

The Continent

**'Tribeless'
Kenya is no
country for
Gachagua**





Cover: Every Kenyan old enough to remember 2007 knows the dark power of ethnicity in politics: it's what wins elections and also what turns them into a bloodbath. Politicians with ethnic influence have been able to hold others at ransom with it. "Usiguse Mlima," Rigatha Gachagua used to say, threatening that if "the mountain" – code for the vote-rich Mount Kenya region he hails from – was touched, hell would break loose. Somebody touched it. Gachagua was ousted from the vice presidency. But the streets are nonchalant. Something in the air is different. And it might be a sign that Kenya is changing (p11)

Inside:

- **Sudan:** More massacres as warlords fight for power (p7)
- **Botswana:** A liberation movement *can* lose an election (p10)
- **Investigation:** US money is helping to discredit opponents of Big Agriculture (p15)
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Reversal: Chadian soldiers parade in N'Djamena after battling rebels in 2021. Photo: Djimet Wiche/AFP

CHAD

Boko Haram kills dozens in raid on army base

On the border between Nigeria and Chad, Lake Chad creates the perfect place for groups like Boko Haram to hide away. The International Office for Migration says 220,000 people have been displaced as a result. Chad's president, Mahamat Déby, succeeded his father, who took power in a coup in 1990 and died fighting rebels, with a promise to make his country's north more secure. This week, Boko Haram attacked an army base and killed some 40 soldiers.

COUSINS

Haven't they heard of gorilla publishing?

There is just a 5% chance that a chimpanzee, if given a typewriter to randomly tap at for its whole life, will coincidentally type "banana". This is the conclusion of peer-reviewed research testing the "infinite monkey theorem", a way of thinking about probability. The idea goes that, given enough time, a monkey typing at random will eventually knock out words, sentences, and even the works of Shakespeare. Unfortunately for the researchers, chimpanzees are apes, not monkeys – so technically the theory remains untested.

MOZAMBIQUE

Election fallout continues

At least 10 people have died in the ongoing protests about last month's election, which kept Mozambique's ruling liberation party in power with 71% of the vote. Opposition parties say exit polls point to a defeat for Frelimo. International observers say the election was neither free nor fair. And NetBlocks says there have been near-total internet blackouts on the days protests were planned. Venancio Mondlane, the opposition candidate who came second in official results, has called for a seven-day national shutdown. He is asking Mozambicans to withhold taxes and to march on Maputo on 7 November.

GHANA

Buy local (ish)

Ghana spends \$400-million a month importing fuel from Europe. Its neighbour, Nigeria, has a lot of the

world's oil. *Reuters* reports that Ghana is eyeing up imports from the new Dangote refinery, tipped as a way for Nigeria to benefit from its own oil instead of other countries doing that and keeping that money for themselves.



The heat is on: A woman in Nigeria's Delta state uses the heat from a gas flare to dry cassava. Photo: Andrew Esiebo/*Washington Post* via Getty Images

GENOCIDE

South Africa brings the receipts

Israeli forces have killed some 43,000 people, including women, children, journalists and aid workers, in the country's response to Hamas's murder of 1,200 people in the 7 October attacks last year. South Africa has been documenting Israel's actions as part of its genocide case against the country. On Monday, its legal team delivered a van-load of evidence to the International Court of Justice at the Hague. Ambassador Vusumuzi Madonsela

told *Al Jazeera*: "The problem we have is that we have too much evidence." According to South Africa's presidency, the filing comprises "over 750 pages of text, supported by exhibits and annexes of over 4,000 pages" that show how the Israeli government is "promoting the destruction of Palestinians" by, among other methods, "depriving them access to humanitarian assistance and using starvation as a weapon of war". The Israeli government has denied all accusations of genocide. It insists it has sought to minimise civilian fatalities. It now has until July 2025 to respond to South Africa's filing.



Here's looking at EU: Morocco's King Mohammed VI with French President Emmanuel Macron. Photo: AFP

MOROCCO

Another setback for Western Sahara sovereignty

A faltering France needs markets and relevance. Its president this week went to Morocco to patch up a three-year dispute between the two countries. Investment deals worth \$10-billion were announced. But the real concession was France recognising “Moroccan sovereignty” over Western Sahara. It’s another win for Morocco over Algeria, which advocates the African Union position that the people of Western Sahara ought to have sovereignty. French newspaper *Le Monde* said in an editorial that the choice is “between the ambitions of a forward-looking Morocco and an Algerian regime fixated on the past”.

SOUTH AFRICA

We stan inning win in outstanding outing

The Proteas – the national men’s cricket team of South Africa – beat Bangladesh by an innings and 273 runs this week. That’s a big deal if you know what a test match is. If you don’t, it works like this: Two teams find somewhere in the world to play each other. Each gets two chances (innings) for their 11 players to bat and score runs. Sometimes, a team is so good and gets so many runs that it only needs to bat once, with the other team failing to beat their score. That’s what the Proteas did. We’ll be back with more sport knowledge some other time. Keep subscribing.

