

## "Imperial Terror, Neo-Colonialism and the Filipino Diaspora"

A Lecture by E. San Juan Jr.

Delivered at the 2003 English Department Lecture series at St. John's University

*Introduced by Michael Pozo*



Photo courtesy of Kenneth Bauzon

On October 9, 2003 at 4:00pm, E. San Juan Jr. delivered a lecture entitled "Imperial Terror, Neo-Colonialism and the Filipino Diaspora" to a room of about 40-45 people. The audience was made up of SJU students and faculty plus such guests as Professor Kenneth Bauzon from St. Joseph's College, members of Philippine Forum and Professor Delia D. Aguilar.

Over the years Professor San Juan's work has been at the forefront of examining the issues of race and racism not only as a social-political force and factor but also its relevance and resonance in academic institutions and fields of study therein. His work can be described best as *unrelenting*. *Unrelenting* in its continual insistence on dialogue between the "third world" and the crucial role the United States has played in its history. *Unrelenting* in its refusal with each and every book that he has written to accept inadequate concessions or liberal compromises to the issues most affecting so-called "minorities" both inside *and* outside of academic institutions. And, *unrelenting* in the continual struggle to find practical applications to local and global problems through activism and scholarship.

Frederic Jameson has called E. San Juan Jr. "a scholar of remarkable range and varied talents". He has been praised by Manning Marable for his "challenging perspective" on racial issues and "vital analysis both for scholars and activists". Alan Wald and Paul Buhle have also commended San Juan for a "rare sense of personal commitment".

E. San Juan has taught English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Brooklyn College (CUNY), University of Connecticut, Tamkang University in Taiwan and has acted as Chair of Comparative American Cultures at Washington State University. San Juan's most recent texts include *Racism and Cultural Studies*, *Beyond Post Colonial Theory*, *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan* and

*Hegemony and Strategies of Transgression: Essays in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature*. Currently San Juan is the Director of the Philippines Cultural Studies Center in Storrs, Connecticut. San Juan is an internationally known Cultural Critic and the leading authority on Philippine-U.S. literary studies.

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Lecture Text:

**"Imperial Terror, Neo-Colonialism and the Filipino Diaspora"**

by E. San Juan Jr.

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* essay summed up the lesson in its title, "In 1901 Philippines, Peace Cost More Lives Than Were Lost in War" (2 July 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 4,234 U.S. soldiers killed and 3,000 wounded) with George W. Bush's ambition to "create a new working democracy as soon as possible" (20 July 2003, M2).

Reviewing the past is instructive, of course, but we should always place it in the context of present circumstances in the Philippines and in the international arena. What is the real connection between the Philippines and the current U.S. war against terrorism?

With the death of Martin Burnham, the hostage held by Muslim kidnappers called the "Abu Sayyaf" in Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippines, one would expect more than 1,200 American troops (including FBI and CIA personnel) training Filipinos for that rescue mission to be heading for home in late 2002. Instead of being recalled, reinforcements have been brought in and more joint military exercises announced in the future. Since September 11, 2001, U.S. media and Filipino government organs 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 National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. 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.

What is the background to the return of the former colonizer to what was once called its "insular territory" administered then by the Bureau of Indian Affairs? With Secretary Colin Powell's decision to stigmatize as "terrorist" the major insurgent groups that have been fighting for forty years for popular democracy and independence—the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, part of a coalition called the National Democratic Front, the introduction 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 bases and facilities for the U.S. military—a bargain exchange for the strategic outposts Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base formerly "owned" by the U.S. and scrapped by a resurgent Filipino nationalism a decade ago. With the military officials practically managing the executive branch of government, the Philippine nation-state will prove to be more an appendage of the Pentagon than a humdrum neocolony administered by oligarchic compradors (a "cacique democracy," in the words of Benedict Anderson), which it has been since nominal independence in 1946. On the whole, Powell's stigmatizing act is part of the New American Century Project to reaffirm a new *pax Americana* after the Cold War

