

# The Continent

with Mail & Guardian



**The colonel who  
overthrew Mali's  
government. Twice.**

Photo: AFP

# Inside:

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***Editor's Note:** In our Mozambique story last week, we neglected to credit investigative journalist Estacio Valoi for his photos from Cabo Delgado. We offer him our unreserved apology.*



**COVER:** Mali had another coup and now has a new president: Despite having already ousted not one but two presidents, Assimi Goïta, a colonel in the Malian Armed Forces, is only 38 years old. He has decided he will now lead the country until what he promises will be fair elections. The most recent coup leaves this vast, land-locked west African country once again embroiled in political uncertainty, even as it continues to battle a long-running Islamist insurgency.

# The week in numbers



The number of African artists nominated at the 2021 BET awards in the United States.

## €1.1-BILLION

The amount promised to Namibia by Germany as amends (though not reparations) for its acts of genocide.

## <2

The number of covid vaccines administered per 100 people in sub-Saharan Africa.

## \$110-MILLION

The cost of the new plane for Senegal's president, Macky Sall.



## 72,000

The number of AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccines returned to the Covax initiative by South Sudan, after it said it could not administer them before they expired.



## 3+

The number of people killed when an artisanal mine in Ghana collapsed. Many more may still be trapped.

EGYPT

## Treaty tactics give Egypt the upper hand

Adding Kenya and Uganda to the list of countries with which it has military co-operation agreements, Egypt has surrounded Ethiopia with the iron fist of diplomacy. The two countries are in a tense stand-off over control of the flow of the Nile after Ethiopia started filling its Grand Renaissance Dam, upriver from the military-led Egypt.

KENYA

## Court burns prez's bridges

Kenya's high court has declared the appointment of 129 government officials as unconstitutional and invalid. The hires were made in 2018 by President Uhuru Kenyatta and his cabinet. The court noted that the appointments did not reflect the diversity of that country. Additionally, the court ruled on Thursday that Kenyatta's passion project of the past three years, known as the "building bridges initiative", was illegal as it sought to alter the basic structure of the current constitution.



RWANDA

## Macron on a mission

Following the lavish summit with African leaders he hosted in Paris, France's President Emmanuel Macron is now on a charm offensive up and down the continent. In Rwanda, he is seeking to fix a turbulent relationship, aided by further evidence that his country played an integral role in allowing the 1994 genocide to go unchallenged. His next stop is South Africa, which France didn't get to colonise. Macron is presumably making up for lost time.



## UGANDA

## On the road

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo is used to its neighbours interfering to make things worse. But Uganda now seems intent on making good on its promise to upgrade roads linking it to Congolese towns such as Beni and Goma.



## SOUTH AFRICA

## 'It wasn't me'

Former South Africa president Jacob Zuma has pleaded not guilty in a long-delayed corruption trial. He stands accused, alongside French arms manufacturer Thales, of massive corruption in that country's purchase of guns, jet fighters and frigates. After dismantling much of South Africa's anti-corruption capacity (and broader governance competence), allegedly in part to avoid consequences for his actions, Zuma maintains his innocence.

## MOZAMBIQUE

## Armying up

SADC leaders agreed to form a military force to be deployed in Mozambique's north, amid the violent uprising there. There was no final word on troop levels, but a total of 3,000 soldiers was mooted.

## MALI

## If at first you don't succeed

Colonel Assimi Goïta has decided that he is in charge of Mali now, after a coup to replace the president he helped install in a previous coup nine months ago. This follows a cabinet reshuffle in which the military said it had not been consulted. Goïta promises elections will still happen. France (there is a theme here) has threatened sanctions, but the colonel appears to hold all the cards.

## AFRICA

## Jabs in a jam

The World Health Organisation says Africa needs 20-million AstraZeneca doses by the end of June or the vaccine rollout will stumble to a halt. This comes after India halted exports of that brand of vaccine so it could use it to tackle the rapid growth of Covid-19 at home.

# Mali



Recouped:  
Colonel Assimi  
Goïta has now  
removed two  
presidents  
from office.  
Photo: Michele  
Cattani/AFP

## Meet the man who ousted two presidents in nine months

**Colonel Assimi Goïta – now *President* Assimi Goïta – has once again thrown Mali's politics into disarray**

**Mohamed Salaha in Bamako**

**S**ince independence in 1968, Mali has experienced four coups d'état. Two of these happened in the past nine months – and they were both led by the same man.

Despite having already ousted not one but two presidents, Assimi Goïta, a colonel in the Malian Armed Forces, is only 38 years old.

The most recent coup leaves this vast, landlocked west African country once again embroiled in political uncertainty, even as it continues to battle a long-running Islamist insurgency.

The first time Goïta rose to international attention was on the evening of 18 August 2020, when he appeared on state television to announce the arrest of then-president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita

(IBK), under the banner of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People – a junta of disgruntled army officers who promised to deliver a brighter, more democratic and more prosperous future for Mali, following widespread popular protests against IBK's government.

In the transitional government that followed, Goïta – a special forces commander renowned for his quiet, calm demeanour – appointed a close ally and fellow military officer, Bah N'Daw, as interim president. For himself, he created the position of vice-president, with direct responsibility for defence and security.

But relations between N'Daw and Goïta grew tense as the pair competed for influence. When the new president announced a surprise cabinet reshuffle earlier this month – dismissing several of the junta's leading figures in the process – Goïta and his allies within the armed forces arrested President N'Daw and his civilian prime minister, Moctar Ouane. Both were detained until Thursday in the Kati military base just outside the capital Bamako, leaving Goïta in de facto control of the country.

## Military man

The third eldest in a family of nine children, Goïta attended military schools, where his record was faultless. With specialisations in armoured weapons and cavalry, he graduated from the military academy and, still a teenager, was assigned to the 134th Reconnaissance Squadron in Gao in 2002.

As he rose through the ranks, he developed a reputation for bravery and



**That junta life: A man holds a sign reading 'A transition led by the army' at a demonstration in support of the military-led coalition that ousted president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.**

Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP

rigour, leading several military operations before, during and after the beginning of the Tuareg rebellion in 2012. Known to inspire trust and loyalty within the ranks of the army, he is an effective man-manager, and when off-duty likes to read and play football.