LIFE

One in three tree species could get permanently axed

Trees have been around longer than humans. They’re critical to the ecosystems that support all sorts of life. They also suck a lot of the carbon out of the atmosphere, delaying the end of days. But they also make tables and power fires. After a study of 47,000 tree species, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature warns that one third of tree species are at risk of extinction. This includes species of ash, mahogany and magnolia, some of the most iconic timber used by humanity.

COLONIALISM

UK is so far behind, it still uses gaslighting

Britain grew wealthy by destroying other nations. It enslaved their people, tried to erase their history, stole anything portable, and took away immeasurable futures. Last week, after a Commonwealth heads of state meeting, one of the two finalists to head Britain's new opposition (and former ruling) party wrote that the people who were colonised don't understand how good they had it, and instead owed the United Kingdom a "debt of gratitude". Which suggests some in the UK are so far



Owed dearies: Ex-colonisers upgrade defences in case de natives get uppity again. Photo: Tolga Akmen/AFP

up their own buttonhole that they should consider getting a colonialoscopy.

SUDAN

Meddling continues as displacement 'nightmare' unfolds

UN Secretary-General António Guterres mapped out the "largest displacement crisis in the world", with 11-million people fleeing their homes since two men decided last April to fight over power. Around 25-million people need humanitarian assistance. He said this to the UN Security Council this week. But its members are too focused on being on the right/wrong side in Ukraine, backing Israel in its ongoing genocide, or oppressing their own people. And the middle-size world powers, like Egypt and the UAE, are fighting a proxy war in Sudan.

UNITED STATES

A vote for billionaire enrichment, or the status quo

By the next time we publish, US voters may well have chosen to return a racist misogynist liar to power. He will continue to enrich himself, and the billionaires that support him in the hope of becoming trillionaires. On the other hand, those same voters might instead choose the first woman to preside over the country. By any measure, Kamala Harris is right of centre and her policies will still push that mix of kindness and violence that has long been the hallmark of US foreign policy. Neither is likely to be able to stem the flow of history into a multipolar, de-Westernised world order.

Botswana

Six decades of liberation party rule end in shock

Keletso Thobega in Gaborone

Nobody saw it coming. “I don’t know what happened... what might have led to us losing power,” said Slumber Tsogwane on Friday morning.

Tsogwane chairs the Botswana Democratic Party, which has governed since independence. A humiliating defeat in this week’s parliamentary elections has ended its 58-year rule. Tsogwane, like most other BDP MPs, has lost his seat.

The party with the most seats in Parliament appoints the president. With the BDP winning just three of the 61 seats, its leader, President Mokgweetsi Masisi conceded defeat on Friday.

“President Masisi failed to hold the BDP together and failed to manage the country’s economic downturn ... [and oversaw] an erosion of democratic principles,” said Pamela Dube, a gender and political activist in Gaborone.

The president-elect is human rights lawyer Duma Boko, leader of the United

Democratic Congress, which won the 31 seats required to form a government.

The UDC promised to improve the country’s minimum wage to \$300 from \$100, winning support among the youth. That promise would not have been credible coming from the BDP given that Masisi’s regime struggled to turn around the downturn triggered by a fall in global diamond prices. The gems contribute up to 40% of Botswana’s revenue. As their sales slumped, so did the economy, driving unemployment to 27%.

The UDC promised to implement a new economic model focused on job creation and wealth distribution plans to empower all citizens. Now it has to deliver on that because, as its own new legislator Kgoborego Nakwane points out, “many young people are struggling, and a great percentage live off handouts from the government because there are no jobs.” ■



All change: Supporters rally for Umbrella for Democratic Change candidate Duma Boko. Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan/AFP

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Sudan

Rampage and ransom after RSF boss defects

A fuller picture of the late October RSF massacres in Gezira, committed under the cover of a communications blackout, is starting to emerge from survivors and victims' families.

Liban Mahamed

Last Friday, at about six in the morning, two loud bangs were heard in the village of Al-Sereiha in North Gezira State. The residents suspected that angry fighters of the Rapid Support Forces had come for revenge. The area was tense since 20 October when AbuAglā Keikal, one of the most senior commanders of the Rapid Support Forces in Gezira, defected to the Sudanese army. More bangs followed the first two and soon enough, militiamen entered the village, took control, and began detaining the men.

“They began to hit us and humiliate us,” a resident who asked to be identified as AbdulNor, told *The Continent*. He was speaking from a shelter in New Halfa to which he escaped after his elderly mother paid the militiamen a ransom for his release. “She agreed to leave and give up her house and farm.”

