

It is disturbing to see Tanzanian cartoonists today

portraying people of Asian and European origin with

prominent, curved noses, the same way Nazi artists portrayed Jews.

'colonists'

THROUGHOUT THE 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Tanzania prided itself on being a leading anti-apartheid campaigner; it was one of the frontline states in the war against colonialism and racism on the continent. The official media, echoing government policy, was staunchly anti-racism.

But now, with the advent of liberalisation, headlines and news articles with racist undertones, or even outright racism, are increasingly appearing. Such pieces are now to be found not only in the popular press, but also in papers that influence public opinion. Well-respected newspapers have taken to referring to people by their race or ethnicity, even when the two have nothing to do with the story being told.

'white lunatics'

As the Media Council of Tanzania's media critic, Kajubi Mukajanga, warned:

"It is a serious ethical problem that should be addressed today and not tomorrow."

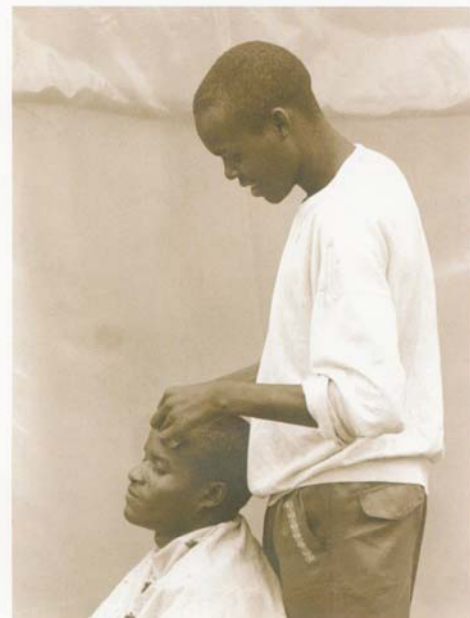
Tanzania's liberalised media is one of the biggest in the region. There are 10 daily newspapers (four English, six Swahili and four evening newspapers) and 14 weeklies. The country has seven television stations, 12 cable television stations and more than 23 radio stations. It is second in media volume only to South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa.

The power of the media to influence events, opinion and decision-making in present-day Tanzania needs no discourse. It has been amply demonstrated during election time, when protagonists compete for media attention, and where the media has proved quite effective in shaping public opinion.

During Tanzania's elections late last year, the Tanzania Elections 2000 Media Monitoring Project felt compelled to add racism/tribalism and xenophobia to its watch list when it became apparent these were to be a feature of media coverage of the elections. The monitoring project recorded about 248 stories with racism/tribalism connotations and 18 stories that were xenophobic. A total of 10 263 entries were recorded in just three months. The project monitored 15 newspapers, seven TV stations and six radio stations.

The monitors found, for example, that some of the articles were aimed at fomenting hatred between the people of the mainland and the Pemba Islands. Headlines such as "White lunatic harrises Nyerere", "Indians continue wave of impregnating house-girls", "Indians murder African youth" and "Somali banditry on the rise" have become common since 1999. In a society such as Tanzania's, where what is written in the press is taken at face-value, appearing to condone racism, however fleetingly, is dangerous.

Much of the racism seems to be aimed at the financially well off, mostly Indians and now white South African investors. A month ago a South African firm, AFGEM, which is investing in the gemstone-rich country around Arusha in the north, was the latest victim. The headline "Boers found another colony in Tanzania" had nothing to do with the issue at hand, which was that AFGEM was trying to protect its area and property from invaders and marketing Tanzanite using a brand name. Similar white-bashing happened when



Tanzania's newly liberalised – and racialised media – is having a powerful effect on daily life in the country and the Media Council is not able to stop reporting that discriminates against Asians and non-Tanzanians.

a leading Tanzanian bank NBC was sold to ABSA, the South African banking group in December 1999.

It is disturbing to see Tanzanian cartoonists today portraying people of Asian and European origin with prominent, curved noses, the same way Nazi artists portrayed Jews. A major Swahili-language Sunday paper from one of the bigger publishing houses has made its selling point the vilification of Tanzanians of Asian origin. There was a time when for nine straight weeks it either led with a story scandalising the Asians, or at least had such a story on the front page.

During the national mourning following the death of Julius Nyerere, anyone who was not 'African' (read 'black') who dared criticise Nyerere was shouted down. Another example is a story which alleged that a white husband had grossly mistreated his black wife and then left for Europe with the children. There was a range of serious accusations in the story, from forced sodomy to corruption, blackmail and battering. Yet no attempt at all was made to balance the story. Even the police, who are said to have been called in, were not contacted.

Tanzanian reporters and their editors are forgetting Article Six of the Code of Ethics in the Constitution of the Media Council of Tanzania, adopted at the National Journalists and Stakeholders Convention in May 1995. It reads: "A journalist should not engage in publication, directly or indirectly or by implication, of stories, information, photos that injure, or discriminate against anybody for his/her colour, religion, origin or sex." But the council does not have the teeth to stop discriminatory reporting. It can only suggest and advise. Nevertheless, there are moves afoot for the government to give the council the clout to enforce a code of ethics on media practitioners.

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A Call for a Code of Ethics

'bandits'

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about the increasing racism in his country's media...