My Heart Makes My Head Swim: The Twentieth Newsletter (2024)

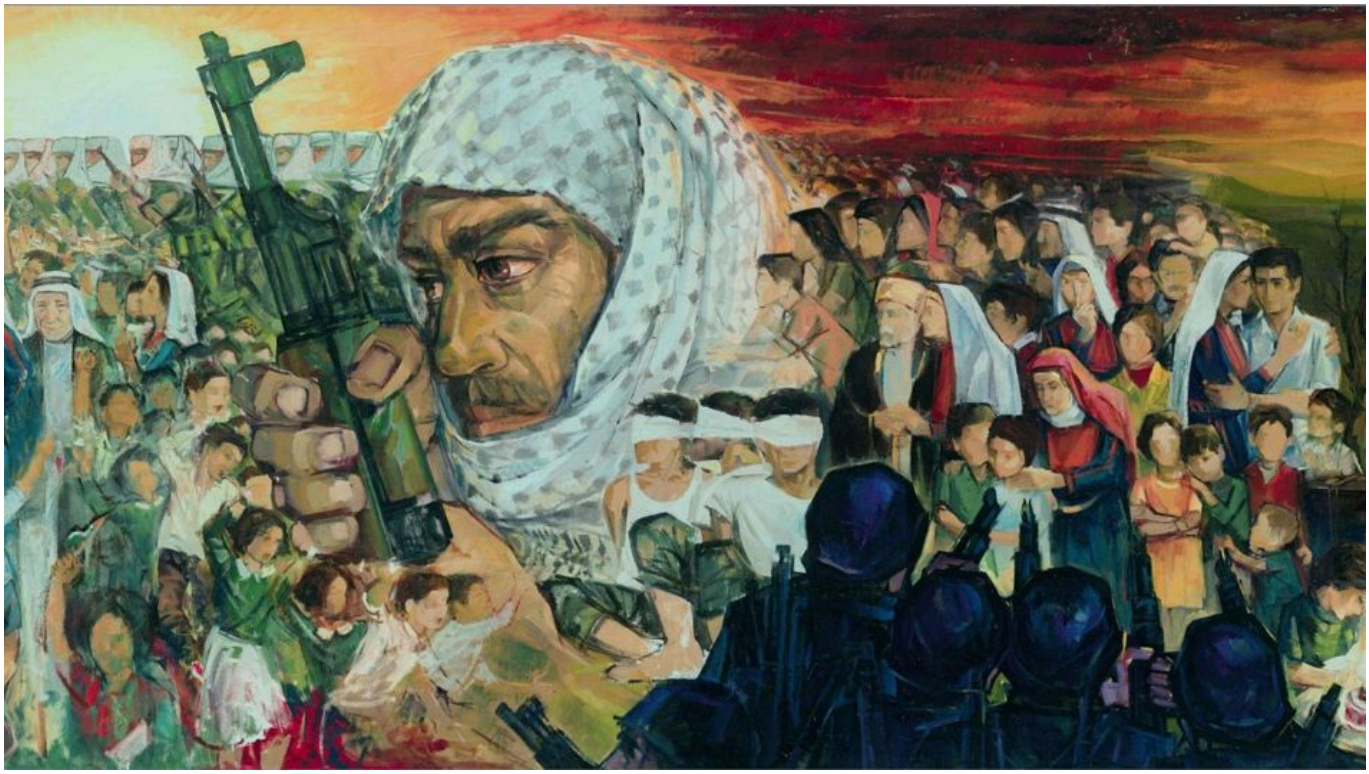
Malak Mattar (Palestine), *Hind's Hall*, 2024.

Dear friend,

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

The title of this newsletter, 'My heart makes my head swim', comes from Frantz Fanon's ***Black Skin, White Masks*** (1952). In a chapter called 'The Fact of Blackness', Fanon writes about the despair that racism produces, the immense anxiety about living in a world that has decided that certain people are simply not human or not sufficiently human. The lives of these people, children of a lesser god, are assigned less worth than the lives of the powerful and the propertied. An international division of humanity tears the world into pieces, throwing masses of people into the fires of anguish and oblivion.

