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What the West African
community can learn
from EU history

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FOCUS


Colonial heritage

The prosperity of many industrialised countries was built on colonial exploitation, and the impacts of imperialism continue to haunt formerly oppressed regions. The global situation shows that neither stability nor cooperation can be taken for granted in any way. Former colonial powers must therefore continue to take responsibility for the past – not least by implementing policies that are based on genuine partnership rather than dependency.

Title: Removal of the statue of colonial German officer Curt von François from its place in Windhoek, Namibia, 2022.
Photo: picture alliance/dpa/Lisa Ossenbrink





 **Our focus section on colonial heritage starts on page 20. It pertains to the UN's 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Peace, justice and strong institutions.**

parities, structural racism and the reckless exploitation of natural resources.

Hasty and incomplete decolonisation, moreover, is at the root of many sovereign debt crises that haunt countries with low and middle incomes. At home, colonial powers had a propensity to reduce corruption, build comparatively clean administrations and enforce the rule of law. In the colonies, by contrast, they relied on cronyism and bribes, showing hardly any interest in universal legal standards that applied to everyone.

All too often, approaches to governance did not change after independence. Officeholders hardly worried about government debt, but many are happy to cozy up to foreign powers provided they personally benefit.

Bassirou Diomaye Faye, Senegal's left-leaning young president, who was elected this year, is among those who speak up for the need of a "second liberation". They see that not all, though many of today's grievances result from the action of white people.

Former colonial powers bear a responsibility for former colonies. They do not do it justice if they:

- focus merely on cheap access to commodities,
- leave former colonies to cope on their own with huge debt burdens or the rising costs of climate damages (which, of course, low-income countries contributed little to cause),
- fail to return cultural artefacts and mortal remains to the communities concerned, or
- refuse to even consider reparations for atrocious crimes of the past.

Critics argue that colonial attitudes persist in the development policies of nations with high average incomes. As the condescending rhetoric of "donors" and "recipients" shows, they have a point.

All too often, the policies of donor governments reinforce dependencies and block true cooperation. True cooperation happens at eye level, and it requires rules that do not only entrench the power of the mighty, but actually work for everyone.



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History did not end

The present is the result of the past. History shapes how societies live today.

In one part of the world, a series of technological innovations fostered prosperity, but also made wars more brutal. Countries with high incomes learned some lessons in World War II and were able to enjoy several decades of stability and democracy. Some even spoke of an "end of history". Henceforth, they claimed, reason and multilateral cooperation would facilitate good lives all over the world.

That was then. History did not end, as new wars, the dramatic escalation of the climate crisis and the growing presence of anti-democratic forces in parliaments and even governments of high-income countries show.

In less privileged world regions, people have known for a long time that the present is not the happy conclusion of past experience. Their past was different. Colonial oppression, exploitation and lack of freedom have marked the history of Africa, Latin America and Asia, in many cases only ending in the 20th century.

The past of former colonies and imperial powers is intricately linked, of course,

and so is the present. The prosperity of the latter was, to a large extent, built on the exploitation of the former.

Imperialist Europeans conquered large parts of the world. Even the USA is the result of colonial ambitions – and of the brutal subjugation and even extermination of indigenous people. Many Americans love to forget this history.

Similarly ignored, however, is the fact that not only western powers built huge empires. Indeed, Russian imperialism is still aggressive, as the invasion of Ukraine proves. The Osman Empire was a Muslim colonial power. And slaves were not only traded across the Atlantic, but towards Arab destinations too.

Colonial masters always assumed to know more, be more advanced and have greater relevance than any subjected people. Imperial powers systematically missed opportunities to learn from knowledge and cultural practices, many of which had been passed down for centuries.

Blatant grievances today are often traceable to the abusive attitudes of colonists. In Brazil as in the USA, legacies of colonial rule include excessive social dis-

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

EU lessons for ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States is in crisis. It should aim to foster economic integration of its member states by removing barriers and drive forward regional industrialisation. The integration process of the European Union might give an idea of how that could be achieved.

By Eric Tevoedjre

Countries join or create economic integration blocs mainly to boost trade among them and improve the welfare of their people. In 1962, Hungarian economist Béla Balassa published “The theory of economic integration”, a landmark book on the subject. Several international economic communities have followed a path of integration that mirrors the stages outlined by Balassa. They include the European Economic Community (EEC), which became the European Union (EU) in 1993, and African regional groups such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In his book, Balassa defines integration as a five-stage process, with each stage representing a deeper level of economic cooperation. It starts with a Free Trade Area (FTA), where countries reduce tariffs for imports of area members, and culminates in complete economic integration, where member countries unify policies and set up a supranational authority.

ECOWAS was established on 28 May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria. It is one of eight African Regional Economic Communities recognised by the African Union (AU). Partially modelled after the EU, ECOWAS promotes the free movement of goods, capital, services and people among its member states.

Today, ECOWAS is in crisis and under pressure to reform. In January, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced they would leave the organisation, citing dissatisfaction with how ECOWAS responded to the coups in their countries. They have formed their own bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States. The question asked by many observers is: can ECOWAS survive? Revisiting the European integration process may offer insights into its future.

Both ECOWAS and the EU seek to harmonise economic and trade policies within their regions, enhancing cooperation and stability. Moreover, they both have adopted supranational structures. However, key differences exist between them, rooted in their origins. The EEC started with only six members, while ECOWAS had 15. Moreover, the EEC emerged from a regional industrial initiative, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

THE SCHUMAN DECLARATION

The idea of the ECSC was famously introduced by then French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman in a speech on 9 May 1950. Under the impression of World War II, the so-called Schuman declaration aimed to create economic interdependence among European countries to prevent future conflicts. By bringing the coal and steel industries of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg under joint management, no single country could produce weapons for war against the others. Schuman’s plan succeeded: There has been no war between any ECSC – and later EU – member states since they became members.

Moreover, after the ECSC had entered into force in 1952, industries dependent on

coal and steel, such as manufacturing and construction, became more interconnected too. European governments and businesses began to see the benefits of broader cooperation, and integration gained momentum as it met increasing economic demands. Schuman’s strategy paved the way for further economic integration, including the EEC, which came into being in 1958, and eventually the EU in 1993.

Compared to ECOWAS, all of this is essential for at least three reasons. First, starting with just six members made the goal of integration much easier to achieve than trying to harmonise the interests of 15 different countries. Second, in the 1950s, European integration was driven by specific, measurable objectives. Indeed, the preamble to the ECSC Treaty states that “Europe can be built only by concrete actions which create a real solidarity”.

The third point is that the founding European countries had the will and the means to make the project work, contributing specific resources like coal and steel. In contrast, ECOWAS membership was based on geography, not commitment. The countries became members because they happened to be West African. There has never been a West African industrial initiative comparable to the ECSC.

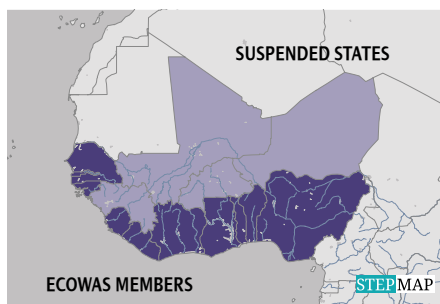
Despite being rich in natural and human resources, ECOWAS member states have failed to develop and implement large-scale industrial projects to process local natural resources and produce durable goods. Trade levels between ECOWAS countries are very low. The value of intra-group



Stranded trucks: in response to Niger's coup, ECOWAS members shut borders in 2023.

trade barely covers 11.5% of the bloc's total exports, compared to 62.6% in the EU. While ECOWAS Vision 2050, a strategy introduced in 2022, aims to create a fully integrated community of peoples, the region remains fragmented.

Until today, ECOWAS's most notable achievement may have been the Protocol relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, adopted in May 1979. However, many implementation gaps remain. Non-tariff barriers such as customs procedures, roadblocks and administrative hurdles continue to impede free trade. Poor infrastructure seriously affects transport and logistics, while border closures between ECOWAS countries disrupt informal cross-border trade, vital for millions working along the Abidjan-Lagos corridor, for example.



What the EU integration process points to is that countries join regional blocs and decide to integrate further because the benefits outweigh the costs. Advantages include economies of scale, reduced trade barriers and greater political stability. ECOWAS should embrace these aspects to emerge stronger from its current crisis. Like

the ECSC, it should agree on specific goals to drive forward regional industrialisation. This would foster economic and political integration. The automotive industry is a particularly promising sector for such collaboration (see box).

LINK

ECOWAS Vision 2050:
<https://www.informe.org/en/content/legislation/ecowas-vision-2050-ecowas-peoples-peace-and-prosperity-all>



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Regional industrialisation

Crisis-ridden ECOWAS could do much more to serve the economies of its member countries (see main text). In their book "Borderless Africa", authors Francis Mangeni and Andrew Mold argue that Africa's market is highly fragmented. They stress that the purpose of regional integration must be "to escape the constraints of a small domestic market" and that "market size is an important determinant of being able to attract sufficient fixed investment".

Market size is indeed important, because large regional blocs can create economies of scale. The automotive industry is particularly well-suited for industrial projects within ECOWAS. Developing regional value chains in this industry will accelerate integration throughout the region and create quality jobs. New employment opportunities will arise in other sectors such as services.

Specialising in the production of car components such as ventilation systems, brakes or fluids could make West African economies more interdependent and complementary.

A key reason to build an automotive regional value chain is that automotive industries already exist in two West African countries, Ghana and Nigeria. Companies such

as Kantanka in Ghana and Innoson in Nigeria produce both conventional and electric vehicles and could potentially expand into neighbouring countries. For example, in 2022, the government of Sierra Leone bought a fleet of Innoson-made vehicles for its army.

The West African automotive industry faces several challenges, including poor transport infrastructure, unreliable energy-supply chains and strong competition from foreign second-hand cars. Nevertheless,

regional demand for cars from Ghana and Nigeria – although still comparatively small – appears to be growing. These vehicles are now also found in other West African countries such as Mali and Liberia.

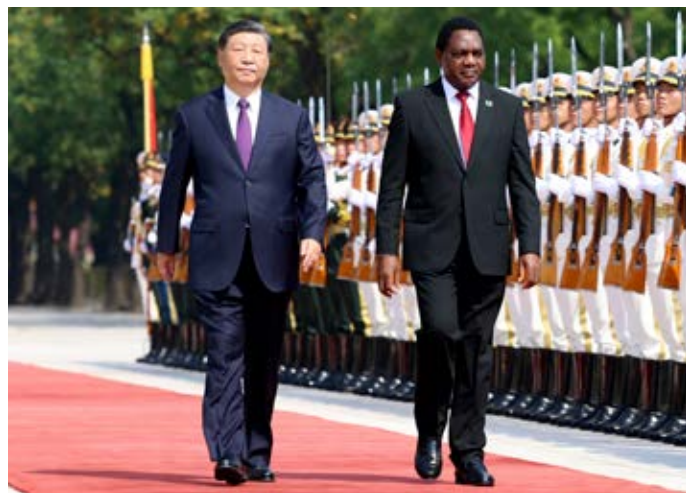
In late 2018, ECOWAS introduced an automotive industry policy framework with the objective to "boost the automotive industry in the region by building the capacity (...) of vehicle assembling, production and marketing". This initiative is quite encouraging. Unfortunately, it has struggled to gain substantial support from regional leaders, despite its clear potential for development, job creation and increased regional integration. ET



Vehicles in Accra, Ghana, 2022.

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Presidents Xi Jinping and Hakainde Hichilema in Beijing in September 2023.