His various commands have taken him across the country: he has battled terrorists and drug traffickers on the Algerian border; hunted down rebel leaders around Kidal and Timbuktu; and beefed up security in Bamako following the deadly attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in 2015. He also did a stint as a United Nations peacekeeper in Darfur, Sudan, where he won a medal for bravery.

During these years, Malian security forces were repeatedly implicated by rights groups and United Nations investigators in human rights abuses and war crimes, including arbitrary



**Show of force: Soldiers arrive in Bamako in August after capturing then-president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. A second coup removed Mali's transitional government this week, and the military is once again in control.** Photo: AFP

detentions and extrajudicial executions. Goïta has not been personally implicated in these alleged crimes.

In 2018, he was appointed commander of Mali's notorious Battalion Autonomes des Forces Spéciales, the US-trained elite special forces unit – and it was from this position that he was able to organise and launch the first coup in August last year.

### Uncertain future

Although Goïta might be in charge for the moment, it is unclear how long he will be able to keep power. While there can be little doubt that he wants to remain president, he faces formidable opposition from the international community.

Both the Economic Community of West African States and the United States have demanded that the political transition be led by civilians, and the United States has followed this up by

suspending military cooperation and threatening targeted sanctions.

That said, the language used publicly by the junta suggests that, this time around, they are more determined to keep control in the hands of the military.

On the soldiers' side is thought to be the powerful National Union of Malian Workers, which had been on strike over a pay dispute with the deposed transitional government, and the M5-RFP, the political coalition that led the protests which preceded last year's coup.

The M5-RFP, however, have publicly opposed Goïta's appointment as president. But even if he doesn't succeed in consolidating his power this time around, we can be certain that we have not heard the last from Colonel Assimi Goïta – and if he doesn't pull it off this time then maybe the third coup will be the charm. ■



# World

## The Yoruba trademark scandal

... and other examples of cultural appropriation™

Simon Allison

**I**t is not simple to learn Yoruba in London. When Gbemisola Isimi's first child was born she could find nowhere to teach them the language she had grown up with in Lagos.

Isimi took matters into her own hands. She started CultureTree, a Yoruba language academy for the children of Nigerian expatriates, and began posting teaching videos on YouTube. In London, home to a sizable Nigerian community, her business took off. One programme, Yoruba Stars, was particularly successful.

Like all smart business owners, she decided to trademark the name "Yoruba Stars" so that no one else could use it. She filed a request with the United Kingdom's Intellectual Property Office, and waited several months to hear back.

Her request was denied.

An English company had already trademarked the word "Yoruba" in Britain, and it had opposed her application. The



**Imagine: Residents of Timbuktu may be surprised to learn that "many people" think their city is fictional. Photo: Souleymane Ag Anara/AFP**

company said she needed to pay them if she wanted to use the word in her business.

Isimi did some research. The company in question, Timbuktu Global, is a clothing company based in the north of England, owned by two white people with no obvious connection to Nigeria or the Yoruba ethnic group. Nor do they appear to have any connection, or even knowledge of, Timbuktu – claiming on their website that many people believe the ancient Malian city is "a fictional location which literally means 'the middle of nowhere'".

This week, Isimi took to social media to raise the alarm.

"I thought it was really strange that a company would be allowed to trademark the word 'Yoruba', a tribe and language of millions of people!" she tweeted. "Let's call out @timbuktuglobal on this daylight robbery! Today it's Yoruba, tomorrow it

could be Igbo, Swahili or even the word AFRICA! I intend to fight this with everything in me!”

Her tweets went viral: within days, the flood of negative publicity had forced Timbuktu Global to surrender their trademark and delete their social media accounts and website.

Isimi may have won this battle, but this is not the first time that intellectual property laws have allowed western individuals or companies to lay claim to Africa’s cultural, linguistic and even culinary heritage. Nor is it expected to be the last.

A few of the most egregious incidents include:

■ In 2003, in successful patent applications in the Netherlands and the United States, a Dutchman named Jan Roosjen claimed to have “invented” teff flour and associated food products – including injera, Ethiopia’s staple food, which has been consumed in the Horn of Africa for millennia.

■ Rooibos, the herbal tea, is only grown in a very specific area of South Africa, and has been for hundreds of years. In 1994, an American company registered “Rooibos” as a trademark in the US – and demanded South African companies pay them to use the name.

■ Following the success of the Lion King, the Walt Disney corporation trademarked an entire Kiswahili phrase: “Hakuna Matata” (meaning, as Timon and Pumbaa tell us in the

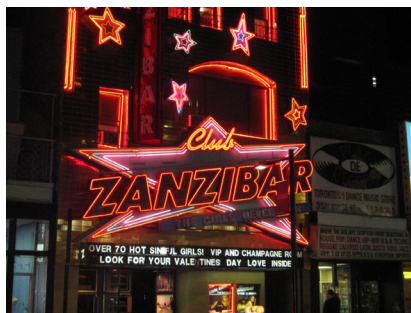
movie, “no worries”).

In a quick search of the World Intellectual Property Organisation’s database, *The Continent* discovered several other examples of western brands that have trademarked African names, symbols and cultural references. Often these associations reinforce negative stereotypes, or simply rely on an African name as shorthand for “exotic” or “other”.

In Canada, a trademark for “Zanzibar” is owned by Toronto’s oldest strip club, the Zanzibar Club. In the US, “Zulu Warrior” is registered to a company that makes a herbal remedy for erectile dysfunction, and whose logo features a scantily-clad soldier clutching a very upright spear.

These examples raise difficult questions about the effectiveness and the fairness of western intellectual property regimes.

