

The Continent

Africans of the Year 2024



It's a wrap!

Every year – or day – that one pays attention to the news, it seems all is lost, or about to be. But sprinkled in with all that news of doom are tidbits about people who are still getting up, still showing up, and – when the stars align – still reaping rewards for it. In what is now a tradition of *The Continent*, we close out the year with a special issue celebrating the people who made us dance, sing, think, cheer, aspire or entertain hope: the **Africans of Year**, as chosen by our editors and contributors (starting on p11).



Top picks

- Wilfred Okiche's films to watch before year-end (p9)
- Refiloe Seiboko's top five earworms (p14)
- Jacqueline Nyathi picks the year's must-reads (p19)
- The extraordinary yet quiet pictures that stirred our photo editor Paul Botes (p22)

STAY IN TOUCH

This year has been a lot. People took to the streets, violent men cracked down on dissent, and tens of millions of Africans voted. Often, that was for change. Liberation movements fell. *The Continent* was there to record Africa in all its complexity. Which is exhausting for our small newsroom. We're closing down to take stock and be humans. We'll be back with an edition on 25 January, ahead of our fifth birthday and a year of quality journalism. Now it's your turn to take the mic: respond to our reader [survey](#) to tell us how we did this year.

And if you have a dime to spare, support [The Continent's fundraiser](#). All the money goes to journalism.

All Protocol Observed.

THE YEAR IN NEWS

The cracks in the global order are widening. This means increased uncertainty – and opportunity.



Lydia Namubiru – editor-in-chief
Kiri Rupiah – communities editor
Simon Allison – international editor

What was the most significant African news story of the year?

LN: It's less a news story but the most significant undercurrent beneath the news: an economic perfect storm. In the optimistic pre-pandemic decade, African countries accumulated debt hoping to keep up the growth that inspired "Africa is rising" analyses. But when the unexpected

happened – Covid-19 and war in Ukraine – the stiff repayments made it impossible to invest in cushioning people, businesses and public sectors from the disruptions of these shocks. Some turned to lenders of last resort like the International Monetary Fund for bailouts but they almost always require public finance managers to roll out belt-tightening measures that squeeze local incomes even further – higher taxes, currency floating and so on. The pain from that storm is driving protests, electoral losses by incumbents, and

some pivots to populism. But, as Kenyan politicians are learning, populist wins are short-lived unless the winner can solve the underlying economic problems – quickly, while also holding onto power.

KR: Perhaps the end is nigh for liberation movements in Southern Africa. Perhaps it isn't. However, the elections in South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique showed what happens when people can't be placated with slogans and struggle credentials.

SA: A generational shift is under way in African politics – with mixed results. You see it in Kenya, where Gen Z refused to allow their president to implement arbitrary tax hikes – and got the entire cabinet fired in the process. You see it in Senegal, where a furious and mobilised

youth vote sent the elite old guard packing, anointing instead Africa's youngest democratically-elected leader (President Diomaye Bassirou Faye is 44 year old). And you see it all along the “coup belt”, where junta leaders skew young. Most notable among them is Burkina Faso's Ibrahim Traoré, who at age 36 is the youngest head of state in the world. The political and economic future of this continent will be shaped by how successfully this new generation of leaders is able to avoid their elders' mistakes.

What story should have received more attention?

LN: Sudan and the geopolitics that continues that horrific war. Because the most significant hands in that war are not the usual Western suspects, we



Mean streets: A protester in Nairobi is caught in the explosion of a tear gas cannister. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

On the line: Men who fled the war in Sudan queue to receive assistance at a transit centre for refugees in Renk, South Sudan.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP



have struggled to cover, understand and question the complicity or negligence of actors like the United Arab Emirates, Mahamat Déby in Chad or the African Union.

KR: The people of Sudan continue to be held hostage by two men and their thirst for power. The number of casualties of the war continues unabated, millions of people have been displaced and now famine is killing those who have miraculously survived the onslaught.

SA: At least 20 African countries are in debt distress, meaning they are unable to service their existing obligations. Collectively, African countries paid more than \$100-billion in debt to external entities this year. Most of this debt is privately-held, and was offered at punishing rates of interest (in some

African journalism. 24 AUGUST 2024 | ISSUE 173

The Continent

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Meet your government's loan sharks

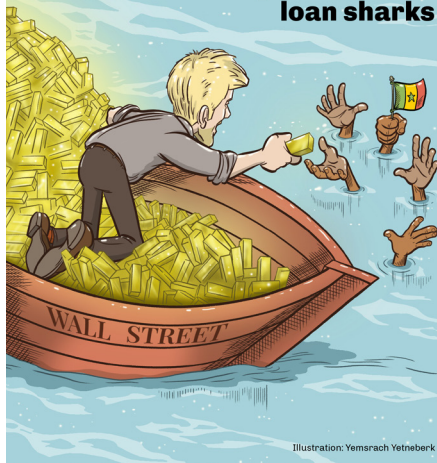


Illustration: Yemsrach Yetneberk

cases, like in Mozambique, western banks offered enormous bribes to persuade ruling elites to accept disadvantageous terms). African prosperity is a pipe dream until the debt crisis is somehow resolved.

