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This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of emerging nations with the potential to impact their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Special Article

Recognising Faith as a Tool for Resistance

- *Nousheen Sharmila Ritu**

A few days ago, a good friend of mine asked in reference to the ongoing genocide in Palestine, “What’s God’s justification for letting this happen and not intervening? I have encountered enough questions like this to know that most of the time, the inquirer does not really want to hear a philosophical or theological explanation of the problem of evil or human suffering. Rather, it is almost always an excuse in disguise to question God’s mercy or divine wisdom. And hence, I retaliated asking, isn’t it worth wondering why the Palestinian people, the subjects to these unfathomable atrocities, never question God’s mercy for a moment? My friend answered, “I actually thought about this and I think it’s because they do not have any other option– what else can they really do?” The answer momentarily frustrated me but then redirected my attention to a familiar problem– the unacceptance of faith as a tool or expression of resistance.

As the popular Marxist dictum goes- ‘religion is the opium of the masses’, religious faith is customarily and conveniently depicted as the resort of the weak or helpless. The submission to divine faith is often conflated with blindness or bias towards rationality as if being religious renders one to be passive in the face of trials or tribulations. This kind of biased conditioning and inadequate understanding of faith is probably one of the key reasons why secular people cannot wrap their heads around the extraordinary reaction of Palestinians in the face of this genocide. It is unfathomable how religion can strengthen an individual with this unbelievable level of patience, resilience and optimism.

There is a popular domain of resistance studies that explores the ‘everyday acts of resistance’ which is much different from explicit or organised forms of resistance such as rebellion, demonstration or retaliation. When we think of resistance, we usually immediately envision images of fervent riots, protests or other collective political action. However, there is another form of resistance that does not always materialize as collective action, instead it is expressed in subtle forms of everyday acts of defiance against the power structure. For instance, James C. Scott talks about Brechtian or Schweikian forms of resistance of powerless groups through acts such as foot-dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, etc. These everyday acts of resistance come off as daily practices that are intersectional, heterogenic and contingent due to varying contexts and circumstances.

Against such a context, it is worthwhile to explore how Palestinians continue to withhold religious values and practices in the brutal conditions they live in. The fact that Palestinians continue to have children despite innocent children being killed every single day is a powerful act of resistance. Each utterance of *alhamdulillah* (all praises and gratitude are for Allah) and *hasbunAllahu ni’maal wakeel* (indeed Allah is the best disposer of all affairs) is an expression of resistance as they refuse to concede to intimidation or despair despite the ceaseless violence in their lives. To think that Palestinians hold on to their faith because it is their last resort is to undermine their agency and resistance. More importantly, it takes the attention away from recognising that having faith or spirituality can be an everyday act of resistance against the oppression of an occupying force.

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Tragedy mounts as Israel-Gaza war continues past 230 days

Following 230 days of war, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continue to live amidst famine and an ongoing genocidal onslaught by the Israeli military. As of yet, negotiations between Israel and Hamas have not borne any fruit, mainly as a result of continued Israeli attempts at sabotaging them. Despite calls not to do so from allies and foes alike, Israel began the invasion of Rafah in earnest on May 6. Since then, the Zionist entity has rejected a ceasefire deal accepted by Hamas, which would have ensured a ceasefire, the release of all captives and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. After talks broke down, Israeli forces attempted a large-scale invasion which was supposedly rejected by the US, due to which Israel conducted airstrikes on Rafah, and seized the Rafah crossing, closing it. Following that, the IDF entered populated areas of the city on 14 May, leading to many civilian deaths. On 24 May, the International Court of Justice ordered an immediate halt to the offensive, which Israel openly flaunted by continuing operations, and perpetrating the infamous Tel al-Sultan massacre in a designated safe area on May 26. The attack killed at least 45 civilians and drew international criticism as videos of burning civilian corpses and beheaded babies rapidly circulated on social media to the shock of international audiences.

