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CANAL+

Illustration: Yemsrach Yetneberk

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**The French
billionaire
and the fight
for our TVs**



COVER: Regulators in South Africa are mulling over what would be Africa's biggest-ever media deal. This would see French satellite TV broadcaster Canal+ buy South Africa-based MultiChoice. It would then have an audience of 30-million Africans. The family behind Canal+, headed by billionaire Vincent Bolloré, has a history of turning the media it buys into versions of Fox News, peddling extremist opinions by far-right talking heads for ratings. If the deal succeeds, they would have a virtual monopoly that stretches across this entire continent (p9)

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RWANDA

Kigali's Lady Di to run against Kagame again

Diane Rwigara, leader of People Salvation Movement, plans to run against President Paul Kagame in Rwanda's July elections. Rwigara made a bid for the presidency in 2017 but was disqualified, with the state accusing her of forging signatures of supporters for her nomination. She and her mother spent a year in jail on charges of forgery and inciting insurrection, but were later acquitted. Kagame – president for 24 years – always wins the election with eyebrow-raising percentages.



Free: Diane Rwigara leaves court in 2018 after charges against her were dropped. Photo: Cyril Ndegeya/AFP

INTERNATIONAL

Push to recognise Palestine statehood wins more support

On Tuesday, The Bahamas announced that it had decided to recognise Palestine as a state. Five countries in the European Union are also reportedly considering the move: Ireland, Spain, Slovenia, Malta and Norway. Jamaica recognised it in April. Currently, 139 of the United Nations' 193 member states recognise Palestinian statehood but despite a majority vote in favour, the US's veto obliged the Security Council to decline to give it full UN membership last month. A vote on Friday by the general assembly urged the council to reconsider this decision.

TUNISIA

Replacement theory: Alas, the president is back on his bullshit

Telling the National Security Council that the country expelled 400 migrants from its eastern border, Tunisia's president, Kais Saied, repeated a conspiracy theory he has spouted – and been criticised for – before, about a “plot” to resettle black people in Tunisia to replace its Arab population. A version of it is also common in racist circles of Western countries. According to *The National*, Saied claimed without evidence that he personally reviewed a document showing that one migrant centre received over 20 million dinars (\$6.4-million) through back channels.

KENYA**Doctors' strike ends
– for now, anyway**

The strike by doctors that started on 15 March ended this week with an undisclosed agreement between the state and their union. The doctors were demanding better pay, payment of arrears, and better working conditions. Kenya's healthcare system is chronically underfunded and understaffed, doctors' access to standard medical supplies is unreliable, and industrial action is a common occurrence.

MALAWI**Come work for us!
Wait, no, not like that**

Twelve workers, who were taken to Israel under a controversial deal with Malawi last year, have been deported for breach of contract. The Malawians were recruited to work on rural farms in Israel, after authorities banned Palestinian workers and sent their own workforce off to attack Gaza. The Malawians had apparently left the farms and were arrested after authorities found them working in a sweet factory.



Broken tide: A wreath of flowers, left on the Italian coast in remembrance of migrants who died in a shipwreck in 2023. Photo: Gianluca Chininea/AFP

ITALY**Rescue wings clipped
in the Mediterranean**

This week, the Italian Civil Aviation Authority banned the use of airports in Lampedusa, Pantelleria and Sicily for small planes that NGOs use to look out for distressed migrant boats in the

Mediterranean Sea. The official reason cited was that the private rescue flights were getting in the way of the Italian coast guard's exclusive mandate to coordinate search and rescue efforts, and put migrant lives at risk. The quiet part is that rescue missions are seen as encouraging migrants to risk the sea routes towards Europe. German NGO Sea-Watch has already defied the order.



That'll go down well: Thebe Magugu's print depicts a shipwreck in progress.

Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art

CULTURE

Did Met Gala find its SA prints charming?

There's more to Metropolitan Museum of Art than the electrifying drama of the Met Gala's carpet walk, where stunningly (or ridiculously) dressed celebrities are paraded out for us to critique. One of the exhibited looks under this year's "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion" theme is by South African designer Thebe Magugu – his fourth contribution to the Met museum's permanent archive. Magugu says the exhibited print from his AW23 *Folklorics* collection, "allegorically speaks of sirens believed to have crashed ships just off the Cape coast". Oh and Tyla was there, too. You may have heard.

CLIMATE

Scientists lose hope that we will keep the world habitable

Nearly 80% of the world's top climate scientists expect global heating to pass 2.5°C this century, according to a survey by *The Guardian*. Scientific consensus suggests heating must stay under 1.5°C or large parts of the planet will become uninhabitable. Only 6% of the scientists who took part in the survey thought the target would be met. The corruption of politics by fossil fuel money is helping to prevent effective mitigation: This week the *Washington Post* revealed that US presidential candidate Donald Trump has promised to scrap "initiatives opposed by the fossil fuel industry" – if they give his campaign \$1-billion.