What was the biggest international story of the year?

SA: The damp squib global climate negotiations in Baku, Azerbaijan. Holding talks to save the world from fossil fuels in the capital of one of the world's most enthusiastic producers of fossil fuels was not a great start. Less encouraging still was the lack of attention the conference received – have we all given up already? The election of Donald Trump, who has surrounded himself with climate change deniers, suggests that we have.

KR: The rules-based order is a figment of our collective imagination. All animals

are equal, but some are more equal than others, or something along those lines. Arrest warrants aside, the International Criminal Court should be commended for trying something new. Chasing only after people of a certain origin and hue must get boring.

LN: The ouster of Syria's Bashar al-Assad. Might be recency bias but has anything bigger than that happened this year? A decade-long resistance won in the end, seemingly overnight. If Bashar can fall, no one is safe.

Who was the biggest villain this year?

KR: Dickson Ndiema who, unable to face and overcome his own inadequacies, decided to set his former partner, Olympic marathon runner Rebecca Cheptegei alight.



Vigil: Ugandan soldiers stand watch over the coffin of marathon runner Rebecca Cheptegei, who was murdered in Kenya. Photo: Badru Katumba/AFP

LN: Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, leader of the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary in Sudan. For the second year running, in my book.

SA: This year alone, Elon Musk helped get Donald Trump elected as president of the United States; destroyed what credibility remained in the digital information landscape, through his brazen manipulation of X's algorithms; and was repeatedly accused of using his social media platform to amplify white supremacists. Elon Musk would prefer to forget his roots in apartheid South Africa, but much of his worldview appears to be rooted in the racist ideologies that he grew up with.

What story gave you hope for next year?

LN: The clinical trials for Lenacapavir, the drug that works almost like an HIV vaccine. In June, we learnt that there were no infections among the 5,300 South African and Ugandan cisgender women and girls who got an injection of it twice a year. In September, we learnt that when it was tested on over 1,000 men and transgender people, only two infections happened. Moreover, thanks to lessons the world has learnt from decades of medical access activism, serious conversations are already happening on fair pricing to prevent it from being out of reach for low income groups with high risk – including the groups who volunteered to test it, like African sex workers and LGBTQIA+ people. The end of HIV/AIDS is actually in sight!

KR: The protests in Kenya against the proposed Finance Bill were a glimmer of hope in an environment which claims young people are not aware nor are they engaged in directing their futures. Gen Z showed up and caused President William Ruto to dissolve his cabinet and rethink his position. Not bad for people who allegedly only know how to take selfies.

SA: At the time of publishing, South Africa has had uninterrupted electricity supply for 262 days. No further load-shedding is predicted for at least another seven months. After more than a decade of almost daily power cuts, it is full steam ahead for Africa's largest economy. ■



Illustration: Wynona Mutisi

We want to hear from you



“

“Groundbreaking, remarkable, unique, high quality, insightful.”

“Easy to read African journalism that reflects the Africa I know and love.”

“Often, the post-colonial criticism takes the place of any analysis of more instructive and African dynamics.”

“Bold, fresh, free.””

That's how some of you have already described *The Continent* in our Big Annual Survey™. This helps us to keep improving the newspaper and our journalism. It also helps us make the case to funders and advertisers to support our work.

And it makes us feel happier. Which is a nice thing in the world. Be more like the person who sent us this: “I'm a better person because I read *The Continent*. Generally, I think it makes me treat people – especially less powerful people – more decently.”

Please click on the [link](#).



The year in MOVIES

As chosen by Wilfred Okiche, *The Continent's* film critic



5 *The Weekend* (Nigeria)
Nothing good comes from meeting the in-laws. Daniel Oriahi's latest title places a young couple, visiting the groom's ancestral home for the first time, in an impossible situation. *The Weekend* achieves a fine balance, weaving between genres until it descends into madness in the grisly final act.



4 *My Mercury* (South Africa)
Pippa Ehrlich, of *My Octopus Teacher*, and Joëlle Chesselet co-direct this profile of Chesselet's brother Yves. The 28-year-old conservationist relocated to an island off the coast of Namibia to make a home for endangered seabirds. Told through Yves' video diaries and personal archives, *My Mercury* is essential viewing.