For Gbemisola Isimi, the Yoruba trademark scandal highlights a much bigger problem. “Why should we have to spend our time and resources rectifying something that should never have happened?” ■



**Far from home: The Zanzibar Club is one of Toronto's oldest strip clubs.**

Photo: Danielle Scott

## NEWS

# Goma evacuated amid fears of another eruption

**Malivika Austere in Goma**

**G**oma, population 1.5-million, is one of the world's most precarious cities. Built in the shadow of Mount Nyiragongo, Africa's most active volcano, this major city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is only ever one eruption away from complete disaster.

Last Saturday evening, that eruption happened – and a river of bright orange, molten lava raced towards the city, destroying fields, roads and smaller settlements en route. At least four people

were burned to death by the lava, and dozens of others were injured; and at least 27 people lost their lives in related incidents, such as vehicle crashes caused as tens of thousands of people fled in panic.

Mercifully, the lava halted just before it reached Goma's densely-packed outlying suburbs, but the natural disaster is far from over. The presence of magma has been detected underneath the city, raising fears of another eruption within the city



itself, or under the floor of Lake Kivu. An eruption under the lake could release enormous deposits of carbon dioxide, which would make the city's air toxic to humans.

Local authorities have urged residents of ten vulnerable neighbourhoods to flee to the nearby town of Sake, and many have heeded this warning.

"Given these scientific observations, an eruption on land or under the lake cannot be ruled out at present, and it could occur with very little or no warning," said Ndima Kongba, the military governor of North Kivu province. "Evacuation is compulsory, those who do not adhere swiftly, carry unnecessary risks."

*The Continent* joined thousands of people on the road out of Goma. Most are on foot, lacking the means to travel

**Disaster: Residents gather on the streets of Goma after the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo last week. Africa's most active volcano, Nyiragongo last erupted in 2002, destroying up to a fifth of the city. In the two decades since then, Goma's population has doubled to over 1.5-million residents. Photo: Guerchom Ndebo / AFP**

by any other way, and are carrying their possessions on their backs. "I cannot bear to see everybody fleeing," said Kasereka Kiswahili Norbert Amabe, who is heading towards the town of Butembo, some 300 kilometres away.

Governor Ndima said that the army and the police will step in to protect the homes of those who have fled, but many civilians who spoke to *The Continent*



worried that the security forces would be among the first to loot.

No one is sure when they will be allowed to go home. "A return home can only take place on the recommendation of the provincial authority," said Ndima. ■

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**(Below) Residents walk through the smoke from the smouldering lava that poured from Mount Nyiragongo in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo last week. Photo: Moses Sawasawa / AFP**



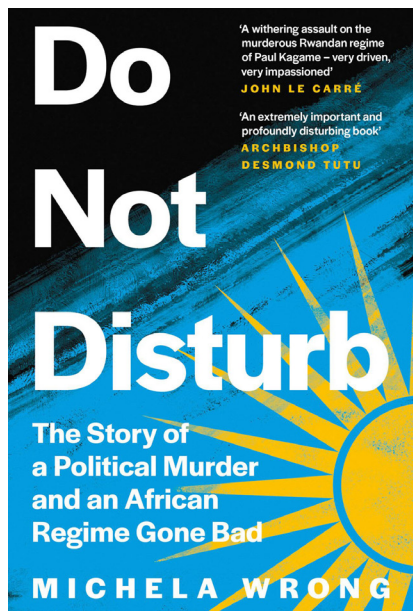
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**(Left) Children play with lava from Mount Nyiragongo, after it unexpectedly erupted, sending a river of molten rock flowing towards Goma at the foot of the volcano. Fire and toxic fumes emanated from the lava flow as it swallowed up houses on its path downslope towards Goma airport on the shores of Lake Kivu, mercifully coming to a halt just as it reached the city's outlying populated areas. Photo: Moses Sawasawa / AFP**

BOOK REVIEW

# Do Not Disturb: Looking beyond Rwanda's genocide

*The opening chapter could have been written by spy novelist John Le Carré: South African police discover the body of former Rwandan spy chief Patrick Karegeya in a tangle of sheets at Jo'burg's Michelangelo Hotel. But this is not fiction – it is the all-too familiar fate of many of Kagame's former friends – and harshest critics.*



Stephanie Wolters

Lies, manipulation, intimidation and control are the mainstays of Paul Kagame's leadership style – if you dare to criticise, you are a threat that needs to be

eliminated. In *Do Not Disturb*, Michela Wrong clearly demonstrates how this has shaped the Rwandan state and seeped into the country's collective post-genocide mentality.

The book lays bare the souring of the intimate relationships between the tight knit group of men who would seize power in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. The two protagonists – the late former intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya and the former head of military intelligence and army chief of staff, General Kayumba Nyamwasa, now living in exile and under protection in South Africa – helped Kagame construct today's Rwanda and were themselves pillars of the system.

They played instrumental roles in nurturing the image of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), first as the saviours and then the guarantors of the Rwandan nation and its people – and in seizing the moral high ground vis-à-vis an international community whose inaction played a significant role in the tragic events of 1994. Wrong explains how Karegeya wooed journalists, researchers

and diplomats alike, wielding the powerful tools of his own charm, and the country's recent tragic history to win them over.

**The book revolves around the souring of relationships between the tight knit group of men who would seize power in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide.**

*Do Not Disturb* demonstrates how this is what lies at the heart of the problem – many people did believe, and more importantly wanted to believe – that the RPF were a selfless group of people whose sincere objective it was to rebuild the country – a belief buoyed by the hope that Rwanda, and humanity, could recover after the scale and horror of the genocide.

As a result, many discounted or disregarded clear evidence of the repression, manipulation and human rights violations that were evident even before the RPF took power, and, in doing so perpetuated the exact image Kagame was working so hard to construct.

This holds true for outsiders as much as it does for many Rwandans. For some, like Karegeya and Kayumba, it took a long time to reach the tipping point: as part of the system, they played a role in the abuses. When they broke with Kagame, he made sure they paid the highest price: loss of status, power, influence – and even life.

