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The Continent



Illustration: Dionisio Matavele

**Masterminding
Mozambique's
insurgency**



COVER: Mozambique's president spent this week jetting around the world, shoring up alliances and securing support for the war in his country's north. He needs money and soldiers to ensure lucrative gas projects go ahead. Against him, an insurgency that grew out of inequality and opposition to those projects continues. In this edition, *The Continent* profiles the insurgency's most public figurehead, pictured on our cover – and the key to understanding their tactics and motivations. (p10)

Inside:

- The icebreaker heading to the Arctic to find a lost ship (p9)
- **Free haircuts** in Cameroon's war-hit Anglophone region (p15)
- The **DRC's largest festival** returned last week as 35,000

partied in Goma (p18)

■ **Africa at Sundance:** The films you ought to watch (p22)

■ **GoShare: Connecting donors to students** unable to pay and graduate (p27)

■ **Afcon is over.** Were you paying attention? Take our **quiz** and let us know (p28)

We'll only be gone a week : *This is the last episode in this season of The Continent. But don't worry, we'll only be gone for one week. Season 4 was quite a ride. Bombs, corruption and coups dominated the news. So many coups. But then we had football, investigations and top-notch independent journalism from and about this continent of ours. We asked for your thoughts on running advertisements, and now we have some... and you supported us with over \$5,000 to pay for more quality journalism. And more quality journalism you will get. We'll be back for Season 5 on 26 February. See you then.*

Give the gift of journalism : *What better way to observe Valentine's Day than by sending The Continent to someone you think would benefit from quality journalism. If you don't observe the day, forward it anyway to do your bit to save the world.*

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chibay/AFP
via Getty Images



KENYA

Dear taxpayers, pls pimp my ride

The State House of Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta has said that it needs an increased car budget and has revised its annual budget to the tune of a 47.7% increase — approximately \$2.6-million more. Kenyatta apparently needs new presidential cars. He will then also require an increased fuel allocation which will put the amount at \$870,000, four times more. The treasury has already allocated \$1-million for the renovation of Kenyatta's residence and other state lodges.

CAMEROON

Gold bonanza, but for whomst?

Oriole Resources, a company registered in London, says its exploration project in north eastern Cameroon has found gold reserves so abundant, they meet the “bonanza” grading. One of the drill holes at the Wapouzé gold project, 90% owned by Oriole, revealed a section of earth holding 36.06 grams of gold per tonne. Gold reserves are graded “bonanza” if the soil holds up to 31 grams per tonne. The company also has a more advanced undertaking in Senegal: Senala gold project.

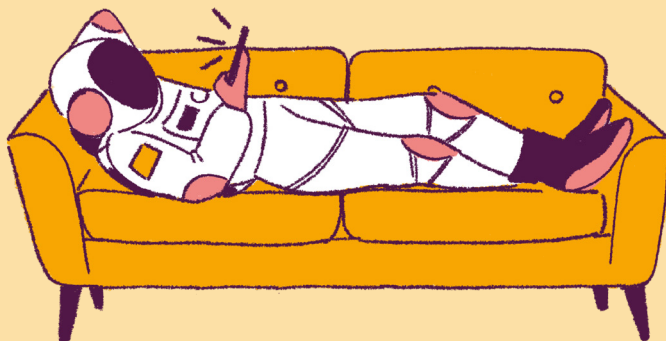
EGYPT

Cairo drops big bills on big guns

On Tuesday, Cairo signed a \$1.6-billion deal to buy arms from South Korea. This is the biggest export contract that South Korea has ever signed for the particular guns Egypt wants: K9 self-propelled howitzers. They are artillery weapons that resemble tanks. This came a week after a \$2.5-billion arms agreement with the United States. In the same week, the US cut \$130-million off its military aid to Egypt claiming outrage over human rights abuses, further laying bare the mixed messages coming from the West.

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UGANDA-DRC

Cough up, Kampala

The International Court of Justice has ordered Uganda to pay \$325-million in reparations to the Democratic Republic of Congo, for Kampala's invasion and brutal occupation of Congolese territory

between 1998-2003. The Court said Uganda owes reparations for the deaths of 10,000-15,000 people and damage to property and natural resources. In the late 1990s, Uganda and Rwanda backed Laurent-Désiré Kabila to overthrow Mobutu Sese Seko and then fought the Congolese army, and each other, in the mineral-rich Ituri region.



Photo: Peter Busomoke/AFP

INTERNATIONAL

Putin: Off my lawn!

In the escalating quarrel between Russia, the US and Europe over Ukraine, the Russian leader just flashed the nuclear card. He said that if Ukraine joins Nato, and attempts to take Crimea by military means, all of Europe will be forced into a war with Russia, "and there will be no winners in a war with the world's largest nuclear power." Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine, in 2014, and over the past month has been building up its forces along the Ukrainian border.

GHANA

Fine we'll pay, but...

Maxam Ghana Limited, the Spanish company responsible for the truck that exploded in January in Prestea Huni-Valley in the country's west, killing 13 people, has been fined \$6-million, for breaches in its handling of mining and civil works explosives. The company has agreed to pay the fine but also said that "based on a different interpretation of the applicable regulations, we believe that Maxam has not committed any of those breaches".