What is happening in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city, is ghastly. Since October 2023, Israel has ordered 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza to move southwards as the Israeli armed forces have steadily moved their gunsights across the Wadi Gaza wetlands down to the edge of Rafah. Kilometre by kilometre, as the Israeli military advances, the so-called safe zone moves further and further south. In December, the Israeli government claimed, with great cruelty, that the tent city of al-Mawasi (west of Rafah, along the Mediterranean Sea) was the new designated safe area. A mere 6.5 square kilometres (half the size of London's Heathrow airport), the supposed safe zone within al-Mawasi is nowhere near large enough to house the more than one million Palestinians who are in Rafah. Not only was it absurd for Israel to say that al-Mawasi would be a refuge, but – according to the laws of war – a safe zone must be agreed upon by all parties.



Ismail Shammout (Palestine), *Odyssey of a People*, 1980.

'How can a zone be safe in a war zone if it is only unilaterally decided by one part of the conflict?', **asked** Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA); 'It can only promote the false feeling that it will be safe'. Furthermore, on several occasions, Israel has bombed al-Mawasi, the area it says is safe. On 20 February, Israel attacked a shelter operated by Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, killing two family members of the organisation's staff. This week, on 13 May, an international UN staff member was **killed** after the Israeli army opened fire on a UN vehicle, one of the nearly 200 UN workers **killed** in Gaza in addition to the **targeted assassination** of aid workers.

Aref El-Rayyes (Lebanon), *Untitled*, 1963.

Not only has Israel begun to bomb Rafah, but it hastily sent in tanks to seize the only border crossing through which aid dribbled in on the few trucks a day that were allowed to enter. After Israel seized the Rafah border, it prevented the entry of aid into Gaza altogether. Starving Palestinians has long been Israeli **policy**, which is of course a war crime. Preventing aid from entering Gaza is part of the international division of humanity that has defined not only this genocide, but the occupation of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank since 1967 and the system of apartheid within the borders defined by Israel following the 1948 *Nakba* ('Catastrophe').

Three words in this sentence are fundamentally contested by Israel: apartheid, occupation, and genocide. Israel and its Global North allies want to claim that the use of these words to describe Israeli policies, Zionism, or the oppression of Palestinians is tantamount to anti-Semitism. But, as the United Nations and numerous respected human rights groups note, these are legal descriptions of the reality on the ground and not moral judgments that are made either in haste or out of anti-Semitism. A short primer on the accuracy of these three concepts is necessary to counter this denial.

Nelson Makamo (South Africa), *Decoration of the Youth*, 2019.

Apartheid. The Israeli government treats the Palestinian minority population within the borders defined in 1948 (21%) as second-class citizens. There are at least **sixty-five** Israeli laws that **discriminate** against Palestinian citizens of Israel. One of them, **passed** in 2018, declares the country a 'nation state of the Jewish people'. As the Israeli philosopher Omri Boehm **wrote**, through this new law, the Israeli government 'formally endorses' the use of 'apartheid methods within Israel's recognised borders'. The **United Nations** and **Human Rights Watch** have both said that Israel's treatment of Palestinians falls under the definition of apartheid. The use of this term is entirely factual.

Laila Shawa (Palestine), *The Hands of Fatima*, 2013.

Occupation. In 1967, Israel **occupied** the three Palestinian territories of East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank. From 1967 to 1999, these three areas were referred to as part of the Occupied Arab Territories (which at different times also included Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Syria's Golan region, and southern Lebanon). Since 1999, they have been termed the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). In UN **documents** and at the **International Court of Justice**, Israel is referred to as the 'occupying power', which is a term of art that requires certain obligations from Israel toward those whom it occupies. Although the 1993 Oslo Accords set up the Palestinian Authority, Israel remains the occupying power of the OPT, a designation that has not been revised. An occupation is identical to colonial rule: it is when a foreign power dominates a people in their homeland and denies them sovereignty and rights. Despite Israel's military withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 (which included the dismantling of twenty-one illegal settlements), Israel continues to occupy Gaza by building a perimeter fence around the Gaza Strip and by policing the Mediterranean waters of Gaza. Annexation of parts of East Jerusalem and the West Bank as well as the punctual bombing of Gaza are violations of Israel's obligation as the occupying power.