SOUTH AFRICA

Building collapse kills dozens of workers

At least seven people are dead and 39 are feared dead after a five-storey private apartment, which was under construction, collapsed in George, a coastal town in South Africa. The disaster came less than a year after a fire engulfed a government-owned building of similar scale in Johannesburg, killing more than 70 people who were squatting in it last August.

NIGERIA

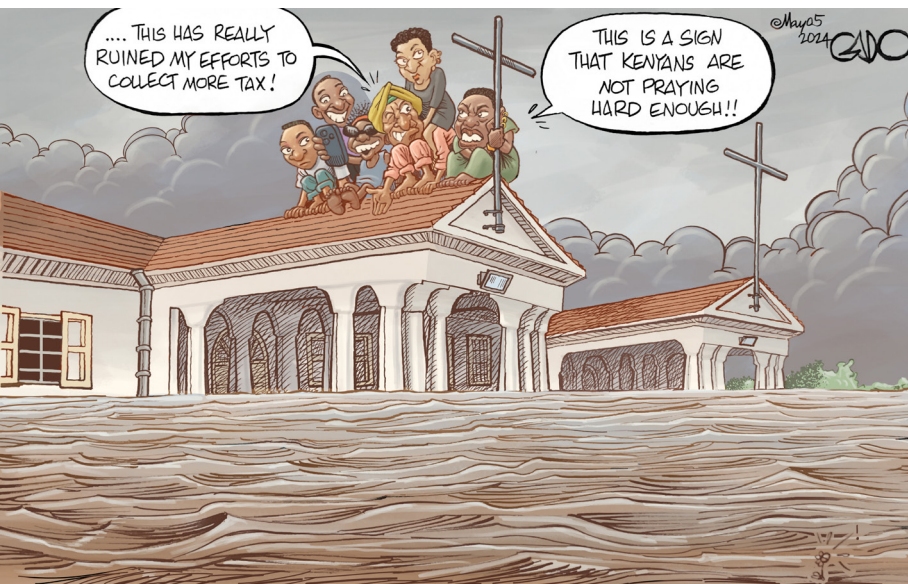
Microsoft changes mind, force quits Lagos dev centre

Tech giant Microsoft is closing its Africa Development Centre in Lagos, just two years after it was set up. The company has been laying off workers globally since January 2023. At the time, Microsoft said it would lay-off 10,000 workers. The Lagos centre was opened in tandem with a Nairobi one as part of a \$100-million Africa investment. It employed about 120 engineers and a total of 200 staff. A Microsoft spokesperson told journalists that the company will maintain some presence in Nigeria.

CHAD

Déby après Déby is all that passes for 'democracy' now

Chad's election body announced on Thursday evening that General Mahamat Déby won 61% of the votes in Monday's presidential election. "The city is crowded with armed soldiers to intimidate people who are unhappy with the result," a correspondent in the capital, Niamey, told *The Continent* in the hours after the announcement. Déby, 40, has been president since April 2021 when the army installed him following the death of the incumbent, his father Idriss Déby Itno, who ruled for 30 years.



Egypt

Not much brotherly love waiting for Palestinians in the Egyptian Sinai

Egypt has repeatedly said that any Israeli bombardment that pushes Palestinians out of Gaza is a war crime. But should push come to shove, it has prepared a militia, not solidarity, to meet those refugees.

A curious conference happened on the Egyptian side of Rafah on 1 May. At its centre was local businessman Ibrahim al-Organi, who drove into the venue in a convoy and left as the appointed head of the Arab Tribes Union, a new paramilitary collective of five Egyptian tribes.

The conference immediately raised eyebrows. “The establishment of this union threatens the future of the state,” one commenter on the YouTube broadcast of the conference said. “The conference does not represent me. Egypt is for Egyptians. We are Egyptians only, not Arabs. Egypt is not tribal,” another said.

In Sudan, as most Egyptians would know, a power contest between the national army and the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group once approved by the government, is tearing the country apart. Hence the apprehension. But the base of this new united militia,

Sinai – where Rafah is located – was also curious. Although a local Islamic State affiliate was active in Sinai, it has been considered defeated since 2022 and the area is largely peaceful.

The paramilitary group’s *raison d’être* is just emerging now. According to *Middle East Eye*, “Egyptian military intelligence held meetings with Sinai tribes in recent weeks to discuss how they could support the armed forces in the event of an influx of Palestinians into Egypt during Israel’s planned bombardment of Rafah.”

The tribal militia is reportedly supposed to help with monitoring the “infiltration” and “harbouring” of Palestinians in Egypt.

“At the meetings, Egyptian intelligence officers said they estimated a Palestinian influx of between 50,000 and 250,000 people towards Sinai if Israel carries out a ground operation in the Palestinian Rafah,” *Middle East Eye* reported. ■

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Beyond Rupert:
Vincent Bolloré is set to expand his already significant media empire on the continent. Photo: Alain Jocard/AFP

Africa's biggest-ever media deal opens the door to far-right nonsense

One of the biggest media deals in the world – and the biggest-ever on the African continent – is being negotiated in South Africa. If it goes through, a French billionaire with a track record of buying media and using them to promote far-right ideologies will have access to tens of millions of African homes.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Simon Allison

Vincent Bolloré is no stranger to controversy. Described by *Bloomberg* as “the French Rupert Murdoch” who is in the process of “building his own right-wing media empire”, he has been implicated in at least one corruption scandal in West Africa.

