

African journalism. 14 JANUARY 2023 | **ISSUE 111**

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

Making the slave-owners pay

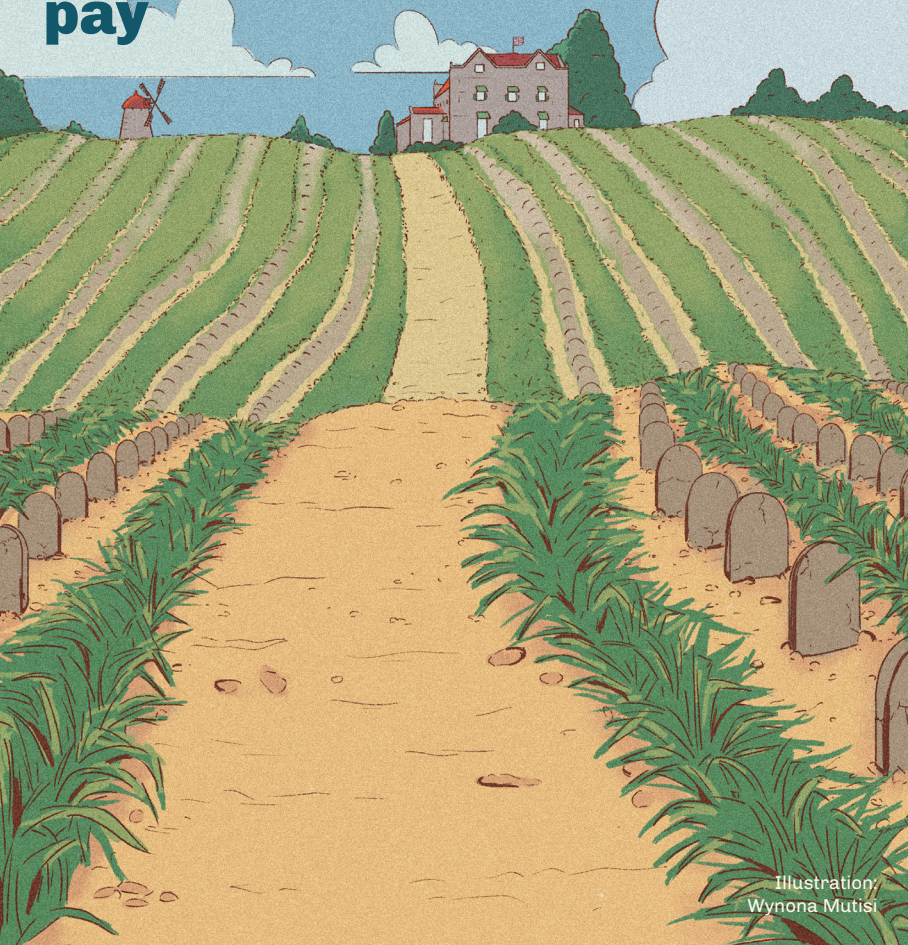


Illustration:
Wynona Mutisi

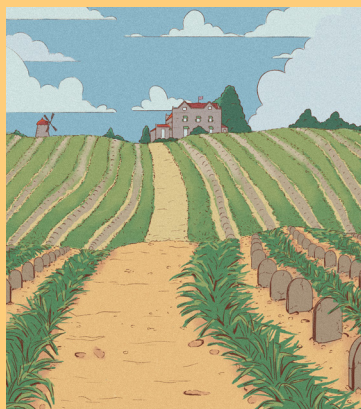
Inside:

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WE'RE BACK! Welcome to the first edition of the year. If this is your first time reading *The Continent*, consider subscribing. We'll deliver your weekly fix of award-winning African journalism every Saturday morning – for free. Save this number to your phone (+27 73 805 6068) and send us a message on WhatsApp, Signal or Telegram. We'll do the rest. Or email us on Read@TheContinent.org.



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Cover: When slavery was abolished, it was the families of slave-owners who were handsomely compensated – while enslaved men and women got nothing. Several centuries have passed since then, but Barbados and other Caribbean countries are now demanding reparations from the west. This campaign is gathering momentum, and its success or failure could define the fight for climate justice too (p17). While it is nearly impossible to make a legal claim against any living individual or family, author Howard French explains why the Drax family – the original Barbados slave-owners, who still own a sugar plantation on the island – are a special case (p12).



Bad seeds: Kenya's William Ruto has unbanned genetically modified crops. Critics say this is less about food security and more about courting megacorp megabucks.

ETHIOPIA

Tigrayan rebels start disarming – your move, Eritrea

In a milestone for the November peace agreement signed in Pretoria, Tigrayan fighters handed over their heavy weapons in the town of Agulae, about 30km from Mekelle, the regional capital. They also said they had retreated from their fighting positions. The process remains fragile because the peace agreement requires that the disarmament happens in tandem with the withdrawal of foreign and non-federal troops allied with the Ethiopian state. The Tigrayans say Eritrean troops are still active in the region.

BOTSWANA

Frustrated San family to appeal to continental court

A family of San origin has been battling Botswana's government in court for over a year for the right to bury their elders on ancestral land. Originally San land, Botswana has since turned the region into the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Pitseng Gaoberekwe died in December 2021 but remains unburied. The family said this week that the state should bury him, if it insists on denying them access to those lands. They said they had exhausted domestic options and will take the matter to the African Court for Human and People's Rights.

