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RACISM IS NO STRANGER to Germany, and again has recently attracted international public attention. In July 2001 a European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report identified increased incidents of racism and anti-Semitism in the country. While the number actually engaged in racial violence is relatively small, far more people are seen to sympathise with racist and anti-Semitic ideas. That's why, the report concluded, racially motivated violence represents a "general climate of racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance", and is not easily dismissed as an "East German problem".

The ECRI report identifies racial discrimination in the housing market; low levels of representation of children from migrant groups in higher education; high rates of unemployment amongst migrants; and the general criminalisation of asylum seekers. It also warns that distorted representation of the compensation of Jewish 'slave labour' may even reinforce anti-Semitism. Home Secretary Otto Schily responded by dismissing the report, and even questioning the right of the authors to criticise Germany, as they were not themselves German.

Anti-racist activities in Germany are generally not taken seriously, either by the mainstream media or more broadly, society at large. In the same week that the ECRI report appeared, two music groups in Germany released anti-racist CDs. On "Brothers Keepers", Afro-German rappers came together to do the song "Adriano" (last warning), dedicated to Alberto Adriano, a black German viciously killed last year by a group of young white Germans in a racist attack. The other CD, "This Song is Ours" by Kanak Attak, is a musical project organised by migrants of the so-called '2nd Generation'. The lyrics on both

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CDs express a self-confident identity and commitment to fighting racism, a message of "We have had enough." The CDs expose the everyday experience of racist attacks and abuse, as well as structural, institutionalised forms of racism and the misguided 'anti-racist campaigns' of political leaders. The mass media have greeted both releases with a 'healthy scepticism', or in some cases without even acknowledging them as strong anti-racist statements.

SEBNITZ – BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Widespread antagonism towards migrants persists in Germany, and the infamous 'Sebnitz case' illustrates this well. It illustrates the insidious threat of scores of neo-Nazi cadres around the country; and it also illustrates the media's confusion and hypocrisy when it comes to 'telling the truth' and defending justice.

In 1997, a group of young neo-Nazis were accused of murdering, in a public swimming pool in the picturesque East German town of Sebnitz, six-year-old Joseph Abdulla, the son of a German mother and Iraqi father. The

provide a network and platform to move migrants beyond their 'victim' identity, to claim a continuity of anti-racist struggles since at least the 60s, in order to apply past experience to the struggles ahead. 'Kanak' is an abusive term meaning something like 'bloody foreigner' and we at Kanak Attak are combating the 'Kanakisation' of people.

Kanak Attak took off with an evening at a Berlin theatre, where alongside talks, lectures, discussions, film and music, a revue was presented, which told the migrant, anti-racist resistance story.

The media reaction was remarkable. There

case was subsequently dismissed due to 'insufficient evidence'.

Because the mother was not content with the case's dismissal, over the last three years she has gathered absolutely convincing evidence, which led to the German media introspectively examining themselves and their initial downplaying of this case. Although the case remains nebulous, it is remarkable that after initial dismay within the media there emerged a willingness to admit that such attacks are a feature of life in Germany.

Even 10 years ago it was assumed that racist attacks, such as the spate of fatal arson attacks on migrant hostels in the early 1990s, were somehow caused by the migrants themselves. The shift in public attitudes, including those of journalists, expressed a realisation that deep-seated racial antagonisms towards 'outsiders' continues to pervade German civil society.

Yet the story subsequently took another turn: in the media discourse, the 'proof' put forward by the mother collapsed; it became 'clear' that accusations made by migrants were not to be trusted; and the media berated themselves for having begun to believe the mounting 'evidence'.

The whole matter, for now, has ended with a double sermon: the media chastising itself, and also wishfully thinking: "If only the extremists on both sides would disappear, then normal people, German and foreign alike, could learn to live together". The subtext is pretty clear: again, migrants are the source of the problem. Let's 'blame the victim'.

KANAK ATTAK: THE TRAP OF REPRESENTATION

Founded nearly four years ago, the anti-racist project Kanak Attak aims to 'rewrite' the untold history of anti-racist resistance by migrants in Germany. The intention is to

was only one article which even acknowledged that this was an *anti-racist* project. The dismissal of the activists and their audience as 'loudmouthed half-breeds', 'bastard-culture' and 'migrant political activists' shows the conservative chain of argument. It was suggested that it was not clear for whom the activists/performers were talking. In other words: "They shouldn't really speak, because they don't represent anyone."

The second important question that evening for the media was the question of heritage. For example, I was approached by a journalist whose main interest was to find out where I 'came from'. Since I refused to reply to this symbolic expatriation, she invented a biography of my family for her article: "By the way: Bojadzjev is German, her far-off ancestors came from Bulgaria." Like most of the other journalists, she didn't talk at all about the work of Kanak Attak, about its anti-racist projects and the fact that a lot of migrants of the first, second and third generations are centrally organised in the project.

Again, the articles on that evening stylised the journalists and their newspapers as representing the 'genuine word of the rank and file', the real affected who are being co-opted by incompetent, would-be anti-racists. This is an anti-intellectual argument. It suggests that the cultural scene is something dubious, and that people working within that space do not have legitimate criticisms.

In fact, despite their pretense of 'speaking for others', particularly the rank and file, the media actually speak for only themselves. And observing the media in Germany makes it pretty clear: racism in this country has not been understood at all.

MANUELA BOJADZJIEV and VANESSA BARTH are both members of Kanak Attak. Bojadzjev gave a presentation on Kanak Attak at the Global Narratives of Race Conference in Cape Town in December.

Coverage of racism in Germany tends to focus on sensationalist attacks by neo-Nazis, and generally ignores the country's institutionalised

racism, write **Manuela Bojadzjev** and **Vanessa Barth**.

Anti-racist activities, often in the cultural realm, tend to be received sceptically or are even deliberately overlooked. But a national movement to confront racism – led by the migrants most often its 'victims' – is demanding its own representation...



How German are They?

'Kanak'

The struggle against Germany's 'identity politics'