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FILM

A reckoning with
Kenyan witch hunts
– today and in history

NOVEL

Modern Muslim
love story in Indian
megacity

EXHIBITION

Hamburg pays tribute
to murdered African
monarch



Challenging racism

Challenging racism

American wounds

Mexicans of indigenous or African descent are discriminated against. Inclusive “Mestizaje” rhetoric is nice, but it has concealed the countries deep-rooted racism for a long time, writes Virginia Mercado, a scholar at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (UNAM). The Black historian Ibram X. Kendi has studied centuries of racist thought in the USA. Hans Dembowski of D+C/E+Z summarises his conclusions. **PAGES 17, 19**

Africa needs new narratives

In colonial times, racism entrenched the power of elite interest groups in Kenya. Today, tribalism serves a similar purpose. Politicians may speak of national unity, but they know how to manipulate tribal identities for their purposes, as journalist Alphonse Shiundu reports from Nairobi. After decades of majority rule, skin colour still matters in South African politics. Jakkie Cilliers, the founder of the non-profit Institute for Security, argues that the nation needs a new, more inclusive narrative. **PAGES 21, 23**

Harmful idea of beauty

A lot of money is made with skin lightening creams. The reason is that racism still shapes ideas of beauty, as development consultant Mahwish Gul points out. **PAGE 26**

Asian marginalisation

Nepal’s Dalits, formerly called “untouchables”, suffer discrimination. Legal reforms were supposed to protect them, but change remains very slow, according to Rukamanee Maharjan, a human rights expert at Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan University. In Indonesia, prejudice against ethnically Chinese people persists even though discriminating laws were abolished. Edith Koesoemawiria, a Jakarta-based journalist, assesses the situation. **PAGES 27, 29**

Europe’s neglected minority

Some 12 million Europeans belong to the Roma. Their history is marked by exclusion and persecution throughout the continent. Things were particularly bad under Nazi rule, but prejudice and marginalisation remain common. The EU wants to improve matters, but change must happen at the level of member states. Sheila Mysorekar, a project manager for Deutsche Welle Akademie and former member of D+C/E+Z’s editorial team, reports. **PAGE 31**

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Focus: Challenging racism



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Decoupling prosperity from skin colour

Racism is offensive and discriminating. Racists disregard human dignity, denying the fundamental principle that all people are of equal value, enjoy equal rights and deserve equal opportunities. Although this principle should be general consensus, racism persists in all world regions. It has many harmful impacts – not only on individual victims, but on entire societies.

Systemic racism means that members of certain communities – for example, those with darker skin colours – stay poorer than those of other communities and do not get the same opportunities in the education system, employment or the housing market. Often, the legal system puts them at a disadvantage too. In particularly bad cases, deadly violence is perpetrated by the police, whose official duty is to „serve and protect“. Shocking examples in the USA gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, and its global spread illustrated the global reach of racism last year.

Even smaller and far less obvious offences cause harm. A person's self-confidence can be undermined by casual slurs on schoolyards, streets, the fitness studio or public transport. People who are constantly treated as though they were second-class, are likely to eventually behave accordingly.

One reason systemic racism is so persistent is that members of marginalised communities are largely denied positions of power. Not always does racism affect minorities. South Africa's apartheid regime put the white minority in control. Even today, the majority of people in many Asian countries have darker skins than the elite. Given that the interests of the oppressed stay neglected, very little changes.

This vicious circle must be broken, and legislation is an important tool for doing so. Before the law, everyone must be equal. Affirmative action, which reserves quotas in employment or higher education for members of marginalised communities, can help to reduce inequality in regard to opportunity. The downsides are that:

- it only facilitates individual upward mobility, without lifting up the entire community, and that
- it can breed resentment among those communities who do not benefit.

It is up to policymakers, law courts, business leaders and civil society to establish equal opportunity. We must uncouple prosperity from skin colour. Social-welfare policies tend to be most accepted if they do not only benefit a particular disadvantaged community, but are basically available to anyone who is in need. Universal social protection tends to work best. An applicant's personal background, skin colour, ethnic or religious affiliation or gender does not matter, as everyone is eligible in principle. Nonetheless, disadvantaged communities benefit in particular, because the share of the needy among them is disproportionately large.

Racist attitudes are often deeply entrenched and prevalent even among people who are convinced they are not racist themselves. Awareness raising is needed to reduce ignorance and promote empathy. It is telling, for example, that anti-Black attitudes in Germany are most prevalent in those regions where hardly any Black people live. But even as societies open up, some persons will stay racist. We must not let them bear arms or control the levers of power. Restricting their influence is not "reverse racism". To protect human rights, we must prevent the empowerment of those who deny other people's human rights.

► 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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Summer Special



The face of anti-racism protests

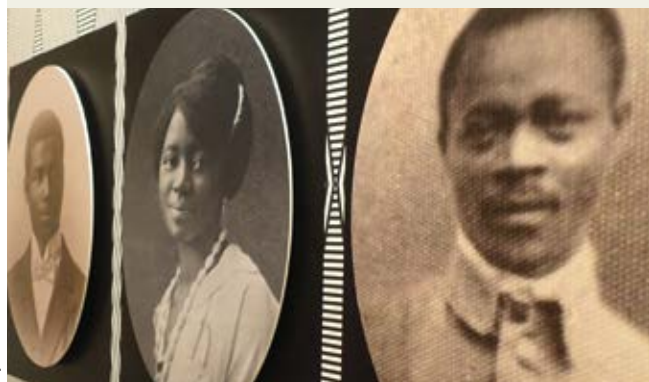
The movie "The hate U give" is based on US author Angie Thomas' debut novel of the same name, which was published in 2017. It tells the story of the police killing a young black person in the African-American community's response. German high school student Sinikka Dombrowski appreciates the message.

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The beekeeper of Aleppo

Nuri and his family are traumatised. They had to flee from Aleppo, Syria, but they refuse to give up hope. They are the protagonists of a novel written by Christy Lefteri. According to Dagmar Wolf of D+C/E+Z, it does a good job of raising awareness of refugees' hardships.

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Tribute to murdered monarch

An exhibition in Hamburg is currently taking account of Germany's colonial rule in Cameroon and the opposition it triggered. A broad range of artefacts and documents is used to tell the story of King Rudolf Duala Manga Bell, who was executed by German officers. The exhibition's target group is young people and their families – and the general idea is to raise awareness of colonial history. Freelance journalist Anke Schwarzer reports.

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Summer Special

This year's summer special comprises of a mix of artistic works once more: the editorial team of D+C/E+Z presents books, films and an exhibition, all of them tackling issues of developmental relevance. We would be pleased if our recommendations inspired you, our readers, to read or watch one of the reviewed works.



Margaret, age 94, seen here at a wedding celebration, must defend herself against accusations of witchcraft.

SUMMER SPECIAL

Witch-hunting, then and now

In eastern Kenya, trumped-up accusations of witchcraft are being used to drive elderly people – mainly women – from their homes. A moving and clear-eyed documentary shows how witch-hunting still haunts modern-day Kenya.

By Aviva Freudmann

Between 1912 and 1915, an elderly widow named Mekatilili wa Menza led a revolt of the Giriama people against British colonial rule in eastern Kenya. Mekatilili, apparently a charismatic person, walked from village to village, giving rousing speeches and leading energetic renditions of the traditional kifudu dance to drum up resistance against the British.

The colonial rulers were not amused. The regional administrator, Arthur Champion, captured and exiled Mekatilili to a prison in western Kenya. She escaped and walked back home to resume the protests. Champion, calling her a witch, had

her recaptured. At the same time he ordered troops to seize large tracts of land and burn protesters' homes.

Fast-forward about a century. In the same region where Mekatilili was persecuted and her people expropriated, elderly women (and some men) are still being called witches or wizards, and still being driven from their homes. This time, though the perpetrators are members of the elderly victims' own families, eager to grab land belonging to the elderly.

This modern-day witch-hunting is the theme of "The Letter", a documentary by the Kenya-based husband-and-wife team of Maia Lekow, a musician and filmmaker whose ancestors come from eastern Kenya, and Christopher King, an Australian filmmaker. The film tells the story of Margaret, an elderly woman who lives in Kaloleni in eastern Kenya, who faces witchcraft accusations from conniving relatives.

Interestingly, the filmmakers initially set out to tell Mekatilili's story. But their pro-

ject, six years in the making, morphed into an examination of a modern parallel to that story: persecution, robbery and occasional murder perpetrated against old people by means of accusations of witchcraft.

According to the filmmakers, the local press reports approximately 10 such murders each month, along with hundreds of family disputes over land and inheritance. In many cases the elderly person is warned, sometimes in a letter, and thus is motivated to escape before being killed. Charities have set up refuges in the region for old people facing such threats.

"The Letter" got its title from such a warning, sent anonymously to Margaret. The letter accuses her of being a witch and placing a curse on the family. At the same time a Facebook post warns darkly of an "elder who is killing out children" in Kaloleni. Margaret's grandson, Karisa, who works in Mombasa, sees the post and travels to his home town, 50 kilometres away, to investigate.

What Karisa discovers after gentle probing is that an uncle named Furaha is behind the threats. Furaha was raised by Margaret after the death of his own mother, who was Margaret's sister. In keeping with tradition, Furaha's father then married Margaret, who raised Furaha and his siblings along-

side the children she eventually had with Furaha's father. The "adopted" son never felt as a full son of Margaret's and came to worry about his share of her inheritance.

Furaha's accusations, which draw heavily on superstition and Pentecostal Christian practices, split the family in two. Eventually, to restore peace and some measure of security for herself, Margaret agrees to attend a kind of purging ceremony to be led by a man calling himself a priest, whom Furaha brings in from Mombasa.

The so-called priest presses Margaret to swear she is not a witch. He turns up the sound on a loudspeaker he has brought to ear-splitting levels, to raise the tension, and sets out to create fear. "God will appear in seven days," he intones. "I pray that no one dies or goes blind."

Margaret, with most of the family's women along with Karisa and her own local priest at her side, sits stoically a short distance away. She is present but refuses to be drawn into the bogus ceremony. Eventually the interlopers from Mombasa along with Furaha and his supporters depart the scene, warning that the next seven days will show whether Margaret is a witch.

The seven days come and go without incident. Margaret, who was 94 at the time of these events, is allowed to live out the rest of her days in relative peace.

"The Letter" – beautifully filmed, with intimately close access to the family and accompanied by a haunting musical score by Maia Lekow – is a cautionary tale. Margaret survived the ordeal and the attempted character assassination, but many

of her age-cohorts in the region are not as lucky.

Coincidentally Margaret was born in 1925, one year after the death of Mekatilili. Neither of these brave and self-possessed women was a witch. But the threat of persecution as witches, which they both faced with courage and dignity, is unfortunately still present today.

FILM

The Letter, 2019, Kenya, directors: Maia Lekow and Christopher King.



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SUMMER SPECIAL

A shy girl becomes the face of anti-racist protests

"The Hate U Give" is a film that tackles pressing issues such as white privilege and racism in a way that appeals to teenagers – thanks to a thrilling story and a charismatic protagonist.

By Sinikka Dombrowski

The film "The Hate U Give" is based on US author Angie Thomas' debut novel of the same name, which was published in 2017. It is also based on a true story. In 2009, police officers shot an unarmed black man named Oscar Grant in Oakland, California. Thomas' classmates saw Grant as a criminal, but she saw him as an innocent man who could have come from her own neighbourhood.

"The Hate U Give" started as a short story which Thomas later expanded into a novel. Starr Carter, the main protagonist, is a teenager who knows how to talk in a way the white media see as well-spoken, but who also can present a vivid account of

police brutality. Thomas' work is marked as Post-Blackness-Literature, as she spreads awareness that African-Americans still face discrimination. Just like Starr, the author attended an almost all-white college and had to shift back and forth between her white college- and black neighbourhood environments. Therefore, "The Hate U Give" has an autobiographic element.

