

Hope Thrives When People Embrace the Internationalist Nature of the Land Struggle: The Eighth Pan-Africa Newsletter (2024)



El Anatsui (Ghana), *Terra Firma*, 2020.

Greetings from the desk of Tricontinental Pan-Africa,

On 22 May 2024, I travelled to Utrecht in The Netherlands to a gathering of scholar-activists, filmmakers,

cultural workers and researchers for *Usufructuaries of earth*. The convention brought together those producing significant work on non-expropriative practices of land use, and related land matters such as housing, social reproduction and agriculture. *Usufructuaries of earth* created a space for sharing and learning around the legal concept of ‘usufruct’ which describes the right to enjoy the use and advantages of another’s property, short of the destruction or waste of it. This idea centres alternative methods of changing how we think of property. It prioritises undoing the regimes of privatisation that perpetually usurp the Earth’s resources for the interests of a select few. **BAK, basis voor actuele kunst**, who invited me, are a leading international platform for theoretically-informed, politically-driven art and experimental research. They address the social, ideological, and environmental urgencies of the present by combining public programming and exhibition-making with research, learning, and talent development.

Together, and from different backgrounds, we looked into practices of ethically sharing the Earth’s usufruct, and how to transfigure regimes of ownership into communal userships. Drawing on dossier no. 53, ***This Land Is the Land of Our Ancestors***, by Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, I emphasised that ‘undoing property’ challenges us to reimagine not merely how land is distributed or owned. It challenges us to analyse agrarian reform, labour relations, and conceptions of home and belonging on land, for those marginalised by the prevailing private property paradigm. A usufructuary of Earth proposes land can be shared by everyone who belongs to the Earth, rather than making individual claims that the Earth belongs to us.



Uche Okeke (Nigeria), *The Conflict (After Achebe)*, 1965

The right of Palestinians to a homeland, a matter which is always in our team's hearts, was also a concern for the convention. Make sure to read our latest on this topic in '**Even in Palestine, the Birds Shall Return: The Thirty-First Newsletter (2024)**'. While it is important to be engaged in struggles in our local contexts, the land struggle has always been internationalist. It revolves around questions of colonialism, imperialism, displacement, dispossession, exploitation, national sovereignty, emancipation, people, and life. We have to insist on life because the systems which we struggle against continue to take lives, violently and in many cases prematurely.

August 2024 marks twelve years since the Marikana massacre, in the North West province of South Africa. Between 12 and 16 August, forty-four people were killed, thirty-four by the South African Police Service on 16 August alone. That week, at least seventy-eight miners sustained injuries and approximately 250 were arrested. The miners were on strike because of low wages and poor working conditions in one of the country's most dangerous and exploitative industries. The management team of Lonmin (now Sibanye-Stillwater) platinum mine and the South African government decided to brutally end the strike that had started on 10 August 2012; the Marikana massacre was the outcome.