A successful businessman, Bolloré has

used his money to buy media companies. His family company, the Bolloré Group, owns a controlling stake in Vivendi, which owns the French television giant Canal+. It is the largest satellite television provider in Francophone Africa. And it wants to buy the continent’s other big provider, South Africa-based MultiChoice, which owns prominent brands that include DSTv, SuperSport and Showmax.

This de facto monopoly could

TV providers across Africa

Africa's dominant satellite TV providers are mostly divided along language lines



give the group and the Bolloré family extraordinary influence over what appears, or doesn't, on some 30-million African television screens.

'A real danger to both press freedom and democracy'

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a journalism defence organisation, says there is such a thing as the “Bolloré system” when it comes to how the billionaire – who it says “systematically sues journalists investigating his business dealings” – manages his media assets. Although the 72-year-old officially retired in 2022, a *Le Monde* investigation found that “in practice, he continues to manage everything, including the media”.

The clearest example of the “Bolloré

system” is the recent history of what is now CNews, a French television channel owned by Canal+. In an investigation, *Nieman Reports* – a media watchdog based at Harvard University – tracked how news there was replaced with often extreme opinion, creating what it dubbed the “Fox News of France”. This opinion “routinely make derogatory statements about migrants and have called on Muslims to renounce their faith”, playing a role in “mainstreaming far-right ideas about immigrants overtaking the French population”.

Operation Stop Bolloré – a coalition of dozens of prominent French journalists, academics and activists – claims this ideological stance is reflected across the media empire and is “unprecedented in our history”. In a 2022 statement, the group said: “The channel [CNews] becomes the place for the broadcast of hateful, racist, homophobic, sexist speech, that of the promotion of identity entrepreneurs, of incitement to violence, that of the trivialization of conspiracy, of climate denialism.”

In a 2021 documentary, RSF described Bolloré's approach as “a real danger to both press freedom and democracy”.

Wider controversies

The Bolloré Group's controversies are not limited to France or the media. In West Africa it has been accused of breaching journalistic ethics on at least two occasions to favour incumbent leaders. Most recently, in December, “Canal+ quickly cut the signal of three channels critical of [junta leader]



Three bags full: In Guinea, Bolloré's media outlets allegedly cut the signal of news channels critical of Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. Photo: John Wessel/AFP

Mamady Doumbouya from its offerings, at the request of the Guinean authorities,” according to *The Africa Report*.

Another controversy was reported by RSF in 2021 – an example of how Bolloré allegedly influences his media assets to further his own business interests. “Bolloré, who has many business interests in Togo, got Canal+ to include a puff piece about Togo and its president in its current affairs programming, as if it was regular journalistic reporting,” it said.

Bolloré is currently on trial in France, where prosecutors accused him and two Bolloré Group associates of bribing the president of Togo, Faure Gnassingbé, to obtain a lucrative port operating licence. The trio deny all wrongdoing (although they did plead guilty in an earlier settlement deal, which was thrown out by a French judge – on the basis that the charges were too serious to be settled out of court, and potentially undermined the sovereignty of Togo).

Representatives of Vivendi and Canal+

dismissed concerns that the proposed takeover could threaten press freedom and democracy in Africa, saying that MultiChoice does not produce news. They also said Vivendi owns numerous media outlets around the world which cover a diverse range of genres and views.

On Bolloré's influence, they directed *The Continent* to his appearance before a French parliamentary committee earlier this year when he said he has “no ideological project” and he considers himself a Christian Democrat and “very gentle and good natured”.

The Bolloré Group's press contact could not be reached for comment.

South Africa's competition commission is currently looking at the proposed takeover, which values MultiChoice at \$2.9-billion.

Vivendi argues that the merger is necessary because of the changing nature of broadcasting: it must compete not just with satellite TV operators, but also with streaming giants Netflix and Disney+. ■

The 'elections' in Togo were a demoralising charade

*After voting last month, Togo has a new parliament. It looks a lot like all the ones that came before it – totally dominated by the ruling party. But this time around, there is one crucial difference: a newly-amended, highly controversial Constitution. Opposition leader **Nathaniel Olympio** reflects on what these changes really mean for his country.*

Political struggle in Togo has gone on for decades. People are getting tired and are demoralised. But there are a few diehards like us who remain standing against this system.

The Togolese people are today very disinterested in politics, especially elections, and the last ones which just took place on 29 April showed this weariness. People did not rush to the election gate and voters shunned the ballot boxes. There were no queues at polling stations – not just in Lomé, but throughout – which casts doubt on the government's claim that turnout was a healthy 61%.

Obviously, abstention gives free rein to the regime who can boast of having Soviet-style scores. As expected, the ruling party, Union for the Republic, won almost everything: 108 of the 113 seats in the National Assembly, and 137 of the 174 seats in the regional elections. Eleven opposition parties shared what remained.