SOVEREIGN DEBT

Slow, but steady progress

Zambia is emerging from default, nearly four years after the government of the natural resource-rich country first became unable to service its sovereign debt. The quest for debt restructuring has been difficult – and the mission has not been fully accomplished yet. Zambia’s government must rise to huge challenges, with different creditors pursuing rather different interests.

By Beulah N. Chombo and Charles Chinanda

In June 2024, Zambia’s finance ministry announced that more than 90% of holders of its outstanding international bonds had accepted its restructuring proposal. The bonds’ nominal is worth \$3 billion, and the deal was an important step towards the comprehensive debt restructuring Zambia needs.

The southern African nation’s sovereign debt now amounts to about \$27 billion, which includes the obligations that have not been met in the past four years.

The debt mountain results partially from governmental mismanagement, but the problems were severely worsened by global trends. The impacts of the climate crisis are getting worse, for example. Moreover, the Covid-19 lockdown not only hit Zambia’s domestic economy, but the international slump depressed the copper price.

Copper is Zambia’s most important export good. The very low commodity price meant that government revenues dropped fast in a time of desperate need when more government spending was necessary. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), sovereign-debt problems have been escalating in many places for reasons like this.

The Zambian government’s quest for debt relief has been long, difficult and cumbersome. A core problem is that many different stakeholders had to be brought on board. Since their interests diverge, the G20’s “Common Framework on Debt Treatment” did not work out well (see box). Important stakeholders include:

- international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank,
- bilateral agencies from high-income countries which belong to the Paris Club of long-established creditors,
- bilateral agencies from China and other emerging markets that do not adhere to the Paris Club and
- private bondholders.

Adding to the worries, Zambia’s government must yet reach an agreement with the commercial banks that it owes money. That may well prove difficult again, not least because they are based in different countries with different political cultures. As the

experience of other countries shows as well, debt restructuring has become even more difficult than it was around the turn of the Millennium. Sri Lanka is a prominent example.

Since the default in November 2020, Zambia’s economy has been in serious crisis. As arrears piled up, the debt mountain kept growing. Quite obviously, debt restructuring was needed to get the economy going again.

PRESIDENT HICHILEMA’S MISSION

President Hakainde Hichilema took office in August 2021, after winning a general election. His top priority was to secure better terms for Zambia’s debt obligations and reduce its debt-to-GDP ratio.

The IMF proved supportive. In August 2022, it approved an emergency loan of \$1.3 billion. Though this loan increased the debt and led to austerity, it did enable Zambia to implement reforms. It also obliged the government to agree on a debt-restructuring plan with its creditors.

It took Hichilema almost a year to reach a restructuring deal with the long-established “official creditors”. These include:

- multilateral institutions like the IMF,
- bilateral donors such as the USA and the EU countries, which all belong to the Paris Club and
- bilateral agencies from emerging markets.

Zambia, however, only owed them \$6.3 billion. The deal rescheduled repayment over 20 years, starting with a grace period. All summed up, it basically means that, instead of having to return \$6.3 billion within 10 years, the country’s debt servicing costs will only amount to \$750 million in that period, on average \$75 million per year.

The deal postpones debt payments and reduces interest rates, but it does not cancel debt, as was the case with debt relief two decades ago. What will happen after the next 10 years, is an open question. All parties concerned hope that growth will pick up strongly, so the country will be able to bear the debt burden in the long run. If its performance improves above expectations, interest rates, for example, will rise again, though details would still have to be defined. The downside could then be that tougher debt-serving would stall growth once more.

After this agreement, the Hichilema government had to get other creditors on board. It did not go smoothly.

Indeed, there was a serious setback in November 2023. After Zambia's negotiators concluded an agreement with the holders of the above-mentioned Eurobonds, bilateral creditors objected. Chinese agencies played an important role in arguing that private bondholders were getting a better deal than governmental institutions. Other bilateral creditors insisted on the principle of com-

parable treatment too. According to it, all creditors must share restructuring burdens fairly.

Zambia's government thus had to find a compromise that would satisfy all parties. Earlier this year, Zambian officials travelled to China. They discussed debt issues with various parties, including the Export-Import Bank of China and Chinese commercial banks. In February, President Hichilema announced that China and India had finally agreed to sign memorandums of under-

standing (MOUs) on restructuring Zambia's debt. He had thus managed to bring the two final bilateral creditors on board.

This step then paved way for accelerated negotiations with Eurobond holders, and a deal could be sealed in the summer. It is in line with the demands of all official creditors. The repayment period has been extended by at least eight to fifteen years. Unlike the multilateral and bilateral creditors, the bondholders have accepted a "haircut" of 25% or so. Haircut is the term financial in-

Cold war in Common Framework

In the late 1990s, established western donor governments learned a lesson. Sovereign debt burdens were crippling development in many low-income countries, so debt relief had become indispensable. After multilateral initiatives made it possible, many of the countries concerned saw progress again. Roughly summarised, the deal was that in return for reduced debts, they would invest more in their people's welfare. At the same time, they were expected to ensure macroeconomic stability in the future.

Western donor governments basically want to tackle debt crises this way again. However, they are no longer the only relevant players. Zambia has borrowed more money from large emerging markets and the private sector. Typically, the countries that are currently heavily indebted owe the latter two categories more money than they do long-established bilateral donors and multilateral institutions.

The governments of emerging markets, and especially China, see things in a different light than those from established economic powers. They resent western influence

and sometimes argue that western loans basically serve hegemonial purposes. At the same time, they want to enhance their own reputation and gain a stronger clout in world affairs. In Chinese eyes, developmental lending contributes to both. The irony is that US leaders have accused them of setting up debt traps.

That was probably not their intention, but it is true that China's leaders have failed to learn the lessons of the west's failed development lending in the past century. Lenders from emerging markets have a general tendency to disregard issues of governance, which are essential for prudent budgeting, and they claim they don't want to be involved in domestic affairs. Moreover, there are disputes regarding whether multilateral institutions like the World Bank serve western interests or global purposes.

Related controversies make agreements difficult. Unlike the established donors, China is reluctant to forgive debt, but rather generous in postponing payments. For obvious reasons, both the established donors and those from emerging markets pay close

attention to not restructuring debts in ways that might ease the other side's burden.

Private investors, by contrast, are only in it for the money. When interest rates in high-income countries dropped to record lows after the financial crisis of 2008, some started to invest in developing countries and emerging markets where returns looked better. Their action was never geared to developmental goals, but only towards good financial returns. They will do whatever they can to maximise returns. It makes things more complicated, however, that the commercial creditors that have lent money to Zambia include state-owned Chinese Banks. They may be focusing not only on financial returns, but geopolitical considerations too.

WHY COMPROMISE IS POSSIBLE

In spite of diverging interests, compromise is possible. The point is that all parties know that they will never get their money back in full from an insolvent debtor. Aware of mounting problems internationally, moreover, the G20 had set up the Common Framework for Debt Treatment (CF) at its summit in Saudi Arabia in 2020. The idea was to provide fast

and conclusive debt restructuring to low-income countries in need. The intentions were good, but implementation was often unconvincing. In regard to Zambia's debt crisis, observers have spoken of "civil war within the CF".

The experience shows that a stronger global framework would make sense. Binding international rules for restructuring sovereign debt after the default of a government would be helpful. Concluding a series of voluntary restructuring deals with different partners, after all, is not only tortuous for the government concerned – it also prolongs the economic slump that makes its people, who did nothing to cause the sovereign debt crisis, suffer serious hardship. BC, CC



The Common Framework was agreed at the G20 summit in Saudi Arabia in late 2020.



vestors use for the reduction of a bond's value. They accepted the deal because they will be paid higher interest rates than the official creditors and get their repayment sooner.

The numbers are not completely fixed. If Zambia's economy performs better than expected repayment conditions for bondholders will be more favourable. The IMF is the arbiter and will decide whether expectations have been exceeded. The risk, of course, is that higher debt-servicing costs might then hamper economic growth in Zambia again.

Zambia's agreement with Eurobond holders certainly represents a critical milestone towards restoring debt sustainability. As attention must now turn to the commercial creditors, it is helpful that the Eurobond deals roughly outline what the final deal must look like.

The good news is that Zambia's economy has begun to pick up speed again. The progress made on debt restructuring has renewed investor confidence and enhanced the country's attractiveness. The government reckons that accounting for inflation and other long-term factors, its total burden of debt plus interest rates will actually be reduced by 40%. As it is set to spend considerably less money on debt servicing in the next 10 years, so its fiscal space is growing decisively. It will be able to spend more on education, health and infrastructure, and to the extent that it manages to stem corruption, it may even be able to avoid painful austerity.

The road ahead, nonetheless, may still prove rocky. The remaining commercial

lenders include the Chinese state-owned China Development Bank and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. Together, Zambia owes them more than \$900 million, and to them, geopolitical concerns may matter again. Other important players are private-sector entities like the multinational African Export-Import Bank or the London-based Standard Chartered. To finalise the debt restructuring process, all of these institutions must agree to terms that are comparable to those concluded with bondholders and official bilateral creditors.



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ZERO HUNGER

“A revolutionary approach to achieving food security”

To date, agricultural research has been mostly geared to issues relevant to high-income nations. Developing countries' national agricultural research systems (NARS) deserve much more influence – and a new consortium is being established to serve that purpose. Ravi Khetarpal, the initiator of the new entity, told Roli Mahajan about this paradigm shift.

Ravi Khetarpal interviewed by Roli Mahajan

What is the Global NARS Consortium (GNC)?

Well, we believe that agricultural research must become research that is geared to achieving the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). So far, it has too often been research for its own sake. Despite some progress, too much research is still disconnected from practical application. We need change. Agricultural research must prioritise achieving SDG1 (end poverty) and SDG2 (zero hunger) by focusing on practical, action-oriented topics in international partnerships (SDG17). We need to break down academic silos and engage with – and for – the people of the global south. And our method of tackling this challenge is GNC, the Global NARS Consortium. It is a collaborative initiative under the Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAiR), which is a network that links national agricultural research systems (NARS) to one another.

What will the GNC do?

The goal is to safeguard food security faster in this era of uncertainty by strengthening global partnerships. The GNC will serve as the interface, linking national systems to global research institutions, donors and UN partners. We aim to bridge gaps in collaboration, with a focus on identifying research opportunities that lead to stronger capacities – not just in technical terms, but also in regard to innovation and policy support. We are not creating a new structure but doing our best to leverage existing ones. We want research to lead to innovative thinking, innovative processes and innovative products. Research results, in other words, must be of more socio-economic value. The capacity to innovate is crucial, and it depends on researchers' ability to listen to local people, coordinate among one another and strengthen policy. The impacts will benefit grassroots communities. For common people, this means that the agricultural research that is being done in their country will, more likely, be collaborative, innovative and supported by global resources. Simply put, the GNC aims to improve food security through ap-

plied research and development that directly benefits those most in need.

Why are national agriculture research systems crucial?