SAHEL

Kettles call the pot black at UN meeting

At the United Nations Security Council meeting on West Africa and the Sahel on Tuesday, ambassadors of Britain, France and the US accused Russia of increasing the likelihood that violent extremism will increase in the Sahel, thanks to the involvement of Russia's Wagner mercenaries. The three said this model was "totally ineffective in combating terrorism". In turn, Russian envoy Anna Evstigneeva accused those countries of having done the same thing in Libya, causing ripple effects that destabilised the entire region. The western nations have not come up with their own effective model for "combatting terrorism" – despite having centuries of practice.

ANGOLA

A big loan for new broadband

Only 36% of Angolans have access to the internet, according to the World Bank. To try to change this, the government this week signed a \$249-million concessional loan with China to build 2,000km of fibre optic cable, connecting remote parts of the country. A submarine cable will also be built to the exclave of Cabinda (an Angolan municipality that shares no borders with the rest of Angola).

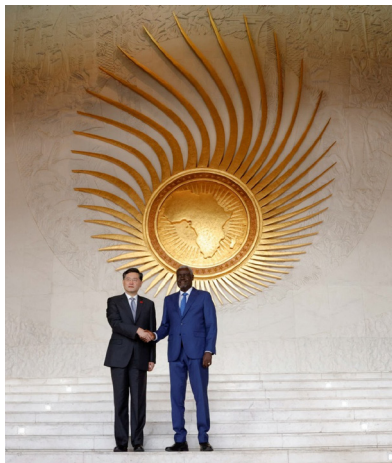


White saviouring: Britain's 'spare' prince Harry experiences the 'real Africa'. Photo: African Parks

PLUS ÇA CHANGE

British royal sons bickered over Africa as their 'thing'

William and Harry Windsor, the sons of Britain's current king, quarrelled over who would get to take credit for saving Africa's buffaloes and elephants, in the name of royal charity and conservation. "Africa is my thing, you can't have it," William, the elder son, told his sibling, according to Harry's recently published memoir. Harry appears to have won that tug-of-warhogs, as he is now the president of Africa Parks, a controversial European-funded NGO that manages 15 wildlife reserves across the continent.



Friends with benefits: Qin Gang with African Union Commission chair Moussa Faki Mahamat. Photo: VCG

CHINA

Foreign minister's African tour

Newly appointed Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang continued what is becoming a tradition in Chinese foreign policy: making Africa his first official trip. This week he visited Angola, Benin, Egypt, Ethiopia and Gabon. In Ethiopia, at the opening of new headquarters for the Africa Centres for Disease Control, built by China, Qin said: “What Africa needs is solidarity and co-operation, not block competition.” In Addis Ababa, Qin also visited the Chinese-built African Union headquarters building, where Chinese surveillance devices were allegedly discovered in 2018.

EGYPT

Listen, Indiana Jones – that’s still not yours

In the ancient Egyptian city of Aswan, authorities this week arrested three men for attempting to steal a colossal statue of Pharaoh Ramesses II. The millennia-old statue weighs about 10 tonnes – the would-be robbers had a crane to lift it. They also had manual digging tools which the authorities believe were for excavating other antiquities in the area. Egypt has lost a significant proportion of its historical artefacts to tomb raiders, some working for foreign governments, who excavate and smuggle them.

TECHNOLOGY

Meta parts ways with controversial content moderators

Facebook’s parent company Meta has ended its relationship with Sama, a San Francisco-based tech firm that provided content moderation services for Facebook in Africa. Sama and Facebook are being sued in Kenyan courts for failing to remove hate speech from the platform that led to massacres in Ethiopia; and for exploiting and underpaying content moderation staff. In Sama’s absence, it is unclear whether African content will be moderated on Facebook at all.

MALI

Goïta ‘pardons’ 49 Ivorian soldiers

Mali’s junta leader Assimi Goïta “pardoned” the 49 Ivorian soldiers who were arrested last July on arrival in Bamako as UN peacekeepers. Malian news website lemalien.com reported that the freed soldiers had returned to Côte d’Ivoire after a stopover in Togo, whose president, Faure Gnassingbé, “played a big role in the release”. Mali’s junta accused the soldiers of collaborating with Malian fugitives in Côte d’Ivoire, where 1.2-million Malians live.



Homecoming: Ivorian soldiers are welcomed home by President Alassane Ouattara Photo: Presidency

SADC

Probe into troops who burned bodies in Mozambique

A two-second video clip reportedly recorded in November appears to show soldiers of the Southern Africa Development Community Mission in Mozambique, throwing dead bodies onto a burning pile of rubbish. The clip went viral this week, prompting Namibian President Hage Geingob to express regret, and announce that the regional body has launched investigations “to establish the circumstances of the matter”. The mission is in the country after Mozambique asked for help in fighting an insurgency in its gas-rich north.

CLIMATE

Exxon predicted climate change – then covered it up

The American oil giant Exxon knew of the dangers of global heating from at least the 1970s, according to internal documents. In fact, new research published in the journal *Science* shows that the fossil fuel company’s internal predictions were uncannily accurate. But instead of sounding the alarm, Exxon spent decades trying to discredit the science – protecting their own business model at the expense of life on Earth. 2022 was Exxon’s best-ever financial year, with profits of about \$58-billion. It continues to obfuscate.

Africa

Our biggest economies are misfiring, says World Bank

Egypt is the exception

Between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing shock of the pandemic, 2022 was a tough year for the continent's economies, according to the World Bank's new Global Prospects Report. But not all countries were impacted in equal measure. It turns out that the quality of your economic policy really matters – as does a little bit of luck.

