private. These schools are preparing their pupils to write the examinations that will mark the end of the second term of the school year – leaving their public school peers a term behind them.

Abdirahman says: “My friend Ayomide goes to Jubilee Glory School and when we talk he tells me about what they learnt. Before I always helped him answer some questions but now, I do not even understand what they are saying.”

He says he has forgotten what he used to know when he went to school: “I do not read. Why should I when I am not going to school? I don’t even know when our school will have classes again.”

Mary says she misses her friends, teachers and the lessons. She’s also worried her friends in the private schools will join secondary school ahead of her.

She is supposed to join in October but “this strike will make me wait till next year”. If she can arrange extramural lessons, she will attempt the entrance exams in June but she wonders: “How will we register if our teachers don’t come back?”

Three other children *The Continent* spoke to – Fatima, Andrew and Ahmed – say they also miss the free school lunch, the reassurance of being able to have a proper meal each day.

The teachers’ strike is unlikely to end any time soon. Before the strike, the state was paying most teachers between \$24 and \$36, instead of the \$120 or more owed to them.

In the last meeting the teachers’ representatives had with the local government, on 9 March, they were offered 70% of their full pay. That offer was rejected. The Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) says the strike won’t end until the state can pay full salaries.

Akayago Adamu Mohammed, one of the teachers on strike who is also the chairman of NUT in Niger state, told *The Continent* that the strike action is difficult for the teachers, too. “The teachers are not doing well. They don’t have enough to feed their families. But none of us is happy with the way they have been exploiting us. Let the governor know that we are not happy.”

In the meantime, Abdirahman and Mary and 681,600 other public school students will be falling further and further behind – and their teachers, too. ■

*The Continent does not generally publish the real names of minors.

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"If my score was a mountain it would be Kilimanjaro"



Photo: Marco Longari / AFP

1_ In which country was Pritzker Prize winner Diebedo Francis Kéré born?

2_ In which year did Somaliland break away from Somalia: 1991, 1981 or 1971?

3_ In which African country did pharmaceutical giant Moderna sign an agreement to build a vaccine manufacturing plant?

4_ Which mineral, mined in DRC, is found in every lithium-ion rechargeable battery on the planet?

5_ What is the name of the cyclone which recently made landfall in Mozambique?

6_ Who was the first

African head of state to receive a Covid-19 vaccine?

7_ Which African currency has the highest exchange rate against the US dollar as of March 2022?

8_ When was the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam completed: July, June or January of 2020?

9_ The skyline of which city is pictured above?

10_ True or false: The island nation of Kiribati is an African country.

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@gm.co.za

The reality of presidential cringe



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

It is a truth hopefully not too universally acknowledged that we at Drift have developed an unseemly addiction over the past few weeks, becoming obsessed with certain reality TV shows, including but not limited to *Love is Blind*, *Pastors' Wives*, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* and *Survivor*. If you do not know these names, we strongly suggest you read no further, so that you may treasure your innocence.

But for those already in the know, help us understand why! Is it the outfits? Is it the glamorous locations? Is it the sheer drama of it all? The eye-rolling, backstabbing cringeworthiness of it all?

Yes. Yes it is. All of the above, and more.

And it's leaked into all aspects of our lives, becoming the lens through which we see not just the power of media, but the mediation of power.

Kenya is on our mind, now that the silly season is officially under way ahead of the August elections. And it seems so is *The Real Politicians of Kenya*, a "show" in which we're seeing alliances being made, promises being broken and a whole load of backbiting and bitching!

In un-breaking news this week, Deputy President William Ruto was officially declared as the presidential candidate for the United Democratic Alliance party.

In a speech urging people to vote for him, he criticised President Kenyatta and his new BFF, opposition leader Raila Odinga, describing them as "the handshake brothers" who "have never slept hungry, never gone job hunting and do not know what poverty is".

Hell hath no fury like a deputy scorned, it seems. Interestingly, Ruto promised to free Kenya from state capture and called out the debt it has accumulated, saying the Kenyan people must not be slaves of debt.

Big sentiments from him, and bold, but just as we see the real housewives lunch together and then complain about each other on camera, its perhaps important to remember that Ruto has for the past nine years been right at the top of the very same government that incurred all this debt!

