

# D+C

MONTHLY E-PAPER

DEVELOPMENT AND  
COOPERATION

ENTWICKLUNG UND  
ZUSAMMENARBEIT

D+C

E+Z

International  
Journal

ISSN  
2366-7257  
October 2019

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Once again, Argentina and Zimbabwe are in a downward spiral

## AMAZON

Fires draw attention to the threat facing the rainforest

## GENDER

South Africa is not preparing boys for responsible manhood



# Faith and politics

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## FOCUS

# Faith and politics

## South American identity politics

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro rose to power thanks to Evangelical as well as conservative Catholic voters. Carlos Albuquerque of Deutsche Welle spells out the implications. One of them is that the Catholic church is being split. **PAGE 16**

## Africa's syncretic pluralism

In Africa, religious pluralism has marked people's lives even after the arrival of Christendom and Islam. According to Samir Abi, who works for a non-governmental aid agency in Togo, those who demand dogmatic purity cause tensions. **PAGE 18**

## Development and religion

In Tanzania, the most important faith leaders have joined forces in calling for a social market economy, as journalist Lawrence Kilimwiko reports. Berthold Weig of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) explains why faith leaders and faith-based organisations are considered promising partners. Ulrich Nitschke, who heads the Secretariat of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, discusses the political ambivalence of religions: On the one hand, they can be used for power political purposes, on the other hand, they can contribute to achieving universal goals. **PAGES 20, 21, 23**

## Power struggles

Elections in December will show whether Sri Lankans opt for a Buddhist theocracy or prefer a liberal society and religious freedom. Anupama Ranawana-Collie, a theologian, and Arjuna Ranawana, a journalist, give an account of the island's recent history. As Maysam Behraves, a political scientist, argues, Iran and Saudi Arabia will have to accept denominational differences if tensions in the Persian Gulf are to be reduced. **PAGES 25, 28**

## Loving Israel, but hating Jews

In the USA, many Evangelicals endorse Christian Zionism. Their attitude tends to be anti-Semitic, and most of them voted for President Donald Trump. Jonathan Brenneman, a Palestinian American Christian, elaborates the background. Benjamin Balthaser, a professor of English at Indiana University, expresses the frustration he and many other American Jews feel in view of the close political alliance of Trump and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. **PAGES 30, 31**

## Common ground

In politics, there are two different ways to refer to religion. One is to pretend to be exerting God's will; the other is to spell out the ethics of one's faith. The first approach is dangerous and ultimately undemocratic, because it excludes anyone who does not belong to this particular faith. Moreover, it claims to be guided by something superior to democratic deliberation. The latter approach, by contrast, fits democratic principles. Its thrust is inclusive and typically prioritises the common good over special interests.

We are living in turbulent times. Right-wing populists have been gaining ground around the world. Often, though not always, they manipulate religious sentiments. Prominent examples include Narendra Modi in India and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Claiming to have a divine mandate, of course, makes it easier to do away with constitutional rules and conventions. Even US President Donald Trump, who is not known to observe Christian values, cultivates his ties to his Evangelical base.

It is fascinating to contrast how the populists act with the attitude of Pope Francis. His demeanour is humble rather than overly assertive. His attitude is one of acceptance, not of division. His message is based on the Bible, but is argued in such a reasonable way that it makes sense to people even if they do not belong to his church.

Faith leaders of many denominations take similar approaches. Political leaders can do so too. In India's independence struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, a devout Hindu, rallied people with an inclusive message of non-violent action. His less prominent ally was Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Pashtun Muslim. When the Camp David Peace Accords were signed in 1978, US President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egypt's President Anwar el-Sadat were all inspired by their respective faith. Carter is Protestant, Begin was Jew and Sadat Muslim. Indeed, all major faiths preach peace. They also foster ideas of justice and charity. Around the world, faith-based organisations are promoting literacy. Self-moderation is a common tenet, and yes, environmental sustainability requires us all to live within our means.

In past decades, international development agencies largely shied away from religion. To some extent, they cooperated with faith-based organisations, but they were basically guided by a misconception of secularism. The idea was that public agencies should stay completely clear of non-scientific belief systems. A healthier understanding is to keep an equidistance to belief systems. The point is that their ethical foundations have much in common. In attempts to bring about social change, it does not help to circumvent people's worldviews.

Religion shapes lives, and that is particularly so in developing countries. All religions can be used for identity politics. On the other hand, it does not make anyone cooperative if their faith is rejected, whereas referring to a religion's ethical principles can be quite effective. It therefore makes sense for development agencies such as Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development to reach out systematically to faith-based organisations and emphasise shared values.

We live on a small planet. If we want to live in peace, we must cooperate, and that includes faith communities. The motto of the Sustainable Development Goals resonates among them. It is to leave no one behind.

► You'll find all contributions of our focus section plus related ones on our website – they'll be compiled in next month's briefing section.



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## Debate



### Yet another economic tsunami

Mthuli Ncube, Zimbabwe's minister of finance, has stopped the publication of inflation statistics. That step showed how dramatic the economic crisis has become. As journalist Jeffrey Moyo reports, the inflation rate had risen to more than 170 % this summer.

PAGE 8

## Tribune



### Amazon region at risk

Huge forest fires have made the international community aware of the dangers South America's most important ecosystems are exposed to. The political background is obvious, writes Carmen Josse of Fundación EcoCiencia, the civil-society think tank based in Ecuador: Brazil's new government shows no interest in environmental protection, indigenous people or the rule of law.

PAGE 12

### Absent fathers

According to conventional norms, men are supposed to be strong and assertive. Ideas of responsible adulthood are often neglected. Making matters worse, male teenagers lack prospects in South Africa due to dismal socioeconomic circumstances. Sonwabiso Ngcowa, a creative writer and social scientist, assesses the situation.

PAGE 11





Overcrowded refugee boat on the Mediterranean Sea near the coast of Libya.

#### REFUGEE POLICY

## More money better spent

How countries should address flight and migration is one of the most urgent questions of our time. Never before have so many people left their homelands either by choice or by necessity. At the same time, countries around the world are less and less willing to take in refugees. A study by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) recommends to ramp up financing for refugee aid and the funds to be used more efficiently.

By Sabine Balk

Migration and the intake of refugees have been central topics of debate in the EU for years. Many states are refusing to step up and accept refugees and migrants. This is the reason why there are still no coherent, long-term solutions. The situation is not much different at the UN level. Despite the fact that

the UN has adopted two global compacts, one on refugees and, last December, one on migrants, these have not led to fundamental improvements. "The funding for refugees was also not substantially increased," criticise the authors of the SWP study (see also Focus section, D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/04).

According to the authors, there is insufficient data on financing and no way to precisely calculate what has been spent so far, since both humanitarian aid and official development assistance (ODA) flow to refugee relief. The study makes it clear, however, that the available funds cannot meet the present need. And without adequate financial resources, "no refugee policy can be effective," the researchers conclude.

They believe that different financing sources and instruments should be opened up, combined and applied in parallel. But first, they argue, ODA must be secured,

which means that all states in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) should meet the target of spending 0.7% of their gross national income on ODA. According to the authors, Germany could set a good example and increase its contributions.

Another opportunity to open up new sources of funding is so-called blended financing, in which public funds that are earmarked for development are combined with private or state loans. In other words, private donors invest in public goods. The European Fund for Sustainable Development is one example. It was established in 2017 and is administered by the European Commission.

Development banks and international financial institutions have worked for years with this "leverage" of public funds. But so far, according to the study, it has been unclear whether and to what degree blended finance actually contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development. The problem with these instruments, the authors argue, is that donors do not see sufficient rates of return from such investments.

Another important instrument to increase funding for refugee assistance could

be expanding concessionary loans and subsidies. These are publicly supported loans provided by development banks at favourable rates. In the past, these types of loans were only granted to low-income countries. However, a large portion of refugees have been taken in by middle-income countries like Jordan or Lebanon. That is why the World Bank changed its way of thinking and, in response to the crisis in Syria, decided to help these countries with concessionary loans. According to the authors, another advantage of these loans is that they can offer support in a very targeted way, for instance when it comes to refugee assistance.

Pooled funds are also an important method of financing humanitarian aid. Multiple donors pay into a fund that is managed by an international organisation, thereby allowing humanitarian aid and development efforts to be better aligned. The authors see potential here that could be further exploited.

Over the past decade or two, “new” donors like China, Brazil, India or Russia have stepped onto the scene. The established OECD states view them with scepticism. But the SWP experts see triangular cooperation between OECD countries, new donors and developing countries as a “very promising approach” (also see Luiz Ramalho et al. in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/07, Focus section). For instance, funding from rich countries could be combined with the expertise of the new donors to reduce poverty. The authors believe that OECD countries should also cooperate with philanthropic donors, who are assuming an increasingly important role in development financing as well.

### GREATER EFFICIENCY

The researchers see the lack of efficiency with which money for refugee aid is applied as a major problem. The way to solve it, in their view, is to strengthen transparency

and accountability in the allocation and use of funds. In order to do that, ownership and participation should be fostered in host countries. Therefore the authors conclude that local and national refugee aid organisations should receive more funding. Furthermore, refugees and internally displaced people should be included more in the implementation of measures. These actions would result in better targeted, more cost-effective and more sustainable aid.

In sum, the researchers believe that it would be advisable to provide prompt, multi-year funding that is more needs-oriented and not earmarked for a specific purpose.

#### LINK

Angenendt, S., et al., 2019: Mehr Flüchtlinge, unzureichende Finanzmittel (available only in German).

[https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2019S16\\_adt\\_EtAl.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2019S16_adt_EtAl.pdf)

## Education as a central driver

According to the UN, the number of migrants hit an all-time high in 2018. Around 258 million people live in another country, around 71 million of whom are refugees. The majority of migrants emigrate to look for work elsewhere. A study by the Berlin Institute for Population and Development analysed global migration trends in every world region.

The authors write that people’s decision to migrate depends on many factors. Top on the list are the fundamental desire to live a different life and the search for freedom, security and a better income. Most people move only a short distance, often within their own countries or to a neighbouring country. Only a small portion of people travel to a different world region, like

Europe, the researchers emphasise.

They give an overview of the factors that lead people to emigrate and identify large population growth as the most important factor. With rising numbers of people, the competition increases for food, housing, jobs and so on. This trend is affecting above all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa).

The authors write that education is another central driving force for migration. The higher a person’s education level, the greater the likelihood that he or she will be able to build a new life somewhere else. Usually it is better-educated people who decide to emigrate. The researchers do not consider political attempts

to address the “root causes of migration” through development very promising: “This is because development and better income opportunities will initially enable more people to organise and finance a migration.” However, they write that education does slow migration over the longer term. Another important factor, according to the study, is the desire for economic improvement. However, the likelihood of migration across national borders only increases starting at a per capita gross domestic product of the equivalent of \$2,000 per year, which the poorest countries are nowhere near reaching.

Other driving forces for migration include conflicts and political factors, as well as environmental changes that have a serious impact on living conditions. According to the researchers’ analysis, networks in the diaspora and a country’s migration policy also encour-

age people to move. People who have already migrated and built networks in their host countries attract more migrants. Countries’ policies towards immigrants can also encourage or limit migration. Since the EU has sought to stem migration following the large influx of refugees in 2015, the number of people seeking protection has fallen dramatically.

According to surveys, 750 million people – 15% of the world’s adult population – could imagine moving to a different country. At 33%, the desire to migrate was highest in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. (sb)

#### LINK

Berlin Institute for Population and Development, 2019: Destination Europe. The future of global migration (executive summary): [https://www.berlin-institut.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Europa\\_als\\_Ziel/BI\\_Mercator\\_Kurzfassung\\_en\\_final.pdf](https://www.berlin-institut.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europa_als_Ziel/BI_Mercator_Kurzfassung_en_final.pdf)



## DIASPORA

## “We are the host society”

**Diaspora organisations for Africans in Germany do valuable work helping to settle and integrate refugees and migrants. And they want politicians to recognise and appreciate the fact. However, diasporans are also hugely important for the development of their own countries of origin.**

By Sabine Balk

“People do not leave their homeland because they want to live on welfare benefits in Germany. They do so because they are desperate” – clear words from Tzehaie Semere, a project consultant at the regional development network EPN Hessen. His organisation provides advice, project development and networking for migrant and diaspora groups – with the aim of strengthening those groups and increasing their political influence.

Semere believes there is an urgent need for that aim to be addressed, in view of the growing hostility to foreigners in Germany and the gradual rise of the right-wing populist party AfD. Migrants need a stronger media voice, Semere says, and they need to talk about their ordeals, motivations and goals in life. Semere’s work is supported by many diaspora groups. One of them is Maisha, an African women’s self-help organisation in Germany.

Maisha’s general manager is Virginia Wangare Greiner, a Kenyan social worker who has been living in Germany since 1986 and was awarded the prestigious Federal Cross of Merit in 2006. She is well aware of the cares and concerns of fellow African women as well as their hopes and dreams. Today, Maisha offers advice to more than just African women on issues of migration, integration or repatriation; it also runs a humanitarian “clinic” for the City of Frankfurt, where anyone without health insurance or papers can go for help and advice.