Engine of industry: Aliko Dangote is pouring oil on Nigeria's climate fires. Photo by Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP

NIGERIA

Cars, oil and maybe net-zero

Aliko Dangote's automobile company has started assembling vehicles in Nigeria. The plant will reportedly assemble about 43,000 a year. Nigeria's car demand is estimated at 100,000 units a year. The Nigerian tycoon is also building a refinery in Lagos, which will process about 540,000 barrels of crude oil a day. All this is despite a new climate law passed last November, which is supposed to push Nigeria towards net-zero greenhouse gas emission between 2050 and 2070.

SUDAN

Osman freed after two-week silence

Amira Osman, whose arrest prompted condemnation from the United Nations, has been freed after two weeks in incommunicado detention. Reacting to her arrest, the UN noted a "pattern of violence against women's rights activists [which] severely risks reducing their political participation in Sudan". Osman had taken part in recent anti-coup demonstrations. In 2002, she was convicted and fined for wearing trousers and in 2013 was charged with "indecent dress" for going out without a headscarf.

SOMALIA

US clips Somali leaders' wings

This week the United States announced visa restrictions against current and former Somali officials who have "undermined" the democratic process in Somalia, as well as non-officials accused of doing the same. "Somalia's national and federal member state leaders must follow through on their commitments to complete the parliamentary process in a credible and transparent manner by 25 February, which will further lay the groundwork for responsive governance in Somalia," said secretary of state Antony Blinken.

South Africa

The world's most difficult ship hunt

South Africa's icebreaker research vessel is tackling the Antarctic to find a century-old wreck

The *S.A. Agulhas II* spends most of its time resupplying South Africa's research stations in the Antarctic. With a reinforced hull to crush ice, a crane for putting supplies on top of ice packs, and an epic range, it was built to tackle the world's harshest seas.

Now, the *Agulhas* is on its way south to find the *Endurance*, which sank in 1915 in one of the most famous maritime disasters

of all time. The boat — one of the strongest wooden ships ever built — carried 28 crew on their way to cross the Antarctic on foot. But then it got stuck in ice and, eight months later, the ice crushed it.

The crew would eventually all escape. They took with them the coordinates of the sinking, as well as photographs of the *Endurance* vanishing underwater.

Agulhas was above the coordinates in 2019 before it lost contact with the remote submarine it had sent out to find *Endurance*. This 2022 expedition has a better submarine, as well as helicopters to build a base on the ice so scientists can drill a hole down to launch the submarine if *Agulhas* becomes surrounded by ice.

If *Endurance* is found, it will be scanned in 3D and then left alone as it is a designated monument. Scientists on board *Agulhas* will also do research on the impact of climate change and other pollution in that part of the Antarctic. ■



Mozambique

Jet-setting president locks down support

Nyusi is flying around the world to shore up support against the insurgency – and to get gas deals going

Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi had little time to celebrate his birthday on Tuesday, as he was flying around the globe making deals to keep the counter-insurgency show in Cabo Delgado on the road.

His diplomatic whirlwind began late last month when he hosted the CEO of TotalEnergies, Patrick Pouyanné, who promised to resume gas production once the security situation had been resolved.

There are billions of dollars at stake for Mozambique, which is relying on a gas bonanza to finance future development – and to pay off existing debt, much of which was acquired as a result of corruption.

With the Mozambican army having failed to contain the conflict, Nyusi's best bet is to make sure that the Rwandan and southern African military interventions

keep their boots on the ground.

To that end, Nyusi commemorated Mozambican Heroes' Day in Mueda in Cabo Delgado, with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa as the guest of honour. From there, Nyusi flew to Addis Ababa for the African Union conference. Days earlier, the AU's Peace and Security Council had adopted a resolution praising the contributions of SADC and Rwanda, which has also sent troops – and calling on AU members and other "partners" to support those missions.

The AU hailed Rwanda's support, in particular, as an "African solution to African problems" – although it does require external funding to continue. Rwanda has asked the European Union to finance the mission.

To help that request along, Nyusi stepped back onto his chartered jet in Addis Ababa and set off for Brussels for a meeting with the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. From there, he flew to Kigali for an audience with Rwandan President Paul Kagame – who had just signed a "collaboration agreement" with none other than TotalEnergies CEO Pouyanné. That afternoon, he flew to Beira to meet with Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Nyusi might be Mozambique's president, but when it comes to the Cabo Delgado insurgency he's not the only one calling the shots. ■

Mozambique's most wanted man



Photo: Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP

A young footballer from the remote district of Palma is now on the US's global terror list – and Mozambique's defence minister has promised to take him dead or alive. Meet Bonomado Machude Omar, the elusive leader of the Cabo Delgado insurgency.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In a report this week, the International Crisis Group described the Islamist insurgency in northern Mozambique, now in its fifth year, as "among the gravest threats to peace and security in Africa". But the origin of this threat, and the identity of the insurgents, have long been shrouded in mystery. In this edition, The Continent profiles the insurgency's most public figurehead – and the key to understanding their tactics and motivations.*

Luis Nhachote and Milda Quarria

His name is Bonomado Machude Omar, born in Palma district, in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique. He's been involved in the insurrection in Cabo Delgado since it started in 2017, and is now – according to the US State Department – the most prominent face of an insurgency that has crippled the region.

