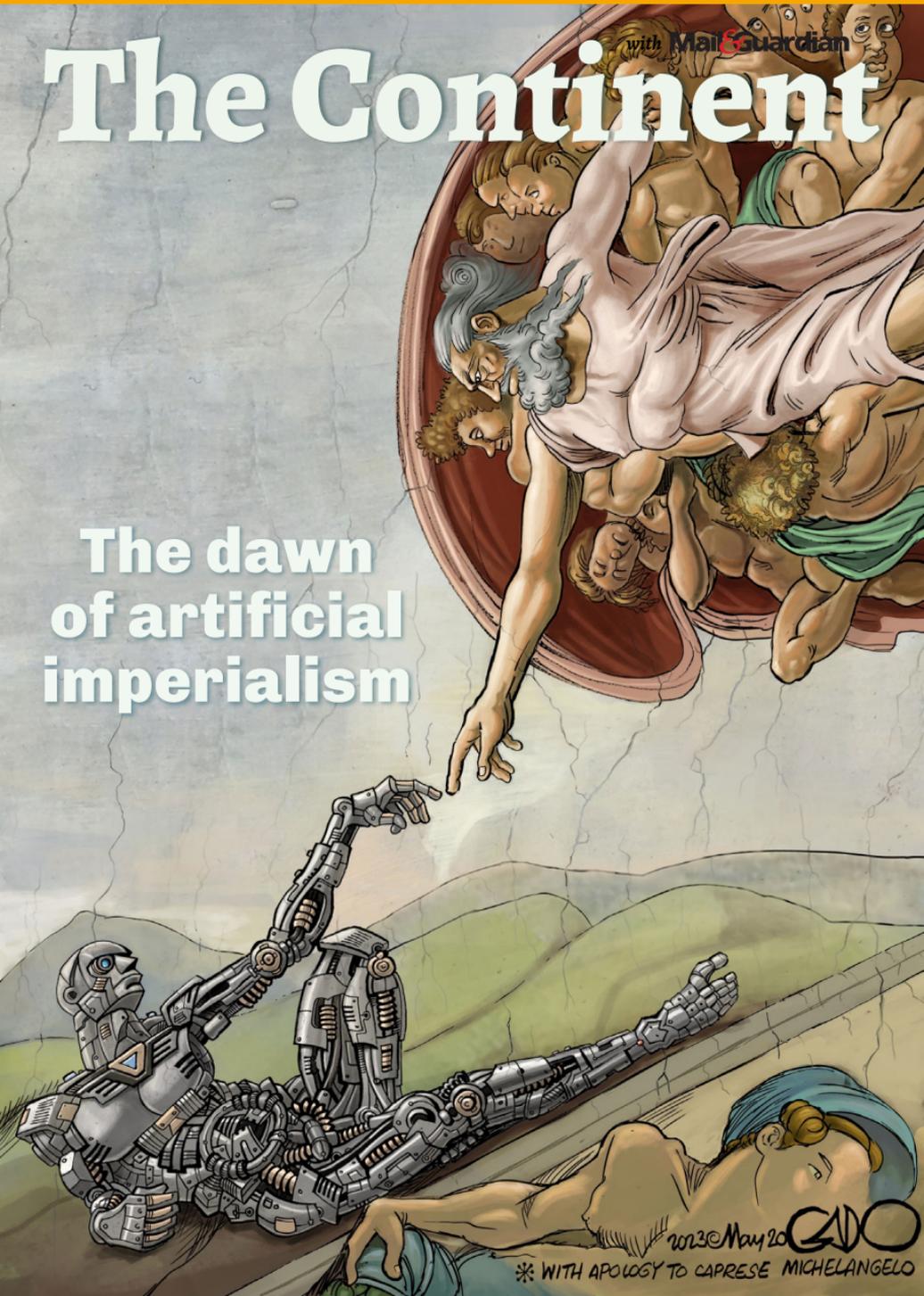


The Continent

with Mail & Guardian

The dawn
of artificial
imperialism



2023 May 20



* WITH APOLOGY TO CAPRESE MICHELANGELO

Cover: *The Creation of Adam*, Michelangelo's iconic fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, depicts the Christian deity breathing life into the very first man. Today, a handful of incredibly rich men in Silicon Valley claim a similarly grandiose mission. This is, apparently, the dawn of the age of "artificial intelligence". According to its creators, this emerging technology is godlike in its abilities: so powerful that it could one day create unimaginable wealth and luxury – or destroy us all. But not everyone is buying into this hype. We spoke to several African AI researchers who see, instead, an all too familiar



pattern of exploitation and extraction. (p15)

Inside:

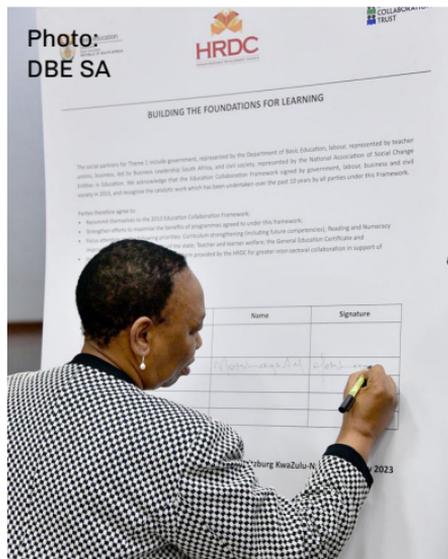
- **KFC v the people:** Love letter to a beloved South African meal (p8)
- **Lesotho:** Lockdown in the Maloti mountains (p9)
- **Ghana:** The pesticides fit for Africans, but not Europeans (p11)
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A, E, I, oh no! South Africa has had the same education minister for 14 years. Marks are getting worse.

