

OPINION

EDITORIAL

JUDGE ISMAIL'S ENCOURAGING MESSAGE

CHILD rapist and porn ringleader Gerhard Ackerman's 12 life terms accompanied by Judge Mohamed Ismail's fitting description of him sends an encouraging message that the country's courts have had enough of violence against women and children.

They go a long way in restoring faith and trust in our justice system, which at times has been criticised for favouring the perpetrators rather than the victims of violence.

Ackerman, arguably one of the most notorious sex offenders in South Africa's history, was convicted on 700 counts of rape, child pornography and human trafficking – much to the relief of his young victims and the child rights activists following this case.

The pain of his crimes will take his victims and families years to heal from, something that obviously has not fully struck him judging by his continued defiance and attempts to present himself as innocent.

His lack of remorse is telling of the kind of a person he is.

His modus operandi in committing crimes was something straight out of a horror movie.

Judge Ismail described him as a "plainly evil man" who lured children from disadvantaged communities and opened them up to abuse from other men, including senior advocate Paul Kennedy, who died by suicide before the start of the trial last year.

He disguised his evil deeds by pretending to be running a so-called massage parlour, and going as far as booking his victims bus rides and hotel stays on behalf of his clients.

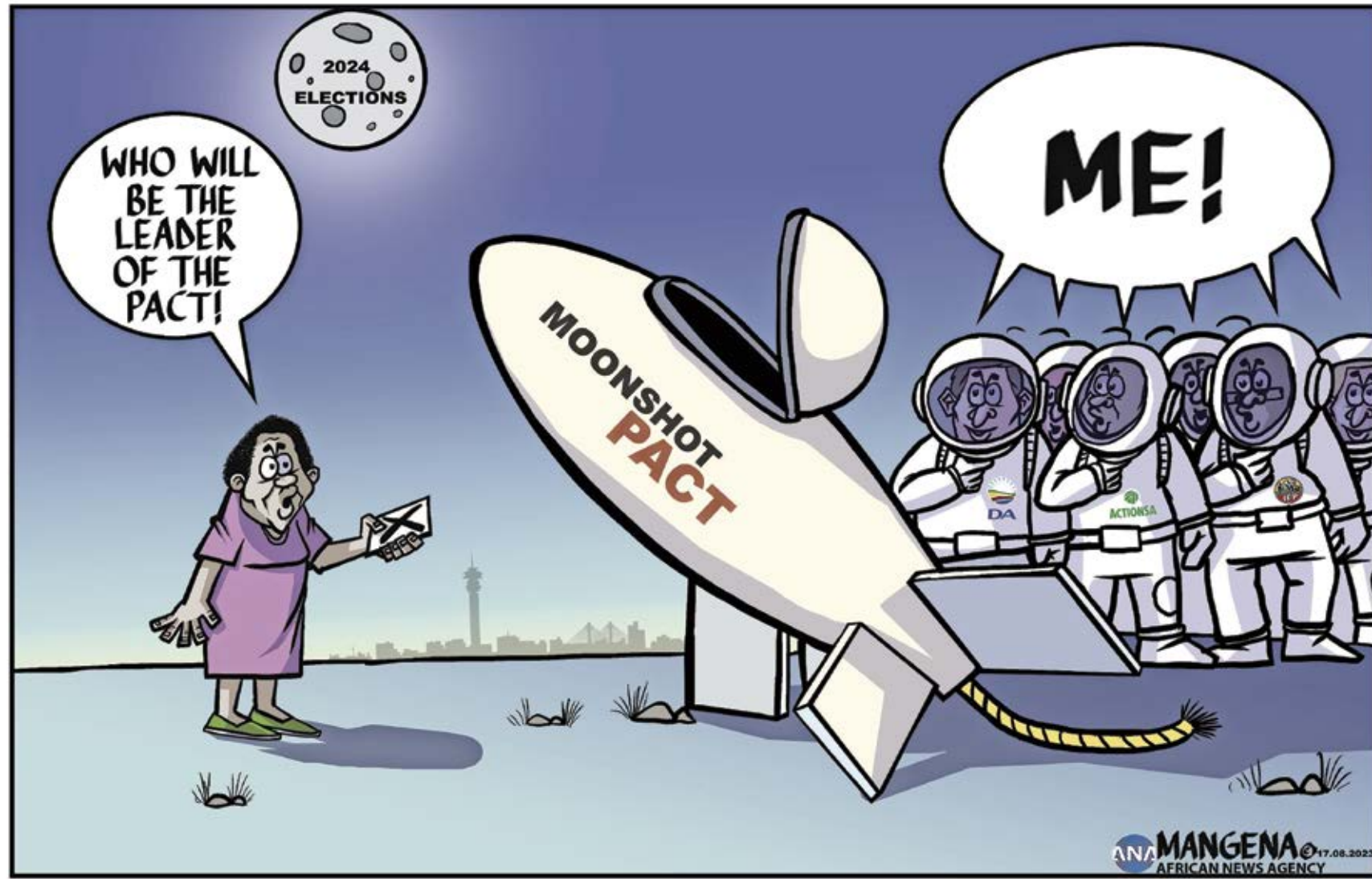
As fitting as this week's sentencing is, it will not undo the pain these men have caused innocent children. Their futures have been severely disrupted early in their lives by people old enough to be their caregivers.