One day Starr is driven home after a party by her friend Khalil Harris, when they are stopped by a police officer. The officer orders Khalil to get out of the car. As Khalil leans into the window to check on Starr and reaches for a hairbrush, the officer shoots him, because he mistakes the hairbrush in Khalil's hand for a gun.

Khalil's story is all over the news, but Starr's connection to him and her identity as the witness are being kept secret from everyone apart from her and Khalil's families. Keeping silent puts her under pressure, while everyone spreads false rumours and

portrays Khalil as a drug dealer with gang connections. In an anonymous interview she defends Khalil, mentioning the King Lords, a drug dealing gang that controls her neighbourhood by means of violence and threats against elderly men and teenagers.

The gang then threatens Starr and her family, forcing them to move in with her uncle Carlos, who is a police detective. Carlos tries to explain to Starr that he is not going to do anything about Khalil's case, because as a black man in the police, he has to maintain his good reputation. He tries to convince her that it is better to protect her family than to speak up.

After a grand jury decides not to indict the officer responsible for Khalil's death, residents of Garden Heights, Starr's and Khalil's neighbourhood, start protesting and rioting under the banner of "Justice for Khalil". Starr decides to speak out during the protests and identifies herself publicly as a witness to Khalil's death.

This causes tensions with her school friends. Hailey Grant, one of Starr's best friends in high school, even defends the officer who shot Khalil, arguing that he acted correctly if he thought the hairbrush was a gun. She accuses Khalil of having provoked the officer with his sarcastic comments, and thus believes the media more than Starr.

Eventually, Starr becomes the leader of the protests against police brutality in Garden Heights. She is all over the news,



Amandla Stenberg as Starr Carter in “The Hate U Give”.

depicted as the girl who wants Khalil to be remembered as the caring and loving boy he was instead of a criminal. During the protests she speaks while standing on top of cars, swearing that she will not let Khalil’s name be forgotten.

Although all the protesters are peaceful in the beginning, members of the King Lords mingle with the people and start to firebomb the grocery store belonging to Starr’s father Maverick. Starr and her half-brother Seven become trapped in the store. The two escape with the help of some Garden Heights business owners, but Maverick’s store is almost completely destroyed.

When the protests end, the community starts to rise up against gang-leader King, who goes to jail. Starr promises to keep Khalil’s memory alive and to continue speaking up against police violence against African-Americans and to fight racism.

Starr is portrayed really well by Amandla Stenberg, an American singer and ac-

trix, and I like the fact that she grows from a shy girl to a bold leader of the protests. Khalil’s death forces her to realise how present the problem of racism still is in today’s society, even by people who are supposed to protect the community. Throughout the film, she acts as a sign of hope for many of the other characters.

Starr’s role is inspirational, as it shows the importance of speaking up on issues that concern you. „The Hate U Give“ shows that a single individual can get results if she receives enough support from those around her. Starr is a role model in many ways, but most impressive is that she risks her own safety to ensure that her friend Khalil did not die in vain.

“The Hate U Give” deals with pressing issues, such as white privilege, racism and discrimination. I think it is important to spread awareness about how African-Americans are still portrayed as thugs. Thomas wanted to encourage young men and wom-

en to speak up and to say what’s on their minds – which she did really well.

I like how the author based the story on actual events and how she tried to give other victims of police brutality a voice through her protagonist. The fact that things like the shooting of Khalil happen in real life is terrifying, but important to know. Aside from that the movie is very well made and especially the protest scenes are very realistic. A few scenes are a bit brutal though, which is why it is good that the movie is not approved for children under the age of 12.

FILM

The Hate U Give, 2018, USA, director: George Tillman, Jr.



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SUMMER SPECIAL

Not safe, but fascinating

“Rohzin” is a love story set in Mumbai (formerly Bombay). The Muslim author portrays life in a fascinating and challenging multicultural environment. Unlike many international bestsellers from India, it takes account of working-class life.

By Hans Dembowski

Rahman Abbas has written a novel that I wish every Islamophobic person around the world would read. It might change their attitude. While they perceive a close-knit and threatening sectarian entity, Abbas describes a diverse and even disparate community. While German conservatives believe that Muslims stick rigidly to seventeenth-century dogmas, Abbas writes about young people discovering all facets of modern mega-city life, including premarital sex, disruptive politics as well as bars and fast-food restaurants. While Hindu supremacists obsess about feeling threatened by the minority community, Abbas elucidates insights of people who know they may become victims of a murderous pogrom sooner or later.

“Rohzin”’s main protagonists are Asrar and Hina. Asrar is a young man who has moved to the city from a coastal village in search of work. He shares a small home with other young men. Though they clearly live in poverty, they appreciate the many opportunities they are able to grasp in the city. Hina, by contrast, is from a more prosperous middle-class family, which is marked by an issue many Western people would believe is more typical of Europe or North America: her parents have split, and the young woman feels torn between them. At the same time, she is considering what courses to take in university and what career choices to make.

UNCONVENTIONAL COUPLE

The two fall in love and become a couple. Quite obviously, their relationship bridges social disparities. They are Muslims from very different backgrounds. Islam defines cultural dimensions of their identities, but not their identity as such. In their daily

lives, they are guided by curiosity rather than Koranic doctrine

Abbas’ novel differs from international bestsellers written by Indian authors like Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor or Jhumpa Lahiri. He does not write from an upper middle-class perspective. Having grown up in a Mumbai slum (see his contribution in Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2021/01), he is intimately familiar with working-class life. On the other hand, his secular outlook on society is not so different from what the above-mentioned authors write.

His focus, however, is on Mumbai’s Muslims. They make up at least one fifth of the population. Abbas makes it very clear that the city is cosmopolitan, with all of its extremely diverse inhabitants contributing to its vibrant multiculturalism. Right-wing Hindus may claim the city for themselves, but Abbas insists that they would ultimately only kill Mumbai’s soul.

The plot unfolds before the background of the floods that submerged large parts of the metropolis in 2005. A little more than a decade earlier, the city was rocked by anti-Muslim riots in 1993. This agglomeration offers homes and opportunities to mil-

lions of people, but nothing is ever really as safe as it might be in Berlin, Paris or London. Though dirt and destitution are omnipresent, the protagonists find life more alluring and fascinating in Mumbai than anywhere outside the city.

Abbas wrote the novel in Urdu. This language is closely related to Hindi, but its alphabet was derived from Arabic and its grammar was codified during Mughal rule. It is now the official language of Pakistan, but also used in India.

South Asian critics consider “Rohzin” a turning point in Urdu literature. The book is indeed modern in the sense of questioning contemporary lifestyles without much concern for traditions of any kind. Thanks to this book, Abbas won the Sahitya Akademi Award, India’s most prestigious literary award, in 2018. A German translation was published in 2018, and an English one is being prepared in India.

BOOK

Rahman Abbas, 2018: Die Stadt, das Meer, die Liebe. Heidelberg, Draupadi.

English translation scheduled for January 2022 by Penguin Random House India.



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Haji Ali Mausoleum is a Muslim landmark in Mumbai.



Afghan women in the illegal refugee camp in Pedion Tou Areos, Athens' largest park.

SUMMER SPECIAL

Fleeing civil war

They have lost everything, they are deeply traumatised and yet they refuse to give up hope. In "The Beekeeper of Aleppo", a young author draws attention to the fate of thousands and thousands of refugees.

By Dagmar Wolf

Nuri is a beekeeper. He was actually supposed to take over his father's tailor's shop in Aleppo, but when his cousin Mustafa introduces him to beekeeping, Nuri makes a life-changing decision. Mustafa is a professor at Damascus University, and while he commutes back and forth between Aleppo and Damascus, Nuri takes care of the hives. The venture goes well. Before long, they have 100 hives producing 10 tonnes of honey a year. Mustafa opens a shop, attracting customers from Europe, Asia and the Gulf States. His plan is for his daughter Aya to take over the store later.

Nuri leads a simple but happy life with his artist wife Afra and young son Sami. But the war draws closer. Mustafa sends his wife and daughter to friends in England. He himself hesitates, unwilling to abandon his hives. One night, however, the hives are

destroyed by vandals, whereupon Mustafa decides to follow his wife and daughter. But then his teenage son Firas disappears.

While searching for Firas, Mustafa finds work in a morgue. His job is to record the cause of death of the corpses. Eventually, Firas also ends up on his autopsy table. As the cause of death, Mustafa writes "This broken world". Only a week later, Nuri's son Sami dies in an explosion while playing in the garden one last time before the family wanted to leave for England.

Afra, who is blinded by the explosion, refuses to leave. She cannot face leaving Sami, who is buried in the garden. But the pressures mount. Mustafa disappears after observing four men execute boys by the river – and shooting three of them dead. Nuri also repeatedly witnesses cruelty and destruction. "I wished I could wipe away what I had seen. I wanted to erase it all from my memory," he says. When fighters seek to forcibly recruit him and destroy the family home, Nuri and Afra have no choice but to finally flee.

They are taken to the Turkish border by smugglers. On the banks of the Orontes, dramatic scenes unfold as they set out to

cross the wide border river at night with other refugees, some in "big cooking pots". On reaching Istanbul, they find they need to wait for better weather before attempting the crossing in an inflatable boat to Greece. There are regular reports of boats sinking and people drowning.

Eventually they end up in Athens, stranded in an illegal camp in Pedion tou Areos Park along with thousands of refugees, mostly from Afghanistan but also from other countries. Strange things go on around them. "Here in the park, it feels as if we have all been forgotten," Nuri says. "In this place, people die slowly, from the inside. One by one, they die."

Wherever possible, Nuri tries to keep in email contact with Mustafa. He thus learns that Mustafa has made it to England and is trying to start up a beekeeping business again. The hope of joining Mustafa in England and their love for each other keep Afra and Nuri going.

The couple are in the very fortunate position of being able to raise enough money to pay smugglers. So, unlike most other refugees, they manage to escape from the proverbial "hell on earth" – but they pay a high price, not only in monetary terms.

At the beginning of the book we find them in a refugee shelter preparing their application for asylum with the help of a social worker, so it is clear from the outset that they eventually make it to England. But the nightmare is far from over. They are both plagued by traumatic memories of their experiences in Syria and on the road.

Christy Lefteri grew up in London as the daughter of Cypriot refugees. In the summers of 2016 and 2017 she spent months in a refugee camp in Athens. Her conversations with people there inspired her to write this compelling sensitive book, for which she was awarded the Aspen Words Literary Prize in 2020.

BOOK

Lefteri, C., 2019: *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. London, Zaffre.



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SUMMER SPECIAL

The last colony

Many years ago, the British forcibly resettled the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean. Now the expellees and their descendants in British exile are fighting for the right to return to their homeland. The documentary “Another Paradise” accompanies their struggle.

By Katja Dombrowski

Of the former British Indian Ocean Territory, precisely one island group remains: the Chagos Archipelago, located in the centre between Asia, Africa and Australia. For decades, London has leased the entire archipelago of 64 islands to the US, which operates a large military base on the main island of Diego Garcia. Yet above all, the tropical paradise is of geopolitical significance to the occupying forces, so much so that they refuse to give it back to Mauritius.

Until the middle of the 1960s, Chagos officially belonged to Mauritius. When the United Kingdom granted Mauritius independence, it retained the remote islands, which had few inhabitants. The UK’s move was illegal, as the International Court of Justice recently confirmed. But while Mauritius, which has fought vehemently for years for the islands to be returned, is the

legal owner, the Chagossians would rather be independent.

It is even more important to them, however, that they be allowed to return to their islands. In order to transform Diego Garcia into a military base, now a restricted area, British colonial rulers expelled the entire population of Chagos, around 1,200 people. They and their descendants now live in Mauritius, the Seychelles and above all in England.

From there, they are fighting for their lost homeland, a struggle documented by Belgian director Olivier Magis in the film “Another Paradise”. The film centres on Sabrina Jean, the chairperson of the Chagos Refugees Group UK. She was born in Mauritius in 1973 and lives in Crawley, around 30 kilometres south of London, where there is a large Chagossian community. “I am fighting for my dad,” Jean explains in the film. Her father’s greatest wish is to be buried at his home in Peros Banhos, a small atoll that belongs to the Chagos Archipelago.