In the international arena, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) backed a Palestinian bid, with 143 votes in favour and nine against – including the US and Israel, to become a full UN member by recognising it as qualified to join and recommending the UN Security Council “reconsider the matter favourably”. As it stands, the US veto remains the only obstacle to Palestine getting the UN Security Council’s backing for full membership. On the other hand, in coordinated announcements, Spain, Norway and Ireland unveiled plans to recognise a Palestinian state on 28 May, while the Colombia government withdrew its diplomats from Israel and broke relations with the country on May 2, announcing it would soon open an embassy in Ramallah. Experts opined that the developments showed the desire of more and more Western nations to advance a credible political track to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza and support Palestinian self-determination. The US remains the only unwavering ally of Israel, although the former has increasingly had to go to extraordinary lengths to cover up for its ally – repeatedly claiming Israel had not crossed any red lines in Rafah yet as the IDF continued to massacre civilians in full media view, pour money into the costly Gaza pier which has been practically useless and a media eyewash unable to provide Gazans with any meaningful aid, threaten the ICC with sanctions for going on with the genocide trial, and continue providing arms and lethal weapons to the IDF to be used in the Gaza war.

Meanwhile, the material and human catastrophe of the war has been piling up, with no end in sight. The number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza as of June 3 is at least 36,439 dead, including more than 15,000 children, while the

number of Palestinians wounded has reached more than 82,627. The number of missing people is more than 10,000. In the Occupied West Bank, there have been at least 523 deaths, of whom more than 132 are children, while more than 5,000 are injured. According to the latest data from the UN, WHO and the Palestinian government as of June 2, more than half of Gaza homes have been destroyed or damaged, 80% of commercial facilities, 86% of school buildings, 14 out of 35 hospitals are partially functioning, 83% of groundwater wells are not operational, while 267 places of worship have been damaged. Every hour in Gaza, 15 people are killed, of whom 6 are children, while 35 people are injured and 12 buildings are destroyed. As of April 5, more than 100 journalists, predominantly Palestinians, had been killed since October 7. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 96 Palestinian, three Lebanese, and four Israeli journalists were killed.

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ICC prosecutor seeks criminal warrants against Israeli officials in Gaza genocide as world court orders Israel to stop Rafah offensive

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan stated that he had requested arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his defence chief Yoav Gallant, and three Hamas leaders (Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Al-Masri, the commander-in-chief of Hamas' military wing known as Deif, and Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas' Political Bureau) for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Israeli leaders have overseen Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza since the Palestinian terrorist group's attacks on Israel on October 7. The reaction of the United States, Israel's primary supporter, was unsurprisingly swift. President Joe Biden called the prosecutor's actions against Israel's leaders "outrageous" and accused the ICC of drawing false moral analogies between Hamas and Israel.

Many have noted the hypocrisy of the US response to the news of impending ICC warrants, since only a year ago the US was full of praise for the ICC when the court issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and another Russian official for alleged international crimes in the Ukraine war. This is symptomatic of the US supporting the ICC only when it suited its own interests while distancing and criticising when it did not; the US has not even become a signatory of the ICC over fears that its own soldiers and generals could be prosecuted for war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, a dozen Republican senators warned the ICC against issuing arrest warrants for Israeli officials over the country's conduct during the Gaza war, stating that such actions are "illegitimate and lack legal basis," and threatening severe sanctions against Khan and the ICC.

The news of arrest warrants came a day after judges at the ICC ordered Israel to immediately cease its military assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, in an unprecedented emergency judgment in South Africa's genocide case against Israel. The case was seen by many as a stark sign of Israel's global isolation over its campaign in Gaza, especially its brutality in the attacks on Rafah, and attempts to sabotage medication efforts to end the war. The ICJ also ordered Israel to open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza so that supplies could be delivered. Israel, it noted, must provide investigators access and report on its progress within one month. The panel of 15 foreign judges voted 13-2 in favour of the ruling, with only Ugandan and Israeli judges voting against it. Senior Hamas officials called upon the U.N. Security Council "to immediately implement this demand by the World Court into practical measures to compel the Zionist enemy to implement the decision."