3 *On Becoming a Guinea Fowl* (Zambia)
In many cultures, it is impolite to speak ill of the dead. Zambian-Welsh auteur Rungano Nyoni's richly imagined sophomore feature is very impolite. In this surrealist fable, young women push back against the complicity of family when they gather at the funeral of their abuser, a respected patriarch.



2 *The Village Next to Paradise* (Somalia)
Somali-Austrian filmmaker Mo Harawe paints a portrait of hope and hopelessness with a story of sacrifice and survival. Harawe reconstructs the nuclear family as comprising a down-on-his-luck fellow, his divorced sister and a motherless child. They struggle to get by even as the world around them falls apart.



1 *Dahomey* (Benin/Senegal)
Mati Diop became the first Black winner of the Golden Bear, the top prize at the Berlinale, for this story of the return of royal treasures plundered from Dahomey by French troops in 1892. *Dahomey* sparks necessary conversations about artistic heritage, cultural memory and the politics of decolonisation.

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Hanifa Safia Adan



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Hanifa Safia Adan



Young, brave and hungry for a better Kenya

Maureen Kasuku

June to August were tumultuous and transformative months in Kenyan politics. In what came to be dubbed the “Gen Z movement”, young people used social media to physically mobilise against the government’s tax proposal. The capital shook. Hanifa Safia Adan – better known as “Honey Farsafi” – was one of the leading voices and organisers.

On social media, Adan describes her existence as “mundane” and “humdrum”. But it is far from that. She is a highly visible, quick-witted social media activist. Her activism for social justice and accountability in Kenya began years ago. She has long angered many powerful

figures, including Nairobi’s governor.

“Before I started my advocacy on the internet, I lobbied for change on the ground,” she tells *The Continent*. “It didn’t help, much. Out of frustration, I posted on social media about garbage accumulation in Nairobi. A three-decade problem was fixed in two months.”

Lesson learned, this time around she used social media to mobilise thousands of people to marches and raised about \$230,000 for the medical and funeral expenses of those whom police injured or killed in their response to the protests. “The trust and accountability I have built online made it possible,” she says, adding: “I accounted for the money and was publicly audited.”

Her activism has come at a cost. The misogyny and ethnic bigotry of many of her critics is chilling. “I have been attacked for being a vocal woman, a Muslim, and for my Somali heritage” she says, lamenting society’s constant need to “humble women”.

Her visibility has many people speaking of her as a key opposition figure in Kenyan politics, something she is quick to distance herself from, saying: “I have no ambitions or desires for any political seat.”

And that is faithful to the spirit of the Gen Z protesters who shook Kenya. Unlike all political actors before them, they don’t want power, Adan says. Just “a country that works for everyone”. ■

Maureen Kasuku is a Kenyan journalist and feminist organiser

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Rema



Illustration: Nziliani Simu

Rema

Benin Boy: Calm before the storm

Rema is taming the beat
and bringing it home.

Wilfred Okiche

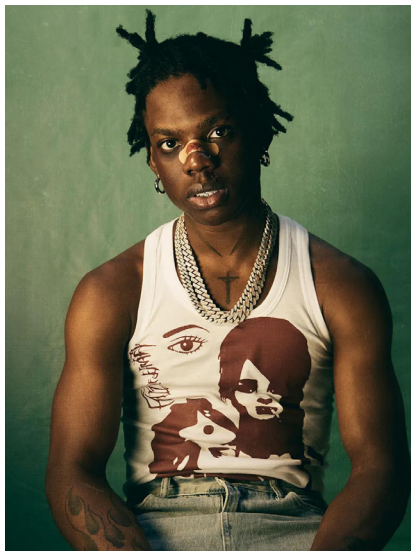
The global popularity of Nigerian pop music – aka Afrobeats – has been characterised by the near-total domination of the big three: Burna Boy, Wizkid and Davido. Not anymore.

Through sheer talent and force of will, 24-year-old pop star Rema – born Divine Ikubor – has made his case to be included in the Afrobeats pantheon. And he knows it. “No more big three, there’s now a big four,” the Benin City-born maverick asserts on *Hehehe*, a single off his game-changing sophomore album *Heis*.

From his blistering breakthrough *Dumebi* in 2019, to his Billboard 100-charting *Calm Down* (with Selena Gomez) which became the first African song to hit 1-billion streams on Spotify this year, Rema is certainly delivering.

What he’s achieved with the turbo-charged Afrobeats of *Heis* – nominated for a Grammy this year – is even more interesting.

Rema shunned the urge to repeat himself or dilute his sound for an ever-expanding global audience, becoming



both a leader of and advocate for a new generation.

Unlike some of his compatriots, Rema has proudly embraced the Afrobeats label, and paid respectful homage to the people who paved the way for his rapid ascension. After a few years building an international profile, Rema is now reconciling the demands of his global superstar status with the need to stay connected to home fans. He performed *Calm Down* at the Brit Awards in March; by August, he was hosting a subsidised concert in his home city for 12,000.