Ackerman, like fellow convicted child rapist Ntokozo Zikhali, have no place in our society.

Zikhali was recently sentenced to life in prison for the rape and kidnapping of a 9-year-old girl, however he was acquitted of the murder of 4-year-old Bokgabo Poo.

It is understood that a new investigating team has been appointed for Bokgabo's case.

Victims of violence, especially children, must always take priority and the courts must send that message.



Just like the Marikana miners, Nigeriens are sacrificing their lives

The Giant of Africa has finally awakened

COMMENT



JULIAN KUNNIE

THE long-standing leading reggae group Steel Pulse has a track called *Black and white oppressors* on its 2019 album, *Mass Manipulation*.

August 12 was just commemorated as the 11th anniversary of the Marikana miners' massacre, a lasting legacy of horror considering that the current president of South Africa, ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa, was on the board of Lonrho, one of the owners of the Marikana platinum mine, who gave the go-ahead for the violent shooting of 43 miners who were protesting for decent income and work conditions in the mines.

The Marikana miners' massacre calls for a national day of commemoration, considering its historic role in the struggle against "black and white oppressors".

Black is signified by the role of Ramaphosa and other corporate black mining shareholders, and white by mining capital that has always raped South Africa's land and people, especially the miners, to the present day in Africa and all over the world.

Just as with virtually every major incident of violence that black and other people of colour face in many parts of the world, especially in the US empire and particularly involving trigger-happy police and brutality, the Marikana massacre horror once again evoked an investigation and commission of inquiry into police violence. Such are the tactics of colonialism in which the coloniser responsible for the very structures of violence in the first place, attempts to adorn a mask of legitimacy and veneer of morality by launching a supposed investigation.

The objective, of course, is always, we are told, to prevent such catastrophes in the future. The fact of the matter is that not only do such events routinely occur, but they escalate particularly in harsh economic times as we have lived through for the past 40 years when people engaged in struggle and protest to get the attention of the respective ruling authorities as to their plight of suffering and deprivation.

South Africa's unemployment according to the Associated Press today is shamefully and disgustingly the highest in the world, at 43%, and is actually higher considering those who are not officially classified as unemployed. For youth, the same rate is over 60%. All of this persists even as the country fades each day with ongoing and avoidable electricity cuts.

Even more ironic, many in the entertainment world celebrated the

crowning of Miss South Africa 2023 over the weekend. No mention or hint of Marikana. Such is the ugly colonial-capitalist legacy that lingers. Spectacular distractions abound while tens of millions of black people experience hunger, impoverishment, depression, and frustration each day, all the while fuelling the profit-maximising system and its partners.

And we are told that the beauty pageant is about empowering women! How about another way in which black women in particular are economically empowered and productively employed to care for their struggling families?

The point here is that the colonial system, particularly in South Africa/Azania, Africa, the Americas, Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Hawaii, Palestine, and other parts of the world, is illegitimate by virtue of its historical invasions and occupation of these indigenous lands. We have all been either repressed, silenced, or conditioned into accepting that such occupation and displacement of indigenous lands, languages, economies, cultures, and lives, is legitimate.

