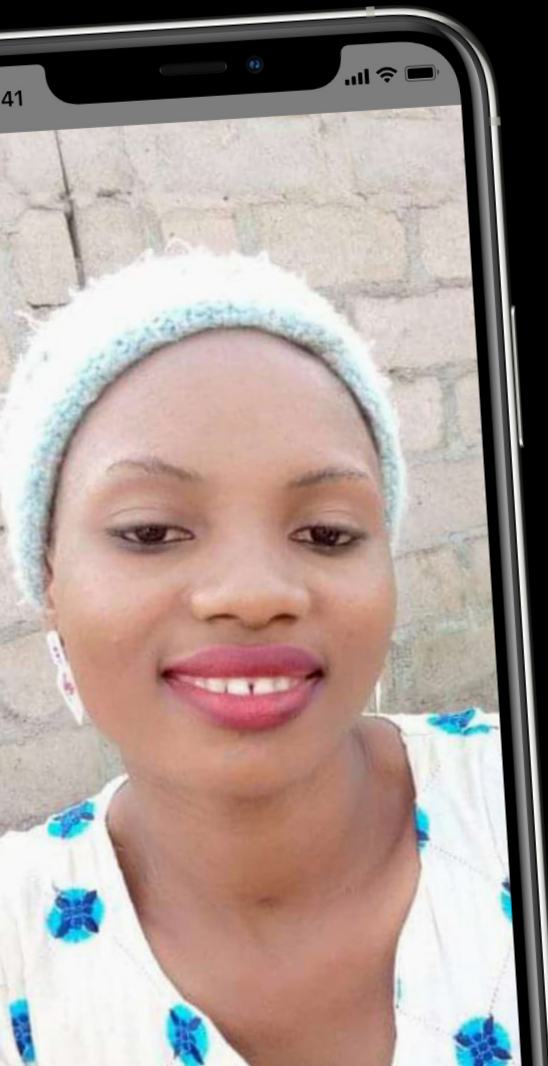


# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



## A 21st century stoning

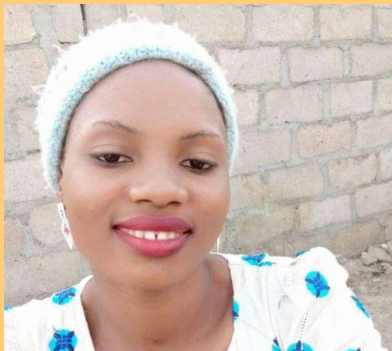
*Disinformation  
and the death of  
Deborah Samuel*

# Inside:

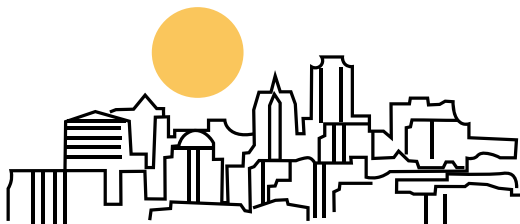
- **Somalia:** A familiar (but new) president faces big problems (p7)
- **Burkina Faso:** The human cost of Canada's mining wealth (p10)
- **Basketball:** Cameroon battles to keep its talent (p20)
- **Herbal remedies:** With a broken health system, Zimbabweans are turning to streetside solutions (p23)
- **Lessons from Manila:** The Philippines elected the son of a violent dictator. Kenyans need to pay attention to how this happened (p25).

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**COVER:** Deborah Samuel was stoned to death – for sending a WhatsApp message. The murder was recorded. Social media algorithms spat those videos around the world, amplifying fault lines in northern Nigeria. Angry communities have become more divided, with little consequence (p12). Vigilantism is inevitable when the police stand by, or brutalise people. But the state has to act to change things (p16). If it doesn't, violence between communities will only intensify and more people will die (p17).



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Photo: Twitter/USEmbalo

## ALGERIA

### Lawmakers seek to criminalise relations with Israel

Youssef Ajesa, a lawmaker from a minority party, the Movement of Society for Peace, has submitted a bill to Algeria's parliament, seeking to criminalise any normalisation of relations between Algiers and Tel Aviv. This is despite there being no threat of this happening — Algeria recognises the right of Palestine to exist in spite of Israeli attempts to stop this. The move comes as Israel has been ramping up its diplomatic work in Africa, attempting to gain more legitimacy.

## GUINEA-BISSAU

### President dismantles key institutions

President Umaro Sissoco Embaló on Monday dissolved Guinea-Bissau's parliament and dismissed all his ministers (except the premier and his deputy). Embaló accuses his fellow leaders of combining their efforts to weaken the country's institutions. His own action means that Guinea-Bissau will now run without two of the country's three top institutions – the legislature and executive branch. He will run the country alone with his two prime ministers until 18 December at the earliest, when parliamentary elections are slated to take place.

## MALAWI

### Dollarlessness bites

Government and private sector forex reserves in Malawi are running low and, as a result, shops are running out of commodities like cooking oil. Kenya Airways and Ethiopian Airways have suspended ticketing in Malawi saying they are having trouble moving dollars out of the country. The Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry has warned that the forex shortage is going to decimate other businesses too. In an attempt at addressing the situation, the government is applying for funding from the International Monetary Fund.

## MOZAMBIQUE

## Exotic strain of polio spotted in the wild

A case of wild poliovirus has been detected in Mozambique — the first since 1992. In February a case was also reported in Malawi. Africa has been free of indigenous polio since August 2020. The new detection does not threaten Africa's polio-free status as the case is not indigenous. Wild poliovirus is endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nonetheless, Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organisation's Regional Director for Africa, says they are “supporting southern African governments to step up the polio fight including carrying out large-scale, effective vaccination campaigns.”

## SENEGAL

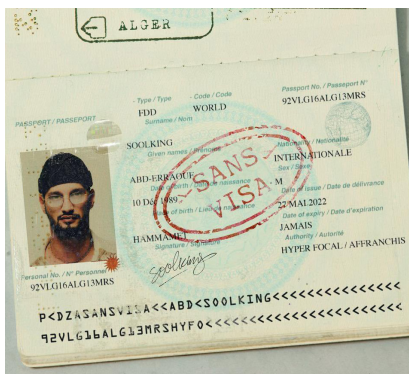
## Footballer's decision splits Francophones

Footballer Idrissa Gueye, who plays for French club Paris Saint-Germain, has divided Francophone communities: some accuse him of homophobia; others say he faces “heterophobia”. The saga began after Gueye missed a game for “personal reasons” when French clubs were set to wear kits with rainbow colours to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. More than 50,000 signed an online petition saying he faces “heterophobia” – a term often misused by bigots to allow them to play the victim when their own antisocial and prejudiced behaviour is called out.