There are imitators, but no one on pop radio or the charts sounds as experimental and refreshing as this Benin Boy. ■

Wilfred Okiche is The Continent's film critic



The year in MUSIC 🎵

As chosen by Refiloe Seiboko, *The Continent's* production editor



5 **Ma Cherie (Remix)** by Bien featuring Fally Ipupa
 Bien officially released this gem last year, but midway through this year we were blessed with a remix featuring none other than Fally Ipupa. It's simple maths: combine the melodic ribbons of Sauti Sol with the romantic serenades of a Congolese legend and you've got a hit. I have yet to tire of the croonings.



4 **Soh-Soh** by Odeal
 The best thing a musician can ask for is for their song to go viral – even if it means the song is forever known as “that TikTok song”. The algorithm couldn't subvert *Soh-Soh*, though. Odeal's music is too strong. This particular song made me question if I've ever heard anything smoother. Not this year, at least.



3 **Jump** by Tyla
 The Tyfification of Planet Earth cannot be escaped. I tried to limit the presence of South Africa's latest and greatest starlet in my life but I failed. She's a true force, that girl. Her sound is infectious: spunky, fresh and very much gives stand-up-and-shake-your-ass. And if you haven't seen the video, jump to it.



2 **Love Me JeJe** by Tems
 Tems can make a groovy, emotion-steeped lovgirl anthem in her sleep, and she did it again with this incredibly catchy call-and-response track. With lines like “You know your love turn me up like NEPA” (Nigeria's often unreliable electricity provider), I found it hugely relatable and hugely heartwarming.



1 **MMS** by Asake and Wizkid
 My year can be divided into two sections: Before *MMS*, and after *MMS*. Just hear this: *O ye oloṣun, o ye oloṣun* (God understands) *Ki la mu wa aye?* (What did we bring into this life?) *Ko soun ta mu waye* (There's nothing we brought with). *Ko si nkan ta ma mu lo* (There's nothing we'll take with us). Shakespeare who?

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Imane Khelif



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Imane Khelif

Pulling no punches

The boxer has bested her opponents inside and outside the ring.

Lydia Namubiru

Imane Khelif has the kind of body that accomplishes Olympian feats: a beautifully muscular machine that lands hard punches. That should not be controversial, given what the Olympic gold medallist does for a living: fighting willing and well-trained opponents. Before we all spent entirely too much time online, this might have gone unremarked.

At the Paris Olympic Games in August, the Algerian boxer landed a superbly effective punch on the face of her opponent. The stunned Italian Angela

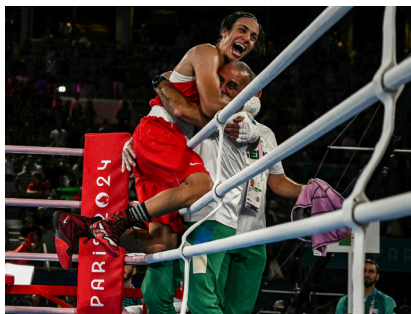
Carina abandoned the bout 46 seconds in and left without shaking Khelif's hand. Then the internet descended on Khelif.

The famous, and often loudly wrong British writer JK Rowling tweeted about "a man beating a woman in public for your entertainment." Elon Musk, the owner of that mad website, chimed in too. And Donald Trump, the once and future American president with 34 felony convictions, went on to use Khelif for his campaign promise to "keep men out of women's sport".

Many African women athletes have been told that they are not women at all. Just ask Aminatou Seyni (Niger), Annet Negesa (Uganda), Barbra Banda (Zambia), Beatrice Masilingi (Namibia), Caster Semenya (South Africa) and Maximilla Imali (Kenya), among others. Some have kept quiet about it.

But Khelif is a fighter. Before leaving Paris – gold medal in tow – she filed a criminal complaint naming Rowling and Musk as cyberbullies. In November, another lawsuit: against a journalist of *Le Correspondant*, who repeated claims that her gender is questionable.

Khelif acknowledges that the kind of harassment she suffered makes winning harder. But hard never stopped her. Not when her parents claimed boxing was for boys and men. And not now, when the idle privileged want to ring fence the sport for dainty girls. ■



Hard-knock life: Algeria's Imane Khelif celebrates after a bout at the Paris Olympics. Photo: Mohd Rasfan/AFP

Lydia Namubiru is The Continent's editor-in-chief

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

**John Dugard, Max Du Plessis, Adila Hassim
and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi**



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

John Dugard, Max du Plessis, Adila Hassim and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi

Litigating a genocide

The four lawyers who gave a masterclass in international accountability.