Others, such as Seth Sendashonga – a Hutu politician who had been



**Paul-bearer: Supporters of Rwanda's President Paul Kagame are unlikely to be impressed by Michela Wrong's book.**  
Photo: Marco Longari/AFP

instrumental in convincing Hutu political forces to work with the RPF after the genocide, and who became interior minister in the country's first post-genocide government – saw the writing on the wall much earlier. Already disillusioned with what he had believed was the RPF's intention of nurturing reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi and in creating an equal country, his watershed moment arrived with the April 1995 massacre of up to 8,000 Hutus in Kibeho, an IDP camp.

Several months later he resigned and returned to his life in Nairobi. In May 1998, he and his driver were assassinated.



**Last laugh: Former Rwandan president Pasteur Bizimungu shares a joke with then vice-president Paul Kagame in 1994.** Photo: Alexander Joe/AFP

Karegeya was suspected to have played a role in Sendashonga's murder, something he always denied. But many years later, after he too broke with Kagame and had gone into exile in South Africa, he felt the need to make amends with Sendashonga's family and asked his widow, Cyrie for a meeting.

She agreed and the two met at a hotel in Johannesburg. Karegeya told her he was not involved in the murder but added: "Your husband was a good man ... If we had kept him and allowed him to do what he wanted to do, maybe Rwanda would be a different place today."

Wrong later interviews Cyrie about the meeting with Karegeya: "Remembering the encounter with the doomed ex-spy chief now, she says something so magnanimous it takes my breath away: 'I felt sorry for them. Because I could see

that Patrick was trying, more or less, to do what Sendashonga tried to do, only later on.'"

**"If we had allowed him to do what he wanted to do, maybe Rwanda would be a different place today."**

Wrong knows all about recognising reality too late, and with the benefit of hindsight. The book starts with a searingly honest mea culpa about her own pro-RPF prejudices in her days as a journalist, and delivers an intelligent and fine-tuned analysis of how so many fell into the same trap – and why we need to get out of it.

To wade into the debate on modern-day Rwanda is to enter a highly polarised and vicious world. From Kagame's own Twitter trolls, to academics who have staked their careers on lauding the RPF and Kagame's success story, there are plenty of people who will vocally denounce Wrong's book and dispute what it exposes about Kagame and his regime.

But for those who want to better understand Rwanda and the region, this is an invaluable, well-researched and beautifully written contribution. Taken as such, it has the potential to spark precisely the discussion about Rwanda that needs to take place. ■

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*Stephanie Wolters is a director of Okapi Consulting, a media and research organisation working on conflict in Africa and a Bradlow fellow at the South African Institute of International Affairs*



## PROFILE

# Marvellous Tshuma

**A fighter for albinism rights in Zimbabwe**

**Derick Matsengarwodzi**



*“This is personal to me; when I think of how I grew up I am moved to soldier on and help others with albinism to endure life better than I did.”*

**L**iving with albinism in Zimbabwe is equivalent to a death sentence.

Many with the condition lack access to basic healthcare, including sun hats and lotions to protect their skin from direct sunlight. Cancer is thought to be rife, although statistics are hard to come by. Activists think that many of the estimated 70,000 people with albinism in the country die from cancer before the age of 50. Almost 5,000 new cancer cases are diagnosed each year in Zimbabwe, with 1,500 deaths recorded.

Last year, after years of her own struggles, Marvellous Tshuma began advocating for the rights of people with albinism. The 25-year-old activist now chairs Albinism Konect, a project launched by The Noble Hands Zimbabwe Trust.

Marvellous was born in Binga, an underdeveloped village linked to a dilapidated road network. It lags in everything. But growing up without access to basic services did not just equip Marvellous with the skills to survive, it gave her the determination to help others battling stigma, circumstance and healthcare challenges. She tells *The Continent*: “This is personal to me; when I think of how I grew up I am moved to soldier on and help others with albinism endure life better than I did.”

In 2020, she began washing cars to raise funds to buy hats and sunscreen. She also started an informal register on social media for people with albinism, to get a sense of numbers.

“This process revealed the untold suffering of people with albinism

especially in the rural areas,” she recalls.

Through this work she learned of Tinayi Mutepe, a boy whose eye was amputated due to cancer. Through Twitter, she raised awareness of Tinayi’s worsening condition, and he went on to receive life-saving treatment in Harare.

Gladys Marima, meanwhile was just 23 when she was thrown out of her home by her relatives because her cancer had caused a grievous facial wound that became infected with myiasis.

Marvellous says: “Her relatives threw her out, saying the wound was stinking. We arranged a house in Harare, and got blankets from donors.”

**“We never chose to be albinos. Discrimination and segregation starting from family members to society is still there but must end.”**

“We never chose to be albino,” the outspoken activist says. “Discrimination and segregation from family members and society is still there but must end.”

Gladys’s story showed the common prejudice against people with albinism. Marvellous highlighted Gladys’ situation on social media and, with the help of the donations that came in, Gladys was able to undergo a facial operation.

Afterwards, however, she was not able to recuperate at the cancer ward at Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare, which was closed due to the Covid-19 lockdown: instead she was taken home

and is now receiving palliative treatment to manage her pain – but sadly no likely cure awaits her.

Faced with seemingly inevitable sadness and setbacks, Marvellous has nevertheless committed herself to fight for the rights of others with albinism. “We don’t have funding, we are solely relying on individual donations to cover accommodation, medical fees, transportation of patients to and from Damofalls and even from their rural areas.”

Operating on limited resources, they rely on hired taxis to ferry the sick to the hospital. “We can’t afford private cancer clinics – they are expensive; the doctors who help us are operating pro bono. We rely on public hospitals which are very slow and ill-equipped.”

Every time a patient is sent to her, she her heart breaks a little more. “So much more needs to be done – cancer patients are dying helplessly.”

The solution, she says, is a dedicated clinic and for the government to take the healthcare problems of albinism seriously.