Nigeria's economy, the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa, grew by 3.1% in 2022, a pace which is higher than the global average of 1.7%. It fell short of its potential, however, primarily because its oil output has fallen so much in the last few years that it's just 60% of what it was in 2019. Combine that with flooding later in the year, inflation that hit a 17-year record, high food prices, and frequent forex shortages, and it meant that people were less able or willing to put more money into the economy.

South Africa, the second-biggest economy, paid the price of its continuing

inability to sort out its power outages, and suffered from falling global prices for some of the key metals it exports. Its economy slowed down from 4.6% growth in 2021 to just 1.9% in 2022.

Angola, on the other hand, exceeded expectations by rebounding from 2021's dismal growth rate of 0.4% to grow at 3.1% in 2022. It managed this by stabilising its oil output and thereby, like most oil exporting countries, profiting from last year's jump in oil prices on the global market.

The best economic news came out of Egypt, despite being a net importer of oil and facing wheat shortages because of the war in Ukraine. It managed to increase its GDP growth from 3.3% in 2021 to 6.6% in 2022. Ordinary Egyptians didn't fare quite so well however: by the end of 2022, prices were nearly 19% higher for urban Egyptians than they had been the year before. ■



Lights out: Green is go, yellow slow, but all SA sees is red. Photo: Getty Images

Brazil

Bolsonarian insurrection tailored for the Trumpen proletariat

Supporters of the former president attacked key institutions in scenes that echoed the January 6 attack on the US Capitol in 2021, after Trump lost the presidential election there

Supporters of Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro on Sunday attacked the presidential palace, Congress, and Supreme Court. The attacks came a week after the swearing-in of current president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who defeated Bolsonaro in a run-off election in October.

Sometimes referred to as the Trump of the Tropics, Bolsonaro did not concede defeat. As president when elections were held in July, he threatened to cancel the process when polls suggested he was not winning. The result was very close, leading to a run-off, which Bolsonaro lost.

Researchers who watch the far right

warned that the election of Donald Trump as United States president in 2016 gave voice to quietly held extreme views in that country, and urged tech platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to stop the spread of disinformation and misinformation to other countries. It wasn't enough. Brazil became fertile ground for what political scientists call "authoritarian learning" – the spread of autocratic playbooks across borders.

Both attacks on public and government buildings show that the authoritarianism is not confined to conversations that are guided by algorithms. Bolsonaro, an ultraconservative populist, was elected to the Brazilian presidency in October 2018. Like Trump's supporters in 2021, Bolsonaro's had in the weeks prior to the attacks accelerated their online conversations, questioning the validity of the Brazilian elections without showing evidence that it was not free and fair.

"It's no secret ultra-right agitators in Brazil and the US are co-ordinating efforts," a statement by 70 Brazilian lawmakers said, citing ties between associates of Trump and Bolsonaro.

Like Trump, Bolsonaro is now the subject of several judicial investigations into possible crimes he may have committed during his time in office. He left Brazil for Florida in the US and is reportedly in hospital for an undisclosed illness. ■

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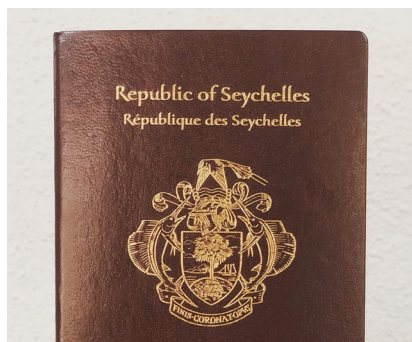
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World

The cost of a bad passport

We all know that some passports open more doors than others. This privilege (or lack thereof) has tangible economic consequences



Power move: The strongest African passport is that of the Seychelles, which gets its bearer into 153 countries without a visa.

In some understanding of the concept, Japan is part of “The West”. That’s certainly the case when we look at how the global borders and visa regime treats its citizens. Holders of the Japanese passport can travel visa-free to 85% of the world (193 destinations), according to the latest Henley Passport Index.

This year, the index documents the economic implications of strict border regimes: they give real economic advantage to citizens of the west, and lock

out everyone else.

With their “go anywhere you want” passport, citizens of Japan (which produces 5% of global gross domestic product) have access to 98% of the global economy. Chinese citizens, on the other hand, who are not by any definition part of the west, produce 19% of global GDP but have visa-free access to just 26% of the global economy.

It’s worse, of course, when we factor in the visa regimes’ obligatory dose of racism. The passport of Nigeria, Africa’s biggest economy, gives its holder visa-free access to only 1.5% of the global economy. Not much to leave home for, considering that Nigeria’s own economy produces 1.2% of global GDP.

It’s a whole lot worse for citizens of countries considered enemies of the west. Henley and Partners, which bills itself as a “leading residence and citizenship advisory firm” says that the lowest ranked passports are for Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, whose citizens it says “are effectively shut out of a shockingly wide breadth of opportunities for economic mobility and growth.” ■

The stories we will be watching in 2023

Buckle up, it's going to be another busy year

The Nigerian election

Africa's most populous country. Africa's largest economy. The stakes don't get much higher than this. Either Bola Tinubu (ruling party favourite), Atiku Abubakar (perennial challenger) or Peter Obi (dark horse) will be Nigeria's next president – can any of them get the country right?

Keeping Ethiopia's peace

Although the peace deal is only months old, it has already lasted longer than many anticipated. Yet tensions in Tigray remain high, and other issues remain unresolved, including growing Oromo discontent, renegade Amhara militias and the continued presence of Eritrean troops.