SOUTH AFRICA

‘Model democracy’ can’t read its rights

Four in every five children aged 10 in South Africa cannot read for meaning, in any of the country’s 11 official languages. The country’s basic education department released these local results of a global survey this week. South Africa came last. In 1976, students in Soweto were killed protesting against an education system that wanted to force them to learn in Afrikaans, the language of the white minority. They eventually won the right to learn in their own languages. But the state has subsequently failed generations of students.

NAMIBIA

Gay intimacy? No! Same-sex marriage? Depends on passport

Although homosexuality is still illegal in Namibia under a rarely enforced 1927 law, the Supreme Court ruled this week that authorities should recognise same-sex marriages contracted abroad between Namibians and foreign nationals. A German woman who married a Namibian woman, and a South African man who married a Namibian man, brought the case against the state after it denied them residence rights that the heterosexual spouses of Namibian citizens get. A separate ongoing case is challenging Namibia’s anti-homosexuality laws.

ECUADOR

Corrup-Ted Lasso?

Driven by interference from the United States, powerful companies and other countries, Ecuador has swung between leaders on the far right and far left. The latest from the right, President Guillermo Lasso, this week disbanded the National Assembly. It was trying to impeach him, amid claims he looked the other way when irregular contracts were signed. Charges may be laid against Lasso, but a loophole in the Constitution allows him to stay in office until new elections are held.

GHANA

All that glitters is deadly exploitation

A gold mine in Kyekyewere, in the Ashanti region of central Ghana, has collapsed and killed 17 people. All the dead and injured were independent artisanal miners although the pit is believed to have been run by a company. Ghana is a leading exporter of gold, much of it mined by large corporations which lease vast areas for operations, turning many who lived as farmers into small-scale independent miners or low-wage employees of the companies.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Notorious Gupta brothers set their sights on Bangui

Atul and Rajesh Gupta, accused of corruptly conniving with ex-president Jacob Zuma to loot the South African state, now “play honorary consul” for President Faustin-Archange Touadéra of the Central African Republic, according to *Africa Intelligence*. It reports that the brothers organised a meeting between Touadéra and a person purporting to be the vice president of BJP, the party of Narendra Modi, India’s president. While under threat of being extradited from Dubai to South Africa, the two applied for asylum in CAR.



Photo: Yassine Gaidi/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

TUNISIA

Political elder locked up after challenging jackboot brutality

A prominent critic of president Kaïs Saeïd was on Monday sentenced to a year in prison over “incitement”. Eighty-one-year-old Rached Ghannouchi was the speaker and majority leader in Parliament before it was suspended by the president in 2021. He has been in detention since April, when the police union brought an “incitement” complaint against him when he described law enforcement as “tyrants”. He is one of many prominent politicians arrested in the president’s recent crackdown on dissent in the country.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA

Cyril's 'non-aligned' road trip for Africa's comrades-in-arms

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa says a delegation of African leaders will travel to Moscow and Kyiv to propose a peaceful resolution to Russia's war in Ukraine. Not that South Africa calls it a war. The reveal comes just days after his country's "non-aligned" position on the war was called into question by US accusations that SA had supplied weapons to Russia. He said the delegation will include leaders from DRC, Egypt, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Yahya Jammeh's staycation to get a no-no from Mbasogo

The government of Equatorial Guinea looks set to expel former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh, who fled there in 2017. Quoting human rights groups and officials, Gambian independent daily *The Point* reports that in light of incriminating evidence that informed the indictment of a former minister in Jammeh's regime, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo is "finally considering a decree" that will tell Jammeh to either leave voluntarily or be forced out of Equatorial Guinea.

FINANCE

Mali, Djibouti and Gambia secure \$1.1-billion in IFTC development deals

The International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation will support Mali, Gambia and Djibouti with \$1.1-billion. On the sidelines of this year's annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank Group, of which it is part, the IFTC signed deals with Mali and Djibouti, to invest \$500-million and \$600-million over five years and three years respectively in each country's energy, health, agriculture and private sectors. The bank will also buy



Beefed up: A man milks a cow in Mali, where an IFTC windfall appears set to boost farming. Photo: AFP/Getty Images

goods and services worth \$55-million for Gambia's national petroleum company and the country's water and electricity parastatal.



Photo: Chris
McGrath/
Getty Images

TÜRKIYE

Elon Musk's Twitter bows to government pressure despite 'free speech' bluster

Twitter deleted more than 400 tweets and restricted several accounts ahead of Sunday's election which ended without a clear majority for President Tayyip Erdogan or his main opponent, Kemal Kilicdaroglu. A run-off is slated for 28 May. A recent investigation by *Rest of World*, a global media outlet focussed on technology, found that since Twitter was taken over by Elon Musk, who styles himself as a champion of free speech, the company has "complied with hundreds more government orders for censorship and surveillance" than it did before.

INTERNATIONAL

Deutsche Bank to pay \$75-million to victims of Jeffrey Epstein

Germany's Deutsche Bank has agreed to pay \$75-million to victims of Jeffrey Epstein, the billionaire sex offender who had links to the high and mighty in the West including Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Andrew Windsor (a brother to Britain's king Charles), and Donald Trump. The bank is paying out the \$75-million to settle a lawsuit brought by a group of women who accused Deutsche Bank, which managed Epstein's money until 2019, of facilitating his sex trafficking operations. JP Morgan in the US also stands similarly accused.

TANZANIA

Traders rediscover voices in tax protest

The good news is that civic space in Tanzania has improved enough for protests to return under President Samia Suluhu Hassan, who took over after the death of John Magufuli. The bad news is that there are plenty of reasons to protest. This week, more than 1,000 shops in the country's busiest market, Kariakoo in the financial capital Dar-es-Salaam, were shuttered for days, in a protest by traders who decry overtaxation and harassment by the police and tax collectors.

Nigeria



Can't stop, won't stop!

