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The Continent

Surviving Sudan

Art: Galal Yousif





COVER: The civil war in Sudan has brought untold death and destruction. And yet, somehow, life goes on. This week's edition is dedicated to the organisers who keep organising (p16); the creators who keep creating (p19); and to the refugees who, having lost everything, are starting life somewhere else (p22). The cover artwork is *The Blue Man and the Crisis of his People* by Galal Yousif, a Sudanese painter in exile. It depicts the sorrow of an entire nation rising up to possess a single person. "The blue man could be anyone," says Yousif.

Inside:

- **Uganda:** Icon that put the tree in colonial history collapses (p7)
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THE HAGUE

Reparations granted for warlord's victims

Nearly 50,000 survivors of Dominic Ongwen, a Ugandan child soldier turned warlord, will receive symbolic cash reparations and rehabilitation services. On Wednesday, the International Criminal Court at the Hague granted \$56-million in reparations to the victims of rape, murder, and abduction – crimes Ongwen was convicted of from his time in the Lord's Resistance Army. The money will come from the court's own fund for victims.

GHANA

Government limits the rights of gay people further

Although gay sex was already a punishable offence in Ghana, on Wednesday the country's Parliament passed legislation imposing a prison sentence of up to five years for the "wilful promotion, sponsorship, or support of LGBTQ+ activities", among other controversial measures. A coalition connected to the ultra-conservative Christian evangelical movement in the United States, championed the new law, winning traditional leaders and politicians to their cause. President Nana Akufo-Addo now has seven days to assent and make it law or veto it.



Ex-ecutive: Moncef Marzouki, former president of Tunisia. Photo: AFP

TUNISIA

From president to repeat offending 'enemy of the state'

In absentia, former Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki heard of his second prison sentencing – a Tunis court sentenced him to eight years for statements he made on social media. Marzouki, who is exiled in France, was also sentenced to four years imprisonment in 2021 for urging France to end its support for incumbent President Kais Saied. The first president to be democratically elected after Tunisia's 2011 "Arab Spring" protest, Marzouki is a loud and unrelenting critic of Saied and has embraced the "enemy of Tunisia" label.

MAURITIUS

Sea-sickness so bad, it looked like cholera

With at least 15 of the 3,000 passengers and crew of the Norwegian Dawn reportedly suffering from diarrhoea and vomiting, Mauritian authorities prevented

the luxury cruise ship from docking, until they were certain there was no cholera onboard. No traces of cholera were found in collected samples and the ship was finally allowed to dock in Mauritius' capital on Monday. Owned and operated by the US-based Norwegian Cruise Line company, the ship was coming from Cape Town, South Africa.



Photo: Finnbar
Webster/Getty Images

CHAD

Electoral calendar off to a deadly start

Days after Chad announced that its presidential election was scheduled for 6 May, an opposition leader was killed in a shootout with state security at his party offices. Yaya Dillo, a cousin and opponent of incumbent President Mahamat Déby, was accused of participating in an assassination attempt on a judge, which he denied. Déby, an ally of colonial power France in a region that is increasingly hostile to it, is expected to run in the May election.

MOZAMBIQUE

Violence displaces 'tens of thousands'

After a period of relative calm, a new wave of insurgent violence has internally displaced tens of thousands of people in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique's north, according to the government. This is happening despite the presence of the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces and troops from the Southern African Development Community. Last month, a Catholic mission in Mazeze was set ablaze, prompting Pope Francis to call for peace in the region.

IRAN

Elections test regime's support

These are tense times in the Islamic Republic. Internally, Iran is still reeling from anti-government protests in 2022, which were brutally suppressed by security forces. Externally, it is in the eye of a geopolitical storm: Iran is Hamas's closest ally, but has avoided being drawn into direct conflict with Israel. Hard-line candidates are expected to sweep the board in Friday's election, but turnout will be key: with political expression tightly controlled, many voters are expected to express dissent by staying home.



Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei casts his ballot in elections on 1 March. Photo: Atta Kenare/AFP

ETHIOPIA

French journalist released after 'conspiracy' arrest

Antoine Galindo, a journalist with Africa Intelligence, was released after being detained in Ethiopia for a week. He has returned to France. The reporter was charged with "conspiracy to create chaos" after interviewing a spokesperson for an opposition party. "His unjust detention was a stark reminder of the dangers of practicing journalism in today's Ethiopia," said the Committee to Protect Journalists. Ethiopia is one of the worst jailers of journalists on the continent, with at least eight journalists behind bars.

RUSSIA

African migrants are now a 'weapon' in proxy war on West

Britain's *The Telegraph* reports that Russia is working to control the flow of African migrants through Libya to "weaponise" migration into Europe. It quotes a security source: "If you can control the migrant routes into Europe, then you can effectively control elections ... you can restrict or flood a certain area with migrants in order to influence public opinion at a crucial time". It fails to mention this "weapon" is only a threat thanks to the demonisation of migrants by politicians and right-wing outlets like *The Telegraph* itself.

ZAMBIA

National disaster declared over drought

There has been little to no rain in Zambia in the past five weeks, when farmers' crops needed it most. This led President Hakainde Hichilema to declare a national disaster on Thursday. Hichilema said the drought has destroyed over half of the country's planting area, and pledged to provide humanitarian aid. Zambia relies on hydropower for electricity; this too is affected by the lack of rain caused by climate change and the El Niño effect.