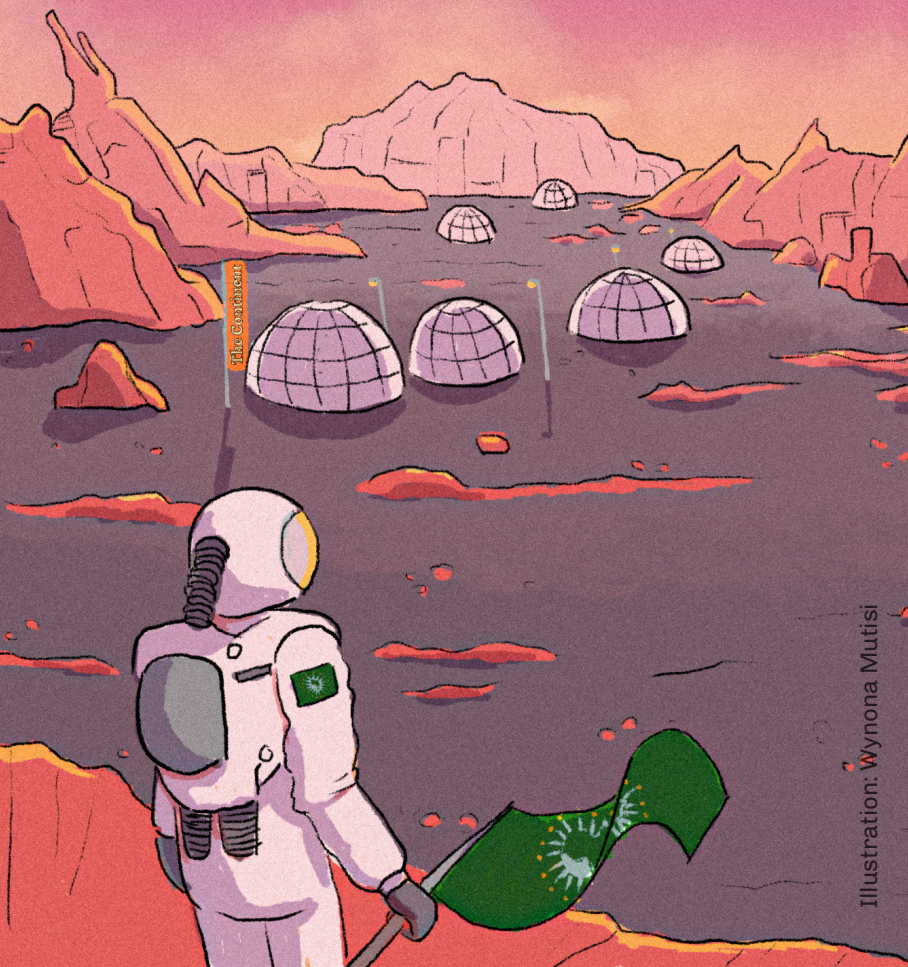
“We need a standalone cancer clinic for people with albinism to treat these cancers when they are still in the initial stage. Just like condoms and contraceptives are given out, sun protection lotions should be distributed for free,” she says. “For people with albinism, sunscreen is a human right.” ■

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*This story is part of a series of profiles on human rights defenders in the SADC region, funded by Internews.*

# A blueprint for living on Mars

200 people by 2040 and 100,000 by 2200 –  
humanity is ready to inhabit the red planet



***Editor's note:** Plans for humanity living elsewhere talk about the “brightest and best” settling new worlds. They're driven by wealthy men in the West and big countries in the northern hemisphere. They envision a future where the rest of us are left on Earth while they take their genetic code to other solar systems.*

*History shows the danger of such elitist thinking. With a Mars settlement looking increasingly likely, we need to all be involved.*

## Sipho Kings

**T**here will be a self-sustaining human colony on Mars by 2040. That is the goal put forward in a detailed plan by a research team from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

It starts with building a robot-driven research base on the Moon in 2024. The main reason is efficiency: to get a rocket away from Earth, 85% of it needs to be fuel. The moon has less gravity, so sending a rocket from there to Mars means more space for cargo. A Moon base also allows for tests on all the things you need to survive on another rock in space, from creating oxygen to water and concrete. Being near the Earth, there is also a chance of survival if things go wrong. Mars is years of travel away, and messages can be delayed by as much as 30 minutes.

“Mars: A Second Home” was published in April, charting the way for humans to become a “prospering space-faring multi-planetary species”. The plan isn't funded – Nasa and SpaceX have plans with some money to back them – but it is thorough and reads as a prospectus for would-be investors.

The Moon base, for example, can easily be grown into a mining operation thanks

to deposits of titanium, platinum and gold. This will offer “an incredible return on investment”.

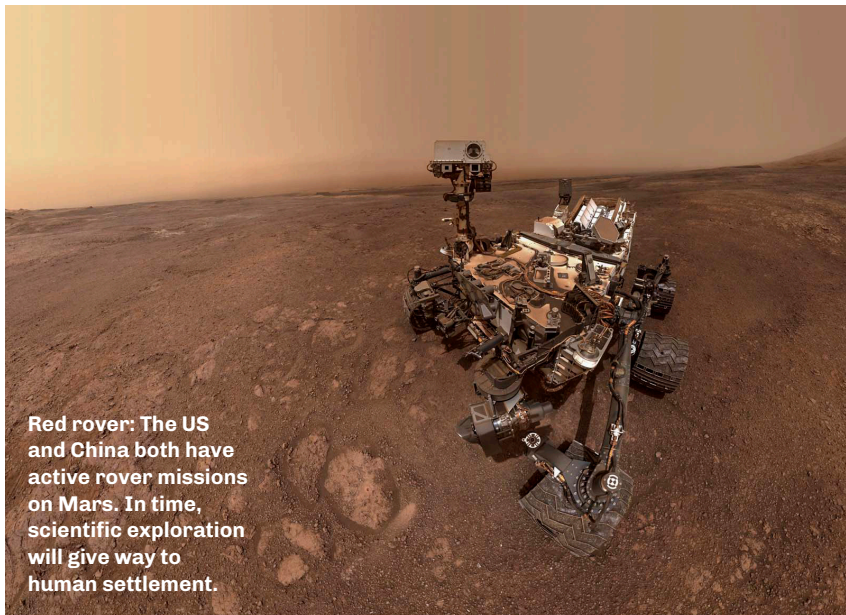
Raw materials also mean a base can be built without much in the way of materials from Earth. By 2032, the research expects a solar-powered vessel to leave the Moon with the first elements of a Mars colony on the plains of Arcadia Planitia. That's on the equator, which makes it easier for future takeoff and also means consistent sunlight throughout the year for a solar farm. Tests also indicate there is water a few centimetres under the surface.

