



Indian Diaspora Centre

Centre for African Studies

The Constructions of Home and Belonging Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC)

University of Mumbai

A Report on the talk 'Africans in Malaysia'



From left to right: Professor Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha and Professor Ute Röschenhaler

The Centre for African Studies and the CoHaB IDC jointly organised a talk titled 'Africans in Malaysia' by Professor Ute Röschenhaler on the 27th of March, 2017. Professor Röschenhaler, an academician in the field of Cultural and Social Anthropology is affiliated with the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. She has carried out research on cultural mobility, trade networks, intellectual property rights, entrepreneurship and markets in Cameroon, Nigeria and Mali, and on African traders in Malaysia. Her talk focussed on the presence of African students in Malaysia, addressing questions regarding their livelihood and the consequential economic ties with their home countries. This opened up a discussion into the academic presence of the African Diaspora in India, especially with respect to the dwindling numbers

of African students at Indian Universities.

Professor Röschenhaler is part of the AFRASO project- 'Africa's Asian Options'. The talk delivered on March 27th was based on her field work in Malaysia in 2014 and 2017 as a part of this project. She discussed the workings of cultural entrepreneurship on the part of the African diaspora in Malaysia. The structural restrictions with respect to immigration policies and labour laws in Malaysia are representative of the divergent interests of the Malaysian

institutions and African students. While the host country sees the immigrants as students paying tuition who will return to their homeland after a stipulated period of time, the students look to the academic opportunity as a means to an end for more lucrative means of livelihood. Cultural entrepreneurship arises as a negotiation between the differing motives. In order to support themselves during the stay abroad, African students employ creative ways of surviving, thereby giving rise to cultural entrepreneurship. Herein, the boundary between formal and informal means of earning is often blurred.



Professor Rösenthaller also talked about community networks within the diaspora as potential market spaces. These networks connect, not only within the diaspora but also help establish contact with the homeland by creation of a possible supply of goods from the homeland. The talk was followed by a discussion on the old and new African diaspora in Asia. Parallels were drawn between the African diaspora in Malaysia and the African diaspora in India. The history of the Siddi community, a Southeast African diaspora settled in Gujarat, Hyderabad and Karnataka was discussed. The issue of racism was brought up and the current state of the old and new African diaspora in India was debated.

The talk was well attended by students of the University of Mumbai and other guests.