



LAND AND LANDLESSNESS

By Qondiswa James

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I am 1 000km up and I am thinking about the planet. It is getting smaller as we ascend, becoming a dotted land mass filled with water. The plane is like an imaginary space ship that's taking us far away from here. I am wondering whether I will have the grace to see things from this vantage point. So far, everything is obscured, hidden. I see some things of course.

First, a long thin cigarette-like tube protruding up into the sky, jutting out, chain smoking as it does – a factory there. It is hot inside where all the work happens, machines pumping out rhythmically their processes. The steel of the machines get hot to the touch and the people working there sweat and strip; in many other ways the people are also stripped and the sweat of their work held ransom for real lives. It is hot even inside here, in another place of work under the ground, or under the baking sun out on the farm lands. I see the factory there on the landscape of capitalist greed, pumping out its heat. They say there is a protective shield between the planet and the sun, and that it is riddled with holes, torn into parts and proving very difficult to patch up. But there is no real possibility of a patch for this, is there? Not for neoliberal democracy that does not deliver service to us but instead delivers a vote with nothing to back it up with except the empty words of the politicians and the faded ink of the constitution. Because there is a link somehow between the holes in the shield, the owners of the means of production who continue to pilfer the communities' wealth through the tearing they have done, and the consequences of the government's failure to uplift its people.

In the first place, perhaps we are our own people, or at least want to be. Secondly, there is no real possibility of a patch for systematic failure. There is a glitch in the matrix and it's spilled out on to the geographical landscape in an irreparable way. Capitalism is the earth's undoing; it is all our undoing.

There is another thing which reveals itself to me: the private offices of the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, there where decisions are made. Those men in their suits around an oval conference table are holding Okapi behind their backs, ready for slicing and tearing. They do this to us, and they do this to our homes. Our homes built on this mud mound, this earth, the green-blue hues of it, that calls all of us back to gravity. Back to our feet. Back to ourselves. Back down to earth. These suits with their heads in the clouds are all headed for Mars and snipping the climbing rope beneath them. Unlike them, we have no choice but to live with both feet firmly planted on the ground, likely the same ground that birthed us, we have no choice but to make do with the deliberate choices of the powers that hoard. The consequences are for us to deal with.

When the dust settles after these dark times we are in. I hope we find each other. And with each other, I hope we find ways of building by dwelling in the landscape first, steeping ourselves in the environment until it reveals to us its ways of being.