Before AbdulNor’s family were forced to flee, the militiamen executed several

men in the village centre for all to witness. “They dragged 10 men in front of us and killed them all at once,” said AbdulNor.

The Wad Madani resistance committee reported that 124 people were killed in Al-Sireiha; one of the worst massacres since war between RSF and the Sudan Armed Forces broke out. Wad Madani is the capital of Gezira State. The committee also said the RSF attacked the town of Al-Hilaliya in Eastern Gezira, resulting in civilian deaths, looting, and the detention of many others.

A telecommunications blackout, imposed on the area which the Rapid Support Forces still control, has made it difficult to determine the exact death toll in affected areas. But local media reports indicate that RSF militiamen have attacked dozens of villages across eastern and northern Gezira since 20 October, taking hundreds for ransom, with some ransom videos being posted to social media in the past two weeks. In one, a militiaman wearing RSF uniform



Time to go: Smoke rises above buildings in Khartoum as people wait for transport out of the city. Photo: AFP

threatens to execute the captive if a ransom is not paid.

Videos of the aftermath of the violence in Al-Sireiha are also circulating on social media. One shows bodies shrouded in white garments on the ground as the recorder states, “These are the martyrs of Al-Sireiha— more than 100.”

Sudanese who live abroad have also begun receiving devastating accounts of what happened to family members in Gezira. Ola Labib learnt that the militiamen killed her non-verbal autistic cousin because he could not respond to their questions. “His mother screamed that he can’t talk. They didn’t care. They beat him to death,” Ola said.

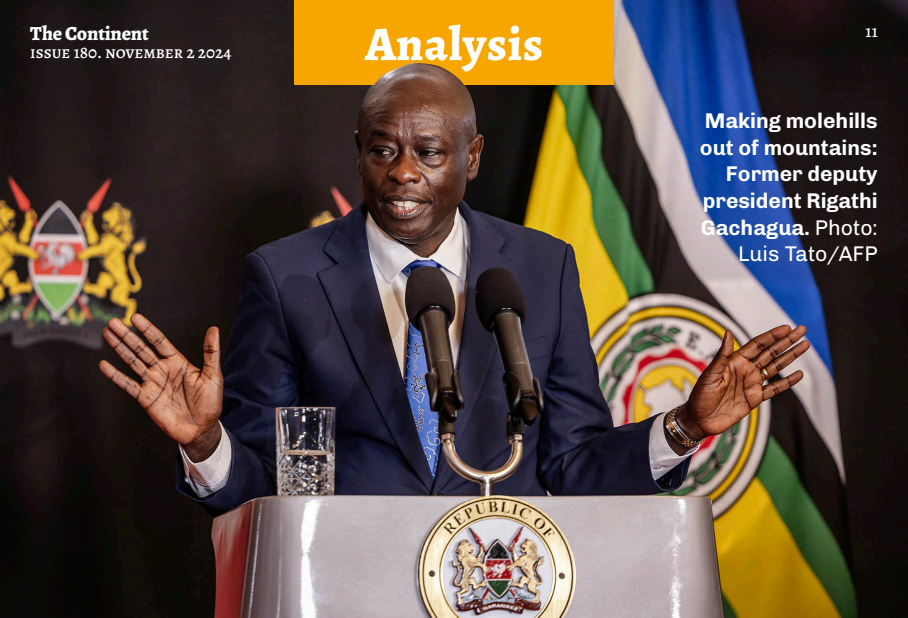
Other videos show large groups of displaced individuals on the move, including many children separated from their families.

According to the UN, more than 120,000 people fled the area as the militia attacks spread.

Local media also reports of a campaign of mass sexual violence by militiamen. According to the *Sudan Tribune*, a local collective in Rufaa, eastern Gezira, says that up to 37 cases of rape were reported in the town over just five days. Some survivors say that women in the attacked villages committed suicide by drowning, rather than be raped.

These sexual violence reports track with the findings of a wider UN investigation.

In a report published on 23 October, the UN said that the RSF and its allied militias have committed “widespread sexual and gender-based violence, rape, sexual slavery, abduction, and recruitment and use of children in hostilities.” ■



Making molehills out of mountains: Former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua. Photo: Luis Tato/AFP

President Ruto touched the mountain ...

... and showed that ethnicity really is losing its shine in Kenyan political organising.

Maureen Kasuku in Nairobi

Before air pollution made Nairobi too foggy, one could see the imposing Mount Kenya from many of its high buildings. Now it takes the clearest day, like the traffic-free lockdown days of the Covid pandemic, for the eye to find it. Before this month, over the psyches of the powerful people who walk the corridors of those high buildings, the political construct of Mount Kenya loomed just as imposingly as the ancient volcano once did. With Rigathi Gachagua's

impeachment, a fog appears to be descending on that construct too.