Containing Congolese tensions

What happens to the volatile situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo if you throw presidential elections into the mix?

Rwanda's reputation management

Kigali's meddling in neighbouring Congo is becoming increasingly hard to deny, and Britain's plans to relocate asylum seekers to Rwanda will renew critical focus on President Paul Kagame's government. The country's slick public relations team is going to be working very, very hard.

Ghana is a test case

Ghana has already stopped paying interest on external debt, and it can't be long before it formally defaults. Other cash-strapped African governments will be watching the international response closely, and formulating their own policies accordingly.

It's getting hot in here

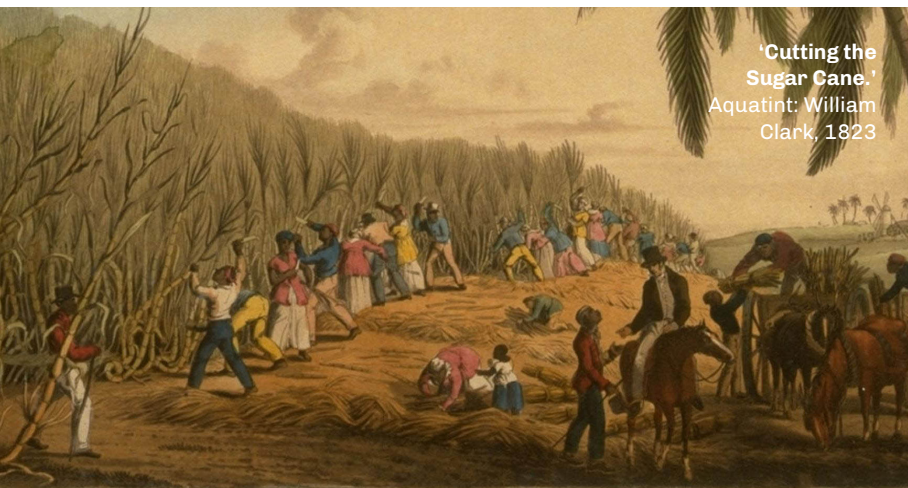
More droughts. More floods. More heat waves. More hunger. More death. None of it is our fault as citizens of African countries – but don't expect the people responsible to help out.

A headache for Emmanuel Macron

It may be an exercise in cynical geopolitics, but the putschist governments of Mali and Burkina Faso are tapping into very real resentments with their increasingly strident rejection of France. Paris has yet to find an effective response.

South Africa has stalled

Cyril Ramaphosa's position as president looks secure, but it doesn't really matter who is steering the ship if the engine has no fuel. Amid intensifying, indefinite rolling blackouts – with no solution in sight – the economic prognosis is grim. ■



'Cutting the
Sugar Cane.'

Aquatint: William
Clark, 1823

Chasing slavery's ghosts

Centuries ago, in Barbados, the Drax family developed the template for industrial-scale slavery. They were generously compensated by the British government for their 'loss' when slavery was abolished – but no reparations have ever been made to the tens of thousands of people who died on their plantations, or the societies which were permanently scarred by their crimes.

Howard W. French

In 2019, during a visit to Barbados, my stay was consumed with two searches that should never have been difficult.

The first, which led me along winding roads without signs into the breezy highlands of the island, took me the better part of an afternoon.

It led finally to the stolid ruins of a plantation estate that was founded in the early 1650s by James Drax – the man who did more than any other individual to establish a ridiculously profitable new

economic model in the Caribbean.

It was Drax who, on this very estate, refined and honed the production of sugar through the brutal organisation of enslaved men and women brought from Africa. In the process, he helped launch the British Empire – and made himself and subsequent generations of his family fantastically wealthy.

The second of my searches was more complicated and stretched out over several days. Its aim was to find what many historians believe may be the largest burial ground of enslaved Africans in



**Empire building:
Drax Hall in
Barbados, where
the foundations of
British colonialism
were laid.**

the Western Hemisphere. What I finally found at the end of an unmarked path, just before sunset one day – ironically boxed in by tall and swaying stalks of sugar – was a field said to contain the remains of hundreds of Africans, most of whom were worked to death by design. There is no monument to commemorate them.

Death by design

In the early 16th century, on the Atlantic island of São Tomé off the coast of Central Africa, the Portuguese first worked out the system of racial, transgenerational bondage known as chattel slavery, and married it to the quasi-industrial enterprise of producing sugar.

As I argue in my book, *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*, this would reign as the most lucrative and socially impactful commodity in the world until the American cotton boom that followed in its wake three centuries later (not coincidentally, white cotton farmers in

the American south employed many of the same practices).

But it was in Barbados, and in particular on the Drax plantation, where the economic potential of this brutal system became most apparent.

James Drax was the first big chattel slavery operator on Barbados. Sugar production processes on the island were copied from Brazil, where the commodity, the modern plantation and the new institution of chattel slavery had been transplanted from São Tomé in the 16th century. While other planters there were still focused on white indentured servants, Drax, one of Barbados's original English settlers, bought 22 Africans for the purpose of producing sugar in the Brazilian way in 1642. Drax purchased another 34 Africans two years later, and by the 1650s there were 200 Africans labouring and dying on his lands at any given time. This was an extraordinary number for any kind of European enterprise in this era.

Drax calculated that it was cheaper to

work enslaved Africans to their death and then replace them with newly-imported Africans, brought to Barbados in chains, than it was to provide better working conditions and basic healthcare.