Last April, the head of Mozambique's military, Cristóvão Chume, promised Omar "will be captured dead or alive". Chume is now the country's defence minister. On 6 August last year, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken designated Omar as a member of the Islamic State and a "global terrorist", in a public statement.

Described as both quiet and brutal, Omar served as a navy soldier in Mozambique's defence force from 2003 to 2005. But he now wants to tear down the very state that he served, and replace it with a caliphate.

Who is Bonomado Machude Omar?

In an article in September 2020, Mozambique's Centro de Jornalismo Investigativo (CJI) identified Bonomado Machude Omar, also called Omar Saide or Sheik Omar, as the speaker in a video which went viral in social media in March 2020. The speaker in the video claims to be a leader of the insurgency, which by that time had been going on for three years.

The following year, Mozambican think tank OMR published a further profile of

the man – explaining how he was born in Palma in the village of Ncumbi, and moved to Mocimboa da Praia at the age of five after his father died. His mother remarried, and Omar's stepfather introduced him to Islam, which he studied and mastered. He finished 10th grade at Januário Pedro High School in Mocimboa da Praia and, according to former teachers, was a calm young man, a good student, and a good football player.

Described as both quiet and brutal, Omar served as a navy soldier in Mozambique's defence force from 2003 to 2005. But he now wants to tear down the very state that he served, and replace it with a caliphate.

After leaving school, he served in the navy in Pemba, and then moved to an African Muslim boarding school to finish 12th grade. He was popular among his peers, known for his sense of justice and protection of the younger ones. One of his hobbies was playing football. Due to his height, between 1.80m and 1.90m, and the fact that he played in midfield, he acquired the nickname of Patrick Vieira, the French footballer who made his name at Arsenal.

He made a living selling vegetables and Muslim clothing at a market in Pemba, on behalf of a foreign merchant, who is said to have been either Tanzanian or Somali. He travelled to Tanzania and South



Locked, Unloaded: Weapons
confiscated from Cabo
Delgado insurgents. Photo:
 Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP

Africa. He then returned to Mocímboa da Praia, where he built a mosque, as well as a stall for the sale of trinkets acquired in Tanzanian markets or in the city of Pemba.

Then he participated in the first attacks on Mocímboa da Praia in October 2017, and took refuge in the bush. It is still unclear how he became radicalised, or what prompted the turn to violence.

For his military skill and camouflage ability he acquired locally the nickname “King of the Forest”. He is, the OMR thinktank says, currently the leader of the insurgents in Mozambique – something confirmed by the US Department of State statement last year, which describes him also as being “the lead facilitator and communications conduit for the group”.

Promise to the people

Bonomado led the insurgency’s attacks on Palma in March 2021, and on Mocímboa da Praia a year before. Both towns have since been retaken by Mozambique’s

military with the help of the Rwandan Defence Force; Mozambique was unable to hold or retake them on its own.

It was after the fall of Mocímboa in 2020 that Bonomado made his now famous speech, recorded on a cameraphone and distributed far and wide. It gives a sense of his motivations.

Standing in front of the town’s police station – a potent symbol of state power that had fallen to the jihadis – Bonomado told the local population that they would not kill anyone or steal from the people, despite facing opposition from them. “We know that your will was for us to disappear,” he told the crowd. “But God has blessed us and we have gained more strength.

“We came the first time, we’re back, this is the second time, we’re giving you another chance; we’re not going to kill anyone, we’re not going to destroy anything that belongs to the people, everything we spoil will be the government’s,” he said.

“We occupy to show that the government today is unfair. It humiliates the poor and gives advantage to the bosses. It’s the lower class who get detained, so that’s not justice,” he continued.

He said his group was working for an Islamic government – and emphasised that “we are children from here, and these faces are not new. There are so many of us in the bush.”

Despite his noble words, the insurgents have been implicated in multiple brutal massacres of civilian populations – just like the security forces they are fighting. And Omar, according to one source with an intimate knowledge of the group’s operations, plays a leading role in commanding military operations.

The insurgents are divided into as many as 30 smaller groups which each having their own specialisation, such as bomb-making, tunnel-boring, and intelligence-gathering, and the leaders of each group report to Omar.

The group finances its activities through mineral smuggling and drug trafficking, and this too allegedly runs through him, the source said.

Due to the shadowy nature of the insurgent group, Omar could not be reached for comment.

A new Dhlakama?

Since that day in Mocimboa in 2020 – and the fall of Palma in March 2021 – the Mozambique government, with the help in particular of troops from Rwanda, have got back on the front foot. The towns have been retaken, and Omar is thought to be moving from base to base, as troops from

Mozambique, Rwanda, and the SADC mission in Mozambique dismantle bases that they find.

But the appeal of Omar and his men to the dispossessed of Cabo Delgado remains a danger, warns Mozambican researcher João Feijó, the author of the OMR think tank’s report on Omar and other leading insurgents.

“Various testimonies describe him both as someone sinister and brutal, but also with a sense of justice,” Feijó told *The Continent* in an interview last week.

“There are several factors that produce this type of leaders: radicalisation through studies in madrasas, revolt with the concrete experience of poverty and marginalisation and even opportunism, which takes advantage of the desperation of communities,” Feijó said.

“I draw a parallel with Afonso Dhlakama,” Feijó added, referring to the late leader of the Mozambican resistance movement and later opposition party, Renamo. “He was the protagonist of a civil war tearing up the country, but he attracted crowds and was very popular.”