Immediately after the proclaimed defeat of the Taliban and the rout of Osama bin Laden's forces in Afghanistan, the Philippines became the second front in the U.S.-led war on terrorism. Raymond Bonner, author of *Waltzing with Dictators* (1987), argues that the reason for this second front is "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*, 10 June 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 U.S. acted as "the world's policemen," aiding the local military in "civic action" projects to win "hearts and minds," a rehearsal for Vietnam. The Stratford Research Group believes that Washington is using the Abu Sayyaf as a cover for establishing a "forward logistics and operation base" in southeast Asia in order to be able to conduct swift pre-emptive strikes against 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 U.S.-supported brutal Marcos dictatorship. What disturbed everyone was the Cold-War practice of "Joint Combined Exchange Training" exercises. In South America and Africa, such U.S. foreign policy initiatives merged with counter-insurgency operations that channeled military logistics and equipment to favored regimes notorious for flagrant human rights violations. In Indonesia during the Suharto regime, for example, U.S. Special Operations Forces trained government troops accused by Amnesty International of kidnapping and torture of activists, especially in East Timor and elsewhere. In El Salvador, Colombia and Guatemala, 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 also against leftist insurgents and nationalists. During the Huk uprising in the Philippines, Col. Edward Lansdale, who later masterminded the Phoenix atrocities in Vietnam, rehearsed similar counter-insurgency techniques combined with other anticommunist tricks of the trade. Now U.S. soldiers in active combat side by side with Filipinos will pursue the "terrorists" defined by the U.S. State Department—guerillas of the New People's Army, Moro resistance fighters, and other progressive sectors of Filipino society. Are we seeing American troops in the boondocks (*bundok*, in the original Tagalog, means "mountain") again? Are we experiencing a traumatic attack of *déjà vu*?

A moment of reflection returns us to what Bernard Fall called "the first Vietnam," the Filipino-American War of 1899-1902, in which at least 1.4 million Filipinos died. The campaign to conquer the Philippines was designed in accordance with President McKinley's policy of "Benevolent Assimilation" of the uncivilized and unchristian natives, a "civilizing mission" that Mark Twain considered worthy of the Puritan settlers and the pioneers 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." This was a realization of the barbarism that Henry Adams feared before Admiral George Dewey entered Manila Bay on 1 May 1898: "I turn green in bed at midnight if I think of the horror of a year's warfare in the Philippines where... we must slaughter a million or two of foolish Malays in order to give them the comforts of flannel petticoats and electric railways."

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 Samar and Batangas, atrocities from "search and destroy" missions reminiscent of Song My and My Lai in Vietnam. This episode in the glorious history of Empire is usually accorded a marginal footnote, or a token paragraph in school textbooks. Miller only mentions in passing the U.S. attempt to subjugate the un-hispanized 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 five hundred and forty soldiers, killed a beleaguered group of six hundred 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 5,000 followers (men, women and children) against the American troops led by Capt. John Pershing. The battle of Mount Bagsak, 25 kilometers east of Jolo City, ended with the death of 340 Americans and of 2,000 (some say 3,000) 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 bandit. The carnage continued up to the "anti-brigandage" campaigns of the first three decades which suppressed numerous peasant revolts and workers' strikes against the colonial state and its local agencies.

With the help of the U.S. sugar-beet lobby, the Philippine Commonwealth of 1935 was established, constituted with a compromise mix of laws and regulations then being tried in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Hawaii. Eventually the islands became a model of a pacified neocolony. Except perhaps for Miller's aforementioned book and assorted studies, nothing much about the revealing effects of that process of subjugation of Filipinos have registered in the American Studies archive. This is usually explained by the theory that the U.S. did not follow the old path of European colonialism, and its war against Spain 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.

Since the period of the Marcos dictatorship (1972-86), the terrorism of the National Security State has inflicted havoc on the lives of millions of Filipinos. Despite the appeals of KARAPATAN, church bodies, and the pleas of progressive representatives in Congress, nothing seems to have stopped the Arroyo military in their campaign of barbaric slaughter. If the security of life and whatever meager property the peasants and indigenous peoples in Mindoro, Mindanao and other areas cannot be protected by the government, who has legal monopoly of violence and other coercive means, then this government has lost legitimacy. In fact, it is open to being indicted for state terrorism in the court of world opinion. Since the Philippines is a constitutional republic, citizens from whom all power emanates can 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, police and paramilitary forces of the neocolonial state, that Luis Jalandoni, the chairperson of the National Democratic Front Negotiating Panel, has 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 calls on the present regime to renounce state terrorism and indemnify its numerous victims, thousands of activists killed in assassinations, extrajudicial executions, and indiscriminate massacre. It would be painful to recount the litany of human rights violations that burden our history since the Marcos dictatorship, nay, since the 1989-1916 Filipino-American War, with 1.4 million Filipinos and Moros killed by the "civilizing" missionaries of Manifest Destiny.

