

The Continent

Revenge of the tirailleurs

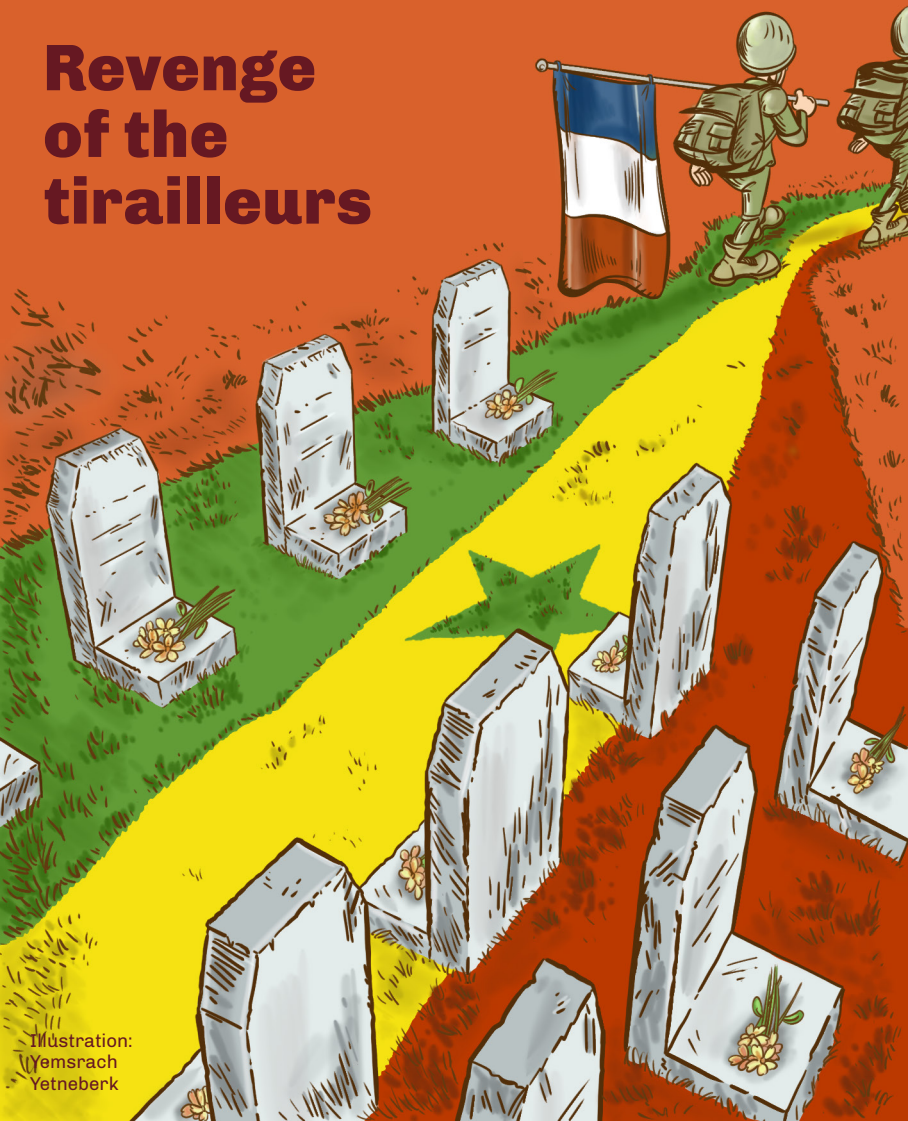


Illustration:
Yemsrach
Yetneberk



Cover: France is not having the best month. This week, its government collapsed. Last week, not one but two of its former African colonies told its soldiers to get out. Many western analysts are blaming Russia. This misses the point, which is that France has a lot to answer for in this part of the world. Just ask the descendants of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* – the West African riflemen who fought for France, and then were killed by the very same country when they dared to demand fair pay (p13).

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The annual survey

Tell us why you read *The Continent*, why you share it and what we can do better. Your insights help us to be better. And they help us to explain to funders and advertisers why they should back our journalism. So if you read our work, dive on into our [annual survey](#) – please and thank you! We'll be back next week with our final edition of 2024: Africans of the Year. It's packed with profiles of amazing people who do wonderful things, plus highlights of the year in news, film, photography and music.



Abiding João: An army honour guard forms up to welcome US President Joe Biden to Angola. Photo: Andrew Caballero-Reynolds/AFP

UNITED STATES

Joe Biden in Angola: the chips are down

This week United States President Joe Biden made his one and only trip to the African continent with a flight to Angola. The *New York Times* spoke of the strong relationship between the two (more enslaved people were taken to the US from Angola than anywhere else – quite the flex). It noted China did not have a similarly strong card to play. But Biden did not come to talk up democracy – he was there to laud American investment in a railway line that will funnel resources out of the DRC through Angola – not unlike China’s Road and Belt approach. East and West seem to think Africa, teeming with elements crucial to 21st century tech, is a prize to be won in a game of colonial poker. But their African hosts are hoping that the house might actually win this time – if they play their own cards right.

CÔTE D’IVOIRE

Attieké is best form of cultural defence

Unesco, the UN’s heritage agency, has formally recognised the cultural significance of the Côte d’Ivoire staple attiéké. Made from fermented cassava pulp, it gets piled next to proteins like fish on special occasions. A separate trademark process is trying to ensure nobody else can ferment cassava roots and call it attiéké – much like the French did with sparkling wine and Champagne. That’s a step mostly aimed at neighbours, like Burkina Faso, who may be obliged to concede that it’s only attiéké if it’s from Cote d’Ivoire – no matter how similar it tastes.