Wangare Greiner wants to help migrants become emancipated and take their place as confident members of German society. But she also calls for more government programmes to promote migrant organi-

sations as well as structural support in the form of premises, furnishings and equipment. She also emphasises the importance of the impact migrants have on the development of their countries of origin: “Development policymakers have only recently recognised, for instance, how important our remittances are for Africa.” According to the World Bank, those remittances have long

politicians to acknowledge and respect us as donors.”

The support Maisha provides for migrants’ countries of origin is not just financial; the organisation also recently opened an office in Ghana to advise and assist returnees. “We offer microloans and advice to help women set up small businesses and manufacturing operations that will provide them with a livelihood.” The products the women make will shortly be sold in Germany through an online shop.

The African organisations’ fundamental message is that they are committed to fighting exclusion and racism and intend to raise public awareness of their achieve-



Virginia Wangare Greiner of Maisha has the ear of top politicians: here she talks to German Chancellor Angela Merkel during the 2018 Integration Summit at the Federal Chancellery.

run at three to four times the total volume of official development assistance (ODA).

With the money that is transferred home from Europe, families set up small businesses and thus support the national economy. That is not sufficiently appreciated, says Virginia Wangare Greiner: “We want

ments. One little-known aspect is highlighted by Tzehaie Semere of EPN: “Where do refugees and migrants go when they come to Germany?” They do not go to German families but to the families and groups of their compatriots. So, as Semere points out: “We are the host society!”

## Protecting ancestral land

The indigenous Waorani people in the Ecuadorian Amazon have won a landmark lawsuit against government bodies. But their fight to protect their territory against mining is not over yet.

The Waorani have taken the Ministry of Energy, the Secretary of Hydrocarbons and the Ministry of Environment to court for violating their rights. They claimed that the consultation process conducted before putting their territory up for an international oil auction was flawed.

Over the past two decades, Ecuador has divided a large portion of its Amazon forests into blocks to lease the mineral rights, specifically for oil, in international auctions. Oil plays a very important part in Ecuador's economy. It has contributed to most of the country's growth between 2006 and 2014, before the oil prices collapsed. On the other hand, the oil-rigging activities negatively affected indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest: their habitat was contaminated, and communities were displaced.

Both national and international laws state that a free, prior and informed consultation process must be conducted before the planning of any extraction process on or near territories belonging to indigenous groups. In 2012, the consultation process – which never mentioned the expected environmental effects – with several indigenous groups including the Waorani had led to the division of the Amazon rainforest area in Ecuador into 16 different oil blocks for sale purposes.

Nemonte Nenquimo, one of the Waorani plaintiffs and representative of the Coordinating Council of the Waorani Nationality Ecuador Pastaza (CONCON-AWEP), says that the consultation process was conducted “for the sake of being conducted” and that it was “tokenistic”. “We fought in court so that no one can enter our territory for petrol. We want to save our territory and our jungles. They are our children's heritage,” Nenquimo says.

Due to the recent ruling in favour of the Waorani, 52 mining concessions along the Aguarico river were cancelled. This helps to protect half a million acres of Waorani territory in the Amazon rainforest from being earmarked for oil drilling.

According to the local non-governmental organisation Amazon Frontlines, which had provided legal support to the Waorani, the verdict provides an “invaluable legal precedent for other indigenous nations across the Ecuadorian Amazon”.

However, the Ministry of Energy plans to appeal against the decision.

In the meantime, the Waorani people keep on fighting. They have been organising regular protests in Quito, the capital city, and recently launched “Waorani Resistance”, a global campaign to get 500,000 people to sign a declaration to defend the rainforest. That would be one person for every acre that the Waorani are protecting.

### LINK

**Amazon Frontline – Waorani Resistance:**  
<https://waoresist.amazonfrontlines.org/>



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## IMPRINT

D+C DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

Vol. 46, 2019

D+C is the identical twin of the German edition E+Z

Internet: [www.DandC.eu](http://www.DandC.eu)

D 12 107 ISSN 0721-2178

D+C Development and Cooperation is funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and commissioned by ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL. D+C does not serve as a governmental mouthpiece. Our mission is to provide a credible forum of debate, involving governments, civil society, the private sector and academia at an international level. D+C is the identical twin of E+Z Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit, the German edition.

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### PUBLISHER:

FAZIT Communication GmbH

Executive directors: Peter Hintereder and Hannes Ludwig

ADDRESS OF THE PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL OFFICE:  
Frankenallee 71–81, D-60327 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

This is also the legally relevant address of all indicated as responsible or entitled to represent them in this imprint.

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Art direction: Sebastian Schöpsdau

Layout: Jan Walter Hofmann

Translators: Malcom Bell, Claire Davis

Disclaimer according to § 5,2 Hessian Law on the Freedom and Rights of the Press: The shareholders of the company are Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung GmbH (40 %) and Frankfurter Societät GmbH (60 %).

### ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE:

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c/o InTime Media Services GmbH

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### PRINTING:

Westdeutsche Verlags- und Druckerei GmbH

Kurhessenstraße 46

D-64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf, Germany

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### PRICES (INCL. MAILING CHARGES):

single issue: € 2.20

annual subscription, Germany: € 14.00

annual subscription, world: € 18.00



## INFLATION

# Yet another economic tsunami

**Mthuli Ncube, Zimbabwe's finance minister, told the National Statistics Agency to stop publishing inflation data in August. That was a clear sign of economic crisis. Indeed, the inflation rate had reached more than 170% in summer.**

**By Jeffrey Moyo**

When consumer prices rise so fast, people's savings lose their value. Poverty is worsening once again. Inflation was actually even worse a decade ago. Back then, money was being devalued at an astronomical rate of more than 200 million per cent. The authorities only got a grip on the problem by entirely abandoning the national currency. Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai adopted the US dollar instead. He was serving an awkward coalition government under then-President Robert Mugabe, who recently passed away. He was an autocratic strongman who stayed in power for almost four decades.

Zimbabwe has not had the currency of its own since 2009. Nonetheless, problems are increasing again. Two years ago, Mugabe was ousted by the military. The reason was that he had tried to install his wife Grace as his successor. Emerson Mnangagwa, his deputy of many years, and other leading members of ZANU-PF, the ruling party, disagreed. Mnangagwa is now president.

Earlier this year, the government banned the use of the dollar. The main problem was that it had been becoming scarce for quite some time. At the end of Mugabe's reign, the government had introduced dollar-denominated bonds to make up for the shortfall, but as people preferred real greenbacks to those bonds, the latter's black market exchange rate kept deteriorating. The government later introduced a digitised equivalent called RTGS dollar, with RTGS standing for real-time gross settlement. The exchange-rate problem persisted. The US dollar kept appreciating.

Therefore, the government this year decided that neither the dollar nor other foreign currencies should be used for payments

in Zimbabwe. That decision accelerated the crisis, so the country is now engulfed in another economic tsunami, which still seems to be gathering momentum. It is making headlines and repelling potential foreign investors. People are angry, with many struggling to afford even the most basic food.

At the same time, the government is showing ever less respect for human rights in desperate attempts to stay in control of things. Violent force has been used to crush protests, with people being killed and wounded. One thing that is particularly

consumer goods are imported, either from neighbouring countries or further beyond. The dollar prices are comparatively stable, so nobody really wants to be stuck with fast depreciating monetary items of merely national relevance.

The government, of course, uses those items, and that means that its workers' wages have been rendered worthless. Civil servants have heard promises that they will get better pay, but up to early September, that has not happened. The situation is similarly tough for people in formalised private employment.

Back in 2009, the response to hyperinflation was the shift to the US dollar. In a similar setting today, the government is commandeering the public to revert to a so far only improvised local currency. The policy is unconvincing, to put it mildly. As John



**Hyperinflation made the old Zimbabwean dollar worthless ten years ago.**

awkward is that Zimbabweans do not know what currency they are supposed to be using. Neither the bond notes nor the RTGS dollar are a real currency. The first exist on paper, the second is electronic. The government has announced that they will reintroduce the Zimbabwean dollar, but so far, that has not happened. For the time being, the authorities consider the bond notes and the RTGS dollar Zimbabwe's legal tender.

In spite of the ban, the US dollar and other foreign currencies are still being used in secret. Not only informal traders prefer it to the domestic alternatives. About 90% of employment is in the informal sector, which only allows most people meagre livelihoods, but is largely unsupervised by government agencies. It also matters that many

Robertson, an economist who writes the Zimbabwe Situation blog, has stated: "The value of the currency is supported by its exports and foreign currency reserves which we do not have." Unless the country shores up its act on both fronts, he warned, "we will not be able to support a currency". Tendai Biti, a former finance minister, agrees: "There are no fundamentals for a new currency."

Zimbabwe's economic troubles do not look as though they will be over soon.



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## ELECTIONS

# New president, old problems

**On 27 October, Argentina will elect a new president. He will face old problems: recession, inflation and foreign debt. Reforms are needed, including to the political system.**

**By Jorge Saborido**

A preliminary presidential election was held in Argentina in August. The outcome was surprising: the incumbent, Mauricio Macri, lost decisively against Alberto Fernández of the Peronist party. Fernández' running mate is Macri's predecessor, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner – popularly known as “Cristina” – and it was basically due to her many mistakes and scandals that Macri won the presidency four years ago.

Argentina is in a serious crisis once again, and that usually helps the opposition in an election. That is especially so if the majority of citizens are bearing the brunt. The relationship with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the country's main creditor has become difficult, and it seems to be inevitable that the current government or its successor will have to restructure liabilities. At the same time, the national currency is depreciating fast. Macri has not offered any real solutions. He struggles merely to explain the countermeasures that his administration has taken. At times when no solution is in sight, slogans like “This is

the only way” are simply not enough. Many middle-class voters have therefore backed off from Macri.

Meanwhile the opposition is re-interpreting history to its advantage. On the campaign trail, Fernández likes to say that Néstor Kirchner, another Peronist, pulled the country out of the 2001/02 crisis. Kirchner was Cristina's husband and predecessor. He was in office from 2003 to 2007 and died in 2010. Fernández was his chief of staff.

Fernández' version of Argentina's most recent history conveniently skips three important issues:

- The mountain of debt that led to the 2001/02 crisis was amassed under Carlos Menem, a Peronist president.
- Néstor Kirchner came to power after Argentina had declared default and the economy couldn't possibly get any worse. After default, moreover, he was no longer bound by IMF conditionalities (see my essay in the Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/09).
- Under Néstor Kirchner, the economy flourished due to strong international demand for commodities, especially soybeans, but the favourable conditions were not used to start structural reforms.

Global commodity demand is currently weak, and under the government of Cristina inflation grew and economic

growth stopped. As a consequence, Macri was forced to turn to the IMF once more. In response to its demands, he balanced the national budget, albeit at a high price: high foreign debt, lower wages for public servants and cuts to social services.

Argentina's next government will face the same old problems: recession, inflation, foreign debt and great economic volatility. Together they add up to Argentina's fundamental problem: the country is incapable of taking in enough money to cover its expenses. Néstor Kirchner made no significant progress in this regard. He only brought about temporary improvements in living conditions.

What is needed now is tax reform, pension reform and fresh momentum in the education sector. In order to accomplish that, Argentina will need a new understanding of the role of the state. However, conservatives like Macri always only want to reduce its size, while Peronists pretend it can pay for everything.

Argentina's political system is dysfunctional. Since the introduction of democracy in 1983, only Peronist presidents have lasted an entire term in office. Their party is an instrument of power that always leaves its elected successors with such enormous problems that they are doomed to failure. The Peronists then use that failure to present themselves as the only legitimate political force. Macri will probably become the first non-Peronist president who has barely managed to complete a term in office. But he was doomed by what he inherited nonetheless.

For a long time, Fernández and Cristina were actually opponents. Now they have put their differences aside so they can rise to power again. Peronists must surely bare the blame for Argentina's democratic era being marked by political instability and – even more – economic and social decline.

Nevertheless, people seem to want to give that party another chance. The big question is whether it is possible at all to change a dynamic that, in the eyes of the world, has made Argentina a country associated with decline.



**Supporters of Alberto Fernández celebrate his victory in the preliminary election.**



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## ELECTIONS

# Nkurunziza rules out running again

**There is tension in the air as Burundi prepares for next year's elections. The date has been set for 20 May. President Pierre Nkurunziza will not run for re-election. The plan to make civil servants pay for the election has caused irritation however.**

**By Mireille Kanyange**

The country's civil servants were shocked when, at the end of 2017, the Ministries of Finance and Internal Affairs issued a joint decree that required them to contribute financially to the elections. According to the decree, a portion of government employees' salaries was to be withheld for a period of two years starting in January 2018. This money was deducted even though the decree stated elsewhere that contributions to election funding were supposed to be voluntary.

There was therefore a collective sigh of relief when President Nkurunziza announced that the necessary funding for the elections was almost in place and thanked everyone who had donated. "Since we have raised close to the target amount, further participation is strictly voluntary," said the president on 30 June during a speech commemorating the 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Burundi's independence.

