

Imperial Terror in the Homeland

We did what we ourselves [Filipino working people] had decided upon—as free people, and power resides in the people. What we did was our heritage . . . We decided to rebel, to rise up and strike down the sources of power. I said “We are Sakdals! We want immediate, complete, and absolute independence.” No uprising fails. Each one is a step in the right direction.

—Salud Almagre, in an interview with David Sturtevant

In spite of the universal horror at the perverse torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and the ruthless devastation of Iraq and Afghanistan by U.S. occupation forces, the U.S. ruling class seems undeterred in pursuing its relentless quest of world domination by military means. Opportunistically seizing the catastrophe of September 11, 2001, the U.S. power elite is desperately trying to resolve the crisis of finance capital by unilateral state terrorism. Whether Democratic or Republican, U.S. politicians all justify the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Selected American intellectuals have been mobilized to legitimate this version of “just war” by theorizing the “clash of civilizations” and the defense of neoliberal democracy by fascist violence. While empire has been disavowed as part of American “exceptionalism,” apologias for “humanitarian” imperialism are now fashionable. Professor Amy Kaplan, former president of the American Studies Association, strongly denounced the USA PATRIOT Act and the idea of homeland security as “violent” acts of secrecy and deception (2004, 3). One example of this attempt to vindicate a long history of violent interventions—preemptive wars for regime change—is the rewriting of the brutal war of the United States to suppress the Filipino independence struggle a century ago. The repressed returns—in the guise of triumphalist celebrations of imperialist barbarism and genocide (Shalom 2004).

When U.S. occupation troops in Iraq continued to suffer casualties every day after the war officially ended, academics and journalists began

in haste to supply capsule histories comparing their situation with those of troops in the Philippines during the Filipino-American War (1899–1902). A *New York Times* article summed up the lesson in its title, “In 1901 Philippines, Peace Cost More Lives Than Were Lost in War” (July 2, 2003, B1), while an article in the *Los Angeles Times* contrasted the simplicity of McKinley’s “easy” goal of annexation (though at the cost of 1.4 million Filipinos killed, 4,234 U.S. soldiers slain, and 3,000 wounded) with George W. Bush’s ambition to “create a new working democracy as soon as possible” (July 20, 2003, M2). *Wall Street Journal* writer Max Boot extolled the counterrevolutionary victory of the U.S. armed forces in destroying the revolutionary Philippine Republic (2002).

To learn critically from the lessons of the past, we need to place historical conjunctures in the context of present circumstances in the Philippines and of the international crisis of globalized capital. What is the real connection between the Philippines and the current U.S. war against terrorism?

Missionary Retribution

With the death of Martin Burnham, the hostage held by Muslim kidnapers (who called themselves “Abu Sayyaf”) in Mindanao, the southernmost island of the Philippines, one would expect that the more than twelve hundred American troops (including FBI and CIA) training Filipinos for that rescue mission would have headed home in late 2002. Instead of being recalled, reinforcements were brought in and more joint military exercises were announced for the future. Since September 11, 2001, U.S. mass media and Filipino government propagandists have dilated on the Abu Sayyaf’s tenuous links with Osama bin Laden. A criminal gang that uses Islamic slogans to hide its kidnapping-for-ransom activities, the Abu Sayyaf is a splinter group born out of the U.S. war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and used by the government to sow discord among the insurgent partisans of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and others fighting for genuine substantive autonomy. Protected by local politicians and military officials, the Abu Sayyaf’s persistence betokens the complicated history of the centuries-long struggle of about ten million Muslims in the Philippines for dignity, justice, and self-determination (Bauzon 1991; Stauffer 1981).