At 7.45am on Monday morning in Lagos, Hilda Effiong Bassey set a new record. The Nigerian chef, known as Hilda Baci, had cooked nonstop for 87 hours and 45 minutes. She finished at 100 hours. Her feat of endurance is still awaiting verification before it is given the title of 'longest-ever cooking session by an individual' by Guinness World Records (a private British company that has somehow become the arbiter of all the world's records). Baci cooked for thousands, deploying 55 different recipes as celebrities and well-wishers dropped by. The winner of the 'Jollof Faceoff' in 2021 has a million followers on Instagram, helping to drive appreciation for Nigerian cuisine around the world. ■

South Africa

In praise of the (not so humble) kota

After KFC caught flak for appropriating a beloved South African dish, we asked **Oupa Nkosi** to fill us in on what makes the kota worth fighting over

Any person who grew up in a South African township knows a kota, which is usually sold in spaza shops. I was in primary school when I had my first one. It was not traditional: instead of being stuffed with French fries, it had hot mashed potatoes, minced meat and atchar (spicy pickles). I used to add avocado. Wow! I would sit under a tree with my friend Fanyana Masuku and indulge.

Cut a loaf of bread in half, and then cut it in half again. What are you left with? No not a quarter... a kota! The soft centre is hollowed out and stuffed with delicious ingredients and sauces. Typical fillings – depending on budget and availability – include Russian sausage, Vienna sausage, special (French polony), ham, egg, bacon strips, lettuce and sliced cheese. French

fries and atchar come as standard.

The more the ingredients, the higher the price. Fancy is as fancy fills.

You'll find kotas all over the country, although it goes by different names in different places: bunny chow in Durban (where it is usually filled with curry), s'phatlo in Pretoria, iskhambane in the Vaal, and kota or shibobo in Soweto.

The most common origin story I hear is that the kota was invented as a way of selling food to black people who were not allowed to eat in certain restaurants during apartheid, but these days, many innovative chefs are giving this legendary dish their own twist, adding things like grilled chicken and boerewors. There is even a Soweto Kota Festival.

But I still like the classic: Vienna, special, atchar and chips, preferably from Nsitsi's Fun Foods in Diepkloof. Your mileage (and arteries) may vary. ■



Loaf at first sight: A Kota King SA, made in Protea, Soweto. Photo: Oupa Nkosi

Lesotho

Journalist's murder leads to curfew – and flashback to Covid woes

Authorities insist a curfew will help address rampant gun violence, but critics say it will bring more pain to the mountain kingdom

Majara Molupe in Maseru

Radio journalist Ralikonelo “Leqhashasha” Joki was shot multiple times on Sunday night, shortly after he left his workplace, Tšenolo FM in the capital Maseru. He died at the scene. Saying that 40 people have been killed in gun violence over the last three weeks, the government imposed a 10pm to 4am curfew starting on Tuesday. Anyone defying the order faces two years in prison or a fine of up to 10,000 maloti – about \$517.

As Basotho hurried home early this week, the hospitality sector in the small “Mountain Kingdom” of about 2-million people, was hit with déjà vu.

“We are facing sure poverty now,” said Motseki Nkeane, the president of the Lesotho Liquor and Restaurant Owners’ Association, which has accused the government of stymieing their businesses while they are still reeling from impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Police commissioner Holomo Molibeli said the curfew would remain in place until further notice. But Nkeane told *The Continent* that without customers in the evening, some bars and restaurants will have to shut down within three weeks. He said the association will take the government to court if negotiations on the curfew do not yield results.

Opposition voices in Lesotho’s Parliament are also not convinced the curfew will address gun violence. The leader of the opposition in Parliament, Mathibeli Mokhothu, said the violence was happening in broad daylight, not just at night, and urged the government to focus on criminals, not on adding to Lesotho’s economic woes.

So far, the curfew seems to have done nothing for investigations into Joki’s murder. Police spokesperson Mpiti Mopeli told *The Continent* they are working to trace the perpetrators, but no arrests have been made and the motive has not been established. “We appeal to the general public to help us with information that could lead to the arrest of the suspects,” Mopeli said. ■

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Deadly for Europeans, but fine for Africans

European state banks are happy to finance projects using pesticides deemed too dangerous for people in their own countries. One of these is in Ghana.

**Jonathan Moens
and Gideon Sarpong**

In 2007, Peter Boafo signed up for a project that would help him and thousands of other rubber farmers in Ghana set up their own plantations. The country's west is filled with forests of rubber trees, leaking milky white sap, known as latex – the raw ingredient for rubber. The 60-year-old Boafo now owns a six hectare farm, thanks to support from Ghana Real Estate Limited, the country's largest rubber plantation company.

In 1995, it drove the creation of the Rubber Outgrower Plantation Project. With Ghanaian state support, and funding from a French and a German public bank, by 2020 it had given loans to about 9,000 smallholder farmers. Up to \$65-million was invested in helping small farmers.

Boafo benefited from this. But nature is unpredictable, and one of his biggest problems comes in the form of weeds. They compete for resources with young rubber plants. They can also act as hosts for pests and disease. Boafo said he was supplied with chemicals to help stave them off. One of these, paraquat, is a highly toxic herbicide that can have severe, even fatal, consequences if ingested. It also carries risks for the environment.

“The biggest side effect of the job has to do with chemical use,” said Boafo. “If you apply the chemicals as instructed, then there will be no issues. But if you don't, you will suffer severe medical complications.”

He said he has not had any health problems from the chemicals that he uses, but other farmers admitted to being lax when it comes to using the protective equipment that is supplied with the pesticides.

Paraquat was banned in the European Union in 2007. Yet the rubber outgrower plantation project uses the chemical and was funded by a French public development bank, Agence Française de Développement. It was also funded by a German development bank, working with Ghana's Agricultural Investment Bank and National Investment Bank.

Agriculture represents about 20% of Ghana's gross domestic product.

An investigation by *iWatch Africa*, *Mediapart*, *Nederlands Dagblad*, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, *El Surtidor* and led by *Lighthouse Reports* found other

examples of European public banks funding projects in Uzbekistan and Paraguay that use pesticides banned in the European Union.