In Kenya, ethnicity remains the principal lever by which the political class mobilises voters. The country's largest ethnic group is the Kikuyu, whose spiritual home is on the fertile slopes surrounding Mount Kenya. The mountain itself plays a central role in Kikuyu history and mythology.

When political analysts talk about "Mount Kenya", they are referring to the region's large, predominantly Kikuyu voting bloc. And, in recent years, when

activists complain about the “Mount Kenya mafia”, they are speaking about the wealthy, politically connected and allegedly corrupt elite that surrounded former president Uhuru Kenyatta.

Kenyatta, the son of Kenya’s founding president, was considered to be the “Kingpin of Mount Kenya”. He was the third Kenyan president to come from the region, of just four presidents in total. But, in the 2022 presidential election, when he threw his weight behind his bitter enemy – veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga – the region threw its votes behind someone else.

In the 2022 presidential election, when [Kenyatta] threw his weight behind his bitter enemy – veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga – the region threw its votes behind someone else.

As *The Africa Report* observed, “3.5-million of President William Ruto’s 7.1-million votes came from Mount Kenya, a regional landslide largely attributed to his decision to pick Rigathi Gachagua as his running mate”.

Ruto became president, and Gachagua – a Kikuyu parliamentarian – was sworn in as his deputy. Gachagua understood the source of his power. Or thought he did.

Since moving into the deputy president’s residence, “Usiguse Mlima” has been his constant refrain: Don’t touch the Mountain. This was a veiled threat: Kenyans are all too familiar with the violent consequences that follow from

political drama, particularly political drama exacerbated by ethnic incitement. Gachagua doubled down, referring to his base as “government shareholders” who should be prioritised for state jobs and resources.

Such brazenly tribal rhetoric did not endear the deputy to ordinary Kenyans. When things started to go wrong for him, public sympathy was limited. The saga that could end his political career was seen as a mere “distraction” from more serious matters.

This month, Gachagua became the first deputy president under Kenya’s 2010 Constitution to be ousted. By making it an elected position, the 2010 Constitution made it a hard job to lose. But, after months of discord with Ruto, Gachagua was impeached by both houses of Kenya’s Parliament.

The impeachment process stirred intense social media debates with many speculating about the intrigue behind the impeachment motion brought by MP Mwengi Mutuse – who then struggled to bring evidence to support the motion on the floor of Parliament. Yet when the motion sailed through both houses of Kenya’s Parliament, the streets reacted with indifference.

“Gachagua’s impeachment is nothing more than a smokescreen to distract the public from Kenya’s real economic and social crises – soaring cost of living, unemployment, and widening inequality,” said Booker Omole, the vice chair of the Communist Party of Kenya, a few days after the impeachment. “These intra-elite power struggles have little bearing on



Slippery slopes: A handful of supporters of former deputy president Rigathi Gachagua protest against his impeachment for alleged misconduct and violation of the Constitution. Photo: James Wakibia/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

the lives of ordinary Kenyans. Kenyans should remain focused on building grassroots movements that challenge the entire political and economic order, rather than being drawn into factional squabbles within the ruling class, which only serve to maintain the status quo.”

Even Njuki Githethwa, an organiser with the Kenya Left Alliance who worries that Ruto’s removal of an elected deputy president could signal the “re-emergence of dictatorship in Kenya in which Parliament is subservient to the executive” said that the saga is “a distraction”.

The nonchalance on the streets continues a shift in popular politics that

started being proclaimed in the anti-tax protests that rocked Kenya in June. The protest movement’s insistence that it was “tribeless” shunned the ethnicity-based organising of mainstream politicians. “This shift complicates the ruling class’s reliance on ethnic divisions to maintain power,” said K Werru of the Progressive African Library and Information Activists’ group.

He added: “While it may be overly simplistic to declare the end of ethnic politics, this emerging movement signals that the political elite in Mount Kenya region and elsewhere must adapt and seek better strategies for mobilisation.” ■

A secret network watches those who watch what they eat

A new investigation by *The Continent*, *Lighthouse Reports* and other partners details a covert campaign that Big Agriculture waged against critics who threaten its very profitable control on what you eat.

Lydia Namubiru, Elena DeBre and Margot Gibbs

Blakk Rasta is a Ghanaian musician and broadcast journalist. He is also careful about what he eats. He says he has been a vegan for 25 years and does not eat white wheat, fish, “anything that is canned or processed,” or drink iced water.

This has made him an avid, if amateur, researcher of food and how it is grown. It’s also made him a target for an industrialised smear campaign with big backing in the United States. That campaign published over 500 often-derogatory profiles of scientists, environmentalists and journalists in Africa, Europe and Asia – with the aim of branding them as cynical actors who profit from protest.