Being leader of the party with a parliamentary majority, President Faure

Gnassingbé, now in his 19th year of power – having replaced his father who ruled for 38 years – will now start his first term under the new constitutional dispensation which he signed into law this week. There may be many more terms to come.

Earlier this year, the Senegalese successfully resisted an attempted constitutional coup by former president Macky Sall. But Senegal and Togo are not the same. Senegal, whatever people may say, is an imperfect democracy, while Togo is an autocracy, if not dictatorship. We live under a regime that has been in place for 58 years now. Don't forget that when Faure Gnassingbé succeeded his late father, in 2005, he did so in violation of the Constitution, which called for the head of the National Assembly to take power.

He has now amended that Constitution (for the third time) to keep himself in power indefinitely. Direct presidential elections have been abolished. Now, Togolese will vote for a Parliament, and



Power lineage: President Faure Gnassingbé (centre) has ruled Togo since 2005. He took over from his father, who himself was in power for 38 years. Photo: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP

that Parliament will confirm (without debate) that the majority leader is the ‘President of the Council of Ministers’ – an executive prime ministerial role, for which there are no term limits.

Electoral fraud is an established norm. For 30 years, the ruling party has won every vote – presidential, legislative, municipal. The fraud is achieved through strict control of the electoral commission, judiciary and communications regulator.

Along with all this, there is repression to silence all dissent. Opponents are forced into exile, or jail; journalists are forced to tow the party line; international media are denied visas. When we recently organised a concert des casseroles – banging pots and pans to show frustration with a broken system, like what happened in Senegal – no media dared to cover it. Inside our party headquarters, gendarmes came with tear gas to take us out. Our press conference was banned.

These are the conditions under which the Constitution was amended, and in which the parliamentary elections took place. The text of the amendments was not

made public until this week – nearly three weeks after it was passed by Parliament.

In a situation where the entire chain is controlled by the executive, all avenues for democratic evolution are closed. I think that Togo has arrived at a crossroads and needs to embark on a path of transition to avoid incalculable consequences. Pressure to do so must come from within Togo, of course, although this comes with grave risks: at least 500 people were killed by security forces when they protested Faure Gnassingbé’s seizure of power in 2005.

But pressure must also come from the international community, and especially Ecowas, the West African regional bloc, which has so far seemed to endorse Gnassingbé’s regime. Only this can lead the president and his supporters to engage meaningfully in the kind of political transition that is necessary to calm the country’s political climate. ■

Nathaniel Olympio is the spokesperson for the ‘Touche pas à ma constitution’ collective, a civil society group. This op-ed was narrated to The Continent’s Borso Tall.

Biden or Trump? (That's the wrong question)

In the run-up to the US presidential elections in November, America's democratic institutions are being pressured like never before. Will they survive the test?

Golden Matonga in Phoenix

At the Maricopa County election office, video cameras operate 24/7, broadcasting live to a Facebook page that can be viewed by anyone in Arizona or the world. No one can enter the warehouses, which house voting machines and ballot papers, with a pen of any ink other than red. America's democratic processes are under scrutiny – and attack – like never before, and electoral officials in Arizona are determined to head off any doubts about the credibility of the upcoming presidential election at the pass.

These new measures are a direct consequence of what happened in the aftermath of the last presidential election, in 2020. Donald Trump, the incumbent Republican, lost. Almost immediately, conspiracy theories – enthusiastically endorsed by the losing candidate himself – alleged that the vote had been stolen in favour of Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Trump initially refused to concede defeat, and his legal team filed numerous court challenges – all ultimately futile – in an attempt to overturn the result. The messy fallout led to a violent attack on

the Capitol Building, home of the United States Congress, by a mob of angry Trump supporters, seeking to sabotage the certification of the election result. The incident has been described as one of the darkest chapters in America's democracy (a bold claim given the country's long history of slavery and discrimination on the basis of gender, race and wealth).

Now Trump and Biden are campaigning against each other again – and, again, the credibility of the election is under attack, with some analysts arguing that Trump is already laying the groundwork to discredit the result if he loses. “If everything's honest, I'll gladly accept the results,” said Trump last week. “If it's not, you have to fight for the right of the country.”

In Arizona, a state twice the size of Malawi, the stakes are especially high. It is what American pundits call a “swing state”: its electorate could go either way.

In 2016, Arizonans voted for Trump; in 2020, they chose Biden. In 2024, it's still too close to call: in an opinion poll released on Tuesday, Biden nudged ahead with 38.8% to Trump's 38.1%. That is well within the margin of error.



Oh MAGA'd: Donald Trump supporters demonstrate at a 'Stop the Steal' rally in 2021. Photo: Mario Tama/Getty Images

Anxious America

Phoenix, the capital of Arizona, is America in microcosm. The city's demographics are changing. But as it becomes more racially diverse, older voters become more restless over migration, while white working class voters worry that they are becoming an unsympathetic minority. These fears – over race, immigration, and a changing economy – were also the driving forces behind the 2020 post-election violence.

Linda, an African expat in Phoenix, thinks that immigration will be the defining issue of the election.