## TENSIONS ACROSS THE ENTIRE COUNTRY

The total cost of next year's elections is still unknown. CENI, the independent national election commission, announced in June that it had submitted a budget proposal to the Ministry of Finance. Christian Kwizera, the ministry's spokesperson has said that the equivalent of approximately \$33 million has been made available. Five years ago, however, the entire election process cost over \$60 million.

Presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections are scheduled for 20 May 2020. Politicians are pleased that they are all being held on the same date. Others have voiced criticism. For example Julien Nimubona, a political scientist, argues that

the election of a president for a seven-year term is of national importance, so it should not be linked to electing members of parliament in specific constituencies and local government leaders in the municipalities. A second round of voting for the presidency is likely, and Nimubona warns that the results of the other elections might be declared void, depending on how other parties than the one of the future president fared in them.

Across the country, supporters of the ruling party, CNDD-FDD, and the most im-

Another party, Sahwanya Frodebu has complained that authorities have banned its meetings and that some of its members were arrested. Aimée Laurentine Kanyana, the minister of justice, has called on all the country's judges to pursue cases of political intolerance. "No one is above the law," she said.

Incumbent President Nkurunziza declared in December that he would not run for re-election, which surprised even some of his fellow party members. The decision was confirmed in May, and the CNDD-FDD announced that there would also be a new party head. It is still unclear who that will be.

In 2015, Nkurunziza ran for an unconstitutional third term, triggering mass protests. The security forces suppressed rallies in the then-capital of Bujumbura, sometimes violently. Many Burundians fled



**In 2018, Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza had the constitution changed to allow himself more terms in office. He is pictured here after casting his vote for the referendum. Now he has announced that he will not run for re-election.**

portant opposition party, CNL, view each other with hostility. Tensions are running particularly high in the provinces of Ngozi, Muyinga and Kirundo in northern Burundi and Makamba in the south. Some local party headquarters have already been destroyed, for instance the office of the CNDD-FDD in the province of Cibitoke and the office of the CNL in Nyabiraba, a municipality in the province of Bujumbura. Tharcisse Nyongabo, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, blamed the latter attack on CNL members themselves. The party denied that accusation.

into exile. In 2018, Nkurunziza instigated a change to the constitution that would allow the president seven terms in office as opposed to the previous limit of two (see also my article in the Debate section, D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/07). Many people in Burundi still find it hard to believe that the president is indeed stepping down.



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SOCIALISATION

# Absent fathers

**Social conventions tend to emphasise that men should be tough and assertive, but traditions of caring fatherhood are being lost. At the same time, economic circumstances often do not offer the young men good opportunities. In South Africa, this mix has a destructive impact on the expectations with which boys grow up.**

By Sonwabiso Ngcowa

My first child, my beautiful daughter, was born on 20 August 2018. While I was massaging her mother's back to help her through labour pains, one of the nurses asked me whether I was really staying for the birth. My response was that I was staying throughout. "Even at the delivery ward?", she wanted to know, and I said: "Yes!" Her response was: "Xhosa men are not made to be in the delivery ward."

Xhosa speaking people are the second largest ethnic community in South Africa and are mostly found along the coast of the Indian Ocean between Port Elizabeth and Durban.

I stayed throughout my baby's arrival and had the honor of cutting her umbilical cord. It was a good experience for my partner and myself. We believe it should not be unusual. It should be the norm. One of the lessons I learned is that women can be tough and can bear a lot of pain, another is that their partners' support is comforting. Ultimately, being present is about sharing, which is more important than keeping the male and female realms apart.

As I have previously argued in D+C/E+Z (see focus section of e-Paper 2016/07), ideas of manhood are often distorted in our country. In this contribution, I'd like to discuss some of the dimensions.

The current patterns of gendered socialisation have deep roots in colonial history. Xhosa speaking people lost their land and cattle in centuries of frontier wars against Dutch and British colonisers and settlers. Xhosa men typically became migrants who worked in far-away mining towns. They were not allowed to bring their families with them. Under apartheid, the laws stayed repressive.

Xhosa boys therefore grew up in female-headed households. They lacked positive male role models. When fathers came back from the mines to stay, they typically suffered from silicosis and other lung diseases. The working conditions in the mines were terrible.

Even today, 25 years after the end of the white minority rule, almost half of South African children share their home with their mothers, but not the fathers. The reasons have changed, however. Today, many young men are unemployed and poor. They cannot marry because they cannot pay the traditional bride price. Making matters worse, they cannot afford the customary fee they are supposed to pay if they make a girl pregnant

out of wedlock. As a consequence, the girls' families will prevent these young fathers from having a relationship with the children.

Many children, moreover, are raised by their grandparents. The reason is that the parents or the single mother have to earn money.

In most cultures around the world, ideas of male adulthood are linked to the ability of earning a livelihood. In modern times, that ability typically hinges on academic achievements. Mainly private schools provide excellent education in South Africa. They are so expensive that they are out of reach for the vast majority of black people. Moreover, there are not enough of those schools to serve everyone. Many of the government-run schools are inferior. In some places, the student-teacher ratio is 90 to one. Buildings are often inadequate, and the schools also lack equipment. About half of South African youngsters never graduate from high school, and the majority of them are boys.



If boys are given toys at all, they tend to get plastic guns.



Drugs are commonly used, and youth crime is a serious problem. The news is full of murders. Sometimes, a young person is killed simply because someone else wants their cell phone. Videos of violent crime are spread on social media. In lack of prospects, some young men adopt a gang culture. No doubt, in many instances, South African society is not preparing young men in an appropriate way for adulthood.

It compounds the problem that boy children, if they are given toys at all, tend to get plastic guns. When I was young, we were poor and we made our toys ourselves. For instance, we built wire cars and drew landscapes with imaginary highways. That is still done today, but the idea of manhood seems evermore linked to violent behaviour.

Initiation traditions matter too. They are similar among various ethnic groups. Among the Xhosa, they include circumcision without anaesthetic. It is painful. Part of the agenda is to teach boys not to fear pain. The historical background is that Xhosa men were expected to be fighters, if the need arose.

This sense of toughness is still emphasised. However, the traditions were original-

ly about much more. Nelson Mandela, the freedom fighter who became South Africa's first black president, was probably the most prominent member of the Xhosa community ever. He wrote that initiation was meant to equip boys with the skills to be responsible men. That includes taking care of other people. Initiation schools traditionally take several weeks and serve to forge a sense of solidarity and cooperation, not mere toughness. Going forward, this is what we must focus on.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Our society would benefit from reconsidering gender roles. The stereotypes prevalent today are rooted in our brutal history of colonialism and apartheid. Injustices must be redressed, because without restitution, the majority of black men will continue to feel powerless. A top priority must be to provide equal and good formal education to all members of the young generation. All teachers must be well trained. At the same time, society needs to look gently at black youth, who are bearing considerable pain.

In some instances, state law is pointing in the right direction. For example, South Africa acknowledges the rights of the homosexual people – in contrast to some neighbouring countries (see Grace Badza in focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2019/07). Unfortunately, traditional cultures are often still hostile to gay and lesbian persons. Change is needed at the community level too.

More generally speaking, tribal cultures must adopt to the new times we live in. Insisting on unaffordable bride prices is destructive, for example. What really matters is to teach adolescents to become caring members of society. Parents, teachers, elders, traditional leaders cannot play their part in making that happen. And the more it does, the more Xhosa men will be present when expecting mothers go into labour in the delivery ward.



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### RAINFOREST

## Amazon region in danger

**Violent forest fires have drawn global attention to the threat facing the rainforest and other Amazon basin ecosystems. The political background is clear: Brazil's new government has little interest in environmental protection, indigenous people and the rule of law.**

By Carmen Josse

The Amazon region is home to the largest contiguous rainforest in the world, and its numerous waterways feed one of the world's largest rivers. The Amazon, its many tributaries and the rain that the forest generates through evaporation are vital to life in a region that furnishes 70% of South America's economic output.

The Amazon region is also home to indigenous people. Their land comprises 30% of the territory. Twenty-three percent of the total area is made up of nature preserves, intended to protect the region's unique biodiversity. Indigenous knowledge has enormous cultural value. And just like the Amazon's natural diversity, it is now being threatened as it never has been before.

Catastrophic fires have been raging in the region since August. The media reports have shocked the entire world. But the fires have a history, and they are not the only threat the region is facing.

Sixty-one percent of the Amazon region is located in Brazil. That's why what happens in Latin America's largest country is so important. At the beginning of this

year, Jair Bolsonaro took over the presidency (also see p. 16 of this e-Paper). Even during his campaign, he declared that he would further economically exploit the Amazon region and dismantle monitoring and regulations. Before that, protection measures had started to bear fruit. From 2005 to 2012, deforestation rates noticeably declined. They have climbed again somewhat since 2012, but are still nowhere near the level of previous years, when success could be attributed to several factors. The two most important were:

- Brazil's Ministry of the Environment upheld its responsibilities and carried out its obligations in international agreements like the Paris climate accord.
- Private soybean companies were willing to compromise. As international campaigns held them partially responsible for the enormous rates of deforestation, they agreed to a moratorium. They also announced that, starting in July 2006, they would no longer purchase soybeans that had been cultivated on clear-cut fields.

The moratorium was in effect until 2016. The private sector assumed that within that ten-year period, government policy and administration would create the necessary structures and regulations for the state to effectively monitor deforestation.

Since Bolsonaro took office, however, policy has changed. The new government has scaled back its monitoring and regulatory authorities and limited their reach. The same is true of all authorities that are responsible for climate issues. The government has also issued decrees entrusting the

will not be prosecuted and has promised to release protected indigenous land for agricultural use and the mining industry. The governments of some states are also contributing to the trend by reducing their employees' involvement in inspection operations.

## ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Unfortunately, it is not only Brazil's government that sees enormous potential in the Amazon region for agriculture and commodity extraction. All of the Amazon coun-

monitored by countries as part of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are adding increasingly to emissions both within and without protected areas. Seven of the nine Amazon countries are generating more emissions through degradation than through deforestation.

Fifty-eight percent of the forest carbon in the Amazon region is stored in indigenous territory and protected areas, but emissions from these forests currently make up only 10 % of the total. Nevertheless, it is clear that the trend towards less environmental protection and weakening indigenous rights and the rule of law will exacerbate global problems. In the region, it amounts to an existential threat to indigenous people and communities and their territories.

The fires in the Amazon and in other areas of the region have, thanks to extensive media reports, shaken people up around the world and led them to put pressure on their governments to do something about the catastrophe. Many have reacted with horror at the sight of the forests in flames. Bolsonaro's decision, in reaction to international outrage, to halt fire clearance for a few weeks was a PR manoeuvre that will not have much impact.

Seen objectively, the catastrophe clearly demonstrates the connection between deforestation and fire. Clearing the forests for agriculture, combined with longer dry seasons as a consequence of climate change, result in a vicious circle of less rainfall and more emissions. The forest is in fact losing its regenerative power. What is destroyed today cannot grow back within a few short years.

Bolsonaro's declared intention to destroy the lifestyles and economic activities of indigenous people in their territories and to open up the latter for agriculture will have international repercussions. These policies are destroying the enormous contributions that indigenous people can make to fighting climate change. The opportunities to limit global warming and ensure humanity a liveable future, are becoming fewer by the day.



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Forests in flames: here in Manicoré, in the Brazilian state of Amazonas.

Ministry of Agriculture, which normally acts in the interest of the agriculture lobby, with many decisions regarding the climate. It is now responsible for licensing, water resources and land issues such as the demarcation of indigenous territory. Bolsonaro has put the fox in charge of the hen house.

The situation is no better when it comes to international obligations. The government has shown no interest in fighting deforestation or creating sustainable economic alternatives for the region. The international Amazon Fund, which supported such efforts, has been suspended.

Instead, the government is actually promoting environmental crime. For instance, it has announced that illegal logging

tries have economic interests that strongly influence their national policies and lead to unsustainable use. However, the advantages will be short-lived, whereas the long-term negative consequences will be irreversible.

For decades, indigenous people and local Amazon communities have put the brakes on progressive deforestation and the associated rise in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which are causing global warming. About 73 million tonnes of carbon are stored in the forests of the Amazon region. New studies show, however, that forest conversion and the associated emissions are increasing, making the region a net source of emissions.

Furthermore, processes of forest degradation that are less noticeable and not



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## Faith and politics

From the developmental perspective, religion is ambivalent. On the one hand, it can be used for identity politics that divide societies and for populist agitation. On the other hand, all world religions share fundamental ethical principles and can thus contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). Dialogue and mutual understanding are essential.



This focus section pertains to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). It also has a bearing on the entire SDG agenda.

# Playing with religious identity

Politics and religion are closely intertwined in Brazil. When Jair Bolsonaro was campaigning for the presidency, he enjoyed strong support from Evangelical Christians. Many Catholics voted for him as well. As head of state, he uses his ambiguous religious identity to build a broad constituency and is exacerbating divisions within the Catholic church.

By Carlos Albuquerque

During the presidential election last year, Bolsonaro's approval ratings were much higher among members of Brazil's free and Pentecostal churches than among the general population. Catholics were also drawn to the right-wing populist, though to a far lesser degree. Bolsonaro won the second-

round vote with a good 55% against Fernando Haddad of the Workers' Party.