With his often angry broadcasts about genetically modified food (or GMOs), Blakk Rasta is an obvious target. He often speaks with anger, likening GMOs to “colonialism” by “people who come and spawn your land [and] feed you on something that you don’t want to eat.”



GM-no: Ghanaian musician Blakk Rasta has been targeted by a multinational-backed smear campaign

In heated moments, he might even refer to GMO science as “terrorist agricultural practices”.

Blakk Rasta’s ire is directed at the giant corporations that profit from GMOs, but nuance can get lost amid the titanic battle that is being fought over what people eat.

Genetic modification is nearly as old as agriculture itself, and it’s often indigenous. Africans have been grafting and cross-breeding for millennia to get crops that are hardier and feed more people. In Africa,



Fertile soil: Women harvest vegetables in Taita Taveta, Kenya. Biotech firms are piling pressure on farmers to grow GMO crops. Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd/FAO/AFP

the growth of some settled civilisations is largely thanks to such cultivation practices. Early in the first millennium AD, people living in the Congo basin created dozens of new banana varieties. A few centuries later, their descendants settled on the northern shores of Lake Victoria where bananas grow very well.

The banana varieties created by their ancestors and the economic activities they supported – food production, beer brewing, crafts makings, etc – became a bedrock of the economies and cultural expressions of lakeside civilisations including the Baganda, Basoga and Bagwere in present-day Uganda.

Blakk Rasta's concerns about GMOs are caused by the industrial nature of the modern process, dominated by multinational firms. He accuses them of "looking at business more than humanity".

This is a very rich industry that is used to getting its way. "They will not tolerate any kind [of dissent] – they don't want to

have an honest conversation. They don't want criticism," says Mariam Mayet, who heads the African Centre for Biodiversity. "They believe there's only one narrative, and it's their narrative. They don't want to engage with us on these issues."

Mayet has been fighting Big Agriculture for decades. Two weeks after the industry's covert smear campaign was revealed, the centre won a nine-year court case in South Africa against Monsanto (now Bayer). This set aside approval for a genetically modified variety of maize, critiquing the original approval process. That's significant because the country ranks as one of the top 10 in the world for uptake of modified crops.

Such victories are rare.

"The industry has so much power over our governments. They have power over the research world. They have power over regulation. They got deregulation," Mayet said weeks before the court win, when she learnt that she and the centre were among



Sowing doubt: An activist in Durban, South Africa, protests against biotech giants and genetically modified food and seeds. Photo: Rajesh Jantilal/AFP

those profiled by the smear campaign.

The campaign wrote and distributed more than 3,500 profiles on people and organisations who have been critical of GMOs and factory-made pesticides, branding them as being “opportunistic stakeholders” in a “protest industry”.

These profiles were shared on Bonus Eventus, a closed, invite-only network that gathers powerful decision-makers in national regulatory agencies, multilateral funding bodies, academia, and international agribusiness. It was set up by v-Fluence, a PR firm founded by Jay Byrne, a former communications executive at Monsanto, the controversial agrichemical firm bought by Bayer in 2016. It has over a thousand members.

Between 2013 and 2019 v-Fluence was paid over \$400,000 to “monitor” the critics of “modern agricultural approaches”. The money came from the USAID via the International Food Policy Research Institute as part of a US government project to introduce genetically modified crops to countries in Africa and Asia.

The founder of v-Fluence, Jay Byrne,

told *Lighthouse Reports*, the investigative outlet that led the media consortium, that his company had not received funds from USAID. He added that his firm is “an information collection, sharing, analysis, and reporting provider” trying to “promote understanding of all the various stakeholders, positions, research ... impacting food and agriculture”.

But a lawsuit in the US paints Byrne’s professional history in more ominous hues. Biochemical giant Syngenta, one of Byrne’s longtime clients, is being sued in the US, by more than 5,000 people, for allegedly suppressing information linking its herbicide to Parkinson’s disease. It denies the charge.

One of the lawsuits names v-Fluence and Byrne as having played a critical role in the information suppression.

Byrne denies the allegations in that suit. ■

Partners: Lighthouse Reports, Africa Uncensored, Le Monde, The Guardian, ABC News, The Wire, The New Lede, The New Humanitarian

PHOTO ESSAY

The work of thy hands

Growing up, I watched many parents in my community work tirelessly in their homes and on streets, using their hands to create a better future for their children. These artisans shape not only their world but also our own. Their craft and workmanship, ise owo as the

Yoruba call it, has been passed down from one generation to another in the informal parts of our economies. Today, some Nigerians learn it at the vocational institutes they turn to when they can't afford to continue mainstream school. ■

Words and photos: Temiloluwa Johnson



Feat of clay: Olubunmi Atere, from Ondo State is a sculptor who likes to keep her work as primitive as possible. She feels that the intricate expression validates her personhood.



