

Water struggles, anti-capitalist resistance to privatization and organizing politics in Africa



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Amanzi Gimpilo, Mati Ivutomi,
Omeya ogo Omwenyo, Kiv'o ni Thayu,
Amatsi Nobhulamu, Alma'
hu Alhaya, Ndokh moy
Doundeu, Ruji ni Moyo,
Manti Gimphilo, Moura
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se Lavi, Pien Ngima,*

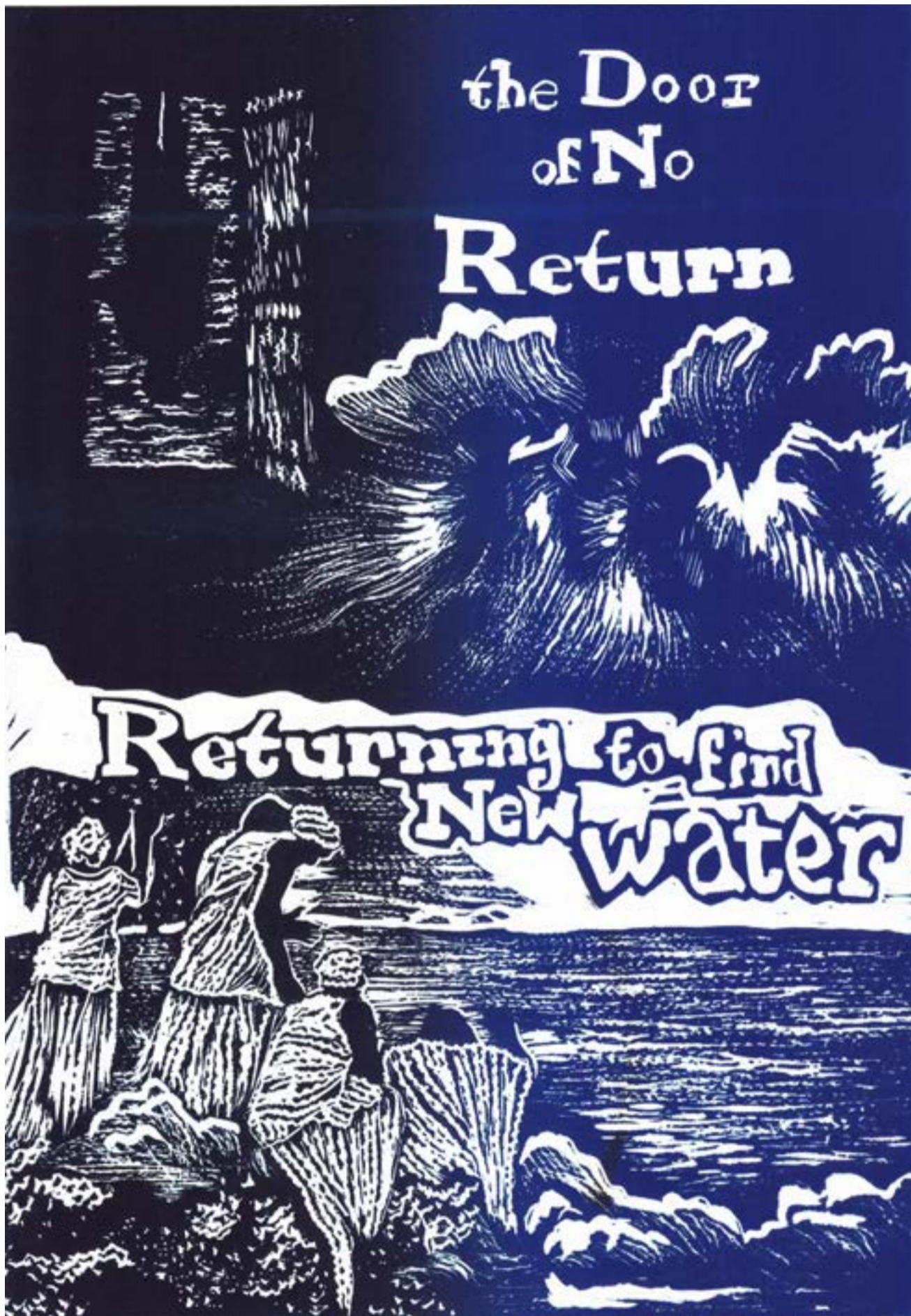
Water is life

"Culture, the fruit of history, reflects at every moment the material and spiritual reality of society..." - Amilcar Cabral