Bolsonaro was raised a Catholic, and is registered as such with the Superior Electoral Court, but he later had himself baptised by a Pentecostal church whose services he also regularly attends. His wife and children are Evangelicals too.

Bolsonaro's victory cannot simply be explained by his religious affiliations. He was also elected by a large majority of people in the south and of the educated and higher-earning people. Even about 30% of LGBTI people, who diverge from heterosexual norms, and almost half of Afro-Brazilians voted for Bolsonaro, even though he vilifies both sexual and ethnic minorities.

Moreover, an analysis of the distribution of votes must take into account the crisis

that the country is experiencing. It has permeated society as a whole. The people attribute this crisis to corruption and previous administrations headed by the Workers' Party. During the campaign, Bolsonaro managed to position himself as the antithesis to the "old politics".

Nevertheless, the support of the Pentecostal churches is important (see my contribution in D+C/E+Z 2013/05, p. 199), and Bolsonaro has always had them on his radar. In speeches, for example, he regularly quotes from the Bible. Three years ago, he and his three sons, Flavio, Carlos and Eduardo, had themselves baptised in the waters of the Jordan River in north-eastern Israel. The sons play important roles in politics.

For sociologist Christina Vital of the Fluminense Federal University (Universidade Federal Fluminense – UFF), this baptism was not simply an expression of Evangelical conversion. She recognises it as an attempt by the Bolsonaros to create an ambiguous religious identity for themselves. She says that the president presents "himself as a Catholic, but is married to an Evan-



Brazils' Catholic Bishops appreciate Pope Francis, their president does not.

gelical and was baptised in the waters of the Jordan". In Vital's eyes, the head of state is claiming a "divine mission" because he was able to achieve such prominence despite his declared personal "insignificance".

In a recently published study, Vital showed that, there was an increase of candidates who are officially Catholic but received major support from Evangelicals in the latest elections. She calls these politicians "allies of Evangelicals" (Aliados dos Evangélicos – ADE). In addition to Bolsonaro, this group includes the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel.

Experts estimate that Evangelicals now make up over 30% of Brazil's population. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, their share was a mere 6.6% in 1980. It had grown to 15.4% by 2000 and to 22.2% by 2010. The next census is scheduled for 2020.

According to Vital, the steady growth of Evangelical churches is a phenomenon that extends beyond religion: "It is expanding simultaneously in society and in centres of power like the media and among politicians at the federal, state and municipal level." The next step, she says, will be to reconfigure the judiciary to conform with Evangelical ideas. "That is not a vision for the future. It is happening now," Vital argues.

In early July, Bolsonaro invited Evangelical senators and representatives, who form their own cross-party block in Parliament, to a breakfast at the Planalto Palace, his official workplace. The meeting took place on the day after the first vote on pension reform, during which these senators and representatives demonstrated their full support of the president. At the breakfast, Bolsonaro promised to nominate a "super Evangelical" judge to the Supreme Court.

## WIDESPREAD CONSERVATISM

Around 166 million of Brazil's 210 million people claim to be religious. "Whether they are Catholic or Protestant, most religious people in Brazil are conservative," says Vital. Not all conservatives support authoritarianism, she explains, but many long for a return to social norms, the loss of which they blame on a leftist social agenda of protecting minorities and promoting diversity. According to Evangelicals, this agenda contradicts family values.

Conservatives see Bolsonaro as a defender of traditional norms. But whereas, for example, the influential Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus – IURD) with its founder, Edir Macedo, the owner of a media empire, at the head, openly appealed for support of Bolsonaro, the Catholic Conference of Brazilian Bishops (Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil – CNBB) did not take a clear position. Its former president, Cardinal Sérgio da Rocha, said in early 2018 that Catholics



should not support any candidate "who promotes violence and calls for solutions that could further exacerbate conflicts in Brazil". However, shortly thereafter the bishops published a declaration that made clear that the CNBB would not take a position on the presidential candidates.

On the other hand, Orani Tempesta, the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, received Bolsonaro in October of last year, ten days before the second-round vote. At that meeting, the presidential candidate promised "to defend the family, the innocence of the child in the classroom and religious freedom". He said he would fight against abortion and the legalisation of drugs.

That message was well received by conservative Catholics. The fact that he ultimately won a particularly large share of votes from this camp highlights the divisions within the Brazilian Catholic Church. The journalist Mauro Lopes wrote in an es-

say that the CNBB is maintaining a precarious balance: "Even though its leadership is oriented towards Pope Francis, it avoids any confrontation with powerful fundamentalists." The Pope, originally from Argentina, is a champion of the poor and social justice. He has also addressed the global climate emergency, which Bolsonaro denies.

Lopes also points out that former President Lula da Silva is Catholic. "But so far no bishop or CNBB delegation has visited him in Curitiba prison." He is serving a sentence for corruption. At the end of May, Pope Francis sent Lula a letter in which he wrote that, thanks to "the triumph of Jesus over death", people should believe that "in the end, good will overcome evil, truth will overcome lies and salvation will overcome condemnation".

At the beginning of May, Walmor Oliveira de Azevedo, the Archbishop of Belo Horizonte, was selected to be the new president of the Conference of Brazilian Bishops. His election is seen as a repudiation of the CNBB's widely anticipated shift to the right: the 65-year-old cardinal is considered a moderate and agrees with Pope Francis on many points.

The latter recently made himself unpopular among Bolsonaro supporters by convening a seminar to discuss the problems in the Amazon region. It is scheduled to take place from 6 to 27 October in Rome. According to a report by the newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo, the head of Brazil's secret service (Agência Brasileira de Inteligência – Abin), General Augusto Heleno, described the Amazon synod as "an interference in the internal affairs of Brazil" and said that "some of the items on this agenda are matters of national security". The government clearly feels that its national sovereignty in the region is under attack.

According to the same newspaper article, Heleno characterised the CNBB as a "potential opponent". Members of the government believe that the Brazilian bishops who are planning to attend the meeting in the Vatican are left-wing. As early as 2018, Bolsonaro said that the CNBB belongs to the "rotten part of the Catholic Church".



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# Religious pluralism serves peace and social cohesion

Since Christianity and Islam spread across Africa, many people there have observed a mixture of religious practices. That is anathema to the fundamentalist faith movements that have been gaining momentum in recent decades. All too often, the result is conflict and radicalisation.

By Samir Abi

On 12 May this year, some 20 armed men burst into a Catholic church in Dablo in the north of Burkina Faso during Sunday Mass. They burned crosses and other sacred objects and then shot dead the priest and five worshippers. The gunmen called on the congregation to change their religion. This was one of about a dozen terror attacks that Islamist extremists carried out in recent months in Burkina Faso. They targeted Christians as well as Muslims.

In Togo's capital, Lomé, vandals destroyed a number of mosques in July and August 2018. Investigations of the attacks are still going on. The perpetrators tore up copies of the Quran and reduced entire places of worship to smoking ruins. The incidents were widely reported in the media. Faith leaders of all major religions appealed to their followers to stand united against such assaults. Their message was that inter-religious conflict must be avoided.

Indeed, no religion calls for violence. They all preach moral standards. Nonetheless, conflicts between faith groups are growing around the world, from Myanmar to the USA. At the same time, African youth increasingly question Christianity and Islam, arguing that these religions were imported. Some people call for return to Africa's old and ancestral religions.

## PROTECTION AND PUNISHMENT BY SPIRITS

Since time immemorial, Africa's polytheistic societies have been shaped by religious pluralism. According to tradition, each community – sometimes even each household

– had its own guardian deity. In the case of family deities, the guardians were believed to be ancestors who had changed the course of family history by either an act of bravery or sacrifice. According to traditional African beliefs, the dead are never really dead. The living are surrounded by ancestral spirits, who offer protection, though they may also punish family members for violating traditional norms. Apart from family deities, there are also village deities.

The belief that supernatural forces are responsible for rainfall, flooding and forest wildlife led to the development of animist cults in Africa. Among other things, those cults helped to protect the environment. Respect for "divine" nature meant, for example, that it was unacceptable to clear forests excessively, pollute rivers and water sources or kill more animals than a family needed for food. With the spread of Christianity and Islam in Africa, those values were eroded.

The history of monotheistic religions in Africa dates back to Ancient Egypt. Pharaoh Akhenaten tried to restrict worship to a single deity. As part of the Roman empire, North Africa later became predominantly Christian. The Arab conquest then made it Islamic. In Abyssinia, present-day Ethiopia, a Jewish community built the first monotheistic temples, but Christian churches followed soon, and Islam spread to the region too. In North Africa and Abyssinia, the three big monotheistic communities mostly, though not always, co-existed peacefully.

Islam spread vigorously through Africa as a result of the Arab conquests of North Africa and Muslim trade caravans. The latter plied routes along the east coast and had contact with the peoples of the Sahel. The rise of Christianity began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and went along with slavery and European colonisation. The advance of these two religions in Africa was marked by conflict and bloodshed. As many people wanted to retain their cultic practices and social order, they resisted conversion.

Though Arabs and Europeans, with superior weapons, ultimately won, the traditional religions never quite disappeared. They merged with the new, monotheistic ones. Even today, it is not unusual for Africans to practise ancestor worship in a church or mosque. The combination of religious practices has long helped secure a degree of social peace. Adherents of animist belief systems, for instance, have no problem with the idea of handing over land for the construction of a church or mosque because it does not interfere with the exercise of their religion. Only with the advent of the new fundamentalist movements that reject any kind of syncretism, has Africa begun to experience violent religious extremism.

## BACK TO THE ROOTS

A major role in this development is played by the international fundamentalist movements that have proliferated in countries that have historically been centres of Christianity and Islam. They claim to return to the "original" forms of their respective faith. Thanks to foreign funding, such movements have spread in Africa. They vehemently oppose religious tolerance and syncretism even more.

Fundamentalism of different varieties has been growing fast thanks to clever propaganda, charismatic preachers and professionally made videos with a focused message. The rapid rise of Islamists and Evangelicals was facilitated by the precarious circumstances in which many Africans live. After independence, many countries failed to develop in both economic and social terms. The failure of intellectual, economic and political elites to improve people's lives along with the spread of corruption resulted in an unprecedented moral crisis. Opposition is often suppressed, so many people seek their salvation in religion.

Christian and Muslim fundamentalism is sold in churches and mosques as the solution to problems such as unemployment, poverty and corruption. Money that is mobilised in prosperous Christian or Muslim countries flows into humanitarian aid and funds faith-based education and related projects. The impact is that even some of the most sceptical have abandoned syncretic religious practices. Study grants and grants for travel to the fundamentalists move-

ments' countries of origin help indoctrinate new followers. The evident personal wealth of fundamentalist leaders, moreover, seems to prove to the faithful that they are on the right track.

### RADICALISATION THROUGH SUPPRESSION

The extreme rejection of syncretic cults by the fundamentalist movements is undermining peace in society. The conflicts they trigger often become violent. The support the movements enjoy from the political class is relevant too. As in other world regions, religion is used in Africa to claim and exert political power. Politicians and religious leaders forge alliances for mutual benefit. Some movements enjoy the protection of ruling politicians and can thus engage in

violence against other religious groups with impunity.

On the other hand, politicians crack down on religious movements that they perceive to threaten their power. This often ends in violent conflict, driving a movement's most radical supporters underground. Rebel groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria came into being in this way. The killing of their religious leader plunged the entire region into a bloody crisis, so millions of people became refugees.

Widespread suffering could have been prevented had a dialogue-based approach been taken instead of a repressive one. Dialogue is the best way to resolve political crises. A prerequisite, however, is to address an extremist group's crimes. Victims often find it hard to accept an amnesty for the perpe-

trators. So the emphasis needs to be on forgiveness, which opens the door to sincere dialogue. Transitional justice – which may, for example, include reparations for victims – facilitates forgiveness. And religion, too, plays an important role in the restoration of social peace. After all, it is love, forgiveness and peace that lead to heaven, not hatred and violence. Radical fundamentalists of whatever belief system need to be reminded of this simple religious truth.



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The Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa is the foremost place of worship of Ethiopia's Orthodox church.



# Praising the social market economy

**In Tanzania, the Interfaith Confederation, which includes Muslims as well as Lutheran and Catholic Christians, is concerned about growing social disparities. Its leaders do not want to see people being left behind.**

**By Lawrence Kilimwiko**

The Interfaith Confederation has expressed itself in favour of Tanzania adopting a social market economy following the German model. The social market economy combines a capitalist system with safety nets and social infrastructure that prevent or at least alleviate poverty. The model requires strong social protection policies and legal provisions that ensure opportunities for all.

In contrast to socialism, the state is neither supposed to plan nor control investments, labour, production and distribution of goods. However, prudent regulation must ensure a healthy business environment. Policies guiding issues such as taxes, competi-

tion, social protection, education or trade must serve this purpose.

In Tanzania, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), which is close to Germany's Christian Democrats, has recently published a book on the issue. It was written by a team of experts who were coordinated by the Interfaith Confederation. An author from the KAS was involved too. The Interfaith Confederation has announced that it has decided it will henceforth pay more attention to economic affairs in general. Indeed, both Christendom and Islam are marked by ideas of social justice, charity and opportunities for all.