## MUSIC

## Rap and Maghrebian folk music merge at the Apollo in Harlem

Soolking, the Algerian rapper acclaimed in France and Francophone Africa for his blend of rap and Maghrebian folk music, stepped into the English-speaking world, playing the legendary Apollo theatre in Harlem, New York. Soolking, who performs in both Arabic and French, has been a working artist in both Algeria and France over the past 14 years. Released in February, his latest hit, *Suavemente* has



**Suave, man: Soolking's latest album, *Sans Visa*. Photo: Twitter/Soolking**

more than 60-million views on YouTube and is on top of the charts in France.

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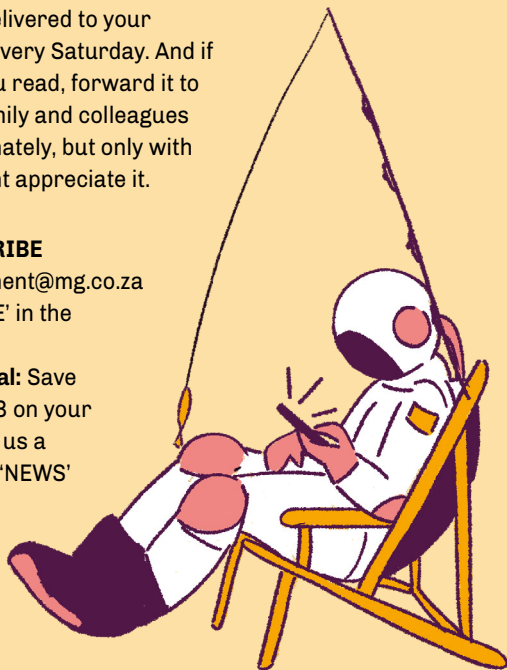
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## INTERNATIONAL

**Cattle beef up US zoo**

The Philadelphia Zoo in the United States has introduced three of Uganda's long-horned Ankole cattle — Yamaani, Gaaju and Kutekaana — to its collection. Unlike most zoo creatures, Ankole cows are not wild animals. International interest in the breed whose horns grow to be about 7kg in weight has grown in recent years. Fans include South African President Cyril Ramaphosa who breeds and auctions them. “We are thrilled to



bring this striking breed to the zoo for the first time in our 163-year history,” the zoo said in a statement.

## UGANDA

**Growing resistance to the East African Crude Oil Pipeline**

A growing list of international insurers and banks are distancing themselves from the oil pipeline meant to transport Uganda's crude oil to the East African coast for export. The international companies are coming under pressure from climate activists fighting the pipeline because it will generate more than 33-million tons of carbon emissions each year. Banks that ruled out financing the project include Deutsche Bank, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Wells Fargo and Morgan Stanley. Insurers including Beazley, Zurich, Axa and Swiss Re, have also distanced themselves from covering it.

## NIGERIA

**Accountant General fired, arrested over \$192-million fraud**

This week Nigeria fired and then arrested the man who managed the country's treasury and oversaw the government accounts. Prosecutors say that, through bogus consultancies and other illegal activities through proxies and his own family members, Ahmed Idris took more than \$192-million from his employer and allegedly laundered the money through real estate involvements. He had been Accountant General since 2015. President Muhammadu Buhari re-appointed him in 2019, even though he had turned 60, the retirement age for most government workers in Nigeria.

# Somalia

## Familiar face returns to Villa Somalia

**Hassan Sheikh Mohamud will be the first Somali leader to serve two non-consecutive presidential terms**

**Hussein Mohamed in Mogadishu**

**S**omalia has a new president, with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud becoming the country's first former leader to be re-elected. He defeated Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" – the man who had replaced him in the 2017 elections.

Because Somalia is so unsafe, this was not a public election. Instead, elected officials met at a fortified airfield in Mogadishu last weekend to decide who would get the tough job of running a country with serious competing problems.

At 66, Mohamud has spent most of his life in the country. Born into a Hawiye family – a powerful clan that dominates south and central Somalia – he went on to study technology at the Somali National University and then technical education

at India's Bhopal (Barkatullah) University.

When Somalia's civil war broke out in the 1990s, Mohamud remained in the country, working for NGOs and the United Nations. Education has been at the core of his public service. In 1999 he co-founded what is now Simad University. Its graduates have been key to rebuilding the Horn of Africa nation. One such alumnus, Alinur Abdi, told *The Continent* that Mohamud "worked hard during a difficult time, sacrificed a lot and now we are reaping the benefits of his efforts."

In 2011 Mohamud joined his friends, all aid workers and educators, to create the Union for Peace and Development Party. The next year, the party propelled Mohamud to the presidency – his first political position. His term saw a reform of the army and the establishment of all Somalia's current regional states, except the semi-autonomous Puntland and fully-autonomous Somaliland.

The country he re-inherits now has big problems, heightened by global problems and inflation linked in part to the war in Ukraine. Some 3.5-million people need urgent food aid, with a serious drought that the UN is warning could drive famine. Al Shabaab militants also have control over large parts of the country. Diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries, particularly Kenya, are strained. ■

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# Malawi

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## Ex-president's graft trial gets the green light

**Bakili Muluzi will face corruption charges for pocketing funding that was meant to build a new hospital**

**Jack McBrams**

**M**alawi's first elected president, Bakili Muluzi, will be tried for corruption after the Supreme Court of Appeal dismissed his latest effort to have the case dismissed on technical grounds. Muluzi, president from 1994 to 2014, was first charged in court in 2009, but multiple postponements and disagreements over technicalities have delayed the case.

The 79-year-old former president, a populist and much-loved figure, is accused of diverting \$11-million of donor funding into his personal account. The money – a grant from the Libyan government – was intended to be used to build a hospital in Blantyre, the country's commercial capital.

Since this legal case began, Malawi has been ruled by four different presidents. A

ministry of justice official told local media that the legal action has already cost the state more than \$10-million.

Malawi's attorney general, Thabo Chakaka Nyirenda, said the state was ready to prosecute the case. "Representing the interests of Malawians, we are happy with this ruling because this will set a precedent to other corruption cases involving unexplained wealth accumulated by public officers."

Not everyone thinks legal action is the best way forward, however. Two former director-generals of Malawi's anti-corruption bureau have publicly said the case requires a political solution, while the country's Public Affairs Committee last year asked the government to discontinue the case.