This poster series hopes to create spaces for conversations on the possibilities of feminist, political and popular education and cultural work. The continent of Africa has a long history of cultural production for the purposes of liberation and revolution as well for the recovery of radical histories and liberatory presents and futures. The African Ecofeminist Collective and the Alternative World Water Forum 2022 believe that this work, telling

and weaving radical histories, and organizing against the various manifestations of the privatization of the water commons adds to the formidable canon of insurgent storytelling on the continent. We hope that the first part of this series which we are presenting to you will be a valuable tool for anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and ecofeminist organizing in Africa and beyond. **Water is life! Reclaim and re-imagine the commons!**

1 | Doors of no return, returning to find new waters



The evidence of the theft of water as a technology for capitalism's machinery is in the ocean. There is no ethical self-cleanse under such conditions. The Atlantic waters carried us into currency, eroding our subjectivity signaling our mutation into the **"Other, alien and Black"**.

Derrick Walcott saw the sea as history, a history contaminated by colonial violence. *Then what is water if not a symbol of our suffering and survival? Water carries the salt wounds of the triumph of the negro spirit hidden beneath the sea's unassuming waves. Water pierced through cracked edges of slaveships to take our breath back to our ancestors. Water is the door of no return carrying aged bones, reminiscent of centuries of old flesh, old clocks in the form of dead bones that live in another world. What lies behind the door of no return? Black seaside worship, joy and leisure. Regenerative and healing waters. Beaded ankles and feet dancing and stomping on the white edges of waves. To be in the water is to be in the world, to know water is to know many non-material worlds. To know water is to know that it can rust old chains and churn out littered plastic onto the land while pulling Black bodies into its waves for restoration and the answering of existential questions about these time bound bodies made of water.*

Linocut: Hlavutelo Ngobeni

2

The alternative world water forums - another world is possible!

From March 22-27, Senegal will host the 9th World Water Forum in Dakar. This meeting takes place every three years and this will be the first time it is being held in Africa since the 1997 inaugural meeting in Morocco. The World Water Forum is an expensive mega-event convened by the World Water Council, a corporate-driven multi-stakeholder body that brings banks, transnational water companies, academics and public agencies together to mainly promote private sector solutions to water governance, management and delivery. This is why for more than two decades, these forums have been opposed by the global water justice movement—a growing network of water and environmental justice organizations, social movements, small scale farmers, trade unions and human rights advocates around the world.

In this same time period, different civil society movements have fought side by side for water justice, citizen and public management of water. Activists have created alternative platforms, propositions and campaigns - from the Alternative world water Forum in Florence in 2003, to the 2009 Alternative Forum in Istanbul, to the 2012 Alternative Forum in Marseille, to the 2018 Alternative Forum in Brasília and within World Social Forums such as those in Porto Alegre, Caracas, Nairobi, Belem, Tunis and Montreal. These gatherings have helped solidify the movement to reappropriate water, a communal resource which belongs to all of humanity.

The organizers of the Forum Alternatif Mondial de l'Eau (FAME) firmly believe that water is life and sacred. That it is not a market commodity but part of our global commons to be shared equitably and protected for future generations. Beyond protesting the water merchants, profiteers and enablers gathering at the World Water Forum, the FAME is about showcasing alternatives, learning together, planning together, and finding new ways to live together.

What will we be doing in Dakar?

The 2022 people's Alternative World Water Forum in Dakar offers the opportunity to learn, to mobilize and to organize around water struggles in Africa and with other anti privatisation struggles across the globe. In Dakar, and for participants who will join virtually from around the world, water activists will continue challenging and resisting the



commodification of water. Activists gathering in Dakar recognise that the struggle for water is an intersectional, internationalist struggle that needs a solid anti-capitalist, people-centered and feminist orientation. Activists will join hands and voices with communities in Senegal, Africa and across the world to strengthen the water justice network and movement.