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Iranian President dies in tragic helicopter crash

According to Iran's official media, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian were confirmed to have died in a helicopter crash in hilly terrain and freezing conditions, after search crews finally were able to locate the wreckage in the East Azerbaijan province of Iran. Malek Rahmati, the governor of East Azerbaijan, and Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, the Iranian supreme leader's envoy in the region, who were aboard the same helicopter with the president and foreign minister, were also declared dead. In the aftermath of the crash and news of the deaths of the leaders, First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was confirmed as interim president. According to Reuters, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani was appointed acting foreign minister. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared five days of mourning. In the face of adverse weather and challenging terrain, the location of the wreckage was identified with the help of a Turkish drone which detected a source of heat believed to be the helicopter's wreckage and transmitted the location to Iranian officials, who dispatched a large rescue squad to the location and found the wreckage.

World leaders have been offering their condolences to Iran in the aftermath of Raisi's death. Among notable leaders are Türkiye's Erdogan, Russia's Putin, China's Xi, UAE President Mohammad Bin Zayed, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, as well as European Council President, Charles Michel. Lebanon, which has close connections with Iran, declared three days of national mourning for Iran's president, while the Palestinian resistance organization Hamas, released a statement thanking Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian for their assistance in the continuing conflict that began on October 7. On the other hand, Reuters reported that an Israeli official has told the news agency it was not involved in the helicopter crash. Raisi's death comes at a time of rising regional tensions, fuelled by Israel's attack on Gaza, which has threatened to escalate into a larger regional confrontation. Iran launched an unprecedented attack on Israel last month, following an Israeli strike that killed top Iranian Revolutionary Guard officers inside Iran's embassy in Damascus.

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World's 1st treaty on artificial intelligence adopted by Europe

In a historic move, Europe has adopted the world's first treaty on artificial intelligence (AI). The Council of Europe (CoE) approved the world's first legally binding treaty aimed at regulating the use of artificial intelligence (AI), following a vote by foreign ministers from 46 member states at the annual meeting of the CoE's Committee of Ministers this month. The move comes amidst calls by experts urging international organizations and governments to address the risks associated with AI technology, which is anticipated to deeply impact human life in the near future.

The convention is the culmination of two years of effort by an intergovernmental body that included the Council's 46 member states, the European Union, and 11 non-member states such as the United States and the Vatican, along with representatives from civil society and academia. Among its various provisions, the treaty mandates that parties ensure AI systems are not employed to weaken democratic institutions and processes, according to the CoE. The framework convention is expected to be signed in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, during a conference of ministers of justice next September.

Earlier, in March, the European Parliament passed comprehensive regulations for governing artificial intelligence, covering advanced systems such as OpenAI's ChatGPT. Senior EU officials have stated that these rules, initially proposed in 2021, are designed to shield citizens from the rapid advancements in AI technology while also promoting innovation across Europe. The adoption of these measures comes amidst growing concerns over the rapid advancement of AI technologies and their potential societal impacts. Experts say that these developments mark a significant step towards establishing a coherent and unified approach to AI regulation not just in Europe but on a global scale.

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UN approves resolution to commemorate 1995 Srebrenica genocide

The United Nations General Assembly has approved a resolution to establish an annual day of remembrance for the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, despite significant opposition from Bosnian Serbs and Serbia. The resolution, initiated by Germany and Rwanda and supported by over a dozen countries including the United States, France, and the Netherlands, culminated in the designation of July 11 as the International Day of Remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide. The UNGA decision is seen by many as an important step in acknowledging and educating about the atrocities that occurred during the 1995 Bosnian War, where Serb forces perpetrated genocide against the local Muslim Bosniak population. Bosnian Serb forces captured Srebrenica, a UN-protected enclave at the time, on July 11, 1995, a few months before the end of Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil war. They then killed over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica, in what is considered the worst single atrocity in Europe since World War II.