The success of such populists underlines the need for any solution to the conflict to include social inclusion, and meeting the basic needs of communities.

“I am not against defence and security solutions, but this approach must be accompanied by the creation of jobs for young people, the provision of basic social services, respect for human rights and incentives for the democratic participation of communities in the political and economic life of the country,” Feijó said. ■



Hair to help: Walters Ngalle Ekie is a cut above the rest.
Photos: Isifu Wirfengla

The humanitarian barber of Buea

Walters Ngalle Ekie – ‘Uncle the Barber’ to his customers – travels Cameroon’s south west, part of the Anglophone region that is embroiled in armed conflict with the state, giving orphans a touch of affection in cruel times: free haircuts.

Isifu Wirfengla

Six years ago, Walters Ngalle Ekie was hawking watermelons on the streets of Buea, the main town of English-speaking southwestern Cameroon. Last month, he was grooming Afcon football stars, as the official barber for the Gambia and Sierra Leone teams.

His journey into haircuts started when he asked one of his best clients



Striking success: Ekie with Gambian players he has shorn.

in the watermelon business to give him 500 francs (less than \$1). “He said he didn’t have but could teach me how to get more than 500 francs.” The man, Louis Mario, then taught Ekie how to trim hair.

In 2017, the year that Ekie started work as a barber, war came to his home region. When President Paul Biya’s government cracked down on Anglophone lawyers and teachers protesting marginalisation within the French majority government, secessionists took up arms in response. Pro-separation militias continue to engage government forces in a war in which both sides have been accused of committing atrocities.

More than 3,500 people have been killed and about 700,000 people forced to flee the country’s English-speaking regions. In Buea, where Ekie’s barber shop is located, the Cameroon army

frequently clashes with the “Amba Boys”, as the Ambazonia separatist group is known locally.

This turn of events might have snuffed out a smaller spirit but in the gloom of conflict, Ekie has found a way to pay forward Mario’s generosity to him. Ekie travels to towns, cities and villages in the region, offering haircuts for free and training to those who would like to become barbers.

“I have offered close to 1000 free haircuts and trained many youths,” he tells *The Continent*.

A haircut might seem like a small thing but this act of touch, care and affection goes a long way, especially for children without parents.

“Some orphans told me their life has changed thanks to Walters,” says Buea-based reporter Batata Boris. “His kindness and affection with orphans earned him the title: Uncle the Barber.”

From a humble background himself, Ekie knew intuitively that a little gesture of help can mean a lot. “The community was there for me and I am giving back what I now have.” But it is also “what has brought me a lot of recommendations from other clients,” he says. It’s good for the kids but

also for his business – and he is an astute businessman.

Ekie has a strong presence and influence on social media and it is there that he has established connections with barbers in the United Kingdom and the United States, who share barbering tips with him. He created *Battle of the Barbers Africa*, a showcase of haircutting talent, make-up artistry, hairdressing and braiding flair. The last edition attracted participants from as far as the US. It was also via social media that Ekie struck deals with the football federations of The Gambia and Sierra Leone.

When the AFCON draw was done, Ekie realised that Tunisia, Mali, Mauritania and The Gambia would lodge and play group matches in the south west region. A big opportunity for him. He reached out to federation figures and some of the players via social media. “That’s how I got the opportunity to render my services to The Gambia and Sierra Leone.”

James Gomez, Saidy Janko, Baboucarr Gaye, Noah Sonko Sundberg are just some of the players who received a trim from Uncle the Barber.

“I had a great time with them,” Ekie says. The players were very friendly and very nice. Very open to me.” ■





PHOTO FEATURE

The show must go on

Never mind the lava, the DRC's biggest music festival has returned to Goma

Mohamed Keita

Globally, cultural producers have been among the hardest hit by Covid-19, but few have had to brave as many extraordinary odds as the organisers of the Amani Festival. The Democratic Republic of Congo's largest cultural event was postponed twice last year – first thanks to the pandemic, and then because

a volcanic eruption that sent a river of molten lava streaming into the outskirts of the host city. But last weekend the annual arts and music event, which has in the past hosted some of Africa's biggest musicians, including Youssou N'Dour, Fally Ipupa and Sauti Sol, returned to the eastern city of Goma. Nearly 35,000 people were in attendance, according to festival organisers.



Named after the Swahili word for peace, Amani began as a space for young people to gather outside of places of worship or political rallies.

“For Goma’s population, the Amani Festival is a reminder of our diversity, of our unity around culture. Congolese always gather around music and dance,” says founding member Linda Bauma, a business lawyer and poet.

Along the way, the festival has endured more than its fair share of setbacks. With the backing of late Belgian entrepreneur Éric de Lamotte, and hundreds of volunteers, the festival was set to launch in August 2013, but that was not to be. “A week before the festival, bombs fell on the headquarters of Monusco [the United Nations’ mission in the DRC], which was less than a kilometre from where we were,” Bauma remembers.

It was eventually held in February 2014. Save for two postponements in

2021, Amani has taken place every February since it began.

In 2017, a drunk police officer fatally shot Djo Paluku, an artist who volunteered at the festival. “For three days, we were on the edges of our nerves and the day after the festival’s end, we were burying Djo,” Bauma tells *The Continent*. The main stage is named in his memory.