MOZAMBIQUE

Nyusi: Be more civil, servants (or else)

Five more people have been killed in protests against the results of last month’s election, according to the national police. As detailed in *The Continent* at the time, opposition parties say the results, which continued the control of the liberation-era ruling party, did not reflect the reality at the ballot. Filipe Nyusi, the outgoing president, has threatened not to pay civil servants if protests continue, saying the protests are stopping investment into the country.

POLLUTION**No new coal plants**

A court in Africa's biggest carbon polluter, South Africa, this week stopped construction on a 1,500-megawatt coal power plant. It ruled that the state has not properly thought about the impact on the rights of people today, and in the future, that comes with a hotter world. The country has a progressive Constitution. Its ruling party has a patronage network that's deeply embedded in the coal industry.

FOOTBALL**Fifa's club sandwich**

This week Fifa laid out how its club world cup will work when it kicks off in the United States in June next year. Africa will be represented by Wydad AC from Morocco, Espérance from Tunisia, Egyptian serial champions Al Ahly, and Mamelodi Sundowns, the South African team owned by Fifa vice-president Patrice Motsepe (who, bonus point, is the brother-in-law of South Africa's current president).

**PALESTINE****Deliberate starvation in northern Gaza**

Israel deliberately targeted a UN attempt to feed Palestinians earlier this year, according to an investigation by *The New*

Humanitarian. Working with people in Gaza, this got food to people – for nearly 48 hours. Then an airstrike slammed into an aid warehouse. Over 100 Palestinian people involved would end up killed. Amnesty International released its own report this week concluding that Israel is perpetrating a genocide.

TANZANIA

Opposition youth leader abducted

Police are investigating the kidnapping of Abdul Nondo, the leader of the youth wing of opposition party ACT Wazalendo. The party said he was taken by unknown assailants from a bus station in Dar es Salaam on Sunday. He had just returned from campaigning for last week's local elections. He was found a few hours later, dumped at a nearby beach, handcuffed, blindfolded and seriously injured. He is currently recuperating in hospital. In September, Ali Mohamed Kibao, a leader of the main opposition party Chadema, was abducted and murdered. His killers



Abducted: Abdul Nondo was kidnapped, blindfolded, beaten and dumped

remain at large. While things seemed to improve when President Samia Suluhu Hassan succeeded John Magufuli, opposition politicians and rights groups have accused her of being an authoritarian leader in the same vein as her predecessor.

SOUTH AFRICA

National carrier pilots on strike

South African Airways has confirmed that wage negotiations with the South African Airways Pilots Association have failed. In May, the pilots' association asked for a 30% salary increase, which was later reduced to 15.7% plus benefits. The airline wouldn't budge on a 8.46% increase, saying its offer was "fair" and was benchmarked against international salary trends – and general increases in South Africa. Holidaymakers have been alerted to the strike and told to make alternative plans as the impasse continues.

SOUTH SUDAN

Peace talks resume, polls still a ways off

After a four-month break and the sacking of a government delegation, South Sudan peace talks resumed in Kenya on Wednesday. The talks are between South Sudan's government and opposition groups that were not included in the 2018 peace accord that ended a five-year civil war, where 400,000 people died. The agreement has not been fully realised, and South Sudan, since gaining independence from Sudan in 2011, has not held elections. Elections scheduled for this month have been postponed to 2026.



Home to roost: Cambridge returned the Okukur bronze to Nigeria in 2021.

Photo: Joe Giddens/PA/Getty Images

BRITAIN

Looted African artefacts found in Cambridge storage

According to the *BBC* some 350 000 African artefacts and manuscripts, including human remains, photographs and fossils, have been found in Cambridge University's collections, gathering dust. The majority were stolen during Britain's various colonialism projects in Africa. As part of Collections-Connections-Communities, a research initiative at the university, Dr. Eva Namusoke spent over a year working with the institution's librarians, curators and archivists to find the items. The initiative aims to reveal the university's relationship with colonisation and enslavement, and how these artefacts were acquired. It is unclear whether they will go on display or be returned to their countries of origin.

ZIMBABWE

Abortion law ruled 'unconstitutional'

The high court in Zimbabwe has ruled as unconstitutional parts of the Termination of Pregnancy Act that specifically prohibit women raped by their husbands, and minors under the age of 18, from accessing abortion. It is only in very special circumstances that a person can get an abortion in the Southern African country; for example if the pregnancy is deemed to be a danger to the life of the woman, or if there is a risk "of such a nature that [the child] will permanently be seriously handicapped". In the case of incest, a woman may be allowed to terminate a pregnancy.

SOUTH AFRICA

Boss Cyril wants G20 to dig into debt

South Africa has assumed the presidency of the G20, succeeding Brazil. Comprising 19 countries and two regional bodies, it was established in 1999, beginning as a forum for finance ministers and reserve bank governors to tackle global economic issues. The G20 now includes heads of state and senior government officials. Speaking on Monday, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa said the country's focus will be on finance and debt relief.

Namibia

First woman president crowned after peaceful poll

But the election was a bit of a shambles, critics say.

Kiri Rupiah

Namibia will have its first woman president after 72-year-old Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah got 57% of the vote, according to the electoral commission – but opposition parties are contesting the results in court.

While the vote was peaceful, the opposition argues it was managed at a level of incompetence that borders on deliberate suppression. Polling stations opened late. Ballots ran out. Queues ran long. The vote was extended by three days.

If the court appeals fail, Nandi-Ndaitwah will become the country's fifth president next March. Every one of those presidents, including her, has come from the governing South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo), which took power in 1990 after Namibia got its independence from South Africa.