“The images coming from states like Texas [on the border with Mexico] will influence many people,” she said. “It will likely lead to a Trump vote. As a migrant, I like the Democrats for their openness on migration but sometimes they overdo it and that is a strategic mistake.”

With six months until the next election, and campaigning in full swing, the uncertainty unleashed by the attack on the Capitol continue to cast a long shadow.

“I have faith in our institutions, but they will be stress-tested over the next year, perhaps even the next four years. The presidency is incredibly powerful and someone who does not respect institutions can do a lot of damage,” David Axelrod, a senior adviser in Barack Obama's administration, told *The Continent*. “However, people should know that those institutions are very strong. At the end of the day we saw them in 2020 and 2021 so I have some faith that we will endure, our democracy will endure.”

Not everyone is so sure, especially given the sheer polarity of American politics. It can seem, from the outside, as if there is very little middle ground between the two major parties, and the people they represent. So much so that actual facts do little to shift political discourse.

When Biden claims that he has managed the economy well, there is plenty of data to back him up – but while 75% of Democrats approve of how he has handled the economy, only 5% of Republicans agree, according to a *Financial Times* poll last year.

In such a tense and emotional environment, and with so much attention on the conduct of the election itself, it is no wonder electoral officials are nervous.

“In 2020, we were sued in around 50 court cases. We won them all,” said Angelica Bland, the communications coordinator at the Maricopa County election office.

In Arizona, they are working twice as hard to ensure that the result in 2024 can withstand similar challenges – but know that even this may not be enough. ■

The True America

Ernest Cole died destitute after photographing apartheid and the US civil rights movement. His work was thought lost. But then 60,000 of his photographs were found in a Swedish bank vault. They tell the story of one of South Africa's great photographers.



Oupa Nkosi

The *True America*, released by Aperture in 2023, is the first published collection of photographs by legendary South African photographer Ernest Cole since his death in 1990. Taken between late 1967 and 1972, the images depict Black lives during a tumultuous period

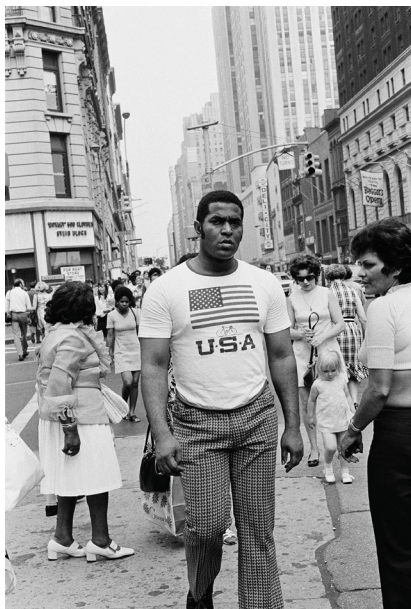
in American history. Cole had fled South Africa in 1966 at the age of 26 to resettle in New York. There, he published his landmark book *House of Bondage*, showing the atrocities of apartheid.

While in the United States, Cole travelled around the country and shot over 40,000 negatives documenting Black life. They are windows into the civil

rights movement during the months right before and just after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, into the fight for racial equality, violent political radicalism and the Black Pride movement, which encouraged African-Americans to embrace their African heritage.

Cole was best known for shooting in black and white. But in his pictures of Harlem, he used colour reversal or slide film, a surprising choice that beautifully brings out the vibrant colours of street fashion then.

“These photographs show Cole taking advantage of a greater freedom to get closer to people in New York than he could in South Africa,” writes researcher Leslie M. Wilson in the book. “In that way, they also reveal more of his interactions with people from a wide range of backgrounds.”



The True America celebrates Cole's life and his immense contribution to photography. It also aims to set straight the record of his life, which was riddled with mysteries.

For photographing revolutionary movements like the Black Panthers, Cole caught the attention of the CIA, which may have forced him to relocate to Sweden for a while. In the US, he received a Ford Foundation grant for a book that would explore Black communities in cities and rural areas – but it never came out.

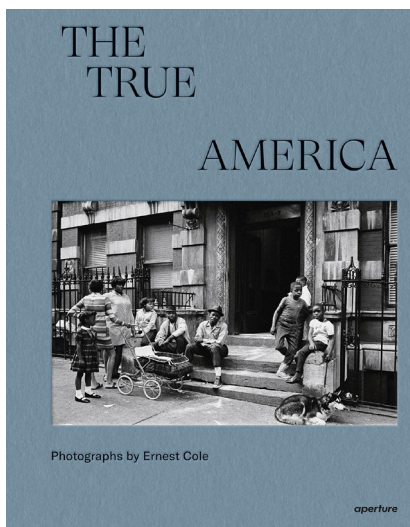
At the time of his death from cancer at age 49, Cole had lost all his negatives and cameras and was destitute.

Then in 2017, more than 60,000 of his negatives which had been missing for more than 40 years resurfaced in the vault of a bank in Sweden that refused to disclose the details of the person or people who had deposited them there.

The book's preface and thought provoking essays by luminaries like Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck and journalist and scholar James Sanders, reveal what might have happened to this

genius photographer.