What is the background to the return of the former colonizer to what was once called its “insular territory” administered at the start by the infamous Bureau of Indian Affairs? With Secretary Colin Powell’s decision to stigmatize as “terrorist” the major insurgent group that has been fighting for forty years for popular democracy and independence—the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing the New People’s Army (NPA), both members of the National Democratic Front, the intro-

duction of thousands of U.S. troops, weapons, logistics, and supporting personnel has been given an imprimatur of legitimacy. More is involved than simply converting the archipelago to instant military facilities for the U.S. military—a bargain exchange for the strategic outposts Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base formerly “owned” by the United States and scrapped by a resurgent Filipino nationalism a decade ago. With key military officials practically managing the executive branch of government, the Philippine nation-state will once again prove to be more an appendage of the Pentagon than a humdrum neocolony administered by oligarchic compradors, a dependent formation since nominal independence in 1946. On the whole, Powell’s stigmatizing act is part of the New American Century Project to reinstall a new *pax Americana* after the Cold War.

Immediately after the proclaimed defeat of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, the Philippines became the second battlefield in the U.S. war to impose its “*pax Americana* in a grossly unequal world” (Foner 2004). Raymond Bonner, author of *Waltzing with Dictators* (1987), queries the obvious rationale: “the desire for a quick victory over terrorism, . . . the wish to reassert American power in Southeast Asia. . . . If Washington’s objective is to wipe out the international terrorist organizations that pose a threat to world stability, the Islamic terrorist groups operating in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir would seem to be a higher priority than Abu Sayyaf” (*New York Times*, June 10, 2002), or those in Indonesia, a far richer and promising region in terms of oil and other abundant natural resources. As in the past, during the Huk rebellion in the Philippines in the Cold War years, the United States acted as “the world’s policeman,” aiding the local military in “civic action” projects to win “hearts and minds,” a rehearsal for Vietnam. Given this time-tested *modus operandi*, Washington used the Abu Sayyaf as a cover for establishing a forward logistics and operation base in Southeast Asia to be able to conduct swift preemptive strikes against its perceived enemies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, China, and elsewhere.

Overall, however, the intervention of U.S. Special Forces in solving a local problem inflamed Filipino sensibilities, its collective memory still recovering from the nightmare of the brutal Marcos dictatorship. What disturbed everyone was the Cold-War practice of “Joint Combined Exchange Training” exercises. In South America, Africa, and Indonesia, such U.S. foreign policy initiatives merged with counterinsurgency operations that channeled military logistics and personnel to favored regimes notorious for flagrant human rights violations (Ray and Schaap 2003). In El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, and other parts of the hemisphere, the U.S. role in organizing death squads began with Special Operations Forces advisers who set up “intelligence networks” ostensibly against the narcotics trade but actually targeting leftist insurgents and nationalists. The well-known CIA

operative Colonel Edward Lansdale, who later masterminded the Phoenix atrocities in Vietnam, rehearsed similar counterinsurgency techniques during the Huk insurrection in the fifties (Schirmer and Shalom 1987).

Today, U.S. soldiers deployed with the local military (a blatant violation of the Philippine Constitution) are pursuing those “terrorists” defined by the U.S. State Department—guerillas of the New People’s Army, Moro resistance fighters, and other progressive organizations. Scarcely has the first decade of the new millennium ended, predatory American troops are again haunting the boondocks (from *bundok*, in Tagalog, means “mountain” refuge for guerillas) in search of prey.

Crusade of “Manifest Destiny”

A moment of reflection returns us to what historian Bernard Fall called “the first Vietnam,” the Filipino-American War, in which 1.4 million Filipinos died. The campaign to conquer the Philippines was designed in accordance with President William McKinley’s policy of “Benevolent Assimilation” of those they treated as unchristian natives, a “civilizing mission” that Mark Twain considered worthy of the Puritan settlers in the proverbial “virgin land.” In Twain’s classic prose: “Thirty thousand killed a million. It seems a pity that the historian let that get out; it is really a most embarrassing circumstance” (1992).