Back of the net: Swapo supporters rally for Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah ahead of the elections. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

Nandi-Ndaitwah has been vice-president since the death in office of president Hage Geingob in February. Her predecessor as vice-president, Nangolo Mbumba, is serving as interim president.

She joined Swapo's youth league in the early 1970s, and was thrown into the fight against the military occupation by apartheid South Africa. Since independence, she has served as minister in several portfolios, including as foreign minister.

She is no progressive. Hawkish and conservative, her focus will be delivering on her promise of creating 500,000 jobs in five years, veteran newspaper editor Gwen Lister told *The Continent*.

She also comes into office at a time when Namibia faces high rates of gender-based violence, spiralling corruption and public dissatisfaction with youth unemployment in particular. ■

Guinea

Horrific end to 'Dear Leader' football match

A fixture staged in honour of the president ended like the 2009 protest against Dadis Camara: in tragedy.

Damilola Adeyera

Aboubacar Kéita's dream was to play for Real Madrid football club in Europe. That dream died with him last Sunday. Kéita, who had just completed high school, joined thousands of football fans at Stade du 3 Avril stadium in N'Zérékoré, Guinea's second-largest city. They were gathered to watch the final of a tournament honouring the country's military leader, Mamady Doumbouya.

The crowd erupted in anger when the referee gave out a red card. Security forces responded with tear gas in the stadium, which had just one exit. In the panicked chaos that followed, at least 56 died, including Kéita. "It haunts me," said his friend, Kalil. "I'm broken."

Mamadou Maladho Diallo, another young man who spoke to *The Continent*, blamed the state, saying its irresponsibility led to the death of his guardian, Aladjji

Telemele, at the stadium. Human rights activists and Guineans in the diaspora dispute the official tally of 56 dead, saying it could be as high as 300.

Doumbouya has promised to set up an investigative commission. Prime Minister Mamadou Oury Bah announced a three-day period of national mourning for the victims. And Yaya Kaïraba Kaba, the minister of justice, instructed the attorney general to initiate criminal proceedings against the alleged perpetrators.

According to Siaka Barry, a former sports minister who served in Alpha Condé's civilian government, the tragedy evokes memories of another wound on Guinea's national memory: 28 September 2009. On that day, over 150 people were gunned down at the Conakry stadium where tens of thousands had gathered to demonstrate against the military government of the day, led by Moussa Dadis Camara. ■



Killing field: Football fans in Conakry race to escape tear gas in the stadium.

Ghana



Yes, we know it's Christmas: Ghana is more concerned with presidential polls than North Poles right now. Photo: Olympia De Maismont/AFP

It's the stupid economy

Both leading candidates in this weekend's election helped to create Ghana's economic mess.

Francis Kokutse in Accra

The issue of Ghana's national debt will decide the 7 December presidential election. Much depends on the length of voters' memories.

Voters preoccupied with current economic hardship will treat the election as a referendum on the current administration, with vice-president

Mahamudu Bawumia contesting for the top job. He is the economist who has been at the head of President Nana Akufo-Addo's economic management team, and nobody wants a repeat of the past few years of economic life in Ghana.

Ghana defaulted on its \$30-billion sovereign debt in 2022. Struggling to recover from the disruptions of the Covid pandemic, the coastal country's economy

was hurt further by the Russia-Ukraine war. It disrupted maritime business and pushed up the prices of imported goods, including food.

The default spooked external investors, reducing even the money coming in for private businesses and sending the currency in a spiral. “If the economic fundamentals are weak, the exchange rate will expose you,” Bawumia used to say on the 2016 campaign trail, when he and Akufo-Addo were running for office for the first time. At the time, 4.5 Ghana cedis bought a United States dollar. Bawumia’s words have come to bite him: the cedi is now more than 15 to the dollar.

Bawumia’s main opponent is former president John Mahama, whom Akufo-Addo replaced in 2016. His campaign has seized on the economic tailspin of the Akufo-Addo years, blaming it on the

incompetence and reckless borrowing by his administration. But Mahama’s own record is not any better.

He was president from 2012 to 2017. During that time, Ghana’s sovereign debt swelled from 49% of GDP to over 70%. Even then, debt was a big enough issue that the Akufo-Addo/Bawumia duo won in part by promising that the country would never again borrow from the World Bank or International Monetary Fund. They walked back those words in 2023, when they turned to the IMF for a \$3-billion bailout.

Despite their equally poor record on the economy, Bawumia and Mahama are the top contenders now. Both have promised to fix the economy this time around: the election is likely to hinge on which candidate has sold that promise more convincingly. ■



Strung out: A man strolls beneath flags of the opposition NDC party in Accra. They're in a tight race with Ghana's ruling NPP. Photo: Olympia De Maismont/AFP

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The Continent

The Continent is hiring!

We're hiring a **distribution editor** – someone ambitious, who can help drive our work to get the newspaper to more people. This is a newspaper shared by 23,000 subscribers in 130 countries. That growth has been entirely organic and down to people sharing it with each other on WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram and over email. We know people love the newspaper when they get it. So we want more people to get that first edition, and then get into the habit of reading quality African journalism.

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- Ability to think strategically and break that down to monthly goals;
- Demonstrable experience using Google Analytics, GA4, and an ability to learn and use new analytic tools;
- Wordpress, newsletter and SEO experience; and
- Capacity to flexibly work 40 hours a week, and work remotely.



THE FINER DETAILS

The initial contract will be for \$3,000 a month for one year, starting in February 2025.