“...everything worthwhile is done with others.”
- **Mariam Kaba**

Linocut: Hlavutelo Ngobeni

3

The open veins of the Niger Delta

**“But they brought affliction to the cheerful river;
They brought flames of fear to the marvellous
forest:
They pissed and pissed barrels of arsenic into the
current
Until it was no longer the ageless river but a
cesspool...”**

‘In the Omoja River’ – Tanure Ojaide

Commercial production of oil in Nigeria began in 1958 with the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in the Niger Delta by Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell). In 2006, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) received a formal request from the government of Nigeria to carry out a comprehensive environmental and public health assessment of the oil-impacted sites on Ogoni land in the Niger Delta. In 2011, UNEP released a report which highlighted the devastating impacts of the oil industry on Ogoni land and the wider Niger Delta. The report revealed that the Niger Delta was one of the most polluted places on Earth and that companies like Shell (which ironically and controversially funded the assessment) were to blame for the state of affairs. The report provided irrefutable evidence of the devastating impact of oil pollution on people’s lives in the Niger Delta – one of Africa’s most bio-diverse regions. One of the most serious facts to come to light is the scale of contamination of the drinking water, which has exposed communities who are mostly fisherfolk, small scale farmers as well as Indigenous Peoples, to serious health risks and largely destroyed most of their livelihood options. In one case the water was found to contain a known carcinogen, Benzene, at levels 900 times above World Health Organization guidelines. Over a decade later, only a limited number of the recommendations in the report around cleaning and restoring the Niger Delta have been actualized.

To think clearly about the destruction of the Niger Delta and specifically its water ecosystems is to also sit with the histories and memories, past, present and future possibilities of resistance to the extractive industries in the region. Some important examples include the mass mobilizations by women in the Niger Delta; the Ogharefe (1984) and the Ekpan (1986) women’s uprisings which were against privatisation, state violence and militarization, against oil extraction and multi-national oil corporations and importantly, in defense of their land and territories. The militancy of the women in the Niger Delta continues to date.

And in the lives of the Ogoni 9 – Ken Saro-Wiwa, Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Barinem



Kiobel, and John Kpuine – 9 men executed by hanging on the 10th of November in 1995 for exposing and opposing Royal Dutch Shell’s ecocide in the Niger Delta as well as its collusion with the country’s military dictatorship –we also remember the countless environmental rights activists in Africa who have been disappeared, suffered sexual assault, maimed, ostracized, exiled and even murdered for their work. The struggles for the commons have a steep price, unfortunately. In solidarity, always!

**“We thought it was oil
But it was blood.” – Nnimmo Bassey**

Linocut: Hlavutelo Ngobeni

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The ecosocialist movements of Mauritius