The resolution, however, has reignited tensions in the region, particularly amongst Bosnian Serbs. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has strongly opposed the resolution, arguing it could lead to further division and instability. Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has also denounced the resolution, claiming it aims to demonize the Serb people. In a letter sent Sunday to all UN delegations, Serbian charge d'affaires Sasa Mart warned that raising "historically sensitive topics serves only to deepen division and may bring additional instability to the Balkans". Russia's UN ambassador, Vasily Nebenzia, called the resolution "provocative" and a "threat to peace and security"; Moscow had previously vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning the "crime of genocide at Srebrenica". For relatives of massacre victims however, the UN debate was seen as an important milestone in their quest for peace; Denis Becirovic, the Bosniak member of Bosnia's tripartite presidency, said that the resolution was "of the highest importance for spreading the truth."

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Putin goes on two-day visit to China

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated their "no-limits" friendship, which has grown as both nations face mounting tensions with the West, and condemned the United States' military alliances in Asia and the Pacific. The statement came after Putin travelled to China on May 16 for a two-day state visit to China as part of his first foreign trip after beginning his fifth term, highlighting an increasingly strong relationship between Moscow and Beijing. According to sources, Xi invited his "dear friend" Putin to China's third Belt and Road Initiative forum where the leaders of 130 countries were set to discuss one of Xi's signature international projects. At their summit in Beijing, Putin hailed Xi for China's recommendations to settle the conflict in Ukraine, which Ukraine and its Western allies have rejected as mostly adopting the Kremlin's stance. They declared their opposition to the United States on a variety of security concerns, as well as a common perspective on everything from Taiwan and Ukraine to North Korea, as well as collaboration on new peaceful nuclear technology and financing.

Putin's two-day official visit to one of his most important friends and commercial partners comes as Russian soldiers launch an attack in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv area, marking the most major border incursion into Ukraine since the full-scale invasion back in 2022. Despite claims of impartiality, China has supported the Kremlin's accusations that the West led Russia into attacking Ukraine, and continues to supply vital components required by Moscow for weapons manufacture. Resisting Western criticism of its cooperation with Moscow, China has claimed that Russo-Chinese relations do not violate international conventions and that it has the right to engage with any government it chooses. Trade between neighbouring China and Russia increased dramatically to \$240 billion last year, helping Moscow mitigate crippling Western sanctions since it launched a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Moscow has diverted the majority of its energy exports to China and depended on Chinese enterprises to purchase high-tech components for Russian defence sectors in order to avoid Western sanctions.

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Major heatwave across South and Southeast Asia sign of worsening climate change

Since April 2024, large parts of South and Southeast Asia, ranging from Pakistan to the Philippines, have experienced prolonged extreme heat. The heatwaves, affecting some of the world's most densely populated regions, impacted everything from individual health and well-being to the economy and education. Many students in India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines have been ordered to stay at home for days owing to a serious health risk from intense heat. Bangladesh even stopped all elementary schools for several weeks after the temperature reached 43.8°C on April 30. The heatwaves are also becoming a key topic in India's election, while in many of the cities of the region, it has adversely impacted labour productivity. Extreme heat in a tropical environment can be less pleasant and more dangerous than the same temperature in a desert since high humidity prevents the body from effectively sweating and cooling – in extreme heatwaves, especially above 38°C, the chances of heat exhaustion and heatstroke increase dramatically.