The film shows how the uprooted older generation living in exile in England tries to pass on to the young their traditions, language, food, clothing and the songs that tell how the British took everything from them.

One gets the sense that this is becoming more difficult from generation to generation, that something has been lost, perhaps irretrievably. The film also depicts the lives of the grandchildren: young people playing football in twenty-first century England, who are far away, in every respect, from the Chagos that the film resurrects in historical footage.

The small diaspora community has high hopes for football. “Another Paradise” takes place in 2016, a few months before the lease with the US runs out, and the Chagossians are betting everything on this lease not being renewed. That’s why they are putting pressure on the British government and protesting in London. There are not many of them, and they don’t have a big lobby. Jean and her fellow campaigners know this. Nevertheless, they have an opportunity to attract more attention: the Chagossian football team – a hobby club in Crawley that Jean heads – has qualified for the 2016 CONIFA World Football Cup.

Participating in the international tournament for stateless people in distant Abkhazia, which was only made possible by a major fundraising campaign, is a high point for the group that the film follows – even when they lose all of their games. In this World Cup of the forgotten, they play against teams from places like Western Armenia, Somaliland or Raetia.

Not shown in the film is the fact that in 2016, the US government’s lease of the Chagos Archipelago was extended for another 20 years. However, that doesn’t mean that the Chagossians’ fight is over. “Another Paradise” makes it clear that they will not give up. They have even proposed acquiring a boat, simply sailing to Chagos and then refusing to leave the islands. It would be a mission with a very uncertain outcome. But Jean gives the impression that she is prepared to do almost anything to achieve her goal.

FILM

Another Paradise, 2019, Belgium/France, director: Olivier Magis.



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Sabrina Jean at the 2016 CONIFA World Football Cup.

SUMMER SPECIAL

Healthy soil, healthy climate

An American Netflix documentary seeks to open viewers' eyes to the enormous importance of soil for climate protection. Its makers explain that regenerative agriculture can stop global warming and even fuel a process of global cooling. The project not only includes a film and a book; it is also backed by a civil society movement.

By Sabine Balk

Industrial agriculture has been a credo of most rich industrialised countries since the 1950s. In North and South America, it accounts for the vast majority of farms. Agricultural areas there typically feature farms geared to mass production, with thousands of animals kept indoors and sprawling monocultures maintained by chemicals. Even among development policymakers, there are still some who advocate this method as a model for agriculture in Africa or Latin America – although it should be common knowledge by now that industrial agriculture is harmful to the environment, the climate and human health.

But one of the main arguments still rolled out is that industrial agriculture is the only way to feed the growing world population. The documentary “Kiss the ground” dispels this myth once and for all. The filmmakers point out that industrial agriculture

destroys valuable humus, which acts as a natural carbon sink. In the long run, they explain, that leads to dead soil – soil that can only produce a crop with the help of agricultural chemicals.

The devastating consequences are already apparent. Two-thirds of the Earth's land area has already turned into desert. Although the film presents horrifying images of dry, dusty fields and parched land, its message is by no means all doom and gloom. It gives plenty of hope – and astonishes the viewer. Desertification can be reversed by a different approach to farming: regenerative agriculture. The film shows examples in many parts of the world where it has worked. The most impressive involves a programme in China where an area the size of Belgium has been regenerated.

Footage from 1994 shows a hilly desert-like landscape and a desperately poor local population with precious little to eat and no educational opportunities for their children. Within 15 years, the area was transformed into a verdant landscape with a huge diversity of plants and trees. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty, and local communities can now live on the crops they grow. And – the film points out – their children today attend the best universities in the country.

According to the filmmakers, all this is possible with the help of regenerative agriculture. The approach is based on a set of four principles:

- no tilling to avoid erosion,
- maintenance of a permanent green cover of diverse plants and trees,
- green manuring, using cover crops that are incorporated into the soil as shallowly as possible and as deeply as necessary to “feed” soil life and “rejuvenate” the substrate, and
- controlled grazing by hoofed animals, because grazing is vital to maintain and preserve grasses.

Advocates claim that regenerative agriculture restores the microbial processes – and thus the life – in the soil that tilling and chemicals destroyed. The soil is restored to health. Crops grown in it have a high nutrient content. Another fantastic effect, according to the makers of “Kiss the ground”, is that regenerative farming takes CO₂ out of the atmosphere and stores it in soil and vegetation. This makes it possible, they say, to stop global warming within a relatively short time and even start cooling the climate down again within around 20 years. Climate activists also support the regenerative approach – which, among other things, is part of “Drawdown”, a project founded by American environmentalist Paul Hawken to identify and promote the most substantive carbon-reduction solutions.

In typical American style, the documentary “Kiss the ground” couches its message in simple, emotive language – which may not appeal to all viewers. But this fact – and the choice of well-known US actor Woody Harrelson as narrator – will help the filmmakers reach a broad and perhaps less aware audience. And that is absolutely necessary and important.

FILM

Kiss the ground, 2020, USA, directed by Rebecca Harrell Tickell and Joshua Tickell.
<https://kissthegroundmovie.com>
<https://kisstheground.com>



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Regenerative agriculture means fields with a wide variety of plants and trees.



The three central figures of the exhibition.

SUMMER SPECIAL

Tribute to a murdered king

An exhibition in Hamburg on the German colonial period in Cameroon addresses issues of resistance, racism and the culture of remembrance.

By Anke Schwarzer

A large-format graphic novel stretches along the walls, winding past contracts and correspondence, old portrait photographs and new artworks. It encircles wooden “tange” – canoe prow ornaments made by Cameroon’s coastal communities – and a “kaba”, a Ngondo festival dress owned by Queen Mother Delphine Douala Bell. The special exhibition “Hey Hamburg, kennst Du Douala Manga Bell?” (“Hey Hamburg, do you know Douala Manga Bell?”) at the Museum

am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) focuses on the German colonial period in Cameroon.

“To my knowledge, this exhibition is the first major public tribute in Germany to the Cameroonian King Rudolf Douala Manga Bell,” said Princess Marilyn Douala Bell when she attended the opening of the exhibition in April by video link. The great-granddaughter of Rudolf Duala Manga Bell sees the current exhibition, which will also be hosted in Cameroon, as a potential bridge for dialogue.

And dialogue between Hamburg and Douala is important. Douala is the largest city in Cameroon and is named after the Duala people. Designed as a place for young people and families, the show also aims to

have a cross-generational impact. MARKK director Barbara Plankensteiner says: “In the past, our children’s programmes in particular have promoted exotic notions of other cultures.” Given that little time is devoted to the subject of colonialism in schools, she adds, it is particularly important to present it in a way that makes it accessible for youngsters from the age of ten.

Activity areas encourage visitors to participate and reflect. A spotlight is trained on works by young Hamburg artists between the ages of 18 and 27. Among them is an installation by Laurel Chokoago showing a deformed plastic chair with the crossed-out title “A Seat At The Table”, illustrating the importance of getting – or not getting – a seat at the table where decisions are made.

Many-faceted objects and historical documents tell the story – largely forgotten in Germany – of the young King Rudolf Douala Manga Bell. He came from a merchant dynasty – one that was involved in slave-trading up to 1840 but later became wealthy mainly by trading in palm fruits. Palm oil

was a valuable commodity in the times of European industrialisation. In 1884, leading representatives of the Duala, Rudolf Duala Manga Bell's grandfather among them, signed a treaty with their German trading partners. But the Germans did not abide by the agreement for long. In 1892, leading Duala raised complaints of unequal treatment and beatings. To no avail. A few years later, the German Colonial Army embarked on wars of conquest.

Even a delegation to Berlin, which included Rudolf Duala Manga Bell, failed to make matters any better. Indeed, even worse was to come. On 8 August 1914, Manga Bell and other resistance fighters were executed by German colonial officials. At the end of the graphic novel by Karo Akpokiere, a Nigerian artist living in Hamburg, Manga Bell says: "You are hanging innocent blood. You kill me in vain."

Other central figures of the exhibition are Adolf Ngoso Din, who was hanged by the Germans in 1914 along with Manga Bell and Maria Mandessi Bell, Din's fiancée, who spent part of her school years living with a pastor's family in Germany.

The exhibition makes an important contribution to the debate about Hamburg's colonial past. As a former ethnological museum, the MARKK is closely linked to colonial expansion. The special exhibition thus focuses not only on the colonial activities of the Hamburg entrepreneurs Woermann, Jantzen and Thormählen, who made fortunes from ivory, rubber, palm oil and cacao. It also displays objects that were acquired by merchants under dubious circumstances in Cameroon and then donated or sold to the museum. One such exhibit is a carved ceremonial staff.

The show is suffused with questions of provenance, authorship and the restitution of objects from colonial times. It also raises the issue of the long-overdue rehabilitation of Rudolf Duala Manga Bell. The charge brought against him at the time was high treason. Yet no evidence that he was guilty of such a crime has ever emerged. Even so, this chapter of colonial history has still not been reappraised in Germany.

"Hey Hamburg! Do you know Duala Manga Bell?" works on many important levels. The exhibition is wide-ranging and

sometimes feels very dense, almost as if it seeks to deal with every long-forgotten, romanticised aspect of colonial violence at once. Nevertheless, precisely because of the persistence of ignorance, it is no easy task to paint a decolonial picture of the history and consequences of the German colonial period in Cameroon. Created in collaboration with international partners from the worlds of academia, art and civil society, the exhibition will run until the end of 2022, when it will then move to Cameroon.

EXHIBITION

Hey Hamburg, kennst Du Duala Manga Bell?
 ("Hey Hamburg, do you know Duala Manga Bell?") 14 April 2021 – 31 December 2022.
 Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt.
<https://markk-hamburg.de/ausstellungen/hey-hamburg/>

ANKE SCHWARZER

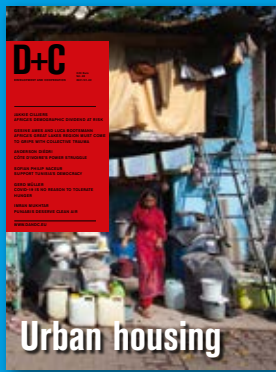
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"Tét'ékombo ô muléma" by artist Hervé Youmbi.



Kaba – a Ngondo festival dress – owned by Queen Mother Delphine Douala-Bell.

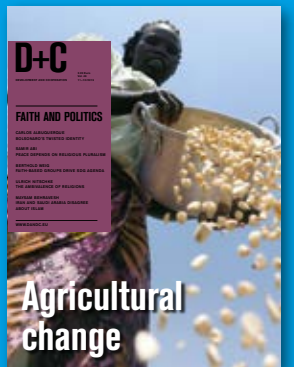
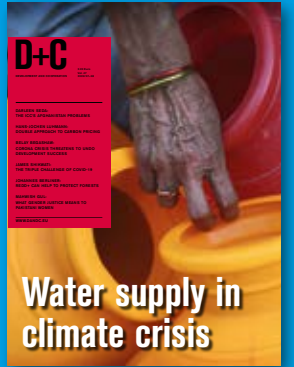


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Malawi refuses expired vaccines

Malawi's health system is practically in a coma, with an inadequate supply of drugs, equipment and personnel. So offers of Covid-19 vaccine supplies came as a blessing: in late March, Malawi received more than 102,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India (SII).

The vaccine was part of a larger lot bought by the African Union from South Africa, which had stopped using the jab amid doubts over its effectiveness against a new Covid-19 variant in that country. But there was a catch: The vaccine was due to expire on 13 April, only a few weeks later.

Malawi used whatever vaccine it could during the three-week window, and said it would destroy the remaining 16,000 doses. The government expressed doubts about the effectiveness of expired drugs and said that using expired vaccines could undermine public confidence in the vaccination campaign.