The recent events in West Africa recall us to the imperative resistance to colonialism, neo-colonialism, and capitalist hegemony and the incessant struggle to break the shackles of oppression. Just like the miners of Marikana sacrificed lives, family, food, and shelter to demand justice and liberation from corporate mining savage greed and exploitation for weeks (since miners and all workers essentially keep the South African economy afloat!), so too the people of Niger are sacrificing their lives for a new day free from the tutelage and terror of ongoing relentless French colonialism and militarism.

French colonialism, along with the West, especially the US empire, has bled and continues to bleed Niger, Africa, and other parts of the indigenous world in Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas of what rightfully belongs to

us. People are generally unaware principally because the truth rarely makes it to the so-called mainstream media (the *Cape Times* is doing better, hopefully!) controlled by the western colonialist and capitalist establishment, including in South Africa that is a minion and puppet of the West. France's predatory colonialist inhumanity is symbolised by the unbridled extraction and looting of Nigerian uranium that keeps much of France's lights on and is sold for lucrative profits, part of its \$3 billion earned annually in revenues. Meanwhile, over 90% of rural Nigeriens and 80% of urban places lack electricity.

France has not seen fit to provide such to the very people it rapes and rips off, intrinsic to its colonialist inhumanity. Few know that the French uranium mining company, Orano, left over 20 million tons of radioactive nuclear waste at Cominak, north-west Niger, after closing in 2021, that lasts millions of years and is a deadly threat to the lives of all Niger's 25.25 million people, according to Iran's *Presstv*.

The threat to cut off "aid" to Niger by the US empire and France (what we call "Aids" because it ensures colonised people are dependent on colonisers for economic sustenance) adds insult to injury. Predatory extractors hold their subjugated victim hostage, demanding of them: "Either you do what we tell you, or you starve." The heroic and courageous African people of Niger have sacrificially accepted the pain of eating and having so much less than the little they have, in the determined struggle to be liberated from France's colonialist yoke.

Colonialism is the ideology and practice, and neo-colonialism continues the pattern. The West assumes over 531 years later that Africans, like all indigenous peoples of colour, are children, are pawns to be used for the sole enrichment and benefit of European people, and that we lack complete humanity. Only accepting European models of life will make us fully human, according to this ideology.

Niger is one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, like the Congo, like Mama Africa as a whole, on Earth. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has \$24 trillion of mineral deposits that include 80% of the world's coltan for use in computers, cellphones, nuclear-powered ships, and electronic equipment and gadgets, along with gold, oil, coal, copper, diamonds, platinum, uranium, cassiterite

(for tin), silver, manganese, iron ore, bauxite, beryl, gold, cadmium, methane, nitrogen natural gases, and other industrial-dependent minerals. Yet the Congo is the most impoverished country on Earth, not poor, but made impoverished by her ceaseless rape and plunder by the Western capitalist and colonialist regimes over the past century and a half.

The Giant of Africa has finally awakened. Ibrahim Traore, the revolutionary Burkina Faso leader now reclaiming the policies, practices, and legacy of assassinated leader Thomas Sankara from the late 1980s, who revolutionised the country's literacy rate from 17% to 73%, elevated women to key cabinet positions, redistributed land, and forged social justice practices throughout the country, has raised the question. He asked at the Russia-Africa Summit in St Petersburg recently: "Representing the youth, Burkina Faso has much water, land, resources, etc., but we are impoverished. Why?"

Niger's leaders have immense popularity with the millions of impoverished people there, demonstrated in the thousands attending rallies in support of the Tiani regime and demanding the departure of French troops and liberation from economic exploitation.

Mali has banned the French language as lingua franca of the country. These are all very important indicators that colonised peoples in West Africa, like the martyred miners of Marikana, are exhausted from being slaves to exploitative systems and are willing to pay the ultimate price for the liberation of their lands and peoples.

The "democratic free elections" system imposed by the west on Africa and the world has failed principally because the system is patterned on Western capitalism and is essentially corrupt and exploitative like colonialism itself, evident in South Africa's so-called democratic dispensation since 1994.