In “*Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903*” (1982), Stuart Creighton Miller recounts the U.S. military’s “scorched earth” tactics in recalcitrant Filipino guerilla strongholds, atrocities from “search and destroy” missions reminiscent of Song My and My Lai in Vietnam. This episode in the glorious history of the U.S. empire is usually accorded a marginal footnote, or a token paragraph in school textbooks. Miller only mentions in passing the U.S. attempt to domesticate the unhispanized Moros, the Muslim Filipinos in Mindanao and Sulu islands. On March 9, 1906, four years after President Theodore Roosevelt declared the war over, Major General Leonard Wood, commanding 540 soldiers, killed a beleaguered group of 600 Muslim men, women, and children in the battle of Mount Dajo. A less publicized but horrific battle occurred on June 13, 1913, when the Muslim sultanate of Sulu mobilized about five thousand followers (men, women, and children) against the American troops led by Captain John Pershing. The battle of Mount Bagsak, twenty-five kilometers east of Jolo City, ended with the death of 340 Americans and of 2,000 (some say 3000) Moro defenders. Pershing was true to form—earlier he had left a path of destruction in Lanao, Samal Island, and other towns where local residents fought his incursions. Anyone who resisted U.S. aggression was either a “brigand” or seditious ban-

dit; the “anti-brigandage” campaigns of the first three decades suppressed numerous peasant revolts and workers’ strikes—a carnage of genocidal proportion. Eventually the islands became a model of a pacified neocolony (Pomeroy 1992)

Except for Miller’s book and assorted studies, nothing of consequence about the effects of that process of barbaric subjugation has disturbed American Studies scholarship despite the recent “transnationalization” of cultural studies in general. This is usually explained by the theory that the United States did not follow the old path of European colonialism, and its war against Spain (now compared to the war against Iraqi and Afghani insurgents) was pursued to liberate the natives from Spanish tyranny. If so, that war now rescued from the dustbin of history signaled the advent of a globalizing U.S. interventionism whose latest manifestation, in a different historical register, is Bush’s “National Security Strategy” of “exercising self-defense [of the Homeland] by acting preemptively,” assuming that might is right, imposing “regime change” for the sake of corporate profit-making—this latter is always glamorized in the slogan of America delivering “freedom and democracy” to the ravaged lands of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Comprador and Tributary Barbarism

Since nominal independence in 1946, especially during the U.S.–Marcos dictatorship (1972–1986), neocolonial state terrorism first in the name of anticommunism, and then later of “law and order,” has inflicted havoc on the lives of millions of Filipinos. Despite the appeals of human rights organizations, religious groups, and international opinion, nothing seems to have stopped the Arroyo military in its campaign of deliberate slaughter. If the security and health of millions of workers, peasants, and indigenous peoples in Mindoro, Mindanao, and other embattled regions cannot be protected by the neocolonial state that commands the legal monopoly of violence and other coercive means, then that government has lost legitimacy. In fact, it is open to being convicted for state terrorism in the court of world opinion (San Juan 2007b). Since the Philippine polity is defined as a constitutional republic, citizens from whom all power emanates have the right to alter the social contract if the government has failed to answer their needs. All signs indicate that the social contract has been broken, violated, damaged many times over since the country became a mock-sovereign nation in 1946.

It is precisely on this ground—the massive state terrorism of the military bureaucracy, police and paramilitary forces of the neocolonial state—that Luis Jalandoni (2002), the chairperson of the National Democratic

Front spearheading the revolution, responded to the Colin Powell–Arroyo doctrine of summary condemnation of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army as “terrorist” organizations. Jalandoni called on the present regime to renounce state terrorism and indemnify its numerous victims: thousands of prisoners and activists killed in assassinations, extrajudicial executions, and indiscriminate massacre by the military. It would indeed be traumatic to recount the litany of human rights violations that burden our history since the Marcos dictatorship, nay, since the Filipino-American War, with millions of Filipinos and Moros killed by the “civilizing” missionaries of U.S. “Manifest Destiny.”

Serfs of the Global Bourgeoisie

For the moment, before addressing the struggle for decolonization, I want to shift your attention first to this unprecedented phenomenon in Philippine history, a qualitative change in our geopolitical status in the present world-system linkage of industrialized centers and peripheral or dependent social formations. This is the diaspora of close to ten million Filipino OFWs, 10 percent of the population of ninety million, around the world—about four million in North America and roughly six million more in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.