Arranging the undated and untitled images into themes must have taken meticulous work. The cover design by Oliver Barstow is stunningly detailed and high quality. The fastidious Cole would be proud of it. And his work continues to talk to the present as much as it does to the past. ■





All photos: Ernest Cole: *The True America* (Aperture, 2023). © 2023 Ernest Cole Family Trust



Unbeached: The rising waters of Lake Malawi have eaten up much of its shoreline. Photo: Jack McBrams/The Continent



TRAVEL

Hurry while Lake Malawi's beaches last

The lake has been swelling since late February – reclaiming the beaches along its shores, and disrupting the country's tourism industry.

Jack McBrams in Salima

When bright orange rays gently kiss Lake Malawi's wavy waters, it is a sight that ordinarily attracts both local and international tourist tourists for the obligatory "I woke up in an exotic place" vacation picture.

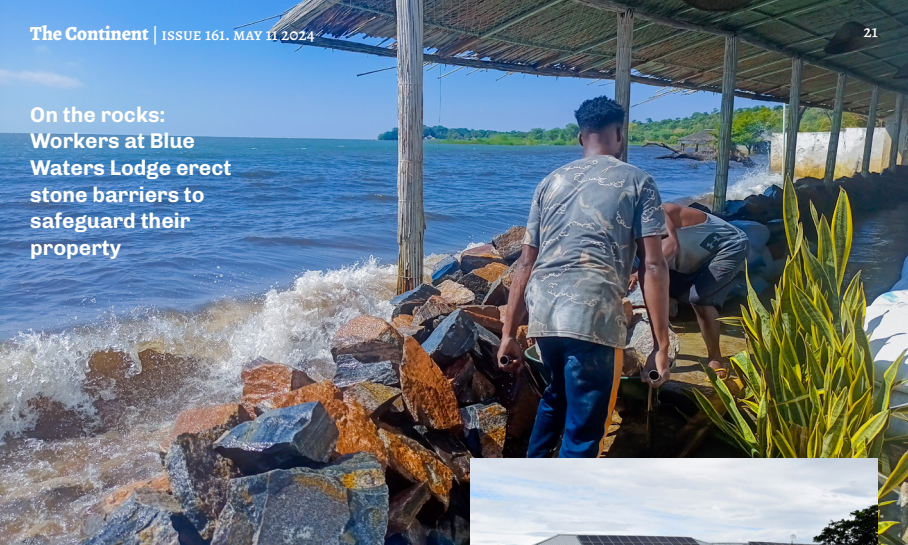
But today, at Sigelege Beach Resort in the resort town of Salima, the beach is deserted, save for a few locals. The usually animated John Banana, a curio seller who has been plying his trade here for five years, looks downcast as he arranges his

wares. "This is bad," he says, gesturing at the waves hitting the shore. "If the water comes any higher, there won't be any beach left."

Next door at the Blue Waters Lake Resort, manager Don Samaraseka is supervising workers as they pile rocks to shield buildings from the waves.

"We've packed in about 100 tonnes of rocks along the waterfront and we are still fighting the waves," he says. When he started working at the resort in 2014, the lake waters were almost 150 metres away from where the shoreline is now, he says.

On the rocks:
Workers at Blue Waters Lodge erect stone barriers to safeguard their property



Along the stretch of the lake, as far as the eye can see, sandbags now line the shore, a frail barrier against the relentless advance of the waters. Some resorts try to pump the water away from their premises.

In the lakeshore resort districts of Mangochi, Nkhata Bay, and Nkhotakota, sandy expanses have been swallowed by the lake.

“The water’s advance knows no bounds,” says George Zibophe, the disaster preparedness official for Nkhotakota.

He says the lake began to swell in February, and tells *The Continent* of submerged resorts and flooded communities on the edges of the lake. “We’re still assessing,” he says. “But the damage is clear. So many buildings and structures.”

Malawi’s agency for disaster management says the rising waters have affected 1,500 households in Nkhotakota alone, and 800 of them have been displaced.



Venice/beach? A resort lies partly submerged in the town of Mangochi.

Photos: Jack McBrams/*The Continent*

The National Water Resources Authority says Lake Malawi’s waters have risen to their highest level in more than a decade: 494.97 metres above sea level, 52 centimetres higher than last year.

As the lake swells, communities once defined by its beauty must battle the elements or watch their fortunes nosedive.

But even their battles might in the end prove too feeble against nature. As Charles Kalemba of the disaster management agency solemnly acknowledges, this development, a sudden calamity for human beings, is nature reclaiming its dominion. ■

Do elections work?

Togo's parliamentary polls on 29 April and Chad's presidential vote this week were the latest in a slate of at least 20 African elections this year. But do elections even work? Many Africans have their doubts.