“There is a certain hypocrisy in the EU: we ban pesticides to protect the health of European citizens and our environment but we support their use abroad by funding development projects or by exporting our chemical industries,” said Martin Dermine, director of Pesticide Action Network, a United Kingdom-based charity focused on pesticide issues.

“What goes on is that people in the Global South are being exposed to highly hazardous substances,” said Marcos Orellana, the United Nations’ special rapporteur for toxics and human rights.

The French development bank said it conducts environmental and social risk assessments before funding such projects. It added that the scheme has allowed for a “reduction in poverty in rural areas thanks to the regular income and training rubber plantation farmers get”. It did not deny the use of paraquat by Ghana Real Estate Limited.

A scientific study looking at the costs of using weedkillers on French-bank-funded smallholder rubber plantations, published in 2021, also explicitly mentions “paraquat-derivatives” as being one of the commonly used pesticides. The study is based on a survey of 80 small farmers.

Three farmers, two of which were direct beneficiaries of the rubber outgrower project, said they were provided paraquat by the company. None of the six farmers that *iWatch Africa* and *Lighthouse Reports* spoke to said they



Band substance: Workers collect dry rubber at a factory in west Ghana, where EU-funded farms have received toxic weed-killers prohibited in Europe.

Photo: Cristina Aldehuela/AFP/Getty

had been harmed through pesticide use, although some admitted having little knowledge of its potentially negative health effects and therefore opted not to wear protective equipment.

For its part, Ghana Real Estate Limited denied using the toxic herbicide. Lionel Barré, its managing director, insisted that it “has never delivered or recommended this pesticide to any farmer.” Gregory Mensah, its land use manager between 2015 and 2020, also denied its use. ■

The reporting was supported by JournalismFund Europe.

Malawi

Families rounded up, trucked off to prison in crackdown on expatriates

Ignoring protests by the UN and local civil society, police and the military have rounded up hundreds of non-Malawians – planning to either dump them in the country’s only refugee camp or deport them – without bothering to see if they hold legal residency permits

Jack McBrams in Lilongwe

In pre-dawn raids on Wednesday and Thursday morning, police in Malawi’s capital Lilongwe bundled families, including nearly 120 children, into trucks and dumped them at the heavily congested Maula Prison.

They did so on the assumption that the people they were detaining were there illegally, without offering an opportunity to prove otherwise. Their credentials, the ministry said, would only be screened later, in the prison itself.

In the wake of the raids, hundreds of foreign-owned businesses remained closed as their owners went underground.

At Mgoni township, where Burundian businessmen run large groundnut export enterprises, police and military loaded 38m-long shipping containers onto

trucks. A police officer at the scene refused to say where they were being taken.

The raids follow a state decree in March that refugees and asylum seekers were to relocate to Dzaleka refugee camp by 15 April. The government has designated Dzaleka as the only location where they may legally reside. About 8,000 people had settled outside it.

Malawi hosts 56,304 refugees and asylum seekers, according to UNHCR, the United Nations’ refugee agency. More than half of these people fled the Democratic Republic of Congo and most of the rest are from Burundi, Rwanda and Horn of Africa countries. Dzaleka, which was set up in 1994 to accommodate 12,000 people, now accommodates nearly 50,000 in its 17,734 households.

Leaders of refugee communities were stunned to see their people “hounded



Forced out:
Families are
shuttled from
Maula Prison
to Dzaleka.
Photo: Jack
McBrams

like dogs while they slept” as Leopold Bantubino, leader of the Burundi community in Lilongwe, told *The Continent*. He said the community had an agreement with the government that allowed refugees of some means to start and run small businesses in town, “so that they do not rely on handouts in the camp”.

Jado Bibakumana, a Rwandese/Burundian national who runs a small business in Lilongwe, told *The Continent* from Maula Prison that he was woken up, assaulted and bundled into a police truck.

“They just dropped us here and we don’t know what will happen next,” he said. “We have no food or blankets. One day I will go back home and tell the story of people who arrest children and pregnant women.”

The raids have been condemned by Malawi’s own Human Rights Defenders Coalition, which said that the action only served to exacerbate the suffering of refugees. “By moving them away from

urban areas, the government is isolating and marginalising these vulnerable individuals, denying them access to essential resources, support networks, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives,” a spokesperson said.

The refugee agency warned in April against moving the people to the camp outside Lilongwe. “The relocation means that children will have to leave their schools, and for breadwinners to abandon their employment or small businesses and return to a camp where they will be dependent on humanitarian assistance.”

The ministry of homeland security said it had rounded up 408 people, including 202 men, 117 children and 89 women. Ministry spokesperson Patrick Botha would not reveal whether the raids would continue or be expanded beyond Lilongwe, telling *The Continent*: “This is an operation. We cannot divulge the details because it then ceases to be an operation.” ■

Their god is not our god

African AI researchers warn against Silicon Valley's 'artificial intelligence' hype. They also talk of the imperative for Africans to build their own AI future.

Simon Allison

Prompt this computer program to describe itself and it says it is “just like talking to a knowledgeable friend”.

Released by San Francisco-based company OpenAI in November, ChatGPT mimics human conversation, instantly responding to anything you type into its chatbox. It can tell you a joke and compose song lyrics; it can draft your presentation notes and offer relationship advice. You think of “it” but it refers to itself in the first person — “I”.

ChatGPT works seamlessly with OpenAI's other flagship product: Dall-E, which can make any pictures and illustrations that you describe with text prompts.

Other tech companies, like Google and Facebook, have already released their own versions of this enormously powerful technology that promises to revolutionise the way that we work and communicate.

But its creators believe it capable of so much more than that. Branding their creations as “artificial intelligence”, they claim that it will eventually make machines smarter – much smarter – than humans.