An occupation imposes a structural condition of violence upon the occupied. That is why international law recognises that those who are occupied have the right to resist. In 1965, in the midst of Guinea Bissau's struggle against Portuguese colonialism, the United Nations General Assembly **passed** Resolution 2105 ('Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples'). Paragraph 10 of this resolution is worth reading carefully: 'The General Assembly… *[r]ecognises* the legitimacy of the struggle by the peoples under colonial rule to exercise their right to self-determination and independence and invites all States to provide material and moral assistance to the national liberation movements in colonial Territories'. There is no ambiguity here. Those who are occupied have the right to resist, and, in fact, all member states of the United Nations are bound by this treaty to assist them. Rather than sell arms to the occupying power, who is the aggressor in the ongoing genocide, the members states of the United Nations – particularly from the Global North – should aid the Palestinians.

Abdulqader al-Rais (United Arab Emirates), *Waiting*, c. 1970.

Genocide. In its **order** published on 26 January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found that there was 'plausible' evidence of Israel committing genocide against Palestinians. In March, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Francesca Albanese, published a monumental **report** called *Anatomy of a Genocide*. In this report, Albanese wrote that 'there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating Israel's commission of genocide is met'. 'More broadly', she wrote, 'they also indicate that Israel's actions have been driven by a genocidal logic integral to its settler-colonial project in Palestine, signalling a tragedy foretold'.

Intent to commit genocide is easily proved in the context of Israel's bombardment. In October 2023, Israel's President Isaac Herzog **said** that 'an entire nation out there is responsible' for the attacks on 7 October, and it was not true that 'civilians [were] not… aware, not involved'. The ICJ pointed to this statement, among others, since it expresses Israel's intent and use of 'collective punishment', a **genocidal war crime**. The following month, Israel's Jerusalem Affairs and Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu **said** that dropping a

nuclear bomb on Gaza was 'an option' since 'there are no non-combatants in Gaza'. Before the ICJ ruling was published, Moshe Saada, a member of the Israeli parliament from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, **said** that 'all Gazans must be destroyed'. These sentiments, by any international standard, demonstrate an intent to commit genocide. As with 'apartheid' and 'occupation', the use of the term 'genocide' is entirely accurate.

Vijay Prashad presents Frantz Fanon's daughter, Mireille Fanon Mendès-France, with a poster of the cover of the new isiZulu edition of her father's classic, *The Wretched of the Earth*, in Paris, France, 2024.

Earlier this year, Inkani Books, a Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research project based in South Africa, published the isiZulu translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, ***Izimpabanga Zomhlaba***, translated by Makhosazana Xaba. We are so proud of this accomplishment, bringing the work of Fanon into another African language (it has already been translated into Arabic and Swahili).

When I was last in Palestine, I spoke with young children about their aspirations. What they told me reminded me of a section from ***The Wretched of the Earth***: 'At twelve or thirteen years of age the village children know the names of the old men who were in the last rising, and the dreams they dream in the *douars* [camps] or in the villages are not those of money or of getting through their exams like the children of the towns, but dreams of identification with some rebel or another, the story of whose heroic death still today

moves them to tears'.

Children in Gaza will remember this genocide with at least the same intensity as their ancestors remembered 1948 and as their parents remembered the occupation that has loomed over this narrow piece of land since their own childhood. Children in South Africa will read these lines from Fanon in isiZulu and remember those who fell to inaugurate a new South Africa thirty years ago.

Warmly,

Vijay