

The Ninth Newsletter (2018): Tender and Radiant World of Sadness and Struggle



Dear Friends,

Sadness and struggle is the mood in Yemen. My Yemeni friends, caught in the midst of an endless war, had a particularly terrible ten days. Saudi-UAE aircraft struck another wedding, while they assassinated an important Yemeni political leader. The UN attempts to raise funds to tend to the 22 million Yemenis who cannot survive without humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, the new UN Special Envoy leaves his post in Syria – another unforgiving war – to try his hand at a political settlement in Yemen. This is the forgotten war, this war on Yemen – with Western arms dealers making a great deal of money selling munitions to the Saudis and the Emiratis who bomb without care for strategy. The details from this paragraph are in my report at *Alternet*, which you can read [here](#).

Surrender is not familiar to the human spirit. Yemen's people continue to struggle to survive. The picture above is of a wall painting done last year by the Yemeni artist Haifa Subay (whom you can follow on twitter: @haifasubay).



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The horrors of the war in Yemen and Syria appear to be without end. A glance eastward will bring us to the Korean peninsula, where the two leaders of the North (Kim Jong-un) and South (Moon Jae-in) will meet on Friday. These two countries have been at war since 1950. Threats of nuclear exchange on the peninsula are real and dangerous. In our first **Tricontinental dossier**, we went over the basic facts around the crisis on the peninsula. At *Newslick* this week, I have a brief reminder of the issues at stake as well as an assessment of the politics behind the handshake between the two leaders. You can read the report **here**.

What remains outside the room is the United States. It has 35,000 troops in South Korea and an additional 40,000 troops in Japan as well as nuclear armed ships and planes that circle the beleaguered state of North Korea. Unless those threats are removed, it is unlikely that any peace can be brokered for the peninsula. We hope otherwise.



In our post-colonial states, the question of ‘minority rights’ is a fraught one. Constitutions of great feeling defend the rights of minorities, but in practice these parts of the legal framework are set aside. Terrible violence is meted out to minority communities of one kind or the other, but mainly those who live at the edges of our states. In Pakistan, the question of the Pashtun people was brought to the fore when the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) gathered in Lahore this week for a massive protest. *Da sang azaadi da* – what kind of freedom is this – was the main chant.

The demands of the PTM – with Tahafuz meaning Protection – is to punish the killer of Naqeebullah Mehsud (killed in January by police officer Rao Anwar), to halt extra-judicial killings, to account for the missing, to dismantle the architecture of the War on Terror that tortures the people who live in the north-west region of Pakistan and to clear the area of dangerous land mines. One of the leaders of the movement is 26-year-old Manzoor Pashteen – whose photograph above was taken in the Lahore rally by Kahlid Mahmood. Pashteen has been memorably frank about the condition of the Pashtun peoples and the atrocities of the Pakistani state, which has acted as the adjutant of the West in its War on Terror. He is already being called Pakistan’s Frontier Gandhi, an homage to Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan – the great Pashtun leader who led his people against British imperialism. He has already galvanised vast sections of the Pakistani public to stand up for a different future. We hope that his vision comes to pass.

What the Pashtuns have experienced in Pakistan, the Chakma people have experienced in Bangladesh. These are a community that live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In 1964-65 – before Bangladesh was carved out of Pakistan – the Chakmas began to experience the limits of the post-colonial nation state. They were ejected from their land for the construction of the Kaptai Dam on the Karnaphuli River. Later, they would face persecution on religious and linguistic grounds. Political attempts by the Chakmas have earned them the wrath of the Bangladeshi state. The Bangladeshi journalist Rahnuma Ahmed has been tracking the atrocities against the Chakma people for decades – some of it documented in her fine book, *Tortured Truths*. This week, Rahnuma has a very finely written report on the abduction and freedom of two women activists Monti Chakma and Doyasona Chakma. I highly recommend that you read this report in *New Age* [here](#). It opens the door to an understanding of the conflict in the Hill Tracts. Follow Rahnuma’s work on twitter [@rahnumaahmed](#).



In South Africa, this has been a week of protests. It opened with the Abahlali baseMjondolo’s annual Unfreedom Day Rally in Durban. This group, which I had written about a few months ago [here](#), organizes the working poor to demand the right to a place to live and to demand the right to be alive. In our world, the working poor are barely treated as human beings. Abahlali spends its time defending squatters from eviction and holding regular assemblies of the poor, where they can fashion their own idea of society. The Unfreedom Day Rally is a political event in line with their work to put the views of the poor on the table. S’bu Zikode made the case that land should not be seen from merely a commercial framework, but it should be seen in a social manner. This is the kind of logic that needs to be taken seriously by intellectuals and policy makers. To read more about the Unfreedom Day Rally, please read the [article](#) by Dennis Webster who is a journalist with the new South African periodical *The Frame* (coming soon).

On Wednesday, the South African Trade Union Federation (SAFTU) and its allied unions took to the streets in South Africa against labour law ‘reform’. At issue here is the right to strike. The new laws, pushed by the new South African president Cyril Ramaphosa, are craftily written – pushing workers to an endless

conciliation process before they can strike (a timetable guaranteed to demoralise workers) and pushing unions to hold secret ballots. A low minimum wage rate and an attack on the political rights of workers led the strike. The leader of SAFTU – Zwelinzima Vavi – announced that if the government did not accept the workers' demands, the union federation would campaign for a two-day strike. There is little indication that the government will concede to these workers, and even less indication that other unions and political parties of the Left will break with the government and stand with the people. This has long been a problem in South Africa, this need to hold fast with the African National Congress despite its slow departure from its national liberation history. Perhaps the militancy of SAFTU and other unions will straighten the spine.

The picture above is from Daylin Paul – also of the *The Frame*.

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This is the world of sadness and struggle. Meanwhile, there is the world of corruption and power. I spent some time last week reading the memoir by James Comey, the former head of the US political police (FBI). It was part of a report that I was doing on the 'mirror trades' and money laundering that have become so integral a part of international business. Real estate and arms deals are key sites for these mirror trades. Trump was – as far as the German and US investigators are concerned – somewhere in the thick of these trades. These investigations are ongoing, with Deutsche Bank at their heart. I have a preliminary report on the question of Trump, Deutsche Bank and the corruption at the heart of power in the new issue of *Frontline*, which you can read [here](#).

Pay attention to the fact that Yemen and Syria are on fire, the working poor in South Africa struggle to make a living and the minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh fight for their dignity – while billions of dollars are siphoned out of countries in mirror trades to enter the shadowy sections of the international banking system. In the first *Working Document* of Tricontinental I suggested that this was part of the global Investment Strike. Whether Trump is actually found guilty or not is only one story. The other story is the prevalence of this kind of corruption, this form of routine mendacity that structures the world to push the majority of the planet's people into sadness and struggle.

Warmly, Vijay.