KENYA

Haiti still thinks Kenyan police can solve its problems

President William Ruto hosted Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry in Nairobi on Thursday. The two leaders are cooking up a controversial deal to send 1,000 Kenyan policemen to quell gang violence on the Caribbean island. The United States offered to pay for the scheme, which was last month declared illegal by Kenya's High Court. But laws have rarely stopped Ruto or, for that matter, Kenyan police, and the deal appears to be going ahead regardless.



Breach of contract: AKA murder suspects in court.
Photo: Darren Stewart/Gallo Images via Getty Images

SOUTH AFRICA

Police claim breakthrough in AKA's murder

Kiernan Forbes, better known by his stage name AKA, was murdered alongside

his friend outside a Durban restaurant in February 2023. Over the past week, police in South Africa and Eswatini have arrested seven men in connection with the crime, which they claim was a contract killing. The men were allegedly paid R800,000 (\$41,600) for the murder. It is not known who ordered the alleged hit.

Uganda



When old trees fall over, it is not usually international news. But few trees on the continent, or in the world, are as storied as this ancient *Canarium* on the campus of Kyambogo University outside Kampala. Thought to be more than 150 years old, it was under its branches that the Buganda king, Muteesa I, met with the first Europeans to travel through the territory. A few years later, under the same tree, Muteesa I drafted a letter – with the help of Henry Morton Stanley – asking the British queen to send missionaries to the kingdom. The tree is now gone, but the missionaries – and the enormous societal changes they ushered in – are still there.

West Africa

Ecowas blinks first in coup belt face-off

Who cares about trying to maintain dignity, when putsch comes to shove.

Kiri Rupiah

The Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) has suspended its sanctions against Niger, and is easing those against Guinea and Mali. The sanctions were meant to punish putschists for military coups.

A wave of coups d'état has swept the region in recent years, starting with Mali in August 2020 and encompassing unconstitutional changes of power in Chad, Guinea, Mali (again), Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon.

Ecowas responded to the coups in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea by imposing sanctions. These included the closure of land and air borders with member states, freezing the countries' financial assets in the region and suspension from the bloc. This, regional leaders said, was meant to compel the military leaders to return the countries to constitutional order.

It has not worked. In some coup-affected countries, the sanctions sparked protests against the regional bloc and in favour of the coup leaders.

It didn't help that some of the overthrown leaders had not been particularly big on constitutionalism themselves. In a disputed election months before the coup, Guinea's Alpha Condé had awarded himself a controversial third term. Gabon's Ali Bongo was overthrown just days after another disputed election in which he was declared winner – never mind that his family had already been in power for 56 years.

Now Ecowas is contending with a “constitutional coup” attempt by one of its stalwarts, Senegal's Macky Sall, who has controversially postponed the election of his would-be successor. Ecowas has asked Senegal to reverse the delay, but has not proposed sanctions.

“We must re-examine our approach to the quest for constitutional order,” said Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu, the current Ecowas chair, at the start of the emergency meeting that eased the sanctions.

Meanwhile, the military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have formed a new regional alliance and announced that they might leave Ecowas entirely. The threat of their exits may have contributed to the decision to relax sanctions. ■

South Africa

Nervous ANC launches re-election campaign

In a few months' time, South Africans will do something that they have never done before: vote in a truly competitive national election.

For most of its history, South Africa was governed by white supremacists, and non-white people were not allowed to vote. This changed in 1994, when apartheid ended. But in the five general elections since then, the ruling African National Congress has been so popular that the result was never in the slightest doubt. The party's worst performance came in 2019, and it still managed to secure a majority of 57.5%.

This time will be different. All opinion polls so far suggest that the ANC will lose its outright majority come 29 May, ushering in a new era of South African politics. The real question, though, is how much it will dip under 50%. If it misses a majority by only a few percentage points, it

will be still able to form a government with the support of a handful of tiny parties, keeping the status quo largely intact.

But if the ANC garners 40% or less of the vote, it may be forced into an uneasy coalition with one of the two major opposition parties – either the Democratic Alliance or the Economic Freedom Fighters. If similar coalitions at a local level are anything to go by, South Africa could be in for five years of chronically chaotic and ineffective governance.

On Saturday, the ANC kicked off its campaign with a manifesto launch in Durban. President Cyril Ramaphosa insisted that the opinion polls were wrong, and promised that his party would secure a two-thirds majority. His bravado served to mask real nervousness among the party's rank and file: this is uncharted territory for Africa's oldest surviving political party. ■



Boxed in: ANC members carry a mock coffin of ex-leader Jacob Zuma's new party, MK. Photo: Rajesh Jantilal/AFP

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Foot down on the gas as biofuel promises blow in the wind

Eni's clean energy promises in the Republic of Congo are limping, but gas extraction is off to a roaring start.

Marlon De Mayila

This week the Republic of Congo loaded its first-ever cargo of liquified natural gas. The cargo “will sail to Piombino’s regasification terminal, in Italy, in the coming days,” said a press statement from Eni, the petrochemical giant controlled by the Italian state.

The shipment is the first output from a 2022 agreement between Eni and Congo’s government, in which the company promised to support the nation’s transition to clean energy while extracting gas for export from at least two energy rich fields in the country.

The clean energy transition promise has not seen the same speedy progress.