HOW TO APPLY

*If you think you can drive our growth, send your CV and a 100 word note on what you would do to get *The Continent* to more people to jobs@allprotocol.org. The deadline for applications is 10 December 2024.*



Calling their name:
Senegal marks the
80th anniversary
of the Thiaroye
Massacre. Photo:
John Wessels/AFP

French foreign lesions: This reckoning is overdue

Colonial atrocities are finally catching up to Paris, and Macron's government is too weak to put up a fight.

Beverly Ochieng in Dakar

On Thursday last week, French President Emmanuel Macron's flailing government was hit with a one-two punch.

"It is time for Chad to assert its sovereignty," said that country's foreign minister, Abderaman Koulamallah, as he declared an end to decades of military cooperation with France.

Chad has ordered France to withdraw the 1,000-odd French soldiers still

stationed in the country.

A few thousand kilometres away, at almost the same time, Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye was telling French media that the presence of some 350 French troops in Dakar "is incompatible with our national sovereignty", and that they would soon be sent home.

It's unlikely the two African governments co-ordinated their announcements. Nonetheless, they landed with a bang in Paris.

"The slap in the face is all the more

stinging for being twofold,” wrote *Le Monde*, a French newspaper, in an editorial. “This is another serious setback.”

In recent years, there have been several such setbacks for the former colonial ruler. France has, after losing most of its colonies in the 1960s, operated a vast network of military bases across its former African territory. But that network is shrinking fast.

In 2022, the junta in Mali ordered the immediate withdrawal of French troops, as did the government of the Central African Republic. Coup leaders in Burkina Faso and Niger followed suit the next year. Now it’s Chad and Senegal’s turn to demand an end to France’s military presence.

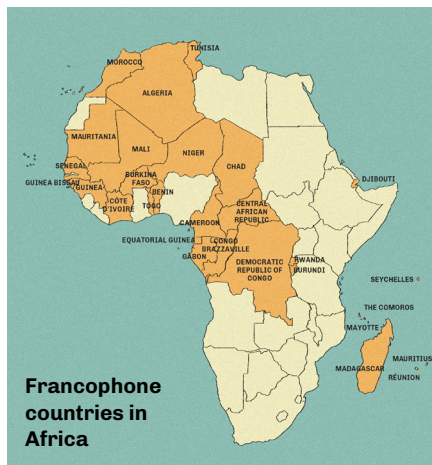
Le Monde, echoing other French commentators, explained these “setbacks” in the context of global geopolitics.

“The opposition to the French military presence is based on the same context: its rejection by a large part of the public, particularly young people, and the many offers of service (American, but also Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Saudi and Israeli) now being made to African heads of state,” the newspaper concluded.

In Chad, there may be some merit to this analysis. From a military perspective, the country is vital to French interests, functioning as the army’s logistical hub for the Sahel region – “an aircraft carrier in the desert”, as it is sometimes described.

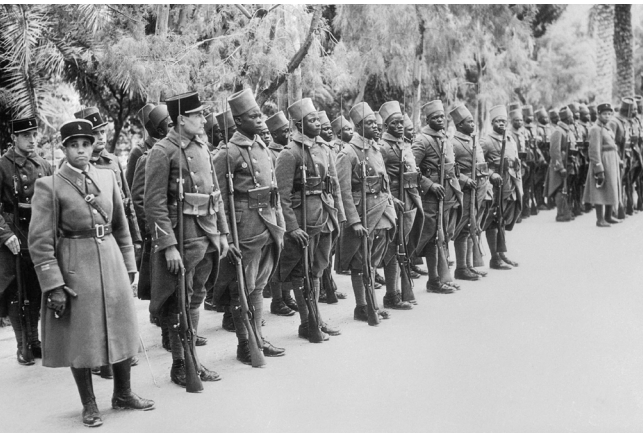
France has a long history of intervening in the internal politics of the country, playing a key role in bringing first Hissène Habré (who ruled from 1982-1990) to power, then later Mahamat Déby’s father,

FRENCH TROOPS	
Currently present	Withdrawn
Senegal 350	Mali 1,500 - 2,000
Chad 1,000	Niger 1,500 - 2,000
Djibouti 1,400	Burkina Faso 400
Gabon 350-400	Central African Republic 2,000
Côte d’Ivoire 600-900	



Idriss Déby Itno (1990-2021).

Déby junior, however, has been dissatisfied with the level of French co-operation in fighting multiple insurgencies – even accusing France of withholding intelligence and air support at crucial moments.



**Hold the line:
The 18th
Senegalese
Regiment of the
French Colonial
Infantry (*tirailleurs
sénégalais*) at the
Oasis of Gabès
in Tunisia during
World War II.**

Photo: Getty Images

At the same time, he has been courting other allies, notably Russia and the United Arab Emirates.

He has also struck up an unlikely friendship with Hungary's President Viktor Orbán, who is sending 200 soldiers in the new year to train local forces, and has promised \$200-million in aid.

Senegal's position is not so easily explained by superpower politicking, however.

There is little evidence of Russian interference, beyond regular diplomacy, and the timing of Faye's announcement suggests a different motivation – one rooted in a terrible crime that happened eight decades ago.

Remembering a massacre

In 1857, the French military began recruiting soldiers from West Africa, forming an infantry unit known as the *tirailleurs sénégalais* – the Senegalese riflemen.

The name stuck, even though the unit

came to include men from all over the region. In World War I, 192,000 *tirailleurs* fought for France. Of those, 30,000 never came home.

A similar pattern played out in World War II, with 179,000 *tirailleurs* fighting for France. This accounted for 9% of France's total fighting force.