Faith leaders were present at the book launch in Dar es Salaam. Sheikh Hassan Kabhehe, head of the Tanzania Muslim Council in the northwestern Mwanza region, said: "Religious leaders have a responsibility of responding in shaping the economy as economies are part of religion, which is in itself not all about spiritual issues only."

As an independent nation, Tanzania has tested other economic models in recent decades. In 1967, the government opted for what it called "African Socialism". The idea was that state control of the production of forces would lead to equality and prosperity. It failed, as became absolutely obvious by the time the Soviet Union collapsed.

In 1992, Tanzania therefore adopted the free market economy and liberalised foreign trade. The emphasis was on private sector development, but most Tanzanian businesses could neither keep up nor cooperate with their international competitors. Moreover, they were not allowed to attract foreign investors.

The free market economy has not delivered the desired results. Social disparities are growing, and poverty is widespread. The country has almost 60 million people, but it only ranked number 159 on the UNDP's Human Development Index last year. The index reflects per capita income, life expectancies and educational achievements.

The new book endorses the social market economy because this model brought about Germany's economic miracle after World War II. The authors argue that, adapted to Tanzanian circumstances, it should facilitate inclusive and sustainable development.

Tanzania's top faith leaders agree that they have shied away from economic questions for too long. The Interfaith Confederation acknowledges that social services and economic activity need to be reconciled. Father Charles Kitima, the executive secretary of the Catholic Tanzania Episcopal Conference, argues that by adopting the social market approach, the country can become strong economically and competitive in regional and international markets. Stephen Munga, the Lutheran Bishop who chairs the Interfaith Confederation, says: "We don't want to see anyone left behind."

## BOOK

**KAS-Tanzania, 2019: Social market economy model for Tanzania: Towards inclusive and sustainable economic development – Smet model.**



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Faith leaders are now taking an interest in economic affairs: Lutheran service in Lushoto in Tanzania.





Interreligious cooperation is very important. Breaking the fast during Ramadan in Groningen, Netherlands.

## Ambitious mission

**In Germany, policymakers noticed the potential of cooperating with religious communities for development purposes long ago. They want faith-based institutions to become partners in achieving sustainable development.**

By Berthold Weig

Many people in secularised Europe forget that we live in a world that is shaped by religion. It is only fair to say that the global south is very religious. But people in industrialised countries too consider themselves very religious and not only in the USA, Canada or Switzerland. An essentially religious outlook has impacts on how people live. It plays a major role in processes of change. Development policy is about improving lives, building institutions and boosting economic activity in developing countries. It would be wrong to ignore religious communities in this context.

State actors in Germany have realised the need for action. For decades, religious communities and their representatives were side-lined and not considered good partners for official development assistance (ODA). The guiding idea was that cooperation with faith-based agencies would fly in the face of the religious and ideological neutrality of the state. As a result, development policymakers missed opportunities to get important civil-society partners on board.

In 2014, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) started to take remedial action. The starting point was that faith communities matter for achieving development objectives because they reach masses of people and are powerful multipliers. This is one of the reasons why church-run aid agencies tend to be rather successful.

The BMZ laid the foundations for cooperation with religious organisations in 2016. They are spelled out in the strategy pa-

per entitled "Religions as partners in development cooperation". It lists ten essential measures. They include amongst others:

- gaining new partners – stepping up cooperation with religious actors,
- developing networks – strengthening religious aid organisations' capacities,
- raising religious literacy,
- factoring in religion and
- joining forces – forging an international alliance.

Faith-based actors are powerful civic forces. They work in diverse ways to promote sustainable development. The BMZ's response is to cooperate with religious communities on implementing action to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The idea is certainly not to support missionaries. In scope and orientation, BMZ cooperation is not denominational. The addressees are not simply the established Christian partners. Indeed, people and organisations of other religions are just as welcome, and they are paid particular attention.

### CHALLENGING TASK

We are still at a fairly early stage of leveraging religious communities' potential for

international cooperation. However, important steps have been taken and a great deal has been achieved (see box below). We appreciate that we have launched a challenging and perhaps even audacious programme. A precondition for cooperation with religious communities, religious actors and faith-based organisations (FBOs) is that the German government does not support or promote religious activities but only civic and socio-political engagement. There must be neither religious nor ideological bias.

German development policy is indeed neutral in religious and ideological terms, but it is value-based nonetheless. Our work is geared to the criteria of sustainability, rule of law – with a special emphasis on human rights – and respect for democratic principles. On this basis, we endorse the fundamental right of religious freedom. It needs to be secured and guaranteed worldwide, not least in view of religious communities' potential for contributing to SDG achievement.

## WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

We want to join forces with religious communities, relevant faith-based actors and FBOs as partners and break new ground in collaboration with them. We want to make the huge potential visible – and tap it. The focus is not so much on an inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue – in which the BMZ, as a secular government agency, does not engage. We focus on development-oriented, socio-political debate with religious communities, their leaders and FBOs. Such dialogue increasingly leads to inter-faith cooperation. We support that trend because it generates positive social capital and helps to shape policymaking and business in the global south in partnership with principled players who have the capacities to make major contributions.

Interest in what links development and religious faith has increased significantly in recent years at both EU and UN

level. We want to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by these partnerships – across the development community and among the general public.

### LINK

**BMZ strategy paper, 2016: Religionen als Partner in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (Religions as partners in development cooperation – only in German).**

[https://www.bmz.de/de/mediathek/publikationen/reihen/infobroschueren\\_flyer/infobroschueren/Materialie275\\_religionen\\_als\\_partner.pdf](https://www.bmz.de/de/mediathek/publikationen/reihen/infobroschueren_flyer/infobroschueren/Materialie275_religionen_als_partner.pdf)



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# What we are doing

Since 2014, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has been working on the promotion of cooperation with religious communities, their leaders and faith-based organisations (FBOs). This approach is new, and the strategy is as follows:

## 1. RAISE AWARENESS

Everyone involved in development cooperation (DC) must be sensitised for cooperation with religious communities and faith-based actors. We must boost awareness of the intrinsic potential. The aim is to consider and involve religious communities in development programmes and projects – both in those that are ongoing and those that are being planned. Development workers now take part in train-

ing courses on how to deal with religious actors and boost their developmental impacts.

Guidance on public DC as a whole is also provided in the BMZ-commissioned sector project "Values, religion and development". Demand for this is growing in all areas.

## 2. PILOT AND BEACON PROJECTS

The first results of cooperation with religious communities and religious actors are now tangible. We have identified and implemented pilot projects, creating so-called beacons with significant and visible impacts. A good example is the iDove project (Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism). In an intensive exchange under professional guidance, young peace activists

from Africa and Europe train one another in methods and procedures for tackling extremism and preventing radicalisation, especially among youth. The participants have widely differing religious backgrounds. They become highly relevant multipliers, returning home as trainers and conveying what they have learned from others.

## 3. COOPERATION IN THE PARAD NETWORK

In 2017, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) was established at the BMZ's instigation (also see interview with Ulrich Nitschke next page). Within the PaRD network, state and multilateral actors cooperate at an international level to help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The partnership profits from the diversity of its members and the massive capacities and

reach of the religious actors involved. PaRD membership now runs to 107 organisations (as of August 2019), which include government agencies (BMZ, USAID, Global Affairs Canada, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, NoRAD), multilateral organisations (World Bank, KAICIID) as well as faith-based agencies, civil-society organisations and academic institutions (ACT Alliance, Catholic Relief Services, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Buddhist Relief, Misereor, Sant'Egidio).

The PaRD is organised in work-streams that tackle specific SDGs: health (SDG 3), gender equality and empowerment (SDG 5), environment and climate (SDGs 6, 13, 14, and 15) and sustaining peace (SDG 16).

Today, the PaRD network has nodes in many places all over the world. It is a pioneer in terms of linking faith and development. (bw)



# The ambivalence of religions

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) was launched five years ago in response to a German initiative. The network includes government bodies, faith-based organisations and civil-society agencies from around the world. In our interview, Ulrich Nitschke, the head of the PaRD Secretariat shared his personal assessment of why religions can be abused for power political purposes on the one hand, but also help to achieve universal goals on the other hand.

Ulrich Nitschke interviewed by Hans Dembowski

## What is interreligious dialogue?

The essential thing is that members of different religions assess what their faiths have in common and what the differences are. The more different religions are involved, the more complicated dialogue becomes.

## But aren't there shared fundamental norms, such as peace, nonviolence and brotherly love?

Indeed, the five overarching principles of all world religions are:

- The golden rule of "Don't do unto others what you don't want others to do unto you".
- Stewardship of creation or, in modern language, environmental sustainability.
- Every world religion has an equivalent of the Jewish and Christian commandment "Thou shalt not kill".
- Equality in the sense of all souls being of equal value before divine eyes.
- Freedom – and protection of – faith and belief systems.

What these principles mean for practical purposes, however, very much depends on the specific context. Religious nationalism is particularly problematic, and it is growing around the world, whether in the form of Hindu nationalism, Sunni nationalism or Catholic nationalism. In some countries, politicians describe their own religious community as somehow disadvantaged or betrayed. At the same time, they claim that this community consti-

tutes the nation. They use the faith to foster a latently aggressive idea of "us versus them", which does not really reflect the spiritual foundations of their respective religions.

Sometimes they even challenge such foundations. In Poland, Jaroslaw Kaczynski emphasises his country's Catholic identity, but opposes any compromise on migration. He is thus directly opposing the Pope, his denomination's top authority, who is in favour of accepting refugees. For similar reasons, it is bizarre how Matteo Salvini, who served as Italy's home minister until early Septem-

ber, likes to agitate against refugees with a Catholic rosary in his hands.

Religious symbols can indeed serve to promote special interests. They are often added into the mix with other identity-shaping matters, including language, ethnicity, regional belongings and family affiliations. At PaRD, we are aware of the ambivalence of religions. On the one hand they preach universal values, but on the other hand they can be manipulated for identity politics. To stem political abuse, we must understand how legitimacy is constructed.

## Can inter-faith cooperation prevent political abuse?

Well, mutual understanding certainly helps, and experience tells us that inter-faith dialogue can contribute a lot to making peace and safeguarding it. The Central African Republic (CAR) is an example. Its state has



Salvini displaying a rosary.



collapsed in civil war; everything is now dysfunctional. However, when the top leaders of the Catholic church, Islam and Protestant communities meet, they get a lot of attention, and when they reach an agreement, it resonates throughout the country. They are currently the only leaders who still have something like a collectively binding authority. Things are similar in other crisis regions. Consider the Filipino island of Mindanao or Sri Lanka for instance. Interfaith dialogue has often proven the start of better cooperation geared to local or regional development.

**Today, however, the globally most dangerous tensions concern Sunni and Shiite Muslims. They are inner-Islamic, so they really only affect one world religion.**

Indeed, experience shows that intrafaith dialogue tends to be more difficult and more complex than interfaith dialogue. One reason is that the other side is referring to the same sacred foundations as one is doing oneself. The implication is that one feels more profoundly challenged. Intra-faith dialogue is only held very rarely, and it is especially rare when it would be needed most. As a matter of fact, there can be tensions within belief systems even if they are defined quite precisely in theological terms. A current example is Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism. This school insists on literal interpretation of the Koran. Nonetheless, there is a great divergence among its followers. Terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda and ISIS are rooted in this ideology, but the Wahhabi royal house has turned against them. At the same time, one of its formal members heads the multilateral Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, and his approach is quite moderate and cooperative. The Bank hands out loans and is developing Islamic finance. The wide range of opinions that now exists within Wahhabism is quite remarkable.

**I find it irritating that the Western public knows so little about Islam and its great diversity. Many Europeans are afraid of Islam as such and do not even know that Islamist violence is claiming more Muslim than Christian lives.**

Depressingly, age-old fears that have little to do with the modern world are still haunting Europe. Therefore, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is paying increasing atten-



Shared values facilitate coexistence: church spire and minaret in Amman.

tion to what we call "religious literacy". Staff of German development agencies take part in courses on religious literacy before being sent abroad. In the past, related things were handled under the rubric "intercultural communication", but in view of the great relevance that religions have in developing countries, that was not enough. To become religiously literate requires more than a basic knowledge of a faith and its cultural implications, its holidays and holy scriptures. To get a feel for someone else's belief system, one needs to grapple with one's own – the experiences one has had, including disappointments. And let's not forget that secularism itself can have different meanings.

**Indeed, in the USA, the founding fathers and mothers separated church and state because they wanted government institutions to keep an equidistance to every Christian denomination so political disputes would not pollute the faith. By contrast, leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru in India or Atatürk in Turkey considered religion to be backwards, so their approach to secularism was to be little and diminish religion ...**

Well, there can be no religious freedom if the state is not separated from religious faith. That is why Cardinal Reinhard Marx, who heads the Catholic German Episcopal Conference, speaks of the "achievements of secularism". Of course, such a sense of equidistance is indispensable for interfaith dialogue too.