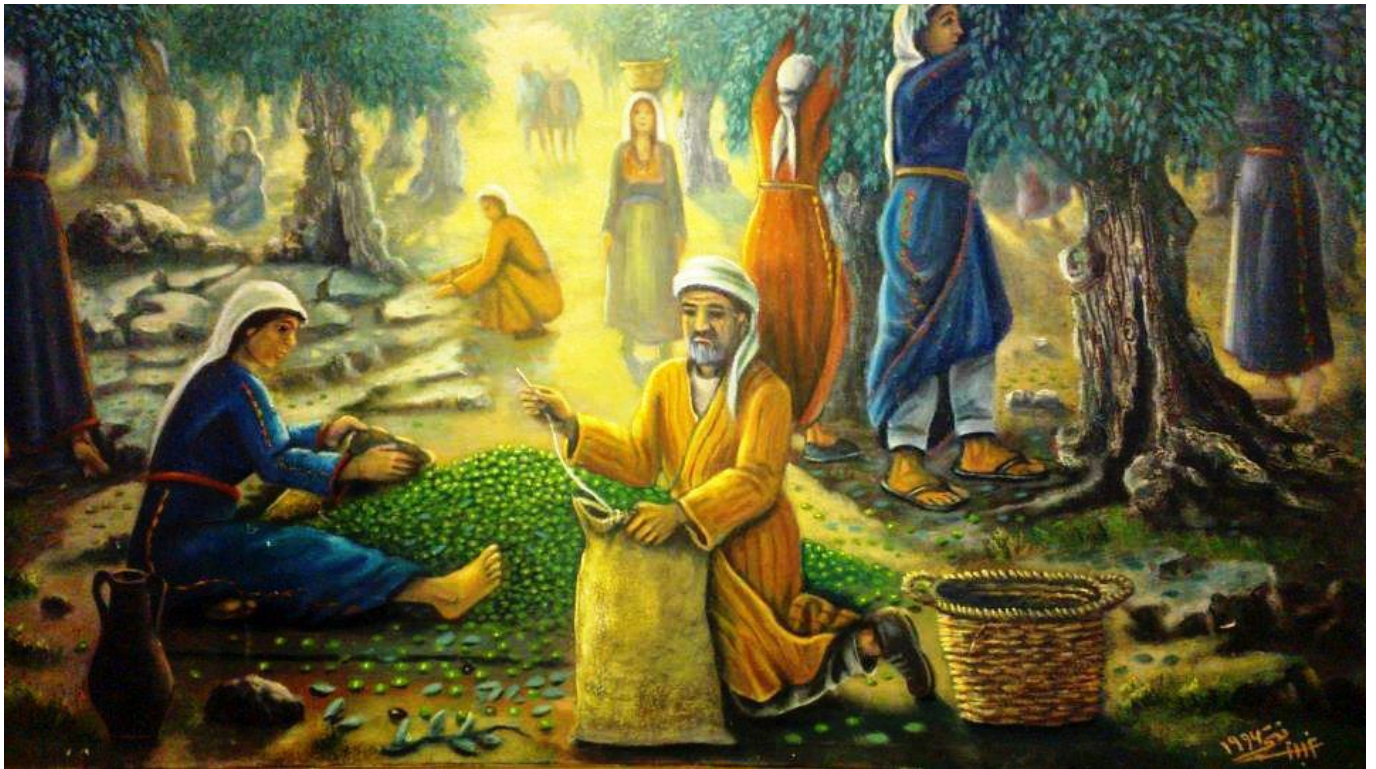
Jabulane Sam Nhlengethwa (South Africa), *Marikana Strike Is Worrying*, 2012.

State-sanctioned violence in aid of capital is regrettably a global norm. Capital's violence continues to persist with impunity, because capital and the state often function as two sides of the same coin. Capital's thievery takes many forms: it steals land, resources, people's lives, and their time. The devastation of a single day can reverberate over the years, such as in the case of Marikana or over decades, in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Recently we explored the DRC and people's resistance in our dossier no. 77, **The Congolese Fight for Their Own Wealth**.

Nevertheless, injustice has always been met with struggle, and being in community or solidarity with others is a potent way to keep the struggle alive. At *Usufructuaries of earth* we agreed that indeed, the greatest failure is the alienation of people from the land. A once existing relationship has been violently ruptured through colonialism, apartheid, and genocide; it now begets further violence in exploitative power and labour relations. This has become a perpetual and vicious cycle. We must continuously grapple with how we make life in proximity to death. This is our kind of perpetuity, always facing oppression with struggle and meaningful international solidarity.

Therefore, beyond asking questions such as: When does Earth become land? When does land become property? When do human beings become labour?, our inquiry must also engage with how we can make our world possible. How do we repair ourselves, even without the prospect of the law enabling justice, and *despite* existing laws? How do we continue to maintain hope and be in solidarity beyond ruination?

At the convention, **Tareq Khalaf**, a design educator, filmmaker, and cultural activist based in Ramallah, Palestine, shared that the concept of *haq*. In Arabic, it means 'right' in legal terms, but also 'justice' and 'truth'. Yet justice and truth are not strictly achieved through the law, instead the struggle for truth and justice comes as a way of life. Being in struggle towards a socialist world requires us to do more than observe, analyse, and critique; it calls on us to act! May we never forget that **We Are Palestine!** **We Are the DRC!** **We Are Venezuela!** **We Are Cuba!** **We Are Tanzania!** In the struggle towards the total emancipation of all marginalised and violated masses, **We Are One!** *Aluta Continua!*



Fathi Ghaben (Palestine), *Olive Picking*, n.d.

I end this newsletter with a revolutionary song, in the spirit of both collective mourning and collective joy.

Yin'i socialism?
Umhlaba wonke ezandleni zabantu!
Akunamuntu opheth'umhlaba eyedwa!

(What is Socialism?
It is all the land in the hands of the people!
There is no one who has the land all to themselves!)

Warmly,

Yvonne Phyllis



Yvonne Phyllis

Yvonne is a researcher, author, and teacher. She received a master's degree in Political and International Studies from The University Currently Known as Rhodes. She is currently the co-director at **The Forge**, a radical pan-African project in Johannesburg, Braamfontein. Her research interests include the landlessness and exploitation of **farmworkers** in South Africa and their land aspirations as well as land redistribution and agrarian reform in Africa.