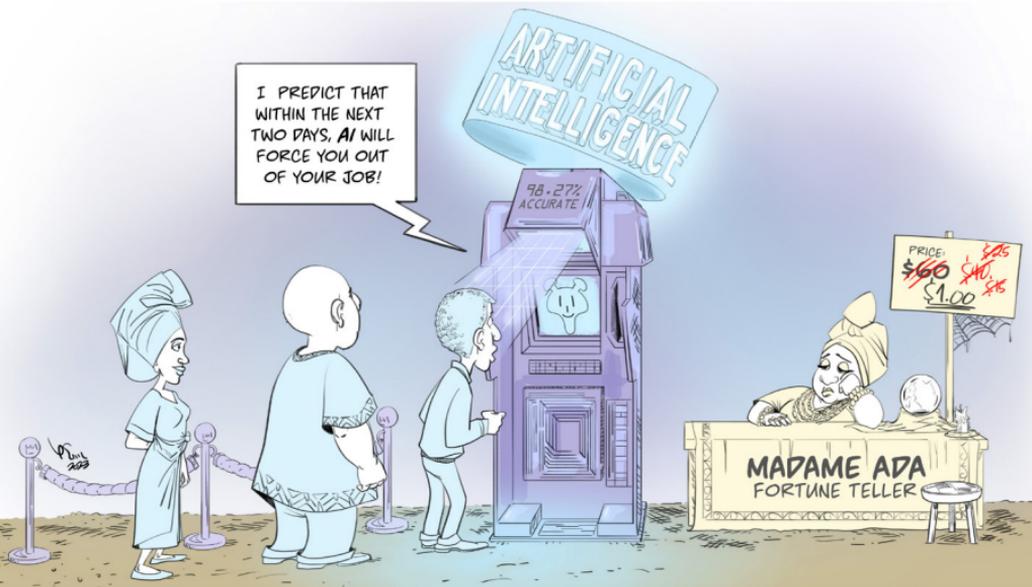
“This technology could help us elevate humanity by increasing abundance, turbocharging the global economy, and aiding in the discovery of new scientific knowledge that changes the limits of possibility,” writes OpenAI's chief executive, a 38-year-old American named Sam Altman, on the company's website. “Our mission is to ensure that artificial general intelligence – AI systems that are generally smarter than humans – benefits all of humanity,” Altman said.

Climate cost, bias and deception

“It's a god they are trying to build,” Ethiopia-born computer scientist Timnit Gebru remarks in an interview with *The Continent*. Gebru, whose work on bias in internet algorithms saw her co-lead Google's Artificial Intelligence ethics team, is not too preoccupied by the “intelligence” of such software.

If anything, the programs in their current incarnation are more like sophisticated parrots – incapable of original thought.

That's because programs like ChatGPT are trained on vast amounts of human words and conversation – much of it scraped without consent or respect for copyright from the internet, a form of



intellectual property theft. When asked, the software can replicate the patterns and connections in those vast datasets, in a way that, to human eyes, can feel like “intelligence”. But the software is not thinking. It is merely regurgitating the data on which it has been trained – and its answers are entirely dependent on the content of that data (although it also has a tendency to invent false answers, which its creators use the human experience of “hallucinations” to describe).

Gebru has dedicated much of her career to highlighting the immediate risks posed by this new software. She and several co-authors wrote a paper in 2020 – which cost her her job at Google – that outlined some of these, including:

- the extreme environmental impact (the energy used to train ChatGPT with a huge dataset of human language just once, could power 12,000

Johannesburg homes for a month);

- the potential for inherent biases and discrimination (if the data is racist and sexist – as so much of the internet is – the outputs will be too); and
- the potential for such models to deceive users (because they are so good at sounding like us, they can easily fool humans – even when the content is inaccurate or totally invented).

An African AI

In a co-working space in Johannesburg, a different vision for artificial intelligence is being pioneered. Lelapa AI is not trying to create one program to outsmart us all. Instead, it is creating focused programs that use machine learning and other tools to target specific needs. Its first major project, Vulavula, is designed to provide translation and transcription services for

under-represented languages in South Africa. Instead of harvesting the web for other people's data, Lelapa AI works with linguists and local communities to collect information – and then gives them a stake in future profits.

The Continent spoke with two of the company's founders, Jade Abbot and Pelonomi Moilola, last week. They share Gebru's fears – as do a striking number of women, and especially women of colour, in the AI field.

“These programs are built by the West on data from the West, and represent their values and principles,” said Abbott, who notes that African perspectives and history are largely excluded from the datasets used by OpenAI and Google's LLMs. That's because they cannot easily be “scraped”. Much of African history is recorded orally, or was destroyed by colonisers; and African languages are simply not supported (speak to ChatGPT in Setswana or isiZulu and its responses

will be largely nonsensical).

For Lelapa, this represents an opportunity. Because African data is so hard to access, OpenAI and Google will struggle to make its tools work effectively on the continent – leaving a gap in the market for a homegrown alternative. “The fact that ChatGPT fails on our languages ... this is the chance for us to build our own house, before they figure out how to exploit us,” said Moilola.

The consequences of failing to build our own house are potentially severe, she said – and all too familiar. “Data is the new gold. They will extract the data from us, create programs and then sell those programs back to us. And then all the profits flow out.”

Gebru tends to agree: “They've put the equivalent of an oil spill into the information ecosystem. Who gets to profit from it? And who gets to deal with the waste? It's the exact same pattern as imperialism.” ■



Illustration: Lelapa AI

PHOTO ESSAY

**Me, myself and icons:
Celebrating Samuel Fosso**



**Samuel Fosso, *Autoportrait*, from the series
70sLifestyle, 1976 © Samuel Fosso
Courtesy of the artist and JM Patras, Paris**

Samuel Fosso is known for his “autoportraits”, where he dresses up as someone and re-enacts an often iconic scene. Those people are normally black. His work is a celebration, and he has portrayed people ranging from Nelson Mandela to Muhammad Ali and Angela Davis. His other work includes poses of a pirate, a golfer and “the businessman”.