Tailored shift: A bespoke garment made by Bukola Opaniyan Samuel, fashioned from fabric called *aşò òkè*. The buttons are made from wine corks.



Everything is aluminated: Abdulazeez Adeyemi is a skilled aluminium craftsman in Iseyin, Oyo State. He honed his craft during a five-year apprenticeship under his father's watchful eye.



Glow with the flow: Amafele Austen creates distinctive art with charcoal and graphite pencils, incorporating a golden halo into every design as his creative signature.



Stitching time: Traditional designer Jelili Tinko has been embroidering since 2006 – it's how he provides for his family. If he wasn't doing embroidery, he says, he'd still want to work with his hands, perhaps as a barber.



Weld done, sun: Babalola Sulaimon Leke, who lives in Ibadan, has been welding and bending iron for 16 years, honing his craft to the extent that he has become known a 'The Solar Welder'.



That wood work: Sefiu Opeyemi, 25, browses for logs to use in the farm tools he makes. From Iseyin in Oyo State, he has been shaping iron for 15 years.



Statue business: A sculptor and teacher based in Lagos, Adeniyi Olawole focuses on Yoruba culture and expression in his art.

Life in the fast lane

Paralympian Husnah Kukundakwe has shown that everyone wins when we abandon disability prejudice.

Karien Jonckheere

Husnah Kukundakwe used to hide the fact that part of her arm was missing by always wearing long sleeves. Yet, she was a lucky disabled child. “Most of the others are abandoned by their families,” she says. “They are left on the streets or left in facilities for them to just find a way to survive when they’re older.”

She hopes to change that awful attitude, at least in her home country Uganda. A rising star in global sport, she is well placed to. “The platform that I’ve been given is one that I use to spread my story: I wasn’t abandoned and now I am a very important person in Uganda,” she says. “I’m very important to the community.”

Kukundakwe was just 14 years old when she travelled to Tokyo to compete. She was the youngest athlete in the Tokyo Paralympics. This year, she participated in her second Paralympics in Paris. She remains Uganda’s only Para swimmer.

“There are other people who are coming up, for sure. They’re training. They’re working hard and, hopefully, we will get classification opportunities for them and the Para swimming team grows to be more than just me,” she explains.

That growth is made a lot tougher by the near absence of training facilities in



Off to the races: Husnah Kukundakwe was just 14 when she competed for Uganda in the Paralympics. Photo: AFP

Uganda. Kampala, the capital city, has just one Olympic-size 50m pool, but it’s connected to a hotel and access to it comes at a price. Kukundakwe trains in a far from ideal 25m pool.

She has always been drawn to the water. Swimming, which she started at three years old, has always made her feel free. And when she realised the stigma that society associated with her disability, something she was born with, swimming became a way of dealing with it. In the pool, it was just her and the water.

“I was able to no longer be shy, no longer feel bad about my disability, but



Photo: Bradley Collyer/PA Images via Getty Images

rather feel comfortable and free with myself without worry about everyone else's opinion about the way that I looked," she says.

She is now a confident 17-year-old. Ahead of the Paris games, she was one of the Paralympic torchbearers and addressed an International Paralympic Committee and a Unesco conference.

In the Paris pool, Kukundakwe didn't quite reach her goals, falling short of reaching her first final. But the experience has made her even hungrier for the next event in Los Angeles in 2028. She is just as intent on becoming a paediatrician, however, so preparation for Los Angeles 2028 will have to be balanced with her school work. In the weeks since her return from Paris, her focus has been purely on the schoolwork.

Her final exams were scheduled for just a month after the Paralympics ended. "I haven't been in the pool for more than three weeks – it's been almost like something in my life is missing," she tells *The Continent*.

It's clear that her time in Paris didn't go unnoticed by her community.

"I'm actually more recognised by people and it's shown me how very supportive they have been. I'm honestly just happy and honoured to be a role model to all children around the world, especially to Ugandan children with disabilities who would love to reach out for their dreams as soon as they can."

The impact of her media exposure has been teaching her some lessons too, like "how much I need to continue telling that story," she says. Seeing people react to her story, she has realised that it was showing them, or reaffirming to them, that restrictions can be pushed and barriers can be broken.

"I kept pushing and pushing and eventually they let me try and I proved to be way better than they hoped. So, if they aren't giving you that platform, you need to fight for it, you need to work hard, you need to prove them wrong. I guess that's what people pick from my story," she muses. ■

What's mined is ores. If ores are yours, are the problems ours?

Natural resource extraction is deeply intertwined with history on the continent, from gold mining in ancient West African kingdoms through European colonial exploitation to ongoing battles for precious minerals and metals needed for green technology.

How do Africans themselves see mining, oil drilling, and other forms of resource extraction?

Afrobarometer's 39-country survey finds that fewer than half (45%) of respondents are convinced that the benefits of natural resource extraction, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh costs such as environmental degradation.