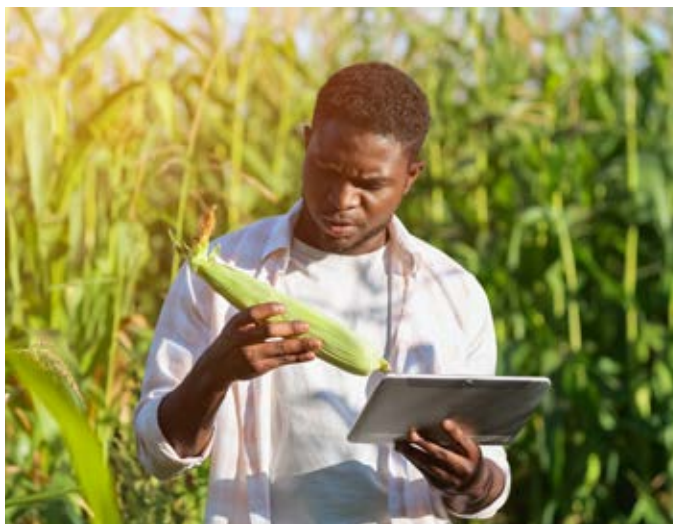
One of the great challenges is that global agricultural research is not representative of the world. The multilateral organisations that were established after World War II have achieved a lot in addressing global issues, but there is still a lack of action-oriented agricultural research that focuses on the specific issues of low-income countries. In particular, the highly influential Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has mostly focused on issues that are relevant to the global north...

...which is not where masses of people suffer food insecurity these days.

Exactly, and accordingly research labs in the global north that specialise in crops consumed primarily in those regions are unable to provide solutions for ensuring food security everywhere. It is essential to boost small-scale production in the global south. To do that, research must focus on crops that are grown and consumed locally. It must take into account people's needs at the local level. Doing so is crucial, not least because the global agricultural landscape is facing unprecedented challenges, from climate change to population growth. Ultimately, the SDGs must be achieved country by country. To make real progress, we must involve the national agricultural research systems right from the start. They must become stronger, better resourced and more effective.

Tell me more about the challenges national agricultural research system face.

National agricultural research systems – NARS for short – vary significantly across regions and countries. Some might actually be called national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) or even national agricultural research, extension and education systems (NAREES), depending on what kind of outreach they have. In emerging markets like India, Malaysia, Morocco or Brazil, the systems are quite advanced, engaging effectively with global partners such as the CGIAR, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) or the UN



African research matters very much.

Development Programme (UNDP). In less developed countries or where economies are in transition, NARS tend to face substantial challenges. These challenges include:

- limited resources,
- difficulties in communication,
- difficulties in accessing global knowledge and resources and
- a general feeling of being neglected at the global level.

Often, they struggle to effectively articulate their needs or engage with international partners, which hinders their ability to participate fully in global agricultural development.

What needs to happen to improve matters?

The lack of south-south cooperation is a major challenge. More developed NARS could offer support to those in less developed regions. The EU model of triangular cooperation – where a funding agency from a high-income nation, a knowledge provider from an emerging market and a recipient from a low-income country come together – has seen some success, but it is not a widespread practice so far. It actually may not be applicable universally. Different regions and NARS may require tailored approaches to address their unique challenges.

How will the GNC operate?

We are taking a global perspective rather than piloting the GNC in specific world regions. The reason is that regional NARS networks exist but have only been operating with varying success. We are currently developing a comprehensive “every NARS

according to its needs and support” mechanism. Our approach includes regular discussions, workshops and webinars. The full governance model is still being defined.

What are the next steps for GNC?

The declaration establishing GNC was signed on 17 March 2023 at a meeting of the leaders of the six existing regional fora. They are the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA), the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), the Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI), the European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development (EFARD), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and the Forum of the Americas on Agricultural Research and Technology Development (FORAGRO). Major international agencies like the European Commission, IFAD or CGIAR recognise the need for a global NARS consortium, and they endorse our approach. The plan is to launch the GNC formally in 2025. This is not just another initiative. It is a revolutionary approach to achieve food security and sustainable development, actively involving those who need it most.



RAVI KHETARPAL is the executive secretary of the APAARI, currently chairs GFaIR and has initiated the campaign to launch the

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Heavy fires have been raging in Brazil this year. Burning forest close to the Bolivian border in July.

FOREST FIRES

Latin America is burning

Year after year, valuable ecosystems are destroyed by wildfires. This drives climate change and decimates biodiversity. Slash-and-burn agriculture is partly to blame.

By Javier A. Cisterna Figueroa

The expansion of agriculture and forestry is a driver of economic growth across Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the World Bank, agriculture alone accounts for between five and 18 percent of gross domestic product in 20 countries in the region. However, the growth of these activities brings a number of environmental problems, including an increased risk of forest fires.

Climate change, forest clearance for farmland and slash-and-burn agriculture are increasingly creating conditions that facilitate devastating fires, which directly threaten local lives and livelihoods.

Reports by government agencies and international organisations indicate that fire disasters are getting worse. Countries affected – including the United States, Canada, European countries bordering the Mediterranean, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Australia – are pushed to the limits in their efforts to respond effectively. Latin America has suffered particularly severe fires. The following are just three recent examples:

- In 2023, forest fires laid waste to more than 17 million hectares of land in Brazil – an area the size of Uruguay.
- In October and November 2023, more than 250,000 hectares were left charred in the La Paz-Beni corridor. The number of fires registered in Bolivia was nearly five times higher than in the previous year.
- The blaze that swept through Viña del Mar, Chile, in February claimed more than 130 lives, making it the second deadliest fire event of the 21st century after Australia's "Black Saturday" bushfires in 2009.

Recently, every forest fire season in South America has been at least as destructive as the preceding one, especially in the Amazon region. The causes include extreme weather conditions and poor land use plan-

ning. Legal and illegal economic activity also plays a major role.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Latin America and the Caribbean currently account for more than a fifth of the world's forests. Between 1990 and 2020, however, the region lost around 138 million hectares of woodland – an area larger than Peru. The FAO says the main reason for this is the use of more land for agriculture, forestry and livestock farming and, to a lesser extent, urban expansion and road construction.

In Brazil, for example, the area of land used for forestry increased by 274% between the mid-1980s and 2019, and agricultural land grew by 160%. Areas for grazing livestock expanded significantly through to the year 2000 but have not been extended since then.

The conversion of land has opened economic prospects but at the same time has had disastrous consequences – among them a heightened risk of forest fires. Latin America's original wet forests, especially the Amazon rainforest, act as natural barriers against fires, preventing them spreading or slowing their progress. The radical changes in land use and the destruction of those green firewalls – coupled with a simultaneous rise in greenhouse-gas emissions – increase the amount of combustible material and thus pave the way for disastrous fire events.

SLASH-AND-BURN OUT OF CONTROL

Another practice that harbours a constant risk of disaster is controlled burning. This



involves deliberately starting fires to prepare land for agricultural use. It can not only have the effect of destroying soils but also results in accidental fires sparked by wind-borne embers.

In Bolivia, for example, slash-and-burn contributed significantly to the forest fires that devastated hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Chiquitania region in 2019. According to the online news portal Mongabay, the Bolivian state itself promoted controlled burning in a drive to expand agriculture. However, the situation got out of hand and vast areas of land with valuable biodiversity fell victim to the flames.

“We have a responsibility and a mandate to grow the Bolivian economy, not just

on the basis of non-renewable natural resources but also on the basis of agriculture and livestock farming,” said Bolivia’s then President Evo Morales months earlier.

Whether more agriculture and forestry are made possible by deforestation or slash-and-burn, both practices result in increased climate change-fuelling carbon emissions, devastated ecosystems and more conducive conditions for forest fires.

Susana Paula is performing research on forest fires at the Universidad Austral de Chile. She says it is not enough for societies that are exposed to major fires to concentrate on firefighting. Instead, they need to do more to prevent or alleviate forest fires or, where possible, adapt to them. She calls for more preventive measures and better

support to create a more diverse landscape. She also recommends changes in land use, especially in areas that are susceptible to fires, greater efforts to control invasive species, to restore native ecosystems and to support affected communities with long-term psychosocial programmes.

One thing is certain: there is an urgent need to reverse the trend and limit the scale of Latin America’s forest fires – for the sake of local people and the entire global community.



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Drawing the right conclusions from data

The causes of the huge forest fires in Latin America are manifold, including climate change and slash-and-burn agriculture (see main text). Disaster expert Michel De L’Herbe calls for affected countries to prepare better for the fires and cooperate more closely.

Michel De L’Herbe in a brief interview with Javier A. Cisterna Figueroa

Wildfires in Latin America are apparently becoming more deadly and destructive every year. Why are we failing to combat them adequately?

Climate change has been discussed and analysed in great depth across Latin America. But decisions have not been taken on the policies needed to address it, especially to facilitate adaptation. In Chile, for example, only one percent of fires have been responsible for more than 80% of the area

destroyed since 2014. Those fires are usually accompanied by high temperatures and present a nationwide logistical challenge. In light of the information available and empirical evidence, we should prepare for this small number of highly destructive fires. But we have been dragging our heels. Preparing for that one percent calls for changes in firefighting



Neighbourhoods burned down by devastating forest fires in Viña del Mar, Chile, in February.

logistics and a prompt and vigorous response capability.

Do you see other similarities at Latin American level?

One thing we have in common is that we do not systematically draw conclusions from data. We know climate change is happening but that has not made us better prepared, even at the local level. We need to start training more people connected with local governments.

How do you view the lack of a coordinated response to common challenges?

It would not be fair to compare us with the northern hemisphere, because countries there have the best logistics internationally. Latin America still lacks that. In Chile, for example, fires cannot yet be fought from the air at night, which means that fires continue to spread during the hours of darkness. However, we can learn from the cooperation we see in the United States, Canada and the European Union. Nothing like that exists here yet. We need to strengthen horizontal cooperation – cooperation between equal partners at the same political level – and think, in particular, of countries that are protagonists of a global problem, as is the case with Brazil and Bolivia shaping the impacts on the Amazon region.



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One way to earn a living in the Dominican Republic is in the tourism industry.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Improving female entrepreneurs' self-esteem

Social factors play a crucial role in the success of women entrepreneurs. They can be experienced as empowering or inhibiting. A survey in the Dominican Republic has identified aspects that help women entrepreneurs to become more confident.

By **Andreina Sánchez Deschamps**

In recent years, female entrepreneurship has grown considerably worldwide. One in six women around the world intends to start a business soon – compared to one in five men – according to the GEM 2022/23 Women's Entrepreneurship Report (GERA, 2023). Women's entrepreneurial intentions are highest in low-income countries (28.2%) and lowest in high-income countries (11%).

However, it is important to highlight the ongoing challenges women face when starting a business. While economic barriers are significant, psychosocial factors deserve attention too.

Over the decades, research has shown that entrepreneurial motivations are deeply influenced by psychological and social factors. Personal traits such as self-efficacy or self-esteem, adaptability and leadership are closely linked to entrepreneurship. Additionally, social influences such as family background, education and age play an important role. According to a quantitative study in Spain in 2012, informal factors such as the perception of entrepreneurial skills, family roles and social networks are more relevant for female entrepreneurship than

formal factors such as financing, training and support policies.

Despite having the same entrepreneurial skills as men, many women perceive themselves as less prepared to succeed in business. Research suggests that many women who have entrepreneurial skills avoid starting a business due to low self-efficacy shaped by social and cultural factors.

In its GEM 2021/22 Women's Entrepreneurship Report, the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association provided an analysis of trends in women's entrepreneurship in 50 countries around the world. Of all the countries considered, the highest proportion of adults either starting or running



a new business was found in the Dominican Republic, where 43.7% of women reported startup activity compared to 40.1% of men.

Despite such encouraging figures, it is worth pointing out that Dominican women often choose traditional or subsistence businesses. A key reason is that these ventures require minimal investment. However, since these sectors are usually saturated, profits tend to be modest.