The World Health Organization (WHO) initially advised Malawi to hold on to the expired vaccines in case they can be used after all. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's Africa regional director, urged countries to "store the vaccines safely as we continue to study and try to get definitive advice on whether the vaccines can be used for longer," the BBC reported.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agreed with the WHO. "My appeal to member states is: if we are doing our part to mobilise these vaccines, you do your part and use the vaccines," Africa CDC director John Nkengasong told a news conference on 22 April. He added that the manufacturer claims "vaccines can still be used even after nine months".

Malawi disagreed and destroyed the expired vials. In his State of the Nation Address in mid-May, President Lazarus Chakwera said: "I have categorically refused to let our citizens be inoculated with expired vaccines. If it's not good enough for use in the northern hemisphere, then it's not good enough for use in the southern hemisphere."

Health minister Charles Mwanamboni elaborated: "Each vial clearly states the expiry date," he told the Voice of America, the US state broadcaster. "Any doctor would not be forgiven if anything happened after he knowingly used a vial that has expired." He added: "If we store these expired vaccines that will be a big blow to our vaccination drive. People will not come."

George Jobe, executive director of Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN), agreed: "The WHO and the African Union should understand that Malawi must protect its people against health hazards. We cannot afford to use drugs that are harmful. Using expired drugs is not an option even if Malawi has run out of drugs."

South Sudan also said it would discard up to 59,000 expired Covid-19 vaccine doses, citing similar arguments.

In view of the uproar, the WHO changed its advice in mid-May and said the expired drugs should be destroyed. "Any vaccine that has passed its expiry date, including [AstraZeneca] Covishield, should not be administered," the WHO said on 17 May. "WHO recommends that these expired doses should be removed from the distribution chain and safely disposed."

Malawi, meanwhile, still suffers from shortages of medicines of all kinds and is looking for new vaccine supplies. Its situation is dire, as more than half of its 18.6 million people live in poverty and more than one-fifth live in extreme poverty – making disease control more difficult. "More avenues for securing additional vaccines are being explored," President Chakwera said in his State of the Nation Address.



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Challenging racism

Racism means that members of specific minorities face resentment and do not enjoy the same opportunities as others. In many cases, though not always, racist attitudes have roots in the colonial era. Compounding the problems, members of mainstream society tend to think that racism is about personal hatred rather than institutions treating people differently. They deny there is such a thing

as systemic racism. Ultimately, everyone suffers. Societies marked by racism typically do not have strong idea of the common good.



This focus section directly relates to the motto of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Leave no one behind. It has a bearing on the entire SDG agenda.

Students rallying in Kathmandu in protest after the killing of a Dalit youth in 2020.

PREJUDICE

Mexico's racial divide

Mexicans with indigenous or black ancestry face discrimination in jobs, education and the justice system – even though racial distinctions officially do not exist. The Mexican doctrine of “mestizaje”, or racial mixing, obscures deep-seated prejudices and systematic discrimination.

By Virginia Mercado

Officially, racial distinctions do not exist in Mexico. After the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century, the government embraced the notion of “mestizaje”, or mixed race, to forge a unified identity. All Mexicans came to be considered “mestizos” – people of mixed European, Indigenous and African race – at least culturally, if not biologically. From the racial point of view, Mexico was to become one big, happy family.

This blanket terminology is deeply misleading and conceals a traumatic colonial history (see my essay in Focus section of D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/11). In fact, racial and ethnic identities are deep and abiding, and they remain major sources of conflict. Mestizaje, which began as a way to remove ethnicity from the national consciousness, unfortunately now obscures that racism still exists.

Consider the use of racial labels in everyday conversation. The words “Indian” (indio), “black” (negro), and “dark” (prieto) all have negative connotations. They are considered so harsh that many progressives use them only in the diminutive, to blunt the insult. This is especially true when they refer to a minor. Adding the diminutive implies making allowances, as in: “poor fellow, it’s not his fault he was born like that”. In contrast, the terms for “fair-skinned” (güero and its diminutive güerito) express approval and acknowledge superiority.

Racism in Mexico goes well beyond words; it has real-world consequences. Last year, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía – INEGI) released a National Survey on Discrimination, which is exceptional government practice because it gathers ra-

cial data. The survey showed that, in 2020, 24% of indigenous people had experienced discrimination and 75.6% felt under-valued.

In the same survey three years earlier, 49% of indigenous people said their rights were not respected. They experience such lack of respect in the form of limited access to jobs and social benefits. All too often, services are denied – including health services, which in Covid-19 times is particularly dangerous. Indeed, many primary-school teachers forbid the use of indigenous languages in class, thus suppressing these languages in favour of Spanish. Non-Spanish speakers typically do not have the same access to justice as Spanish-speakers.

Scholars from Vanderbilt University in the USA have confirmed the existence of race- and ethnicity-based discrimination in Mexico. They found that lighter-skinned Mexicans complete more years of schooling than darker-skinned ones – 10 years compared to 6.5 years. Since Mexico does not usually collect racial data, pollsters working for Vanderbilt’s Latin American Public Opinion Project themselves categorised respondents’ skin tone using an 11-point scale.

In short, race matters in Mexico – contrary to the ideology of mestizaje. Indeed, a significant proportion of Mexicans self-identify as members of racial or ethnic groups. Studies have shown that up to 60% self-identify as mestizos, but the rest see themselves as indigenous (30%), white (nine percent) or other (one percent). According to Oxfam, about 70% of the indigenous people are poor – the figure for other population groups is 39%.

HEATED DEBATES

The racial divide has become an increased focus of national debate since the left-of-centre government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office in 2018. To be sure, the government continues to issue optimistic statements about the narrowing of economic and social gaps. But public discourse on social and national media tells a different story. People’s physical appearance and ethnicity are clearly part of the conversation.

Consider, for example, the debate over compliance with Covid-19 restrictions. Elites, who are mostly fair-skinned, have been able to stay at home comfortably. Their houses are big enough to allow storage space for food for long periods, they usually can work from home, and their children have the technology to attend school lessons remotely. Members of these elites have criti-



Covid-19 has hit indigenous communities especially hard.

cised disadvantaged people for breaking the rules, going to work and even bringing their children along. Those children, however, lack the technology needed for distance learning.

Debates of this nature are becoming more frequent, prompted by politicians' speeches and videos that go viral. In the ensuing discussion, name-calling and slurs occur again and again.

For example, the term "whitexican" has gained popularity on social networks to describe privileged elites who disparage or discriminate against groups they consider inferior. In popular parlance, a "whitexican" sees racial and ethnic minorities as ignorant and incompetent, rather than as victims of ingrained injustice. Individuals accused of being "whitexicans" have countered they are victims of "reverse racism" – showing that some attitudinal gaps are difficult to bridge.

Some argue that such polarisation is evidence of classism, not racism. That argument only makes sense to some extent, because racism and classism clearly overlap. The convergence of wealth, power and light skin is actually ingrained in the system. At the same time, people with darker complexions are especially likely to suffer because of organised crime and government action to repress it. The militarised war on drugs has claimed some 300,000 lives since 2006, according to civil-society activists.

Researchers have found that, especially in areas where the cartels control much of the land, many indigenous or Afro-descendant people have been:

- forced to participate in the cultivation of drugs,
- stripped (once again) of their lands, and
- suffered forced displacement.

On the other hand, the lowest ranking army soldiers, who are most at risks, are from poor families.

At the same time, dark-skinned Mexicans who have done well economically still face discrimination, because some prosperous whites do not expect a person with a dark complexion to be their equal. Occasionally, a person wearing ethnic clothing is asked to leave a high-priced restaurant – for the same reason.

Racial divisions between indigenous people and those with European ancestry also appear in public debates related to the



Historical painting depicting the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán in August 1521.

colonial legacy. A few months ago, President López Obrador asked the Spain's government to apologise to Mexico on the occasion of a significant anniversary: the fall of the Aztec stronghold of Tenochtitlán on 13 August 1521. He saw this apology as an act of symbolic reparation for historical damage to indigenous peoples. Spain flatly refused.

The incident caused an uproar on social media, with tirades on both sides highlighting the racial and ethnic divide. Indigenous groups favouring the president's request pointed to other countries that have apologised for historical damage. The president's opponents, by contrast, argued that the Spanish colonisation was a civilising process, not a damaging one. Many of them have European ancestors, and they consider the president's request an insult to Spain. Some even said he exposed Mexicans to international ridicule.

The pernicious influence of racism goes far beyond fostering a self-defeating belief among some disadvantaged groups that dark-skinned Mexicans are to blame for failing to overcome the colonial legacy. Instead, racism affects thinking at all levels of society, and poses a formidable barrier to economic progress for large segments of the population.

Mexico's national media are part of the problem. Indigenous people are mainly absent from shows depicting daily life. When they do appear, they are mainly servants to their more important and successful white

employers. Afro-Mexicans are also nearly absent from national media.

MIXED-RACE CONUNDRUM

The irony behind *mestizaje* is that historically, before the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, the territory now known as Mexico was ethnically diverse. In an effort to dehumanise native groups, the conquerors began to treat them as an undifferentiated mass. The same process was applied to slaves from Africa and Asia. The colonisers introduced a fixed hierarchy based on skin colour, with whites at the top.

After its war of Independence in the early 19th century, Mexico officially abolished this caste system. But something of the colonialist attitude has remained. The "mestizaje" ideology notwithstanding, inter-racial mixing was neither a universal process, nor a smooth one. It followed a variety of configurations and responded to a variety of migration patterns in different regions of the country. It is fine to strive for national unity – but in Mexico, it has to be unity in diversity. Ignoring racial disparities does not help.



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Protesters march in the Minneapolis suburb where, on 11 April 2021, a police officer killed Daunte Wright, a young Black man.

USA

Anti-racists' two-front struggle

Two kinds of news stories have recently been proving that Black people are still exposed to serious racism in the USA in 2021. First, Republicans in many states are changing voting laws in ways designed to reduce the participation of minorities in elections. Second, police violence against people of colour keeps occurring. In this context, the history of racist ideas is most relevant – and a Black scholar published a book on the matter in 2016. This article summarise some of his conclusions.

By Hans Dembowski

As Ibram X. Kendi writes in the prologue to his book “Stamped from the beginning”, historians’ work is marked by the era they live in. He claims to be writing in the Black Lives Matter era. The book was published in 2016, four years before the death of George Floyd under the knee of a police officer in Minneapolis triggered protests around the world. The depressing truth is that Floyd was neither the first nor the last innocent Black victim of police brutality.

An important distinction Kendi makes is between individual racism and institu-

tional racism. He insists that racism is about much more than personal feelings of hatred. Institutional racism is about members of a particular community faring worse than the rest of society – for example in regard to job opportunities, housing, education et cetera. There can be no doubt that, in institutional terms, the USA is indeed a racist society.

Referring to federal statistics, Kendi reports that young Black males were 21 times more likely to be killed by the police and their white counterparts between 2010 and 2012. The median wealth of white households exceeds the median wealth of Black households by the factor 13, and Black people were five times more likely to be incarcerated.

Kendi is a professor at Boston University and the founder/director of its Center for Antiracist Research. As he sees it, antiracists are fighting a two-front struggle. While segregationists, who want to keep Black and white people apart, are obviously racist, the case is less clear for assimilationists who basically argue that Black and white people could share a nation if only Black people adapted better to society’s standards. The fundamental problem with the assimila-

tionist approach is that it makes Black people responsible for repairing the damage they suffer in an unjust society with the horrific history of slavery.

Kendi spells out clearly why it is impossible for Black people to assimilate in a way that would satisfy assimilationists’ expectations. Black achievers, however, are perceived as exceptions who do not really represent the Black community. There is a long history of some white people appreciating an individual Black person as an “extraordinary Negro”. He names Barack Obama as the most recent prominent example. At the same time, many white people respond to a Black person’s success with resentment.