But views range widely across the

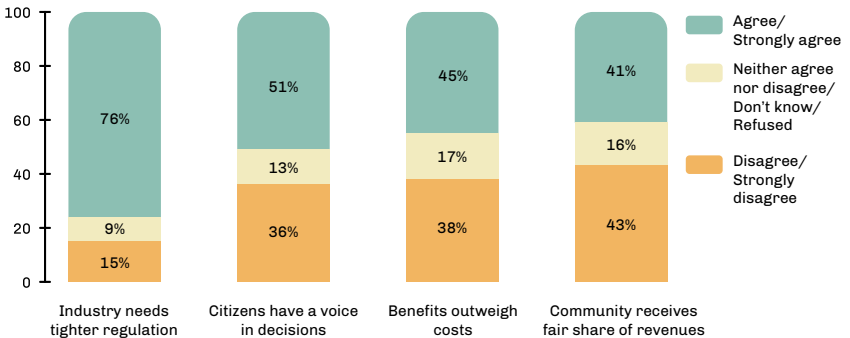
continent: More than seven in 10 Malians (73%) see the industry as a net gain, compared to just two in 10 Seychellois (21%) and Angolans (22%).

Africans are split on the question of whether local communities receive a fair share of revenues from extractive activities in the vicinity: 41% think they do, whereas 43% do not.

Half (51%) think local citizens have a voice in industry decisions affecting their communities.

One area of widespread agreement is regulation: Three-quarters (76%) of respondents say the extraction industry should be more tightly regulated to reduce negative environmental impacts.

Views on natural resource extraction | 39 African 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.

No such thing as a universal museum

A French political scientist and artist who grew up in Algeria and Réunion grapples with her people's self-coronation as global arbiters of art and taste.

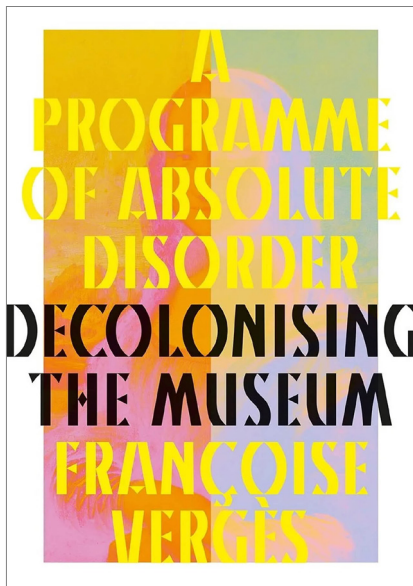
Jacqueline Nyathi

Formerly colonised peoples would be hard pressed to find reasons why the glamorous museums of the West – the Louvre, British Museum, etc – continue to stand as they do. Too much of our heritage lies in the basements and storerooms of these ethnological museums of former colonisers.

Looted and spirited out of their contexts into Europe's metropole, works of art created for community use, worship and memory lie dusty and neglected. Dislocated from their contexts, they can no longer serve their *raison d'être*.

A small fraction is displayed in galleries for tourists – generally not African – to ogle at without understanding, transforming them into mere “objects”.

In *A Programme of Absolute Disorder*, Françoise Vergès interrogates the concept of the “universal” museum and grapples



with why these museums hold onto what their societies could never ethically use.

Is the persistence of the Western ethnological museum about money? To some extent it is. But that's clearly not the full story given that much of that heritage is not on display but in storage.

Vergès eloquently argues that it has a lot more to do with prestige and a sense of superiority. Perhaps it's also about control, and power. Whatever its motivations, with respect to material heritage from previously colonised peoples, it is epistemicide.

When activists call for repatriation of African holdings, directors and curators of these “universal” museums have often argued that these “objects” (a problematic



Woolly thinking: Amun as a ram protecting King Taharqa, from the Temple of Amun in Nubia. Exhibited at the Louvre in 2022, on loan from the Ashmolean Museum in the UK. Photo: Stephane De Sakutin/AFP

term in itself) are safer where they are, and serve the purpose of educating the world about humanity.

They, you see, are the only rightful educators and custodians, in their minds. As Vergès reminds us, Europe sees itself as the true cradle of civilisation (because of the Enlightenment): Superior, of course, and the true arbiters of art and taste.

There are many other problems with the Western museum as it is: “Philanthropy” in artwashing, gentrification, whitewashing, obscuring the history of slavery and colonialism (and the role of those same custodian nations in this), to mention only a few.

Vergès also takes us through a history seldom recounted: Napoleon rampaging through Europe and taking the art treasures of conquered nations. Many of these ended up in the Louvre – a precedent for the looting that later happened in Africa and other places.

The book then zooms into an attempt to step away from the culture of curating by pillage. Réunion, a creation of France,

is evolving its own history even as it grapples with its identity.