## **By 2032, the research expects a solar-powered vessel to leave the Moon with the first elements of a Mars colony**

This advance robot team will set up a GPS satellite system and, with 20 robots, go about turning Mars soil into cement for buildings. When they need to build something big, like the overground cave system that will shield and house the first habitable base of operations, the robots can combine to make a bigger robot.

A manned space flight will then leave





**Red rover: The US and China both have active rover missions on Mars. In time, scientific exploration will give way to human settlement.**

the Moon in 2035 with 10 astronauts. The decade before will have boiled down the best combination of skills and traits for people to be stuck together in a potentially fatal trip to another planet. This, the research notes, will find people “who can continue to work well with others even in extremely stressful environments”.

A mix of pilots, biologists, medics, engineers and psychologists will start that colony. Thanks to nuclear propulsion (using technology that has not yet been proven) the trip will take just three months. Nasa’s current planning is for seven months, which means more exposure to solar radiation and low gravity.

On arrival, they’ll get about building a self-sustaining settlement.

To grow food, advanced plant habitats – already being tested on the International Space Station to grow wheat – will be built into a greenhouse. Mars soil seems to have all the ingredients needed for plants so the colony won’t need fertiliser. To get water, that soil will be heated to 400°C so the water evaporates. For oxygen, a prototype for converting the excess carbon dioxide on Mars to oxygen arrived there onboard NASA’s Perseverance rover this year. Homes, dubbed ‘Marshas’, will be 3D printed and scaled up to create common areas. Furniture will be printed using plastic waste from food packaging and other things that are shipped from the Moon.

By 2040, the plan envisages a settlement with a launchpad, 25 Marshas,

a mining centre, research centre, laboratory, medical bay, greenhouse module, common area and backup storage for oxygen should things go wrong. All of this will be powered from a solar farm and, if possible, the nuclear reactor that got the humans there in the first place.

Governance will be democratic and will work in “close connection with the United Nations of Earth” (which doesn’t exist). Over time the colony will develop its own constitution and judicial system, driven by the people of Mars knowing what is best after being “exposed to their set of challenges and unique environment”.

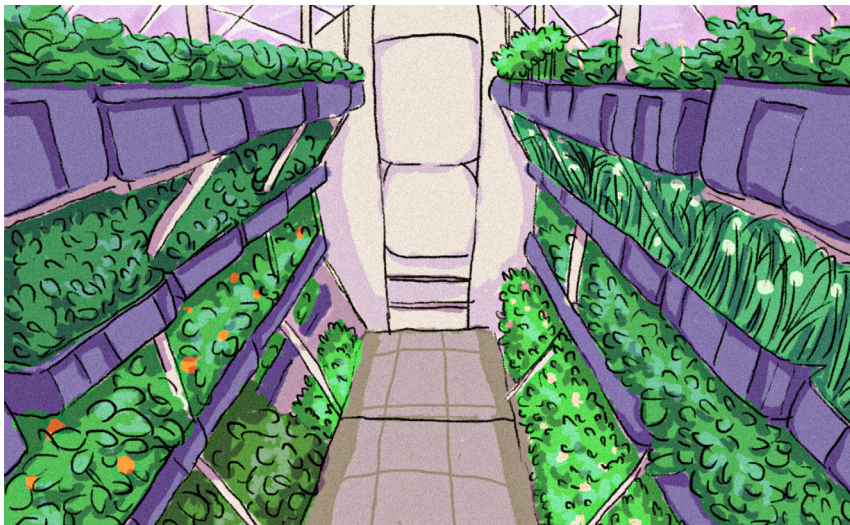
By then the colony will be ripe for commercial exploitation. And terraforming. The researchers expect that by 2200 the population will number

100,000 with a ferry from Earth and the Moon docking with an orbital station to bring in workers, as well as tourists.

The technology to turn a whole planet into something habitable, so people don’t have to live in insulated bubbles, does not exist. Mars has no ozone layer so solar radiation hits it unopposed. Nasa scientists have proposed creating an artificial magnetosphere to repel solar winds and help create a habitable space. With its existing ice caps and soil, the planet can then be rendered habitable.

The researchers argue, like many others, that humans have to expand to minimise the risks inherent with living on one planet. The resources and technology could also improve life on Earth.

Time will tell if this is just a way for an elite few to escape solving the problems of this planet. ■



Illustrator Wynona Mutisi's impression of an advanced plant habitat on Mars.

# If climate change doesn't kill us, the stress of it might

**Few African countries are prepared for the mental health crisis that is already building.**

**Sophie Mbugua in Nairobi**

**L**ast year, during heavy flooding in Kenya's Baringo County, Pauline Yator lost her home, and very nearly lost her grip on her own sanity, too.

"The farm I had called home for nearly 30 years was completely submerged. I was in shock and afraid. For two weeks I walked by the roadside speaking to myself," the 50-year-old farmer told *The Continent*. "Questions ran through my mind without answers. How will my children survive? Where do I resettle? It was a difficult time."

Yator's experience is anything but unique. Last July, Kenya's national task force on mental health recommended that the government declare mental health a national emergency.

It pointed to rising levels of depression, death by suicide, post-traumatic stress

disorder and substance abuse.

It also said climate change and its effects, such as droughts and flooding, were key contributors to mental distress. A hotter world means more sudden disasters as well as more slow-onset disasters, where rainfall patterns change and crops fail.

Boniface Chitayi, a consultant psychiatrist with the ministry of health and the president of the Kenya Psychiatric Association, told *The Continent*: "Mental health issues are often forgotten amid other life-threatening disasters like coronavirus, storms, droughts, and floods."

Kenya is ill-equipped to deal with this growing mental health crisis. An estimated 1.9-million Kenyans already suffer from depression, and the country has only 71 psychiatrists for its nearly 50-million people.