Right in the midst of the controversy over Powell's exorbitant act of extending the State Department reach to the liberated zones of the New People's Army, we read this news from Canada: a Filipina domestic worker, out of the generosity of her heart, has given her kidney to her sick employer in Toronto. Frustrated with the public health care system, this Canadian employer turned to the Filipina for help, claiming that she was part of the family. Earning \$2 an hour, for 24 months, under the Live-in Caregiver Program, Filipina domestics function as modern-day slaves, vulnerable to any and every kind of abuse and exploitation. Canada tolerates the import of Filipinas to provide rich Canadians their internal organs and body parts, according to the Philippine Women Center of British Columbia.

I will soon move on to address the question of postcoloniality, particularly a certain form of "Orientalism" applied to the Moro struggle for self-determination in the Philippines. But I want to shift your attention first to this unprecedented phenomenon in our history, a qualitative change in our geopolitical status in the present world-system linkage of industrialized centers and peripheral or dependent social formations.

Since our colonization, thousands of Filipinos have migrated to distant territories, first as recruited workers for the Hawaii sugar plantations, and then as seamen, U.S. navy personnel, nurses and doctors, and so on. We have about three million Filipinos in North America, but millions more in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. But since the Marcos martial-law regime, the "warm body export" (including mail-order brides, and assorted cargo in the global sex traffic) accelerated tremendously. Everyday 3,000 Filipinos leave for abroad, close to a million every year. In Hong Kong alone, there are 200,000 Filipina domestics. Moreover, 25% of the world's seafarers, and cruise waiters, are Filipinos. With about nine to ten million Filipinos scattered around the world as cheap or affordable labor, mainly domestics and semi-skilled workers, the Philippines has become the supplier of what is euphemistically called human capital—in actuality, hands to do work for minimal pay, work largely unpaid, producing enormous surplus value (profits) for transnational corporations as well as for affluent families in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East.

Everyone knows that these Filipino Overseas Workers' remittance of billions of dollars--\$12 billion annually—(aside from fees and all kinds of taxes) is the major earner of dollars needed to pay the foreign debt and keep the system afloat. It guarantees the privileges of the rich and powerful. It preserves and

aggravates the impoverishment of over half of the population, as confirmed by the recent statistics compiled by Representative Satur Ocampo's office. Despite the unrelenting cases of brutal treatment, rape, all kinds of conceivable deprivation, and murder—about 4 or 5 coffins of Overseas Filipino Workers arrive 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" (quoted in David Diamond, "One Nation, Overseas," 1999, <<http://wired.com/wired/archive/10.06>>). This is as if over four hundred years of colonization have not yet been sufficient contribution to the enrichment of the Western metropolises and the indulgent appetites of their citizen consumers.

Indeed, we have contributed prodigiously to the accumulation of surplus-value/profits and wealth to the whole world—except our own country, the very soil and land of which have been depleted, polluted, ravished, plundered, scorched, pillaged, trampled upon and mutilated.... One commentator ascribes to Filipinos the common refrain: "Look Asian, think Spanish, act American...". I doubt the applicability or appropriateness of this ascription, something that not a few traditional anthropologists and social scientists delight in when they proudly proclaim that ours is a culture of diversity, hybridity, creative assimilation, 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 free-wheeling market and sacred private property.

As many Filipinos have still not forgotten, there was a mini-people power when Flor Contemplacion's body was returned, but when Sarah Balabagan arrived, the mass media "salvaged" her by sublimation—she was turned into a mini-star as ephemeral as Nonie Juice, the miracle tonic, and other fads. Was the public outrage over Contemplacion's death merely melancholia and mourning mediated by gossip and other kinship rituals, as some postmodernist sages aver? Are we still caught in the frame of hallowed Filipino values like *hiya*, *pakikisama*, and smooth interpersonal relations? Are we ready to give our remaining internal organs to the Colin Powells and the hustlers from the World Bank/International Monetary Fund?