**'Representing the interests of Malawians, we are happy with this ruling because this will set a precedent to other corruption cases.'**

Muluzi's lawyer, Jai Banda, said they would wait on the state's next move. "The ball is in their court now so we will just wait for the way forward. We will take it up on how the state proceeds, but we are ready for trial," Banda told *The Continent*. "One does wonder whether prosecuting a case for 15 years ... is it worth it?" ■



# South Africa

## Struggling workers slam mine boss's gargantuan pay package

The tax man is not the only one smiling because of the commodities boom

Kiri Rupiah

Three weeks ago *Moneyweb*, a South African online publication, revealed how just four mining bosses – two chief executives, a chief financial officer and a chief operations officer – will receive more than R700-million (\$43.7-million) in guaranteed compensation for 2021 and 2022. Of these, Sibanye-Stillwater's chief executive Neal Froneman will take home the biggest package: just over R300-million (\$18.7-million).

Unionised workers at his company have not reacted well to this news. They have been on strike since early March, demanding a raise of just R1,000 (\$62) a month, while the company is offering to increase the monthly wage by R850 (\$53) each year, for three years.

A combination of surging food and fuel prices coupled with an economy reeling from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, has left many workers unable to stretch stagnant and declining incomes.

Froneman, meanwhile, has defended his remuneration package saying it had been approved by shareholders, and that the process had been transparent. He told the media at a mining conference in Cape Town recently that his true salary was only “something like R28-million (\$1.7-million)”, while the larger portion of the package was a long-term incentive that is not a cost to the company.

Froneman added that Sibanye-Stillwater would not be bullied into unsustainable wage demands.

This current mining strike comes a decade after the police killed 34 striking miners at Marikana, South Africa's worst act of police brutality since the end of apartheid. They were also demanding fairer wages. ■



**Mine, all mine: Sibanye-Stillwater's CEO Neal Froneman will be paid lots of dosh.**

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# Burkina Faso

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## Vanishing hope for the miners trapped underground

Diallo Moussa in Perkoa and Kiri Rupiah

**T**his week, rescuers reached the first of two survival rooms in the flooded zinc mine in Perkoa, Burkina Faso, but found it empty. None of the eight miners trapped underground since the mine flooded on 16 April had managed to reach the chamber which held supplies of food and oxygen.

The mine, owned by Vancouver-based Trevali Mining, lies about 100km west of the capital of Ouagadougou. It was flooded by heavy rainfall which triggered flash floods that breached the open pit.

*The Continent* visited the site of the crisis on 13 May with a delegation including three ministers, the secretary general of Burkina Faso's government and a team of journalists. Five weeks after the flooding, Trevali Mining had pumped out only a quarter of the 165-million litres that had entered the mine.

A team of medics and psychologists was on site. "Anxiety, dread, stress and questions haunt our days and sleepless nights," said Abdoul Moussa Sanou, a mine worker.

A tearful Mireille Batiebo, sister-in-law to one of the trapped miners, has been going to the site every day since the day after the flood. Mathieu Bama, the elder brother of another trapped miner, was in Mali when the flooding happened. He travelled to the site because, "over the border, it was difficult for me to get accurate information," he said.

Waiting with them was Aminata Kinda, the wife of another trapped miner. Her family initially hid the bad news from her, but once she confirmed on 18 April that he was trapped, she has been going to the mine every day. "I thank the authorities for their efforts in the search but I think time is running out," said the young woman.

Many of the family members continue to wait at the site, their vanishing hope now locked on a second survival room buried 710m in the mine.

Built to provide protection from noxious gases and falling rocks, it's doubtful that the lower room is withstanding the amount of water that has flooded the mine for the past six weeks.

Earlier this month Burkina Faso's Prime Minister Albert Ouedraogo said in a statement that the mine's managers have



**Mine horror:**  
Burkinabè  
rescue workers  
gaze into the  
abyss. Photo:  
Government of  
Burkina Faso

been barred from leaving the country while investigations into the cause of the incident are underway. Ouedraogo reportedly blamed “irresponsibility” and alleged that several days before the accident “dynamite was used on the open-air [part of the] mine, which weakened the [underground] gallery and enabled the flooding”.

Trevali’s president, Ricus Grimbeek, said the company had imported additional machinery and equipment for the rescue. “Our thoughts are with our colleagues’ families, and we continue to work closely with the government to ensure their needs are met during this difficult time.”

Trevali owns 90% of the mine, while Burkina Faso holds a 10% interest. The bulk of Trevali’s revenue is generated from zinc and lead mined in Burkina Faso, Namibia and northern New Brunswick, Canada. ■

### **Vancouver mining hub**

*Trevali Mining is based in Vancouver, Canada – home to some 1,200 mining and exploration companies. Canada’s other major city, Toronto, has 58% of the world’s mining companies listed on its stock exchange. Both cities bill themselves as environmentally and socially sound. Often ranked one of the best cities in the world to live in, Vancouver’s local government plans to make it the greenest city in the world. Mining revenues are making such goals possible. The industry contributes about \$36-billion to Canada’s total gross domestic product, according to the Mining Association of Canada, which touts the industry’s contribution to a “cleaner, low-carbon future”.*

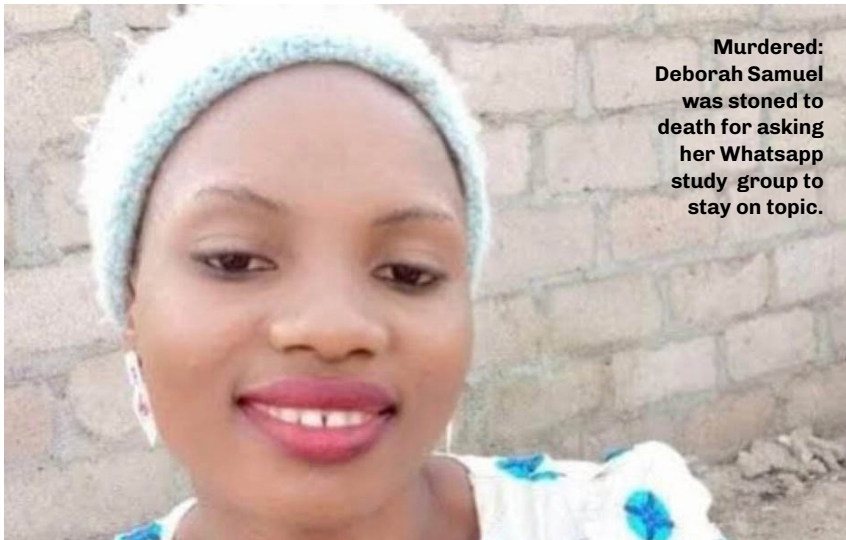
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# Nigeria

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## A 21st-century stoning

*In Sokoto, in the far north of Nigeria, Deborah Samuel was stoned to death for a message she posted in a WhatsApp group. Then her killing was replayed, millions of times and all around the world, amid a torrent of hate speech, death threats and disinformation. This is what social media does: It amplifies the very worst of us, until we can't hear anything else. And few are ever held to account.*



**Murdered:**  
Deborah Samuel  
was stoned to  
death for asking  
her WhatsApp  
study group to  
stay on topic.

### Simon Allison

**S**tudents at the Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto have a WhatsApp group to coordinate their coursework and activities.