Suraya Dadoo

Heroes don't wear capes – they have LLBs. So read a placard in the crowd at Johannesburg's international airport in January. The crowd had gathered to welcome home South Africa's legal team who, earlier in the month, had argued at the International Court of Justice that Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

John Dugard (who literally wrote the book on international law), Max du Plessis, Adila Hassim and Tembeka Ngcukaitobi presented their case at The Hague. They argued that, with bombs and blockades, Israel was systematically squeezing the life out of the Palestinians of Gaza. The court later ruled that their genocide arguments were plausible.

"I must say that I have never felt as proud as I felt today when our legal team was arguing our case in The Hague," said South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Although the lawyers have been lauded by the state, they have also litigated against their own government. Du Plessis held it



Dream team: John Dugard, Tembeka Ngcukaitobi and Adila Hassim at The Hague. Photo: Michel Porro/Getty Images

accountable for failing to arrest Sudanese war criminal Omar al-Bashir in 2015. Hassim represented the families of 144 mentally ill patients who died at the hands of state health officials. Ngcukaitobi successfully argued for the "State Capture" report on government corruption to be made public. Human rights champions, yes. Government cheerleaders, no.

In October, the team submitted thousands of pages of evidence that they say documents how the Israeli government is violating the UN Genocide Convention by inciting and committing genocide, by destroying infrastructure, and using disease and starvation as weapons of war.

Israel's war on Gaza continues, and it may be years before the ICJ passes a final judgement, but South Africa's legal team has already made a powerful moral and political statement: international courts aren't for African leaders only. ■

Suraya Dadoo is a writer based in Johannesburg, South Africa

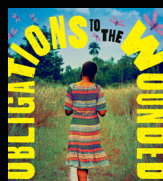


The year in BOOKS

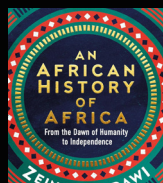
As chosen by Jacqueline Nyathi, founder of Harare Review of Books and *The Continent's* book reviewer



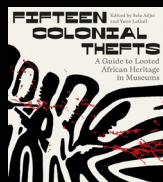
5 **Monster** by Dzifa Benson
British-Ghanaian poet Benson's history of Sarah Baartman gives Baartman a voice and some agency within the constraints of her terrible abduction and exploitation. This is, in the words of the publisher, "a bold and lyrical exploration of the Black female body as a site of oppression and resistance".



4 **Obligations to the Wounded** by Mubanga Kalimamukwento
These stories are about the wounded, about making their voices heard. The child exploring their gender identity is punished by their mother, but there's redemption later. Girls prevented from growing into themselves before they're forced into society's roles. There's pain here, but also humour, dignity and defiance.



3 **An African History of Africa** by Zeinab Badawi
There's no easy way to fit the great history of a great continent into one book, but Badawi has made a fantastic attempt. Ancient Egypt, Kush, Aksum, Songhay, Ghana, Benin, Mali, Mutapa, Rozvi, Gaza, Zulu, Kongo and more: their rise, their fall, their legacy. An expansive, illuminating and necessary book.



2 **Fifteen Colonial Thefts** by Sela Adjei, Yann LeGall (Eds)
Adjei and LeGall's collection of thoughts from African thinkers and community leaders is a guide to some of the most important of Africa's beautiful and sacred looted artefacts (and ancestors). It reframes restitution from the perspective of the wronged parties: Africans. Colonial violence is still and always with us.



1 **Samahani** – Abdelazziz Baraka Sakin, Adil Babikir (tr), Mayada Ibrahim (tr)
An Omani princess of Zanzibar grows up – and close – with the young eunuch she is given as a slave. With biting humour, incisive insight, and the power of a great storyteller, Abdelazziz Baraka Sakin leads us through their story to a shattering conclusion.

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Chidimma Adetshina



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Chidimma Adetshina

Beauty is in the eye of the passport holder

Desmond Vincent

On 16 November 2001, Agbani Darego became the first Nigerian and Black African to win Miss World. This year, on that same date, 23-year-old Chidimma Adetshina crowned a chaotic and cruel year with a first runner-up finish at Miss Universe. Crowned Miss Universe Africa and Oceania, she brought Nigeria its highest-ever placement at that pageant.

Yet the story isn't the title. It's the intense politics that marked Adetshina's journey to that title, and to representing Nigeria in Miss Universe.

Born in Soweto to a Nigerian father and a Mozambican mother, Adetshina was raised in Cape Town. In July 2024, she entered the Miss South Africa competition, sparking a national debate. Critics said her Nigerian heritage should have made her ineligible – despite her South African citizenship. Gayton McKenzie, South Africa's controversial culture minister, said her participation gave him “funny vibes”. The country's department of home affairs opened an investigation, alleging her mother had obtained citizenship fraudulently.