Now we know that all things develop via contradictions. The diaspora of 9 to 10 million Filipinos is bound to generate forces of critique and transformation with their own self-generated leadership. They will emancipate themselves, for nobody else can do it for them. Already the Hong Kong domestics 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, risky engagements in the political arena, not just with the relentless pursuit of the creature comforts of a frayed if not mythical civil society.

The revolutionary upsurge in the Philippines against the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986) stirred up dogmatic Cold War complacency. With the inauguration of a new stage in Cultural Studies in the nineties, the historical reality of U.S. imperialism (the genocide of Native Americans is replayed in the subjugation of the inhabitants of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Cuba) is finally being excavated and re-appraised. But this is, of course, a phenomenon brought about by a 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 NAFTA; the heralding of current anti-terrorism by the Gulf War; 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 colonized territories cannot be confused with the nationalist patriotism of the dominant or hegemonic metropolises, or how the mode of U.S. imperial rule in the twentieth century differs in form and content from those of the British or French in the nineteenth century. The received consensus of a progressive modernizing influence from the advanced industrial powers remains deeply entrenched. Even postcolonial and postmodern thinkers commit the mistake of censuring the decolonizing projects of the subalternized peoples because these projects (in the superior

gaze of these thinkers) have been damaged, or are bound to become perverted into despotic postcolonial regimes, like those in Ghana, Algeria, Vietnam, 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/IMF/WTO, and hope for a kind of "benevolent assimilation."

What remains to be carefully considered, above all, is the historical specificity or singularity of each of these projects of national liberation, their class composition, historical roots, programs, ideological tendencies, and political agendas within the context of colonial/imperial domination. It is not possible 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. Otherwise, the result would be a disingenuous ethical utopianism such as that found in U.S. postnationalist and postcolonialist discourse which, in the final analysis, functions as an apology for the ascendancy of the transnational corporate powers embedded in the nation-states of the North, and for the hegemonic rule of the only remaining superpower claiming to act in the name of freedom and democracy.

I have already alluded earlier to what happened in 2002, *l'affaire* Abu Sayyaf and its use as a pretext for the invasion by over a thousand U.S. troops of this second front of the war against terrorism, after Afghanistan. Can you imagine what our country would have looked like if it were really turned into another Afghanistan? One may counter that the situation in Basilan and other regions is worse than those of Kabul or Kandahar. Comparisons are really unavailing—if not altogether self-serving. But what have we learned?

I have read reports of the resurgence of a "moro-moro" mentality in government and the public. Fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front are now branded "terrorists" and subject to harassment (recently at the Muslim compound in Barangay Culiati, Tandang Sora, Quezon City). It is expected that the MILF will be classified as a "foreign terrorist organization"—foreign, of course, to Americans, but not to Filipinos. We have always lived with the Moros, our Muslim brothers and sisters, as comrades in the struggle against the American soldiers who massacred thousands of men, women, and children at Mount Dajo, Jolo in March 9, 1906, and Mount Bagsak on June 13, 1913, among other barbaric outrages not noticed by the sharp wit of Mark Twain and other philanthropic humanitarians. These events are not memorialized for their horrors but cited to arouse a sense of solidarity with the courage and sacrifices of the BangsaMoro nation in their struggle for dignity and freedom.

When President Arroyo allowed the U.S. Special Forces to participate in the pursuit of this group of bandits (more exactly, mercenaries), a creation of both the CIA and the Philippine Armed Forces, did she not violate the Philippine Constitution? Indifference to this question is a symptom of the larger problem of either ignorance of the plight of the Moro people, or complicity with the ruling class in the oppression and exploitation of at least 7.5 million citizens who happen to subscribe to another faith.

Thousands, perhaps over a hundred thousand now, have died since the flare-up of Christian-Muslim hostilities in the sixties, climaxing in the years after 1972 with the battle of Jolo, Sulu. The city was actually burned by government forces, producing 2,000 corpses and 60,000 refugees in one night. A ceasefire was reached after the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, but it was often honored in the breach. The split of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front led Hashim Salamat from Misuari's more secular Moro National Liberation Front introduced a sectarian but also conciliatory element in the scene, precipitating the formation of the Abu Sayyaf along the lines of the government-sponsored and CIA-funded Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) in 1976.