Eni says that by 2026, it will harvest 170,000 tonnes of crops from Congo for biofuels – clean energy that is supposed to help wean the world off the kind of fossil fuels that made it a 48-billion euro company. However, unlike its very hands-on approach to gas extraction in the country, Eni delegated the initial biofuel activities to other companies. They include the troubled Agri Resources, a

Congolese subsidiary of multinational conglomerate Monaco Resources. Agri-Resources has gone from one problem to another. First, it was accused of damaging local farms when setting up a vast 22,000 hectare project in Louvakou, south-western Congo.

“They moved in and started destroying the fields. When they ransacked the plantations, they didn’t even ask the plantation owners to come and take their cassava crops,” said Audrey Mandigou, a farmer in Louvakou.

After a long legal battle, Agri-Resources agreed to pay 15-million CFA (about \$24,000) to 57 farmers.

It is also in financial distress – a minority shareholder sued it in 2019 on allegations of forgery and fraud, according to press reports. Martine Moussahou, whose family leases land to Agri Resources in Louvakou, said that her quarterly rental fees had stopped coming due to a “financial crisis” at the company.

It’s on 300 hectares of this Louvakou farm that Agri Resources helped Eni test castor beans for biofuel. In June 2023, Manuel Saunieme, a technical officer



Gas giant: Eni's Tango liquefied natural gas facility off the coast of the Republic of Congo. Photo: Eni

with Agri Resources, said the company had “just completed a very successful first trial of castor oil crops” and was waiting for “the release of funds from Eni to begin planting in October”. But five months on, Agri Resources’s chief accountant Bon Samaritan Biene Biene said the yield “was not conclusive in view of the projections”. In other words, the 300 hectares planted to test castor beans did not yield enough to warrant sowing on a large tract by the onset of the rainy season in November.

A hundred kilometres away from Louvakou, at Tolona Farm, the test didn’t go much better. There, the castor bean trial field covered 800 acres. Last July, a staff member at the farm said the trial was successful but the company “didn’t get any machines from Eni-Congo to harvest the beans, so everything dried up in the grass”. No further planting had happened by early December. Responding to questions about it, Eni said the pilot’s performance has been “limited”.

Tolona’s manager, Oscar Gonzales

Martinez, said that the castor beans have yet to be “adapted to tropical areas” and that future collaboration with Eni will “depend on that and other aspects related to finance and profitability.”

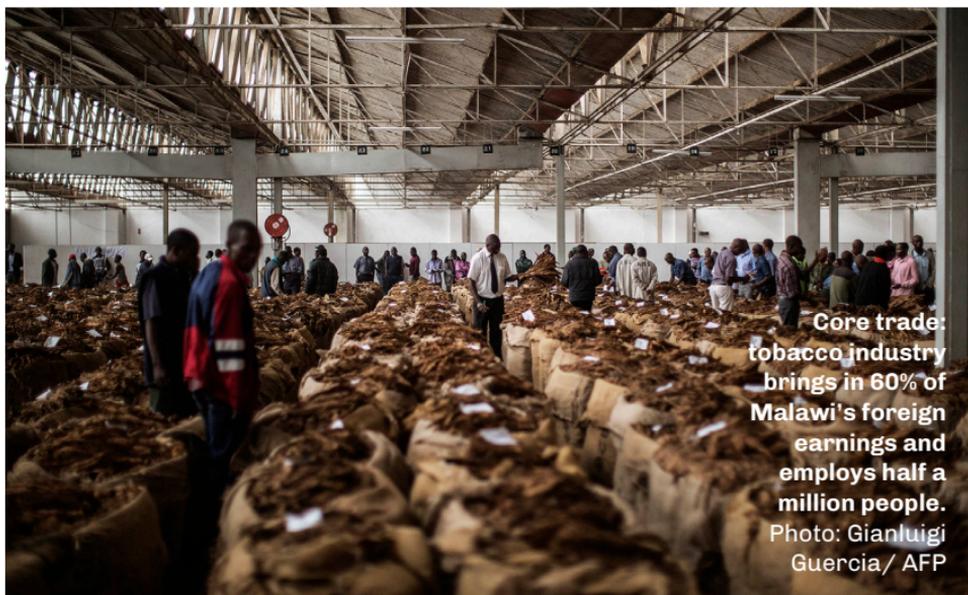
There has been no industrial production nor shipment of biofuel feedstock to Italy to date even though Eni promotes Congo as one of the African countries where its biofuel projects are most advanced.

Responding to questions, Eni said: “The pilots evaluated the performances of several castor varieties. The best performing varieties will be adopted in the agricultural campaign in 2024, along with the best agricultural practices.”

The company said that it has identified more than 20,000 hectares in Bouenza, Niari and Pool for the 2024 cultivation program. Eni also said that it is constructing an agri-hub in Loudima where it expects to start extracting vegetable oil in early 2024 – and that it will construct more. ■

Smokes and mirrors: How Big Tobacco may have avoided Malawi's taxman

If you've ever smoked a cigarette, chances are you have inhaled a little of Malawi's most famous crop. The southern African country is one of the world's biggest producers of tobacco. This should be a cash cow for a strapped government. Instead, one of the industry's biggest players pays barely any tax, while extracting massive profits for its shareholders. How do we know? We've seen some documents we were not supposed to.



Core trade:
tobacco industry
brings in 60% of
Malawi's foreign
earnings and
employs half a
million people.
Photo: Gianluigi
Guercia/ AFP

**Zuza Nazaruk and
Josephine Chinele**

2020 was a really good year for Alliance One Tobacco (Malawi) Limited, which controls 40% of Malawi's tobacco market. This is the local subsidiary of one of the world's largest agricultural

companies, Pyxus International.