No one was spared – including pregnant women who were forced into the fields, often carrying atop their heads large vats of dung to fertilise the quickly depleted soils. A consequence of this grisly bottom-line-dominated mindset was that the average life expectancy for Africans from the moment of arrival in Barbados was as low as five years. And this gradually became the template throughout the sugar-growing islands of the Caribbean.

Drax calculated that it was cheaper to work enslaved Africans to death than it was to provide better working conditions

The profit-obsessed Draxes were transformers in other ways as well. Africans taught him to plant sugar cuttings sideways in long trenches rather than upright, and this promoted much more rapid growth. James Drax was also a pioneer in integrated operations, moving the sugar boilers with their large chimneys, like the one in ruins I found during my visit, onto the farmland so that the crop could be converted into finished sugar in one continuous and finely synchronised operation.

According to the reparations commission of Caricom, the Caribbean regional body, 30,000 slaves died on the

various Drax plantations in the region. “The Drax family has done more harm and violence to the black people of Barbados than any other,” said committee chair Hilary Beckles.

Buried yet unresolved

The Drax plantation was lifted somewhat from its obscurity lately when it was reported that the Barbados government of Prime Minister Mia Motley is considering imposing reparation payments on the successors of the plantation’s founder, led by Richard Drax, who is a direct descendant of James Drax. This is at the recommendation of the Barbados national reparations commission.

Richard Drax is a member of the British Parliament, representing the ruling Conservative Party, and is worth an estimated \$180-million. He recently travelled to Barbados for a private meeting with the head of the reparations commission to discuss the issue.

The contents of that discussion have not been made public. Richard Drax did not respond to a request for comment from *The Continent*, and has previously said that he does not wish to comment on the reparation claims. In 2010, he told a British newspaper: “I can’t be held responsible for something 300 or 400 years ago.”

The concept of transgenerational guilt – meaning historical guilt assumed by the descendants of people who committed atrocities in the past – is contentious. Where slavery is involved, the British public itself is sharply divided on racial lines, with white people broadly opposing

reparations, and people of African descent even more broadly supporting them. There are few stories better suited than that of the Draxes, though, to support the arguments of those who today demand payment for the wrongs of history bound up in the transatlantic slave business, plantation agriculture and empire.

In 2020, an investigation by *The Observer* newspaper revealed that Richard Drax had not declared the value of the family plantation I visited, which sits on 617 acres of land. He inherited it in 2017 from his father, Walter Drax, when it was valued at £5.25-million.

It still produces sugar.

Building the West off Black labour

In 1836, the Drax family received the sum of £4,293 in compensation – worth a small fortune at the time – from the British government for the loss it suffered when

London abolished slavery throughout its empire three years earlier, forcing them to free 189 enslaved people. This payment to the Drax family was part of a broad post-abolition indemnification that Britain paid to its wealthy slave owners, the value of which amounted to \$16.5-billion in today's money – some 40% of the British treasury's annual output at the time.

The Drax family received compensation for the financial loss it suffered when slavery was abolished

Britain could afford this thanks to the vast wealth generated by sugar, which helped to turn an also-ran in the early imperial age into a pacesetter, and eventually into the world's dominant power.

Sugar income changed England in

**Sugar daddy:
Richard Drax
said he can't be
held responsible
for his family's
atrocities . Photo:
Getty Images**



Sugar's bitter fruits: Canecutters in Jamaica after slavery ended, mid-19th century. Over half of the enslaved were women.



many ways, from diet to democracy, through the birth of the coffee shop in Oxford and its rapid spread to London, where it spurred the creation of newspapers. But it also financed the country's muscle, allowing London to mount a fleet to take over Jamaica from Spain in 1655. The Draxes quickly invested in the chattel and plantation commodity businesses on that far larger island, too, swelling their fortune. The government of Jamaica is also considering demanding reparations from Richard Drax, according to media reports.

It was only through the extraction of labour from Africa on an enormous scale that Atlantic-facing Europe was able to eclipse China as the wealthiest and most powerful centre in the world; and in this, the plantations of the Caribbean were key.

It is also impossible to imagine Europe harnessing the continental Americas to its profit without the sacrifice of the millions of Africans whose enslavement made such a vast enterprise viable. This is what made

the West the West.

No one knows how today's claims against the Drax family will play out, but as someone who has grappled deeply with this history, I have a favourite solution.

The hilltop estate that produced so much wealth for the family and so much suffering and horror for the Africans brought there should be turned into a museum that spotlights the long-downplayed African origins of the modern age.

And the obscure burial ground down below should be hidden no more. Indeed, it should be made a world heritage site for pilgrimage in the memory of the anonymous dead interred there. ■

*Howard W. French is a journalist and author. His most recent book is *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War*. He is a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and a weekly columnist for *Foreign Policy* magazine.*

The case for reparations

The Caribbean is leading the way when it comes to holding colonial powers accountable for their role in the slave trade

Simon Allison

The campaign for reparations for slavery is not new. “It is an age-old demand, it goes back centuries, into the period of enslavement,” says David Comissiong. He is speaking to *The Continent* from his office in Bridgetown, Barbados, where he is the deputy chair of the country’s national task force on reparations. He is also the ambassador for Barbados to Caricom, the Caribbean regional body, and one of the region’s leading pan-Africanists.

For the most part, demands for reparations, or even any acknowledgment of guilt from nations and companies that perpetrated a centuries-long crime against humanity, have fallen on deaf ears.