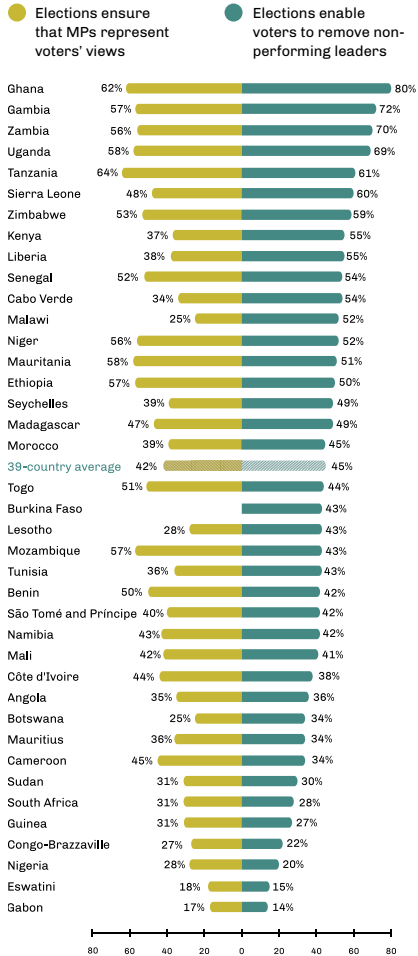
Even though 75% of Africans support elections as the best way to choose their leaders, only 42% think their elections ensure that members of Parliament represent voters' views. Just 45% say their elections let voters remove leaders who don't do what the people want.

Some countries that are seen as strong democracies express little confidence that elections ensure representation, including Botswana (25%), Cabo Verde (34%), and Mauritius (36%).

Faith that elections let voters replace non-performing leaders is low in Gabon (14%), long ruled by the Bongo family, and in Eswatini (15%), where an absolute monarchy resists demands for political reform. And while Mauritius and Botswana are touted as democratic models, only 34% of people feel empowered to unseat incumbents.

The strongest faith in this function of elections is in Ghana (80%), which has seen multiple electoral changes in leadership, and the Gambia (72%). ■

Efficacy of elections 39 countries | 2021/2023



Source: Afrobarometer is a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/- two to three percentage points.



Climbing higher but going under

Growth – financial, social or emotional – comes at a steep and personal cost.

Wilfred Okiche

Folarin (Ozzy Agu) looks like he has a great life. He is young, handsome and married to a beautiful woman from a wealthy family. And he is the public-facing manager of an ambitious government project to deliver kilometres of light rail.

But Folarin is also spiralling. His marriage is cracking under the pressures of growing their family. The rail project is stalling: over budget and mired in political scandal. His boss expects him to fix it even if it means making some dodgy calls. Everyone is looking to Folarin, but there is only so much this man can take.

The idea of a functional light rail

system in Lagos has been kicking around for at least 40 years. Its failure to fully materialise despite successive attempts has created a ghostly presence of cement and rod that haunts the city's skyline.

Over the Bridge, directed by Tolu Ajayi and written by Tosin Otudeko, uses the light rail project as a backdrop for an elemental story about mental health and the cost of development, especially to indigenous communities who become collateral damage.

To sell his project to the local population, Folarin offers them shiny promises of uplift that he has no means or intention of seeing through. When the pressure becomes overwhelming, he snaps and finds himself the newest member of a remote fishing village. Can he find his way back? Should he?

There are ways such a setup can go wrong, leading to a film that has underprivileged characters doing emotional and physical labour for a member of the oppressive class. *Over the Bridge* wisely sidesteps this, evoking some earned sympathy for a fellow who has been blinded by privilege for so long.

Ajayi's cross-cutting of scenes with the Lagos skyline is thoughtful and deliberate, and the actors put in solid work. These efforts are often undermined by a weak screenplay that could have used some more rounds of edits, but the result is promising, nonetheless. ■

Over the Bridge opened the New York African Film Festival on 8 May

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

"Foo me once, krain on me. Foofoo me twice, krain krain's on you."



Photo: Edwin Tan/
Getty Images

- 1_** Who is Mozambique's president?
- 2_** Houari Boumédiène was the president of which country from 1976 to 1978?
- 3_** Who did former US president George W. Bush gift a black stetson hat to in 2006?
- 4_** Krain krain is a meal eaten in which country?
- 5_** In which country are mountain bongo antelopes found?
- 6_** In which year did Faure Gnassingbé assume office?
- 7_** The first Ugandan shilling replaced which currency in 1966?
- 8_** What is the demonym for people from Chad?
- 9_** Which Zambian city was Northern Rhodesia's capital until 1935?
- 10_** In which African country can one visit Pink Lake (pictured)? (Hint: it's not Senegal.)

HOW DID I DO? WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Usually this week's *Drift* would be a Met Gala special. We would be holding a similar event for our leaders. They all know their fashion, after all. From the Coupdashians with their military chic and their smouldering expressions (Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso, we're looking at you!). Not to forget the "change the Constitution but make it couture" gang, and of course the old schoolers giving us vintage.

The Met Gala theme this year was inspired by the short story *The Garden of Time* by JG Ballard, and New York's Metropolitan Museum's exhibit "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion" – but that may have been a touch too ironic for our event considering the frequency with which we see our leaders fall asleep at events, and also because for many of them time is an illusion – how else can you explain so many years in power?