It is now public knowledge that the Abu Sayyaf, like the MILF, was set up by the government to split the Moro struggle for self-determination and pressure the MNLF into capitulation. Since 1991, according to Senator Aquilino Pimentel, Gen. Alexander Aguirre, former president Estrada's National Security Adviser, acted as "the handler" of the group some of whose members were involved in the CIA-managed *mujahideens* recruited to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. But since 1995 the Abu Sayyaf has turned into a

Frankenstein's monster devoted to hostage-taking for ransom and terrorizing civilian communities, as in their attack on the town of Ipil, Zamboanga.

In the midst of U.S. intervention last year, an International Peace Commission went to Basilan on March 23-27, 2002, and produced what I think is the most comprehensive and detailed report on conditions in the region. The conclusion of their report, entitled *Basilan: The Next Afghanistan?*, is unequivocal: the Abu Sayyaf is a symptom of the disastrous failure of the state in ensuring not only peace and security but honest and efficient government—both provincial governance and military-police agencies—in a milieu where the proverbial forces of civil society (business, church, media) have been complicit. Enmeshed in corruption that involves local officials, military officers, and central government, the region where the Abu Sayyaf thrives has witnessed the reign of absolute terror over civilians. Nowhere in the entire Philippines is the violation of human rights and the brutalization of civilian suspects so flagrant and ubiquitous as in Basilan.

In this context, the deployment of U.S. troops in Mindanao, compliments of the Arroyo administration, has only worsened the situation, demonized and mystified the Abu Sayyaf as an Al Qaeda accomplice, and promoted hostility among various ethnic groups. I had occasion to deliver a public talk on the situation in Mindanao in Madison, Wisconsin, last November—a Halloween week-end, and had reason to look up an article by the American anthropologist Charles O. Frake in the prestigious journal *American Anthropologist*, 1998 ISSUE, ENTITLED "Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities among Philippine Muslims." While Frake is quite erudite in referencing the history of the Muslims from the Spanish times to the present, he never examines seriously, except in a tokenizing gestural mode, the political and economic context of land dispossession and economic marginalization of the Muslim majority. Instead, typical of postmodernist disciplinary discourse, he focuses on the Abu Sayyaf as an attempt to solve "the logical gap in the identity matrix of Philippine Muslim insurgency." Since the Moro movement has been fragmented by ethnic antagonisms among Tausugs, Maguindanaos, Maranaos, Yakans, and so on, the Abu Sayyaf, according to Frake, is "militantly Islamicist." And because its leadership draws from the displaced and unaffiliated youth, as well as the traditional outlaw areas, the group represents "a new layer in the strata of kinds of identity laid down in the long history of conflict in the Muslim Philippines" (1998, 48). In short, the Abu Sayyaf (according to Frake's postmodernist optic) is a symptom of the problem of "identity proliferation," since the fault-lines of identity construction are often revealed in explosions of political violence.

Frake is an example of a knowledge-producer intent on unwitting mystification. The result of applying Geertz' "thick description," that is, the focus on how participants interpret everyday happenings, instead of clarifying the nexus of causality and accountability, muddles it. Frake wants to answer the question: "How can such nice people [meaning the anonymous members of the Abu Sayyaf], at times, do such horrible things?" But his premise—that the central motivation of individuals in society is to be recognized as somebody, to establish an identity—is completely detached from historical specificities, even from the basic determinants of any cultural complex or location. Despite the empirical citations and putative data, Frake's attempt to deploy postmodern ethnography on the Abu Sayyaf phenomenon results only in a simplistic reduction: that in situations of struggle, people fail to unite because they continually interpret what's going on around them, thus multiplying "contested identities." I am afraid such "thick descriptions" are really thick, or *makapal*—obscuring instead of illuminating the plight of the Moro people. Vincent Crapanzano's critique of Geertz may be quoted here: the method of "thick description" "offers no understanding of the native from the native's point of view, ...no specifiable evidence for his attributions of intention, his assertion of subjectivity, his declarations of experience" (quoted in San Juan 2002, 234). The same caveats apply to two indefatigable American anthropologists intending to explain Filipinos to themselves: Thomas McKenna's *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (1998) and Nicole Constable's *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (1997).