INESCAPABLE DOUBLE BIND

This kind of double-bind means that however much Black people try to live up to assimilationist demands, they simply cannot succeed. The expectations are excessive. Nobody is perfect, Kendi insists, so nobody expects a white person to be flawless. By contrast, there is a pattern of reading any shortcoming of any Black person as proof of inadequate adaptation of every Black person, whereas any achievement is considered exceptional.

Marginalised communities around the world will recognise these patterns:

- There is a tendency in all Western countries, for example, to hold all Muslims responsible for atrocities committed by

Islamist extremists. At the same time, perpetrators of right-wing hate crimes are generally declared to be isolated individuals who may well suffer mental health problems.

- Systemic discrimination against disadvantaged communities means worse opportunities in regard to jobs, health care, housing and education. Indigenous communities in the Andes or India's Dalits and Adivasis share that fate. They know, for example, that it is considered proof of personal inferiority when members of their community rarely graduate from educational institutions they only have limited access to in the first place.

- Many mainstream conservatives will deny they have any racist leanings simply because they happen to have an acquaintance who belongs to the minority and interact with that person on friendly terms. They refuse to discuss institutional racism.

Racist ideas, according to Kendi, have always helped to entrench vested, privileged interests throughout American history. Today, the stoking of racist tensions distracts attention from other issues such as universal access to health care or affordable college for everyone. By facilitating progress in these areas, the author argues, anti-racist policymaking would benefit the majority of white Americans too.

On the other hand, Kendi warns that attempts to end the debate on racism normally promote unwitting racism. For example, it was wrong to declare that the USA had

become a post-racial society simply because a Black man was elected president in 2008. That Barack Obama moved into the White House, after all, did nothing to change the statistics that prove the USA's institutional racism.

SLAVE OWNERS' CALL FOR LIBERTY

Kendi's book is powerful. He traces currently prevalent racist ideas in the USA back to the 15th century when Portuguese and Spanish seafarers started to interfere in far-away societies. His book elaborates how the slave trade flourished in the colonial era. Kendi emphasises irony of the founding fathers of the USA demanding liberty from Britain whilst denying freedom to their slaves. Most prominently, Thomas Jefferson, the author of the declaration of independence and a highly influential third president of the USA ideologically opposed slavery, but also opposed its abolition. Indeed, he owned slaves. He had sex – and several children – with one of them.

The book explores why segregationists prevailed, especially in the South, after the civil war. Even though slavery was abolished, white supremacists brutally enforced their rule. State laws circumvented constitutional amendments designed to protect the rights of Black people. Horrific lynchings were common, but the perpetrators claimed they were only “punishing criminals”. In particular, they had a pattern of accusing

Black men of raping white women. Kendi elaborates why Black intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois often started out as assimilationists, with some never moving beyond that approach. The historian points out that segregationist views stayed acceptable among scholars until the genocidal horrors of Nazi Germany discredited attempts to create a genetic hierarchy of peoples.

He explains why the Voting Rights Act in the 1960s was more progressive than other contemporary civil-rights legislation: it emphasised results rather than intentions. Among other things, it required southern states to get federal approval for their voting laws. However, the Supreme Court decided that this was no longer needed in 2013 – and as a result, laws that make it harder for Black people to vote have been proliferating since.

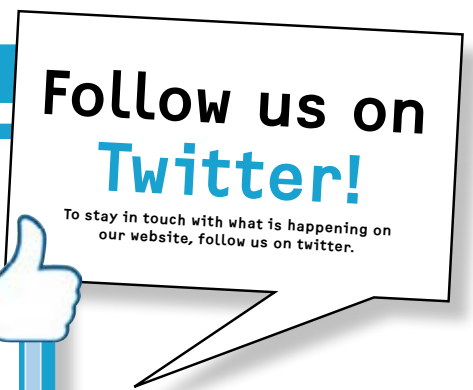
In 2016, “Stamped from the beginning” won the National Book Award for Nonfiction in the USA. That was also the year in which Donald Trump was elected president. While the Black-studies scholar admits that an anti-racist society will not be achieved soon, he expresses the optimism that it will eventually happen. What is needed, in his eyes, is policies that ensure Black people enjoy equal opportunities.

REFERENCE

Kendi, I. X., 2016: *Stamped from the beginning – The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. New York, Nation Books.



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IDENTITY POLITICS

Shifting loyalties

Tribalism is today what racism was in colonial Kenya. It entrenches the power of the elite and vested interests. Top leaders now claim they want to transcend tribalism, but their action is still marked by this very phenomenon.

By Alphonse Shiundu

Kenya's top two leaders, President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto, are in a potentially dangerous political conflict. They were re-elected on a joint ticket to a second term in 2017. Their alliance was billed as a unity pact between Kenyatta's tribe, the Kikuyu, and Ruto's tribe, the Kalenjin. Nonetheless, the two leaders are now scheming against each other, stoking old tribal rivalries once again.

In the run-up to the 2022 election campaign, Kenyatta has announced a "national unity pact" with opposition leader Raila Odinga of the Luo tribe – thus leaving Ruto and the Kalenjin out in the cold. The Kenyatta-Odinga combination has historical precedent. In 1963, Kenyatta's father and Odinga's father became president and vice president of Kenya's first independent government after colonial rule.

The new Kenyatta-Odinga alliance claims to be more than a reshuffling of tribal coalitions. Instead, it claims to have the loftier aim of national unity.

After signalling their new alliance with a much-advertised handshake, Kenyatta and Odinga proposed a sweeping constitutional overhaul. Among other things, they proposed to "promote electoral competition based on ideas, values and our shared humanity, rather than on the common-enemy identity politics that have defined our electoral cycles to date."

Similarly, Kenyatta and Odinga want to decentralise the administration to ensure "greater inclusivity, fairness, equity and accountability in the distribution of resources." Moreover, Odinga suggested a "rotating presidency" in which each tribe gets a chance to lead the country. The big irony is that Kenya's constitution is only ten years

old and was adopted after the country went through a traumatic post-election violence in early 2008. Back then, tribal clashes and police killings claimed more than 1,000 lives.

In January 2021, however, Kenyatta stated that the presidency is not the private reserve of Kikuyus and Kalenjins. "Perhaps it is the turn for another community to rule," he said. His comment was widely interpreted as an attack on Ruto.

Quite obviously, debate is still focused very much on tribal identity. Leaders may debate ways to lessen its influence, but they are far from eradicating it.

ROOTING OUT TRIBALISM

Kenyatta himself admitted as much when he announced the constitutional reform proposal in October 2020. He said the system of incentives linked to tribalism will be difficult to change.

"The fact of the matter is that we are a tribal society, and this is what divides us," he said. "We pretend that we are national leaders. But when the time comes, we switch to [tribal] vernacular and become what we



Young Kenyans go to school, but employment opportunities remain rare.

Ruto shot back, saying that politics should focus on issues other than tribalism in the first place. Instead, he said that "everybody should campaign based on policies that will change the lives of Kenyans." Ruto took up the cause of young people who say politicians are talking about tribes when they should be talking about money and livelihoods. Ruto's comments, in turn, were interpreted as an attack on the new Kenyatta-Odinga alliance.

are." He admitted that he himself was not an exception.

Indeed, he reverted to type fast. When Ruto started mobilising his supporters in early 2021 in opposition to the new Kenyatta-Odinga alliance, the president, who has unlimited access to the national broadcast network, turned to radio stations that broadcast in his tribal language. He chose to address only the Kikuyu people – his people. He had done so before. His step



immediately re-kindled resentment over “Kikuyu privilege”.

Such grumbling is nothing new. Sometimes inter-tribal tensions flare up into violence, especially during election campaigns. The reason is that so much patronage is at stake. Tribal affiliation determines whether one gets a job or a government contract, and whether a region gets a new road, a new hospital or other crucial infrastructure.

Although the country has at least 44 tribes, two dominant groups – the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin – hold close to 40% of civil-service jobs. Not coincidentally, only members of these two tribes have served as presidents of independent Kenya. Government officials are generally known to use their jobs to share the spoils with their respective communities.

Had Kenya’s leaders done a better job since the British colonial power left in 1963, ethnicity would no longer be an issue. Instead, tribalism is today what racism was in pre-independence Kenya. It is held in place by informal structures, with networks making the system profitable for those in power.

As a result, tribal identity remains very important. These attitudes are rooted in traditions and cannot be eradicated quickly. Tribalism is perpetuated in subconscious cues, innuendos, dog-whistling, stereotyping and even overt cultural slurs. Proving hate speech is difficult, so abuses are not necessarily punishable by law. When the targets of slurs call out such behaviour, they are often accused of tribalism themselves.

YOUTH REBELLION

Still, there are signs of change in the enduring focus on tribalism. At least in theory, Kenyatta and Odinga are calling for an end to identity-driven politics – although their actions speak a different language. Their new call for unity may simply serve as a smokescreen to hide the shutting out of Ruto, at least it started a conversation about changing the focus to fair opportunities for all.

More promising is the emergence of a movement of young people. They want identity-based patronage to end and demand more opportunity for all (see box below). Ruto has taken up their cause, arguing that discussing fairness and opportunity is far more important than debating nuanced constitutional reforms.

He is trying to attract the potentially huge constituency of Kenya’s young people. An estimated 75% of the population is under 35 years old. Most of them have primary and secondary education but still must eke out a living in the informal sector. They are less willing than their elders to accept the narrative of one or the other tribe being to blame

for grievances. They are increasingly turning away from cultural stereotyping, fabricated ethnic animosities and long-standing divide-and-rule strategies.

Ruto says the real political divide is between those who work their way up the economic ladder and those who inherit privilege and wealth. He says the important issue is fair access to land, jobs and opportunities. Fair access would mean, for example, that regions dominated by the opposition would get their share of roads, hospitals, electric power lines and other infrastructure.

The big issue is how to achieve fair distribution. There already are laws and institutions to guard against discrimination based on ethnicity. There is even a National Cohesion and Integration Commission, a government agency that promotes diversity and inclusion.

Ultimately, discrimination persists because of entrenched beliefs that one’s own group is better than “those others”. Tribal prejudice in this sense is similar to racism; beliefs about the superiority of one’s own group perpetuate injustices. Those beliefs must be addressed through a process of public education, and implementing the aspirations of equality and fairness in existing laws. More laws and a big, ill-timed constitutional reform will not do the job.



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The underlying issue

Although young Kenyans are more likely than their elders to move the country away from tribal politics, advocates of change face an uphill battle. Some 20% of the voting-age population did not attend school. This large segment is an easy target for well-educated, but manipulative merchants of

tribalism. Moreover, the emerging, but insecure middle class is anxious to escape poverty, and not interested in any potentially disruptive discussions. They have reason to fear that some kind of class war may erupt.

Nonetheless, a conversation about the gaps between rich and poor is overdue. The

country has dozens of millionaires. Their wealth was largely stolen from the public. At the same time, over 15 million people languish in deep poverty. The list of ills is long, including:

- theft of public funds meant for youth,
- giving retirees jobs meant for young people,
- hiring young people in jobs with big titles but no influence.

Corruption takes many other forms of course. Tribal

abuses are linked to attitudes that justify privilege and discrimination. A good place to start changing these attitudes is to ask why tribalism – with its implicit message that some people are inherently better than others – continues to play such an important role in national life. It is worth noting, moreover, that it goes along with a serious and proven risk of violent conflict (see main story). AS

RAINBOW NATION

Changing the conversation

More than a quarter-century after establishing black majority rule, South Africa has not been able to rid itself of race-based politics. To move forward, the country needs a new, positive narrative about what binds, not what divides.

By Jakkie Cilliers

The African National Congress (ANC) party has governed South Africa since the country's first democratic, non-racial elections in 1994. The ANC won a resounding victory that year, ending the disgraceful apartheid system of racial segregation (see box next page).

But when the team of the new president, anti-apartheid revolutionary Nelson Mandela, took office, it found apparent vacant buildings and empty file cabinets. Beyond a steady exodus, much of the civil service, dominantly whites, anxiously hid in their offices fearing retribution and had destroyed those files that recorded their abuse.