In 2023, I conducted a study in the Dominican Republic for my master's thesis at University of Leipzig, focusing on 20 women entrepreneurs. Of these, 10 had received specialised training, held postgraduate or master's degrees. Nine had completed higher or university education, and one had technical education. Despite their high levels of education, many of these women felt they still lacked sufficient entrepreneurial skills.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT MATTERS VERY MUCH

My study highlights the strong influence of social environments on women entrepreneurs. It shows that the family can play a key role in encouraging business activity, particularly for women: 90% of the participants have a family member who is or has been an entrepreneur. This supports the idea that growing up with an entrepreneurial role model in the family increases the likelihood of developing entrepreneurial skills.

Moreover, it is relevant for women entrepreneurs to receive support from their social circle when deciding to start a business. Without encouragement from family and friends, many entrepreneurs lose motivation and may abandon their ventures. Seven of the 20 Dominican women entrepreneurs declared that their social environment did not support their decision to start a business, leading to a loss of motivation during their entrepreneurial journey.

For female entrepreneurs, support from family and friends is very important, particularly for those with partners or children, as family responsibilities can complicate their business careers. Among those who received both emotional and financial support, emotional support was consistently ranked as more important and valuable.

A troubling finding is that half of the interviewees reported they did not engage with other women entrepreneurs in their field. Only five are members of relevant or-

ganisations or business associations. This lack of networking means they miss out on significant opportunities that social networks offer, such as access to role models and resources.

ENHANCING WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM

The central aim of my study was to develop a group business coaching programme that allows participants to collaborate on personal and business development tools. The month-long online programme "Reprogram Your Business Mindset" targeted fears, blockages and limiting beliefs that often hold women entrepreneurs back. It combined elements of business, coaching, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and other self-development tools. Its primary goal was to empower women by boosting their self-esteem. The women were encouraged to reflect on the impact of psychosocial factors and how to work on them to improve their businesses.

The programme had an empowering impact on the female participants and their businesses. Initially, many women struggled with low self-efficacy regarding business due to sociocultural stereotypes. However, by the end of the programme, their self-belief had improved. They had recognised their personal and entrepreneurial skills – and had worked on them by taking action in their own businesses.

Additionally, women entrepreneurs learned and grew significantly when they shared with others in their field. During the programme, they discovered the joy of belonging and feeling understood in groups where they could freely share their experiences.

DEVELOPING NEW STRATEGIES

Participants have implemented several new strategies in their businesses, including:

- aligning the business focus with their personal values,
- diversifying products and services,
- automating processes,
- creating an internationalisation strategy,
- collaborating with partners and
- improving decision-making and tasks implementation.

Since the levels of business self-efficacy among women entrepreneurs are heavily

influenced by the sociocultural context in which they operate, it would be valuable to investigate the outcomes for businesswomen in other countries with circumstances similar or different from those in the Dominican Republic. In general, women entrepreneurs can greatly benefit from training focused on personal development. It can help them develop professional and personal skills like leadership, communication,

“Without encouragement from family and friends, many entrepreneurs lose motivation and may abandon their ventures.”

time management and decision-making, while also boosting their self-confidence.

Last but not least, collaboration and networking with other women entrepreneurs can enhance their self-efficacy by showing them that they are not alone in their entrepreneurial process. Such connections also provide opportunities to meet inspiring peers within their industry, demonstrating that their goals are achievable.

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Traditional Dalit diets – diverse and delicious

A new publication documents the dietary traditions of Dalit communities in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

“Dalit kitchens of Marathwada” by Shahu Patole is more than a typical cookbook, as it boldly explores issues of caste, identity and culture through food. Marathwada is a region in Maharashtra, and Dalits are the lowest-caste Hindus, who have a long history of discrimination and marginalisation.

The author is a Dalit himself. He says he felt compelled to write the book because he could not find any references to the communities’ food culture in religious or social literature. Patole is a retired government officer and writes in Marathi. The English edition makes his insights internationally accessible. The excellent translation was prepared by Bhushan Korgaonkar.

The reader gets a glimpse of how food relates to Hindu belief systems. Food is often classified as pure (“sattvic”) or sinful (“tamasic”). Rigid rules that were derived from Hindu scriptures

determine what certain castes may eat. Food was thus weaponised to entrench caste divisions.

Patole challenges such long-held ideas. The harsh reality is that Dalits were historically denied access to ingredients like milk, ghee (clarified butter) and oil. The book draws upon his lived experience, showcasing Dalits’ resourcefulness in terms of making delicious meals with minimal resources.

The book paints a stark contrast between the food security of Dalits and upper-caste farmers. The lowest caste had to make use of whatever resources they could get. One message is that the marginalised communities have a deep connection to nature. That bond was born from necessity, as they relied on what was available to survive.

The author describes hunting practices of the Mahar and Mang communities, such as catching rabbits or birds. In the eyes of traditionally vegetarian upper castes, this kind of food is disgusting. Patole, however, challenges the idea that “one becomes what one eats”, and it does not bother him that pretentious people might accuse him of sinning simply because he wrote the book.

What makes his publication particularly powerful is the vivid depiction of Dalit cuisine. The book features lesser-known ingredients and unconventional cooking methods. Precise measurements are secondary to intuition—mirroring not only how the recipes were passed down through generations, but also how Dalit cooks had to make do with whatever was available at any point in time. From humble staples to celebratory dishes, the recipes show how food is closely related to cultural identity. Patole’s documentation of Dalits’ culinary culture is an important step towards achieving a more equitable future.

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EXTREME WEATHER

Nepali lessons that must be learned

Three days of unusually heavy rain caused devastating flooding and landslides in Nepal in late September. Events like this are becoming normal around the world and getting less attention than they did in the past. Nepal faces significant challenges in protecting its people.

By Rukamane Mahajan

On 3 October, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority released a report according to which flood waters and landslides caused 236 deaths, with 19 persons still missing. Entire villages were destroyed, and more than 16,000 families displaced. Moreover, vital infrastructure was damaged – from roads and bridges to hydropower projects and irrigation schemes through to high- and low-tension transmission lines. Many schools and health centres were affected too. In the early hours after the disaster, landslides blocked many highways. Domestic flights were disrupted.

In one fateful incident in Kathmandu, two men and two children were swept from the tin roof on which they had waited to be

rescued for more than four hours. One girl went missing, the other three were saved. Six football players were killed by a landslide when they were trying to reach a safe place in the southwest of the capital.

Survivors are traumatised, having lost loved ones, homes and belongings. Businesses and livelihoods have been affected, but government relief is very slow and unreliable.

The recent disaster hurts tourism, an important sector of the economy. September and October are considered the peak tourism season, for trekking in particular. This year, some important destinations were inaccessible.

Domestic travellers were affected too. During the long holiday breaks for the Hindu festivals of Dashain (3 to 16 October this year) and Tihar (30 October to 3 November) many people were returning to their home regions, which meant using dangerously damaged roads this year. News of bus accidents, of course, are frequent even in good times.

It is well known that Nepal is exposed to climate risks. While its contribution to

global heating has been negligible, it is suffering serious impacts. Mountain slopes are losing snow, and the glaciers are melting fast. Water problems – both scarcity and flooding – are increasing. The fragile Himalayan environment is changing.

Several measures have been taken at the federal, provincial and local levels to manage the risks. Nepal has funds for rescue and relief. There are preparedness and awareness programmes.

When the rains caused disaster in September, however, nothing seemed to work. Even in the capital city, rescue and relief operations were slow and less effective than needed.

Security staff from the army and the police did their best, but they only had limited equipment. They mostly made do with primitive means like ropes, bottles and shovels.

Quite obviously, Nepal needs a more pro-active approach. It is simply not enough to have disaster-management committees at the local level if they do not have what they need for effective responses to catastrophes.

Due to budget constraints – Nepal is South Asia's poorest country – state agencies are generally under-equipped. Nepal deserves more adaptation support and damage compensations from far more prosperous nations that have done much more to cause the climate crisis.

Tight budgets, however, do not excuse everything. All too often, sensible rules are not enforced. During the recent calamities, too many officers were not up to the tasks at all levels of government. Once again, apathy, indifference and incompetence were apparent. It was irritating, for example, that no one predicted the disaster's devastating scale even though there had indeed been warnings about heavy rain and potential flooding.

Nepal must learn from disaster. We need early warning systems, community preparedness, strong infrastructure and appropriate planning. Policymakers and administrators have their work cut out for them, and it includes mobilising more climate finance from high-nation countries.



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Traumatising loss of loved ones, livelihoods and homes.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Defanged judiciary

Pakistan's military-backed government has managed to eviscerate the country's Supreme Court. The new chief justice is a person of its choice.

By Imran Mukhtar

Pakistan's Supreme Court (SC) has a history of putting a check on government action. In several cases, it has insisted on constitutional principles and ruled against national and provincial governments. By setting precedents like that, it has encouraged lower courts to place state agencies under judicial review as well. Pakistan's higher judiciary thus has a history of ruling against the country's powerful military (see essay by Muhammad Nawfal Saleemi on page 31 of this e-paper) from time to time.

In future, the judiciary will be less likely to act assertively. The reason is that the government, which is backed by the generals, has managed to pass constitutional amendments which allow politicians to pick leading judges. Earlier, that had been the task of a judicial commission which was bound by seniority and consisted mostly of judges.

The constitutional package was rammed through in haste. The government only managed to get enough votes in both chambers of Parliament just in time to prevent Syed Mansoor Ali Shah from becoming chief justice. He is known to be independent minded and would have been next in line. After the reform, however, a new Special Parliamentary Committee has chosen the new chief justice from among the three most senior judges. Instead of Ali Shah, Yahya Afridi was thus be sworn on 26 October.

Pakistan is struggling with a deep economic crisis and serious security issues. Its multi-party coalition government took office after a general election in February in which supporters of Imran Khan, a controversial former prime minister, won the most seats, though not a majority. After the event, there were serious accusations of rigging. The government thus had reason to fear

that the SC might nullify the result under the leadership of Ali Shah.

Observers fear the amendments will have further impacts. Political repression is currently increasing in Pakistan. Imran Khan has been imprisoned for many months, and many say on trumped up charges. Some of his party's leaders are also in jail or in hiding. Political activists, social-media influencers and even opposition lawmakers have mysteriously disappeared. Some later reappeared thanks to a court intervention. Such interventions will probably become rare in the future, and perhaps will not happen at all anymore.

The reason is that the amendments have stripped the Supreme Court and the provincial High Courts of their jurisdiction over matters with political implications. The reform introduces new constitutional benches at the SC and HCs, which, for all practical purposes, will operate as separate judicial entities. A modified Judicial Commission with stronger representation of the government and headed by the SC chief justice, moreover, gets to decide who sits on those benches. In other words, the government will directly and indirectly determine the persons who will monitor its actions for judicial purposes.

Those persons will thus no longer be truly independent, bound only by the law. They are more likely to be careerists who have a history of trying to please those in power in the hope of being appointed to constitutional benches at some point in time.

It always raises suspicions when a government insists on modifying constitutional amendments that weaken judicial independence. That is especially so when that government has reason to fear court interventions itself. Making matters worse in Pakistan this time, the details of the amendments were only made public very late, so broad-based democratic debate of fundamental changes was impossible. To many citizens, what happened looks like a power grab.

According to the International Commission of Jurists, the amendments have indeed defanged Pakistan's judiciary. "These changes bring an extraordinary level of political influence over the process of judicial appointments and the judiciary's own administration," Santiago Canton, the secretary general of this non-governmental organisation has said. "They erode the judiciary's capacity to independently and effectively function as a check against excesses by other branches of the State and protect human rights."



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Supreme Court building in Islamabad.



Protests by European farmers against the EU-Mercosur agreement in Brussels in February.