I am not indicting all of American or Western anthropology, let alone the hermeneutic methodology of the social sciences. But I would like to mention here two other sources of historical and political inquiries, aside from the writings of Cesar Adib Majul: one is the work of the Indian scholar Aijaz Ahmad (1982), and the essay of political scientist Robert Stauffer (1981). In both these thinkers, the differentiated totality of Filipino society and its historical imbrication in the world-system of global capitalism are the two

necessary requisites for grasping the concrete linkages and contradictions in the Moro struggle for autonomy and dignity. For these intellectuals are not only practitioners of a mode of scientific analysis of history but also protagonists in the search for solutions to the most urgent social and political problems of our time.

I cannot imagine any intellectual who, endeavoring to grasp the roots of a long-enduring, complex "Moro problem," will preemptively assert or claim a detached or disinterested stance. In fact, postmodernists like James Clifford openly announce their point-of-view, their subject-positions—if only to wash their hands, of course, of any complicity with US colonialism or imperialism. Professions of neutrality have been replaced with gestures of liberal guilt manifest in philanthropic compassion. Unfortunately, these gestures only prolong the orientaling supremacy of Western knowledge-production and its hegemonic influence. In response to this Orientalism, we seem to offer only the famous SIR (smooth interpersonal relations) codified by Prof. Frank Lynch. Incidentally, in 1970, an American sociologist, George Weightman, noted in his study of the Philippine intellectual elite that "the military academy and Ateneo appear to dispense the best SIR techniques for dealing with Americans" (1970, 28). In fairness to Ateneo University, I would like to interpose here the observation that all educational institutions, all pedagogical agencies (in Karl Mannheim's phrase, the "everyday constituent assembly of the mind"), are sites of ideological class struggle and none can be hermetically insulated from the pressures of material local and global interests. There is no vacuum or neutral space in the planetary conflict of classes and groups for hegemony.

For this reason, and because the Moro struggle for autonomy and dignity is the key, virtually the catalyst and crucible, of our all-encompassing struggle for national democracy and liberation from imperialism, I would urge everyone to learn more about the history and culture of the BangsaMoro nation, their ethos and aspirations, which are all integral to the vision of a free and prosperous Filipino nation.

In my article on Cultural Studies in Ateneo de Manila University's electronic journal, KRITIKA KULTURA (sponsored by the Department of English), I called attention to recent developments in Cultural Studies as a disciplinary practice in North America and Europe that have subverted the early promise of the field as a radical transformative force (see also my book, *Racism and Cultural Studies*). In every attempt to do any inquiry into cultural practices and discourses, one is always carrying out a political and ethical project, whether one is conscious of it or not. There are many reasons for this, the main one being the inescapable political-economic constitution of any discursive field of inquiry, as Pierre Bourdieu has convincingly demonstrated. And in the famous theoretical couplet that Foucault has 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 envelopes and surrounds the intellectual, the would-be knower, learner, investigator, scholar, and so on.

This is the moment when I would like to close with some reflections, and questions, on why problems of culture and knowledge are of decisive political importance. Although we always conceive of ourselves as citizen-subjects with 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 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 singular 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.

I am following an argument elaborated by the late Canadian scholar Bill Readings in his provocative book, *The University in Ruins*. Speculating on the impossibility of subjective self-identity, of being free from obligation to others, Readings comments on an attitude prevalent in the United States—an attitude that, I think, became more articulate when, after September 11, 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. Readings of course includes his fellow Canadians in the following remark—which we can immediately apply to our own relations with the Moros, Igorots, and other ostracized neighbors:



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)

If we are indeed accountable for what is happening around us—the killings in Mindoro Oriental, the Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping and terrorism, President Arroyo's violation of our sovereignty in welcoming U.S. troops to carry out police actions and exert a repressive pressure on Filipino citizens, and General Powell's doctrine of stigmatizing Filipino dissenters and critics of the unjust status quo as "terrorists"—then we need to find out what needs to be done. Is the breakdown of civility caused by the lack of a "strong republic," hence the need to institute authoritarian and quasi-fascist measures? A state is strong or weak depending on the nature of the class relations, the alignment of political forces, determining its conduct.