In the lead-up to the 2020 festival, organisers received death threats from a group of local youths opposed to the festival taking place in Goma. In a colossal irony, the group threatened to grenade the festival of peace because they wanted it to be held in Beni, the epicentre of brutal violence in eastern Congo.

The event relies on 800 volunteers, and a shoestring budget of \$350,000 stumped up by local sponsors. Monusco provides equipment, transportation and the supply of water tanks and generators. Private

businesses and foreign embassies help with fundraising.

Organising each Amani Festival is an exercise in pushing beyond limits. “We are always confronted with unexpected challenges and we have to be resourceful,” says Bauma. The inclusion of international artists fulfils one of the festival’s major goals: to change the global narrative of the city long associated with war and sexual violence.

“When you googled Goma, it was recognised as the global capital of sexual violence, that X number of women were raped every 48 hours, or that X number were raped each two minutes,” Bauma says. She has lived through three conflicts in eastern Congo in the devastating fallout of the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. She recalls fleeing Goma in 1996 as Rwanda invaded Congo in the first of two wars. In 2012, she stayed put as a Rwandan-backed rebel group

marched into the city. “Some people fled. We stayed. We were two days under our beds, hearing the crackling of bullets.” Bauma believes these experiences forged Goma’s resilience.

Today, a cursory search of images of Goma will yield results of a panoramic view of this city at the foot of Africa’s most active volcano: Mount Nyiragongo. The devastation caused by Nyiragongo in May 2021, which forced the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of residents, dominates search results. The people of Bauma’s hometown remain unseen, however.

“You don’t see the young people who are starting businesses,” she says. “You don’t see this young woman who has created earrings with volcanic stones. You don’t see all these young people producing coffee. You don’t see the chocolate now produced in Goma. You don’t see how beautiful the landscape is,





and how you can enjoy a boat ride on the lake or a barbeque on Tchegeira island.”

Chris Ayale, the founder of Kivu Green, an online platform connecting local farmers with customers for farm to table produce, got his start through Amani. His business makes locally sourced agricultural products cheaper and more accessible.

Amani has been a boon for the local economy. It now features panel

discussions on a variety of topics, including women’s issues and gender equality, and hosts an artist development incubator pairing local musicians with big name artists.

In turn, some of these artists have recorded portions of their albums in Goma. The festival also supports a start-up competition, allowing young entrepreneurs to compete for seed funding. ■

Africa at Sundance

Wilfred Okiche

At last year's Sundance Film Festival in the United States, Nigerian filmmaker Akinola Davies Jr won the grand prize in the short film category for his Lagos-set coming-of-age story *Lizard*.

This year, Sierra Leonian-American writer/director Nikyatu Jusu claimed the grand prize for her debut feature *Nanny* – a horror fantasia that incorporates West African myths like mami water and Anansi the spider into the story of an undocumented Senegalese woman (Anna Diop) hustling in New York City.

While no other African filmmakers took home prizes in any of the festival's major categories, they nevertheless made a decent showing at Sundance this year with the following titles.

\$75,000

In certain communities, a complete albino human skeleton can fetch up to \$75,000. This harmful myth has been responsible for high rates of murder and violence meted out on people living with albinism. Malian writer-director Moïse Togo's 14-minute short tackles the stigmatisation and dangers of being born with albinism in African communities. Togo layers first-person narration of real-life accounts in Bambara, Fon and Yoruba languages over high-concept 3D imaging.



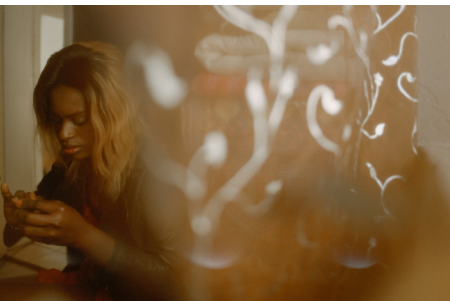
Rearview mirror: In *Egúngún (Masquerade)* from director Olive Nwosu, a young Nigerian woman comes to terms with the world she left behind when she went to live overseas.

Egúngún (Masquerade)

In Olive Nwosu's intimate and elegant coding of same sex desire alongside its traumatic repercussions, a young woman Salewa (Sheila Chiamaka Chukwulozie) finds herself adrift when she returns from London to attend her mother's funeral in Nigeria. A chance encounter with a childhood playmate (Teniola Aladese) brings back repressed memories and helps her confront her complicated relationship with her family.

Living

Technically, *Living*, a superb remake of *Ikiru* – the 1952 Japanese classic by Akira Kurosawa, is a British film. But it is a British film with a South African director. Oliver Hermanus (*Beauty, Moffie*) reaches for an international breakthrough with this delicately mounted adaptation of a classic film widely considered a masterpiece. The faithfully realised



Home, away: Elijah Ndoumbe's *Prayers for Sweet Waters* (left) is set in Cape Town, while John Ogunmuyiwa's *Precious Hair & Beauty* takes place in London

screenplay by author Kazuo Ishiguro transports the story to 1950s post-war Britain. Bill Nighy and Aimee Lou Wood are both sensational in this redemptive story of a dour civil servant who discovers purpose in life after he is diagnosed with a terminal illness.

