

Voices of Dissent

building global resistance against neoliberal
violence and the criminalisation of protest



FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY



The Violence of



In the last decade, vast numbers of people have taken to the streets in acts of dissent as they become more marginalised and oppressed by the global socio-economic and political framework.

The neoliberal economic framework has become pervasive. We see it daily as states give way to global economic interests, favouring the interests of private capital over the public interests of ordinary people. Every day we see poor people being violently evicted from their homes as private developers move in to take over more urban spaces in what can only be seen as projects of social cleansing. We see workers' rights being severely eroded as more workers become precarious, temporary and fluid as companies bid for more profit accumulation. We see indigenous peoples losing their land to extractive mining, commercial agriculture and capital interests as governments unreservedly open up their countries for business. We see our health care, education and basic service delivery being privatised and sold off to the highest bidders. Neoliberalism acts with particular intensity towards women. Whilst all of this is happening, we are being asked by our governments to wait patiently for the benefits of this economic growth to trickle down to us. We are asked to be compliant, to be consensual.

People have become tired of waiting, tired of being patient as inequality between the classes becomes more apparent and more vulgar. From Boston to Brixton to Blikkiesdorp to Buenaventura, disillusioned people have voiced their anger over police brutality and state sanctioned violence against the poor, against minority and indigenous groups as they are forced from their homes and off their land. People are angry at the violence of austerity measures that are stripping them off their rights to education,



Neo-liberalism

health care and basic services. There are vast numbers of people living in shacks, who are homeless, who are hungry and without food. People are angry.

As more incidents of dissent take place, there has been an equally matched determination of states to squash these either through denying protestors the right to protest, arresting activists and members of grassroots communities for participating in protests and in some extreme cases, activists have been shot and killed by police for participating in protests. Some have been killed whilst defending their land, their homes and their resources. Black people are feeling more alienated and persecuted as many are being killed by police, subjected to racial profiling and targeted by stop and search tactics. Indigenous people are being disappeared.

This booklet explores the violence of neoliberalism and its infringements on human rights. It uses case studies which are drawn from the experiences of grassroots communities in South Africa, the UK, Mexico and Colombia to highlight the violence against the right to housing, shelter, land, resources and protest – a violence that is aimed particularly at the poor, at women and at Black people.

As we move into a time when attempts are being made by states to roll back human rights advancements, giving way to capital interests, the need to dissent and protest becomes ever more important. People have become disillusioned with the power of electoral politics. Spaces for dissent are becoming smaller and more infringed by governments. It is time to demand that power be returned to the people.

Amandla! Awethu!

Violence Against The Right to Housing and Shelter

South Africa

On 1 September 2013, residents of the Marikana Land Occupation informal settlement in Cato Crest, Durban (South Africa) were violently evicted by heavily armed members of the Anti-Land Invasion Unit (the state's weapon against informal settlements). They demolished shacks destroying the personal belongings of the residents. For a period of a year thereafter, the same residents would face similar violent evictions 17 more times as the state ignored a Constitutional Court judgement that ruled that the interdict they were using to evict people was unconstitutional. During those 17 evictions, the Anti-Land Invasion Unit shot and injured one person and killed three others. In the Western Cape, shack dwellers were moved out of an informal settlement into one of the Temporary Relocation Areas in Delft. They were moved in 2008 just prior to the World Cup with the promise that social housing would be built for them. It was supposed to be temporary. Seven years later, people are still living in this area which they have renamed "Blikkiesdorp", meaning the tin can town after the shiny galvanised metal, similar to materials used to build a shack, which they are now forced to call their homes. Despite the Constitution stating that everyone must have access to a house and the state's promise to build a million houses a year for 20 years, there is still a housing crisis in post-apartheid South Africa. The number of households living in shack settlements with no water, electricity and toilets has more than doubled. Social movements like Abahlali baseMjondolo and the Housing Assembly work tirelessly to challenge every eviction and to campaign for decent housing. And while there have been significant victories, these activists face constant state repression, intimidation and violence. Their stories are told later in this booklet.





© DIGS Hackney Renters

United Kingdom

Over a quarter of a million households are on a waiting list for social housing in London. At the same time, apartment blocks, like One Hyde Park, stand empty having been bought and developed by private developers who have gone on to sell it to off-shore foreign investors. The story of London's housing crisis is bound up in neoliberal practices that can only be viewed as violence against the poor: austerity measures are being applied to the already squeezed poor who have had their housing benefits, disability and unemployment benefits ripped from them. Not being able to make their rent, they are being forcibly evicted from their homes. At the same time social housing is being sold off to private developers who are evicting people to make room for those who can afford to pay the higher "market value" rentals. The housing crisis in London has sparked off collective action under the umbrella of the Radical Housing Network: the Guinness Estate in Brixton, Aylesbury Estate near Elephant and Castle, Sweets Way Estate in Barnet being just a few of the waves of protests actions that have taken place against social cleansing projects in a bid to reclaim the city from private developers. Recently the DIGS Hackney Renters defeated the Borough of Hackney's attempts to impose fines on people who are sleeping rough. But as their victories grow, so too does the state's suppression of this activism: for example, in coordinated acts between councils and the police, leaders of housing movements such as Focus E15 who have been protesting evictions in London have been arrested without valid reasons being provided.