Tens of thousands were captured by German forces, and held in prisoner-of-war camps. After they were liberated by the advancing Allies in 1944, they were sent to the Thiaroye military base in Dakar to await discharge.

Living conditions there were poor, and French authorities were slow to deliver the demobilisation benefits that they had promised. So slow, in fact, that it took until 2017 for the surviving *tirailleurs* to be granted French citizenship, which had been a key aspect of the recruitment drive. Only 28 men were alive to receive it.

On the morning of 1 December 1944, the *tirailleurs* in Thiaroye protested against their harsh treatment and unpaid

wages. The French response was brutal.

Official French accounts say that 35 West African soldiers were killed that day. Other accounts put the casualty count in the hundreds, but the truth has always been hard to establish: for decades, France denied researchers access to its archives, and both French and Senegalese governments at times censored discussion of the massacre.

Neither country included the history of this bitter chapter in school curricula.

Nonetheless, Senegal never forgot: not the Thiaroye massacre, and not the extraordinary human sacrifices that Senegal made, over nearly a century, in defence of the French Republic.

As Léopold Sédar Senghor, the country's first president and also its pre-eminent poet, put it in *Aux Tirailleurs Sénégalais morts pour la France*, written in 1938: "They put flowers on tombs and warm the Unknown Soldier / But you, my dark brothers, no one calls your names."

On 1 December 2024, in a sombre ceremony in Thiaroye – now a suburb on the outskirts of Dakar – Faye brought flowers to mark the 80th anniversary of the massacre.

Macron was not there, but he did send a letter, acknowledging for the first time that what happened in Thiaroye was a massacre.

He did not apologise.

Making history

In their successful campaign for the presidency, Faye and his running mate Ousmane Sonko, who is now prime minister, spoke often about French

atrocities and unjust policies in Senegal.

This ugly history fuelled some of their Pastef party's nationalist policies, including the demand to end France's military presence.

Another key demand is that Senegal withdraws from the CFA Franc, a controversial regional currency that is pegged to the euro. Critics of the currency say that it gives Paris far too much control over West African monetary policy.

These policies found immense popular support, and were a significant factor in Faye and Sonko's stunning electoral success in March.

They may not be implemented in full: French troops have not left Senegal yet, and Faye is likely to negotiate for some kind of military training and intelligence-sharing deal with France, as well as commercial opportunities.

But by invoking the injustice of the Thiaroye Massacre, Faye is giving himself, and Senegal, the moral high ground – putting the country in a position to extract major concessions.

The lesson for Paris, and other colonial governments, is that its history cannot be whitewashed away: injustices suffered decades and even centuries ago remain a potent political force, with present-day consequences.

It is, perhaps, some small measure of justice for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whose memory was honoured in Thiaroye on Sunday. ■

Beverly Ochieng is a senior associate and analyst with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies



Fuel me once: Despite being an oil producer, Nigeria is getting poor quality fuel from countries like Russia.

Photo: Frédéric Soltan/Corbis via Getty Images

Done dirty: Nigerians pay a premium for super dodgy fuel

To dodge sanctions, oil companies blend Russian oil between ships – offshore, out of sight. This can lead to dirty fuel. The kind thought ‘good enough for Africa’.

Marian Ansah

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Western sanctions targeted Russian exports, like refined oil. But in the eight months following the invasion, an oil tanker loitering just outside Maltese waters sold nearly two million barrels of Russian oil to Nigerian importers. Blended with products from elsewhere, it was then sold as oil from Malta. It also sold at prices 24% higher than unblended Russian oil.

Data from Kpler, a platform that tracks oil shipments, shows that the Huihai Atlantic arrived in the waters off the Maltese coast in January 2023. The following month, it started receiving oil and naphtha via ship-to-ship transfers, a controversial practice often associated with illicit trade. Tankers from Russia transferred 2.1-million barrels to the Huihai Atlantic, and ships from Bulgaria, India, Italy, Romania, Spain, and Türkiye gave it about 2.7-million barrels.

The blended fuels were then sold

as originating from Malta, usually to Nigeria, with a small amount sold to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Nigerian buyers – including Oanda, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, Rano Oil, Rainoil, and Matrix – bought at least 3.9-million barrels of fuel from the Huihai Atlantic.

At the time, the average price for Malta fuel was \$131 per barrel. Had they openly bought the Russian products, they would have paid about \$100 per barrel, the cap that sanctions set it at, and the price paid for imports direct from Russia to Nigeria in 2023.

None of the companies responded to *The Continent's* questions. But the scheme under which they bought the oil was wider even than those named above. In early 2023, ship-to-ship transfers increased dramatically as international oil marketers tried to skirt the sanctions that sought to cap the prices at which they could sell Russian oil.

A June 2023 report by Windward, a maritime intelligence company, said that ship-to-ship transfers rose by 50% in Malta and 220% in the Greek port of Kalamata. Both Malta and Greece resisted European Union sanctions before they took effect in February 2023.

In the waters outside Lomé and Lagos, 26 ship-to-ship transfers happened in the first half of 2023, compared to just three between the same period in 2022.

The EU reacted with a package of sanctions that banned access to European ports for any vessels suspected of busting sanctions by engaging in ship-to-ship transfer of Russian oil.

Dirty fuels that kill lungs

Offshore oil blending is also controversial for another reason: it can produce low-quality, inefficient and extra-polluting blends: dirty fuel.

Nigeria is already struggling with the quality of fuel. In March, it limited allowable sulphur content to 200 parts per million (ppm). This is still higher than the 50 ppm recommended by international standards. But when reporters analysed fuel samples from Nigerian petrol stations in September, one was found to have sulphur content of 800 ppm.