Neptune Frost

In this visually dazzling sci-fi punk musical directed by the duo of Rwandan actress and playwright Anisia Uzeyman and multidisciplinary American artist Saul Williams, lyricism and thematic concepts take centre stage. The stunning hills of Burundi make for the setting of the unnamed Afrofuturist universe in which the dreamlike, dystopian world of *Neptune Frost* is set. The film bounces in a circular, nontraditional manner, pitching ideas about big tech, colonialism, structural inequality and the wealth of nations. Awash with stunning visual imagery and ideas too major and disparate to be engaged with conclusively in any single project is as much Uzeyman as it is Williams.

Prayers for Sweet Waters

In Elijah Ndoumbe's *Prayers for Sweet Waters*, a homeless outsider navigates finding safety and family in online spaces. A refugee turns to faith while searching for belonging, and an elder dedicated to community reflects on wisdom of the past. Ndoumbe fits in stories that intersect across vivid realities and dreamscapes to submerge audiences in the very real worlds of three transgender sex workers living in Cape Town.

Precious Hair & Beauty

A fictional African hair salon on one of London's busiest main streets plays host to a babble of colourful characters on any given day. John Ogunmuyiwa's vibrant and energetic short film spends a day with the Nigerian immigrants who work in the Precious Hair & Beauty salon, and its customers from the African diaspora who come to get their hair done. *Precious Hair & Beauty* captures the hilarious mundanity and madness of the big city as seen through the window of this tiny salon. ■

No juju: Surreal 16 Collective makes it to the cinema

An anthology of magic surrealism is proving to be a welcome antidote to the Nollywood formula

Dika Ofoma

Juju Stories, a three-part anthology film exploring juju (magical) stories rooted in Nigerian folklore and urban legends, has been showing in Nigerian cinemas since 21 January.

The film is written and directed by Abba T Makama, Michael Omonua and CJ Obasi, the trio who make up Surreal 16 Collective, a movement dedicated to making artistically-minded films away from Nollywood's commercially driven melodramas and slapstick comedies.

Their manifesto includes making surrealistic stories from an African perspective. Anthologies and individual films from the filmmakers have been screened in festivals around the world, such as Locarno, Toronto International Film Festival, British Film Institute and Africa International Film Festival. However, this is their debut in Nigerian

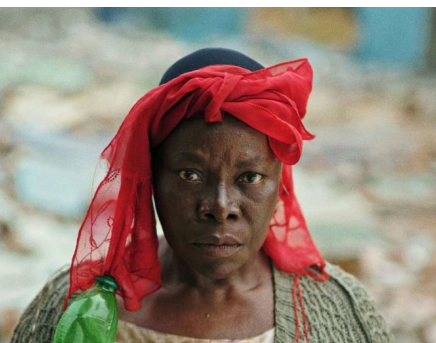


cinemas. Why did it take so long if they've been making features for years?

In 2016, Makama's first feature film *Green White Green* was rejected by cinema exhibitors. It was different. A satire featuring relatively unknown young actors. The Nollywood fare already proven to be profitable are comedies filled with A-listers and Instagram influencers. So with his second feature, *The Lost Okoroshi* (2019), Makama didn't bother with cinemas. After the film's festival run, it went straight to Netflix.

Juju Stories, which was recently reviewed in these pages, is cut from the same cloth as these films. So what could have convinced Nigeria's largest distribution company Film One to take a chance on this unusual Nigerian film?

"I think the audience response and



acceptance and celebration of the film is what propelled Film One to give the film a chance," Oge Obasi, the film's producer told *The Continent*.

Last year, after showing in international festivals like Locarno and the British Film Institute, *Juju Stories* screened to a packed audience at the Africa International Film Festival in Lagos.

Omonua's *Love Potion* examines the mythological concept of the magical drink which makes the drinker feel love and passion for the person who's offered it. Omonua's protagonist Mercy develops a strong desire for a man she met at a party. They go on a date, have sex and

Mercy wants more, but the man wants out. He is engaged. A friend encourages her to use a love potion, which she does, but grows to realise that her idealistic view of him is not matched by the reality.

Growing up in Nigeria, kids were told often that if they picked anything from the floor, especially money, they would turn to yam, like a real tuber of yam.

It was a clever way to put kids off stealing, but Abba T Makama's *Yam* makes a satire of this fable. He imagines what it might mean for humans to pick up money off the floor and turn to yams using a street rascal whose greed leads him to an unfortunate end.

The last chapter of the film belongs to Obasi's *Suffer The Witch*. The short concerns a young woman Chinwe (Bukola Oladipupo) who fears her obsessive friend Joy (Nengi Adoki) could be a witch. Although Chinwe had considered their friendship purely platonic, Joy reveals her romantic intentions soon enough.

The National Film and Video Censors Board insisted on cutting some scenes because they consider same-sex attraction offensive. It was a tough decision for the filmmakers to make. "It makes you wonder if that matters at all to those who are at the helm of these things. I don't know how they think about these things," Oge Obasi says.

Juju Stories is still showing in some cinemas in Nigeria, and while it is not upsetting the box office, its exhibition alone serves as an inspiration to Nigerian filmmakers who wish to explore genres and stories outside the comedy and melodrama staple. ■

Are taxes too high?