Like WhatsApp groups everywhere, not everyone sticks to the topic at hand.

On Thursday morning last week, Deborah Samuel – a 22-year-old economics student – had had enough. In a voice note, she told people to stop posting

“religious stuff” in the group. “The group wasn’t created for that,” she said, in Hausa.

Later that morning, she was dead: clubbed and stoned to death by a mob of fellow students on the school grounds, who accused her of blasphemy.

Samuel’s brutal, unnecessary death epitomises some of modern Nigeria’s most glaring fault lines.

There are the religious tensions. Samuel, a Christian, lived and studied in Sokoto, a predominantly Muslim city in the far north. Ahead of next year’s elections, politicians from both sides are fanning these flames for their own ends – often with violent, fatal consequences.

There is the inability of the state to protect its citizens. As early as 9am, Samuel had phoned her father to tell him that she was in danger. She was locked inside a room on campus, with an angry mob forming outside. He phoned the police, who eventually responded in force. But they failed to disperse the mob, and were overrun when they attempted to escort Samuel to safety. In the end, they simply watched as Samuel was murdered.

And, finally, in the absence of effective law and order, there is the growing tendency of citizens to take matters into their own hands – with very mixed results. Sometimes, this means that communities band together to effectively police themselves and enforce the law. Sometimes, this means that innocent people are summarily executed.

### **‘Virtual’ has real consequences**

This is the digital age, so Samuel’s death was captured on video. It was shared

on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp. Now, no matter where you are in the world, you too can participate in the stoning of Deborah Samuel.

We know, thanks to internal Facebook documents leaked by whistleblower Frances Haugen – and reported last year by *The Continent* – that this is how social media works. The more extreme the content, the more likely it is to go viral. And go viral it did.

**Sometimes, this means that communities band together to effectively police themselves and enforce the law. Other times, this means that innocent people are summarily executed.**

Within hours, the gruesome video had spread far and wide.

The killing was all that Nigerian social media could talk about. Samuel was an apostate who deserved it, or an accidental martyr. Her killers are the worst of humanity, or heroes of the faith. Some religious leaders called for peace; others for revenge. New videos emerged, “proving” the culpability of one side or another – except these were mostly faked or totally unrelated.

For Ayodeji Rotinwa, the Abuja-based deputy editor of *African Arguments*, it all got to be too much. “I was just following the story as a Nigerian, not as a journalist. When it was happening it was quite overwhelming — to see people defend this thing.”

For his own sanity, he decided to switch off for a few days. Stay at home, watch a movie, and ignore the world. On Saturday evening, he was halfway through the Disney classic *Aladdin* when his phone started buzzing. “Have you seen this?” his friends were asking.

Rotinwa’s photograph had been posted online next to a screenshot of a Facebook post. The post, written by a “Dr Christopher Uche-Ayodeji”, made some shocking, inflammatory claims.

“I think my three months’ service in the north before I left for the UK was just so fun because I literally allowed the northern Muslims to die under my care as a doctor,” the post went. “I wasn’t even bothered because I know they don’t value human life.”

Rotinwa does not know how his photograph came to be associated with this post. But already the damage was done: there were dozens of furious posts on Twitter and Facebook calling for action to be taken against the “killer doctor” – all of which were using Rotinwa’s picture. Soon, the story was picked up by blogs and disreputable media outlets, which spread the claims even further.

Rotinwa panicked. Suddenly, he was nervous of his neighbours, of being seen in public.

“People have died for less. Deborah Samuel died for less,” he told *The Continent*. He packed his bags and moved to the home of a sympathetic acquaintance.

A few days later, he left the country – and he is not sure when it will be safe enough to go back.

For Rotinwa, the connection between online hate and real-world consequences had just been made abundantly clear.

### The algorithms fuelling hate

There is no such person as Dr Christopher Uche-Ayodeji.

The most likely explanation for the inflammatory post is that it is a sophisticated piece of disinformation, designed to deflect criticism from the perpetrators of Samuel’s murder.

The name – Uche is an Igbo name, while Ayodeji is Yoruba – seems carefully calibrated to inflame Nigeria’s geographic and ethnic divides.

And the danger is not just to Ayodeji Rotinwa, whose photo was erroneously associated with the post. “Someone chose to create the fake Facebook profile with an Igbo-Yoruba name, knowing that it could lead to the rejection, or worse, of southern doctors in northern Nigeria,” said Rosemary Ajayi, research director at the Digital Africa Research Lab.

*The Continent* made contact with one Twitter user who had shared the disinformation post with Rotinwa’s photograph. He said he was shocked when he heard that Rotinwa had been misidentified, and deleted the post immediately. “It had just been posted by one Twitter influencer — I just copied it in order to spread the message,” he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In the future, he said, he would attempt to verify information before sharing it further.

Once alerted, Facebook was relatively quick at deleting the posts with Rotinwa’s



**Deadly consequences: Pall bearers carry coffins of people killed during sectarian clashes in northern Nigeria.**

Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP

photograph, responding in minutes. Facebook has also removed the video of Samuel's murder from its platform.

"The murder of Deborah Samuel is appalling and we will not tolerate attempts to use our platforms for violent means," a Meta spokesperson told *The Continent*.

**'Someone chose to create the fake Facebook profile with an Igbo-Yoruba name, knowing that it could lead to the rejection, or worse, of southern doctors in northern Nigeria.'**

Twitter was much slower, taking up to 30 hours to acknowledge the misidentification of Rotinwa and begin taking down posts. The video of Samuel's murder can still be viewed on the platform and continues to rack up hits. Twitter did not respond to requests for comment.

"People engage in this kind of harmful behaviour because they believe they will

get away with it," said Ajayi. "There ought to be consequences for the people posting this nonsense as well as companies that repeatedly fail to act proactively and swiftly to counter them. But what would these consequences look like and how do we ensure the Nigerian government develops an appropriate response which centres citizens' rights?"