During the U.S. colonial period, thousands of Filipinos migrated to the metropole, first as recruited workers for the sugar plantations in Hawaii, and then as seamen, U.S. Navy personnel, nurses and doctors, and so on (San Juan 1999). Since the Marcos martial-law regime, the “warm body export” (including mail-order brides, children, and modern “slaves” in the global sex traffic) accelerated tremendously. This is explained by the worsening crisis of a neocolonial society—chronic unemployment, rampant poverty, corruption, criminality, military atrocities—that coincides with what Stefan Engel, in his powerful book *Twilight of the Gods—Gottterdammerung over the New World Order*, indicts as “the policy of neoliberalism with its propaganda of unrestricted flow of capital, privatization, deregulation,” and so on (2003, 368).

Every day three thousand Filipinos leave for abroad as the servants/maids of the globalized world order. In Hong Kong alone, over 150,000 Filipina domestics service the middle strata and elite. Moreover, 25 percent of the world’s seafarers, and cruise waiters, are Filipinos. With 10 percent of the population scattered around the three continents as cheap or affordable labor, mainly domestics and semiskilled workers, the Philippines has become the world’s leading supplier of what is euphemistically called “human capital”—in actuality, hands to do work for minimal pay, tied to jobs often humiliating and sometimes unpaid, producing enormous surplus

value (profits) for transnational corporations as well as for affluent sectors in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Everyone knows that these Filipino workers' remittance of billions of dollars—\$10 to \$12 billion annually—(aside from exorbitant government fees and taxes) is the major earner of dollars needed to pay the onerous foreign debt and keep the system afloat. It guarantees the privileges of the comprador and landlord oligarchy. It preserves and aggravates the impoverishment of over half of the working population. Despite the unrelenting cases of inhumane treatment, rape, all kinds of conceivable deprivation, and murder—about three to four coffins of OFWs arrive daily at the Manila International Airport, reminiscent of Flor Contemplacion and others—the humorless Labor Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas was quoted as saying: "It's not politically correct to say you're exporting people, but it's part of globalization, and I like to think that countries like ours, rich in human resources, have that to contribute to the rest of the world" (Diamond 1999). It seems that more than four hundred years of colonization are not sufficient for Filipinos to sacrifice themselves to the white-supremacist bourgeoisie at the altar of consumerism and commodity-fetishism.

Generations of Filipinos have contributed prodigiously to the accumulation of surplus-value and total wealth of the planet—except to our own country, the very soil and land of which have been depleted, polluted, plundered, its people exploited and oppressed in diverse ways. One commentator advises Filipinos to be versatile, in keeping with "flexible" capitalism: "Look Asian, think Spanish, act American. . . ." Is this a joke? I doubt the appropriateness of this maxim, something that not a few traditional social scientists delight in when they proclaim that Filipino culture is one proud of its diversity, hybridity, cosmopolitanism, and other disingenuous rubrics to compensate for the horrific reality. Some usually resort to an apologetic reprise about how the "third world" poor excel in spiritual beauty. But inner wealth, like inner beauty, is precisely the symptom of the profound alienation and disenchantment afflicting the benighted recipients of Western modernity—multitudes of colonial subalterns blessed by commodity-exchange (their bodies, among others), by the freewheeling market and the relentless commodification of everything under the aegis of sacred private property.

Now we know that all things develop via contradictions and the dialectical process of their unending resolution. The diaspora of ten million Filipinos is bound to generate forces of critique and transformation with their own self-generated leadership. They will surely emancipate themselves, for nobody else can do it for them. Already OFWs in Hong Kong, Canada, and elsewhere have organized as far as the laws will allow; our compatriots in Europe, in countries where they are subjected to vicious racist treatment, have also become more politically aware and have

mobilized to raise consciousness and protest their inhumane conditions. If and when they return, we hope that they will not be cadavers but vibrant bodies ready for militant engagements in the political arena, not just with the panicked pursuit of the creature comforts of a frayed if not mystifying bourgeois public sphere, the pleasures of a “cannibalistic” (if this term has not been demystified by the black market selling of body parts such as kidneys, hearts, eyes, and so on) predatory civil society.