GLOBAL TRADE

Don't stop, do better

The prospective trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur might unlock opportunities for deeper cooperation. It is criticised by civil society, but the issues raised could be resolved in better ways than by breaking off the talks.

By Georg Schäfer

Negotiations on a trade agreement between the EU and the South American common market Mercosur (Mercado Común del Sur – full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) commenced in 1999 and have still not been finalised. The EU is pushing for Mercosur to commit to complying with environmental and social standards. It particularly wants the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest brought to a halt. At the same time, a number of EU countries fear that the agreement will have a negative impact on their farmers. The Mercosur countries, for their part, do not like the idea of having their environmental and social policies dictated by the EU.

The aim of the agreement is to create a free trade zone between the two economic areas, which together form a market of more than 700 million people. According to an

analysis prepared for the EU, trade in goods will increase significantly. Mercosur will predominantly export more agricultural products and the EU more industrial goods. The agreement's impact on gross domestic product is estimated to be low, but positive for both sides.

The planned agreement has been sharply criticised by civil-society organisations such as Misereor and Greenpeace. They argue that it reproduces the colonial logic of Latin America as a perpetual supplier of raw materials and importer of industrial goods. Rising meat exports and growing soya and sugar cane production would increase environmental destruction, water pollution and pesticide use. The agreement would thus exacerbate the climate crisis and accelerate species loss. Small farmers and indigenous people would be driven off their land.

Contrary to this assessment, however, the qualitative imbalance in trade between the EU (industrial products) and Mercosur (agricultural products) is not a result of the agreement; it is the status quo prior to the agreement. In the short term, the planned dismantling of tariff barriers will accentuate that specialisation. But in the long term,

cheaper access to intermediate products could create new opportunities for the Mercosur countries to transfer industrial value creation there. Export orientation in East Asia has proven a much more successful strategy than import substitution in Latin America.

The criticism expressed by civil society is partly justified. It gives the impression, however, that the environmental and human-rights issues raised could be resolved by scrapping the agreement. That can only be achieved by the Mercosur countries themselves adopting a cohesive policy. Stopping the agreement would only affect trade with the EU and the growth that results from it. The EU imposing a general import ban on products linked to deforestation (already adopted) and a general export ban on hazardous pesticides (still pending) is much more effective.

In addition, civil-society criticism should take account of major development policy concerns. There have long been calls for the EU to open its internal market to agricultural imports from the global south. If the agreement in its current form is rejected by some EU countries, it will not be out of concern for the climate and environment; it will be largely due to the vested interests of the agricultural lobby in those countries.

If the agreement should fail after more than 20 years of negotiations, a great opportunity will have been missed for EU participation in deeper north-south cooperation. China and the USA will step into the gap. It is doubtful whether this would serve the interests of civil society. Furthermore, the development-policy discourse in Germany could be severely damaged. Labelling the agreement a “toxic treaty”, as Greenpeace did in a campaign in 2023, is not only unfortunate but dangerous. It would be disastrous if such language were to fuel right-wing populist polemics against cooperation with the global south. Civil-society organisations should thus work to improve the agreement – not to stop it.



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FOCUS

Colonial heritage

The forgotten Arab slave trade

By Bob Koigi (p. 21)

Britain and France oppressed West Africa in equal measure

By Baba G. Jallow (p. 23)

Apologies are not enough

By Lawrence Kilimwiko (p. 25)

Consequences of German colonialism

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Racism and environmental destruction in Brazil are rooted in colonial past

By André de Mello e Souza (p. 29)

Institutions of the British Empire continue to shape Pakistan

By Muhammad Nawfal Saleemi (p. 31)

The Opium Wars made Britain rich

By Hans Dembowski (p. 33)

Storm clouds over the
Victoria Memorial in
Kolkata.



Slave trade monument in Zanzibar.

SLAVERY

The forgotten trade

The transatlantic slave trade had a devastating impact on Africa and affects the continent to this day. The fact that the Arab slave trade also took a terrible toll on millions of Africans is often overlooked.

By Bob Koigi

From the 7th century and over 13 centuries, between 10 and 18 million Africans were trafficked through the Sahara and the Indian Ocean to the Arab world, mainly to the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and other parts of the Middle East. The effects of this trade continue to shape the geopolitical landscape to this day.

Whereas the transatlantic trade primarily targeted the west coast of Africa, the much older Arab slave trade operated on the east coast and the trans-Saharan routes. The European colonial powers were aware of the existing Arab trade networks and integrated them into their colonial strategies. The co-

lonial borders and political units in Africa were influenced by the existing trade routes and the regional power dynamics shaped by the slave trade.

The displacement of millions of Africans led to a significant population decline in several regions. People from East and Central Africa were transported across the Indian Ocean and had to endure appalling conditions.

For many slaves, the journey began in Zanzibar. The archipelago in present-day Tanzania became a central hub in the slave trade network that connected East Africa with the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

The islands were under the rule of the Omani Sultan family from the end of the 17th century until their independence in 1963. Zanzibar was not only a centre for the slave trade, but also for a range of commodities such as cloves and ivory, which were transported from here to various parts of the Arab world.

The journey through the Sahara Desert was an alternative route for slaves from different regions. It could take months. Here, too, the conditions were brutal: extreme heat, lack of water and malnutrition took their toll. It is estimated that up to 50% of the slaves died before reaching their destination.

The transatlantic trade was primarily looking for strong men to work on farms and ranches, while Arab traders focused on capturing women and girls for concubinage and sexual exploitation in harems. The demand for female slaves was high enough for traders to charge high prices, with the ratio of captured women to men being three to one.

A particularly brutal aspect of the Arab slave trade was the castration of male slaves, especially those who served as palace guards or soldiers, in order to render them incapable of reproducing. Castrated men were considered more reliable and less susceptible to rival claims to power.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

The economic consequences of the Arab slave trade were far-reaching and continue to have an impact in the affected regions until today. Zanzibar is a good example:

the archipelago initially benefited from the exploitation of slave labour. However, the long-term effects of the trade made Zanzibar economically dependent on slave labour and the associated industries, for example clove plantations. Even after the abolition of the slave trade, Zanzibar's economic structure remained partly dependent on the plantation economy, which hindered broader economic development.

In other parts of East Africa, the loss of a large part of the labour force meant that agricultural production and trade were impaired – a consequence that was even more pronounced in West Africa as a result of the transatlantic slave trade.

The slave trade also had a profound impact on social structures and cultural practices in the affected regions. The capture and enslavement of large numbers of people led to the breakdown of traditional family structures. In East Africa, the abduc-



tion of young men and women tore apart family ties and impaired social cohesion. In West Africa, the constant threat of raids to round up more slaves created fear and instability that eroded societies.

The influx of enslaved Africans into the Arab world led to a blending of cultures, but also to a marginalisation of African cultural practices. Enslaved Africans were often forced to give up their cultural identity, and their descendants were assimilated into the new cultural contexts they lived in.

LASTING GEOPOLITICAL IMPACTS

“The economic and political advantages gained by Arab traders had an impact on colonial borders and regional power struc-

tures,” says Oscar Otieno from the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Nairobi (UoN). He adds: “These historical trade patterns continue to shape geopolitics today.”

“Historical grievances and stereotypes based on centuries of exploitation are contributing to current diplomatic and social tensions, particularly between North African and sub-Saharan African countries,” says Salah Trabelsi, lecturer and researcher at the Mediterranean and Middle East Research and Study Group at Université Lumière Lyon 2.

One example of this is the migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa to North African countries and the conditions experienced by migrants in the latter. Today, they are characterised by discrimination and abuse, which can be seen as a legacy of historical exploitation.

Historical trade routes that emerged during the Arab slave trade also continue to influence economic relations between the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have significant economic interests in Africa that are shaped by these historical relations.

REPARATIONS

Scholars have referred to the slave trade as a “veiled genocide”. This term reflects the severe humiliation and conditions slaves were subjected to, from their initial capture and sale in the markets to the gruelling labour they were forced to perform abroad and the harrowing journeys in between.

Although formal reparations for the Arab slave trade are less emphasised compared to those for the transatlantic slave trade, there are ongoing discussions about recognising these historical injustices and supporting the affected communities. The main issue is the elimination of social and economic inequalities resulting from historical exploitation.

This is important, for example, in view of the discrimination and abuse to which Africans are exposed today in North Africa and as cheap labour in the Middle East, be it as domestic helpers in wealthy Emirati families or as construction workers on building sites in Qatar.

According to Otieno of the UoN, addressing these issues requires recognition of

the historical context and a commitment to eradicating the legacies of exploitation. He notes: “It is necessary to preserve and pass on the historical narratives of the affected

“Although formal reparations for the Arab slave trade are less emphasised compared to those for the transatlantic slave trade, there are ongoing discussions about recognising these historical injustices and supporting the affected communities.”

communities and at the same time create platforms for continuous dialogue and mutual respect between the descendants of those affected.”

MODERN SLAVERY

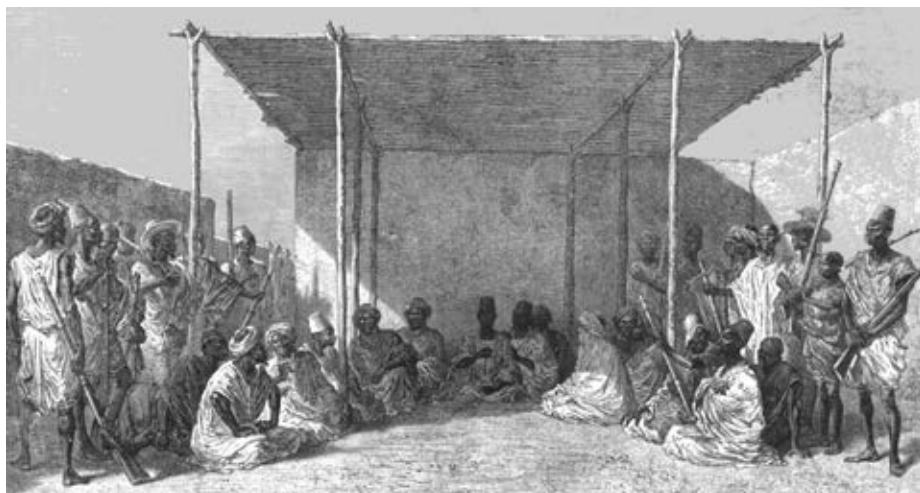
In some countries such as Mauritania slavery was only officially abolished in the 21st century. And reports of slavery are still persistent. Combating modern forms of exploitation, such as human trafficking and forced labour, is an ongoing challenge. Organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO) as well as Anti-Slavery International support victims of human trafficking and work with governments to improve policies.

Patricia Umwe from the School of Development and Strategic Studies, Maseno University Kenya, emphasises: “Addressing the legacy of the Arab slave trade involves not only acknowledging historical injustice, but also combating modern forms of exploitation and discrimination. The lessons of history must be incorporated into today's human-rights efforts to ensure that the injustices of the past do not lead to future suffering.”



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Advice mattered in pre-colonial times: 19th century Bambara king in consultation with elders.

GOVERNANCE

Oppressive idea of “civilisation”

The British and French forms of colonial domination in West Africa were not identical, but ultimately quite similar. Their legacy of authoritarian administration is similar too.

By **Baba G. Jallow**

In the late 19th century, European powers partitioned Africa and set up colonies (see box). Britain and France established their rule over West Africa. The tiny exceptions were Portuguese colonies, which are now Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde.

The colonial powers used a combination of blatant subterfuge and naked force. They made African rulers sign “treaties of friendship and protection” and thus transferred the control of entire kingdoms and chiefdoms to Europe. Where African rulers disagreed, the colonial powers used military force. Either way, colonialism served extractive interests.