Today, 27 years later, things have moved on. South Africa's government appears to be substantively involved in inter-racial cooperation. The principle of black majority rule is firmly in place and the civil service is overwhelmingly black. Yet ele-

ments of the old racial mistrust persist, and government agencies do not function as efficiently as they should. In a different guise, race and race-driven politics continue to hamper progress, making it harder to spread prosperity.

In the early years after the 1994 election, the outlook for cooperation between the races was promising. Under Mandela's leadership, the ANC took a non-racial high ground. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's vision of a "Rainbow Nation", in which all peoples would come together, served as a basis for genuine reconciliation efforts on all sides. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission exposed the brutality of apartheid, and, to some extent, helped the nation to come to grips with it. South Africa seemed prepared to set its demons aside.

Perhaps reflecting this optimism, South Africa's economy experienced a 20-year growth spurt. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose from a low of \$9,100 in 1993 to around \$12,500 in 2014 (see chart.) Growth accelerated sharply under the government's 1996 "Growth, Employment and Redistribution" policy. When Mandela stepped down in 1999 his deputy, Thabo Mbeki, became president and continued to

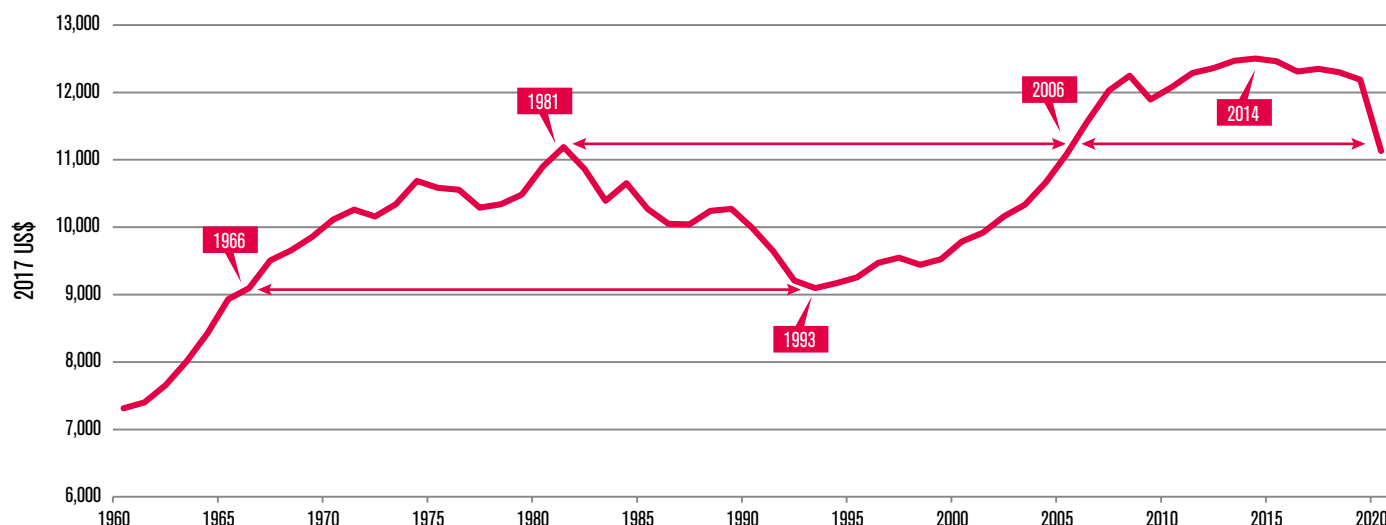
pursue growth and redistribution policies to aid the poor.

The growth trend did not last. Per-capita GDP began to decline under the corrupt presidency of Jacob Zuma, a traditionalist who became the head of state in 2009 and who was again confirmed in office in the 2014 election. He presided over a wasted decade – with per-capita GDP eventually plummeting to \$12,200 in 2019 and then \$11,100 by 2020 due to Covid-19. His tenure has become associated with "state capture" where private interests subvert governmental decision-making for their own benefit. A judicial commission is still reviewing the corrupt practices of that period.

Zuma failed to rise to South Africa's most daunting challenges, but he remains popular among a faction within the ANC and many Zulu kinsman. When he was arrested in July because he had refused to cooperate with the judiciary his supporters instigated violence that soon escalated. The subsequent rioting reflected the damage that he did to the state and the frustration many people feel.

Regrettably, racial politics became virulent again in the years of stagnation and decline, giving rise to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a political party with an aggressively anti-white and anti-Indian message. Its firebrand leader, Julius Malema, has accused the ruling ANC of serving "white monopoly capital". He claims that whites have remained in de facto control even in black majority ruled South Africa by

Roller coaster (South Africa GDP per capita)



manipulating the ANC. Agitation along racial lines has made the EFF the third largest party in parliament. It is not an exaggeration to accuse it of reverse racism.

The notion of a powerful white minority manipulating the government behind the scenes has thus taken hold in large segments of the population, including some ANC members. The facts show that it is

wrong. South Africa has a strongly progressive tax regime that transfers significant sums to poor blacks. Some 19 million of the country's 60 million people receive grants from the government, and every aspect of government spending is governed by aggressive black empowerment criteria.

Moreover, South Africa's spending on education is among the highest globally,

roughly 6.5 percent of GDP. The government has also continued to make huge investments in expanding access to water, electricity and sanitation. In addition to black empowerment, large sums are spent on creating a black industrial class. The private sector is encouraged and regulated to advance the interests of the black population. Nonetheless, many believe that the ANC is

Revisiting apartheid

Apartheid was a racist system designed to keep people of different skin colours "apart" in South Africa. For decades, the white minority imposed its rule.

In 1948, the National Party won a whites-only election. It represented the interests of Afrikaners, the ethnic group descended from predominantly Dutch settlers who saw their victory as a triumph over British colonists. The National Party subsequently implemented segregation with brutal efficiency, inflicting mass suffering on the black majority.

Black people were barred from many public places, could only visit city centres for work and were forced to settle in specific areas. Their access to law courts and public services was restricted. Trade unions were not forbidden, but apartheid laws meant they could not assertively fight for black workers' rights. Mixed marriages were illegal.

For decades, economic growth was driven by the country's rich natural resources, especially gold and diamonds. The mining industry exploited black labour, and its success allowed white South Africa to thrive. Nonetheless, pressure to change kept growing, both domestically and internationally.

The National Party's grip on the country began to loosen when violent protests started in Soweto outside Johannesburg in 1976 and soon spread nationally. Subsequently, civil-society and faith-based organisations around the world called for boycotts of South African goods. In 1986, even the US Congress imposed economic sanctions.

The success of liberation movements in neighbouring countries such as in Mozambique, Angola and eventually Zimbabwe, moreover, meant that apartheid South Africa

stood increasingly alone and it became obvious that its white conscript army was becoming overburdened.

At the same time, repression of the black freedom movement in South Africa consistently led to yet more international opprobrium. Against this backdrop, the leadership of the National Party started negotiations with the ANC (African National Congress), initially in secret. President Frederik Willem De Klerk thought that an agreement with the ANC would preserve some protection and privilege for whites – and specifically for the Afrikaners as a group.

It did not turn out that way after De Klerk unbanned

the ANC and the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) started its work in 1990. In addition to the National Party and the ANC many anti-apartheid groups were involved in the Convention, but generally played second fiddle to the two dominant negotiating partners.

After long and intense deliberations, a liberal constitution was adopted. Its bill of rights protects individual, not group rights. In 1994, the first democratic elections put the ANC in power – where it has stayed ever since. Its track record is mixed (see main story).

JC



Celebrating the new constitution in May 1996: Nelson Mandela (then president), Frederik Willem de Klerk (deputy president) and Cyril Ramaphosa (chairman of the Constitutional Assembly).

exploiting poor blacks as evidence of large-scale corruption within the party mounts.

In some areas, for example land transfers, progress for black citizens has indeed been slow. The reason, however, is not some kind of conspiracy, but rather administrative waste, inefficiency and corruption. Hiring ANC members for important government jobs was supposed to empower black people, but the result was that many government agencies, especially at the local and provincial levels, have ground to a halt. Many services are simply not provided.

Slow progress also has other causes, however. Insufficient economic growth has limited opportunities. South Africa needs labour-intensive and sustained high rates of growth over several decades that creates new opportunities for all. It would generate additional wealth that could be invested in reducing inequality and deprivation. The country must generate more prosperity if it wants to improve the prospects for its black majority. Only trying to redistribute existing wealth, the focus since Zuma took, is a dead-end strategy. It will not deliver results.



President Cyril Ramaphosa became Zuma's successor in 2018. His rhetoric and attitudes are completely different. He has managed to halt South Africa's downward trend but has been unable to ignite growth given the extent of wastage, policy confusion and lack of accountability that has become a hallmark of government. The Covid-19 pandemic, moreover, has hit the country hard. Ramaphosa is a veteran ANC leader and trade-union activist. He later thrived in the private sector and has become one of the country's richest persons.

To move forward, South Africa needs a new, inclusive national narrative. It needs

to embark upon its own mythmaking – putting forward a positive story of its present and future, focussing on what binds and not what divides. Since race and class largely coincide, the focus should shift from race to class-based policies that provide opportunity based on need, not skin colour lest the country remains trapped in the policies that created many of its past crises.

That said, South Africa must keep working on coming to terms with its past, revisiting painful memories to draw useful lessons from them. A new social contract depends on all parties looking closely at how apartheid began, what it meant and how it ended – and then vowing never again to use race as criteria for privilege.



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Salesperson with skin-lightening product in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2016.

SKIN-WHITENING PRODUCTS

Black and beautiful

Many people in low-income countries spend money on products to lighten their skin colour. Health risks do not deter them. However, underlying racist ideas of beauty may slowly be starting to fade.

By Mahwish Gul

Many people – and especially women – buy cosmetic products to make their skin appear less dark in different world regions. In a study published in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) reckoned that the global sales of such creams will amount to \$31.2 billion by 2024. It also stated that the turnover of the multinational beauty-products manufacturer Unilever in this segment was more than \$500 million a year in India alone.

There are some signs that consumer demand may be changing, however. In June 2020, Unilever rebranded its 45-year-old skin-lightening product “Fair & Lovely” – one of the most popular beauty products in South Asia. The new name is “Glow & Lovely”. At the same time, pharma giant Johnson & Johnson stopped selling two

of its skin-whitening creams in Asia altogether.

These two developments indicate that cosmetics producers may have started to slowly back away from skin lightening. One reason is that information about health hazards and environmental risks are spreading. Another is that black-rights activists are agitating against racist stereotypes.

Some of the products are made with harmful chemicals such as mercury and bleach. According to the WHO, the adverse health effects include kidney damage, skin rashes, skin discolouration and scarring. Moreover, mercury used in some whiteners is eventually discharged into wastewater and can enter the food chain. Fish, for example, can be contaminated. Apart from creams, pills and injections are popular too.

Unilever states its creams do not use harmful chemicals, relying instead on vitamin B3, glycerine and sunscreens. Unilever now even denies that its product is a skin-whitener, saying it is for “enhancing radiance and glow” by firming skin tone and smoothing skin texture. In the past, how-

ever, advertisements suggested a link between light skin and beauty, exploiting and reinforcing prejudice against people with darker skin.

ORIGINS OF ‘COLOURISM’

This prejudice is known as “colourism” in South Asia. It has deep historical roots. The Mughals, who ruled large parts of South Asia from the 16th to the 19th century, had lighter skin colour than native residents. Even before the Mughals arrived, the high-ranking castes – and especially the Brahmins – had lighter complexions compared to the lowest caste of Dalits. European colonists further deepened this divide. Lighter skin is generally associated with status, social acceptance, economic opportunity and self-esteem in South Asia.

In Africa, too, companies do a brisk business in skin-lightening products. “Anecdotal, the appearance of lighter skin means faster and easier access in landing higher paying jobs, particularly in sales and marketing,” writes Vicky Colbert of the Bergen Project, a US based non-governmental organisation.