The situation is even worse in Kenya's rural areas, where there is just one psychiatrist for every 3-million people, compared to one per 500,000 in the cities.

## **Kenya's national task force pointed to rising levels of depression and suicide**

Nor is this just a Kenyan problem. Nigeria, for example, has fewer than 300 for a population of over 200-million, while the Central African Republic has just one working psychiatrist for its 4.75-million people – hardly ideal preparation for a world that, as it heats up, is going to get a lot more stressful. ■

FILM

# ***The Mauritanian:* An absorbing thriller that pulls its punches**

**Wilfred Okiche**

**F**ollowing the 9/11 terrorist attacks on American soil, Mauritanian citizen Mohamedou Ould Slahi – a former Mujahideen anti-communist fighter in Afghanistan – was picked up (with his government's permission) and handed over to the US authorities. Slahi was held at the detainee camp in Guantánamo Bay in Cuba without charge or trial for 14 years before he was eventually released.

*The Mauritanian*, directed by Scottish filmmaker Kevin Macdonald (*The Last King of Scotland*, *Whitney*), is the big screen adaptation of Slahi's much redacted bestselling memoir, *Guantánamo Diary*, written while still in prison.

Macdonald's film boasts superb performances led by Tahar Rahim, a French actor of Algerian descent, and is framed – perhaps a little too obviously – within the confines of a typical Hollywood legal thriller.

But forget the title: Macdonald's *The Mauritanian* is ultimately an American story, rooted in the excesses and injustices of its war on terror. The film outlines, through Slahi's experience, how people

become collateral damage when national security interests, wounded pride, moral outrage and the obsession to dispense justice come to a heady mix.

Absorbing and a little on the nose, *The Mauritanian* uses Slahi as a placeholder to critique torture as a weapon of engagement while highlighting the villains and (mostly) heroes of the Slahi affair. The heroes in this case include Slahi's lawyers – the duo of Nancy Hollander (Jodie Foster) and Teri Duncan (Shailene Woodley) – as well as the military prosecutor Stuart Couch (Benedict Cumberbatch).

Adopting the forgiving tone and shortage of bitterness that Slahi demonstrates in his book, *The Mauritanian* manages to draw a self-congratulatory sketch out of what could easily have been a damning takedown of imperialism and government overreach.



The *Mauritanian* is available to rent on Amazon Prime

# Mauritius: From 'model democracy' to surveillance state?

**A new law will allow the government to intercept all online communications**

**Jess Auerbach**

Last week comment closed on the Mauritian government's proposed new internet regulations. If passed, this would allow it to intercept anyone in the the island nation's online communication. The impact on freedom of speech will be significant – and not just in the country: it should be seen as a canary in the coal mine for private communication within democracies.

The new regulation claims the move is justified by the lack of moderation, by social media companies, of posts in creole – the majority language.

The government argues this allows for abuse and defamation to take place online without consequence – a line of reasoning employed in other countries to limit the capacity of opposition groups to organise and express dissent, and which is in line with Mauritius's own slide into autocracy

since the 2019 elections.

The regulations have been loudly opposed, with 2,194 responses received, including from Google, Mozilla, Facebook, and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

A petition by writer Ariel Saramandi received 20,000 signatures. But many Mauritians did not sign due to threats or fear of retribution – not without reason: the state has been known to block the employment of members of certain families through name-based blacklisting.

Comment is now closed, but the world should be watching closely when it is debated by parliament in June. The pandemic has seen a rise in surveillance technologies around the world.

If Mauritius, with its longstanding commitment to democratic systems, becomes a surveillance state, it seems inevitable others will follow.

In Mauritius' defence, it is problematic that the data its citizens produce becomes the intellectual property of global corporations. In principle, the desire for data sovereignty is one that should be recognised as legitimate, and should be supported – but not at the expense of citizens' rights.

It cannot take place without a deep commitment to freedom of speech and the right to privacy. ■

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*Dr Jess Auerbach is a senior lecturer in anthropology at North-West University in South Africa.*



# THE QUIZ

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"Every day is Africa Day."

- 1\_ Salé is a city in which country?
- 2\_ The birr is which country's currency?
- 3\_ In which country did a volcano erupt for the first time since 2002?
- 4\_ Timbuktu is a real city in which country?
- 5\_ True or false: Former South African president Jacob Zuma pleaded guilty to corruption charges this week.
- 6\_ True or false: Zinedine Zidane was born to Algerian parents.
- 7\_ In which city in Mali can one visit the Djinguereber Mosque?
- 8\_ Africanised bees or Africanised honey bees are also known as what?

- 9\_ What type of cotton is thought to be longer, stronger and softer than most?
- 10\_ What is the name of Nigeria's national football team?

## How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you.

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at [TheContinent@mg.co.za](mailto:TheContinent@mg.co.za)



Photo: Marco Dormino/UN Photo

# Boko Haram's leader has died – again. Is this a chance for peace?

Fola Aina

**A**bubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, also known as Jama'atu Ahl al-Sunnah lil-Dawa wal-Jihad (JAS), is believed to have died. According to internal reports from Nigerian intelligence, he met his end after detonating explosives when seeking to resist capture by fighters from the rival Islamic State West Africa Province. But governments in Africa and the West are reluctant to confirm the news because Shekau has been reported to have been killed on three previous occasions, only to embarrass his enemies by magically coming "back to life".

The manner in which Shekau allegedly died demonstrates that insurgent leaders face a greater threat from each other than they do from the Nigerian military – which has been trying and failing to eliminate Shekau for years. So, while his alleged death represents an important moment, it should not be read as a significant turning point in the ongoing conflict. Instead, its main significance may lie in the potential for a realignment to take place between

the various radical Islamic movements currently jockeying for hegemony.

Most notably, it will take JAS some time to establish a leader with Shekau's reputation and authority, especially given that he did not establish a clear line of succession.

In the short term, its operations are likely to be disrupted. In turn, this may create opportunities for the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction to extend its control over JAS and hence the region, securing tactical and operational advantages through its hold over the Sambisa Forest in northeast Nigeria.