Back in the real world, there have been few consequences too for the men who murdered Deborah Samuel – who proudly bragged of their culpability on camera. Only two people have been arrested in connection with the killing, and it is not yet clear what they will be charged with.

On Saturday, a crowd of several hundred people gathered outside the palace of the Sultan of Sokoto to demand the release of the alleged killers.

The protest was live-streamed, and fuelled another vicious cycle of online hate speech and disinformation – all of which serves only to exacerbate divisions, and make another Deborah Samuel even more likely. ■

# Nigeria must finally eschew vigilantism if it truly seeks a safer future

**Given the failures of the state, it is understandable that some take matters into their own hands – but this only makes things worse**

**Nnamdi Obasi**

**T**he increasing reliance on vigilante groups by communities and state governments across Nigeria is hardly surprising. Many communities in Africa's most populous country are unable to count on federal security forces to protect them against violent crime, insurgencies, herder-farmer violence and armed groups pillaging communities.

Yet, there are dangers to this trend towards self-protection, especially if it becomes entrenched as a long-term security solution. Often poorly trained or equipped, many of the groups lack a legal mandate, raising questions about their constitutionality. There are also concerns about their effectiveness in combating armed violence, given their

lack of arms or training. Reports of human rights violations and the emergence of ethnically exclusive groups also highlight the potential for vigilantism to heighten rather than lower the risks of conflict.

The debate around vigilantism is a thorny one, pitting the right to self-defence against the federal government's duty to protect – a duty in which it has failed, in many cases. Whether or not one condones vigilantes, their recent proliferation is at least understandable in light of the public's diminishing trust in the federal government's will or ability to protect all citizens and communities.

In the short term, while vigilante groups might be considered a necessity, the onus now is on the federal and state governments to formulate a framework for regulating such groups and containing the dangers they present.

In the long-term, Abuja must move away from vigilantism by reforming the Nigeria Police Force and increasing its funding, personnel and equipment, while also devolving some policing powers and functions to the states.

These measures would help restore confidence in the state's ability to protect the population and discourage the instinct to take the law into one's own hands.

Vigilantism is a short-term solution to an immediate problem. It must not become Nigeria's default solution to its own internal security challenges. ■

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*Nnamdi Obasi is the International Crisis Group's Senior Adviser on Nigeria*



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# Nigeria

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## In Rukuba, a massacre leads to further abuse

**Stretched thin, Nigeria's security forces are failing to respond to local violence effectively, and appear to be brutalising people when they do respond. This is just one example of an alarming trend, one that is fuelling dissatisfaction with the state – and vigilantism.**

**Gabriel Ogunjobi in Rukuba, Plateau State, Nigeria**

**R**uth Francis, a native and resident of Jos, is in her early 40s. She rears pigs and keeps a small maize farm within their compound, which sits beside steep ancient rocks in the Rukuba area of the town. Last August, she was in her pig pen when she spotted a man hiding just behind the garden.

“I screamed and he ran away,” she said.

Shortly after, he returned in the company of four soldiers.

Unbeknownst to Francis, that day had been hell for people like the man in hiding – a Fulani. Along Rukuba road, gunmen attacked a group of five buses carrying Fulani Muslims, killed 20 people and injured at least 23. Others managed to flee and hide.

The Fulani man pointed out Francis as the person who forced him out of

hiding. The soldier arrested everyone in the compound except one woman who happened to be carrying a baby. The commotion woke one man, Yohanna Mashall, from his afternoon nap.

Despite his neighbours testifying that he had just returned from an all-night work shift at Amo Byng Nigeria Limited, a well-known feedmill company in Jos, he too was taken by the soldiers.

For two days after the attack on Rukuba road, the military did a door to door sweep and arrested 22 people who were then secretly confined in the military cell of the Special Task Force of Operation Safe Haven for several days.

The group was then handed over to Jos police, who freed all the women and a few young people, but kept everyone else for a month and a half.

The August attack on the travellers on Rukuba road was just one incident in the scourge of organised violence gripping



**Unregulated strife: Nomadic Fulani herders lead their livestock to a watering point in northern Nigeria, where tensions with crop farmers and other residents are escalating to the point of outright conflict.** Photo: John Wessels/AFP

Nigeria.

Last month, gunmen attacked a passenger train between Abuja and the northern town of Kaduna, killing at least eight people and kidnapping others. More than 160 passengers remain unaccounted for. The past five years have seen more than 4,200 attacks on civilians by rebel, political and identity militias across the country, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project – and the number grows each year.

In 2021 alone, 1,319 attacks were recorded.

The Fulani, an ethnic group which has traditionally lived in the arid Sahel region as nomadic pastoralists, are coming under

incredible pressure from climate change. The expansion of the Sahara desert is pushing them further south into greener parts of Nigeria occupied by farmers, leading to bloody clashes over land and water.

In the months leading up to the August attack, more than 200 people had been killed in attacks in the Miango area, of which Rukuba is a part. This is according to Gastor Barrie, who runs a humanitarian organisation in the area.

The day of the attack itself coincided with a mourning procession for those killings. Locals planned to carry the latest victims to the state morgue in Jos.

Some of those spoke to *The Continent*,

saying they received “intelligence” that the incoming travellers (allegedly of Fulani ethnicity) were heading for their community to disrupt the funerals and had guns in their buses.

Thus the stage was set for a bloody clash.

### **Policing failures**

Nigeria’s official security forces, of about 450,000 personnel, are stretched thin over the vast country of over 200 million people, leaving many parts of it prone to violence. As a result, volunteer security groups operating with and without guidance from the official forces have sprung up. One of the biggest of them is the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), said to have about a million members. Sometimes armed but often not, they attempt to police communities where there is no official security presence, with repeated instances of their work favouring different groups at the cost of others.

Maxwell Bernard was the local leader of VGN last August. He told *The Continent* that he heard about the pending clash on Rukuba road but quickly concluded that he was ill-equipped to intervene. “When I heard people running and shouting: ‘the Fulani have entered Rukuba road’, I also ran because I was not in uniform to ask questions,” Bernard said.

Instead, he sprinted one kilometre to his VGN office where he called a police chief and the army commandant. “They both answered and promised to deploy their men to the scene,” the 47-year-old told *The Continent*.

However, one hour later, soldiers

barged into the office where Bernard was hiding to “arrest me, claiming that I was sitting inside while the crisis went on under my watch”.

He added: “One of them shot in between my legs while I struggled not to be handcuffed.”