That year, Alliance One exported nearly 27-million kilogrammes of Malawi-grown tobacco leaf worth \$173.6-million, *The Continent* found, by independently analysing export data.

Corporate income tax in Malawi is supposed to be 30% of a company's profit.

One would expect this revenue to fetch the government a tidy sum in income tax. But documents from the Malawi Revenue Authority, leaked to *The Continent*, show that in fact the company paid nothing. Zero. Zilch.

The document also covers 2021, and shows that Alliance One paid just \$41,000 in income tax, after exporting tobacco worth at least \$151-million.

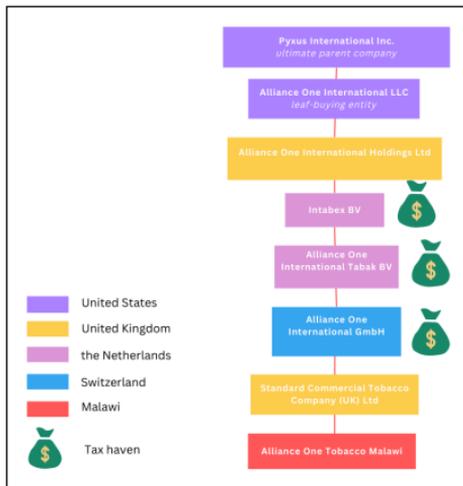
Alliance One did not respond to our request to explain why it declared little or no profit despite substantial export revenue in those years.

The Malawi Revenue Authority refused to comment on the matter, saying that taxpayers' matters are confidential.

Where did all the money go?

The leaked documents offer a clue on what may have happened. In the two years covered, they show that Alliance One did pay \$843,000 in a category called "withholding tax". This is a 20% levy that is applied by the government when local companies pay foreign entities. It suggests Alliance One may have moved \$4.2-million in taxable profits out of Malawi through such payments. This is a technique, which can be used by multinational companies "to shift profits and avoid taxes," according to Vincent Kiezebrink, a researcher at the Netherlands-based Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations.

The payments to overseas entities that help multinationals avoid tax usually take the form of interest on loans and royalties between related companies. Pyxus International, the Alliance One's parent



Filtering down: A chart showing the chain of Alliance One Tobacco's ownership structure. Source: Zuzana Nazaruk

company, had 53 subsidiaries across the world by March 2020, giving it plenty of room to manoeuvre.

Customs data also shows that Alliance One sold about a fifth of the tobacco leaf to sister companies within the Pyxus International group. This is at an average of \$5.31 per kilogram, which is lower than the \$5.39 per kilogram average for sales to unrelated companies.

Intra-group sales at lower prices than the fair market value can also help companies avoid taxes in countries with higher tax rates by lowering how much sales revenue they have to declare. In 2020 and 2021, Alliance One appears to have lowered its Malawi sales revenue by more than \$980,000 with this practice, which is often referred to as transfer pricing.

A losing hand for most Malawians
Michael Msukwa grows tobacco



Harvest: A Malawian worker processes tobacco for grading at a farm in Zomba.

Photo: Gianluigi Guercia/AFP

in Malawi's northern region. He is contracted to supply his crop to Alliance One, but said the contract is exploitative and barely allows him to make any profit. He chairs a collective of 30 farmer groups that are contracted by Alliance One.

"We want to improve our livelihoods and provide for our families ... But [Alliance One] is greatly benefiting from tobacco farming, more than us, the farmers," he said. "When you're in contract farming, you're trapped. You have no say about your tobacco," he added.

Alliance One binds contracted farmers to sell only to it and then asks banks to lend them money for fertilisers and other inputs. The company commits to paying the bank should the farmer default. Msukwa said that he agreed to a loan of

five million kwacha (\$2,980) in a recent farming season, but 10-million kwacha was deducted from his sales income for loan repayment, leaving him with two million kwacha for three months of work. "It's as if I only farmed to repay the loans. I got very little compared to the amount of money and energy I invested," Msukwa said.

The company denies that its contracts with farmers are exploitative, saying that "we keep the farmer at the heart of everything we do".

Despite leaving a big part of the cost of producing tobacco to farmers, the multinational gets away with declaring little to no profit from selling it. "The duty-bearers are aware that these companies are not paying enough but someone may be benefiting from these deals at the expense of our sweat," Msukwa said.

And that affects more Malawians than the tobacco farmers. It "cripples our government's potential to invest in sectors that are important to Malawi citizens. The government is failing to invest in the health, agriculture, and education sectors due to limited resources," said Wales Chigwenembe, a social accountability expert.

Despite all this, farmers feel they have no other choice but to work with the companies. "We couldn't afford the inputs. If we had sustainable means to grow tobacco without the companies, we wouldn't involve them," said Muskwa. ■

This collaborative cross-border investigation was supported by CiFAR - Civil Forum for Asset Recovery



Rise up: A man recites a poem of resistance at a Khartoum rally.
Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP

As the war rages on, the resistance committees are keeping Sudan's revolution alive – but only just

They ousted a dictator, defied a junta and now Sudan's resistance committees are desperate to preserve their communities amidst the war. [Mark Weston](#) spoke to one committee member in Khartoum.

We will call her Amal. That's not her real name, but using her real name could get her abducted or killed. She lives in the east of Khartoum, close to the River Nile, and she is a member of her local neighbourhood resistance committee. This committee's 80 members

include students, blue- and white-collar workers, artists, activists, journalists, trade unionists and members of political parties. Many are women.

