

# Resistance against South African Apartheid, Racism and Settler-Colonialism: Remembering Peter Tosh and the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre

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Global Research, March 24, 2017

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

March 21 was the 57th anniversary of the [Sharpeville Massacre](#) that was carried out by the South African apartheid regime against protesting Africans in 1960. This protest was organized by the liberation organization the [Pan Africanist Congress \(PAC\)](#). It targeted the pass law of the settler-colonial regime that regulated the movement and residential pattern of the indigenous Africans. International opinion was so outraged by the murderous behaviour of the apartheid system that the United Nations' General Assembly was inspired to declare March 21 the [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(IDERD\)](#).

Whenever, we commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre and the IDERD, we are politically obligated to highlight the valiant effort of the late reggae singer, Pan-Africanist, Rastaman, revolutionary, and [human rights champion Peter Tosh](#) in creating greater public awareness of the crimes of South Africa's apartheid system. Tosh was one of the original Wailers' trio alongside **Bob Marley** and **Bunny Wailer**. He was a reggae superstar at the time of his assassination by lumpen elements in Jamaica on 11 September 1987. Tosh was known as a militant cultural worker and organic intellectual who did not mince words in condemning the powers-that-be like the Old Testament prophets.

According to Tosh's former manager **Herbie Miller** in the book [Remembering Peter Tosh](#), Tosh loved to read about international affairs and politics in general, biographies of noted Pan-Africanists as well as "literature about the origins of the apartheid system." Tosh's 1977 album [Equal Rights](#) was an anthem against racial and economic oppression and Miller said that

"it was this era of legal segregation and political unrest that inspired Peter's recording of the album."

On this album, Tosh demonstrates his function as an organic intellectual of the international African labouring classes with the anti-apartheid song [Apartheid](#) that exposed the economic motivation and action of the apartheid regimes in South Africa and Namibia. The first four lines in the song bear witness to the natural resources extraction activities of the white supremacist, capitalist, settler-colonial regime in Southern Africa:

Inna me land, quite illegal  
You inna me land, dig out me gold, yes

Inna me land, diggin' out me pearl  
Inna me land, dig out me diamond

Tosh is not distracted by the ideological structure of white supremacy that was used in a vain attempt to mask the economic and financial imperatives behind the system of apartheid. It is not accidental and is quite instructive that this Rastafari prophetic voice went straight at the foundation of the system of apartheid in this song - the theft and occupation of Africans' land and exploitation the natural resources.

This militant reggae icon exposes and indicts before the court of international public opinion the vicious and murderous apartheid system for its neglect of the social needs of the oppressed. Since the apartheid regime lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the people, it was forced to invest heavily in the coercive arm of the state (the police, army, courts and prisons) in order to keep in check the people's struggle for freedom:

You inna me land, you no build no schools for black children  
You inna me land, no hospital for black people  
You inna me land, you built your prison  
You inna me land, you built your camp

Peter was quite aware of the threat of the apartheid regime in South Africa and Namibia to international peace and regional stability in southern Africa. The settler-colonial apartheid regime did not confine its vile and brutal actions inside the territories under its control. It went after the liberation movements from Namibia and South Africa. South African apartheid brought death and destruction to the people of the frontline states that gave shelter to the freedom fighters and anti-colonial forces:

You cross the border, you shoot off the children  
Cross the border, shoot down women  
Cross the border, you take your might  
Cross the border to beat the right

Tosh told the apartheid regime that it must expect a fight from the victimized Africans. He knows that the language of force is the one in which the forces of white supremacy and Babylon were most fluent. The downpressed had no option but to fight:

Now we have to fight, fight, fight  
Fight 'gainst apartheid  
Black man got to fight, fight, fight  
Fight 'gainst apartheid  
Come on and you fight, fight, fight  
Fight 'gainst apartheid  
We got to fight, fight, fight  
Fight 'gainst apartheid

If the call to arms against the forces of exploitation and the disastrous consequences for them are not clear enough, Tosh outlines the desperate situation in which the downpressors will find themselves in the decisive and final moments of the triumph of the downpressed. In the song [Downpressor Man](#) from the Equal Rights album, he informs the exploiter of his fate:

Downpressor man  
Where you gonna run to  
Downpressor man  
Where you gonna run to  
Downpressor man  
Where you gonna run to  
All along that day

You gonna run to the sea  
But the sea will be boiling  
When you run to the sea  
The sea will be boiling  
The sea will be boiling  
All along that day

You gonna run to the rocks  
The rocks will be melting  
When you run to the rocks  
The rocks will be melting  
The rocks will be melting  
All that day

Long before activists coined and popularized the slogan “No Justice, No Peace,” Tosh captures that sentiment of the people and immortalized it in the song [Equal Rights](#). This Rastafari cultural worker knew that the foundation of peace is justice and equity. The absence of peace and equal rights would ensure the continuation of predatory warfare by the downpressor and the necessity of revolutionary violence or armed self-defense by the downpressed:

Everyone is crying out for peace, yes  
None is crying out for justice  
Everyone is crying out for peace, yes  
None is crying out for justice

I don't want no peace  
I need equal rights and justice  
I need equal rights and justice  
I need equal rights and justice  
Got to get it, equal rights and justice

Tosh was an internationalist and he links the fight of Africans against racism, settler-colonialism and apartheid in Southern Africa with the struggle of the Palestinians against Zionism and Israeli apartheid. In the song [Equal Rights](#), he proclaims that “Palestinians are fighting for equal rights and justice.” This reggae and Rastafari revolutionary took the opportunity at the 1977 No Nukes concert in Madison Square Garden, New York, to demonstrate his solidarity with Palestinians and other Arabs against Israeli colonial and military aggression.

Herbie Miller says that Tosh purchased and performed in the traditional clothing and headgear of the Gulf State Arab men. According to Miller,

“He intentionally did this at the No Nukes concert because he knew that there were certain countries with nuclear armaments and the concert date also fell close to one of the Jewish holidays. He made this political statement fully

aware of the ongoing conflicts between the Arab and Jewish states in the Middle East.”

Tosh expression of internationalist solidarity with the cause of Palestinians and others in the Middle East might have caused the withdrawal of his invitation to address the relevant United Nations’ committee on apartheid. He would have been the first reggae cultural worker to do so.

We should share Tosh’s legacy of principled resistance and solidarity against apartheid, racism and economic exploitation with young people. Tosh used his art to turn the people on to the struggle for justice, equal rights and world peace.

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