

Twenty-Third Newsletter (2018): My Land Is Where I Lay My Feet



Dear Friends,

Greetings from the desk of the **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research**.

The title of this newsletter – my land is where I lay my feet – is the motto of a gathering place in Palermo (Italy) called Moltivolti, many faces. Their motto – *La mia terra è dove poggio i miei piedi* – refers to the experience of the group of owners, all migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Gambia, Senegal, Spain, Zambia and from other parts of Italy. It is a phrase that deserves to be emblazoned on passports and on borders, on landscapes that suggest division of the essential unity of humanity.

The Indian government has just decided to disenfranchise 4 million people who live in the state of Assam. What will befall them is unclear. This population – mostly Muslims – are almost four times the total population of the Rohingya community, now ruthlessly exiled from their homeland in Myanmar and sent into exile in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Most of you who read this newsletter are familiar with the refugee crisis at the Mediterranean Sea, but not all will know that there are millions of human beings in Africa and in Asia who are on the move, whose movements are constrained by borders of one kind or another.

It is well-known that there is a steady stream of migrants from across Africa towards Libya and Europe. But what is not so clear is how Europe and the United States have begun to deal with this ‘problem’. What the Europeans and the Americans have done is to move – without any international discussion – the European border from the northern rim of the Mediterranean Sea to the southern rim of the Sahara Desert. Hundreds of millions of Euros and Dollars are being spent to build a military cordon across the Sahel from Mauritania to Chad. The pretext is the War on Terror and the War on Drugs. But these are only part of the story. The real story is elsewhere, inside the heart of the new military expansion of the West. To read more about this, and about the heart-stopping US military budget for next year, please see my report for this week **here**.

It is far easier to focus on the question of Brexit and of Trump’s trade announcements, far easier indeed to talk about Russian intervention in the US election, but far harder to focus on matters that impact hundreds of millions of people from Africa and Asia (and of people within the US being disenfranchised from the polls, as I report **here** for *Frontline*). Far, harder, for instance, to focus on how Pakistan – with its new government – is being squeezed between the United States and China (as I report today **here**).

The painting above is by the Yemeni painter Haifa Subay. It is her latest work. It suggests the human residue from the terrible war that befalls her people, a people whose land no longer seems able to hold their feet.



Our friends from **Abahlali baseMjondolo** – the shack dwellers’ movement in South Africa – report several incidents of attacks on their leaders and threats of executions. These are not idle. Violence is integral to the way in which property defends itself against humanity. ‘Our lives continue to count for nothing in this society’, they write. ‘We can be evicted, threatened and murdered with impunity. We will not back down. The struggle for land and dignity continues’. But, it is important that they receive messages of solidarity and that the authorities in South Africa are informed that there is a world that is watching how the State responds to the quest of the poorest in South Africa to attain justice. For more on the struggles in South Africa and the role of the trade unions, see this new **report** on the work of the National Union of Metalworkers.

There is such ugliness in our world. It is the ugliness bred not of human nature, but of the motivations built into a system that puts property, power and privilege over other grander human motivations. It defends these narrow principles with the force of arms, not allowing other – more powerful – impulses a chance in the battle of ideas. **Reading** Corina Rodríguez Enríquez of the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) on the importance of care systems provides another example of the ugliness. Taking the example of Mexico, Rodríguez Enríquez shows that the ‘monetary value of unpaid domestic and care work is estimated to be 21 percent of GDP, more than manufacturing, trade and construction, transportation and mining altogether’. Despite this, the power of paid and unpaid domestic and care workers is virtually nil. Many of the women and men who live in the shacks in South Africa and are organised into Abahlali baseMjondolo work in these sectors. Not only do they help reproduce human society, but they also produce monetary value – as Rodríguez Enríquez shows us.

Across the African continent, UN women found, almost half of the houses are more than 15 minutes from water sources. This means that women and girls – the main water carriers – haul the water in more than 70% of the households. It takes them time to do this work, time that is taken away from other pursuits: in fact, it takes them 40 billion hours to do this work per year (equivalent to a year’s work of the French workforce). Why this is important to Rodríguez Enríquez and to the UN Women is that this shows the lack of

investment made by the State to lift the burdens imposed by the gendered care economy.

Rodríguez Enríquez points to the government of Uruguay, which has created a **National Care System**. Three points need to be emphasised: (1) Uruguay provides national child care for children under three years of age; (2) Uruguay provides services for elder care and people with disabilities; (3) Uruguay has professionalised paid care services, so that this sector comes out from the shadows (a 2016 ILO **report** showed that 50 million of the 67 million domestic workers are in the informal sector). This should be a model for governments around the world.



The picture above by Mohannad Darabee is of the young Palestinian militant – Ahed Tamimi – who was just released, with her mother, after serving an eight-month sentence in an Israeli prison. Ahed, who turned 17 in

prison, was incarcerated for slapping an Israeli soldier a day after Israeli troops fired onto her village of Nabi Saleh, hitting her cousin Mohammed. Ahed is brave. She is one of the many, many children who are in the frontlines of struggles to make a decent world. Alice Speri wrote a lovely **essay** on Ahed’s return home to her family. It is a long read, but one that I recommend for this weekend. As well on Ahed, there is a blog post on her and on BDS at the LeftWord Books **website** as well as a **review** of the LeftWord Books volume on Palestine’s Freedom Theatre, a key part of the struggle for the emancipation of the Palestinian people.

In Palestine, Abdelaziz Mousa Thabet and Sanaa Thabet – both of the Child and Family Training and Counselling Centre in Gaza – write with such great feeling about the trauma inflicted on these children by the Israeli occupation. These are scientists (Abdelaziz was Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the School of Public Health at Al Quds University in Jerusalem). Their work and those of Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem captures the damage done to these children. However brave they are, they are still children. It is all the more reason why the Israeli occupation is so ghastly, so brutal.



Speaking of children, in Dhaka (Bangladesh), young school children have occupied the city centres. They are angry that the State has been unable to protect them as they make their often-long journeys to school. The death of two teenagers, run over by a speeding bus, provoked this almost week-long protest. One sign sets the dial at revolt – ‘Road closed. National repair in progress’. It is the children who have made this claim. They want so much more. The picture above is by the Bangladeshi chronicler of the working class, **Taslima Akhter** who teaches at the **Pathshala South Asian Media Academy**. Taslima’s work to document the lives of

garment workers and to document their death (at Rana Plaza) should be widely seen. We hope that these children open up a new, infectious dynamic inside Bangladesh.

Coming next week from **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** is our dossier on the trade wars and on the imperialism of finance – a dossier devoted to a fascinating interview with Professor Prabhat Patnaik. For earlier issues of the newsletter, for our dossiers and for our working document, please visit our website. The image below is the first in our **Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research** image for Thursday – #TricontinentalTBT. Each of these will be shared in the newsletter. Please share them if you'd like.

And, if you feel like a quick laugh, have a read of my **review** of Boots Riley's superb film, *Sorry to Bother You*. The title of the film reflects how I feel when I send you these newsletters. Sorry to bother you, but so be it.

Warmly, Vijay.