**What else is needed to set in motion the kind of interfaith dialogue that can drive peace building?**

There are three preconditions:

- Facilitators are needed, and they must have profound understanding of the religions and cultures concerned because they have to be credible in the eyes of all partners involved.
- The parties concerned must want the dialogue. Things work out best when they take the first initiative. To succeed, dialogue must be voluntary; it cannot be enforced from outside.
- To the extent the donor agencies sponsor dialogue, they must give up control. If they prioritise their own goals and ideas, the exercise is doomed to fail.

**Must interfaith dialogue systematically be geared to a goal like peacebuilding?**

Well, if there is no goal, there normally is no dialogue. At PaRD, we see interfaith dialogue as one of several tools that we can use to tap the potential of religions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We want to find partners and cooperate with them. In that effort, we use a broad range of tools to tackle a great variety of topics, ranging from education and health to gender justice through to environmental sustainability.

**Is it not abusive to harness religious feelings for political purposes?**

That is something I am told again and again, but I don't agree at all. We are neither damaging any faith nor harming any religiously motivated institution. We emphasise ethical principles that are embedded in every faith. PaRD is geared to achieving the universal Sustainable Development Goals that were spelled out in the 2030 Agenda and adopted anonymously by the United Nations. The idea is to achieve more by joining forces. What's wrong with that?



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Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara following his release in May.

## Tinged with racism

Presidential elections will be held in Sri Lanka in December. The elections will be a referendum on whether the people want to live under a Buddhist-Sinhalese theocracy or in an open, multi-cultural country in which all religions and ethnicities enjoy the same rights.

By Anupama Ranawana-Collie and Arjuna Ranawana

The Easter Sunday bombings of three churches and three hotels ripped Sri Lanka out of a ten-year period of relative peace. Some 260 people were killed. The country had felt comparatively quiet since the end of the civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and government forces. But the old tensions continued to simmer under the surface, and new ones have emerged.

April's suicide attacks were carried out by Islamist extremists belonging to the organisation National Thowheed Jamaat. They targeted Sri Lanka's Christian minority. But Buddhists instantly grasped the opportunity to express anti-Muslim resentment and launch campaigns accordingly. Right-wing nationalist organisations like the "Buddhist fighting force" Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), an organisation founded by Buddhist monks that has long warned against Islamist extremism, have been gaining momentum.

The ethnic and religious tensions in Sri Lanka's complex society can be traced back to before the colonial era. They have repeatedly led to violence. Events that have gone down in history include the Kotahena riots of 1883, a series of bloody clashes between Buddhists and Catholics, and the Sinhalese-Muslim riots of 1915, in which Buddhists fought against Muslims.

However, the ethnic and religious causes of these conflicts cannot be teased apart: these affiliations overlap in Sri Lanka, and religious identity to a certain extent forms the basis of ethnic identity. That is how "ethno-religious" groups emerged.

The largest population group are the Sinhalese, who are overwhelmingly Buddhist. The second-largest group are the Tamils, most of whom are Hindus. There are also Muslims and Christians, the latter being found among both the Sinhalese and the Tamils, as well as a few other small religious communities.

The Buddhist Sinhalese have always seen Sri Lanka as their homeland. They believe that they have an uninterrupted history as a Buddhist-Sinhalese nation and claim to always have lived here. By contrast, the Hindu-Tamil minority has always lived with a feeling of insecurity. Some were brought to the island by the British colonial power in order to work on plantations. However, the larger number who live in the north and east have a distinct culture. Their feelings of exclusion worsened when the Sinhalese came to power after independence and soon cur-

tailed the special rights ethnic minorities had enjoyed, for instance in regard to education, trade and political representation.

Language plays an important role. Before the country became independent from Britain in 1948, English was the official language and the language of education. Then an argument erupted concerning whether Sinhalese and Tamil should serve those functions. Some stated that only the language of the majority should be used. Following an election that was largely focused on this issue, a national coalition came to power in 1956 that pushed Sinhalese through as the sole official language.

## BUDDHISTS AGAINST HINDUS

That event was one of the primary reasons why the Tamils began, in the 1960s and 70s, to fight for their linguistic and political rights. When their demands were rejected, they called for the creation of an independent state in the areas where they made up the majority of the people. That effort failed as well, and various groups took up arms. The result was three decades of civil war.

The conflict is often presented as an ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. But rhetoric and mobilisation often depicted it as struggle between Buddhists and Hindus. When the nationalist government of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the former president, militarily beat them, it acted as though its victory was the triumph of Sri Lankan Buddhism over all other religions.

Even after 2009, however, ethnic and religious tensions did not subside completely. All subsequent governments have manipulated the tensions, and no administration has attempted to uproot radical priests and intolerance. Policymakers fear to offend those leaders' constituents. Christians, particularly Evangelicals, are threatened and intimidated. In recent years, Muslims have also increasingly become the target of attacks and hate speech. Nationalist Buddhist groups like the BBS are particularly aggressive. Over time, the BBS has become a broad-based movement that has ramifications throughout the country. It could also count on the silent support of Rajapaksa, who was in office until 2015.

At a large rally in February 2013, the BBS published a ten-point resolution. Among other things, it demanded that food should no longer be certified as halal,

that women should no longer be allowed to work in the Middle East and that no more mosques should be built with funding from Arabic countries. The BBS propagated the idea that Muslims would destroy Buddhist heritage and that Muslim business owners would force their Sinhalese employees to convert to Islam.

This BBS campaign came to a head in the June 2014 riots that cost four people their lives. Around 80 others were wounded and thousands were displaced. The leaders of the BBS and other radical groups escaped unscathed.

There was another wave of violence against Muslims in February 2018. This time, it was primarily perpetrated by the group Mahason Balakaya. In Sri Lanka's central province, numerous Muslim-owned businesses were destroyed after a group of Muslim youth had killed a Sinhalese in a fight. A visually-impaired Muslim died in a burning house. The leaders of the extremist organisations that was responsible for the aggressions were arrested and charged, but they were later released on bail.

The Easter Sunday bombings led to the latest flare-up of anti-Muslim violence. Some three weeks later, Muslim businesses were attacked in multiple cities in the northwest and west. According to the Muslim activist Hilmy Ahamed, most of these incidents were inspired by rivalries between shop owners. In his eyes, the problem is that "racism mobilises the mob". A full-blown campaign is going on against Muslim women. Many Sinhalese have decorated their shops with stickers that read "Api Sinhala" ("We are Sinhalese").

## A DISCONCERTING PARDON

Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, the general secretary of the BBS, is a Buddhist monk. He was sentenced to prison last year for threatening witnesses and lawyers in court. Shortly after the Easter Sunday attacks, he was pardoned by President Maithripala Sirisena. He had not even served a single year of his six-year sentence. The head of state was apparently eager to secure the support of Buddhist-Sinhalese hardliners.

The current government had never criticised the radical monk in the past, even though it came to power primarily on the votes of Hindus, Christians and Muslims. The pardon disconcerted human-rights ac-



tivists in Sri Lanka. It is now being contested in court. The BBS, meanwhile, is enjoying the public's full attention, staging huge rallies and dominating TV news.

The ethnic tensions are playing into the hands of the nationalist Sri Lanka Podujana Party (SLPP), which is now fielding Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the former president's brother as its presidential candidate. The party wants to come back into power in the upcoming elections and is trying to secure the support of Sinhalese voters with racist statements. At a demonstration in the city of Kandy, Gnanasara went so far as to say that he wants a parliament that is only made up of Buddhist-Sinhalese representatives. "We cannot have any minorities in parliament because that would give them the power to make decisions about the government."

Hopefully the upcoming election campaign will spark a public debate about what kind of country Sri Lankans want to live in. We will know in January whether a Buddhist-Sinhalese theocracy will prevail or a multi-cultural vision that has the courage to treat all religions and ethnicities equally. The great irony is that Sri Lanka has a long history of religious communities living peacefully side by side. Such peace cannot be taken for granted however, because identity politics offers reckless leaders routes to power.

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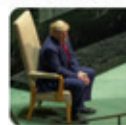


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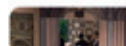


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# The sectarian dimension

**A major driver of unrelenting tensions and instability in today's Middle East is the deep-rooted rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The first is the region's Shia powerhouse, the latter is its Sunni nemesis.**

By Maysam Behravesht

The rivalry is of a geo-strategic character and concerns who has a greater say over what happens in the region. It is about defining the “rules of the game” and establishing some kind of “balance of power”. The two rival countries are involved in proxy wars in Yemen and Syria. Yemen's Houthi rebels are backed by Iran and belong to a Shia sect. Bashar al-Assad, Syria's dictator, belongs to another Shia sect. Militant violence in Iraq similarly reflects Shia-Sunni rivalry.

Quite obviously, the enmity has a religious dimension. The Sunni-Shia schism dates back to the days of Prophet Mohammed (see box next page). Iran's Islamic Republic is based on the Twelver Imam strand of Shia Islam. It is ultimately controlled by the clergy. Though President Hassan Rouhani was chosen in popular elections, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, a high-ranking cleric, actually has more power.

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is an absolutist monarchy. Its religious doctrine is the Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam. It insists on the literal interpretation of the holy scriptures. Arguing that Mecca and Medina, the holy cities, are in Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabis claim international leadership of the faith.

Problems arise because both sides use their religious beliefs for political purposes. The faith is thus made an instrument of foreign policy. On either side, the leaders pretend to have divine legitimacy for wielding influence, projecting power and enforcing their will.

In January 2016, tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia came to a head when Riyadh executed Nimr al-Nimr, a cleric who belonged to Saudi Arabia's marginalised Shia minority. He was accused of having close ties to Iran and promoting “terrorism”.

At the time, 47 people were beheaded or shot. The Saudi government declared

them all to be “terrorists”. One of them was Faris al-Zahrani, an al-Qaeda leader. Al-Qaeda, however, is a terror organisation with Wahhabi roots. That Nimr was executed with al-Qaeda convicts was a stark message to Tehran. In the eyes of the Saudi leadership, Iran was cultivating the Shia minority. It showed that it would not tolerate such interference, equating it with al-Qaeda terrorism.

In response, a group of state-affiliated hardliners stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran and set it on fire. Another radical mob attacked the Saudi consulate in the north-eastern city of Mashhad. This kind of vandalism was widely perceived as retaliation.

In response, Saudi Arabia and its close ally Bahrain severed all diplomatic ties with Iran. Ever since, relations have only strained further, with both sides resorting to indirect methods. Most prominently, the proxy war in Yemen has further escalated. Though the Saudi establishment promised the Houthis would be uprooted “in a matter of days” in May 2017, the war is still being waged. According to the UN, Yemen is currently suffering the worst human-made disaster.

Numerous attempts at rapprochement and reconciliation by President Rouhani, who is considered a moderate, failed. Saudi Arabia's strongman Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) has shown no interest in détente. In May 2017, shortly before becoming crown prince, he expressed his deeply sectarian views, ruling out any dialogue with Iran. He stated in an interview that the Shia regime was “built on an extremist ideology” and wanted to “control the Islamic world”.

## EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES

Saudi Arabia has extremist intentions of controlling the Islamic world too. Its missionaries have a long history of spreading fundamentalist views abroad (see review essay on page 33). MbS warned in the interview: “We will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia, and we will work so that the battle is on their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia.”

In early June 2017, Iran's parliament and the mausoleum of late Ayatollah Khomeini were targeted in a terrorist assault by ISIS, another terrorist outfit that grew out of Wahhabism and has been disowned by Saudi Arabia. The attack left at least 16 people dead. In September 2018, a military parade in Iran's southern city of Ahwaz was attacked. Civilians were among the 25 dead. Both ISIS and another Sunni outfit



The proxy war in Yemen is causing mass suffering.



called al-Ahvaziya claimed responsibility. Yet another Sunni militant group is Jaish ul-Adl (Army of Justice), which is active in Iran's east along the border with Pakistan. In February 2019, a car bomb killed at least 27 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

Iranian authorities have criticised Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for backing militant Sunni groups. There has been violent retaliation as well. The Houthis have used missiles and drones to attack Saudi territory. These arms are widely believed to have been produced with Iran's technical assistance if not provided directly by Tehran.

In mid-September, drones set fire to Saudi oil-production facilities. Houth forces claimed responsibility, but Washington and Saudi Arabia blamed Tehran.

Iran has been backing other militias too, for example the Shia Hizbollah in Lebanon. Iran generally does not support Sunni militants, though Hamas in the Gaza Strip is an exception. It is close to the Muslim Brotherhood which is being ostracised by both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Muslim Brothers are Sunnis, but do not endorse Wahhabism. While Egypt and Saudi Arabia declare they want peace with Israel, Iran

pretends to represent Arab interests in denying Israel's legitimacy.

US President Donald Trump has prominently taken the side of Saudi Arabia. On his first trip abroad after taking office, he convened an anti-terrorism summit in Riyadh in 2017. Leaders of predominantly Sunni Muslim countries from around the world attended the event. Tehran was declared to be the hub of terrorism, and all parties involved were urged to isolate the Islamic Republic.

Trump's approach was not successful. Soon after the summit, Qatar decided to maintain its good relationships with Iran. Qatar needs to cooperate with Iran to exploit gas fields in the sea, but is now isolated among the Gulf monarchies. More recently, however, the UAE decided to scale back their military presence in Yemen and seek maritime security negotiations with Tehran.