Violence Against The Right to Protest

Mexico

On September 26, 2014 about 100 students from a teacher's college in Ayotzinapa, Mexico took part in a protest against education reforms. As they entered the town where the protest was to be held, the three buses they were travelling in were surrounded by the police and other armed men. Shots were fired at the buses, two of the students and five bystanders were killed. The rest of the students fled the scene into the neighbouring hills. Some returned to the town over the next few days but 43 students remained missing. It is thought that they were arrested by the police and then handed over to a gang. They were later all killed and their bodies burned.

The families and the different organisations and collectives in solidarity with the disappearance of the 43 students have been under constant threat of further anti-democratic measures, heavy militarization, and human rights violations such as torture and enforced disappearances. This crisis in Mexico brought to the fore the collusion of the state with organised crime. It also brought to the fore the criminalisation of protest.

However, it is protest that represents hope for counteracting the oppressive and violent nature of the Mexican state that has devastated a large part of Mexican society. In London, the London Mexico Solidarity facilitates the exchange between London and Mexico activist communities. Their aim is to build relationships of mutual respect and support with groups resisting neo-liberalism.

“Mambush” Noki, ‘the man in the green blanket’, shot dead at Marikana

© Leon Sidiki / City Press



The Marikana Mining Massacre, South Africa

Mgcineni (Mambush) Noki was one of the 34 striking miners who were killed on the 16 August 2012. On that fateful day, police opened fire on thousands of striking platinum miners in Marikana, north of Johannesburg. 112 were shot and 34 were killed. Mambush was found dead with 14 bullets in his face, neck and legs. He was just 30 years old, a rock-drill operator with no official union rank working at one of the most lucrative extractive mining companies, Lonmin (a London-based company). He cut a striking figure, standing at the frontlines with a bright green blanket draped over his shoulders, making impassioned speeches calling for peace. The actions of the police took South Africans back to the dark days of apartheid where black people were shot by the police for protesting: Sharpeville in 1960; Soweto in 1976. But this was more shocking because it happened under the watch of a democratic state, with one of the most progressive constitutions and bill of rights in the world. The miners had been on strike for a week before they were shot and killed. At the time of the strike, rock-drill operators at Lonmin earned between R4-5,000 (£215-270) per month. Through the strike they were demanding R12,500 (£670) per month – a similar rate to what miners were being paid at nearby Impala platinum mines. Many saw the killing of the striking miners as sacrificing lives, human rights and democracy for money and profit. Giving into public pressure, the Presidency set up a commission of enquiry to investigate who had given the order to shoot to kill the protesting miners. The commission sat for 293 days before handing over its report to President Zuma in March 2015. The report absolved the police and the state of any responsibility for the killing of the miners. As yet, none of the families of the dead miners have received compensation. No one has been brought to justice for the killings.



Violence Against The Right to Land and Resources

Nigeria

The community of Rumuekpe in the Niger Delta should be one of the richest in the world. But despite the huge oil wealth contained in its territory, Rumuekpe's 20,000 residents live in abject poverty: without electricity, running water, basic drainage systems or any school. This bears sharp contrast to giant Anglo-Dutch corporation Shell which, since 1956, has pumped countless barrels of oil from its installations in Rumuekpe, racking up billions of pounds in profits. Traditional subsistence agriculture has grown increasingly futile for the Rumuekpe community due to decades of oil spills and acid rain caused by the company's illegal 'gas flaring'. Oil operations have also failed to provide employment in the community. While the plunder of its resources and the degradation of the environment have dealt big blows to this rural community, its destruction has been fuelled by deadly armed conflict. The crisis began in 2005 with a minor dispute and quickly reached epic proportions, engulfing the entire community. More than 60 men, women and children lost their lives, most of the houses and school buildings were razed to the ground, and thousands of people were forced to flee. This war was engineered for profit. Shell has been actively pitching community members in wars against one another. And while the guns were firing, Shell never stopped drilling. Not for a single day. Social Action has been working to end the crisis that has devastated this community. It has facilitated meetings between opposing factions, highlighting to those involved how Shell has manipulated the crisis for its own benefit. They have managed to broker a peace deal between the two factions created by Shell in Rumuekpe.