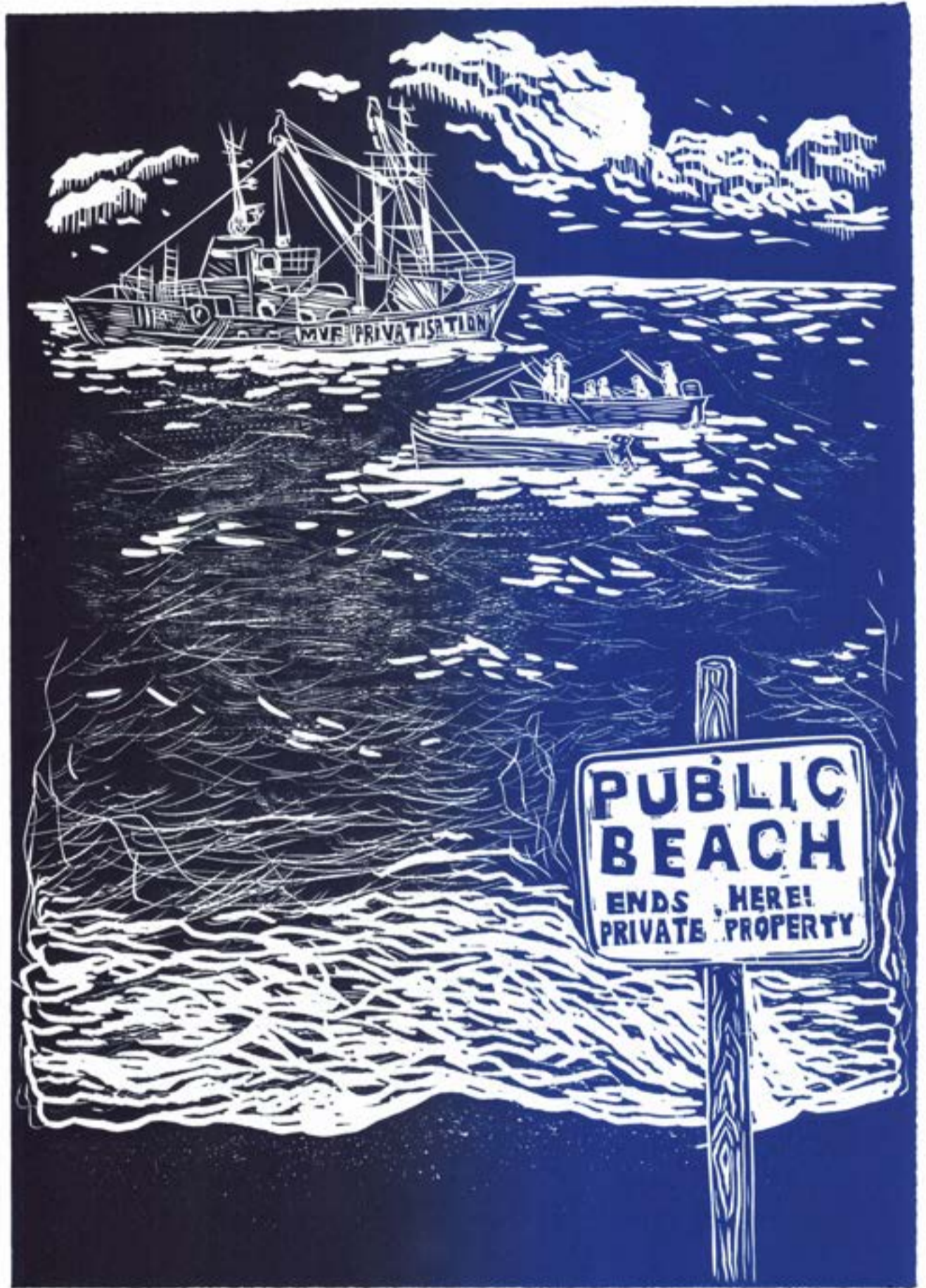
Who owns the coastline? Whom does the ocean belong to? It depends on who you ask. Mauritius is marketed as one of the most exotic tourist destinations in the world and mainly attracts wealthy tourists from South Africa, Europe, the US and Canada.

Rezistans ek Alternativ (ReA) is a Mauritian ecosocialist movement founded in 2014 and which brings together anti-capitalist environmental, labor and feminist organizers working on the intersections of ecological justice. One of the founders of the movement Ashok Subron defines the nature of the tourism industry in Mauritius as “settler-tourism” – extractivist in nature. The industry is problematically favored by successive Mauritian governments over other sectors, with notoriously low wages and poor working conditions, gentrifying and driving up the local property prices, detrimental to the environment, guzzling more water than what is available to poor and working-class Mauritians and finally, privatizing access to most of the ocean and coastline.

The militant activists of ReA work and organize to challenge the extractivist and privatizing logic of the Mauritian tourist industry which has made access to public beaches extremely difficult for ordinary Mauritians folk as only 10% of the coastal zone is now accessible to them.

In addition, successive Mauritian governments have leased the ocean to commercial fishing/ trawling fleets from Japan and the European Union (EU), a practice which has completely ruined the livelihoods of the local small fisher folk. This in turn has had a detrimental effect on food sovereignty in Mauritius and for a country that has one of the biggest maritime zones in the world, it imports fish from South Africa and incredibly as far away as Alaska and Indonesia, a direct result of the assault of the livelihoods of small-fisher folk by the commercial fishing industry.

Rezistans ek Alternativ has over the years deployed a combination of civil disobedience – tearing down fences erected by tourist resorts and occupying these spaces with families and communities as well as legal action. Importantly they utilize political education, including their annual school of ecology which brings together comrades from across Southern Africa and other parts of the Global South to learn and share experiences about their work on ecological justice.



Linocut: Leila Khan

“Whom does the ocean belong to?”