But Caribbean islands are now making the demand for reparations a pillar of their foreign policy. “The Caribbean is the quintessential slave society,” says Comissiong. “We were shaped by the genocide of the native people of the Caribbean, followed by the centuries of African enslavement.”

A sorry sight

A regional reparations commission put together a 10-point plan outlining what those reparations should look like. In 2016, formal letters of demand were sent to six western European nations – Britain, Denmark, France, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain – inviting them to meet to discuss the issue.

“Our position is that Europe purchased its development at the expense of the underdevelopment of the Caribbean, of the systematic looting of the Caribbean,” explains Comissiong. “Multiple generations of our ancestors were forced to work on these slave plantations, never getting to enjoy the fruits of their labour, which instead were siphoned off to European institutions, companies, families, and ultimately European nations. Our concept of reparations is that because of this history, we now possess a fundamental right to development; and the nations and societies that looted us, and plundered us, are now under a corresponding obligation to help facilitate that development.”

None of the six western nations has agreed to a meeting. Nonetheless, says Comissiong, “we are making progress”. He cites the 2019 example of the University of Glasgow, which signed an agreement with the University of the West Indies to fund a centre for development research worth \$24-million, after it found it had benefited financially from Scottish slave traders.

And this week the Church of England released a damning report that found

the church knowingly profited from the slave trade, and pledged to establish a \$124-million fund to “address past wrongs”. It avoided the word “reparations”.

More significant still was the apology in December, by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, for the Netherlands’ role in promoting and profiting from slavery – an unprecedented admission from a former colonial power, though he too made no explicit mention of reparations.

‘Uncomfortable’ conversations

Until now, the Caricom reparations commissions and its associated national task forces have focused mainly on leveling reparations claims against national governments and major companies, because international law is relatively clear on their historical responsibilities.

Nevertheless, “we should not simply see reparations as whether a legal case can be successfully mounted against a particular entity. There is also a moral dimension,” says Comissiong.

This raises awkward questions for a number of rich and famous westerners, most notably the Hollywood actors Benedict Cumberbatch and Edward Norton, both of whom are from families that prospered because of chattel slavery. “These things are uncomfortable,” Norton said earlier this month.

The Caribbean is working hard to get global support for its campaign. Barbados Prime Minister Mia Motley recently wrote to the African Union to request its support, and the continental body is likely to discuss the issue at its next summit in February. After all, the slave trade had



a devastating impact in Africa too. In its previous iteration, the Organisation of African Unity was a key driver of the reparations debate, but momentum on this has stalled in recent years – in part, says Comissiong, due to intimidation by western leaders.

This time around, as the climate crisis worsens, there is even more at stake.

The principle that underpins the campaign for reparations for slavery – that of reparative justice – is the same that drives demands for climate justice. This is no coincidence: after all, it is western industrialisation, powered by slavery, that is the main driver of human-induced climate change.

“First you injured us in order to develop your industry [through slavery], then you profit from your industry, and that has created conditions that now injure us a second time,” says Comissiong. “You must now do what is necessary to help us protect ourselves from this injury, to adapt to this injury ... if that does not happen, that is going to poison human relationships going forward.” ■

2023 is going to be another great year for African cinema

From streaming gems to festival darlings and commercial enterprises, there are plenty of movies to get excited about this year – and a few titles are already standing out from the crowd. **By Wilfred Okiche**



A Sunday Affair

Netflix and EbonyLife Films join forces once again for the romantic drama *A Sunday Affair*. Nollywood favourites Dakore Egbuson-Akande and Nse Ikpe-Etim play best friends who fall in love with a charming and very eligible Lagos bachelor, played by Oris Erhuero. What could possibly go wrong?

The Cemetery of Cinema

With *The Cemetery of Cinema*, Thierno Souleymane Diallo continues his active excavation of his country's past. This

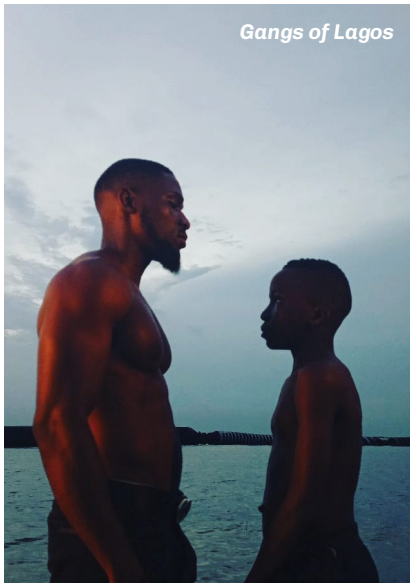
documentary, which premieres at the Berlinale in February, has the filmmaker trace Guinea's film heritage and history while contextualising the importance of film archives.



Gangs of Lagos

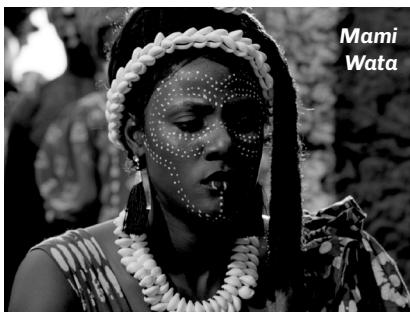
The crime thriller *Gangs of Lagos*, produced and directed by Jádé Osiberu, arrives ahead of the three-year deal the Nigerian filmmaker inked with Amazon Prime. It follows a group of friends navigating the troubled streets of a storied Lagos neighbourhood. Tobi Bakre and Adesua Etomi-Wellington star with Akin Omotoso co-producing.