At the same time, both JAS and ISWAP hope to bring other factions, such as Ansaru – the first breakaway faction of Boko Haram – back to the fold.

Should this happen, they would gain access to Ansaru's large network of armed bandits, strengthening their operations.

Nigeria's military can take advantage of the ongoing tensions between these groups, but only if it does a better job of securing intelligence and starts to fight smarter while wasting fewer resources through corruption and mismanagement. Shekau's death changes, rather than reduces, the terrorist threat.

The battle ahead is a long one. ■



Fola Aina is a Doctoral Fellow at the African Leadership Centre, King's College London. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

# Where there is dirt, let there be soap



## Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Like sands through the hourglass, so are the daily headaches of life on the continent. And with all the dirty drama of the powers that be, no wonder soap operas are so popular with those of us who wish they'd clean up their act.

Bless them, but some of our leaders are trying. Not to clean up their act, but to get in on some of that soapie action. Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, for example, keeps auditioning for a leading role in *The Not-So-Young and the Restless*, while Mahamat Déby over in Chad is all about *Dynasty* (As opposed to *Déby does Dallas*, which would be dirty in a slightly different way).

Playing out in Mali at the moment is *A Coup within a Coup* or perhaps *The Bold and the Not-So-Beautiful in Bamako*. Just hours after announcing a new government that failed to feature any senior military officials, Mali's transitional president, Bah Ndaw, and prime minister Moctar Ouane were arrested and taken to

a military camp this week.

Shortly thereafter, the vice-president of the interim government (and former head of the junta that saw the end of the Ibrahim Bouabacar Keita presidency), Colonel Assimi Goïta announced he had fired them for failing to consult him on cabinet appointments (and supposedly violating the transitional charter) and also for mishandling tensions in the country.

Cue the dramatic music! Cue tense close-ups on ECOWAS, the African Union and the international community! (Is that a vein we see throbbing dramatically on Emmanuel Macron's forehead?)

Now, apparently, the detained transitioners have resigned. So many twists, so many turns.

Tune in next week to see who's in charge, who's back from the dead and which roles have once again been recast.

## Twist and shout

The best soaps are chock full of affairs, backbiting, secrets, lies and plot twists. Entertaining, perhaps, but surely it is best for such things to remain fictional?

If you're in charge of Zimbabwe's script, perhaps you disagree. Just this week, the country's high court ruled that President Emmerson Mnangagwa's

decision to extend the tenure of Chief Justice Luke Malaba was illegal.

But it seems Malaba decided to channel his inner Stefano DiMera, slipping back into his robes of justice and shimmying on over to his old office anyway – despite the court order. This then prompted the head of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, Musa Kika, to file an application to have His Judginess arrested.

Meanwhile, this episode's secondary storyline was playing out as the government unveiled a statue of Mbuya Nehanda – a national heroine in the fight against colonialism.

Honouring our heroes is important, of course. But the response of many Zimbabweans was along the lines of, “Yeaaaaaah... Imma stop you right there.” Clearly less impressed with the government than they are with Nehanda herself, critics took to social media to call out the state's handling of the economy, education, unemployment and a struggling health sector – suggesting that instead of paying lip service to the values of Mbuya Nehanda, the government might want to try to actually embody them?

## Lava's in the air

The Democratic Republic of Congo has had to put its many dramas aside as it deals with the tragedy and trauma of Mount Nyiragongo's volcanic eruption last Saturday.

Thirty-two people were killed and more than 20,000 are now homeless after the eruption, which saw a broad river of molten lava spill out and cut a fiery path

into the city of Goma at the foot of the volcano, releasing lethal gasses into the atmosphere and raining ash down on the surrounding countryside.

With aftershocks still rocking the area, and amid fears the volcano could erupt again, more than a million more people are being evacuated from the city.

In the nearly two decades since the volcano last erupted in 2002 – burying a fifth of the city under molten rock – the population of Goma has doubled to nearly two million people.

Alarming as this has been, we should also be alarmed that there was no alarm raised in advance.

Seismologists and volcanologists have been studying Mount Nyiragongo off and on, but their research and measurements have been interrupted by war, politics and corruption. The eruption came suddenly and without warning. But with less conflict and crime – and less petty drama – could there have been a warning?

Could lives have been saved?

Let our warring leaders take note: your squabbles and violent self-interest mean little when the earth itself awakes. Instead of leading us into conflict, please would you lead us to safety instead?

The days of our lives are few enough as it is. ■

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*Samira Sawlani is a journalist and analyst with a focus on East Africa. She holds an MA in international studies and diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and previously worked in the humanitarian aid sector.*

## THE BIG PICTURE

**Safe harbour:** The tranquil beauty of sunset at a beach in Pemba offers a moment's respite from the unrest in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province. Tens of thousands of people from across the region have sought refuge here from the violence and terror wreaked by religious insurgents across the northern province for more than three years. (Photo: John Wessels/AFP)

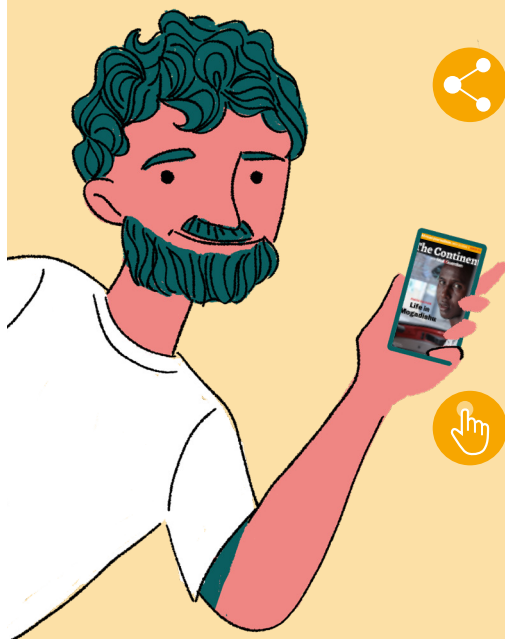


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