Born in Cameroon, he grew up in Nigeria before fleeing that country’s civil war in the early 1970s, and moving to

Bangui in the Central African Republic. Aged 13, he started taking portrait photographs to send home to his mother in Nigeria. That grew into a life’s work.

This month, his work was recognised by winning this year’s Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation prize, one of the most prestigious in his industry. The judges said Fosso had created “an extraordinary platform for Black voices and artists throughout his career”. The award comes with a £30,000 prize. ■

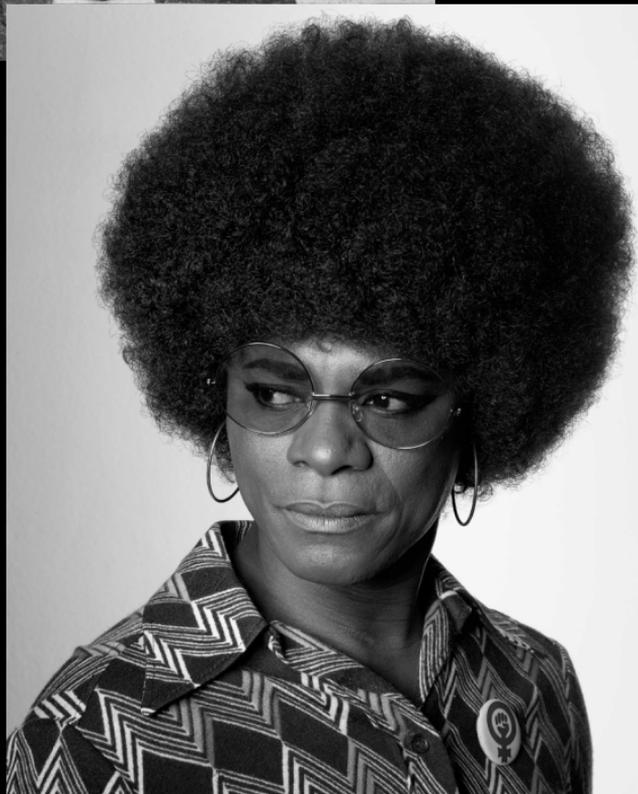


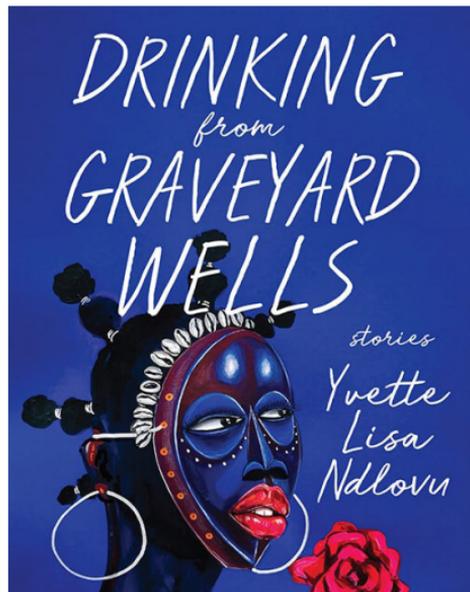
**Samuel Fosso,
Self-Portrait
(Tommie Smith)
from the series
African Spirits,
2008 © Samuel
Fosso. Courtesy
of the artist and
JM Patras, Paris**



ABOVE
Samuel Fosso,
from the series
70s Lifestyle,
1975-78 © Samuel
Fosso. Courtesy of
the artist and JM
Patras, Paris

RIGHT
Samuel Fosso,
Self-Portrait
(Angela Davis)
from the series
African Spirits,
2008 © Samuel
Fosso. Courtesy of
the artist and JM
Patras, Paris





In lamentation we expose our hurt and heart

Ndlovu takes an uncanny scalpel to the wounds of Zimbabwe's troubled, troubling and living reality

Jacqueline Nyathi

Zimbabwe's Yvette Lisa Ndlovu has a knack for bringing a speculative twist to subjects all too familiar to her countryfolk, and in *Drinking from Graveyard Wells* she collects phenomenal

stories together for the first time.

Through the everyday cloth of hyperinflation, power cuts, fuel shortages, and Zimbabwe's troubled history, she weaves threads of strangeness: disappearing homes, a shape-shifting praying mantis allied to liberation fighters, carnivorous ants, various gods, magical turtle hearts and njuzu, the mermaids of Zimbabwean folklore. In doing so, Ndlovu leans into social commentary, reflecting on Black tax, the callous stripping of widows' marital property, greed and exploitation.

In one story, the idea of blood diamonds takes on new meaning as a monster traps amakorokoza – artisanal miners – beneath the earth for not paying tolls, unwittingly enriching the greedy capitalists who pull the strings. *Gusheshe* is a thinly-veiled story about the abduction of a famous comedian in Zimbabwe, while the horrors of virginity testing and female genital mutilation are explored in *Plumtree: True Stories*.

The despair of the poor is the focus of the title story, *Drinking from Graveyard Wells*, which serves as a quiet commentary on the destruction of homes in 2005's Operation Murambatsvina. And in *Home Became a Thing With Thorns* Ndlovu moves us to tears, exploring the experience of migrants losing parts of themselves to gain acceptance in new lands.

This astonishing collection is a lamentation with enormous heart that sees Ndlovu take her rightful place as a new star in the firmament of Zimbabwean literary excellence. ■

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

"Let's cut to the chase: those waterfalls are giving TLC"



- 1_** The Ouzoud Falls (pictured) are found in which country?
- 2_** Pointe-Noir is a city in the Democratic Republic of Congo. True or false?
- 3_** Name the Cameroon-born basketball player who recently won the NBA's Most Valuable Player award.
- 4_** What is Sudan's currency?
- 5_** What is South Sudan's currency?
- 6_** How many solo albums did Fela Kuti record: Was it 23, 46 or 51?
- 7_** In 2016, Wayde van Niekerk ran the fastest 400m by a male athlete. Which country is he from?
- 8_** Mohamed Bazoum is which country's president?
- 9_** Pasteur Bizimungu served as which country's president from 1994 until 2000?
- 10_** What is the historical name Ethiopia was previously known as?