Ultimately, the police charged 10 men with conspiracy and culpable homicide in relation to the Rukuba road attack. The police said they had 60 witnesses connecting them to the attack but for more than six weeks, none was formally charged.

### **Nigeria’s official security forces are stretched thin over the vast country of over 200 million people, leaving many parts of it prone to violence.**

The charges only came when the employers of one of those arrested subpoenaed the police to produce him in court.

Suwa Tongshaka, a lawyer who is defending the 10 men on pro bono terms, told *The Continent*, “We know none of these people are guilty of the allegations levelled against them.”

*The Continent* contacted Ishaku Takwa, the spokesman for Operation Safe Haven, the army unit which conducted the arrests in Rukuba, and Muyiwa Adejobi, the police spokesman in Abuja, the nation’s capital, for comment on the allegations in this story. Neither had responded to our inquiries by the publication deadline. ■

# Cameroon's complicated relationship with its NBA stars

To have a chance at the world cup, Cameroon needs bureaucratic finesse and all of its All-Star hands on deck

Daniel Ekonde

After illuminating the National Basketball Association (NBA) for more than six seasons, Joel Embiid, of the Philadelphia 76ers, and Pascal Siakam, from the Toronto Raptors, the only two Cameroonian players in the league, have come under scrutiny for the ways in which they are – and are not – representing their country of birth.

A May report by French RMC Sport said 28-year-old Embiid was considering taking up French nationality in order to play for the country in the 2024 Olympics. *L'Équipe* has also reported that he indeed wants to play for France.

However, the player's father, Thomas Embiid, a retired military colonel, has said his son has not engaged in the

naturalisation process, and that it is French authorities that approached him.

The move has left Cameroonian basketball officials on edge. "We feel very bad about it [the news]" Yves Tsala, the spokesperson of the Cameroon Basketball Federation told *The Continent*. "Since 2018, the French have been doing this [asking Joel to play for them], but we want Joel to play for Cameroon."

Embiid has fared well in the NBA this season: he averaged 30.6 points per game – the highest in the league – in the regular season, making him the first-ever international player to win the NBA scoring title; and was one of three finalists for the Most Valuable Player title alongside the Denver Nuggets' Nikola Jokic and the Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Born in Yaoundé and Douala respectively, Embiid and Siakam were discovered in basketball camps by their compatriot and former NBA player Luc Mbah a Moute.

Embiid joined the Sixers in the 2014 NBA draft and Siakam entered the league two years later. Siakam became an NBA champion in 2019, also winning the Most Improved Player that year. Both players' strength and skills have made them invaluable to their teams – and have also created a gulf between them and Cameroon.

In 2007, Cameroon reached the AfroBasket final, a feat they have not managed to replicate since. Their most recent effort, in the 2021 tournament in

Rwanda, ended in the group stages where they were defeated by South Sudan and Uganda.

Now Cameroon are competing to play in next year's International Basketball Federation World Cup. "The Indomitable Lions" are in a dire scenario in the qualifiers, thanks to losses to Tunisia and South Sudan in the first qualifying matches in February 2022. With the next window of qualifiers coming up in July, when the NBA is in its offseason, Tsala believes the federation needs the backing of the Cameroonian government in order to ensure its star players are in place.

"Pascal is willing to play for Cameroon but has said we [the federation] should discuss with the Raptors. While Embiid wants guarantees from us. What we need is more support from our government. For instance, if we can afford to watch Raptors and Sixers games in the NBA, and meet these players in person in the corridors and dressing rooms, something may change," Tsala said.

Cameroonian sports writer Njie Enow believes that it should be possible to arrange – if it's offseason in the NBA, and if the federation gives the teams assurances that their players will be treated properly, then "it will motivate the Raptors and Sixers to release them".

Despite the 1988 ruling that cleared NBA players to feature in international competitions following the US's humiliating semifinal loss to the Soviet Union in the Seoul Olympics that year, the league has largely been a powerful, closed consortium whose clubs wield powerful influence over their employees.



**Home court: Cameroon's basketball federation is hoping to have both Pascal Siakam (left) and Joel Embiid (right) on their roster in future.** Photo: Tim Nwachukwu/Getty Images

Should Cameroon win over the NBA players and their clubs, a world cup qualification could be on the cards – something Embiid and Siakam may well find an enticing prospect. For now, however, France's reported offer to Embiid could be more attractive – after all, France defeated the US in the group stages of the Tokyo Olympics (though they narrowly lost to the Americans in the final).

But if Cameroon go all the way in 2023 they would be making history, and Embiid could be part of that glory.

Tsala is optimistic. "It is possible for him to represent France, however, if we qualify for the 2023 world cup, we will likely have them [Siakam and Embiid] wear the Cameroonian shirt." ■



## Oh mother, where art thou?

Jacqueline Nyathi

**I**n Okwiri Oduor's stunning novel *Things They Lost*, birds laugh at people, sisters can be made, and a car may be drawn by a horse. The wind can be red, or blue. A woman runs a café that no one ever comes to. There are grieving ghosts in the attic of a once-stately mansion that make the walls shake. And the girl at the centre of

the book, Ayosa, yearns for the love of her mother.

Nnedi Okorafor coined the term *africanjuicism* to describe “a subcategory of fantasy that respectfully acknowledges the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative”. Oduor's book falls into this category, along with a blend of Christian and Muslim cosmologies. The rules of the world Oduor has built do not align neatly with a modern, Western-centric worldview. Here, even inanimate objects are conferred with life, agency and yearning.

Among a wonderful cast of supporting characters is Jentrix – an apothecary, midwife, and traditional doctor. She is the closest thing to family that Ayosa has apart from her mother. Ayosa befriends Mbiu, an orphan, a “throwaway girl,” the owner of the horse-drawn car. Sindani, who also becomes Ayosa's friend and protector, owns the café, Mutheu Must Go, named for a zebu cow. Other villagers function as something of a Greek chorus; watch for the repetitive text signalling their entry.

*Things They Lost* explores the relationship between mothers and daughters, mostly from the daughter's perspective, and considers absent mothers and generational trauma. It is fully a novel about girlhood. It is also about being an outsider, and how a village does not always raise a child.

Read it for Oduor's breathtaking mind-bending and magical-realist style, and for its truly immersive and delightful story. ■

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# Zimbabwe

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## With few other options, herbalists offer high risk at a low cost

Unable to rely on the ailing public healthcare system, desperate Zimbabweans are turning to affordable but unregulated herbal remedies for treatment

Jeffrey Moyo in Harare

**A**t age 34, Dayton Hwengwere is now a famous herbalist conducting his trade along Speke Avenue and Takawira Street in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare.