5

“Movement on the road ‘96” - The Amazigh indigenous peoples of Imider

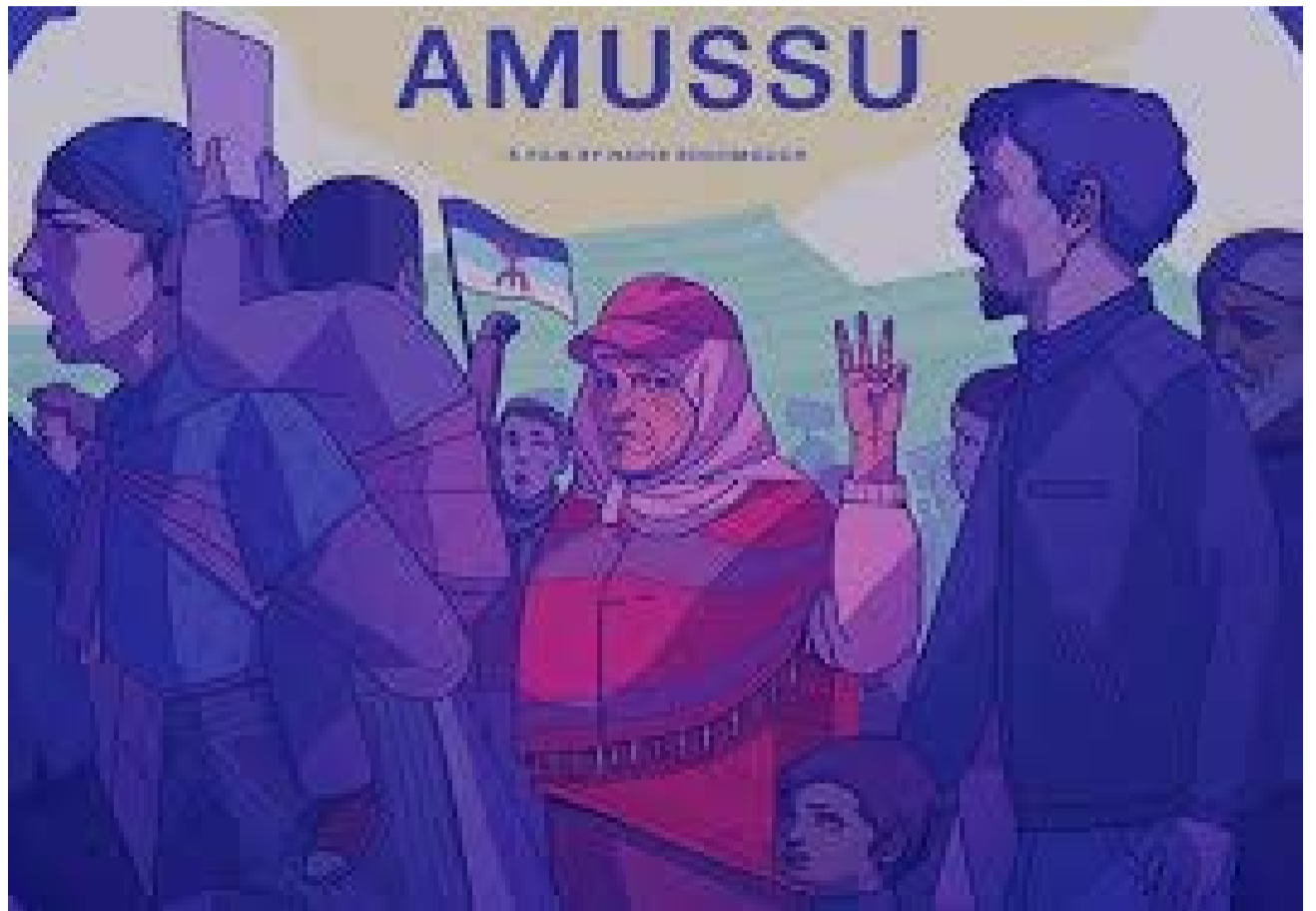
In 1996, the Indigenous Amazigh people of Imider, located about 300km to the South of Marrakech in Morocco rose up against a silver mine company, ‘La Societe Metallurgique d’Imider’, which is owned by ‘Societe Nationale d’Investissement’ (SNI), a private company under the control of the Moroccan Royal family. This company popularly known as MANAGEM is Africa’s largest and most productive silver mine company while Morocco ranks as the 15th largest silver producer in the world. The movement was heavily repressed by the Moroccan police and military.