Pageant pending: Chidimma Adetshina's tale pits a princess against internalised divisions. Photo: Benson Ibeabuchi/AFP

Xenophobic rhetoric targeting Adetshina got so intense that, fearing for her safety, she withdrew from that pageant. Flabbergasted Nigerian pageant organisers invited her “home” and she entered their iteration, and won.

Adetshina says she will now focus on her education – away from the pageant scene. But she is likely to be one of the more memorable queens of recent times. She drove conversations from Nigeria to South Africa about the colonial separations we made our own. And her journey is one for the storybooks, the tale of a Cinderella whose nasty stepsisters couldn't keep her from having a ball. ■

Desmond Vincent is a Lagos-based writer



The year in PHOTOS

As chosen by Paul Botes, *The Continent's* photo editor



5 John Wessels /AFP

This year, I found myself drawn to quieter photographs that slow things down and encourage us to look a little longer, see a little deeper. This particular photograph makes me smile. I love the feel of it: an everyday moment in Banjul, elevated by the composition.



4 Angelos Tzortzinis /AFP

Sand from the Sahara reaches Athens every few years. This year it was particularly severe, casting an eerie orange blanket over the city. There is a lovely, soft intimacy to this picture.



3 Michele Spatari /AFP

Ethiopia's Danakil Depression is one of the most inhospitable places on earth, with acid ponds, geysers and temperatures that can exceed 50°C. The simplicity of this moment, and its careful composition, belie the otherworldly nature of the image.



2 Luis Tato /AFP

A woman wades through floodwater in Garissa, Kenya. Other pictures depict destruction from the flooding, but this photo also elicits empathy and a deeper understanding of the scale of the disaster. The proximity to her forces us to see it through her eyes.



1 John Wessels /AFP

Young girls hold hands in Cap Skirring, Senegal, during Eid al-Fitr celebrations. The colour of the walls and doors complements their dresses. The ice-cream with which the smallest girl is preoccupied adds nostalgia.

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Madeleine Fullard



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Madeleine Fullard



Photo: Marc Shoul

The woman who won't let us forget

This self-described 'gravedigger' is collecting evidence of apartheid crimes – and giving rest to the dead.

Kiri Rupiah

South Africa is often described as a crime scene. Evidence of the brutality of the apartheid regime is scattered all over Southern Africa. Thirty years after the official end of apartheid, there are some who would prefer that certain parts of the country's history, and where it intersects with the rest of the region, remain buried. Madeleine Fullard is not one of them.

In September, Fullard was in

Zimbabwe, exhuming the remains of 15 freedom fighters who died in exile. It was far from her first dig. She tweeted a picture of her team with the words: "Two countries, four cities, seven cemeteries, forty eight exhumations."

Fullard once described herself as a "gravedigger" to *The Guardian*. There's more to it than that. The job of this self-described "obsessive tabulator of pre-1994 dead", and former Truth and Reconciliation Commission researcher, is to find out what happened to people who disappeared between 1960 and 1994. In that era, South Africa was governed as a white supremacist state. It also engaged in widespread cross-border destabilisation tactics, including murdering anti-apartheid activists and freedom fighters abroad. Fullard seeks to recover the remains of the victims where possible.

It is not an easy task. She follows strands of incomplete stories, fading memories and hearsay. It is even harder to find disintegrated bone fragments, often all that's left of those hastily buried where they fell or were forgotten in a pauper's grave.

In many African cultures and traditions, a person who is not properly buried or grieved does not rest, nor does their family. Fullard and her team cannot bring apartheid victims back to life – but their difficult work can give some measure of closure. ■

Kiri Rupiah is The Continent's communities editor

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Luol Deng



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Luol Deng

Keeping hope and hoop alive

Luol Deng found fame and fortune abroad – and used it to rebuild South Sudan.

Lee Nxumalo

At six years old, Luol Deng left South Sudan to escape a brutal civil war.

At a refugee settlement in Egypt, Deng and his brothers encountered former NBA player and fellow Dinka, Manute Bol. He introduced Deng to basketball, a sport that would shape the trajectory of his life.

In 2004, Deng was drafted to play for the Chicago Bulls – in itself an extraordinary accomplishment.

In 2011, South Sudanese people took part in a referendum for independence from the rest of Sudan. At the time, Deng was in his prime as an NBA player. He earned two All-Star appearances and was a key figure in the Bulls' journey to the Eastern Conference Finals. But he made sure to support referendum efforts back home by funding travel for citizens to vote. And vote they did: in great numbers and, overwhelmingly, to secede.

By late 2013, South Sudan had descended into another civil war. It led to mass displacements, famine, ethnic cleansing and rampant sexual violence against women and children. In response, Deng expanded his humanitarian efforts



Aim high: Under Luol Deng's leadership South Sudan's basketball team took Paris by storm. Photo: Akuot Chol/AFP

– and started building what would become the Manute Bol basketball courts in Juba.