Festivals of the Oppressed

The revolutionary upsurge in the Philippines against the Marcos dictatorship (1972–1986) stirred up dogmatic cold war complacency. With the inauguration of a postmodernist stage in cultural and humanistic studies in the post-cold war era, the historical reality of U.S. imperialism (inaugurated by the genocide of Native Americans and confirmed by the subjugation of the indigenes of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Hawaii) is finally being excavated and reappraised. But this is, of course, a new development brought about by the confluence of multifarious events, among them: the demise of the Soviet Union as a challenger to U.S. hegemony; the sublation of the sixties in both Fukuyama’s “end of history” and the interminable “culture wars,” the Palestinian intifadas; the Zapatista revolt against the North American Free Trade Agreement; the vicissitudes of the ongoing U.S. anti-Islamic fundamentalist holocaust in Afghanistan and Iraq; and the fabled “clash of civilizations.” Despite these changes, the old frames of intelligibility have not been modified or reconfigured to understand how nationalist revolutions in the dominated territories cannot be confused with the chauvinist patriotism of the hegemonic metropole, or to grasp fully how the mode of U.S. imperial rule after World War II differs in form and content from those of the British or French in the nineteenth century. The received consensus of a developmental, modernizing impact on the colonized by the capitalist taskmasters remains deeply entrenched. Even deconstructionist thinkers commit the mistake of censuring the liberatory projects of the subalternized peoples because these projects (in the condescending gaze of these scholastics) have been damaged by emancipatory passion and soon to become perverted into despotic post-colonial regimes, such as those in Ghana, Algeria, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The only alternative, it seems, is to give assent to the process of globalization under the aegis of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund/World Trade Organization, and hope for a kind of “enlightened” patronage in the style of Bush’s “compassionate” conservatism.

What remains to be carefully evaluated, above all, is the historical specificity or singularity of each of these projects of decolonization and

national liberation, their class composition, historical roots, programs, ideological tendencies, and political agendas within the context of “humanitarian” imperial supremacy (for a background on the capitalist crisis, see Dickhut 1986; Fitt, Faire, and Vigier 1980). It is imprudent if not fatuous to pronounce summary judgments on the character and fate of nationalist movements in the peripheral formations without focusing on the complex manifold relations between colonizer and colonized, the dialectical interaction between their forces as well as others caught in the conflict (Weightman 1970). Otherwise, the result would be a mendacious ethical utopianism such as that found in U.S. “postnationalist” discourse that, in the final analysis, functions as an apology for the machinations of the transnational corporate powers ensconced in the nation-states of the North, in particular for the hegemonic rule of the only remaining superpower claiming to act in the name of everyone’s freedom and salvation.

The project of national liberation acquires substance in the Filipino critique of imperialist ideology and its vision of a truly sovereign, just, egalitarian society. Among Filipino progressive intellectuals, Renato Constantino (1978) is distinguished for his acute grasp of how the profound Americanization of the Filipino psyche, mediated through the instrumentalities of education, mass media, elections, and so forth, prevented the majority from seeing through the myths of American democracy, free trade, altruism, and so on. Constantino exposed the Filipino elite, the “new *ilustrados*,” as effective conduits for neocolonial control, a fact witnessed by the sycophancy to the United States of succeeding administrations since the country’s nominal independence in 1946. The criminal regime of Ferdinand Marcos at the height of the cold war epitomized the demagoguery, corruption, and brutality of the neocolonial state manipulated by U.S. overseers (Sison and de Lima 1998). Not to be outdone, the treacherous policies of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo have not only abetted the barbaric U.S. aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq but also surrendered the country’s sovereignty to the Pentagon as well as to the onerous diktat of the managers of globalization: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (Tuazon et al. 2002).