Each day, like many other roadside vendors, he spreads his wares on torn sacks on the pavement as he advertises his herbal remedies, picking one concoction after another as he explains to passers-by how they work.

Hwengwere's business is thriving at a time when Zimbabwe's public healthcare system faces collapse following decades of economic decay and haemorrhaging staff.

Patients have to pay \$20 to see a general practitioner, who often refers them to a specialist who charges a further \$50 to \$80 in consultation fees before any treatment.

These are astronomical sums for people in a country where, according to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' figures, there is 90% unemployment.

Consequently, many herbalists like Hwengwere have become the go-to alternative for desperate Zimbabweans who cannot access treatment or medication from either private or public healthcare centres.

That's the case for Jonathan Muhomba. At 74, he tells *The Continent* how government hospitals have failed to treat his prostate cancer, simply giving him a list of drugs to buy before sending him on his way. While healthcare is free for senior citizens, most health institutions don't have pharmaceutical drugs on hand.

His solution is Hwengwere, who he says has "kept me going".

For the roadside vendor, this trade has meant a livelihood. His remedy for stomach ache, for example – a mix of herbs and water – costs just \$2.

"On a good day I take home around \$30 to \$40. While selling herbs, I have been able to support my wife, and our four school-going children," Hwengwere says.

With people desperate for help, con artists who sell ineffectual herbs have also emerged. Letiwe Mhizha tells *The*



**Nature's bounty:**  
A traditional healer takes stock of his wares. In Zimbabwe, herbalists are in greater demand than ever.  
Photo: AFP

*Continent* she paid \$50 for medicinal herbs to alleviate the symptoms of a heart condition. But it turned out it was “just a mixture of water and pure ashes”.

As a seasoned herbalist, Hwengwere claims he has built trust with a wide range of patients seeking his services. “People with cancer, people with HIV, people ill from diabetes and heart challenges come to me and I supply them with herbs to improve their conditions.”

Left without much choice, for many Zimbabweans like Muhomba who are battling chronic conditions, roadside herbalists have become the answer to getting treatment in a country whose public healthcare system faces collapse.

A top official in the national health ministry who spoke to *The Continent* on condition of anonymity, said that they “discourage” people from taking herbal remedies. But they also concede “we either have medicines or not ... and

patients have to find their own options. Government can't be liable.”

Although herbal medicines can and have been used as complementary to mainstream therapeutics, the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe, which regulates the country's medicines, has publicly said it is battling to control the burgeoning market of backyard herbalists.

Hwengwere, meanwhile, admits he has no formal qualifications to help people.

But according to Ranga Munjanja, a 47-year-old diabetic, that is not a deal-breaker. “Getting herbs from these dealers on the streets is better than not getting treatment at all, although this is risky”.

That risk worries healthcare providers. Danisa Gumbo, a doctor in private practice in Harare, told *The Continent*: “Traditional or modern medicines are very dangerous if not used correctly; there is need for serious regulation before people may be allowed to take them.” ■



# Kenya, do not let them steal your future by rewriting their history

**Disinfo campaigns in the Philippines serve as stark warning of what's to come**

**Gilbert Kiprono**

**V**oters in the Philippines have elected Ferdinand Marcos Junior as their next president. He is the son of a corrupt former dictator and human rights violator, who was ousted in 1986 by that country's citizens after two decades in power.

To get himself elected, Marcos Jr rewrote his father's history – amplifying his message with the tactical use of social media. This holds grave warnings for voters in Kenya, who will head to the polls in August.

Marcos Jr ran a very modern online campaign, characterised by disinformation, whitewashing the past, and spurious attacks on his opponents.

At the heart of this was a reshaping of Marcos family history to paint the two decades of dictatorial rule as a golden age in the history of the country. This was accompanied by malicious campaigns

against opponents, negative messaging, false endorsements, the very selective use of historical statistics, and manipulative polls.

These spread through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok, helped by the widespread use of troll farms to spread misinformation. This ensured people were getting information on their phones that distorted reality.

The manipulation campaign started some years before the general elections. And it built on the successful tactics that the outgoing president, Rodrigo Duterte, used to get into power.

## **Skew you, democracy**

In Kenya, it is estimated that more than 11-million people have access to social media. That is around a fifth of the population. Beyond this, almost all people with internet access use WhatsApp.

Social media has been weaponised before in Kenya. In the previous elections of current president Uhuru Kenyatta, social media was allegedly manipulated to support his campaigns. This was with the support of Cambridge Analytica, the now-defunct “political consultancy” whose online disinformation skills helped to skew democracy in places like the United States.

With general elections now less than three months away, Kenyans are faced with the proliferation of fake news, uncorroborated events and widespread use of social media to further political agendas.

Social media influencers have cashed in, leveraging their hundreds of thousands of followers to spread politicians' agendas – regardless of the authenticity of the information shared.

Fake images, fake headlines and fake newspaper front pages have all been shared in support of these agendas – both on public platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and on private platforms such as WhatsApp, where disinformation proliferates without any checks.

This can quickly lead to falsehoods being shared, usually with the aim of maligning targeted individuals.

It is difficult to regulate these channels of disinformation.

Technology often outpaces the law and Kenya's digital regulation is minimal, especially as it relates to campaign messaging. The application of existing laws is also lax, leaving Kenyans at the mercy of indiscriminately disseminated fake news.

### **Technology often outpaces the law and Kenyan digital regulation is minimal, especially as it relates to campaign messaging**

There is the danger that social media can also be used to spread hate speech and ethnic war-mongering directed at certain communities which can spur post election violence.

In an attempt to prevent this, the National Cohesion and Integration Committee banned certain words and



### **Bespoke reality: Ferdinand Marcos Jr weaponised social media to gain power in the Philippines.**

phrases from being used both online and offline.

However, in the recent past the commission seems to lack the capacity to implement its policies.

There is a need for digital information to be linked to its original source, and for this to be clearly marked and corroborated. Kenyans also need a crash course in seeing fake news, disinformation and manipulation for what they are so these stop going viral across social media platforms.