The origin of the demand for such products in Africa is similar to that in South Asia: a hierarchical social order that was internalised by its victims. The slave trade and colonial rule entrenched disparities in status, wealth and beauty. According to Colbert, “the legacy of racist views which positions white Europeans as superior has remained a structural belief system.”

Ideas of beauty, moreover, are probably reinforced by pictures of Black women celebrities in the USA. Their complexion tends to be rather light. Popstar Beyoncé is an example.

It need not be this way. “I am black and beautiful,” proclaims a poem in the Biblical “Song of Songs”: a young woman celebrates her blackness and asks why she should try to hide it (“why should I be like one who is veiled...?”) Slowly, this age-old insight – that black is beautiful – is seeping into regions where many women still try to hide their blackness.



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CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION

On society's lowest rung

Nepal's Dalit people, formerly known as "Untouchables", face widespread discrimination and often suffer violence at the hands of people from higher castes. The government should meet its obligations under national laws and international treaties to protect its most vulnerable people.

By Rukamane Maharjan

For a relatively small country of 29 million people, Nepal has a wealth of ethnic and caste diversity. The government counts a total of 126 ethnic groups and social castes – hereditary groups with a fixed ritual status –

ries, the non-Hindu indigenous groups were incorporated into the Hindu caste system, although they did not adopt all of its practices. Things are similar in India.

Ethnic and cultural diversity can be a strong point for a country. But diversity can also be a great weakness when it involves discrimination and violence between groups. Unfortunately, Nepal's caste system continues to foster such discrimination and violence, especially against Dalits.

Nepal's first written law – the Muluki Ain (National Code) – took force in 1854 and was based on the caste system. A new Muluki Ain was promulgated in 1963. It used more

In May 2011, Nepal's parliament passed the Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability (Crime and Punishment) Act. This law specifically prohibits discrimination based on custom, tradition, religion, culture, rituals, origin, caste, race, descent, community, occupation or business. It imposes punishment for caste-based discrimination, as do provisions of the country's Civil and Criminal Codes of 2017. The Constitution of 2015 also guarantees fundamental rights to Dalits.

In practice, caste-based discrimination and violence persist nonetheless. A centuries-old caste consciousness continues to determine identity and social status. This consciousness permeates all levels of society. Even public officials and educated people hold caste-based prejudices and practice discrimination.

OSTRACISM AND VIOLENCE

The brunt of the discrimination is felt by the Dalits, the Untouchable people – a general category that comprises some 20 different groups. Dalits comprise 13.6% of Nepal's population, or about 3.6 million people, according to the 2011 Census. The idea of untouchability arose centuries ago when privileged classes came to regard aboriginal tribes with "uncertain means of livelihood" as impure.

That view eventually translated into a generalised ostracism. Dalits today face physical and psychological abuse in almost all areas of life. They suffer poverty, landlessness, segregation and discrimination in public and private spheres. They are not allowed to enter places of worship. The so-called upper castes will not accept food or water that has been touched or handled by them. Dalits who qualify as medical practitioners have trouble getting jobs. Inter-caste marriages involving Dalits face strong disapproval.

Often Dalits are subjected to violent attacks and even killings. Dalit women are vulnerable in particular. All too often, they become victims of trafficking and sexual slavery. In 2007, around 400 Dalit women from the Badi community came to the capital, Kathmandu, to protest against a widespread practice of forcing girls from their community into prostitution. They also demanded better housing, land to establish farms and free education for children. Their pleas went unheeded.



Police officers blocking a Dalit rally during Covid-19 lockdown in Kathmandu in May 2020.

according to its most recent census in 2011.

Nepal's Hindu caste system has four main social strata, ranging from the Brahmins at the top to the Sudra, also known as Dalits or Untouchables, at the bottom. Separately, more than one-third of the population consists of indigenous peoples, known collectively as the Adibasi Janajatis, which include 63 ethnic groups. Over the centu-

caste-neutral language and outlawed some forms of discrimination. Nepal, moreover, signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which took effect in 1969. The country thus committed to equal rights and dignity for all. Nonetheless, progress stayed very slow. Despite various legal reforms, traditions of discrimination persisted.



Discrimination and violence against Dalits continues to the present day. The murders of six young Dalit men in May 2020 in Nepal's mid-western region attracted worldwide attention due to the caste hatred involved. Nawaraj Bishwakarama, a 21-year old Dalit man, and five of his friends were killed while trying to bring Bishwakarama's 17-year old upper-caste girlfriend from her village to theirs. The girl's family and neighbours reportedly attacked and killed the young men.

On the same day in western Nepal, 13-year-old Angira Pasi, a Dalit girl, was found hanging from a tree. On the previous day she reportedly was raped by 25-year-old Birendra Bhar. Instead of referring the rape case to the police, local residents and their ward representative decided that the young girl would be married to Bhar. Due to the stigma attached to rape, Angira's mother agreed to this arrangement and sent her to the Bhar family home.

At the Bhar home, however, Birendra Bhar's mother refused to let her in, and beat

her instead. After she was found dead, police initially refused to bring a case against Bhar; they relented only after a public outcry.

Such incidents are unfortunately widespread. The catalogue of shame is a long one. In September 2020, for example, a 12-year-old Dalit girl was raped and murdered. In June 2018, a 21 year old female Dalit social activist was gang-raped and murdered. Also in 2018, Mana Sarki, a Dalit ward representative, was beaten to death in her home. In 2016, Ajit Mijar, an 18-year old Dalit man, was murdered for marrying a girl from the so-called upper caste.

According to media reports, over two dozen Dalits have been killed for breaking caste-based norms since 2011. Many of those killings were related to inter-caste marriages. In one year alone – the fiscal year that ended in mid-July 2020 – 30 crimes related to untouchability were registered with police officials in Nepal.

JUSTICE DENIED

These figures are the tip of the iceberg. Many incidents go unreported due to Dalit people's fear of reprisals and worries about being shunned even within their own communities. A veil of silence hides systematic denial of justice to Dalit victims and their families. Police are sometimes suspected of turning a blind eye to crimes against Dalit people.

The UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) – a group of experts that monitors member states' implementation of the Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – has repeatedly expressed concerns over caste-based discrimination in Nepal. In May 2018, it cited Nepal for poor implementation of its anti-discrimination laws. The Committee said Dalit people are still barred from places of worship, public spaces, public sources of food and water, educational facilities and housing areas used by other castes.

The CERD called on Nepal to ensure that the police records all complaints of race-based discrimination. Cases must be thoroughly investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned. The UN experts also insisted that Nepal ensures that victims receive appropriate compensation.

Unfortunately, Nepal has made little progress towards meeting those goals. The government is failing to meet its obligation to protect Dalits and to ensure accountability for caste-based crimes. This gives perpetrators a sense of impunity, with the result that Dalits continue to face a wall of discrimination and violence.

In January 2021, the UN Human Rights Council made recommendations in the context of the third cycle of its Universal Periodic Review. What impact that will have, remains to be seen. Deep-rooted social attitudes tend to change slower than new legal principles are adopted.



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#DalitLivesMatterNepal

If Nepal is to become a more equal society, it must give low-caste people a social and political voice. One recent initiative to do so is #DalitLives-MatterNepal. Using the slogan "Uniting against inhumanity, standing with the Untouchables", the movement provides an online forum for exchanging

information on discrimination against Dalits.

The movement takes aim at untouchability itself. Its online forum highlights all forms of caste-based discrimination against Dalits, including instances of harassment, dehumanisation, rape and murder (see main article).

The organisers of this initiative are young people skilled in using social media to deliver a message to a broad audience. The involvement of young people gives rise to hope that Nepal may change its direction and grant Dalits equal rights in future.

Unfortunately, the initiative has not gained the same momentum as Black Lives Matter around the world after the police killed George Floyd in

Minneapolis last year. In any case, an online initiative cannot be sufficient on its own. The government must take overall responsibility for preventing all forms of caste-based discrimination, including prosecuting those who victimise Dalits.

Even international relief organisations have a role to play by reporting instances of discrimination they observe while distributing aid. RM

DISCRIMINATION

Indonesia's ethnic resentments

More than two decades ago, Indonesia formally repealed laws that promoted discrimination against citizens of Chinese descent. Getting rid of the underlying prejudice, however, will take yet more time.

By Edith Koesoemawiria

"I don't want to drive into that street; it is packed," says Anwar, a Jakarta taxi driver. It is an odd comment, since traffic in the city has thinned under the impact of Covid-19 related restrictions. Still, many drivers shy away from certain side-streets – such as the

everywhere in Jakarta, but this area is affected in a particular way. Difficult times tend to trigger jealous suspicions that others are doing better than oneself, and in Indonesia such suspicions tend to focus on citizens of Chinese descent.

Some of the animosity is related to jobs. Indonesia is one of the main sites of China's Belt and Road infrastructure-building initiative. About 1,000 Chinese companies have built a presence in the country. They are involved in construction, mining and electronics and have brought in at least 25,000 workers from China. The firms prefer

– have attacked Chinese people again and again. In 1740, soldiers of the Dutch East India Company killed some 10,000 ethnic Chinese. Legally sanctioned discrimination was rampant for centuries, culminating in anti-Chinese laws imposed by autocratic President Suharto in the 1960s. Despite the subsequent repeal of those discriminatory laws, xenophobic sentiments still live (see box next page).

BIGOTRY IN ACTION

Prejudice against ethnic Chinese is most likely to surface during election campaigns. Consider the hate campaign directed against the first governor of Jakarta to have Chinese forbears, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known by his Chinese nickname Ahok). In 2012, he took office when his predecessor Joko Widodo was elected the nation's president. Ahok had been his deputy. He became the target of racist attacks when he ran for office in the next election. In a predominantly Muslim society, it added to his problems that he is Christian. Army General Surya Prabowo said Ahok should "know his place lest the Indonesian Chinese face the consequences of his actions". There were large anti-Ahok rallies moreover.

To many Indonesians, the threatening subtext was that there might be anti-Chinese rioting. That had happened in several Indonesian cities in May 1998. Back then, vigilantes rampaged for two days. Nearly 1,000 people were killed and 87 women were raped, most of them of Chinese descent. Ahok did not win re-election.

Echoes of prejudice can be heard right up to the present day. In September 2020, the government printed a new 75,000 Rupiah (the equivalent of about €4.50) bank note to commemorate Indonesia's 75 years of independence. One of the images on the new bill was a traditional Chinese costume. An uproar followed in social media, with Indonesians questioning whether a Chinese image belongs on the currency. The debate died down only after the government insisted that the costume actually belongs to a native tribe in Borneo.

Other ethnic minorities also face discrimination. In August 2019, Indonesian nationalists attacked ethnic Melanesian students from Papua in the Javanese city of Surabaya, hurling racist epithets such as "dog" and "monkey". Ethnic Papuan stu-



Shoppers in Jakarta's Chinatown in February: Covid-19 has slowed down business.

one that leads to the Petak Sembilan market in Jakarta's Chinatown. The reason may indeed be to avoid crowding. But it may also be to avoid a neighbourhood whose residents – unjustly – have a negative reputation.

Jakarta's Chinatown has been experiencing difficult times recently. The pandemic has slowed business considerably

to hire speakers of Mandarin. The presence of so many foreign workers cause resentment among Indonesians.

But Indonesia's anti-Chinese sentiment goes well beyond a current scuffle over jobs. Indonesia's rulers have discriminated against ethnic Chinese since colonial times. Mobs – some sanctioned by governments



dents from the Maluku islands in eastern Indonesia have experienced similar attacks in central Java.

Such incidents are a reminder of a long history of ethnic tensions and discrimination. Many scholars trace the problem back to colonial times. The Dutch created a class system in their former colony, which was known as the Dutch East Indies. They considered Europeans as first-class foreigners. They viewed Asian foreigners, mainly of Chinese and Indian origin, who typically belonged to comparatively prosperous trader communities, as second-class go-betweens. The colonial power treated Indonesian natives as third-class, colonised people, to be exploited and controlled. This system created animosities between the ethnic Chinese and the indigenous peoples.