Gangs of Lagos



Mami Wata

Nigerian director CJ Obasi's long-gestating *Mami Wata* will be debuting at the Sundance film festival before bowing in theatres shortly after. With entrancing imagery, Obasi revisits the mythical being at the centre of an enduring folklore, teasing out a violent clash of ideologies and a crisis of faith.



**Mami
Wata**



Milisuthando

Milisuthando Bongela, the former arts and culture editor at the *Mail & Guardian*, makes her debut with this coming-of-age personal essay on love and what it means to become human within the context of race. *Milisuthando* explores her memories and experiences growing up unaware of apartheid.

Shimoni



Shimoni

This darkly textured drama screens in a few days at the Rotterdam film festival. Kenya's Angela Wanjiku Wamai makes her directing debut with this engrossing tale of a man (a fantastic Justin Mirichii) who struggles to assimilate into normal society after serving time for a brutal murder. ■



Not digging it: Outside Ellis Park, this tableau depicts the 1922 *Rand Rebellion*, an armed uprising of white miners in the Witwatersrand. Photo: James Oatway/New Frame



What goes around: Six metres in diameter, the *Wellness Wheel*, in Indwe Park, connects city landmarks with the medicinal plants, fungi and insects that surround them.

PHOTO ESSAY

Tiling over the cracks

Johannesburg is home to exclusive – and exclusionary – art galleries, where air-conditioned exhibits are viewed by a privileged few. But Andrew Lindsay did things differently. His mosaics can be found on in public spaces in bustling inner city, accessible to everyone. Lindsay died in 2021, but his work lives on through the Spaza Art Gallery, which he founded.



(C)artography: The *Randjeslaagte Triangle* (left) depicts the original boundaries of inner city Johannesburg. To the right, a wall at Andrew Lindsay's house in Troyeville, Johannesburg. Photo: James Oatway/New Frame



Tall order: The *iThemba Tower* (left) community art project at the Spaza Art Gallery. Photo: James Oatway/New Frame. Chip off the old block: A mosaic (right) in the National Union of Mineworkers building in Marshalltown.

The poverty we live

To measure “lived poverty,” Afrobarometer goes beyond official GDP numbers to ask ordinary people how often they experience shortages of five basic necessities – food, clean water, medicines or medical care, cooking fuel, and a cash income.

When we asked 48,084 adults in 34 countries across the continent in 2019/2021, we found that large numbers of Africans were unable to meet their most basic needs.

On average, six in 10 respondents (61%) reported going without needed medical care at least once in the previous 12 months, and nearly as many suffered shortages of clean water (55%), food

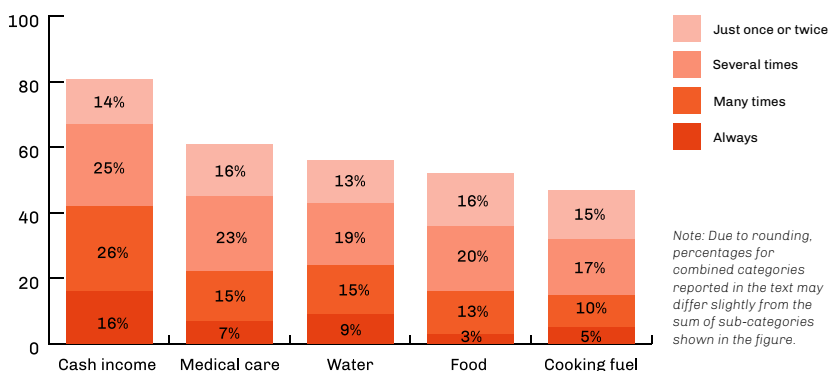
(52%), and cooking fuel (46%).

Reflecting the continent’s employment crisis, the most common form of deprivation remained a lack of access to a cash income – 80% of those surveyed said they had gone without an income at least once in the previous 12 months, and 42% had done so “many times” or “always”.

Of course, lived poverty rates depend on where you live. For example, while only one in 10 Mauritians (10%) experienced a shortage of food in the previous year, three quarters of citizens in Liberia (73%), Zambia (75%), Niger (76%), and Malawi (79%) went without enough to eat.

Next week we’ll look at whether – and where – things are getting better or worse.

Lived poverty: The proportion of people who went without basic necessities in the previous year | 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.

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

"He wasn't just the king of Afrobeat, he was also a jolly good Fela."



- 1_ What is the capital of Barbados?
- 2_ Which Nigerian artist was known as the king of Afrobeat?
- 3_ Which currency is used in Egypt?
- 4_ How many times did football legend Pelé visit Nigeria?
- 5_ Mohammed VI is which country's king?
- 6_ What is Kenya's flag carrier airline called?
- 7_ Zanu-PF is which country's ruling party?
- 8_ In which country was the "Year of Return" celebrated in 2019?
- 9_ The Harmattan season occurs between late November and mid-March in which region?
- 10_ Côte d'Ivoire is known as the world's largest producer of which export?

HOW DID I DO?

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

New year, new coup?



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Happy 2023, dear reader! We come to you fresh and rested from our lovely little holiday break – while we did try to take a break from the news, we must admit we found our thoughts drifting to our favourite leaders: How they spent their holidays; what they feasted upon at their festive banquets; and whether they were knocked sideways by the back-to-work blues as badly as the rest of us.

On Christmas Day, were they left dismayed and bereft when they realised they must have landed on the wrong side of Santa's naughty or nice list? Were they *surprised*? Or did Mr Claus not dare naughtyify them, lest he end up intercepted at the border and bundled off to a Rwandan summer camp.