In August 2011, a new uprising began in which the Indigenous Amazigh people of Imider set up an encampment on Mount Alleban and shut off one of the key water valves that transported water to the mining company. Up until the forceful end of their encampment on the mountain as a result of continued state repression in 2018, the movement in Imider was considered to be the longest protest movement in Morocco’s recent history as well as one of the fiercest environmental struggles in Africa.

MANAGEM continues to be accused by the residents of Imider of poisoning their water sources with the toxic chemicals used in the mines as well as draining their water reserves. The Global Amazigh Congress, an international organization which works for the rights of the Amazigh peoples, has over the years released several reports which state among other things, that the mine uses 1,555 cubic meters of water per day, which is twelve times the daily water consumption of the village. The mine has also destroyed their agricultural life, with soils also affected by the mining chemical toxins, not forgetting that a lot of land belonging to the villagers was confiscated for the setting up of the mine.

Africa’s Indigenous Peoples like those across the world continue to bear the brunt of so-called development projects such as this mine in Imider – the deep colonial and capitalist projects of trying to “civilize” them continues in the ‘post-colonial’ world and the full negative impacts of this afterlife of marginalization to their lives, communities, lands, cultures, bonds and environment cannot be fully quantified.

In November 2016, the residents of Imider opened their mountain and resistance to a solidarity caravan made up of environmental



activists and organizers from across Africa for a week. On that liberated mountain, with the water valve they had shut off sometimes acting as a sitting space for the small children resting after playing and still standing as a testament to the possibilities of collective power – a film festival and ecofeminist political school that were co-organized by the villagers and their visiting comrades was held. In the bitter cold winter mornings, there was always Moroccan green tea. In the afternoons when the warmth fought to come through, they learned from one another. In the nights, an introduction to Moroccan Gnawa music for the visiting comrades, food that was collectively made was shared on platters and there were many dreams of freedom.

For the comrades in Imider on top of mount Alleban, their struggle wasn’t just for the water – it was above all an attempt to re-make, re-pair, re-imagine and re-build the world and our relations with one another. A struggle for the commons.

