

**PRECIOUS CHIEBONAM NNEBEDUM
HANNAH RACHEL AYALON
PRECIOUS OTENG
ABOUT RACISM, DISCRIMINATION AND TANAKA GRAZ.**

Racism is not a subject I like to talk about or take pride in talking about. In fact, if I didn't have to talk about racism, I wouldn't.

Nor do I take much pride in being called an "ambassador for African migrants" or being seen as "a prime example of a black person who is successfully and fully integrated in Austria". I am not the "black person" that every business or project needs to meet the "foreigner quota" in order to be considered culturally diverse and inclusive. I never want to be either.

In the last few months, we have all witnessed a global uprising and multiple protests around the world, mainly around the issue of institutional or systemic racism. In the first place, these worldwide "outbreaks of protest" have been sparked by the killing of a black man, George Floyd. The videos showed the 46-year-old black man being detained by police officers for attempting to use a counterfeit \$20 bill at a store. A police officer knelt on his neck and choked him for 8 minutes and 46 seconds until he drew his last breath and called for his mother. The whole time he barely resisted. His last words, "I can't breathe," were shouted at the demonstrations that took place in so many countries as a result of this event.

Admittedly, racism and discrimination have been a problem for some time. I dare say almost every person of colour has experienced racism or discrimination in some way at least once. Although these are extremely present phenomena, they are unfortunately at the same time almost taboo topics, which are often debated about where they begin and where they end. You get the feeling of walking on thin ice. Rightly so.

Racism and discrimination are very sensitive issues that must be treated with caution. It's about people - about human lives, human behaviour and as I also call it so radically, it's also about human dreams. I wonder if these aren't reasons enough to approach these events with a certain sensitivity.

One thing immediately struck me about these worldwide demonstrations. I think we've all noticed an evolution of these protests through the years. The demonstrators were mostly young this time. Young people, tired of always settling for less and making compromises at their own expense, have taken to the streets. We went out into the street. We're slowly learning to take now. We take a seat and raise our voices against the culture of silence.

After the first official demonstration in Graz, where around 10,000 people took part to protest against systemic and institutional racism, we realized that the POC community (People Of Color) in Graz finally needs a safe space. We've watched too long as decisions are made over us. Together with two colleagues Precious Oteng and Hannah Ayalon, we founded the group TANAKA Graz. In Shona (Zimbabwe) this word means "the good times that come after a long struggle". With TANAKA we want to summon this time, which we urgently awaited. Our motto: "if not now, then when?" The main goal: empowerment.

We TANAKA want to be part of a society where young people dare to think. Where we can raise our voice and ask for more, even when asked to quietly obey all the rules, even those that have held us captive long enough. We do not want to give up what is rightfully ours and be eternally grateful when less is offered to us.

Our approach is to look at racism and discrimination in a completely different way and start from a young age. In other words, offer clarifications, experiences, and encounters from an early age or at least appeal for these to be offered and brought closer to the children by the respective responsibilities. The so-called imprinting period, which is the period of time in which the foundation of a person's character is laid, is in our opinion the most crucial for learning. For this reason, we value youth work very much, but see a need for improvement, especially in households with a history of migration.

We have realized that systematic racism is very much a huge problem. However, it only has so much power over people and POC if we give it this power, especially with our attitudes and ways of life. So it is important that POC deal with their own identity. There must be a detachment from the conventional attributions of identity to POC. We need to be able to determine what identity we adopt, and who and what we want to be and represent in the future. And that's exactly where we put TANAKA.

Knowing that we will not be able to end the racist and discriminatory incidents directed at us any time soon, but we do not want to remain in the position of being at their mercy, we have decided to free ourselves from their grip. Put simply, the identity of a POC, a person of dark skin colour, or a person with a migrant background can be seriously attacked if the person knows their own history and rights, and is also convinced of their potential.

We want to pass this empowerment and education about one's person, origin and cultural heritage on to young people who are often told that they don't belong where they are at the moment. We want to pass on exactly this knowledge that we lacked in our younger generation or that we had to learn the hard way for ourselves so that the younger generation is better armed than we were.

The strategy is now to build, strengthen and promote a community. Present contact persons, make and maintain contacts outside of the community. Having a safe space, a place to laugh, to talk about serious things, to feel good and come back.

So we don't grab the bull by the horns but by the tail to bring him to a halt. Because racism and discrimination only live if it is nourished.