There, Vergès and others founded the *Maison des Civilisations et de l’Unité Réunionnaise*, a “museum without objects” centring Marronage – self-liberation from slavery, and moving away from the universal museum’s fixation on visual representation.

In some ways the project failed, derailed by politics; but it set a precedent for imagining museums in new ways, Vergès says.

To a lay person, the book’s material feels dense at times. But art scholar or not, it echoes the words of Aimé Césaire in his 1955 *Discourse on Colonialism*.

“And the museums of which M Caillois is so proud, not for one minute does it cross his mind that, all things considered, it would have been better not to have needed them; that Europe would have done better to tolerate the non-European civilisations at its side, leaving them alive, dynamic and prosperous, whole and not mutilated.” ■

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

"Does *Hakuna Matata* mean I just can't wait to be king of this quiz? No worries if not."



1_ This week marked the 50th anniversary of the 'Rumble In the Jungle'. In which present-day country did the fight take place?

2_ What was the country called at the time?

3_ *Hakuna Matata*, from *The Lion King*, is a phrase in which language?

4_ Thabo Mbeki succeeded Nelson Mandela as South Africa's president. True or false?

5_ What is the demonym for people from Zanzibar?

6_ Ngozi Family, a prolific

Zamrock band, is from which country?

7_ Blaise Compaoré was president of which country from 1987 to 2014?

8_ Matola, Beira and Pemba are cities in which country?

9_ True or false: Botswana has both a president and a prime minister.

10_ Korup National Park Forest (pictured) is touted as one of Africa's oldest, richest and undisturbed forests. Which country is it found in?

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We will have to go further than repairing the tear

Those that benefited from colonialism bristle at the mere mention of reparations. Yet that is just the first step to real equity.

Patrick Gathara

Not many people have heard of the other Balfour Declaration. No, not the 1914 one about a Jewish homeland in Palestine that set the stage for the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. I'm referring to the 1926 one which, while formally stipulating Britain as equal to her dominions, yoked them together under a common allegiance to the British Crown: free association as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In 1949, the embarrassing "British" part was dropped, to make it the Commonwealth of Nations but allegiance to the Crown was maintained, styled as "the symbol of free association".

In Samoa last week, during the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, that allegiance was sorely tested. The natives were in full revolt, demanding reparations for their years of exploitation and servitude. The British king, Charles Windsor (styled in Britain as Charles III), whose family profited from both slavery and colonialism heads this "free association". In his speech, Windsor did acknowledge "painful aspects" of the past

but dodged the issue of repair for them, saying "none of us can change the past, but we can commit ... to learning its lessons". His prime minister was more blunt. Keir Starmer outrightly rejected what he said would "end up being very, very long endless discussions about reparations on the past".

But the natives were having none of it. Taking the idea of equality much further than their former masters would have it, they resolved to proceed regardless and forced the Brits to acquiesce to talks.

But, the natives were having none of it. Taking the idea of equality much further than their former masters ... they forced the Brits to acquiesce to talks.

The summit statement declared they had "agreed that the time has come for a meaningful, truthful and respectful conversation". True to form, Starmer tried to put a spin on it, insisting there had been no mention of cash payments. But that door has now been wedged open.

Colonialists are wont to tell themselves that their dispossession and oppression of



other people were acts of benevolence that introduced the savages to the benefits of civilisation and whiteness.

One British MP, Robert Jenrick, a frontrunner to be leader of the opposition Conservative Party, wrote in the aftermath of the summit that the natives should in fact be *grateful* for their subjugation by the British, rather than demanding reparations. His argument is somewhat undermined by the fact that the British themselves have tried hard to bury the truth about their empire, even enacting an official programme known as Operation Legacy to remove incriminating documents from former colonies as each one gained independence.

In any case, the British are wrong about reparations being about the past. They are, to quote Starmar, about “current future-facing challenges”.

They are about addressing the future that was stolen, not undoing the past; about dealing with the ongoing legacy of centuries of robbery and imperialism which have created a global caste system with the white Brahmins at the top and the dark-skinned untouchables wallowing at the bottom. This system has bled and continues to bleed former colonies – Africa, for example, is a net creditor to the rest of the world.

In the end, though, even reparations will not be enough. The road to real equity must run through the dismantling of the current global architecture and building of a new one. Not a new “Commonwealth” with the masters still on top, but one that actually lives up to its egalitarian billing. ■

Patrick Gathara is a Kenyan journalist, cartoonist and author

THE BIG PICTURE

Astro's turf: Christina Khumalo (5) poses for a picture at the *Gateway to Space* exhibition in Johannesburg in 2019. The photo is part of the *Bold. Black. Baldwin.* exhibit running in Miami until March 2025.

Photo: Alon Skuy



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