People's Resistance Against Historical Plunder and Neocolonialism: The Second Asia Newsletter

Dear friends,
Greetings from the Asia team!

The recent ceasefire in Gaza, brokered after 15 months of relentless violence and more than **46,000 deaths** including nearly 18000 children, has brought a temporary respite to a region long besieged by occupation and war. The ceasefire, while fragile, is a testament to the resilience of the Palestinian people in this struggle. Yet, as the dust settles, the structural violence of apartheid, displacement, and economic suffocation remains unaddressed. The ceasefire is not peace; it is merely a pause in a decades-long war waged against an entire population.

Amidst this fragile calm, the **release** of Khalida Jarrar, a Palestinian leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, offers a moment of hope. A beacon of courage and compassion, Jarrar was targeted by Israeli military occupation forces. Over the years, she has faced repeated arrests and administrative detention, often without formal charges. Jarrar's years of imprisonment symbolize the broader repression faced by Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Her steadfast commitment to the cause of Palestinian liberation, even behind bars, serves as a testament to the indomitable spirit of resistance. In 2020, during her earlier detention in Israel's Damon prison, she managed to smuggle out a **letter**, which was read in the keynote panel at the Palestine Writes Literature Festival. In the letter, she emphasized the transformative power of cultural work within prison walls:

> *"Books form the cornerstone of life in prison. They help maintain the psychological and moral equilibrium of freedom fighters, who see their imprisonment as an integral part of the broader resistance against the colonial occupation of Palestine. Books also become a battleground in the individual struggle of will between prisoners and the prison authorities. This struggle represents a challenge for Palestinian detainees, as the jailers aim to dehumanize us and sever our ties to the outside world. The task for prisoners is to turn our incarceration into a state of 'cultural revolution' through reading, education, and literary dialogue."*

Sliman Mansour (Palestine), Freedom, 1980

Art has always been a weapon of the oppressed, a means of preserving memory and asserting identity in the face of erasure. In Palestine, where the physical landscape is constantly reshaped by occupation, art has always been a vibrant site of resistance – a way to reclaim space and voice. Artists like Naji al-Ali and his iconic **Handala**, and contemporary collectives, use their work to document oppression and envision liberation. The artistic movement in Palestine is not merely aesthetic; it is deeply political. From the murals of Gaza to the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, Palestinian art is a testament to the indomitable spirit of a people who refuse to be silenced. Our **Tricontinental Interventions: Conjunctural Analysis from Asia (TICAA) no. 3**, highlights that cultural production is a central pillar of the Palestinian liberation struggle and notes that "artistic expression in Palestine is not merely a reflection of resistance; it is resistance itself."

In the Palestinian struggle, art goes beyond the act of documentation – it is a tool for mobilization and solidarity. The art creates a shared language of resistance, connecting Palestinians as well as allies across borders and generations. The solidarity movements

from Africa to Latin America stand testament to the global resonance of Palestinian art.

Tamam Al-Akhal (Jordan), Siham and Mariam, 1989

While the Palestinian struggle reminds us of the ongoing violence of colonialism, a recent **report** by Oxfam, titled 'Takers, Not Makers', sheds light on the historical roots of this violence. The report reveals that 'between 1765 and 1900 the richest 10% in the UK extracted wealth from India alone worth US$33.8 trillion in today's money', a staggering figure that underscores the systemic nature of colonial exploitation.

The report, which draws on extensive historical data, shows that colonialism was not merely a political project but an economic one, designed to enrich the coloniser at the expense of the colonised. Economist Utsa Patnaik's meticulous research published in the book '***Agrarian and Other Histories***' revealed that the British drained over $45 trillion from India between 1765 and 1938, a figure that dwarfs the country's current GDP. Britain's wealth was not the result of trade or investment but of outright plunder, facilitated by the violent subjugation of Indian people and the destruction of local industries.

This extraction fueled Britain's industrial revolution while systematically deindustrialising India. The destruction of local industries, such as Bengal's flourishing textile sector, coupled with exploitative land revenue policies, entrenched cycles of poverty and dependency. Today, these patterns of extraction find echoes in neoliberal policies and unequal trade agreements, perpetuating global inequities.

Pala Pothupitiye (Sri Lanka), South Asia Map, n.d..

The legacy of colonialism is not merely historical. It manifests in contemporary wealth disparities, climate injustices, and geopolitical tensions. Our **study** on Sri Lanka highlights the ways in which colonial-era exploitation has evolved into modern-day neocolonialism. Sri Lanka, like many countries in the Global South, is caught in a web of debt and dependency, with its economy shaped by the demands of international financial institutions and foreign powers.

Geographically Sri Lanka is positioned at the heart of the Indian Ocean, making it a key area of interest in the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States. The US has been concerned about losing influence in Sri Lanka, especially as the country developed closer ties with other countries in the Global South. The study highlights how the Indo-Pacific region has become a new frontier for imperialist expansions, particularly Sri Lanka where blocs like the United States-led forces are vying for influence. This expansion is not just geopolitical but economic, as the global north weaponises debt and investment to extract resources and secure strategic advantages. These expansions were also used in the New Cold War against China.

The situation in Sri Lanka is a microcosm of a global phenomenon. From Latin America to Africa, countries in the Global South are trapped in a cycle of debt and dependency, their economies shaped by the demands of foreign powers. Breaking free from this cycle requires not only political will but a radical **reimagining** of the global economic system.

U Arulraj (Sri Lanka), Into the tea forest 01, 2024

The themes covered in this newsletter – from the ceasefire in Gaza to the legacies of colonial plunder and the neocolonial debt trap – are deeply interconnected. They reveal a world where imperialism, in its old and new forms, continues to shape the destiny of billions of people. Yet, they also highlight the resilience and creativity of those who resist.

Whether through the defiance of Khalida Jarrar, the art of Palestinian resistance, or the demands for economic justice, these struggles remind us of the power of solidarity. As we confront the challenges of our time, let us draw inspiration from these acts of resistance and work collectively toward a more just and equitable world.

Warmly,

Atul Chandra