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How we know what people think

EDITOR'S NOTE: *We've worked with Afrobarometer for nearly two years. As the most trusted source of public attitude data across this continent, they have allowed us to tell you what people are thinking on issues ranging from corruption to healthcare and climate change. And we can personally vouch for the quality of their data: our news editor cut her teeth doing Afrobarometer surveys for them in Uganda. This week, the Afrobarometer team is meeting in Ghana to plan its tenth round of surveys, and we asked them to explain to us exactly how they collect their information, and what makes it reliable.*

Eight in 10 Gambians (79%) say the country is heading in the wrong direction. Only 46% of Angolans have heard of climate change. In Malawi, 66% of citizens – two thirds – think corruption increased last year.

Says who?

Says Afrobarometer.

Who's that?

Afrobarometer is an African-led network of researchers in more than 35 countries on the continent who conduct public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, quality of life, and related issues. We were created in 1999 by three professors who were tired of hearing self-appointed “experts” (and self-serving leaders) claim to speak on behalf of “the people”.

Our motto is: “Let the people have a say.” And our vision is “a world in which Africa’s development is anchored in the realities and aspirations of its people”.

So our teams travel to every corner of their countries – by car or bus, by canoe,

by motorcycle, by horse, on foot. Once we had to rebuild a washed-out bridge.

The teams randomly select 1,200 to 2,400 people in their country and interview them face to face about their personal realities and aspirations. The interview, lasting an hour or more, is conducted in the language of the respondent’s choice.

We use the same questionnaire in every



All illustrations:
Roland Polman

country, so we can compare attitudes and experiences across the continent. And we repeat the surveys on a two-year cycle so we can track changes over time. We started with 12 countries in 1999, and are now wrapping up our ninth survey round, covering 39 countries – and planning our tenth.

We want people to use our data to make – and demand – good choices for Africa’s development, and to hold their governments accountable. That’s the whole point. And we work hard to nurture the next generation of researchers, as well as data-savvy activists, legislators, and journalists.

We share the results as widely as we can – in briefings and webinars, papers, blogs, social media posts, and more – so that African voices are heard in local, continental, and global policy debates.

We also make all our data available for free. With a few clicks on our website, you can download a data set or do your own data analysis – any country, any survey

round, hundreds of questions. It’s easy, even if you don’t speak statistics.

How do they know?

If we want to report what a country’s citizens are thinking after interviewing just 1,200 of them, the critical principle is “randomness”. As we figure out whom to interview, the selections have to be random at every step in the process – like drawing numbers from a hat. Every person in the country – including you – must have an equal chance of being included in our sample.

We want people to use our data to make – and demand – good choices for Africa’s development, and to hold governments accountable

We begin by using census data to allocate our 1,200 slots across regions and across urban and rural areas in the same proportion as their share of the national population. So if the census shows that 10% of a country’s population live in the urban parts of Province Alpha, then we allocate 10% of our sample – 120 cases – to those same areas.

Next we randomly select the census enumeration areas that we will visit. Our national partner organisation sends the interview teams it has trained to every selected area in every region.

Once in the census areas, the team randomly selects a starting point, and all team members walk in different directions, counting households and choosing the



fifth and 10th ones they come to. They visit those households, make a list of adult household members, and – randomly! – select one. That person, and no one else, is our respondent. Meaning that a husband can't step in for his wife, or a father for his daughter. If the selected respondent can't or doesn't want to be interviewed, we start the process again, picking a new household and a new respondent.

This is important, because the quality of our sampling is one of the things that makes our results reliable, and that sets Afrobarometer apart from surveys that may only do interviews in areas that are urban or easy to reach, or that rely on self-selected online respondents.

It's why we can describe our results as “nationally representative”, meaning they represent the views of all people in the country within a few percentage points.

Why 1,200 respondents? Because statistical formulas tell us that's how many we need to talk to in order to get a result that's precise enough.

“Precise enough,” for us, is a survey margin of error of +/- three percentage points. Meaning that if we report that 79% of Gambians say their country is heading in the wrong direction, we can be pretty confident that if we asked *every* person in the country, we would find that between 76% and 82% (79+/-3) feel this way.

How confident? We report results at a 95% confidence level, meaning that if we repeated the survey 100 times with 100

different samples of 1,200 respondents, 95 times we would get a result between 76% and 82%.

We could make our results a little bit more precise if we interviewed a lot more people – and spent a lot more time and money. But samples of 1,200 are widely accepted as representing a good balance between precision and cost.

Afrobarometer's methods have been described as “the gold standard” for survey research in Africa.

So when we report “what the people have to say,” you – our readers – as well as governments, policy makers, activists, and other users can be confident that they reliably represent the views, experiences, and aspirations not just of our respondents – and certainly not of self-appointed “experts” – but of millions of ordinary Africans. ■



Source: Afrobarometer, 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.