Meanwhile Kenyatta's wandering political eye has led him to look outside the family, not just flirting but actually endorsing opposition leader Odinga as his preferred candidate in the election. Odinga has been quoted as saying that should he win, Kenyatta would act as an advisor to the government. So sweet!

Just a few years ago the two men were bitter rivals, with Odinga claiming Kenyatta had stolen the last election.

Now here they are, making nice



In-jean-ious: The West loves Zelensky, so they'll love me if I dress up as him, right? Photo: Twitter/truthandfiction

together five years down the line, millions of dollars in debt, cost of living rising and trees being cut down in Nairobi. What a twist – in the tale, yes, but also of the knife in Ruto's back.

Some country that we used to own

As loyal as you are, dear reader, you will already know that for us the reality show that can't stop and won't stop is *Keeping Up With the Coupdashions*. In this week's episode we are in Mali. On one side we have Colonel Assimi Goïta bringing us military drip, and on the other, French President Emmanuel Macron, fresh from his photo shoot in which he seems to have abandoned his over-scrubbed head-prefect look, and started cosplaying as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky,

with tons of stubble and casual clothing.

Relations between Mali's junta and Paris have been deteriorating for months and are unlikely to improve as Bamako announced its intention to initiate the process to suspend both France24 and Radio France International after both channels broadcast what it describes as untrue allegations regarding Malian soldiers carrying out human rights abuses.

Human Rights Watch says the Malian army and armed groups have killed 107 civilians in the country since December 2021 and that 71 of these deaths were linked to government forces.

Those familiar with *Love is Blind* will know it involves potential matches sitting behind a wall and talking, unable to see each other. In some cases love blooms and a wedding proposal is issued, but will they make it down the aisle once they finally see how the other looks?

Imagine that applying to refugees. It's been good to see European countries open their hearts (and borders) to people fleeing the awful war in Ukraine, and yet at the same time remembering how those same hearts (and borders) were and remain closed to refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Love might be blind, but we see you, European Union.

Every so often something good does happen to lift our spirits. This week it was news that Burkinabè architect Francis Kéré won the 2022 Pritzker Architecture Prize, which is considered architecture's highest honour. It's good to build a better tomorrow, but it's great to see one of our own out there *literally* building a better today. ■

This is how the United Nations fails the world

Rasna Warah

The United Nations is one of the world's most influential organisations and in the midst of the crisis in Ukraine is needed more than ever. Yet the UN also allows the most heinous crimes – from the theft of donor funds to the sexual exploitation of refugees – to take place under its watch. Why? And what can we do about it?

To start with, we need to debunk the myth that the UN is a club of equals committed to preventing wars and protecting human rights. On the contrary, the five permanent veto-holding members of the UN Security Council – the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China – have the power to overrule the will and votes of the majority.

In too many cases, the Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council operate on the whims of their most powerful members – who have not even censured Saudi Arabia for the brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

As a former UN insider, I know how white privilege, misogyny and a culture of impunity create a toxic work environment that shape how programmes are

implemented. Indeed, in many ways the UN is simply a mirror of the misogyny and racism in the rest of society.

Not even the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements had an impact on how the UN deals with sexual harassment and racial discrimination. Internal surveys show that up to a third of employees have experienced sexual harassment and more than half of people of colour have experienced racism, yet few victims report it for fear of retaliation.

To start with, we need to debunk the myth that the UN is a club of equals

Partly as a result, development projects continue to perpetuate racist and patriarchal models that end up hurting rather than helping beneficiaries.

So what is the way forward? We need to transform the UN, providing whistleblower protection and replacing internal oversight mechanisms with a truly independent body that is not beholden to any member state or to the secretary-general. We also need to reconstitute the Security Council, which has failed to prevent numerous wars since 1945.

Only then will the UN stop failing the world. ■



Rasna Warah is a Kenyan writer and journalist. This article was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa.

THE BIG PICTURE

Just desert: Sand from the Sahara fell at Piau-Engaly in southern France on Monday night, covering the snow at the popular ski resort. Leaving cars orange, subway corridors dusty, and a blocked and yellowish horizon in its wake, the sand blew in across the Mediterranean, sweeping over Madrid and other parts of Spain before heading to France. Photo: Bastien Arberet/AFP



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