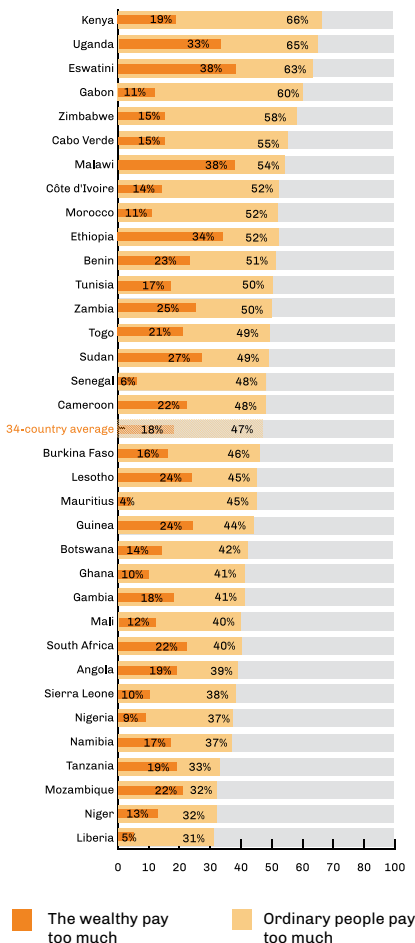
Six in 10 Africans (61%) endorse their government's right to make people pay taxes, according to Afrobarometer surveys in 34 countries. Despite a decline of 10 percentage points over the past decade, the legitimacy of taxation still has solid support.

But whether tax rates are fair is a different question. Across the 34-country sample, almost half (47%) of respondents say ordinary people are required to pay "somewhat too much" or "far too much" in taxes – four times the proportion who think they pay too little (12%). This is a particular concern in Kenya (66%), Uganda (65%), and Eswatini (63%), while fewer than one in three citizens in Mozambique (32%), Niger (32%), and Liberia (31%) feel this way.

About a third (32%) of respondents are happy with the amount of taxes that ordinary people are asked to pay.

In contrast, very few Africans (18%) feel that the rich are overtaxed, ranging from just 4% in Mauritius and 5% in Liberia to 38% in Eswatini and Malawi. Twice as many (38%) say the wealthy pay too little, while 31% believe they are taxed about the right amount.

Perceptions about taxes for the wealthy vs ordinary people | 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 +/- 2 to 3 percentage points.

Struggling students find a helping hand

A new crowdfunding platform is designed to help South African students struggling to pay their fees

Zibusiso Radebe

Last year, more than 100,000 South African university students were unable to graduate because they could not pay their fees – despite having successfully passed their exams. Some of these students have been waiting since 2012 to receive the qualification that they earned.

Tshegofatso Masenya, a 23-year-old final-year medical student at the University of Cape Town, is trying to do something about this. After seeing her peers begging for donations on social media, she started an online crowdfunding platform that she hopes will restore the dignity of students seeking financial assistance.

“It can be so humiliating to talk about your family’s circumstances in order to have people feel something for you and give you money. And so, I felt that we need to move past that idea of people having to grovel and beg and present the poorest

of their circumstances to be deserving of funding,” she told *The Continent*.

Along with four friends, Masenya started GoShare – a website that connects potential donors with students seeking funding.

Students needing assistance sign up on the website, provide the necessary documentation that proves that they are registered at an institution and owe money.

Once that information has been verified by GoShare, they become eligible for funding. Donors also go onto the website and “simply and straightforward” make a donation using their banking card details.

Despite launching just last month, already 1,000 students have reached out. And the donations are beginning to flow in too, with two students receiving the assistance they needed in full.

Masenya has set herself the ambitious goal of raising R1-million (\$65,000), which would cover the fees of at least 100 students.

The issue of university fees is a major political issue in South Africa. In 2017, former president Jacob Zuma pledged free tuition to the neediest students, but this policy has proved expensive to implement, while many students who do not qualify for the scheme are still struggling to afford all the costs associated with going to university. ■

*This reporting is supported by ABSA.
The Continent retains full editorial control.*

THE QUIZ

0-3

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

4-7

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

8-10

"I didn't even need to explain the offside rule."



Photo: John Wessels/AFP

1_ In which country was the Africa Cup of Nations held this year?

2_ In which country will the next Africa Cup of Nations be held?

3_ How many teams participated? Was it 22, 24 or 25?

4_ Which country finished second in the tournament?

5_ True or false: Cameroon placed third in the tournament.

6_ Which country's team is known as the Super Eagles?

7_ Which country's team

is known as the Black Stars?

8_ The first Africa Cup of Nations was held in 1957. Which country won that year?

9_ Which country has won the tournament more times than any other?

10_ Which country won the latest tournament?

HOW DID I DO?

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

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za

There's something in the air



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Love is in the air, dear reader! I can see it's bringing a tear to your eye already... oh, wait, no, that's the tear gas in Sudan where pro-democracy demonstrators are once again the target of security forces' dubious affections.

But we were talking about love, not the heavy-handed quelling of a righteous uprising against injustice. Love is in the air! Or another weird strain of Covid. No, no, it's definitely love this time. So what is it that you are getting for your beloved this Valentine's? Flowers? Chocolate? A booster shot? Cash?

Giving cash isn't *especially* romantic. But that's exactly what the International Court of Justice has ordered Uganda to do in its spat with the Democratic Republic of Congo over the 1998-2003 conflict in Ituri: Uganda has been ordered to pay the DRC \$325-million in reparations; \$225-million for damage to persons, which includes loss of life, rape, recruitment of child soldiers and displacement of civilians; \$40-million for damage to property, and \$60-million for damage to natural resources.