From the Marcos dictatorship to the politically bankrupt regimes of Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and up to Macapagal-Arroyo, the Filipino people suffered intolerable hardships and unconscionable deprivations. Countless atrocities and human rights violations (extrajudicial political killings, forced “disappearances,” torture, and so on committed with unconscionable impunity) perpetrated by the neocolonial state since the Marcos era are still unpunished up to this day. Severe unemployment caused by the International Monetary Fund-World Bank “structural conditionalities,” and government policies of privatization

and deregulation, have driven millions of Filipinos to seek work abroad (Gonzalez 1999). With a corrupt oligarchy that supervises not only the state apparatus but also the institutions of civil society, the U.S. strategy of “low intensity democracy,” which accompanies “low intensity” counterrevolutionary measures, continues to wreak havoc on the daily lives of workers, peasants, women, urban poor, and middle strata (white-collar workers and petite-bourgeois professionals). Taking account of the U.S. military presence in the Philippines for almost a century, and the U.S. stranglehold over its economy, culture and politics, Filipino jurist Romeo Capulong recently handed out this judgment based on a substantial inventory of evidence: “I find the U.S. government accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity it committed and continues to commit against the Filipino people and peoples of other countries in over more than a century of colonial and neocolonial rule in the Philippines” (2004). The verdict still awaits execution by the masses of victims.

Scholastic Complicity

We may ask at this point to what extent the discipline of cultural studies (of which I am a practitioner), for all its claims to offer oppositional critiques of establishment orthodoxies, has engaged the crisis of transnational globalization, in particular U.S. terrorism against the peoples of the world. The answer is: Precious little, from the perspective of the OFWs and the victims of ruthless U.S. bombing in Iraq and Afghanistan. In my books *Racism and Cultural Studies* (2002) and *Working through the Contradictions* (2004), I called attention to recent developments in cultural studies in North America and Europe that have subverted the early promise of the field as a radical transformative force. In every attempt to inquire into ideological practices and discourses, one is always carrying out a political and ethical agenda, whether one is conscious of it or not. There are many reasons for this, the chief one being the inescapable political-economic constitution of any discursive field of inquiry, as historical-materialist critiques have convincingly demonstrated. And even without invoking that famous theoretical couplet that Foucault and Bourdieu have popularized, knowledge/power, the production of knowledge is always already implicated in the ongoing struggles across class, nation, gender, locality, ethnicity, and so on, which envelop the total sensibility of the would-be knower, learner, investigator, scholar, and so forth.

This is the moment when I would like to open the topic of why problems of culture and knowledge-production are of decisive political importance. Although we always conceive of ourselves as citizen-subjects with inalienable rights, it is also the case that we are all caught up in a

network of obligations whose entirety is not within our conscious grasp. What is our relation to Others—the excluded, marginalized, and prostituted Others who affirm our existence and identity—in our society? In a sense we, all Filipinos, are responsible for the plight of the Moros—yes, including the existence of the Abu Sayyaf—insofar as we claim to live in a community of responsible if not rational persons who alternatively occupy the positions of speakers and listeners, I's and you's, and who have obligations to one another, and reciprocal accountabilities.

Here I am following an argument elaborated by the late Canadian scholar Bill Readings in his provocative book *The University in Ruins* (1996). Speculating on the impossibility of subjective self-identity, of being free from obligation to others, Readings comments on an attitude of cynical self-congratulation prevalent in the United States. I am referring to a widely shared stance or posture that became more articulate when, after September 11, 2001, most Americans, newly self-anointed as victims, refused to see any responsibility for what happened to them and disclaimed any share in causing such horrendous disaster, what is indeed a terrible tragedy because it is uncomprehended and disconnected from the flaws of the “egotistical sublime,” hence the hunger for revenge. No doubt Readings includes his fellow Canadians in the following remark whose pedagogical lesson we can immediately apply to our own relations with members of ostracized communities, marginalized minorities, or invidiously categorized neighbors whom we encounter every day and who share our common habitat:

It is the desire for subjective autonomy that has led North Americans, for example, to want to forget their obligations to the acts of genocide on which their society is founded, to ignore debts to Native American and other peoples that contemporary individuals did not personally contract, but for which I would nonetheless argue they are *responsible* (and not only insofar as they benefit indirectly from the historical legacy of those acts). In short, the social bond is not the property of an autonomous subject, since it exceeds subjective consciousness and even individual histories of action. The nature of my obligations to the history of the place in which I live, and my exact positioning in relation to that history, are not things I can decide upon or things that can be calculated exhaustively. No tax of “x percent” on the incomes of white Americans could ever, for example, make full reparation for the history of racism in the United States (how much is a lynching “worth”?). Nor would it put an end to the guilt of racism by acknowledging it, or even solve the question of what exactly constitutes “whiteness.” (1996, 186)

Underpinned by an ideology of white supremacy, the racialized U.S. nation-state controlled by finance capital mystifies its violent strategy of maintaining post-cold war global hegemony by claiming that it is giving freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Colombia, Haiti, and others, whatever the cost in terms of suffering, injustice, deaths, and other “collateral damage” in its endless genocidal war of reprisal, occupation, and remorseless self-aggrandizement (Mann 2002; Meszaros 2001).

In the Belly of the Beast

What about the beleaguered situation of Filipinos in the fabled “land of promise,” the quasi-utopian “new world” wrested from the American Indians? In the United States, the Filipino Americans have suffered, as everyone knows, from the latest act of vengeance against what it designates as Islamic extremism or terrorism: the USA PATRIOT Act. We are struggling against what may be the initial stage of authoritarian rule, “friendly fascism,” in the new guise of Homeland Security. We have to fight a version of pragmatic patriotism more arrogant than anticommunism, a self-righteous Manichean worldview intent on preemptive strikes and other unilateral interventions against “Jihad International,” against all those resisting the hegemony of the “only remaining superpower.” Civil liberties and constitutional rights have been annulled if not eviscerated. What Susan Sontag (2002) calls the “dangerous lobotomizing notion of endless war,” the pseudowar of the civilized versus barbarians, has already encouraged all sorts of repressive excesses—racial profiling, incarceration of suspects, killing of innocents who look like Arabs or “terrorists,” contingent on the demonology of the day. If “measure and proportionality require the language of law and justice” (Asad 2002, 38), then the mad rush to war against Iraq after the merciless devastation of Afghanistan has broken all records. A climate of fear and suspicion reigns hidden by the fog of mindless consumerism and patriotic hysteria.

Noam Chomsky, as well as other public intellectuals, have called the United States “a leading terrorist state” (2001, 16). Just to give an example of how this has registered in the lives of Filipinos in the United States: In June, sixty-two Filipinos (among them, doctors and engineers) were apprehended by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services for overstaying their visa or for lack of appropriate documentation. They were arrested as “absconders,” handcuffed and manacled in chains while aboard a plane on the way to the former Clark Air Base in Pampanga, Philippines. Roughly three hundred thousand Filipinos were scheduled for deportation, some were treated as hardened criminals; several plane-

loads had already been dispatched before their relatives in the Philippines could be notified. Over three thousand persons, most of them people of color, have been detained as suspects, already being punished as “war combatants,” without benefit of any public trial or legal assistance (Mahajan 2002). I am not referring to the prisoners captured in Afghanistan and confined to quarantined cells in Guantanamo, Cuba; I am referring to U.S. citizens who have been jailed on suspicion that they have links with Osama bin Laden or other terrorist groups listed by the U.S. State Department, groups that now include the CPP/NPA. One may ask: How many more Filipinos, and for that matter U.S. citizens with an immigrant background, will suffer arbitrary state terrorism led by the U.S. ruling elite, a fate that may befall any one of us who as citizens (here or in the Philippines) may be branded as unpatriotic or traitors because we dare to criticize, dare to think and resist with our uncompromising conscience?