Five years later, a power-sharing agreement signalled the end of the war. Around the same time, Deng retired from the NBA and poured himself into developing basketball in his home country.

That work has led to remarkable progress. Finishing as the top African team in the 2023 FIBA World Cup, South Sudan qualified for this year's Olympics – their maiden appearance. They captured global attention in an exhibition game when they took a star-studded United States team to the wire, losing by just one point.

Through this year's success, the South Sudanese basketball team embodied hope. It has become a symbol of a nation that is rewriting its national story – even as it waits to fully realise its democracy. Deng has been the architect of this success. ■

Lee Nxumalo is a writer and content producer. Her work explores the intersection between sports and culture

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Esther Kimani



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Esther Kimani



Outstanding in her field

Soila Kenya

On the farm in Kenya's Nyandarua county where Esther Kimani was raised, her family used to lose as much as 40% of their crops each season. That's standard for the country's five million smallholder farmers. So she used her computer science background to create a device that detects plant pests and diseases early, and is cheap for people to use.

Her work on the unit – a solar powered camera and computer system – began when she was a student at the University of Eldoret in eastern Kenya. Atop a stand that sits above a field, it continuously

photographs crops within range and analyses the pictures for signs of infestation or infection. When it detects a problem, the device sends an SMS alert to the farmer's phone suggesting what might be wrong and recommending solutions.

Used correctly and consistently, Kimani says the device can reduce crop losses by 30% and increase yields by 40%.

Farmers lease it for \$3 a month – a great deal less expensive than transporting an agricultural extension worker to one's farm, or the \$100 an hour to rent a crop surveillance drone.

But great ideas need help to scale. So Kimani moved to Nairobi and immersed herself into the city's tech start-up scene. She co-founded Farmer Lifeline Technologies. She also applied for any programme that could support her work. And in June, the Royal Academy of Engineering, a British institution, awarded her its prestigious Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation. That came with over \$63,000 to help roll out her innovation.

The 27-year-old innovator told the audience at the awards ceremony in June that her goal is to bring her now-patented crop monitoring device to a million farmers over the next five years.

In July, she told a podcaster: "I left home to save home." This technology is a big step towards that. ■

Soila Kenya is a data journalist and fact-checker with particular interest in technology

AFRICANS OF THE YEAR

Zukiswa Wanner



Illustration: Nzilani Simu

Zukiswa Wanner



Return to sender

Zukiswa Wanner couldn't be swayed or silenced – and she's still speaking up.

Jacqueline Nyathi

In March, the first African woman to receive the Goethe Medal – one of Germany's highest honours – returned it to the German embassy in Nairobi in protest against Germany's "continued support" of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Zukiswa Wanner was awarded the medal in 2020 for "outstanding service for international cultural relations", along with Elvira Espejo Ayca, a Bolivian artist and museum director, and British author Ian McEwan.

Wanner is an author and publisher with roots in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

One of her passions is African literature, and in 2020, she organised and curated Afrolit Sans Frontières, an online literature festival that included some of Africa's best-known authors.

Wanner has devoted much of her career to promoting the works of other African writers, and advocating for literature. She is using the platform she's built to speak out against injustice, war, genocide, settler colonialism, the muzzling of free speech, extrajudicial killings and more – taking a stand for justice and freedom.

In a world where many remain silent or feel coerced into not speaking up, Wanner has chosen courage that comes at great personal cost. And she's not backing down.

Continuing her activism for Palestine, Wanner was part of a protest march to the United States consulate in Johannesburg in October. She gave a speech in which she linked Palestinian freedom with places worldwide where there is injustice and conflict – Lebanon, the DRC, Haiti and Sudan.

Explaining her decision to renounce the Goethe Medal, Wanner wrote in *Africa is a Country*: "What I see is Germany being on the wrong side of genocide again ... I thus find myself unable to stay silent or keep an official decoration from a government that is this callous to human suffering." ■

Jacqueline Nyathi is the founder of Harare Review of Books and The Continent's book reviewer

Act thoughtfully and think actively

*If theory without action is ivory tower vanity, then
action without theory is violent chaos.*

Patrick Gathara

In the imagination of many, power – especially of the political and military sort – is at the heart of liberation. “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you,” urged political theorist and Ghana’s first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

In 2018, when the superhero movie *Black Panther* was released, many African and Black people around the world celebrated its vision of an African country as the most militarily and technologically advanced nation on earth. The thinking it seems is that all things were added to the fictional nation of Wakanda after it managed to safeguard its political freedom from coloniser predation.