The British and French forms of domination were not identical, but ultimately quite similar. Britain used the term “indirect rule”, while the French spoke of “assimilation”. Both concepts were built upon the idea of Africa being a dark continent that needed the light of western civilisation.

The British claimed that the best way to govern Africans was through their

own traditional systems of governance. By supposedly allowing Africans to rule themselves, though under British control, traditional customs were supposed to be preserved.

This claim was hollow. For one thing, only African rulers who pledged total submission to British hegemony were allowed to stay in power. Those who resisted were removed, and the colonial masters replaced them with “warrant chiefs”, who were often persons of low status in African society, and sometimes even outcasts. These persons would normally never have come close to positions of leadership.

The French appointed chiefs, who were called “chefs de canton” and resembled Britain’s warrant chiefs. The main function of both were:

- the collection of taxes for the colonial administration,
- the regulation of trade and
- the maintenance of what was called law and order, but really only served the dominance of the colonial power.

Warrant chiefs and chefs de canton were salaried servants of the colonial administration. They did not owe their authority to the Africans they ruled, but to the colonial authorities that appointed them. They could be sacked and replaced at will. At the

same time, they could expect their supervisors to only interfere minimally in local affairs. They actually wielded more power than precolonial predecessors had been afforded. The warrant chiefs and chefs de canton were unaccountable to the people and not constrained in any way by traditions of consultation, which, for example, had given elders or faith scholars considerable influence in community affairs.

Some historians argue that the warrant chiefs were actually more powerful than the chefs de canton. Most likely, power relations varied from place to place. There were very few essential differences between British and French colonial policies.

Both London and Paris had racist notions of European superiority and claimed to be on a civilising mission. The ultimate objective, however, was empire building and the extraction of African resources.

Taxpayers in the imperial centres were unwilling to pay for the administration of far-flung colonies. “Indirect rule” was therefore built on the rationale that African colonies had to finance their own administrations through trade and taxation.

The situation was basically the same in French-controlled West Africa. French assimilation, however, was built on the notion that Africans not only needed western civilisation in general but would benefit in particular from the superiority of French language and culture. Unlike the British, the French wanted Africans to become French citizens in order to be fully human. Nonetheless, the idea of French citizenship for all African subjects suffered a stillbirth.

Had all French colonial subjects been granted full citizenship, the French people would have become a minority in their own country. An African candidate could easily have won a presidential election, and the French parliament might have seen a majority of African members. Obviously, neither possibility was acceptable to the imperial power.

Only four African municipal areas, called “communes”, became fully French: Dakar, Goree, St. Louis and Rufisque. All are in what is now Senegal. Their people were made full citizens, but all other Africans under French rule remained subjects without voting rights nor other benefits of assimilation.

When it came to administration, the French were more direct in abolishing African systems of governance. The British hid

behind the mantle of indirect rule and to some extent kept relying on African structures. The French abolished such structures and replaced them with cantons and prefectures. These administrative entities mostly survive unchanged to this day.

ARBITRARY BORDERS

What further undermined traditional African governance systems was that few of the chiefdoms or kingdoms survived the European carve-up in their original form. The boundary makers split African communities and ethnic groups indiscriminately. People who spoke one language and shared one culture found themselves under different colonial powers. Both Britain and France, of course, relied on their own language, their own legal system and their own administrative concepts.

The impact is still felt today. Wolof, for instance, is spoken in Senegal and Gambia, Ewe in Ghana and Togo and Hausa in Niger and Nigeria. Senegal, Togo and Niger use French for official purposes, the other three countries use English. There are many more examples of arbitrary colonial borders splitting ethnic communities in two.

The borders that were drawn arbitrarily remain dysfunctional today. Supranational organisations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU have not done much to improve matters. Citizens of ECOWAS members may now hold an ECOWAS passport, for example, but the movement of both people and goods across borders remains difficult. Taxes must be paid and permits, which are issued by customs and immigration authorities, procured. Different languages, currencies and laws complicate

things. Capricious border controls similarly obstruct travel, commerce and educational transactions.

In the eyes of West African governments, rigid notions of sovereignty remain almost sacrosanct. Moreover, policymakers all too often feel entitled to unlimited power and, like the colonial masters before them, give the public rather little say in public affairs. The sad truth is that the ghosts of European colonialism still haunt West Africa – as well as other parts of the continent.



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The Scramble for Africa

In the 1880s and 1890s, several European powers were engaged in what is now known as the Scramble for Africa. It was part of a worldwide process of land grabbing and the imposition of colonial rule. Before 1880, European influence in Africa had mostly been limited to the continent's coastal areas. By 1900, almost the entire African landmass was under European overlordship.

The transformation was drastic and near-permanent, indefinitely sealing the fates of millions of people. Britain and France built the largest empires in Africa, but countries like Belgium, Germany, Portugal and Italy had colonies too.

The scramble was entirely driven by European interests. Economically, the end of the Atlantic slave trade coincided with the industrial revolution in Europe. The growth of the factory system led to increas-

ing demand for raw materials. The production of surplus goods meant that foreign markets were needed too. The generation of excess profits, moreover, required new investment outlets.

A strong sense of nationalism had gripped Europe after Belgium, Italy and Germany were established as nation states. Their aspirations to build empires caused insecurity

in Britain and France, especially after the latter's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71.

The rush to grab African territories could easily have led to war. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck averted that risk by convening the infamous Berlin Conference from November 1884 to February 1885. The event served the imperial powers to divide the African continent among themselves. Not a single African individual was present – nor was a single African territory represented.



Contemporary cartoon of Bismarck.

The concerns of African people did not matter. The imperial powers defined the rules of partition and carved up the continent.

One rule was that, when any European power intended to lay claim to African land, it had to inform the other powers immediately. Any counter claim was to be settled amicably. The colonial masters also agreed that annexation of an African territory by a European power had to be followed by occupation and the establishment of administrative structures.

It was also agreed at Berlin that all European powers were free to extend their spheres of influence and control as much as they could as long as they did not encroach on the sphere of another European power. Finally, all European powers were declared to be free to navigate the Congo and Niger rivers without hindrance. European bickering and skirmishes over that right had been a key catalyst for the Berlin conference. BJ



German President Steinmeier with descendants of Maji Maji heroes in Songea.

REPARATIONS AND REPATRIATION

Today, it is clear that words are no longer enough for the descendants of the victims of colonial rule. They are demanding reparations and the repatriation of the remains of their ethnic leaders and ancestors.

Haji Abdulkarim is 90 years old and a grandson of Chief Songea. “They should return the skulls and remains of the local chiefs so that we have the chance to bury our ancestors with the respect they deserve and in accordance with our culture,” he says.

Another point that the descendants are demanding is financial compensation for colonialism and the associated atrocities. Abdulkarim emphasises: “The apology will have no meaning if the families do not receive financial compensation for the suffering caused by the colonisers.”

These colonisers were people like Carl Peters, a ruthless and brutal colonial administrator who was responsible for the colonisation of what was then German East Africa and is now Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda. Carl Peters earned the local name “mkono wa damu” – Swahili for blood-stained hands – because of his cruelty towards the local population. Facts such as his name not being forgotten in East Africa underlines the general perception that Germany needs to do more today to address the crimes committed during its colonial rule.

Those demanding financial compensation in Tanzania and other parts of Africa point to the payments made by the Germans after the Holocaust. Available records show that Germany agreed with Israel in 1952 to pay around \$714 million after Israel made a claim relating to the resettlement of 500,000 Jews who had fled Nazi-controlled countries.

Between 24,000 and 100,000 Ovaherero and 10,000 Nama were killed by the Germans in a genocide between 1904 and 1908 in former German South-West Africa (now Namibia). Both the Ovaherero and the Nama are still fighting to receive adequate compensation from Germany for the people killed by the German colonisers.



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REPARATIONS

Words are not enough

One year ago, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier travelled to Tanzania to apologise for the atrocities committed by his country during its colonial rule. This was a first, but an apology does not suffice.

By Lawrence Kilimwiko

“I would like to ask for forgiveness for what Germans did to your ancestors here,” Steinmeier said at a ceremony in October 2023 at the Maji Maji Memorial Museum in Songea, southern Tanzania. Songea is named after Chief Songea Mbano, one of 60 chiefs of the Ngoni people who were executed on a single day in 1906 by German colonialists for their resistance to foreign rule.

Steinmeier apologised as he stood in front of their graves. The chiefs were executed in the so-called Maji Maji rebellion between 1905 and 1907, in which up to 300,000 people died. Most of them starved because the German colonialists used “scorched earth” tactics against the resistance – they burnt down fields and crops and thus deprived the people of their food. The Maji Maji rebellion is still an important part of East Africa’s historical self-image today,

and it is part of history lessons from primary school onwards.

It was the first time that a German head of state publicly acknowledged his country’s colonial atrocities. However, the apology fell short of the demands for reparation, compensation and, above all, the return of the mortal remains of the ethnic leaders, most of which are still in Germany.

The skull of Chief Songea is one of numerous skulls that the Germans cut off and shipped to Germany (see box). As Steinmeier’s speech made clear, Germany had not yet found it – the identification of “perhaps even thousands of skulls” in museums and anthropological collections is a challenge even for experts.



No surrender to the Germans

One of the few skulls returned from the huge amount of human remains brought to Germany during its colonial rule over what is now Tanzania (see main text) is that of Chief Mkwawa of the Hehe. It was found in 1953 in a museum in Bremen, a city in northern Germany, where it had been kept since 1898. A year later it was returned and is now on a pedestal, protected by a glass case, in a museum in Kalenga in the Hehe region.

Mkwawa staunchly resisted German rule for several years, declaring that he would

fight it to the utmost rather than submit to it, and that he would rather die by his own gun than surrender. This is exactly what he did. Historical records show that a bounty was placed on his head in 1898, which led to a manhunt. In July, Sergeant Major Johann Merkl approached Mkwawa. Merkl reports that they heard a shot and rushed to Mkwawa's hideout, where they saw two people lying by a campfire. One of them was identified as Mkwawa himself. They cut off his head and took it to Germany. For many people in East Africa,

it remains a mystery to this day why the Germans carried out the practice of beheading so meticulously and took the human skulls and other bones home in large quantities.

Interestingly, the return of Chief Mkwawa's skull was mainly due to pressure from Edward Twining, the colonial governor of the then British-controlled Tanganyika, who was pursuing British interests. He tried to appease the Hehe because he wanted to use them to put down the Mau Mau uprising in the neighbouring British colony of Kenya. By returning the skull, Twining believed he could persuade them to join the King's African Rifles, a regiment raised from Britain's East

African colonies. They were then to be sent to Kenya with the army to fight the Mau Mau freedom fighters there. LK



Chief Mkwawa.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa/Carola Frenntzen

GERMAN COLONIALISM

The long shadow of the past

In a new book, the development scholar Henning Melber assesses how Germans have dealt with their colonial history from the days of the Kaiser until today. He sees some success, but also backsliding. What is needed in his eyes is an honest reckoning that takes into account the grievances of the oppressed.

By Jörg Döbereiner

The monstrosity of the Holocaust has long overshadowed the fact that the German nation-state committed atrocious crimes long before the Nazis rose to power. Whether in West, East or reunited Germany, our country's role as a colonial power in Africa, Asia and the Pacific from 1884 until World War I

has been largely neglected. This chapter of German history got far less attention than the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship and, more recently, communist rule in East Germany. Colonialism played at best a minor role in public discourse and school curricula.