written by Patrick Kane



Buenaventura

Buenaventura, on Colombia's Pacifico Coast, is the country's most important port. Around 70% of Colombia's imports and exports pass through this city of around 370,000 mainly Afro-descendent residents. Buenaventura is one of the most poverty-ridden municipalities in Colombia: 40,000 children are not attending school, unemployment is at 60% and poverty is at a staggering 80%. The port city represents an uncomfortable truth for the Colombian government. It is the city through which most wealth passes, yet it is the poorest. It is the city with the highest presence of police and army forces, yet it is the most violent. The Colombian Minister of Defence last year claimed that the paramilitary chop houses in Buenaventura were a 'cultural practice' of communities in the city, and blamed the violence on power struggles.

However human rights groups have long pointed to the fact that the violence is centred upon areas of the city which have been earmarked for large-scale corporate infrastructure projects. These infrastructure projects are set out in a document entitled 'Master Plan: Buenaventura 2050', drawn up without knowledge or participation of representative organisations in the city. As peace talks between the Colombian government and FARC rebels reach an advanced stage, the EU has claimed free trade will protect and even improve human rights in Colombia. Organisations like Palenque el Congal and Asociacion Nomadesc both work to empower and defend communities in Buenaventura.

Black Lives Matter

Since 1999, the residents of Buenaventura have been subjected to a violent nightmare which has been linked to the large scale corporate infrastructure projects. Between 2011 and 2014, over 107,000 people fled the city. Between 1999 and 2014, human rights groups estimate at least 5,800 people were violently killed, and at least another 1,060 forcibly 'disappeared'. The violence continues through the operation of paramilitary 'chop houses', where victims are dismembered alive within earshot of residents, spreading terror and driving displacement. Discoveries of clandestine mass graves containing victims' body parts are commonplace. Children are regular victims of dismemberment, having been forcibly recruited to paramilitary groups. And witness testimonies have consistently pointed to collaboration between government forces and paramilitary groups. In December, 2014, 76 protestors were arrested at the Westfield shopping centre in London. The protest was called by the London Black Revolutionaries, the NUS Black Students Campaign, The London Campaign Against Police and State Violence and Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts. It was held in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter campaign in the USA following the deaths of black men, women, trans-gendered individuals and children at the hands of the police. Black Lives Matter saw police brutality as structural violence aimed specifically at black people in the US. The reason for the solidarity action with Black Lives Matter is that this experience of state sanctioned police brutality is being experienced by black, minority and ethnic groups globally. In the United Kingdom, there is an over-representation of black people at every stage in the criminal justice system including the deaths of black people at the hands of the police.



South Africa also bears a long legacy of state sanctioned police brutality against black people. It is therefore saddening to see this historical practice finding its way back into South Africa's fledgling democracy. It has recently been shown that since 2004, there has been an increase in the number of protests with the majority of these being service delivery related including access to water, sanitation, electricity and housing. With the increase in protests has also come an increase in people being killed by the police during these protests, with 43 people being killed since 2004. This excludes the miners killed at Marikana. In September, 2014 Thuli Ndlovu, the chairperson of Abahlali baseMjondolo's Kwandengezi branch was gunned down in her home in front of family and her community. Two councillors from the African National Congress were arrested on suspicion of Thuli's assassination. At the time of her assassination, Thuli had uncovered corruption involving the local Kwandengezi's councillor. Prior to Thuli's assassination, three other Abahlali baseMjondolo activists were killed: Nkululeko Gwala, Thembinkosi Qumbelo and Nqobile Zulu, a 17 year old girl who was shot in the back at a protest against evictions in Cato Crest. With the exception of Thuli's case, no one else has been arrested and brought to justice for any of the other murders. Abahlali baseMjondolo's activists are under constant threat of violence. Many activists have gone into hiding, fearing for their lives.



But people are fighting back. For every act of neoliberal violence taking place globally, there is an equal act of resistance from those upon whom the violence is afflicted. In South Africa there are rising service delivery protests and protests against the killings of activists. Communities in Buenaventura are fighting back. Over 40,000 people took to the streets in a demonstration in February 2014. In the US thousands of people got behind the #BlackLivesMatter campaign and continue to do so. In London, on the 20 June, 2015 approximately 250,000 people took the streets to march against austerity measures.

Peoples' resistance is growing. Join War on Want to build this movement of global resistance against neoliberal violence and the criminalisation of protest!

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War on Want is a membership organisation of people committed to social justice, in the UK and around the world.

Our vision is a world free from poverty and oppression, based on social justice, equality and human rights for all.

Our mission is to fight against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation, as part of the worldwide movement for global justice.



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