This proliferation of dirty fuels is especially concerning in urban Nigeria, where diesel generators are ubiquitous.

“In Lagos, houses are built so close together that the generator exhaust fumes often blow directly into neighbouring homes. Combined with car emissions, the air quality can be terrible,” said Otonye Iworima, who advocates for cleaner air in Nigeria’s commercial hub.

Iworima used to be an elite athlete but shifted her focus because she is convinced poor air quality is killing her family. She believes it contributed to her sister’s death from a pulmonary embolism.

“She had asthma, just like my brother,” she said. “Half of my family suffers from asthma, and the other half has respiratory allergies. For me, air quality has always been deeply personal.”

Her story is far from unique. ■

Data journalism provided by Data Desk and the Centre for Research and Clean Energy (CREA). This article was developed with the support of Journalismfund Europe

Boats to nowhere

Kigoma, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, is one of Africa's great frontier towns. But the big ships are not sailing any more.



Photo: Michael Goima/The Continent

Simon Mkina in Kigoma

For more than a century, the lakeside town of Kigoma has connected Tanzania to its neighbours. The *MV Liemba* – the oldest ferry in the world – usually sails south, to Zambia. The *MV Mwongozo* used to head north, to Burundi's major city Bujumbura, carrying 800 passengers and 200 tonnes of cargo. And a fleet of small wooden boats traverse the 40km width of Lake Tanganyika, to the DRC and back.

Collectively, these vessels form one of East Africa's most important economic networks. The lake's calm, open waters connect the people and goods of four different countries, which might otherwise be inaccessible.

Kigoma is this network's central node.

This multicultural city of 2.5-million people, built on the hills that overlook the lake, can be astonishingly beautiful: especially at sunrise and sunset, when the sky is painted with vibrant colours. The beauty cannot disguise the poverty, however: this is one of Tanzania's poorest regions, despite an abundance of natural resources.

For many residents – some of whom are refugees from neighbouring countries – the cross-border trade offers an economic lifeline, and the dusty streets near its port bustle with traders laden with fish, fruit and textiles.

But over the past decade their trade has grown significantly more complicated: Both the *MV Liemba* and the *MV Mwongozo* have been removed from active service, leaving no government-



Ripple effect: Yadunia Kigufa, a fisherman in Kibirizi, Kigoma, where fortunes have begun to wane. Photo: Michael Goima/The Continent

owned ferries operational on the lake. No other ships can carry the same kind of loads as these two large ferries, nor can they travel the same long distances. Traders are suffering.

“Business was thriving, and life was good when the ferries were in operation. Now, it’s just a struggle to make ends meet,” said Julie Mucco, a Burundian trader who used to run a profitable business selling women’s clothing. She specialises in khanga, a light cotton cloth worn throughout the Great Lakes region. She would source her cloth from the DRC and sell it in Kigoma, but the absence of reliable and affordable transport has crippled her trade.

Similarly, Shaaban Hamis Ally, a Kigoma fish trader, used to sell 500kg of dagaa (dried sardines) every week to buyers from Burundi, DRC and Zambia, at a price of 25,000 Tanzanian shillings (\$9) per kilo. Now he is limited to customers from Burundi, which can be reached via a long, arduous road journey, and is lucky to shift a fifth of that.

The road less travelled

Just 234km separate Kigoma from Bujumbura. But once you factor in the border crossing, the state of the roads, and the poor condition of the buses that ply them, it can take as long as 13 hours to cover this distance – as *The Continent* discovered this week.

There is a single large bus, operated by the Burundi Public Transportation Corporation, that travels the route each day. It is 15 years old. It leaves at 7am every morning, carrying more than



Top: Tatu Maulid Ngoka drying dagaa, not to be confused with dagga.

Bottom: Fruit for sale on the bus journey to Bujumbura. Photos: Michael Goima/*The Continent* and Simon Mkina/*The Continent*

90 passengers per trip – despite being designed to hold only 60.

The vehicle is in poor condition: some windows are missing, seats are worn out, and the interior resembles a mobile garage, littered with spare parts and repair tools, as it is expected to break down at any time.



The driver's dashboard is cluttered with loaves of bread, snacks and unopened bottles of Saint Anne wine. None of the dashboard instruments – not the odometer, speedometer, tachometer, temperature or fuel gauge – was working.

At the border itself, the wait was long. Despite the East African Community's commitment to the free movement of citizens across the borders of member states – both Burundi and Tanzania have signed up – Burundian immigration officials asked everyone the same question in Kiswahili: “Chai yetu iko wapi.” Where is our tea? The “tea”, in this case, costs between \$2 and \$4 per passenger.

While the road to the Tanzanian border was decent, on the Burundi side things began to deteriorate quickly.



Top: Batteries, charged by solar panels, are used to run lights for night fishing. Above: Women sell fish at the market.
Photos: Michael Goima/*The Continent*

“Umushoferi uriko uratugirira nabi!” the passengers cried out in Kirundi. Driver, you're hurting us with all these potholes!

In drydock: The MV Liemba has a rich past and, local traders hope, a rich future, too. Photo: Daniel Hayduk/AFP



They would rather be on a ferry.

High and dry

The *MV Liemba* began life in Germany in 1913, as the *Graf van Goetzen*. From there, it took 5,000 wooden crates to move it to its permanent home on Africa's deepest lake – Lake Tanganyika.

It arrived at the beginning of World War I, and was swiftly converted into a warship that gave imperial Germany absolute control of the lake.