Many Germans are thus not aware of what happened. Historians have researched the era well, however, and that is evident, for example, in the long list of references that concludes Henning Melber's book "The long shadow of German colonialism". According to the author, this comprehensive knowledge still tends to be ignored or marginalised in public life.

Melber is a German-Namibian scholar who has been a D+C/E+Z contributor for

many years. He considers himself to be both academic and activist. He expresses solidarity with those who suffered colonial oppression as well as their descendants who still feel the impacts today. As the subtitle of the book states clearly, "amnesia, denialism and revisionism" are unacceptable in his eyes.

A common narrative is that German colonialism did not matter much and was less harmful than the British, French, Spanish or Portuguese varieties. In truth, however, German rule was very brutal and far-reaching. Far more than 1 million locals lost their lives in colonial warfare, and many more lives were destroyed or damaged, Melber writes. Political, economic and cultural impacts still mark the lives of people today.

Colonial rule was particularly violent in what is now Namibia and was then German South-West Africa, as Melber elaborates in a long chapter. The genocidal war that German troops waged on the ethnic communities of the Ovaherero and Nama from 1904 to 1908 is obviously of crucial relevance. In Germany, whether what hap-

pened was actually a genocide was debated for a long time. The Federal Government only began speaking of genocide in 2015.

Melber assesses German hesitancy, Namibian reactions and how German-Namibian relations developed. In his eyes, the two governments' "Joint Declaration" on addressing Germany's colonial crimes was a "tragically missed opportunity marred by flaws". He emphasises that representatives of victims' descendants say that their voices still remain unheard, in both Germany and Namibia.

CHALLENGING ONE'S OWN PERSPECTIVE

Melber insists that victims' descendants deserve attention. He moved to Namibia in 1967 as the son of German immigrants. He thematises his own understanding of colonial history and how it was shaped by western perspectives, which could potentially perpetuate existing inequalities. „We cannot and should not claim ownership of the suffering and trauma of others that we never have been able nor will be able to experience ourselves. But we can help make such suffering and trauma known (...). This undertaking does not claim to speak for the victims but seeks to ask how we can come to terms with our past in a better way, as a modest effort to side with those who were

“Melber paints the picture of a nation that is only slowly rising to its responsibilities and, in spite of some progress, is still largely in denial of the atrocities that did occur.”

far too long on the receiving end, without claiming to join their ranks.”

Melber's focus is thus on Germans and how they have dealt with their nation's past. The book puts colonialism in its context by

- showing how it was connected to the Nazi era,
- considering how it was seen in both East and West Germany and
- shedding light on the ongoing debates regarding reparations, the restitution of cultural artifacts and the renaming of streets that still bear the names of perpetrators of colonial crimes.

Today, Germans are paying more attention to their colonial history than they did in the past. Melber makes it clear that a lot has been achieved, not least thanks to civil-society activism, academic research as well as awareness raising in the arts. How-

ever, there is revisionism too. The author explicitly mentions the right-wing party AfD.

Melber paints the picture of a nation that is only slowly rising to its responsibilities and, in spite of some progress, is still largely in denial of the atrocities that did occur. He calls for "a new, self-critical, reflective orientation and positioning in the shadow of colonial history". He wants Germans to challenge their own worldview and acknowledge the experience of "the other".

Melber points out that a reckoning with the past requires a "human face". Factual analysis is insufficient, according to him, as personal accounts and interaction foster empathy and respect. At the same time, reconciliation as a collective process cannot succeed as long as the victims' descendants remain marginalised.

In this regard, Germans still have a long way to go, as the state of German-Namibian relations shows.

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Memorial stone on Namibia's Shark Island commemorating the Ovaherero-Nama genocide.



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BRAZIL

Colonial legacies and current challenges

Brazil's ongoing struggles with social tension, inequality and environmental degradation are deeply tied to its colonial past. The lasting influence of Portuguese colonialism continues to hinder efforts to improve public welfare, address structural racism and protect the country's rich ecosystems.

By André de Mello e Souza

While Brazil has been politically independent since 1822, it has been a colony since the early 1500s. This means that Brazil has been much longer under colonial rule than it has been an independent state.

The most harmful and lasting legacy of colonialism is undoubtedly slavery. For about 350 years, black Africans were brought to colonial Brazil to work on sugar, cotton and coffee plantations as well as in gold mining. Brazil was probably the largest slave colony in history. It became the last country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1888.

Slavery has left lasting effects on Brazil's social, economic and racial inequality. The country usually ranks high up in world inequality rankings based on indicators such as the Gini Coefficient. Oligarchies continue to capture the state, shaping laws and diverting resources, even under recent left-leaning governments, including the current administration led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Though Brazil never institutionalised racism through laws like South Africa or the US, and despite myths of Portuguese "benevolent" slave owners and of a "Brazilian racial democracy", black people remain underrepresented in political and corporate leadership, elite schools and high-paying jobs. On average, they have lower levels of education and earn less than white people in similar roles. Socio-economic data and research make it clear that structural racism persists, and it cannot be understood without recognising the legacy of slavery.

The experiences of South Africa and the US underscore the difficulty of overcoming racism in this day and age. In these countries, racism was inherited not just by slavery but also decades of Apartheid and Jim Crow regimes, respectively. The term Jim Crow laws refers to laws enforcing racial segregation in the southern states of the US between the late 19th century and the 1960s.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF INEQUALITY

Economic historians have attributed Latin America's slower development, in particular compared to the US and Canada, to inequality. A common focus is the comparison between Brazil and the US – two large colonies in the Americas that followed different development paths. In the northeast-

ern US, small landholders settled to create new homes in America, while Brazil and the southern US were occupied by large plantations based on slave labour and aimed at exploiting the land.

Inequality produces all sorts of detrimental effects, undermining not just economic growth by keeping productivity low, but also weakening democracy, as long noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in the 19th century. Brazil's illiberal democracy, marked by clientelism and relations of patronage, reflects these dynamics. It has not led to the expected social change. Indeed, inequality in Brazil persists even in times of democratic consolidation and economic growth.

Finally, inequality has also been linked to crime. Large areas of major cities such as Rio de Janeiro are in fact controlled by drug dealing factions and armed militias. This situation poses significant threats to democracy at the local level. More recently, illegal gold miners, loggers and land squatters linked to organised crime are increasingly targeting the Amazon rainforest. Beyond political, economic and social consequences, colonialism has also negatively affected environmental issues in Brazil (see box).



Demonstration against racism in São Paulo in November 2023.

TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE POLICIES

Recognising the enduring and deeply rooted colonial legacies in contemporary Brazil should not result in inaction. Instead, it should serve to promote a deeper understanding of the root causes of the country's patterns of inequality and environmental degradation. On this basis, appropriate policies can be designed and implemented.

The urgent need to address the climate crisis in Brazil presents an opportuni-

ty to challenge powerful economic interests and outdated narratives of progress which prevent the adoption of fairer and more sustainable models of development. In the more comprehensive meaning of the term, adopted by the international community, "sustainability" is not limited to the environment but also has social and economic dimensions.

The destruction of the Amazon affects the frequency and intensity of rains and thereby Brazil's agricultural production,

while droughts are reducing hydroelectric production, and floods cause massive human displacement. The need for a new development paradigm has never been clearer.



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Colonialism and environmental preservation

Brazil is the most biodiverse country in the world, home to much of the Amazon rainforest and most of the largest tropical wetland, the Pantanal. Given this natural wealth, Brazil has long aimed to play a global leadership role in environmental issues. Recently, the Brazilian government is concerned with meeting its Paris Agreement climate goals and preparing for the 2025 Conference of the Parties (COP) in the Amazonian city of Belém.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva holds a very different position on sustainability than his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. Lula ran for office pledging to protect the environment and indigenous peoples. He reappointed Marina Silva as environment minister and promised to halt deforestation by 2030.

Yet, Brazil has faced severe impacts of climate change, and the government's response has clearly been insufficient. In May, heavy floods submerged much of the large southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. Shortly after, extreme droughts and fires ravaged the Amazon,

the Pantanal and states like Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Scientists warn the Amazon may be nearing an irreversible tipping point, which could have serious consequences for the economy, environment, energy supply and public health.

Why is it so hard to protect the environment in Brazil, even when there is alleged political will to do so? While logistical and resource challenges play a role, Brazil's colonial legacy has a lasting impact – as it does in other sectors (see main text). High rates of Amazon deforestation are linked to colonial plans of economic exploitation and domestic migration

that generate social tensions too. Research shows that old-growth forests carrying pre-Columbian ecological legacies are still prevalent in regions where indigenous groups live, and colonial influence was weaker.

Under Jesuit influence, partially open forests were enriched with cacao trees. Latex extraction during the rubber boom altered the distribution of species in several areas. More recently, deforestation has made way for soybean farming and cattle ranching. This environmental history has significantly impacted the Amazon's biodiversity and carbon dynamics.

Deforestation has been associated with colonial ideas of modernisation and progress, which favour clearing land for economic use and settlement. Historically, this was also

viewed as essential for maintaining Brazil's territorial integrity, both in colonial times and after independence. The north-western region, for example, needed to be populated and become prosperous in order to contain foreign influence.

Resource extraction, commodity production, agricultural and infrastructure development have thus been shaped by a colonial logic. While this logic has varied across time, it has invariably led to unsustainable practices that hurt both the environment and indigenous peoples.

To a considerable extent, this logic persists today, even among those who claim to support the preservationist cause. For example, during Dilma Rousseff's leftist administration, a large hydro-electric dam was built in the northern state of Pará, drawing harsh criticism from environmentalists. Bolsonaro's extreme-right reactionary rule sought to displace indigenous peoples to expand agriculture, mining and infrastructure projects. Lula himself is pushing for oil extraction at the mouth of the Amazon River. Additionally, the National Congress has recently approved an amendment to Brazil's constitution that restricts the land rights of indigenous groups.

AMS



Cattle in an illegally deforested area in Rondonia state, Brazil, 2023.

SOUTH ASIA

Oligarchic coalition of military leaders and landlords

Pakistan's society, economy and politics are still marked by the legacies of the British Empire after 77 years of independence. The legacies include deep-rooted authoritarian attitudes.

By Muhammad Nawfal Saleemi

When scholars attempt to explain divergent developmental trajectories of nations, they often emphasise the role of institutions. A simple way to define “institution” is “collective expectations”. One might also speak of “formal and informal rules”. There is a broad range of institutions, from marriage to law courts.

Institutions tend to be sticky. Social expectations have in-built reinforcing characteristics. Whether good or bad, they often persist. Created by humans, however, they can be altered. Such change can be incremental, in a succession of family-law reforms, for example, but it can also be sweeping due to revolutions or wars. The colonisation of the Americas, Asia and Africa by Europeans in the 16th to 19th centuries left lasting imprints on the institutions of colonised areas and later post-colonial independent states.

India was economically and politically the British Empire's most important colony. Within it, Punjab played a paramount role. The former Sikh kingdom had great economic relevance, and the colonial masters recruited soldiers there.

Punjab was the last major region the East India Company conquered in South Asia. It took two major Anglo-Sikh wars in 1846 and 1849. In the first few years after annexation, the British were obsessively concerned with demilitarising society. They wanted to prevent any native resistance. That attitude changed soon however.

In 1857, the Bengal Army, which had been at the forefront of the East India Company's military campaigns across North In-

dia, rebelled. The Brits spoke of a “mutiny”, but historians now see the event as an early, though failed war of independence.

The colonialists ultimately succeeded in crushing the rebellion, but they needed Punjabi help for doing so. In view of the insurrection, Punjabis suddenly looked less

no longer trusted. Soon, the British were systematically praising the strong physical constitution of Punjabi men and their “honourable conduct”, arguing they were naturally suited for military and belonged to the “martial races”.