The question is: When will South Africa arise? Her unemployment and pervasive entrenched poverty is a ticking time bomb. Only time will tell. Miners at Marikana, *Mayibuye!*

Kunnie is an internationally-renowned activist and educator in the struggle to decolonise Africa, the Americas, and the world. He is a professor and author of four books. His fifth book forthcoming in 2024 is 'The Earth Mother and the Collapse of Capitalism in the 21st Century'.

COMMENT



GERT GROBLER

A growing partnership for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa

IN ORDER to further promote economic development and to counter low levels of intra-Africa trade, Africa adopted the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) in Kigali on March 21, 2018.

The World Bank recently described the AfCFTA as a "game-changer" that would create a single, continent-wide market that unites 54 countries with a combined population of 1.3 billion and gross domestic product of \$3.4 trillion (R65 trillion).

As of February 2023, 46 of the 54 signatory countries in Africa (85.2%) have deposited their instruments of AfCFTA ratification.

The AfCFTA represents a comprehensive plan that seeks to create a single, liberalised market for goods, services and labour.

It would reduce barriers to trade and investment and boost competition, raising the attractiveness of Africa for regional value chains and to investors. Wamkele Mene, the secretary general of the AfCFTA Secretariat, recently said: "The AfCFTA sends a strong signal to the international investor community that Africa is open for business, based on a single rule book for trade and investment."

To boost intra-African trade, which currently amounts to only 14.5%, the continent is embarking on the gradual elimination of tariffs on 90% of goods, and the reduction of barriers to trade in services aimed at increasing intra-African exports by more than 81% and Africa's income by \$450bn by 2035, according to the World Bank. It further estimates that the AfCFTA has the potential to lift almost 50 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035.

To unlock the untapped potential, various intra-African non-tariff barriers, including costly non-tariff measures, infrastructure gaps, and market information gaps, need to be successfully addressed.

This requires continued joint efforts under the AfCFTA and many issues need to be resolved before the agreement can fully function.

Negotiations on the continent are, however, in full swing and the implementation of the AfCFTA is thus on track.

Despite many headwinds, trade between Africa and China jumped to a record level of \$260bn in 2022 and continues to grow, as a result of Beijing's recent push to boost imports from Africa, with a 11% year-on-year growth. It was the second-consecutive year of growth after the pandemic which had a negative effect on trade in 2020.

Apart from eliminating trade barriers and boosting intra-Africa trade, the AfCFTA will also advance trade in value-added production across all sectors of the African economy. Africa-China's increasing constructive co-operation in boosting economic recovery and, in particular, the concrete measures introduced by China to contribute to the expansion of value-added exports from Africa to China towards balanced growth of bilateral trade, is of significant importance to Africa.

It further underscores the vital role that China, as Africa's largest trading partner, continues to play in trade, investment and manufacturing on the continent. Furthermore, China shares South Africa's belief in the benefits that a proposed partnership with Africa can bring to BRICS, and is eager to explore opportunities, jointly with all the BRICS partners, in supporting and benefiting from the full operationalisation of the AfCFTA.

The international community will increasingly embrace the continental free trade area which augurs well for future well-being and prosperity in Africa. It is a credit to Africa and its leadership that in a time when the world is generally experiencing a rise in trade protectionism and trade wars, the continent, over five years, has taken the lead in negotiating an agreement that liberalises and "opens" trade. It is indeed a critical evolution in African policy making.

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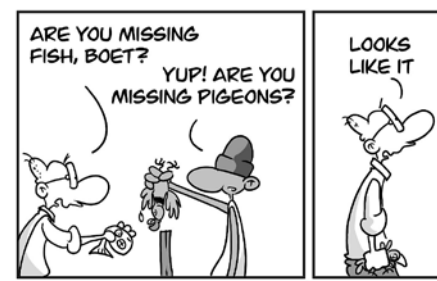
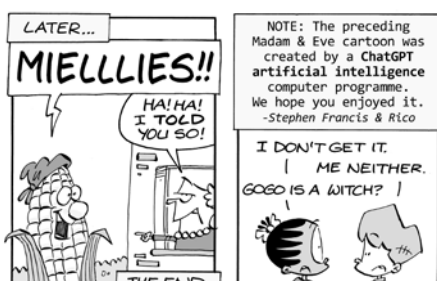
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