Historically, this is not how things have worked out. We’ve seen that power grabs are rarely accompanied by things like prosperity, good governance, respect for personal rights and human dignity. It is not that political power is unnecessary, or a bad thing in itself. It is a necessary condition but not a sufficient, nor even the most important one.

Now it goes without saying that much

of what passed for political independence on the continent was little more than a cruel hoax. Many of the new African states were born still umbilically tethered to what used to be known as their “former colonial masters”.

**Action is important – as
Nkrumah said: “The best way of
learning to be an independent
sovereign state is to be an
independent sovereign state.”
But it is not sufficient.**

But, even internally, our independence liberators often lacked a theory of change. Once we had the sovereign power, what would we do with it? Without that answer, the political kingdom became just another prison. We ended up building little Wakandas, governed by wealthy, power-hungry, feuding and feudal elites, and having few thinkers to develop systems of transitioning power that do not involve lethal combat or coup d’état.

Kenya’s Dr Wandia Njoya has frequently decried the solutioneering approaches that emphasise action and disregard theory. We are urged to act –



“what’s your solution” – but not theorise about what the problem we are addressing is and whether the proposed action is actually useful.

Action is important. As Nkrumah said: “The best way of learning to be an independent sovereign state is to be an independent sovereign state.”

But it is not sufficient. What revolution calls for, as he reminded us, is that we “think as [wo]men of action and act as [wo]men of thought”.

It is not that we don’t have the theorists. We just sometimes don’t listen to them in our rush to act. Yet they can help us theorise how, as a continent, we can overcome the mental and institutional

barriers that continue to shackle us.

This year, I was impressed with the Gen Z protesters in Kenya. They did not rush for power. In fact, they refused to play the “leadership” game. Instead they held massive social media forums where they debated what the problems and solutions were even as they demanded action. There is a lesson for the continent there. If, rather than Wakanda, Africans want to reach out for Nkrumah’s vision of Africa as “one of the greatest forces for good in the world”, that begins with theory, not just power. ■

Patrick Gathara is a Kenyan journalist, cartoonist and author

THE QUIZ



Photo: Michele Spatarì/AFP

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

"After the year we just had, it's okay to feel a bit geologically depressed."

- 1_** Which continental tournament begins in December 2025?
- 2_** True or false: Ghanaian president-elect John Mahama previously served as both president and vice-president.
- 3_** Which three colours are on the Gabonese flag?
- 4_** 'Chipolopolo' is the nickname for which country's men's national football team?
- 5_** Hage Geingob was the president of which country when he died in February?
- 6_** Which East African country's vice president was impeached in October?
- 7_** True or false: Sudan's currency is the Sudanese dollar.
- 8_** What is the easternmost country in continental Africa?
- 9_** What is Africa's largest lake by area?
- 10_** Where does Chad get its name from?
- 11_** In which year did Bassirou Diomaye Faye become Senegal's president?
- 12_** What colour is the star on Burkina Faso's flag?
- 13_** *The Year I Turn 21* is a 2024 album released by which Nigerian singer?
- 14_** Name the singer who released her debut album, *Born in the Wild*, this year.
- 15_** Kigoma is a city in which country?
- 16_** The kwanza is which country's currency?
- 17_** Who is the king of Eswatini: Mswati I, Mswati II or Mswati III?
- 18_** Shaabi is a genre of music from which North African country?
- 19_** Name the African president who celebrated 42 years as president in November.
- 20_** The Danakil Depression, a geological depression (*pictured*), is found in which country?

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

THE BIG PICTURE

Hot or not: Cameroonians in Fouban dance during the 548th edition of the Unesco-recognised Nguon festival, which puts the Bamoun monarch's popularity with their people to the test.

Photo: Daniel Beloumou Olomo/AFP



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About us

We published the first edition of *The Continent* in April 2020, betting that people want to read quality African journalism. Learning from others, we reimagined what a newspaper looks like in the 21st century. That meant sharing it where you are – on WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram and email – and packing it with bits of African life, from big investigations to stories of everyday people navigating extraordinary circumstances.

We now have 24,000 subscribers. The typical subscriber says they forward the newspaper to four or five people: in church WhatsApp groups, work Slack channels and across Signal and Telegram. That's nearly 100,000 each week getting insight from on-the-ground reporting by our network of over 400 journalists across most of the countries on our continent.

People, not algorithms, decide who gets to read *The Continent*, and our old-school newspaper format means they get a fuller picture of their world than they would from piecemeal articles scattered across the internet.

That work has been supported by these funders over the years: Mott Foundation, 11th Hour Project, Open Society Foundations, National Endowment for Democracy, Energy Transition Fund, Luminate, Fred Foundation, African Climate Foundation, Africa No Filter, Pulitzer Centre.

None of them controls what we publish. Such decisions rest solely with our editor and our newsroom.

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