Alas, no Met Gala special in *Drift* this year – we were unable to bring ourselves to check in on the red carpet amid the latest news from Gaza. Knowing that Israel was poised to carry out an offensive in Rafah, the last refuge for tens of thousands of Palestinians, left us somewhat disinclined

to ooh and aah over strangely dressed celebrities.

But if our leaders are disappointed to have missed out on their Drift Gala invites this year, they just need to remember that taxpayers money is always on hand for a private jet and a new wardrobe.

Perhaps there will be some new fashions by then, too! We've got our eye on Mozambique's President Filipe Nyusi, who is flirting with an experimental new trend in continental fashion: actually stepping down!

With his term coming to an end this year there was speculation that he might fiddle around with the Constitution so that he could hang about for another term, or two, or six.

But the rumours can finally be put to rest as the country's ruling party Frelimo announced that Daniel Francisco Chapo, the governor of Inhambane province, will be its candidate for the elections in October.

And just like that Nyusi joins the elite gang of leaders who do step down when their time is up! Whether this will lead to any improvements in the country – particularly in terms of the security situation – remains to be seen.

Red carpet blues



CONTINENTAL DRIFT
Samira Sawlani



'Bique shots: Mozambique's President Filipe Nyusi (left) and likely successor Daniel Chapo (right)

Seen looking fashionable at the polling station this week was Chad's presidential candidate Mahamat Déby.

Dressed in a crisp white jalabiya, wearing dark sunglasses, Mahamat or "Midi" as he's apparently known was seen casting his vote on election day. Déby was named transitional leader in 2021 after the death of his father Idriss Déby Itno, who had been in power for 30 years.

Hours prior to the polls a group of local civil society organisations said that authorities had failed to issue accreditation for 2,900 election observers.

The European Union, who had contributed funds for the observers, said the move "prevented their contribution to the transparency of the electoral process".

So in this week's unbreaking news you'll be surprised to hear that Déby junior was declared winner of the polls! Stand up dear reader we did not expect you to pass out from the shock!

Provisional results show he received 61.03% of the vote – how trendy!

Aside from the ongoing events in Palestine, there have been a myriad of events on this continent that have left us feeling meh about the Met Gala.

According to the World Health Organisation floods in Kenya have affected 286,000 people, with 47,000 households displaced and 238 deaths reported. To add to that, 44 cases of cholera have now been reported in Tana River County. The government issued an evacuation notice to people in some flood-prone areas and have begun to demolish some homes, leaving many wondering where to go.

Amidst it all, police officers somehow decided it would be a good idea to arrested 27 human rights activists who were protesting against the government's forceful evictions of families who had survived the floods.

And the news from Sudan remains dire, as the civil war shows no sign of relenting. This week Médecins Sans Frontières suspended its work at Madani Teaching Hospital due to "harassment and obstructions" including looting.

Meanwhile a new report from Human Rights Watch claims that the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias "are responsible for a campaign of ethnic cleansing targeting the Massalit people and other non-Arab communities in Sudan's West Darfur state".

War, murder, cruelty and carelessness; if that's what's in fashion then our leaders don't deserve the red carpet anyway. ■

The promises of Kenya's politicians ring hollow

The rains washed away public confidence in the government, along with homes and lives.

Brian Kabenah

In recent weeks, some areas of Kenya received more than 150% of their average monthly rainfall in just a few days. This has caused widespread flooding, loss and misery. Over 200 people have died and thousands more have been displaced across rural areas like Tana River and urban ones such as Nairobi.

Although the rains could not be controlled by political leaders, their impact could have been. Kenyans are frustrated with the poor urban planning that exacerbated this impact.

On social media, Kenyans have long pointed out the likelihood of flooding and water damage during the construction of some of the worst-hit roads and buildings. But even though the inevitability of these consequences was obvious to all, profits were nevertheless put before people or sustainability, and the warnings were not heeded until it was too late.

Hard-hit low-income neighbourhoods like Mathare, Mukuru Kwa Njenga and Kariobangi were characterised by unstable structures, high population density and poor sanitation, despite being close to areas of great wealth and

prosperity. As *The Continent* reported last week, well-known human rights activist Benna Buluma – Mama Victor – died after being trapped in her house when Mathare flooded in early April. And even when the rains stop, survivors struggle with homelessness and public health risks such as malaria, cholera and diarrhoea.

Politicians have been quick to make new promises. The government has said it will care for all those affected by the floods. Members of Parliament and governors like Anne Waiguru and Lee Kinyanjui have promised to construct temporary shelters and rehabilitate roads and bridges. But weeks after the flooding, the Mathare Social Justice Centre says at least 200 displaced individuals have not yet received any government support.

Kenyans are sceptical that the aid promised will come, or that authorities have truly gleaned any valuable lessons. And as the floodwaters finally ebb, so too does any lingering public confidence. ■



Brian Kabenah is a law student at the University of Strathmore. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Can't make it drink: A man looks on as a woman rides a horse along a beach in Banjul, Gambia on May the 4th, a day of no particular significance in this galaxy.

Photo: John Wessels/AFP



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