There are hundreds of such committees in Khartoum, and thousands countrywide. In the absence

of a functioning government, they often provide the only semblance of governance – informal, democratic bodies that respond to the needs of their local communities, while pushing for national reform.

Their impact has been phenomenal.

It was these largely youth-led groups that spearheaded a peaceful revolution that put an end to the 30-year tyranny of the brutal dictator Omar al-Bashir. As the uprising spread, thousands of resistance committees were formed across the country. Amal's formed in December 2018. "We came together organically, organising night marches and stand-up protests in the neighbourhood and participating in the main protests in the city centre as well," says Amal.

The committees worked together to coordinate daily demonstrations that drew hundreds of thousands of participants. Local committees planned and publicised routes, raised money to treat those who were injured by security forces, supported the families of the many who were killed, and created neighbourhood spaces for discussion and debate.

By April the next year, Bashir was out. But the resistance committees were not done. They continued to organise massive sit-ins, especially in Khartoum, where hundreds of thousands of people gathered daily to demand civilian rule instead of the military junta that removed Bashir.

Traffic was banished from the vast sit-in site outside the army headquarters, and barricades erected to keep the security forces out. Artists, musicians, singers

and dancers converged to promote the revolution. Banners were posted to show protesters, many of whom had been kept in the dark, the full extent of Bashir's atrocities. Street children were given free food.

Then came the brutal backlash. In June 2019, the sit-in was dispersed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful militia group that was part of the junta. Hundreds of protestors were killed, and dozens raped.

Committees publicised routes, raised money to treat those who were injured by security forces, supported the families of the many who were killed, and created spaces for discussion and debate.

This was a wake-up call for the committees. "After the Khartoum sit-in, members became more aware of political dynamics," says Amal. Nonetheless, they continued to push hard for a government led by civilians, and their calls caught the attention of the international community, which forced the generals to form a joint military-civilian transitional government.

This did not last long. In 2021, the generals ousted the civilians in a coup d'état. And then, in 2023, they turned on each other. Since then, the RSF has been locked in a civil war with the Sudanese Armed Forces. The war has devastated much of the country, leaving more than 13,000 people dead and nearly eight million people displaced.



Resistance is fertile: Anti-coup protesters demonstrate against military rule in Kharoum in June 2022.

Photo: AFP

Dreams of democracy are further away than ever before. In response, those resistance committees still operating on the ground have focused on their social role, delivering life-saving support to their communities. Amal's resistance committee runs a communal kitchen to feed members of the community who are struggling to feed themselves. Political photos and artwork decorate the walls.

"Each resistance committee is different," Amal says, "but most of them are participating in providing humanitarian assistance and organising mutual aid. In our case we have helped set up an emergency response room."

Local health workers use the emergency room to deliver medical care, while soup kitchens provide food to more than 6,000 people every day.

For many, it is the only support available. "In some areas, including Khartoum, we are the only provider of aid on the ground – there is nobody else doing it. And if we are to keep supporting

our community we will need more aid. Our funding is extremely limited and it's difficult for aid from overseas to reach us. As the war goes on, finding food is becoming more and more difficult."

And the backlash from the generals has not relented. Hundreds of resistance committee members have been killed around the country since the outbreak of the civil war last year – a war which is, in part, a brutal rejection of the committees' vision of a free and democratic Sudan. Shortly after our interview, several members of Amal's own committee were abducted by militia fighters.

Even in the midst of the suffering of war, the resistance committees continue to show how a more democratic and peaceful Sudan is possible. "We try to keep the revolution alive," says Amal. ■

Mark Weston is the author of The Saviour Fish: Life and Death on Africa's Greatest Lake. He lived in Khartoum for the first two years of the revolution.

Artists in exile

Sudan's revolution in 2019 ushered in a golden age of art and creativity. Then came the war.



Photo: Circle Art Gallery, Nairobi

Vincent Ng'ethe in Nairobi

15 April 2023 was “a normal Ramadan morning” in Ibrahim Mohamed Ibrahim’s apartment on Airport Street in Khartoum. Then the filmmaker’s phone rang. The friend on the other end warned him that something was afoot. He felt a rumbling and heard the squeaking of tyres in the street. Not a normal Ramadan morning at all.

Military vehicles sped through his neighbourhood towards Khartoum’s international airport, which soon became the heart of the fighting. In the days that followed, Ibrahim says, “we were

trapped between the army and the RSF [a paramilitary group] and there was no electricity and water”.

Ten and a half months later, he is in Nairobi, nearly 3,000 kilometres from Khartoum.

Like many artists and creatives, Ibrahim and his film company flourished in the few years between the 2019 fall of dictator Omar al-Bashir and the outbreak of war last year. “For the first time, we could film outside our building and the intelligence service building was right in front of us.” They were making *Khartoum*, a cinematic ode to their home city, when the war interrupted.

In those short, heady years of freedom, they made and released *Bougainvillea*, a film about women imprisoned in the final days of Bashir's reign; and *Journey to Kenya*, which told the story of an unfunded Sudanese jujitsu team that travels in an old van to participate in a tournament in Nairobi.

In Nairobi, Ibrahim who also goes by Snoopy – due to an uncanny resemblance to rapper Snoop Dogg – is part of the Rest Residency, a collective of Sudanese artists and musicians who fled the war in Sudan.