If we don't do this, there is a real danger that we will not learn from the abuses that have let people like Marcos Jr to grab power in the Philippines – and allow our own democracy to be corrupted. ■

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*Gilbert Kiprono is a freelance writer from Nairobi, Kenya who advocates for public accountability.*

# 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

"Those pharaohs can't fool me with their pyramid schemes"



Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP

- 1\_ Tutankhamun, or King Tut, was the last of his family to rule which country?
- 2\_ Who is Liberia's capital Monrovia named after?
- 3\_ Before coming to power through a coup what did Madagascar's president Andry Rajoelina do for a living: A) Hunt; B) Sing; or C) DJ?
- 4\_ Which now extinct flightless bird, whose last sighting is widely accepted as being in 1662, was native to Mauritius?
- 5\_ What is the northernmost country in Africa?
- 6\_ Who was the queen of the 18th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt and the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten?
- 7\_ Wild poliovirus is indigenous to Africa. True or false?
- 8\_ Idrissa Gana Gueye plays for which French football club?
- 9\_ Ankole cattle are known for their: A) Horns; or B) Hooves
- 10\_ True or false: Kehinde Wiley is a Nigerian artist.

## 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](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za)

# The spirit is willing but our leaders sure are trash



**Continental  
Drift**

**Samira Sawlani**

**N**amaste, dear reader. We at Drift have been focusing on our spiritual health these past few days, inspired by our favourite leaders – who we have observed at summits and meetings with their eyes closed as they contemplate the mysteries of the universe.

Horrid critics have accused them of being asleep, if you can believe it, but as we all know they are really in a state of profound meditation, either intently focused on the matter at hand, or emptying their minds so that they might better hear the call from above urging them to run for one more term.

We too have been in a deep state of meditation. Alas, our minds are not empty. They remain encumbered by life's big questions: Jollof or Pilau? Nap now or nap later? Binge watch or binge eat?

Between snacks, we have fathomed several mysteries. We can reveal, for example, is that life is a circle. Just ask Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who served as Somalia's president from 2012 to 2017, was then succeeded by Mohamed



**Encircled : Ugandan opposition figure Kizza Besigye (centre).** Photo: Twitter/kizzabesigye1

Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo”, who he in turn defeated in the country's election, making him the 10th president of Somalia! An election win, an election loss and an election win again. The circle of life! (That's pretty good actually, we should turn that into a movie or something. Maybe a musical?)

Anyway, we say circle of life, you say déjà vu, everyone else says, oh no not again. Like Ugandans this week who saw authorities deploy police around senior opposition figure Kizza Besigye's home after he called for protests against the rising cost of living.

The police have since left, but for those of us dabbling in a little fortune telling, we predict that it's only a matter of time till it happens again.

## Coup-coup clock is ticking

Thanks to our spiritual journey on Instagram we are now familiar with the concept of karma, which itself ties into the circle of life: What goes around, comes around. This is something Mali's leaders are bound to be meditating upon in the wake of its latest (attempted) coup. Transitional president Assimi Goïta led the previous coup, after all, which saw Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta removed as president and replaced with Bah Ndaw. And then a bit later he led a coup-within-a-coup, in which he removed Ndaw and installed himself in the role.

Goïta declared that those behind this latest coup attempt – who hadn't even invited him to join in even though he does the best coups around, ask anyone – had been backed by a “western country”.

This mysterious western country keeps cropping up. This week Mali withdrew from the G5 Sahel force set up to fight terrorism in the region, saying it had been blocked from taking up the organisation's rotating presidency, even though it was totally its turn. It said other member states, which include Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso, were ganging up against it, spurred on by a state from outside of the region that is “desperately seeking to isolate Mali”.

## What a croc of shhh...

Animals have great spiritual significance in many cultures. A crocodile symbolises perseverance and patience, for example, which Zimbabweans might find ironic, as it's because of one particular croc that they are having to practise the art of patience.

A week ago President Emmerson Mnangagwa told banks that they weren't allowed to lend out money any more, in a bid to stop people from borrowing money to speculate against the Zimbabwean dollar, driving its value down.

Critics said the ban would only worsen the country's economic situation and that it was everyday Zimbabweans who would suffer. Other not-so-everyday Zimbabweans must have thought they'd suffer too, and leaned on the government, because just a few days later authorities announced that “the temporary suspension of lending services by banks has been lifted with immediate effect”.

The circle got squeezed.

## Make the circle kinder

There are a million and one ways to practice spirituality, but we think the most important is kindness, perhaps because it is so rare. In Egypt, the family of the imprisoned activist and blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah have raised the alarm over his well-being, saying his health is deteriorating fast as he remains on hunger strike. Egypt's National Human Rights Council say he has finally been transferred to a better prison facility, but his sister says this does not necessarily mean an improvement in conditions.

Meanwhile British MPs have urged their government to assist Fattah, who has dual citizenship, saying that their embassy has not been granted access to him. But considering the track record and disposition of the current British government, we doubt anyone is holding their breath. ■

# A feminist government: the only way to achieve equality in Swaziland

Zakithi P Sibandze

**S**waziland – or Eswatini as it has been renamed by the king – is in the midst of unprecedented political turmoil. Political unrest in June and July last year left more than 80 people dead and 250 in hospital after peaceful protests for democratic reforms were disrupted. Despite intense pressure to reform Africa's last constitutional monarchy, the king has refused to make meaningful concessions.

This part of the story has been well publicised. What is less well known is that during this period the police and defence force brutalised 150 women, with nine confirmed deaths and many more suffering horrendous gender-based violence. At least three women suffered miscarriages as a result.

As Eswatini awaits a political dialogue initiated by South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, it is clear Swazi women do not just need a new constitution: they need a feminist government.

Discrimination is not limited to the current regime. Gender inequality extends to some of the opposition movements and the very households in which women reside. Changing the government without feminising the government would leave women and girls locked out of power and economic opportunities.

What would feminist transformation look like in this context? The Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly has demanded not just democracy, but a fair society that promotes (rather than just recognises) the rights of women and girls and women's empowerment in every sphere.

To do this it is critical to recognise the importance of drawing on different schools of feminist thinking. This includes development feminism, which teaches us that if women control the distribution of the food they produce and food surpluses, they will enjoy greater economic and political influence, and social construction feminism, which recognises that gender is a social institution that is rooted in problematic practices in education, the workplace and the law.

This dream may seem like it is a long way off, but that is a reason to fight harder, not to give up. Otherwise, we are risking our lives for a new political dispensation that will still sell women short. ■



*Zakithi P Sibandze is a women's rights activist and student at the University of Eswatini. This analysis is produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa*

# The Big Picture

Photo: Jekesai Njikizana/AFP

**Tusk management:** An armed guard from the Zimbabwe National Parks service walks through piles of elephant ivory during a tour of the stockpile by European Union envoys, in Harare on Monday. The country's wildlife authority is campaigning to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species for a once-off sale of the elephant ivory on the legal market – with proceeds benefitting communities surrounding animal conservancy areas.



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