Needless to say, Kampala is not in love

with the idea. Its attorney-general has branded the decision as "yet another failure to understand African matters".

If you aren't receiving gifts or money, then perhaps take inspiration from some of our leaders who are simply turning to taxpayers for affirmation.

Take our personal favourite, President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. State House Kenya has revised its car purchasing budget, proposing an increase from just under \$90,000 to more than \$2.6-million. Parliament hasn't yet reviewed these proposals, but we wish them luck – not approving them might be the equivalent of opening a Pandora's Box of problems for themselves. And we know the president has something of a monopoly on all things Pandora.

"Roses are red, violets are blue, no Valentine's Day plans because I lost my job in a coup"

Perhaps you are not the gifting kind and would rather plan a nice activity for the object of your affection. Candlelit dinners are usually a winner. Although they haven't helped Eskom, South Africa's fumbling power utility, win any hearts. Or maybe a trip to the Olembe Stadium, in Yaounde, where you can prove your love by climbing down the steps President Paul Biya seemingly could not get down,

meaning that the AFCON trophy had to be brought to him to present to Senegal.

Whatever your plans are, spare a thought for those government officials in Burkina Faso who served under recently ousted president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, whose date-night plans have possibly been interrupted.

Transitional president and star of *Keeping up with the Coup-Dashions*, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba issued a statement giving all ministers 72 hours to vacate government owned residences, return official vehicles and “any other equipment and materials that had been made available to them.

As the old love poem goes, “Roses are red, violets are blue; no Valentine’s Day plans ’cos I lost my job in a coup.”

Block party

For those of us who Valentine’s Day leaves feeling a little nostalgic or, dare we admit, a little hungry for attention, stay strong! Though you may even find yourself considering unblocking “they who must not be named” on your phone, remember they were blocked for a reason!

Mind you, we’re quite glad the government didn’t follow this advice in Tanzania, where the media licences of *Mwanahalisi*, *Mawio*, *Mseto* and *Tanzania Daima*, banned by the late John Magufuli, have been reinstated. Free the media, not your stupid ex!

It’s always worth celebrating love though. Not just the romantic kind, or the love triangle between you, your phone and Netflix, but the deep and abiding love we have for friends and family. Our hearts



go out to those who may not have that this year. We think of the family of young Rayan Oram, the five-year-old boy in Morocco who was trapped underground for four days after falling down a well. Our hearts were warmed by the herculean effort to rescue him... only to be utterly broken when he didn’t make it.

And then broken further yet when we heard from Ugandan novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, who was recently released from incarceration after being arrested last month over social media posts relating to President Museveni and his son.

Since his release, it’s emerged that he was tortured in custody. He shared photos of a web of grievous scars and barely healed weals on his back, from beatings in prison. Additionally, the courts refused to release his passport, but he appears to have made it out of the country anyway, and is said to be receiving medical care abroad. We hope he’s surrounded by the love he was denied in prison.

We hope you are surrounded by love too, dear reader. Whether you’re kissing frogs, loved ones or – like some of our leaders – the mirror. The world could do with a lot more of that, don’t you think? ■

Corruption scandal smoulders as Chakwera fires cabinet

Golden Matonga

Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera came to power promising to tackle corruption. But his handling of a deepening corruption scandal of state capture proportions, threaded through three of his predecessors' terms, is threatening to undo his own presidency.

A United Kingdom-based businessman, Zuneth Sattar, is accused of bribing several government officials for over a decade in order to obtain hefty contracts with the Malawi government. Britain's National Crime Agency and Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) have launched an investigation into Sattar's alleged state capture and one cabinet minister, Kezzie Msukwa, was arrested recently by the ACB.

The president, who previously fired two ministers who were embroiled in corruption or abuse of office, failed to fire Msukwa from his cabinet for over three weeks after he was arrested.

Then Chakwera snapped into action, dissolving his cabinet. He simultaneously

launched a scathing attack on Chizuma, the popular anti-graft czar, for allegedly breaking her oath of office. This followed the widespread circulation of a recording in which Chizuma was heard commenting on issues surrounding the Sattar investigation.

In the recording, Chizuma complains of lack of support from the executive, accused some judges of receiving bribes from Sattar and suggests that influential churches cherry-pick who to criticise for being embroiled in corruption on the basis of their church affiliation.

The president said he was hurt by the recording but also said that he has no plans to axe Chizuma, despite pressure to do so within his own administration.

Chakwera then pledged to hire a new cabinet. He released a partial 12-member cabinet, without naming the powerful foreign affairs, finance and homeland security ministers, among others.

Many will welcome the political changes and the retention of Chizuma but will be concerned about whether the president has a long-term plan to transform the country's political dynamics, and the deterioration of his relationship with those whose job it is to get a grip of Malawi's corruption challenges. ■

Golden Matonga is a journalist working as an investigative journalist and columnist for Malawi's Nation Publications Limited. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



THE BIG PICTURE

Fire in their eyes: Kenyans rally to stop the spread of a series of wildfires that tore through the Aberdare national park. About 100 people from Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenyan Forestry Service, local NGOs and the neighbouring scout community worked together to beat back the last of the fires, which broke out at the weekend. Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP



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