Trump's "maximum pressure" policy towards Iran is causing pain in Iran, but so far has not delivered results. Those who have been observing the region know only too well that things were always more complex than his idea of Tehran serving as the hub of terrorism.

Most worrisome, the nuclear deal looks set to collapse. In cooperation with

Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China, Trump's predecessor Barack Obama had lifted economic sanctions in return for Tehran stopping to enrich uranium in ways that would allow it to build nuclear weapons.

Ideological and sectarian differences between Shia-majority Iran and its Sunni nemesis are here to stay. They have the potential of escalating to full-blown war, which would devastate the entire Middle East. Given that Russia and China tend to side with Iran against the USA, the scenario is very dangerous.

The region needs a more peaceful approach. A realistic reconciliation strategy would be for both sides to learn to accept that sectarian differences exist and stop manipulating them for political purposes. At this point in history, that may seem utopian, but it is not impossible. The plain truth is that minority Shia communities have a long history in predominantly Sunni areas, and so have Sunni communities in what is now Iran.



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## Islam's age-old schism

Soon after its inception, Islam was divided into two denominations. The reason was a fight over who would succeed Prophet Mohammed. It erupted after his death in 632.

One group of his disciples insisted that leadership of his faith should stay in his family. In their eyes, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Mohammed's son-in-law, was to be the heir. Others believed that the best-qualified person should be the leader. The schism soon caused violence and eventually proved permanent. The first group spawned Shia Islam and the second Sunni Islam.

In principle, either denomination denies the other's legitimacy. Some Sunnis even consider Shias to be infidels who deserve death. Nonetheless, communities of both versions of the faith have lived together peacefully in many places, with hostilities only erupting in exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the pilgrimage to Mecca has been practiced by both denominations for centuries, mostly without disruption. On the other hand, such differences can serve political purposes.

Most Muslims are Sunnis, but Shias are the majority

in Iran, Bahrain, Azerbaijan and Lebanon. Large Shia communities exist in Iraq, Pakistan, India and even Saudi Arabia.

It is noteworthy, moreover, that neither Shia nor Sunni Islam are monolithic denominations. There are several

different Shia sects, of which the Twelver Imam sect is the most important. It is the dominant faith in Iran. Sunni Islam has spawned a variety of different legal schools, as well as fundamentalist Wahhabism, which is the doctrine of Saudi Arabia. (D+C/E+Z)



In 680, the Kerbala battle entrenched the difference between Shias and Sunnis.



# Anti-Semitic Zionists

**Among Evangelical groups in the USA, Christian Zionists have a special relation to the state of Israel. As important Trump constituents, they have a huge influence on his foreign policy and are increasingly crowding out Jewish interest groups. Their ideology is inherently anti-Semitic, but they tend to hide this fact.**

**By Jonathan Brenneman**

US President Donald Trump is obsessed with the state of Israel. Some analysts consider his policies the most pro-Israel in history. Trump basically endorses everything Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does, though Netanyahu himself is a most controversial politician himself. For example, Trump has moved the US embassy to Jerusalem. He supports Israel's illegal actions including the building of settlements on occupied land and the demolition of Palestinian homes.

While Trump's pro-Israel bent is clear, the reasons are not obvious to many people. It is true, of course, that every US administration since the creation of Israel has been staunchly pro-Israel. Some observers say

that is due to shared geo-strategic interests. Others point out lobbying efforts by Jewish Americans. Trump's relationship with Netanyahu is uniquely unquestioning, and that is because some of his most important constituents like it that way.

Among Trump supporters, Christian Zionists are especially strong, whereas Jewish voters tend to oppose him.

Christian Zionism is a belief held by many Evangelicals, who number one quarter of the US Christian population, but adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation of the bible. Christian Zionists believe that Israel must gather all the Jews of the world, enlarge its territory, destroy Muslim holy places, and ethnically cleanse "the holy land" of all non-Jews. Many assume that this must be done to facilitate the return of Christ. Evangelicals of this kind support Israel, but not Judaism. In their worldview, Jews play a merely instrumental role. The implicit subtext is that Jews do not belong in American communities, because good Jews move to Israel. Their ideology is tinged with anti-Semitism, and it fits the picture that Trump himself has a pattern of using anti-Semitic memes (see essay next page).

These things, however, are only rarely expressed explicitly. Nonetheless, there is a long history of anti-Semitic statements. For example, John Hagee, a prominent Christian Zionist, has declared that the Nazi genocide was ordained by God to send Jews "back to Israel." He has also said Jews have only themselves to blame for anti-Jewish sentiments. The reason, in his view, is that they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, and thus "birthed the seed of anti-Semitism that would arise and bring destruction to them for centuries to come".

In any case, Christian Zionists are told that it is their religious duty to support Israel. They will be blessed if they do, and they risk being cursed if they don't. They endorse the most pro-war, racist and right-wing forces in Israel. Accordingly, they want the US administration to do so too.

Up to a quarter of US citizens are Evangelicals. A recent survey by LifeWay Research showed that about 80% of them basically appreciate Christian Zionism. Experts reckon that up to 30 million are Christian Zionists. They are not simply a religious group, but have become a hugely influential political movement. Robert O. Smith, a theologian, speaks of "political action informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine."

## POWERFUL LOBBY ORGANISATION

Several lobbying groups are pushing the agenda. The biggest, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) was founded by the above-mentioned Hagee in the 1990s and now claims to have 7 million members. Though the number is difficult to verify, CUFI is certainly the largest pro-Israel pressure group in the USA today. It dwarfs better known, mostly Jewish organisations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) or J Street.

In July, CUFI held its annual summit in Washington DC. Its political clout was on full display. Vice President Mike Pence, a professed Christian Zionist, addressed the meeting, and so did Mike Pompeo, the secretary of state, and John Bolton, the national security adviser. Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and other Republican senators were present as well.

CUFI currently has more political clout than Jewish organisations. CUFI



Republican Senator Ted Cruz addressing this year's CUFI conference.

wholeheartedly endorsed moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, for example, while many Jews did not. CUFI was in favour of Netanyahu's Nation-State Bill in 2018, which codified Jewish primacy into Israel's basic law. This constitutional amendment was controversial in Israel because it undermined the principle of equal citizenship. Therefore, most Jewish organisations in the USA opposed it, but the Trump administration stayed silent.

American Jews find themselves in an awkward position. Their stance on Israel tends to be more nuanced because they do not believe everything Netanyahu does or that everything Christian Zionists want is good for Israel. Netanyahu himself is controversial among Jews, not least because he recently called new elections simply because he otherwise would have had to face corruption charges.

Their problem is that Christian Zionists have usurped their influence on US policy toward Israel. Christian Zionists do not show any regard for peace, reconciliation

and human rights in the holy land. They basically resent liberal political parties. All they are interested in is their interpretation of Biblical prophecies.

While Christian Zionists tend to hide their anti-Semitism, they are outspoken about resenting Muslims. Their hatred and fear of Arabs is an important reason for their support of Israel. Their Islamophobia was on full display at the CUFI summit in Washington. For example, the Palestinian refugee crisis was blamed on the "inhospitality of Arab nations". The killing of children by the Israeli military was explained away with false accusations of Arabs using them "as human shields". Such anti-Muslim rhetoric is nearly indistinguishable from mainstream American Islamophobia since the terror attacks on New York and Washington on 9/11 2001.

The public has mostly ignored Christian Zionism. Therefore, challenges have basically arisen from Christian groups so far. "It was mainly an internal Christian conversation," says Alex Awad, a Palestinian Chris-

tian. He has founded a group called "Christ at the Checkpoint" which invites Evangelicals to Palestine so they can see with their own eyes what painful impact Christian Zionism has on Palestinian Christians. Awad and likeminded Christians emphasise Jesus' message of love.

Popular opposition to Trump is growing. Due to Evangelicals' deepening alliance with him, CUFI and similar groups are getting ever more exposure. A wider audience has become aware of their political potency. At this year's CUFI summit, activists from various faith backgrounds – Jews, Muslims, Christians and secular activists – rallied in protest. They made it clear that refuting Christian Zionism is no longer merely an issue of inner-Christian debate.



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## Loving Israel and hating Jews

**As this issue was being finalised, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seemed to be on his way out after failing to win a majority in recent elections. Many progressive American Jews feel Netanyahu's close relationship with Donald Trump encapsulated their long-standing unease with the Israeli state.**

**By Benjamin Balthaser**

A curious image circulated in social media in the last few years: Shmuley Boteach, a charismatic right-wing orthodox rabbi, shown smiling with Steve Bannon, Trump's former advisor and a known anti-Semite. Why, one might ask, would a rabbi want to pose with someone who was not only reported to have refused to send his children "to a school with Jews", but more importantly was the editor of Breitbart News, a website

openly associated with white nationalism and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories?

One could as easily ask, is the photo any more odd than the Israeli government's love of Donald Trump? Most Jewish Americans, including myself, consider the US president to be an anti-Semite. He prominently spoke of "very fine people on both sides" after white nationalists rallied in Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting "Jews will not replace us". One of them, moreover, had killed a woman by driving a car into a group of anti-supremacist protesters.

Trump also routinely deploys anti-Semitic imagery in campaign ads, featuring opponents beside Stars of David on piles of cash, or linking prominent Jewish bankers and financial experts to the global economic crisis of 2008. And yet Trump is the most popular US president in Israel in living memory. Which is only slightly less strange

than Israel's government arming Ukrainian neo-Nazis or supporting Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the most anti-Semitic elected leader in Europe.

For many people, the spectre of anti-Semites who love Israel appears to be a new phenomenon (see Jonathan Brenneman, p.30). However, the idea that Jews should relocate to Palestine was not only an idea endorsed by Jewish nationalists. Christian policymakers were among the instrumental architects of Zionism, often with their own reasons to want to send Jews packing.

Lord Balfour, the British diplomat who pledged a Jewish nation in the British colonial mandate, was a known anti-Semite. He believed that Jews had no real home in England and would be pliant clients in Palestine, too weak to create a state that might challenge the British empire. Nationhood for Balfour was a biological condition only experienced by Christian, Western Europeans.

Ernest Bevin, a British foreign secretary, echoed this thinking. He argued that it was better to resettle hundreds of thousands of Jews who had survived the Nazi Holocaust in Palestine than to have them move to



Trump and Netanyahu on an Israeli election poster. The writing means: "Netanyahu, another league".

the UK or the USA – countries in which survivors had extended family, and they looked to as new possible homes. Bevin believed – correctly – that the west would not welcome these victims of war and genocide.

As the socialist magazine *Jewish Life* reported in the years after the war, rather than condemn such sentiments, Zionist activists welcomed them: they too lobbied for Jews to be barred from resettling in the US or Britain.

### AWFUL IN A DOUBLE SENSE

Trump's recent accusation that American Jews who support critics of Israel, such as Democratic Congress women Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, are being "disloyal" to Israel, has a long lineage. Trump's words were awful in a double sense. He reiterated the old idea among white supremacists that American Jews are not really loyal to the USA, and he reinforced the Zionist idea that to be a good Jew, one has to put Israel above party, or country.

That is a sentiment the longest serving prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, has repeatedly echoed: the di-

aspora, the home of Jews for thousands of years, is a place of death. Jews, he said recently at the Holocaust memorial site Yad Vashem, deserved the Nazi genocide as they were "weak" and didn't fight back. Jews who do not enlist in Fortress Israel deserve what is coming. As education minister Rafael Peretz recently said, "assimilated" or diasporic Jews in the US are a "second Holocaust": one wonders if he means it literally.

Jewish Studies historian Enzo Traverso remarked that Zionism, originally conceived, was to "regenerate" Jews by making them more like European nationalists, and if that means turning them into a colonial power, so much the better.

While there have been historically other visions of Zionism that were not colonial, right-wing Zionists founded the Israeli state, and they can only conceive of Jewish life as bound within the confines of an ethnically defined nation, one in which they are the ethnic majority and the ruling and economic elite. They are ethno-nationalists. It should not be surprising that Netanyahu and others like him speak badly of non-Israeli Jews who do not believe in a nation

defined by a single race. White nationalism, the historical enemy of the Jewish people, has now found an alliance with the only Jewish state.

Yet Jews are not reducible to a single state; neither demographically nor politically. We don't need any Lord Balfours telling us where our "home" might be. Criticising Israel is not criticising Jews; to suggest so is to conflate Israel with the Jewish people. And yes, that is anti-Semitic because Jews belong to the nations and communities in which they live, like anyone else.

And yet anti-Semitism is on the rise: Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, massacres in synagogues are but some of the features of our new political reality. If you would like to oppose anti-Semitism, oppose the far-right – but do not oppose legitimate critiques of Israeli human rights abuses or its ongoing occupation of Palestinian land.



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# A heartfelt sermon

Ed Husain spells out many important insights in his book "The house of Islam". However, it is not the "global history" the subtitle promises. Anyone who is unfamiliar with Muslim history should not rely only on his work to gain a first understanding of these important issues. Karen Armstrong's "Islam - A short history" of 2000 is good complementary reading.