“The people are our mountains.”- Amilcar Cabral

Design by: Ayoub Normal

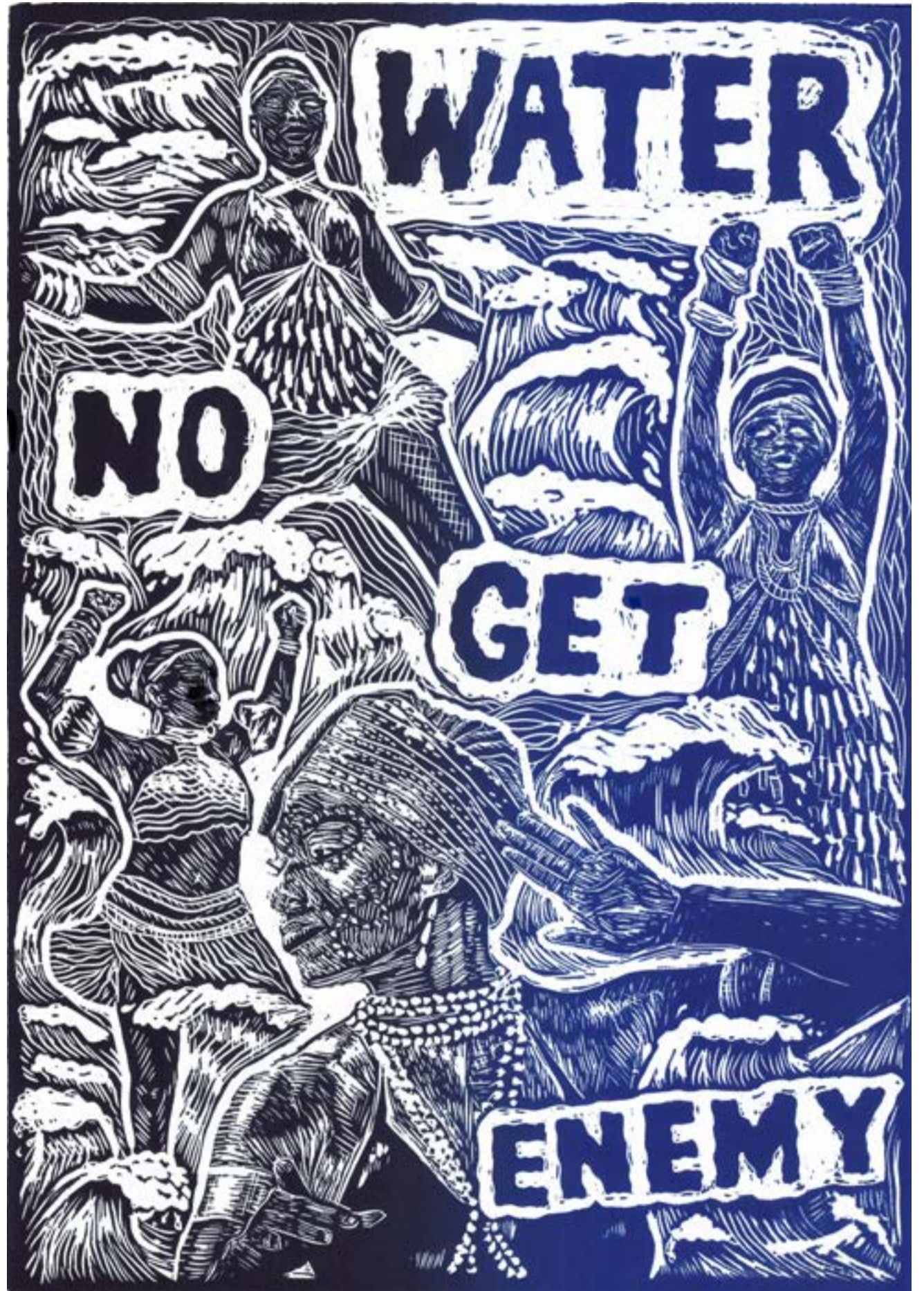
Special thanks: The Revolutionary Amazigh Movements of Imider

6 | "Water no get enemy"

The importance of a cultural resistance consciousness in the struggle for water as a commons and for the commons as a whole is often neglected or erased.

The culture of oppressed people is resistance, through art we are able to rekindle the hope for environmental reclamation, resuscitation and in fact, redemption. Culture gives us the strength to respond to threats in imaginative ways that symbolically honor the poetic, sonic and visual traditions of the oppressed.

Through art and cultural resistance water's subjectivity and belonging to all the elements of the earth is restored. Culture teaches us that music and dance are the energies that move water, turning bodies into flesh dripped in saltwater, dancing on water – water dancing on us. Culture teaches us that the deprivation of water is tantamount to the theft of joy, worship, memory and dreams. Art reminds us that water was our first country, it was our first movement and rhythm, and the first poetic habitation. Art reminds us of the water buried under cities as a result of the invasion of colonial infrastructures. In the wake of colonial disruption and fragmentation, art historicizes the condition of the peoples and their lands, the spiritual fracture, severed connection to both land and water and by doing so raises a counter-narrative in confrontation against powerful institutions and governments on behalf of the dispossessed and the environment.



Linocut: Leila Khan

"Art reminds us that water was our first country"

0 | Credits

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The Alternative World Water Forum is a global water justice movement—a growing network of water and environmental justice organizations, social movements, small scale farmers, feminists trade unions and human rights advocates around the world. The organizers of the Forum Alternatif Mondial de l'Eau (FAME) firmly believe that water is life and sacred. That it is not a market commodity but part of our global commons to be shared equitably and protected for future generations.

The African Ecofeminist Collective (AEC) is an autonomous anti-capitalist group started in 2013 by several African feminist organizers, academics, researchers,

and grassroots activists, all working on the intersections of gender, economy and ecological justice on the continent of Africa. AEC integrates various popular educational political pedagogies into their work. In addition, their organizing also leans on African women's, Indigenous and feminist oral traditions of weaving and "...giving history back to the people in their own words", contesting and unsettling narratives of everyday life of Africans experiencing multiple and intersecting inequalities around climate and environmental injustice, and importantly, co-creating spaces for Africans to re-imagine the possibilities of liberation through a politics of radical and rooted ecologies.