When the tides of war turned against the kaiser, the ship was scuttled to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. No matter: it was salvaged from the lake floor a few years later, before being sunk again in bad weather.

Somehow, after being salvaged a

second time, British authorities found that its engines and boiler were still in working order – and so put it to work.

Since 1927, the *MV Liemba* has been sailing south from Kigoma to Zambia, stopping at port towns and villages along the way. It was the backbone of the lakeside region's economy – some of these towns could only be accessed by water. But it ceased operations in 2018, ahead of a proposed \$13-million overhaul. A Croatian company has been contracted to do the work, and it should be ready to set sail again in June 2026.

“The halt in operations has made life difficult for people in Kigoma and Burundi, who relied heavily on the ferry for trade and transport,” Titus Mnyanyi, who has captained the *MV Liemba* since



Photo: Michael Goima/
The Continent

1999, told *The Continent*.

He emphasised the significant role both the *MV Liemba* and the *MV Mwongozo* have played in alleviating poverty in Kigoma – already one of Tanzania’s poorest regions – and noted that their absence has worsened the economic situation.

Mnyanyi noted how the absence of both the *MV Liemba* and the *MV Mwongozo* have worsened the economic situation.

Fortunately, plans are also under way to refurbish the *MV Mwongozo*, which stopped sailing in 2014, according to Erick Hamis, the director general of the Tanzania Shipping Company. He acknowledged the suffering that the

breakdown of the ferry services on Lake Tanganyika has caused, and said that the government is doing everything it can to deliver reliable transportation. This includes the ongoing refurbishment of the *MT Sangara*, a fuel transport vehicle, and the construction of a new passenger ferry with a capacity of 600 passengers and 400 tonnes of cargo. In addition, the state plans to build a shipyard in Kigoma.

These promises, if delivered, have the potential to revitalise Kigoma town and the surrounding region – whose future, as always, is inextricably bound up with the lake and the ships that sail upon it. ■

'Borderlands' is a new series by The Continent, reporting from some of Africa's most interesting border crossings. The series was made possible with support from the African Union and GIZ

Kenyans are changing how they get their news

Serious consequences for democracy are inevitable.

Norbert Mburu in Nairobi

Earlier this year, Kenya witnessed massive, Gen Z-led protests against new taxes proposed by the president. These protests manifested in the streets of Nairobi, but were organised and amplified online. Many Kenyans only learned about the protests through social media.

How exactly *did* that news spread? The answer is grim reading for legacy media houses – and may reshape the nature of political discourse in the country.

According to our research, so-called alternative media outlets accounted for as much as half of the most popular digital news consumption in Kenya, even at the height of the uprising. This is significant in a country where 89% of news consumption happens online.

These alternative media outlets tend to be focused on light, snappy content – usually with little regard for journalistic principles or ethics. The most popular among them is *The Nairobi Gossip Club*, a tabloid-style website that focuses on

romantic scandals and celebrity news.

Crucially for the health of Kenyan democracy, these new media voices are unconstrained by traditional journalistic standards of ethics, fact-checking and avoiding conflict-of-interest. Yet, whether they like it or not, they are on the front line of upholding news credibility and fighting mis- and dis-information.

For legacy media houses, the success of such platforms – and the continuing failure of Kenya's biggest newspapers to grow audience or revenue, while laying off dozens of journalists – must make them rethink their approach. Should they try and replicate *The Nairobi Gossip Club's* approach? If not, how do you compete with their brand of news on crowded social media feeds?

The political implications are also clear. Politicians will co-opt these new media voices. We saw this in the recent United States elections, where candidates invested significant time and effort in new media platforms (like Donald Trump's three-hour long appearance on *The Joe Rogan Experience*, a podcast) and spent less time engaging with traditional media.

Influencer and alternative media's mastery of digital-native formats, coupled with high audience trust, will become invaluable for reaching younger, always-online voters – but who, exactly, will be holding the politicians to account? ■

Norbert Mburu is the Culture Research Lead at Odipo Dev, a Nairobi-based data consultancy

Up and up, and soon the top

African countries have slowly been stacking up wins in netball, but can they break into the global top four?

Karien Jonckheere

After a year of intracontinental jockeying for position, Africa is making a name for itself on the netball court. Three countries are in the top 10 in the world: South Africa in fifth, Uganda in sixth and Malawi in seventh.

That local rivalry is pushing each team. Last month, South Africa's netball team, the Proteas, beat the Malawi Queens 3-0 in a Test series. Next up is the Africa Nations Cup in Namibia next week.

"A couple of years ago, South Africa was the only African team that people recognised when it came to netball," said Proteas assistant coach and former player Zanele Mgodana. "Then Malawi came into play, and now Uganda have put up their hands, so that speaks to the growth of African netball."

But, while there has been growth and improvement in recent years, the question remains – can an African nation bridge the gap between fifth place and the top-four powerhouses of Australia, England, New Zealand and Jamaica?

South Africa has come closest, with a spot in the 2019 Netball World Cup semifinals. The next world cup – hosted on African soil for the first time, in Cape Town – the Proteas lost to Uganda in the



We have lift off: Thandi Galleta of Malawi at their world cup 2023 match against Tonga. Photo: Ashley Vlotman/Gallo Images/Netball World Cup 2023

playoff for fifth place.

For African teams to go further, Malawi captain Towera Vinkhumbo reckons the next step has to be a professional league in South Africa. "It's going to help again because there are going to be more players outside, not only in Africa but maybe outside Africa coming and playing in this league."

Mgodana agrees, noting that the gap will begin to be closed when Africa can retain its players. Last month, the president of Netball South Africa, Cecilia Molokwane, reiterated her goal of making the league a reality in 2025.