What about for Filipinos in the fabled "land of promise," otherwise known as "the belly of the beast"? In the United States, the Filipino Americans have, as you know, suffered from the latest act of vengeance against Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda: the Patriot Act. We are struggling against what is 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 before, planning preemptive or preventive strikes and other unilateral interventions against Jihad International, against all those resisting the domination of the "only remaining superpower." We have signed numerous petitions, one called "A Statement of Conscience: Not In Our Name." We oppose the Manichean outlook that the struggle is between good versus evil, and that the only possible answer to what happened in 9/11 is "war abroad and repression at home." What Susan Sontag calls the "dangerous lobotomizing notion of endless war" or the pseudo-war of civilization versus barbarians, has already encouraged all sorts of excesses—racial profiling, 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 ruthless devastation of Afghanistan is breaking all records.

Noam Chomsky and other public intellectuals have called the United States itself "a leading terrorist state" (Chomsky 2001, 16). Just to give an example of how this has registered in the lives of Filipinos in the United States: Last June, 62 Filipinos (among them, doctors and engineers) were apprehended by the US 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. About 140 Filipinos are now being treated as hardened criminals, according to Migrante International, thanks to the Patriot Act. Over a thousand persons, most of them people of color, are now detained in the United States as suspects, already being punished. I am not referring to the prisoners captured in Afghanistan and confined to cells in Guantanamo, Cuba; I am referring to American citizens who have been jailed on suspicion that they have links with Osama bin Laden or other terrorist groups listed by the US State Department (which now includes the CPP/NPA). Just last November, there was a report of eight Filipino aircraft mechanics who were detained since last June without bail due to "suspected terrorist links"; they are now being deported because of alleged **inaccuracies** in their immigration papers. I conclude with this question: How many more Filipinos will suffer globalized state terrorism spearheaded by the United States government, a fate that may befall any one of us who as citizens (here or in the United States) may be branded as unpatriotic or traitors because we dare to criticize, dare to think and resist?

I want to conclude by focusing on the historical trajectory of 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.

Because of the historical specificity of the Philippines' emergence as a dependent nation-state controlled by the United States in the twentieth century, nationalism as a mass movement has always been defined by events of anti-imperialist rebellion. U.S. conquest entailed long and sustained violent suppression of the Filipino revolutionary forces for decades. The central founding "event" (as the philosopher Alain Badiou would define the term) is the 1896 revolution against Spain and its sequel, the Filipino-American war of 1899-1902, and the Moro resistance up to 1914 against U.S. colonization. Another political sequence of events is the Sakdal uprising in the thirties during the Commonwealth period followed by the Huk uprising in the forties and fifties—a sequence that is renewed in the First Quarter Storm of 1970 against the neocolonial state. While the feudal oligarchy and the comprador class 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 against terrorism and 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.

For over a century now, U.S.-backed developmentalism and modernization have utterly failed in the Philippines. The resistance against globalized capital and its neoliberal extortions is spearheaded today by a national-democratic mass movement of various ideological persuasions. There is also a durable Marxist-led insurgency that seeks to articulate the "unfinished revolution" of 1896 in its demand for national independence against U.S. control and social justice for the majority of citizens (80 million) ten percent of whom are now migrant workers abroad. Meanwhile, the Muslim community in the southern part of the Philippines initiated its armed struggle for self-determination during the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986) and continues today as a broadly based movement for autonomy, despite the Islamic ideology of its teacher-militants. Recalling the genocidal U.S. campaigns cited above, 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 peasant revolts, the Filipino culture of nationalism constantly renews its anti-imperialist vocation by mobilizing new forces (women 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 as mediated by third-world nationalist movements (Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh, Mao) but whose sites of actualization are the local events of mass insurgency against continued U.S. hegemony. The Philippines as an "imagined" and actually experienced ensemble of communities, or multiplicities in motion, remains in the process of being constructed primarily through modes of political and social resistance against corporate transnationalism (or globalization, in the trendy parlance) and its technologically mediated ideologies, fashioning thereby the appropriate cultural forms of dissent, resistance, and subversion worthy of its people's history and its collective vision.

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