Started by Rahiem Shadad, the programme immerses artists in Nairobi for five and a half months, allowing them time to reflect, work on projects and experience hospitality. In mid-February, it announced the start of its formal programme and named its first 21 participants, who include painters, photographers, musicians, filmmakers, a fashion designer and a novelist.

Started by Rahiem Shadad, the program immerses artists in Nairobi for five and a half months, allowing them time to reflect, work on projects and experience hospitality.

“They’re doing a great job of taking all these creatives under their wing,” Snoopy says. “You feel like you can continue being creative. You’ve already lost home, so you need home far away from home.”

Like Snoopy, all the artists *The Continent* speaks with admit to underestimating just how vicious the fighting would be. “Since the revolution,



Deep cover: Sudanese artist Ibrahim Mohamed Ibrahim also known as Snoopy. Photo: Vincent Ng'ethe

Sudan had been very unstable,” Mohammed Almahdi explains. “Every Sudanese thought it would take a week or a month and go back to normal.” When they left, many artists left their work behind. They thought they’d be back soon.

But the war intensified, and it became clear that studios, artwork and equipment would all have to be abandoned. Ibrahim calls the decision to leave his equipment his “biggest mistake”. He’s sure it was all stolen: cameras, computers, lighting, sound. Only their films, which were backed up, survived.

Sannad Shariff was at home in Khartoum’s Kafouri district on 15 April, watching a movie, when the war broke out. A graffiti and mixed materials artist, his art often features eyes that show pain. He had started a programme for young painters called Artist249, the number



Photo:
Vincent
Ng'ethe

referring to Sudan's country code.

He stayed in Khartoum for seven months, venturing out to observe and shoot videos, until one went viral and his friends convinced him to leave. He fled to Port Sudan, passing through Atbara, and then from there to Gedaref, Gondar on the Ethiopian border, Addis Ababa and finally Nairobi. "I lost maybe 100 pieces of my art." He's been told that his home was looted. "But they've done that to everyone," he shrugs.

During the revolution, Yasir Algrai was part of a group of artists who painted murals in Khartoum. "Our message was make art, not war," he says.

At the Circle Art Gallery in Nairobi, where an exhibition of Sudanese art is currently ongoing, Yasir's portrait shows a woman dressed in a purple thoub. A dove is perched on her arm. "She is waiting for the peace," says Yasir. So is he.

The art of war: Yasir Algrai (left) with his painting *Sudanese Woman Waiting for Peace*, and Mahasin Ismail (right).

The exhibit's curator is the jovial, fast-talking Mahasin Ismail.

Her idea to curate a Sudanese exhibition sprung from frustration. "The only way for me to practise art was to write articles about the war and artists trapped in warzones, whose stories hadn't been covered enough."

Since she fled Khartoum, she's been keeping track of the artistic sites and galleries in Sudan that have been damaged. At least nine active galleries have been robbed, she says. Many artists remain trapped in Sudan.

One artist, called Rasoul, gave her some art as she fled. "He's still in Khartoum," she says. "But we've lost all contact with him." ■

PHOTO ESSAY

An uneasy, uncertain refuge from Sudan's war

Photos: Luis Tato/AFP

On the banks of the White Nile in South Sudan's border county of Renk, boats wait to take people fleeing the war in Sudan to safety further south in Malakal, a journey that takes days. At the UN's Malakal reception centre, hundreds more arrive every day on trucks and on foot. More than 550,000 Sudanese have fled to South Sudan since the civil war broke out in April 2023. In addition, more than 820,000 South Sudanese – who had fled to Sudan in earlier conflicts – have had to return. For those who do make it to South Sudan, there is silence from the guns, but little else – aid is severely limited because the country is still recovering from its own civil wars. No one knows when they might return.



Casting off: A young woman on board a boat on the White Nile watches over the belongings of families fleeing the war in Sudan on 14 February.



Safer harbour: Displaced people arrive at a transit centre for displaced people in Renk.



Disembark: A Sudanese woman alights from a truck in Renk.



Helping hand: Men line up for cash assistance at the Renk transit centre.



Seeking solace: A Sudanese girl waits to be registered by the authorities at the Joda border crossing.



Passing through: Children at a transit centre peer into a tent being used as a nutrition clinic.

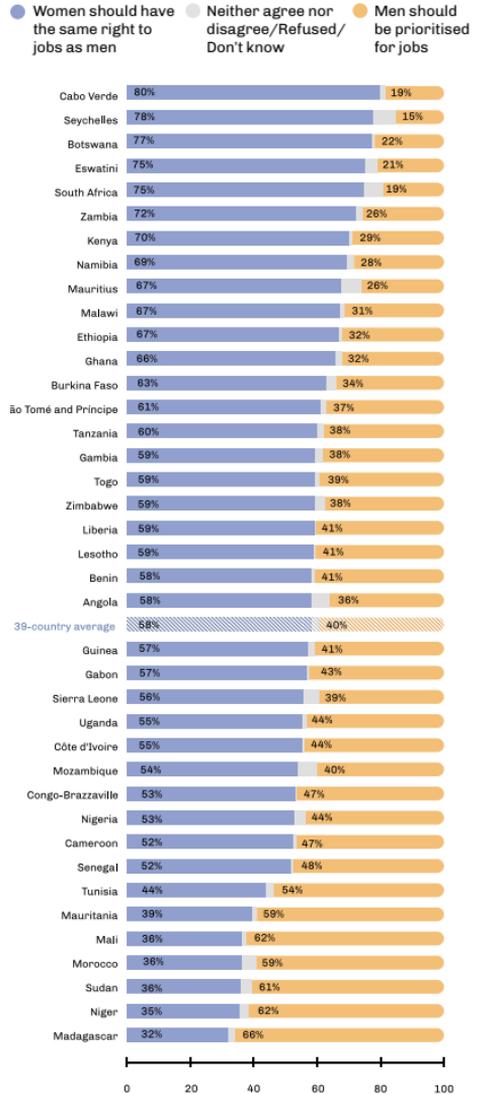
Gender fairness is an unfinished job

On the double occasion of Zero Discrimination Day (1 March) and International Women’s Day (8 March), we’d like to celebrate that 100% of Africans reject discrimination against women in the workplace. If only it were true.