Perhaps when one is a member of the exclusive club of big boy presidents it's more of a Secret Santa situation. ("Tear gas from *Ammo Amass Amat's* spring collection? Aw, you guys really get me!")

For many, though, it's the shift into the new year that matters most: a time to either let go of old grudges – or declare that this year they're getting rid of the toxic people in their lives.



UN-wanted: Mali gave the UN's Barbara Manzi (left, white) the old heave ho.

Burkina Faso, for example, might fall into the latter category. Clearly desperate to cleanse its aura of negativity, the military-run country declared United Nations representative Barbara Manzi to be persona non grata, and demanded that she leave the country.

While no official reason was given, local media quoted sources as saying the ruling junta had decided that Manzi was "tarnishing the image" of the country. So they were simply manifesting their vision of, like, removing bad vibes, you know?

Then France said the Burkinabe junta had written to them demanding they recall their ambassador too. This move came just weeks after authorities in the country suspended the broadcast of Radio France International.

Break-ups are hard, even when "it's not me, it's coup".

But while some are breaking up, others are making up.

The Mali cast of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashes*, led by Colonel Assimi Goïta, made headlines last July when 49 soldiers from Côte d'Ivoire were arrested in Bamako, accused of being mercenaries.

To work through the diplomatic spat that followed, an extra group therapy session per week for Ecowas leaders was convened and Togo, bless its heart, was called upon to mediate. Three of the soldiers were released as a gesture of goodwill, but in December the remaining soldiers were sentenced to 20 years in prison for “conspiring against the government and undermining state security” and the three who had been released were also sentenced – to death.

But as the calendar reset, it seems so too did diplomatic relations:

Last Friday Goïta pardoned all the soldiers, saying this illustrated his commitment to “peace, dialogue and preservation of relations with fraternal countries”. When they arrived home, Côte d'Ivoire's President Alassane Ouattara greeted them personally and said that with the crisis over, their country could now “resume relations with the brother country of Mali” ... so sweet!

Sadly, rekindling old flames doesn't always turn out well. For Morocco and Algeria, for example, after the former's Football Association announced that Morocco will not be taking part in the Africa Nations Championship, which kicks off this week. They said Algeria was refusing to let the Moroccan team to fly directly to the country on Royal

Air Maroc. Not especially surprising, considering Algeria cut diplomatic ties with Morocco in October 2021 and banned its aircrafts from entering its airspace, retaliation for Morocco supporting secessionists, it claimed, and supposedly starting wildfires in the north of the country. The football saga will no doubt be fanning those old flames, regardless of who sparked them.

Seems some of our leaders are just happy to be 'New Year, old me' – and this time we're not talking about age!

This time of year is when many of us are doing the whole “New Year, new me” thing but it seems some of our leaders are just happy to be “New Year, old me” – and this time we're not talking about age!

In Zimbabwe President Mnangagwa has signed into law the Health Services Bill, which prohibits health workers from striking for more than three days – anything more could see them fined or even sent to prison. This is a serious blow to the underfunded health sector, whose demands the government will now be empowered to simply ignore.

But let us not lose hope so early in the new year. In Uganda, an end to the recent Ebola epidemic has been declared. Since the first case in September, 55 people have died – but 87 have recovered, and now health authorities say the danger is over.

May these glad tidings set the tone for 2023 – for them, for us, and for our whole weird and glorious continent. ■

Can a currency redesign tackle criminality in Nigeria?

New banknotes might help tackle counterfeiting, but it might help more if they didn't look the same as before

Tunde Oseni and Damilola Adeniyi

Nigerians disagree on many things, but one area of consensus is that criminality and corruption are major challenges. Yet the latest attempt to tackle these issues by the central bank has divided the nation. With just a couple of weeks until the 2023 general elections, the central bank has redesigned the country's currency, the naira, but the move has not proved popular with everyone.

The logic of the change is that it will kill a number of birds with one stone. The length of time many banknotes have already been in circulation has led to wear and tear that makes it easier for counterfeiters to pass off fakes.

The new notes, according to the central bank and the government, contain security features that will make it more difficult to copy them.

At the same time, central bank governor Godwin Emefiele has said that he expects the new banknotes to help control inflation. This might happen, for example, if the level of counterfeiting was so high that it replicated the effect of the central bank printing money.

The problem for Emefiele is that he

overplayed his hand, claiming the move would also reduce corruption and money laundering. Nigerians were therefore confused and disappointed when the new notes proved to be almost identical to the old ones. The main difference appears to be a change of colour, prompting critics to ask why the bank had not been able to find a single decent graphic designer in a country of 213-million people.

Critics have asked why the bank has not been able to find a decent designer

Emefiele may be right that when Nigerians head to the banks to swap new notes for old ones ahead of the end of January deadline, many counterfeit notes will be removed from the money supply. But after such bold promises, this will not be enough for his reforms to be seen as a success. ■

Tunde Oseni is an associate professor at Lead City University, Ibadan. Damilola Adeniyi is a researcher in Nigeria. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



The Big Picture

Photo: Ashraf Shazly/AFP

Fronds with benefits: A Sudanese woman gathers palm leaves, which she and her fellow villagers will use to weave baskets, food trays and other items, in the small hamlet of Al-Saqqai, about 57km north of the country's capital, Khartoum. In Sudan, the date palm is considered as both a sacred and a mundane resource, and is widely used in spiritual and physical rites.



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