Over time, identity politics gained a firm hold. Citizenship rights became linked to people's ethnic backgrounds. As indigenous groups gained power, ethnic Chinese people were treated as a separate

category of citizens even though they had long since assimilated into native communities. A stigma of "otherness" was attached to non-native groups. Ethnic Chinese in particular, who typically did well economically, became targets of deep mistrust, Indonesian scholar Irawan S. S. Basuki stated in an article.

To bridge the country's ethnic divides, Basuki calls for writing a balanced history of Indonesia that challenges age-old stereotypes. "Our perceptions of the Chinese can be changed by rewriting their history in a proportional and contextual way," he says. "Their contribution to the struggle for independence must be communicated to students through the history textbooks."

CELEBRATING MULTICULTURALISM

Indeed, Indonesia embarked recently on a campaign to promote cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding. Several large religious groups regularly hold public worship services to spotlight the country's broad range of religious practices. The government, media and various non-governmental organisations strive to educate the public about the country's multicultural nature. They emphasise the need for social inclusiveness. Such efforts are starting to bear fruit.

For example, around the time of the Chinese New Year, Jakarta's Chinatown –

with its Buddhist temples, food stalls and lion dances in the streets – attracts Indonesians of all ethnicities to join the celebration of Chinese culture. It helps that the government made the Chinese New Year a national holiday 20 years ago.

Beyond that, the government likes to promote Indonesia's "exotic" qualities. Its tourism brochures promote the image of extravagant, colourful and unconventional "differentness", for example. This approach, however, can be a double-edged sword, as the positive concept of "exotic" and the negative notion of "otherness" become intertwined.

In many ways, Indonesia benefits from its great cultural diversity. But there's a difference between highlighting a country's palette of cultural traditions and ensuring that the practitioners of all those traditions see other groups as equally empowered members of society.

Indonesia has started on a path towards honouring its cultural diversity by removing discrimination from its legal code. Now its population needs to follow suit and make equality a reality on the ground throughout the country's approximately 6,000 inhabited islands.



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A history of "us and them"

In 2009, the deputy governor of West Kalimantan, an Indonesian province in south Borneo, made a shocking discovery. At the Pontianak immigration office, ethnic Chinese residents were still required to regularly present their Indonesian citizenship certificates to administrators.

By law, this requirement had been abolished 13 years previously. The immigration office had simply not imple-

mented the new law. Christianidy Sanjaya, the deputy governor, found the implicit racism frustrating and ordered the office to change its ways.

Unfortunately, Indonesian history is full of examples of discrimination. The issue is slow to fade away. During his authoritarian "New Order" regime (1967–1998), President Suharto

- shut down all Chinese schools,

- allowed regional authorities in Aceh and North Sumatra to expel ethnic Chinese,
- prohibited Chinese cultural expressions, including displays of Chinese writing and
- allowed only one Chinese language publication to continue publishing, though only under army control.

Ethnic Chinese people were forced to take Indonesian-sounding names. After Suharto fell in 1998, things began to change. In 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid threw out the prohibitions on practicing Chinese culture. Nonetheless,

ugly incidents of racism still pop up – for example during election campaigns involving ethnic Chinese candidates (see main story).

At least two generations of Indonesians have lived in a republic since independence in 1945. Ethnic divides that began during colonial times can no longer be blamed on the former rulers. Given that discrimination still occurs today, one would like to know how much more time will be needed before citizens of all ethnic backgrounds are accepted as full equals in Indonesia. **EK**



At a memorial service in Auschwitz (Oswiecim), Poland, a Roma flag is displayed in memory of the Roma and Sinti murdered by the German Nazi regime in the Second World War.

SINTI AND ROMA

The invisible millions

Some 12 million Europeans belong to the Roma. Their history is marked by exclusion and persecution throughout the continent. Things were particularly bad under Nazi rule, but prejudice and marginalisation remain common. The EU wants to improve matters, but change must happen at the level of member states.

By Sheila Mysorekar

There are around 12 million Roma in Europe, and they face extreme discrimination throughout the continent. “Roma” (from the singular: Rom = human being) is the self-designated name of an ethnic group that migrated westwards from the north-west of India to Europe more than 1,000 years

ago. The Sinti are a Romani sub-group who settled centuries ago in the German-speaking parts of Central Europe. The name Sinti possibly derives from “Sindhi”, the name of a people native to the Sindh region in present-day Pakistan.

Little is known about the origins of the Roma. Their migration to Europe from what is now India and Pakistan spanned around 500 years and took different routes. Their language, Romani, is related to the ancient Indian language Sanskrit but includes elements borrowed from the languages spoken in the countries where the migrants settled. In Germany, for example, there is a dialect known as “German Romani”. The Roma are thus a collection of very heterogeneous groups. Their religion also tends to follow

the majority society, depending on where they live; in Central Europe, for example, they are generally Christians.

In the official EU definition, the term Roma covers “various groups such as Roma, Sinti, Kalé, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptian, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Travellers (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.)”. Every European country has different names for groups within the Romani minority – some of them pejorative. But all of those groups have one thing in common: they are generally descended from outcasts, who were not allowed to settle permanently. That made them an itinerant people – not necessarily by choice but because they were denied rights. In south-east Europe, they were forced to live for centuries as serfs or even slaves.

ONGOING DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination reached a peak in Nazi Germany, when the Roma were targeted



Eviction of a Sinti community from an industrial site in Rome in 2019.

for persecution. From 1934 onwards, large numbers of Sinti and Roma were forcibly sterilised and, from 1942 on, many were systematically murdered. It is estimated that around half a million Sinti and Roma across Europe fell victim to the National Socialists' extermination policy. The genocide is known in Romani as the "Porajmos" – "The Devouring" or "Destruction".

Discrimination continued even after the Nazi years, as evidenced by the long hard fight that was needed for survivors to be even considered victims of fascism. The Sinti and Roma genocide was not recognised as such in Germany until 1982. In 2015, a European Day of Remembrance was established for victims of the Porajmos.

In the post-war years, the German police force often worked with the same lists as the Nazis, where the names of Roma and Sinti appeared as alleged "criminals". In many cases, investigating officers were the same ones who had organised transport to the concentration camps during the Nazi era. Perpetrators were not held accountable for their actions.

There is a racist background to this continuity: antiziganism – what the Ger-

man Federal Agency for Civic Education calls the "defensive attitude of majority populations towards Roma and Sinti". Antiziganism refers to the political exclusion and persecution of Sinti and Roma in Europe since the 15th century. In antiziganism, members of the Roma and Sinti groups are indiscriminately labelled "alien" or "criminal". In other words, millions of an ethnic minority are alleged to have an innate, unalterable tendency to live outside society or outside the law. The majority of Roma have actually led a settled life for generations; however, they are still considered "nomadic".

Even today, antiziganism is still a widely held and widely accepted attitude towards Sinti and Roma in European societies. This means the ethnic minority faces massive discrimination. "Antiziganism today," says Berlin historian Wolfgang Wippermann, "is more a product of the past than of the present." However, the impacts are still keenly felt.

In 2014, a survey conducted for Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency showed that Sinti and Roma have an extremely bad reputation in Germany. The

researchers found that "they are the least desirable neighbours and their lifestyle is viewed by a particularly large number of people as deviant". Eastern Europeans, Muslims, Blacks, Italians, Jews and asylum seekers scored better.

Two years later, a study by the Heinrich Böll Foundation proved that almost six out of ten Germans would have a problem with Sinti or Roma living in their vicinity. Around half thought that Sinti and Roma should be banned from inner cities.

THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Since 1995, Sinti and Roma have been recognised as a "national minority" in Germany, which obliges the state to make it possible for them to "maintain their traditions and cultural heritage". However, they have a very low social status. This can be seen in education, for example, as confirmed by a 2021 RomnoKher study on the current situation of Sinti and Roma:

That study shows, for example, that more than 50% of over 50-year-olds have no school qualifications. Among 30 to 50-year-olds, the figure drops below a third and

among under-30s it is 15% – as compared with less than five percent for the population as a whole. Nearly 80% of over-50s and around 40% of 18- to 50-year-olds have no vocational qualifications. In response to the study, Sinti and Roma groups are calling for action against bullying and racism in schools.

The situation of Roma in many European countries is catastrophic. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Roma children are often routinely placed in special schools as if they had learning disabilities, which results in de facto segregation in education. In Bulgaria and Romania, Roma make up a tenth of the population but only half of them in Romania have jobs and only 46% in Bulgaria have health insurance.

Throughout the EU, Roma are frequently victims of eviction, harassment by authorities and violent assault. In a 2014 report, the human-rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) documented a wide range of hate crimes. In Greece and France, for example, it was found out that police often failed to intervene in violent assaults on Roma. In the AI researchers' own words,

perpetrators are “often not seriously investigated” and suspected “racist motives are ignored”.

In Hungary, Roma are targeted for violent attacks by far-right “vigilante groups”, largely unhindered by the police. Under the pretext of “special support”, Roma children are often placed in separate school classes, leading to further segregation.

In 2020, the rampant Covid-19 pandemic had dire consequences for hundreds of thousands of Roma across Europe. In many places, lockdown restrictions presented a risk of starvation. Racist resentment led to physical assaults and indiscriminate acts of repression, adding to the troubles of Roma communities living in many countries in precarious conditions – often with no access to clean water or health care. This is a humanitarian catastrophe in the heart of Europe, yet it is largely ignored by international media.

However, there have long been Roma-led organisations in every European country campaigning against antiziganism and fighting for more participation and equal opportunities. During the Covid-19 pan-

demic, for example, the #Act4RomaLives campaign was launched.

Today, racism and discrimination in general are topics of more widespread discussion in Europe. This encourages many Roma to stop denying their origins. Even a number of celebrities are now known to have Romani roots: German pop singer Marianne Rosenberg, US actor Yul Brynner and Rolling Stones guitarist Ron Wood are just a few examples. These are exceptional success stories but participation should be everyone's right.

LINK

RomnoKher, 2021: Ungleiche Teilhabe. Zur Lage der Sinti und Roma in Deutschland („Unequal participation. On the situation of Sinti and Roma in Germany” – only in German).
https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/2021_RomnoKher_Ungleiche_Teilhabe.pdf



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Equality, inclusion and participation for Roma and Sinti

The EU's first “Roma Strategy” was rolled out in 2012 but did not bring any major improvements for the communities concerned. In October 2020, responding to the extreme marginalisation and socioeconomic discrimination the groups still face, the European Commission adopted a new ten-year plan to support Roma in the EU (2020–2030).

It includes a list of seven areas of special focus. They include: equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health and housing. For each of them, the top EU body has spelled out

new targets. It also made recommendations to help the EU member states to achieve them. The minimum targets for 2030 are:

- cutting the proportion of Roma who experience discrimination by at least half,
- doubling the proportion of Roma filing a report after experiencing discrimination,
- reducing the poverty gap between Roma and the general population by at least half,
- cutting the gap in participation in early childhood education by at least half,
- cutting the proportion of Roma children attending

segregated primary schools by at least half in member states with a significant Roma population,

- cutting the employment gap and the gender employment gap by at least half;
- cutting the gap in life expectancy by at least half,
- reducing the gap in housing deprivation by at least one third and
- increasing the proportion of Roma with access to tap water to at least 95%.

These minimum targets are not binding, however, and responsibility for achieving them resides with the member states. They are obliged to submit national strategies by September 2021. Moreover, they will have to report on implementation progress to the European Commission every

two years. There is no guarantee things will go smoothly.

Herbert Heuss of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma doubts that will happen. His assessment is: “Roma are not a European minority, they are first and foremost members of a national minority in their respective home country”.

The implication is that equality and participation indeed have to start at nation-state level. SMY

LINK

EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020–2030:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/union-equality-eu-roma-strategic-framework-equality-inclusion-and-participation_en

Read our summer special which includes a mix of artistic works.

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