By Hans Dembowski

Husain correctly writes that the fundamentalist version of Sunni Islam, which is promoted by Saudi Arabia's Wahhabis, is a perversion of the faith. It has spawned Salafism as well as the terrorism of Al Qaida and ISIS. The Wahhabi's focus on strictly literal interpretations of the Scriptures neglects their meaning and moral substance. Dress codes, for example, serve the purpose of fostering a sense of equality and modesty among the faithful and are not even spelled out in detail in Quran. Husain finds the idea absurd that people today should be required to wear exactly the kind of clothes that the prophet and his followers wore in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

While the Quran provides basic guidelines for social life, it leaves ample room for interpretation and adaptation to local contexts and conventions. This adaptability of Islamic law (sharia) is an important reason why this religion became important from Morocco to Indonesia. Throughout history, Islamic law scholars engaged in intense debate on how to apply the religious norms to changing realities. They did their best to make sense of the rules, and rational arguments were not only accepted, but welcomed. The diverging schools did not strive to apply the principles as literally as possible but wanted to serve society well. As Husain insists, an enlightened, modernised interpretation of the faith is indeed possible on this basis.

## A LESS REPRESSIVE RELIGION

While Christian Europe historically did not accept Islam as a valid religion, Jew-

ish and Christian minorities were tolerated in North Africa and the Middle East for centuries. Husain is right to point out that Islam is traditionally the less repressive religion. The kind of violence perpetrated by ISIS and other terrorist outfits today is not how Muslim empires were run in the past.

In Husain's eyes, Wahhabi-inspired extremism has gained far too much influence. Such radicalism thrives on both the indulgence of Muslim communities and the vehement rejection from the Western public. The more Islamist extremists are ostracised by the West, the more attractive they look to frustrated Muslim youth, as the au-

thor knows from personal experience. He is a British Muslim who fell for Sunni Islamism in his youth but then went on to study Arabic and theology, developing a more sophisticated and less dogmatic understanding of his faith. He now wants Muslim scholars to take a determined stance against Wahhabism.

At the same time, Husain warns that Western ignorance is dangerous. The failure to understand the basics of Muslim mindsets has repeatedly led to policy failure and resulted in the escalation of crises. In his view, for example, the Muslim Brothers, whose ideas of Islamist politics is not rooted in Wahhabism, have the potential of becoming something akin to Europe's Christian Democrats. However, the latter are unable to tap this potential as they normally fail to even see it.

Indeed, the Muslim Brothers' Tunisian branch is currently a moderate con-



Souad Abderrahim of the Muslim Ennahda party is the mayor of Tunis.

servative force. Their party Ennahda has accepted the country's pluralist constitution and is sharing power in a coalition government. Its leaders state that they are "Muslim Democrats". Souad Abderrahim, the female mayor of Tunis, is an Ennahda politician. She proves that women can assume roles of leadership in Islamic contexts. It is too early, however, to tell whether Ennahda has truly become the equivalent of European Christian Democrats. Turkey's AKP, which for a long time seemed to be developing in that direction too, has become a thoroughly

mocracy and private-sector development in peaceful countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) instead of waging war on Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Husain argues that no other world region is culturally and linguistically as homogenous as the MENA region. But even though the preconditions for pooling sovereignty are thus in place, no other world region is less integrated in political or economic terms. The author states that the region would do well to establish a MENA union according to the EU model. That idea

ment of reality. Muslims are not the coherent community he claims they are – and that is one reason why there is not even an inkling of the MENA union he would like to see established. Yes, he does elaborate on the historical schism between Shias and Sunnis, but he consistently downplays the relevance of Shia Islam. He does a good job of dissecting the shortcomings of Wahhabism, but pays hardly any attention to Shia fundamentalism, which is dangerous too. He consistently refers to the Sunni dominated Ottoman and Mughal as examples of Muslim rule, but does not elaborate the similarly impressive history of Iran's Shia dynasties.

### CROSS-CHECKING MAKES SENSE

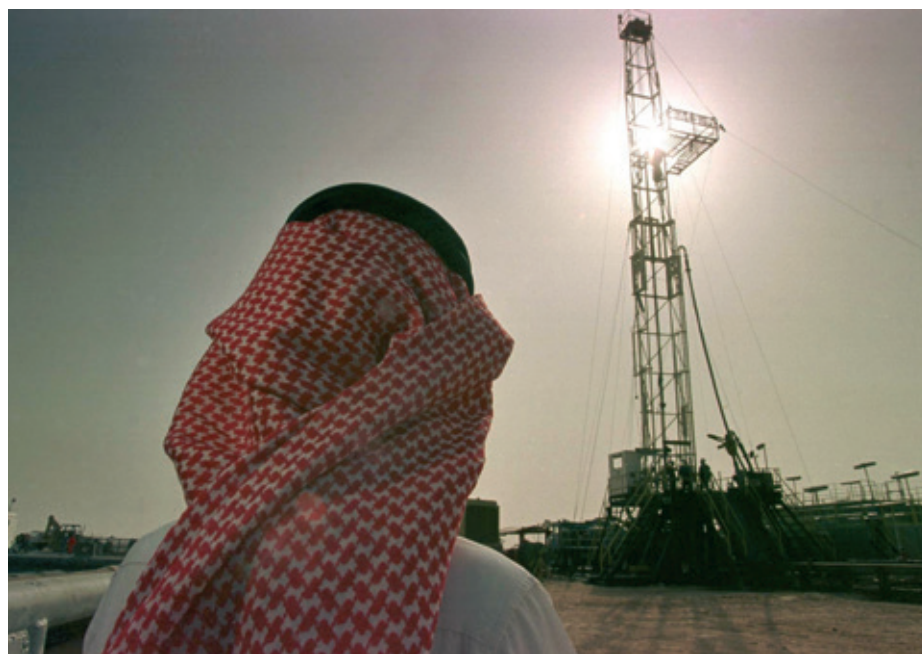
While Husain's book provides useful insights into the complexity of Muslim thought, readers will do well to cross-check what he writes with other sources. It is actually not quite clear who his target audience is: to some extent, he seems to be arguing with fellow Muslims about how to deal with Wahhabism, but other parts of the book read as though he intended to write a primer introducing western non-Muslim readers to the history of Islam. In my eyes, he serves the first target group well, but the second would deserve a more neutral assessment.

A good book to complement Husain's work is Karen Armstrong's "Islam – a short history". It was first published in 2000 and offers a coherent overview – from the times of the prophet to the turn of the millennium. Armstrong discusses the schisms that affected this faith and elaborates diligently what empires were ruled by Sunni as well as Shia leaders. Her assessment of recent fundamentalisms differs from Husain's because the former Catholic nun puts it into the context of religious fundamentalisms in general.

A shortcoming is certainly that Armstrong does not pay Wahhabism much attention. The reason is certainly that she wrote her book before Al Qaeda attacked New York and Washington in 2001. Al Qaeda and ISIS are rooted in Wahhabi ideology.

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Oil money has funded fundamentalist missionaries.

authoritarian entity in recent years, which is something Husain should, but does not acknowledge.

Western policymakers, unfortunately, all too often do not know the difference between diverging Islam-inspired political groups. Many of them still fail to see how dysfunctional their alliance with the Gulf monarchies has been. Depending on oil from the Arab Peninsula, they turned a blind eye to the disruptive impact that fundamentalist missionaries had – and have – on the traditionally far more tolerant Muslim societies. Those missionaries depend on money from Saudi Arabia and its neighbours. In a similar vein, it is worth considering what the state of the world might be today, had the USA invested some \$2 trillion in promoting de-

mocracy in principle, but Husain should acknowledge that it is entirely utopian at this point in history. Tunisia is the only democracy in the Arab world. The violence that is tearing apart Syria results from deep divisions that mark other countries of the region as well.

While Husain conveys many important insights, his book is unfortunately not a sober-minded analysis of Muslim history and the current state of MENA affairs. He would have done well to tell readers the sources of the vast socio-economic data he uses. Instead, he basically only indicates sources that refer to theological issues.

To a large extent, Husain is a true believer who is preaching his version of his faith. Wishful thinking blurs his assess-

# Malevolent leader

**Mahatma Gandhi, India's independence leader, often referred to his Hindu faith, but he consistently reached out to the country's religious minorities. His vision was a free India for the great diversity of Indian communities. By contrast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is promoting an exclusive idea of a Hindu-dominated country. A recently published book assesses his dangerous identity politics well.**

**By Hans Dembowski**

K.S. Komireddi's recently published book "Malevolent republic" was written before Modi was returned to power in India's general election in May. With about 45% of the

approved this constitutional change. Kashmir is no longer a state, but has been downgraded to "union territory". Due to decades of troubles, Kashmir is a heavily militarised area. In August, however, even more troops were sent in. So far, the policy change has not triggered militant unrest, but violence is likely to erupt at some point in time.

At the international level, however, Modi has so far managed to cultivate the image of a business-oriented reformer. Even in development circles, western experts tend to expect him to endorse prudent economic policies. They should read Komireddi, who criticises Modi harshly, whilst basing his essay solidly on facts. The book is thoroughly referenced.

it early on. Over 1,000 people, most of them Muslims, were killed. That happened when Modi was that state's chief minister.

In that position, he nonetheless earned his reputation as an economic moderniser. He basically did it by simply approving any application made by an industry leader, as Komireddi points out. He facilitated fast investment, but achieved very little in terms of reducing poverty. To judge by the relevant statistics, Gujarat stayed an average Indian state and never became a beacon of human development.

At the national level, Modi's economic reform promises have not come true either. The greatest disaster was "demonetisation". Komireddi has dedicated an entire chapter to the annulling of most of India's banknotes on short notice in 2016. The idea was to thwart corruption and get a grip on black money. Neither goal was achieved. The economy slowed down, and the lives of smallholder farmers, informal entrepreneurs and people who depend on them were disrupted seriously.

What is far more important is that the Hindu supremacists are undermining the independence of important institutions such as the judiciary, the central bank or the election commission. Komireddi's account is detailed and frightening. He also does an excellent job of explaining how Modi is increasingly politicising the military. Most mainstream media, in the author's eyes, have caved in to government propaganda and pressure.

The outlook is terrifying. The author sees India turning into "a make-believe land full of fudge and fakery, where savagery against religious minorities is among the therapeutic options available to a self-pitying majority frustrated by Modi's failure to upgrade their standard of living".

"Malevolent republic" does more than dissect Modi and his government. The first part of the book assesses what made his rise to power possible. It tells the story of how the Congress party, led by the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty (no relation to Mahatma Gandhi), lost people's trust in decades of bad governance. It is worth reading, but what Komireddi has to say about Modi is certainly more important.

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**Whether he likes it or not, India's Muslim heritage is undeniable: Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivering an address to the nation from Delhi's Red Fort.**

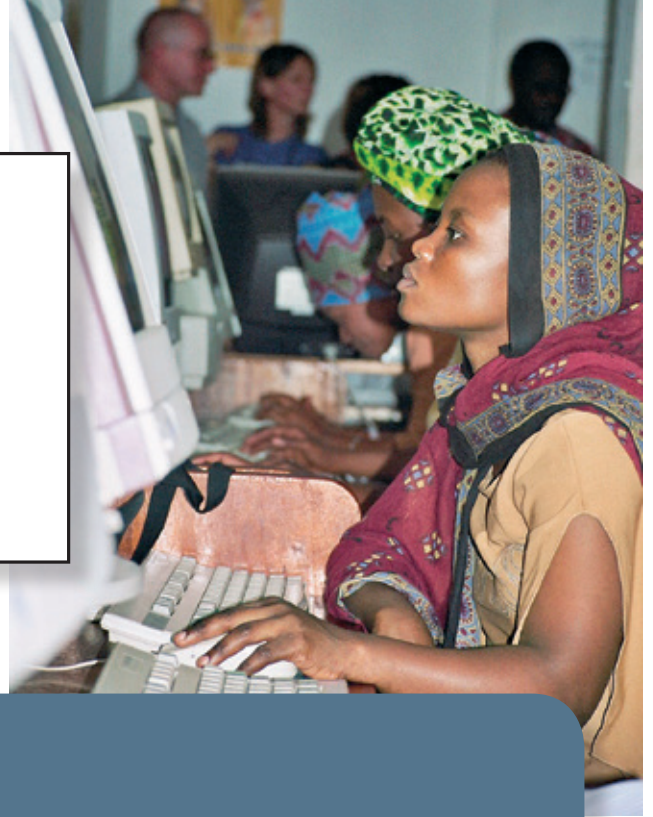
vote, his party, the BJP, and its allies won more than 50% of the seats in the national parliament.

Modi's election campaign was marked by aggressive Hindu nationalism. His Kashmir policy fits that pattern. In early August, his government cancelled the special rights the country's only predominantly Muslim state enjoyed in the past. Parliament fast

The journalist argues convincingly that Modi and his government are not interested in modernisation of either state or economy. They are driven by an aggressive and vindictive ideology. According to their world view, Hindus are now finally striving for world leadership after centuries of humiliation and oppression. That is the core issue, and the Gujarat riots in 2002 proved



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