Heatwaves can be caused by local conditions such as lack of vegetation in urban spaces and local wind patterns, as well as global influences such as El Niño (warm phase of a natural oscillation of temperatures in the tropical Pacific) and climate change. The Pacific has been in an El Niño phase since May 2023, causing increased heat and worsening global warming in many regions. In regions of Asia, this leads to episodes of excessive heat occurring more frequently, staying longer, and being even more intense in addition to global warming's contribution. This is particularly perilous for cities in South and Southeast Asia that are struck by the current sequence of heatwaves, which have seen a long-term increase in the frequency of days in April with such dangerously high temperatures during the last 85 years. Amidst projected increases in extremely hot temperatures in the region, experts have demanded the adoption of rapid adaptation measures and heat action plans, along with the obvious global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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Scientists debate whether microplastics discovered in human testes are connected with rise in male infertility

According to the latest research done in connection with microplastics and human health, researchers at the University of New Mexico observed the presence of microplastics in more human and animal organs. The researchers found traces of 12 distinct types of microplastics in 47 canine and 23 human testes obtained from neutering surgeries and cadavers, respectively. This follows in the wake of earlier studies which found microplastics in the bloodstream, and in other human organs such as the liver, the heart, and the lungs. The concern with the latest study, however, lies in the fact that the human testes are one of two places protected by a special blood barrier and that scientists did not expect microplastics to cross this barrier in the first place. In light of this new information, some have begun to ask questions about whether microplastics could be a driving factor in the decline of male fertility rates.

Others, however, have cautiously pointed out that correlation is not tantamount to causation, since this study simply adds to what we know about the presence of microplastics in the human body, but does not establish a definite cause-effect relationship between microplastics and male fertility rates. Simply put, more research is required to understand the full impact of microplastics on reproduction. The research also brings to the fore the issue of plastic pollution and the role of major corporations in this regard. The United Nations estimates that 400 million tons of plastic waste is produced each year. According to a 2020 research, petrochemical corporations were found to carry the greatest responsibility for single-use plastic trash. According to the survey, 20 petrochemical corporations account for more than half of the world's single-use plastic garbage, with ExxonMobil leading the way, while just 100 firms manufacture 90% of all single-use plastic.

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Islamophobia is the major theme of Indian elections

Irfan Ahmad, while discussing the concerning state of democracy in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, highlights several key issues contributing to the erosion of democratic principles and the rise of authoritarian tendencies. One of the primary concerns is the systematic targeting of Muslims, which has become a central strategy for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its electoral alliance the NDA. Muslims are frequently portrayed as threats, with rhetoric that links them to terrorism and illegal activities. This has created a climate of fear and repression, which has been exacerbated by incidents of bulldozers being used to demolish Muslim homes and places of worship, reminiscent of tactics used in other authoritarian regimes. However, the oppositional Indian National Congress (INC), and its alliance the INDIA, are not friends of the Indian Muslims either, and Irfan Ahmad shows how Congress has been practicing a soft version of Hindutva politics for a long time, despite mouthing hollow slogans calling for Hindu-Muslim unity. These attitudes, argues Ahmad, point to populist anti-pluralistic trends that depict Christians and Muslims as not belonging to "the real India" and aim to simultaneously achieve the gory pursuit of building a Hindu state.

In practice, therefore, the figure of the Muslim has been envisioned as the common enemy by both the BJP and Congress, as seen in various aspects. Firstly, Ahmad shows that both parties made accusations against each other of acting like the "communalist" Muslim League of 1947. BJP's Modi in an electoral speech said that the Congress would promote Muslim interests above those of Hindus like the Muslim League, while the Congress replied that it was the BJP whose political ancestors had been "in love with" the Muslim League. Secondly, Ahmad notes that Modi had further accused Congress of being anti-Hindu because it did not attend the Ram temple's dedication event. However, it is generally known that although Congress misled Muslims into believing that the Babri Masjid would be safeguarded, it unofficially allowed the construction of a Ram temple on the same site where the Babri Masjid had stood for generations. In fact, Congress confessed in 2019 that it sponsored the construction of a temple dedicated to the Hindu deity Ram. Using these examples, Ahmad argues that in actuality, there is widespread agreement among both government and opposition parties about Muslims being the ultimate adversary, even though, in the political arena, they act as opponents.

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