In fact, Afrobarometer surveys in 39 African countries tell us that four in every 10 adults (40%) think that men should be given priority in hiring. Majorities in 32 countries do endorse gender equality when it comes to jobs, including more than three-fourths of respondents in Cabo Verde (80%), Seychelles (78%), and Botswana (77%). But seven countries record majorities who say men come first, led by Madagascar (66%), Niger (62%), and Mali (62%). Given women’s under-representation in managerial positions, the finding that only half (50%) of men believe in gender fairness doesn’t bode well for female job applicants.

Support for equality in hiring does increase with education (to 65% of those with post-secondary qualifications) and with economic status (to 64% among the best-off respondents). But as for generational progress, young adults are no more likely to reject job discrimination than their elders. ■

Should women have equal rights to jobs? 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.



Photo: *Io Capitano*

Migrants are people too

Line Sidonie Talla Mafotsing

Many media stories about migrants who journey from Africa to Europe, across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, tend to begin when the boats first meet the shores. Other stories focus on statistics: the 2,500-plus migrants who have died or gone missing at sea in 2023, or the thousands more who lost their lives in the desert. What happens between the decision to leave home and the arrival on European soil is rarely portrayed in detail.

Io Capitano is Italian director Matteo Garrone's entry for best international feature film at this year's Academy Awards. In it, Garrone takes these Western, outsider perspectives and turns them on their head, capturing the tense and treacherous migrant journey through the eyes of those who live it.

The movie follows teens Seydou (Seydou Sarr) and Moussa (Moustapha

Fall) as they travel from Senegal to Italy, with dreams of pop stardom. For months, Seydou's mother believes that her son and his cousin spend their days playing football. In reality they have been working as labourers, stashing away enough cash for their long-anticipated trip.

Life in Senegal for Seydou and Moussa is more or less calm, as we get a glimpse into their family life and watch them play drums at a *sabar* party at the beginning of the film. But the boys can't help but want more for themselves, their desire to experience the European life they see on their phone screen superseding any warnings they were given by those around them about their plan.

This epic odyssey is anchored by the performances of its two leads, particularly that of first-time actor Sarr. His character doesn't hide his fear or his helplessness, especially when he and Moussa are separated in the desert by a Libyan militia. In spite of it all, he continues forward into the unknown, understanding that turning back may not be possible for him anymore.

What happens between the decision to leave home and the arrival on European soil is rarely portrayed in detail.

Garrone succeeds in showing the fullness of the migrant experience, and its truths without sensationalising. The director's conscious choice to work with a group of consultants made up of former

migrants, like Mamadou Kouassi and Amara Fofana, paid off, as their personal stories influenced what we see Seydou and Moussa go through on screen.

From being taken advantage of by the network of people who profit off the backs of migrants to the horrors and atrocities that occur in Libyan detention centres, Garrone doesn't allow his audience to look away. Through director of photography Paolo Camera's approach, emphasis is placed on the menacing and dangerous conditions of the reality that is migrating from Africa to Europe in this way.

In contrast, the stress and exhaustion in the desert scenes are not represented in the lush aerial shots of the Sahara, but in the close-up shots of sand-covered faces, the dehydration-induced desperation in the migrants' voices, and the lifeless

bodies that litter the desert floor.

From being taken advantage of to the horrors of Libyan detention centres, Garrone doesn't allow us to look away.

Despite Europe being the final destination, *Io Capitano* is defined by the African experience and spirit. It is rooted in the desire that many people on the continent have: the promise of a better life and the need to obtain it at whatever cost. Although Seydou – who is tasked with an impossible mission by a Libyan trafficker – is the hero of his story, his character isn't forced into becoming the representation of all migrant stories. *Io Capitano* forces us to bear witness, no matter how heart wrenching it is. ■



Impossible mission: Seydou Sarr and Moustapha Fall in *Io Capitano*.

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

"No, *The Click Song* was NOT followed by *The Like & Subscribe Song*."



Photo: Amisom/
Tobin Jones/AFP

- 1_ Who has been the president of South Sudan since its independence?
- 2_ In which year did South Sudan gain independence?
- 3_ N'Djamena is which country's capital?
- 4_ Which country does "the smiling coast of Africa" refer to?
- 5_ How many states does Nigeria have: 35, 36 or 30?
- 6_ *Qongqothwane*, also known as *The Click Song* was made famous by which singer?
- 7_ The sovereign state of Tanganyika, which existed from 1961 to 1964, eventually became which present-day country?
- 8_ Which Somali city is also known as Xamar?
- 9_ Which country won the first Women's Africa Cup of Nations (then the African Women's Championship) in 1991?
- 10_ In which city in Somalia can one visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (pictured)?

