

## **Preface**

We're so grateful for the really wonderful and encouraging response to the first volume of the **Padkos Digest**. Even in our own life at the Church Land Programme (CLP), the **Digest** has been a really useful resource to have; to refer back to; and to share with others.

It was quite a surprise to realise a few months back that we were ready to put another collection of twenty+ Padkos offerings together. But, once we reviewed what could be included, we had no doubt that it's an extraordinary collection once again. In addition to the powerful written pieces shared on the Padkos list, this second volume of the Digest reminds us of:

- the astonishing privilege we've had hosting at our offices, some of the world's leading thinkers of a militant and emancipatory project: S'bu Zikode; Marie Huchzermeyer; John Holloway; Aziz Choudry; Daria Zelenova; Richard Pithouse; Kathryn Oberdeck; Richa Nagar; and Sylvia Federici; and also
- the launch of the Padkos Bioscope initiative during 2013 showing twenty two engaging and relevant documentaries of struggles round the world.

We want to extend a special note of thanks to Dr Anna Selmeczi for writing the Foreword to this collection. Back in October 2010, Anna's work was the first piece we ever circulated via Padkos; she was the first visitor we hosted for a Padkos event; and hers was the first article in the Volume 1 of the **Padkos Digest**. At the time, we introduced her as a young "PhD candidate at a university in Hungary who ... quite simply 'gets it' as far as we are concerned". Well, she's still young, and still 'gets it' – but has now attained her doctorate, and is based at the Centre for Humanities Research of the University of the Western Cape here in South Africa.

In her Foreword, Anna generously and correctly flags contributors to this Digest who have profoundly connected with and enlightened our own thinking within CLP – people like S'bu Zikode, Marie Huchzermeyer, John Holloway and Richard Pithouse. She might just as well have added her own name – and indeed readers will notice that her ongoing intellectual work continues to feature in CLP's own discussions and reflections (see for example references to her work in the final piece in this collection from CLP entitled, "What we believe").

Anna's Foreword gives an indication of what's included in this volume – so we're not going to repeat that – but, in a way, it also invites us all to understand the Digest, and indeed Padkos itself, as an invitation to join a community of friends, militants and comrades, established in the conviction of the Truth of grassroots struggle for humanity, dignity, and justice. As S'bu Zikode, chairperson of Abahlali baseMjondolo, has put it in a recent piece for the UK Guardian newspaper (and subsequently re-published in South Africa's [Mail and Guardian](#)): "we [are] struggling for a world in which human dignity comes before private profit and land; cities where wealth and power are shared fairly".

Join in ... read on!

The Padkos Committee.

## **Foreword**

by Anna Selmeczi

In an email that Mark Butler sent me with the material needed for writing the foreword, he reminded me that Padkos is, in fact, “only a tiny part of CLP’s work”. True, this remark is made already in the Preface to the first volume (CLP 2012, 3), and is one that, I believe, has to be taken seriously if, in writing about the project, one is to remain faithful to the practice of the Church Land Programme. In turn, what thereby emerges as the task for this foreword is a creative impossibility: to focus on the Padkos project while at the same time dispersing this focus in order to keep its wider context, the majority of CLP’s work, on the horizon. Difficult as this task may seem, holding on to the notion of impossibility seems to offer a potential route to navigate it. Hence, in what follows, I aim to introduce Padkos and the second set of its wholesome servings by relating them to the ways in which the impossible or, more precisely, *the impossible possible* features in CLP’s thinking and practice.

How, then, does the impossible possible define the bulk of CLP’s work? As documented in their “Finding our voice in the world”, offered as the second Padkos (see CLP 2012, 31-40), it entails CLP’s understanding of politics not as “the art of the possible”, as it is often referred to, but precisely that of the impossible: “CLP increasingly reserves the name ‘politics’ for those properly emancipatory moments – or ruptures – where the people establish their human subjectivity in the wider society, and throw off the oppression of being objects of history and domination” (CLP 2012, 31). In this sense, politics is the event of the impossible because it emerges at the very moment that the framework defining what is possible to say, think and do, as well as the distribution of who is to speak, think and do, is disrupted; at the moment when the architecture of the world-as-it-is is disturbed by what was previously inconceivable, for instance, that shack-dwellers theorize their own politics (see Zikode in CLP (2012) and Figlan in this volume), or they take the Province of KwaZulu-Natal to the Constitutional Court, and win. Drawing on philosophers like Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, CLP (2012, 34) sums it up: “politics proper creates the possibility of what could be, of the impossible”. Yet, arriving at this conception is only the beginning – the more difficult problem is to configure a practice that abides by it, and this is precisely what CLP did, and keeps on doing, through the decision to adopt animation as their method of working in the spaces of politics, that is, “the spaces of the impossible possible” (Ibid.).

Arrived at through a series of exercises in self-reflection (see CLP 2007), animation is approached by CLP as an iterative process located within spaces of politics, and moving from learning to action and back, so as to understand the context and specificities of each and every single struggle, and to intervene in them strictly in ways that allow the struggling people themselves to act, and act in ways that they themselves determine. Clearly, this defines CLP’s position as very different from the majority of organizations working within what is usually referred to as the civil society. Indeed, this position is articulated precisely through the refusal of that common allocation: “Against the expectations of us as a ‘civil society organization’, we refuse our assigned place in the orders of power and instead discover our humanity in the struggles against the world-as-it-is” (CLP 2012, 31).