Journalists in the firing line once again

Cameroon is one of the worst countries in Africa to be a journalist

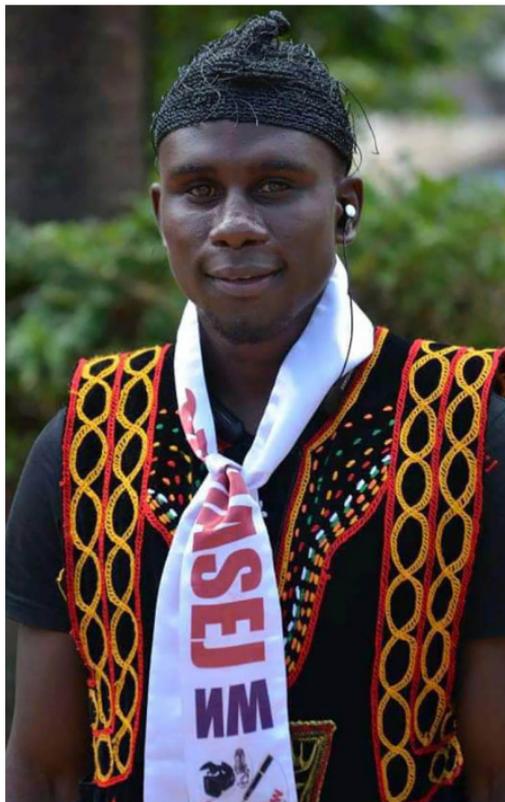
Amindeh Blaise Atabong
in Yaoundé

Two weeks ago, on a Saturday, journalist Anye Nde Nsoh was attending a funeral on the outskirts of Bamenda. As the casket was lowered into the ground, he broke into a cold sweat. “I am afraid to die,” he told a colleague, who was quick to reassure him. They both laughed it off.

The next day, Anye was dead.

He had been moonlighting as a hype man – an emcee, of sorts – at a pub in Bamenda’s Ntarikon neighbourhood. Gunmen stormed the venue and shot him point-blank. He died with a microphone in his hand, leaving behind an 11-month-old daughter.

Bamenda is the major city in north-west Cameroon, a predominantly English-speaking part of the country. Since 2017, this region has been embroiled in a bitter and deadly conflict between Anglophone separatists and Cameroon’s security forces, which has its roots in decades of real and perceived marginalisation by the Francophone-dominated government.



Point-blank: Anye Nde Nsoh, shot dead by separatists. A ‘mistake’, they said.

More than 6,000 people have been killed so far.

Capo Daniel, a frontline separatist leader, claimed that Anye’s killing was a case of “mistaken identity”, and that the armed group that carried out the attack was actually targeting a military commander. He said that the separatists have designated journalists as “protected persons”. The government has made a similar pledge to ensure the safety of media practitioners.



Last rites: Journalist Anye Nde Nsoh is buried. Photo: Sah Terence Animbon

But journalists keep getting killed. Journalists like Samuel Wazizi, a local broadcaster who was arrested and then died in military custody; and Iyabo Becky Jeme, who drove over an improvised explosive device laid by the separatists, are tragic examples.

Others have been forced into exile. Those who have stayed behind are routinely harassed, kidnapped, tortured, detained, attacked, censored, or imprisoned on bogus charges, as documented by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Four journalists – Tsi Conrad, Mancho Bibixy, Thomas Awah, and Kingsley Njoka – are currently in jail under Cameroon’s draconian anti-terror laws, which are often used to target the media.

Amos Fofung, a young journalist who worked for the leading English-language daily *The Guardian Post*, has been a victim. When reporting on the conflict in Buea – the capital of the other predominantly Anglophone region in the south-west – he had to navigate the dangerous tensions between the separatists and the security

forces, both of whom wanted their narrative to prevail in his reporting.

It was the security forces who snapped first. He was arrested and transferred to the dreaded Kondengui maximum security prison in the capital Yaoundé, some 300km away. He was there for six months without being charged. After his release he subsequently relocated to the United States.

“Any media practitioner who has reported in a war, protest or conflict zone will tell you how challenging the situation can be. And that was exactly what I witnessed first-hand during my reporting days in Buea,” Amos told *The Continent*. “But still I remain grateful that I was able to walk out of detention and back to being a reporter ... not many have been so fortunate.”

Cameroon holds the grim distinction of being one of the most hostile media landscapes on the continent. Just this year, two radio presenters – Martinez Zogo and Jean-Jacques Ola Bébé – were assassinated in or around Yaoundé and their killings remain unresolved.

For journalists in the conflict areas, the situation is even worse. According to Ignatius Nji, the president of the north-west chapter of the Cameroon Journalists Trade Union: “Media practice in the north-west and south-west is like walking on a razor. Journalists in these regions have learned to adapt to the hostile climate by being economical with the whole truth about the happenstances. Most reporters are victims of trauma given the daily bloodshed witnessed and reported.” ■

Digital tech was meant to save Nigeria's election. What went wrong?

On the face of it, the tech was sound. But humans have a knack for mucking things up (and sabotage)

Fidel Abowei

As attention turns to opposition parties' petitions against Nigeria's disputed 2023 presidential election, it is time to revisit the failure of BVAS – the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System.

Intended to protect the election from rigging, this technology failed less because of the equipment itself and more because of deliberate subversion by those entrusted to manage the process.

BVAS was supposed to safeguard democracy. At the registration stage, it serves as a voter enrolment device, while at the voting stage, it performs the dual function of accrediting voters and transmitting the results to IREV – the Independent National Electoral Commission Results Viewing Portal. By using fingerprint and facial identity to

prevent multiple or underage voting, and providing a secure way for results to be transmitted, BVAS and IREV were meant to reduce the scope for manipulation.

What went wrong? In the main, the BVAS kits worked well in accrediting voters. The real problems began when it came to transmitting election results to the IREV portal in real time. Partly as a result of poor communication of likely timelines, and partly due to unexplained delays, results were slow to start coming in – and never did for some areas.

Why was this process so haphazard? First, the electoral commission spent too little time training officials. Second, the commission effectively lost control over officials in some areas, and due process was not followed. A parallel vote tabulation conducted by Yiaga, for example, found results in Rivers and Imo states did not match their data, and some officials had operated in a partisan way.

In response, we must not throw the baby away with the bathwater. In countries such as Kenya, it took many iterations to get the technology to work well. Rather than abandoning the system, Nigeria needs to focus on improving the “human” aspect in its elections, so that the technology works as intended. ■

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THE BIG PICTURE

Fraternité: Dancers help each other don their customary attire ahead of an intercommunity meeting in Douala, on 13 May. Traditional authorities from the Center and Littoral regions of Cameroon gathered to denounce the rise of speeches calling for tribal hatred.

Photo: Daniel Beloumou Olomo/AFP



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