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

We're in a pretty bad mood today, dear reader. Which may come as a surprise to those who know us to be the epitome of sunshine and happiness. More shocking still is the fact that we're feeling this way while in Nairobi where Israeli-Canadian-American televangelist Benny Hinn was holding a "Healing The Nation Crusade". Yet here we sit, eating chips, binge watching *Love is Blind*, and snapping at everyone around us, we very much remain "unhealed".

Among those present and involved with the organising of the "crusade" were President William Ruto and First Lady Rachel Ruto.

Mrs Ruto gave a speech in which she stated that at the time Kenya got its independence, it was on par with South Korea.

Apparently South Korea then experienced "the Move of God" which affected many areas including their economy, and they are now "way ahead of us". Not good policies, not the South Korean government investing in research and development, and not government support for domestic industries. Simply, the Move of God. Just to add here, statistics show that an estimated 51% of

the South Korean people have no religion.

President Ruto spoke about how Kenya will be "greater than what you see, and it is because we believe in the living God". Newsflash Billy, you are literally the president, the country can also be greater and work for its people with the right policies, reforms and taking action on corruption!

Maybe also not in the greatest of moods is Senegal's president, Macky Sall. When the constitutional court ruled that his decision to delay elections until the end of the year was unlawful, they ordered that the election must be held as soon as possible.

Old Macky held a dialogue this week, one which was boycotted by almost all presidential

candidates, where 2 June 2024 was proposed as the new election date. Sall took to the social media platform still referred to as Twitter and posted that he wants to make it "categorically clear" that he will step down on 2 April 2024, which is when his term ends. No "it's complicated" relationship statuses from him it seems!

If the election date is confirmed, then it begs the question regarding who would

Gloom boom? Shake the doom



CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Samira Sawlani

be in office from April to June, we're pretty sure Macky is not going to be booking any holidays during that time.

In what is a West Africa heavy column this week, we bring you the latest instalment of *Keeping Up With The Coupdashians*.

Recently Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger said they were withdrawing from Ecowas, but it seems the regional bloc decided to blink first.

After a heads of state summit, they called for the three countries to reconsider this decision, and announced that some sanctions on Niger were being lifted alongside the ban on recruitment of Malian nationals in Ecowas institutions.

While there has been no response to the move from the gang and whether they'll change their mind about the exit, we have to give it to them, well played.

Ecowas also lifted some of the sanctions on Guinea, which should cheer up its apparently interim-for-life president, Mamady Doumbouya.

He has had a tricky time of it lately, with workers going on strike across the country as they called for the release of a prominent trade unionist, the lifting of media and internet restrictions, reduction in food prices and implementation of a deal promising better conditions for civil servants.

But before you go feeling too sorry for him, two young men were reportedly shot dead by security forces after clashes broke out on the first day of the strike. The strike has since been called off, so perhaps Mamady will be feeling better now.



Rest in peace: Namibian soldiers lay to rest the late president Hage Geingob, who died on 4 February. Photo: Michael Petrus/AFP

While we try to identify the source of our glumness we cannot separate it from news from Ghana that Parliament has voted in favour of the Anti-LGBTQ+ law which criminalises identifying as LGBTQ+.

A devastating blow for members of the community in Ghana, a blow for human rights and also, a wholly unnecessary piece of legislation, distracting from the myriad of challenges that the country faces.

The bill will only pass into law once signed by President Nana Akufo-Addo.

We end this week's *Drift* by paying tribute to Namibia's former president Hage Geingob, who was laid to rest this week. He will be remembered through the ages for his leadership and his contribution to the Southern African country.

Our thoughts are with his family and the people of Namibia. Go well. ■

The polls will make little difference

For the country in general, and the opposition in particular, there is simply not enough time to do what it would take to make the next election fruitful.

Deka Barrow

South Sudan's opposition parties seem as unprepared as the electoral commission for the general elections scheduled for December. If elections are held, it is unlikely that a strong opposition alliance – that can hold the ruling party accountable – will emerge in the legislature.

The opposition is very divided and the factions have struggled to keep the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in check. Key opposition groups include the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by Riek Machar; the South Sudan Opposition Movement Alliance (SSOMA) of six parties led by Thomas Cirillo Swaka; and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) of eight parties headed by Josephine Joseph Lagu and Hussein Abdelbagi, the country's second vice president.

The SPLM-IO stands out as one of the few with national name recognition. It was formed in August 2014 by Machar, the country's first vice president, following a rift with President Salva Kiir that

precipitated the civil war. The SPLM-IO has struggled to broaden its appeal, however, in part because of the tight restrictions on its operations – Machar remains under house arrest – and partly because it has little in common with SSOMA and SSOA.

Another major problem is that, perhaps not trusting the electoral process, Machar has threatened to boycott the polls unless a long list of demands are met. These include serious peace-building efforts, a census and agreement on a new permanent constitution, which are not unreasonable but unfeasible in the remaining time. With the SPLM-IO investing more time objecting to the polls than winning new supporters, there is a considerable risk that any elections will lead to a dominant-party state. While surveys show that voters want elections, the reality is that this may not translate into greater accountability and inclusivity than the current system. ■



Deka Barrow is a journalist and researcher. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

THE BIG PICTURE

Speak out: Demonstrators in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo gather to denounce the international community's silence in the face of the crisis in the country, and to support the DRC army and pro-government militia Wazalendo.

Photo: Guerchom Ndebo/AFP



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