As a background/prologue to the Filipino collective project of actualizing self-determination, I would like to delineate briefly the historical trajectory of the ongoing people’s war in the Philippines. The case of the national-democratic struggle in the Philippines may be taken as an example of one historic singularity in this new millennium. Because of the historical specificity of the Philippines’ emergence as a dependent nation-state controlled by the United States in the twentieth century, national democracy as a mass movement has always been defined by events of anti-imperialist rebellion. U.S. conquest entailed a violent racist, genocidal suppression of the Filipino revolutionary forces for decades. The foundational inspiring “event” by public consensus is the 1896–1898 revolution against Spain and its sequel, the Filipino-American War, together with the Moro resistance up to 1914 against U.S. colonization. Another political sequence of events was the Sakdal uprising in the thirties followed by the Huk uprising in the forties and fifties—a sequence that was renewed in the First Quarter Storm of 1970 against the neocolonial state. While the local feudal, comprador, and bureaucratic power-elite under U.S. patronage utilized elements of the nationalist tradition formed in 1896–1898 as their ideological weapon for establishing moral-intellectual leadership, their attempts have never been successful. Propped by the Pentagon-supported military, the Arroyo administration today, for example, uses the U.S. slogan of democracy versus Moro (or Muslim) terrorism, supplemented by the fantasies of the neoliberal free market, to legitimize its continued exploitation of workers, peasants, women, and ethnic minorities. Following a long and tested tradition of grassroots mobilization, Filipino nationalism has always remained centered on the peasantry’s demand for land closely tied to the popular-democratic demand for equality and genuine sovereignty spearheaded by the progressive elements of the organized working class and radical democratic intelligentsia. Its

proletarian orientation continues to draw nourishment from the vital and sustainable living tradition of Marxist-Leninist anti-imperialism.

For over a century now, U.S.-backed developmentalism and modernization have utterly failed in the Philippines. The ongoing resistance against global capital and its neoliberal extortions is constituted and defined by a national-democratic mass movement of which the National Democratic Front remains the most viable socialist vanguard. We have a durable proletarian-led insurgency that seeks to articulate the “unfinished revolution” of 1896 in its demand for genuine national independence and social justice for the majority of citizens, including ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, the Muslim community in the Philippines initiated its armed struggle for self-determination during the Marcos dictatorship and continues today as a broadly based movement for autonomy, despite the religious orientation of its teacher-militants. Recalling the genocidal U.S. campaigns against the Muslims cited earlier, BangsaMoro nationalism cannot forget its Muslim singularity, which is universalized in the principles of equality, justice, and the right to self-determination.

In the wake of past defeats of numerous peasant revolts, the Filipino culture of popular-democratic nationalism rooted in proletarian militancy constantly renews its anti-imperialist vocation by mobilizing new forces (women, youth, and church people in the sixties and the indigenous or ethnic minorities in the seventies and eighties). It is organically embedded in emancipatory social and political movements whose origin evokes in part the Enlightenment narrative of sovereignty and secular humanism. And though mediated by third world nationalist movements (Fanon, Ho Chi Minh, Mao), its sites of actualization may be witnessed in the local events of mass insurgency against continued U.S. hegemony (San Juan 1998a, 2000). The Philippines cannot thus be reduced merely to an “imagined” community in an idealist construal. It is embodied and enacted in actually experienced practices of communities, collective bodies of workers and peasants, dynamic social blocs in motion, whose habitat remains in the process of being constructed primarily through modes of political and social resistance against finance-capitalist transnationalism (or globalization, in the trendy parlance) and its technologically mediated ideologies. Sustained and enriched by the conscious, organized participation of the working masses, the current national-democratic revolution in the Philippines and in the Filipino diaspora is fashioning thereby the appropriate concrete forms of dissent, resistance, and subversion worthy of its history of uninterrupted revolts and its internationalist socialist vision.