Another name for this refusal and thus for animation as the practice of working within the spaces of the impossible possible is “nothingness”; the consideration that if CLP is to act in solidarity with popular politics, then it should bring nothing to the spaces of such politics (see CLP 2012, 35-37). If CLP refuses the practice of imposing ready-made scripts and solutions on poor people’s struggles – a practice common among nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other actors of the South African left – then it must limit itself to the work of solidarity that enacts a firm belief in the equal capacity of everyone to imagine and create the impossible and thus change the world. Facilitating discussions through which people recognize this capacity as their own does not require handing down enormous funds or predetermined projects. It is based on this realization, the power of delivering ‘nothing’ to spaces of properly emancipatory politics, that affirming everyone’s equality figures as the key to CLP’s practice of animation aligned to the work of the impossible possible. At the moment, such work is undertaken alongside the shack-dwellers’ movement Abahlali baseMjondolo; the Rural Network of local struggles in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) around issues of land, violence, and various forms of anti-poor politics; the Nkuthu women’s groups fighting against patriarchy in Northern KZN through self-sustained aid and livelihood projects; and people working and living on church owned land at locations such as St Joseph’s and Coniston.

In light of this practice of fidelity to the impossible possible, what is the place of the Padkos project then? Again, we find a cue in the previous volume of the *Digest*, where the Preface defines Padkos as a “remarkably productive experiment” (CLP 2012, 3). Indeed, it emerges as an experiment in how intellectual engagement can align itself with the work of emancipatory politics; an experiment in conducting genuine intellectual exchange without losing sight of its context that is being in formation at various sites of the impossible possible. As such, the insistence that, no matter how “extraordinary” or “remarkably productive” the Padkos project is (Ibid.), it is only a tiny part of CLP’s work bears the mark of the idea of “nothingness” and draws (albeit porous) limits around Padkos accordingly. Certainly, while its function is to nourish those who join CLP and friends to discuss the texts and movies on offer, and as such they certainly can and do end up informing and shaping thought and practices, Padkos is not meant to become a laboratory of emancipatory political strategies. It is much more about creating a space of dialogue, and inviting into that space people who do not necessarily have an insight into the bulk of CLP’s work and the knowledge practices it is shaping and by which it is shaped. The dialogical space that Padkos creates reflects those practices that nurture a firm belief in the equality of everyone. While the Padkos mailings always contain a “blurb” that introduces the text, film or music and briefly states why the particular piece is relevant to CLP’s work, the shared material allows everyone to participate in the dialogue on an equal footing – CLP does not claim the authority of interpretation. In the spirit of what Rancière (1991, 38) calls the “democracy of the book”, rendered as the matter (“the stuff”) of the discussion, the servings create an equal distance between those who engage them. “The materiality of the book keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another” (Ibid., 32).

The materiality of Padkos – which is surely reinforced by the accompanying blurbs’ rich play on the metaphor of the “food for the journey” – yet again articulates the modesty of the project along the lines of the principle of “nothingness”. While the mailings of course reach list members regardless of their geographical distance from the CLP offices in Pietermaritzburg, the idea of the project is fulfilled only in the event of the actual discussion, in the physical togetherness that it requires. Nothing expresses this better than the new initiatives launched since the publication of the first *Digest*: the film

screenings of the Padkos Bioscope series and the occasional inter\_mission gigs inviting Padkos friends to enjoy live music or poetry – i.e. “kultsha” – together (CLP 2013). In this way, the *Padkos Digest* embodies another aspect of the impossible possible, as it can never convey the experience of the personal encounter within the dialogical space of the actual events, yet, it bears a new materiality, that of the book. In this format, mailed out to list members as a non-perishable batch of padkos, it becomes susceptible to the unpredictable. The interaction of the texts created by the format of the compilation, just like the associations of the reader browsing through the volume, open up endless and ever new possibilities within and without the context of CLP’s work, potentially invoking ideas and practices that the Padkos events could not possibly do.

Therefore, the second volume of the *Padkos Digest* deserves to be described exactly as the first one: “an extraordinary collection of a remarkable productive experiment” (CLP 2012, 3). As you are about to explore (or recall), the invited speakers, distributed texts, the film screenings as well as the musical events added up to an incredibly rich season. Throughout the past year, Padkos hosted several of the thinkers who have long inspired the work of CLP and, I’m confident, many of their fellow travelers. S’bu Zikode, Marie Huchzermeyer, John Holloway and Richard Pithouse have all been major figures in forming CLP’s practice. No less enthralling was the visit of Aziz Choudry, Daria Zelenova, Kathryn Oberderck, Richa Nagar and Sylvia Federici – while the geographical focus of their work might be located in New Zealand, the Asia-Pacific, Russia, North America, India, elsewhere on the African continent or on the operation of capitalism globally, as their writings collected here show, they share many of the sentiments that direct CLP as it travels the world through its work. Together with texts shared in the Padkos mailings – those of Crystal Bartolovich, Nigel Gibson, Raúl Zibechi, Lindela Figlan and Jeff Guy – they manifest a genuine belief in everyone’s equal capacity for politics, and a firm commitment to popular struggles.

This volume, just like the previous one, also includes texts from CLP itself: “What we believe”, “Philanthropy and dignity”, and an earlier piece on “The land question: A statement of belief”. Beyond all these, Padkos also gave place to a number of thematic events, where the texts and discussion centered on often painfully topical issues such as the Marikana Massacre and, relatedly, the unsanctioned brutality that activists of popular struggles face in South Africa and elsewhere; the Traditional Courts bill; the question of food sovereignty, and, staged as the paradoxical but no less significant opening padkos, a fast in solidarity with Palestinian hunger strikers in Israeli prisons. So as to insert the new genres into the full pack and thus underline the importance of non-textual forms of knowledge production and the common experience of the artifacts on offer, this *Digest* furthermore includes the posters for the Padkos Bioscope screenings, as well as those of the inter\_mission gigs.

Quite a feast – enjoy!

### **List of references**

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