From 1858 to the 1880s, there was a steady increase in military recruitment from Punjab. The army was expected to ensure dominance over the entire imperial territory, forestalling any challenge to British rule.

From the 1880s on, a new fear gripped the British leadership. As the Russian empire became more assertive, competition arose over what is now Afghanistan. The colonial military was no longer only expected



Powerful military celebrating of the “Defence Day” in Lahore in September 2024.

dangerous, so the colonial regime began to co-opt Punjab's economic and military elite. This elite, in turn, grasped the opportunity to re-establish its economic fortunes and its social standing at home.

British military recruitment policies shifted away from the traditional high-caste troops in the Bengal army. Those castes were

to ensure internal control, but also had to be able to withstand a potential Russian invasion.

Racist ideas of “martial races” became even more prevalent. The British primarily relied on Muslims from the Salt Range region, Sikhs from Central Punjab and Hindu Jats from Eastern Punjab.

POWERFUL LANDLORDS

At the same time, Punjab played an important economic role. It had massive agrarian surpluses. Large land holding benefited from new water infrastructure. Barrages were built, canals were established, and irrigation was expanded.

The colonial power set up a system of paternalistic authoritarianism. It relied on landholding local elites through whom imperial dominance was exercised down to the village level. During World War I, yet more Punjabis were recruited to fight in Europe. For the soldiers and their families, that meant additional incomes and secured pensions. For the land and military elite, however, the war was an ideal opportunity to showcase their loyalty to the Empire. In return, they got official recognition as well as large land grants.

In other South-Asian regions, nationalist challenges were emerging. In response, there were some minor constitutional reforms and a gradual democratisation of politics. Regions were granted rather limited self-rule.

As urban, educated classes tended to lead efforts to gain independence, the British deliberately gave the rural electorate more clout. In Punjab, regional politics was dominated by the loyalist Unionist Party. Its inter-faith coalition included Muslim, Sikh and upper-caste Hindu landlords plus military leaders.

For the British, the system worked well until World War II triggered a severe economic crisis and the influence of the all-India-level independence movement grew stronger. However, the movement splintered along faith lines, with the Muslim League opposing the Congress party.

PARTITION TRAUMA

In 1947, British India was split into predominantly Hindu India and Pakistan as a country for Muslims. Two important regions – Punjab and Bengal – were divided into their eastern and western parts. West Punjab became part of what was then Pakistan's west wing, and East Bengal became the east wing.

Conservative estimates suggest that over a million people died in the partition violence. More than 15 million were displaced. The ceding colonial government made no effort to ensure an orderly transition.

It is no coincidence that Punjab, the most important province in both military and agricultural terms, witnessed the worst brutality. Ever since, deep trauma has reinforced the animosity between British India's successor states.

Pakistan's post-colonial state inherited a landed elite that was used to having an alliance with those wielding power. As before, the arrangement meant that it had



the means to control people at the local level. The racist constructs of martial races persisted, with the new threat from India now reinforcing militarism. In the Cold War, formally non-aligned India began to lean towards Soviet Russia, so Pakistan's post-colonial elite chose the US camp.

Allegiance to the west, however, did not mean any deepening democracy. Instead, the military-bureaucratic oligarchy and the landed elite maintained their mutual support. Elected politicians were sidelined – if need be, in military coups. The state prioritised military spending and increasingly turned Pakistan into a garrison state. Social development did not get much attention.

The post-colonial dominance of the military often proved dysfunctional. The most obvious example was when the top brass prevented Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, an East Pakistani politician whose Awami League had won general elections, from becoming prime minister. After a short and brutal war, East Pakistan became the new sovereign state of Bangladesh.

The military had not only failed to address legitimate Bengali grievances. It had tried to crush any opposition. That its defeat did not diminish its role in the Pakistani state shows how persistent institutions can be.

Though multiple social movements have challenged the dominance of Pakistan's oligarchy, it remains firmly in place. Part of its strength is based upon its imperial alliances. In the 1980s, Pakistan once again became a frontline state, first during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and later the US-led occupation in the so-called "global war on terror".

Over the decades, the military used some of the inflowing money to build a huge corporate empire. It is the biggest player in the economy. All in all, the alliance with western countries reinforced the colonial inheritance that had allowed military leaders to seize the reins of power.

For some periods, military juntas ran the country. When democracy was formally restored, the generals stayed the ultimate arbitrators against whose wishes no policy could be implemented. Resistance movements have risen up in the periphery again and again, but they hardly made a dent in the military-dominated state.

Just how strong this system is, is evident in how it was able to deal with Imran Khan, who is the country's currently most popular leader. He was once the military's foremost defender but fell out with the generals when serving as prime minister from 2018 to 2022. Parliament removed him from office, and his party was banned from running in this year's general election. He has been in prison for over a year on trumped-up charges.

Nonetheless, supporters of Khan performed strongly as "independents" at the polls in February, even though there are strong indications of rigging against them. They won almost a third of the popular vote, more than any other party. Having secured 93 of 272 seats in parliament, they are now the opposition.

A multi-party coalition was cobbled together against them. It lacks popular legitimacy but has military support. That this support matters more than votes, is a colonial inheritance – and the major stumbling block in Pakistan's development.



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In 1860, a joint force of French and British troops demolished the Summer Palace in Beijing.

ILLICIT DRUGS

The British Empire’s narco-state

In western high-income countries, the Opium Wars are largely forgotten. People do not know that the East India Company ran a most profitable, but brutally exploitative narco-state in the Gangetic plains in order to export a highly addictive drug to China.

By Hans Dembowski

As colonial power, Britain forced poor farmers to grow poppies and then bought their produce at very low prices. It processed the harvest in order to export an innovative and highly addictive version of opium to China and, to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia. This drug trade made the British Empire strong and helped it to fund its expansion.

In a new non-fiction book, the Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh delves deeply into how opium shaped colonial rule and what the legacies are. To some extent, “Smoke and ashes” is based on research he did for his Ibis trilogy, three novels he wrote about the buildup to the First Opium War (1839 to 1842). However, he has also read historical studies that were published after he completed his trilogy. Ghosh proudly reports that, in two cases, the researchers explicitly stated that his novels inspired their work.

Ghosh is appalled by the colonial power’s blatant cynicism. Brits claimed that opium exports to China were necessary because they responded to Chinese demand. In truth, opium had not been a convention-

ally used drug there, and smoking the new addictive variety spread fast. The colonisers ostentatiously bemoaned Asians’ weak moral character which supposedly made them prone to addiction. At the same time, they made sure that the potent drug they sold them never became easily available in the mother country.

Indeed, the colonial power created the opium demand it then satisfied in China. The plain evidence is that opium exports increased extremely fast over a long period of time. Ghosh points out that the East India Company sold China a mere 200 chests of opium in 1729, and the number increased to 30,000 by 1830.

At that point, the Chinese Empire decided to get a grip on the problem and eventually stopped the imports. In response, Britain went to war and forced China to allow the importation of this dangerous drug. The colonial power claimed to be acting on behalf of “free trade”. China even had to pay compensations for opium it had confiscated

and destroyed before the war. Moreover, Britain claimed the island of Hong Kong and turned it into its trade hub in the Pearl River Delta. In the Second Opium War (1856 – 1860), other European powers supported Britain, and the Chinese Empire became a failed state in which opium was an essential commodity.

FREE TRADE RHETORIC, MONOPOLISTIC ACTION

While insisting on “free trade” in China, the East India Company systematically enforced a monopoly on the opium trade in Eastern India. There were no free markets where farmers might have bargained for the highest prices. The company ran a specialised bureaucracy, the Opium Department, which controlled the entire industry in what are now the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

The system was so exploitative that farmers often had to sell their produce at a loss. As Ghosh argues convincingly, farmers therefore did what they could to sell some of their harvest on the black market. Penalties were harsh. The colonial power established a brutal system of control, which was, however, undermined by corruption. The system led to desperate poverty, which encouraged illegal activities that appeared perfectly legitimate in the eyes of the oppressed.

According to Ghosh, it is no coincidence that Bihar has a reputation of underdevelopment, organised crime and violence today. In a similar sense, he argues that the strength of Marxism in Calcutta (now Kolkata) is linked to the fact that, in colonial times, the opium market was under strict state control there, even though it obviously had huge economic relevance.

There was, however, another Indian region where poppies were grown and opium became a crucial commodity, as Ghosh explains. It was in central Indian areas, in which the colonial power only imposed indirect rule without establishing an administration of its own. Nominally, regional monarchs were the lords of these “princely states”, but the British Resident, who represented the colonial power, was generally the most powerful person at their courts.

In some of these areas, many of which are located in what is now Madhya Pradesh, the opium industry took a foothold too.

The Brits figured out that it would be hard to gain monopolistic control without imposing an administration of their own, but that they could easily benefit from the Indian drugs trade by taxing it. The result was that some Indian entrepreneurs thrived on opium – from the farm level to export businesses and shipping firms. For these people, opium did not mean misery, but opportunity. They used Bombay (now Mumbai) as their hub – and it is still independent India’s commercial centre today. In Ghosh’s view, these people’s complicity with the British



Empire is one reason why there is a strong sense of animosity between India and China even today.

Ghosh elaborates that opium was the growth engine that turned Calcutta, Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong into globally relevant centres of trade. Other imperial powers, very much including the USA, were involved in the drugs business too. Unsurprisingly, North American traders relied on free-market Bombay rather than monopolistic Calcutta. Other European powers made use of their Asian colonies.

In China, the inflow of opium proved disastrous of course. Masses of people became addicted. Traditional values and long-established institutions were eroded. Trust in systems of governance faded away, and so did faith in relatives and neighbours. Eventually, poppy cultivation was introduced in China too, making opium even more easily available. Europeans began to call China “the sick man of Asia”.

Today, China’s leaders speak of a century of humiliation. This rhetoric makes more sense than most western people are probably aware of. Ghosh does an excellent job of showing how Chinese influences on western countries were made invisible. The

Chinese Empire was actually the model case of a modern nation state with a culturally homogenous people, a professional bureaucracy, a coherent system of governance and institutions of higher learning. Before the Opium Wars, Europeans had admired China for these reasons. Afterwards, they made fun of its corruption and ineffectiveness, both of which they exploited and, to a large part, had brought about.

It is telling that the East India Company, as Ghosh writes, copied the Chinese model of meritocratic recruitment to the bureaucracy. Those who wanted to join its powerful ranks, had to prevail in rather tough contests, competing with many other aspiring young persons. Britain later introduced similar contests at home. When masses of young people make huge efforts to succeed in the annual entry exams of the Indian Administrative Service these days, they are mostly unaware of this practice having originated in imperial China.

The international community owes historical China many other things too, of course. Tea is one of them. Its growing popularity in 18th century England actually contributed to the British Empire eventually adopting its aggressive opium policy. At the time, only China produced this mild stimulant, and it insisted on being paid in silver. The reason was that it was self-sufficient and did not need any other goods that British traders could offer. As the Britons ran out of the precious metal, they discovered that they could export opium to China. As a result, the British Empire thrived, and the Chinese one became a failed state.

History shapes people’s mind sets. That different nations cherish – and pass on – different memories, can thwart mutual understanding and make international cooperation quite difficult.

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 Ghosh’s Ibis trilogy consists of “Sea of poppies” (2008), “River of smoke” (2011) and “Flood of fire” (2015). The three novels were also published by John Murray.



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Heavy fires have been raging in Brazil this year.

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