The next world cup is in Australia in 2027. ■

Ungrease the wobbly wheels of democracy

Bad news ahead of International Anti-Corruption Day this Monday: In the eyes of ordinary Africans, corruption is getting worse, as recent Afrobarometer survey findings reveal.

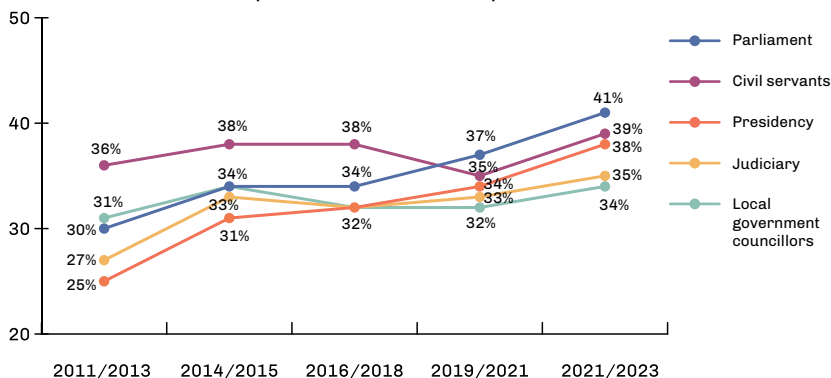
On average across 39 African countries, nearly six in 10 respondents (58%) say corruption increased in their countries over the past year, including 82% in South Africa and 87% in Eswatini. Only three countries record majorities who say corruption decreased: Benin (70%), Mali (64%) and Zambia (53%).

Trends in perceived corruption in specific institutions paint a similar picture: Across up to 30 countries for

which we have complete data, 38% of respondents say “most” or “all” officials in their president’s office are corrupt, up by 13 percentage points since 2011/2013. Perceptions of widespread corruption show similar increases for members of Parliament (+11 points) and the judiciary (+8 points), with marginal increases of three points for local government councillors and civil servants.

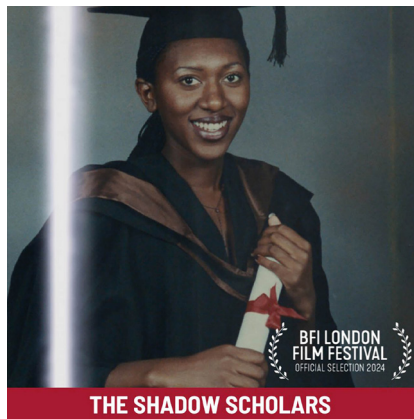
Two thirds (67%) of Africans say their governments are failing in their anti-corruption efforts, and 71% say whistleblowers risk retaliation. If neither ordinary people nor their leaders can fight this menace, who can? ■

Most/All seen as corrupt in key public institutions
| 30 African countries* | 2011-2023



* Not all questions were asked in all countries in all survey rounds.

Source: Afrobarometer is 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.



Outsourcing academia

Meet the Kenyan intellectuals quietly ghostwriting academic works for lazy students in the Global North.

Wilfred Okiche

Kenya is host to a thriving army – about 40,000 strong – of college graduates who work as academic writers. These “shadow scholars” are commissioned and paid by students in the most prestigious institutions in the western hemisphere to produce essays, papers, scholarly articles and graduate theses on their behalf. Worth around \$7-billion, this shadow industry is built on the wide economic

gulf that exists between wealthy nations and a developing country like Kenya.

The Shadow Scholars, by first-time feature director Eloïse King, dives full throttle into this underground world. It’s a compelling documentary that builds on the work of sociologist and Oxford University scholar Patricia Kingori.

Kingori, born in Kenya, is a rising star in academia and one of the world’s leading scholars on contract cheating. As narrator and subject, Kingori provides not just intellectual heft to the project, but also a fair-minded approach that is in lockstep with director King’s vision of shining a light on under-reported stories.

There are many ways that this story could have been sensationalised, with clear villains and victims. But *The Shadow Scholars* comes at this respectfully through the people involved, specifically the young Kenyans who labour in the trenches for their more privileged counterparts a world away.

For security reasons, the film disguises the identities of these essay writers while trying to break down their motivations. The film also insists on not reducing these Kenyans to the status of victims to be pitied.

Kingori’s scholarship is interested in teasing out how power dynamics shape the past, present and future of the global order. In this case, she is appalled by how easily the efforts of these young Kenyans are erased as they go uncredited for their intellectual output – an erasure with loud echoes in history. ■

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

"When ndombolo drops so fine like wine, mom & pop get boppin' like it's 1999."



1_ In which country is La Médina d'Agadir, or Agadir Medina (pictured), located?

2_ Which country voted Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah in as president this week?

3_ Menelik I was the first monarch of which country?

4_ Who was the first president of the Central African Republic?

5_ Faustin-Archange Touadéra is which country's president?

6_ Curepipe, Quatre

Bornes, and Beau Bassin-Rose Hill are towns in which island country?

7_ In which country does ndombolo music originate?

8_ Which African country did US President Joe Biden visit this week?

9_ Name the Kenyan author famous for his 1967 novel *A Grain of Wheat*.

10_ Which African country is holding general elections on 7 December?

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to [+27 73 805 6068](tel:+27738056068) and we'll send the answers to you!

THE BIG PICTURE

Touch brass: South African military band members ventilate their dress uniforms in a spot of pre-muster clustering ahead of a military parade to welcome a bigwig in Tshwane, in Gauteng province.

Photo: Roberta Ciuccio/AFP



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