

E . S A N J U A N , J R .

War in the Filipino Imagination: Filipino Writers in the United States Wrestling with the Minotaur

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man,...continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

—Thomas Hobbes

We must not belittle the saying in the book of Sun Wu Tzu, the great military expert of ancient China, “Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.”

—Mao Tse-tung

Violence in its many forms, as an involuntary quest for identity, has in our time come to reveal the meaning of war in entirely new guise. This is a dimension of war totally invisible to the old men from Iron Mountain,...being itself a form of education.

—Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore

For Filipino writers resident in the United States, the phenomenon of war has been experienced and represented in modalities so bewildering as to make it symbolic of modernity's vicissitudes. In the rubble of warring thoughts, however, we can pick useful guideposts for our inventory. Unless we subscribe to the Hobbesian world-view of war as given in any society, or to the Freudian optic of aggression as given in our psyche, it might be useful to follow the view that war is an organized armed struggle between states, classes, and groups to implement policies and beliefs. Carl von Clausewitz provided the standard definition of war or violence as the means used "to compel our opponent to fulfill our will" (41). It is thus not an end in itself but an instrument or tool to advance ends associated with will, purposes, designs beyond individual passions or whims. In the literary archive, war manifests itself customarily in the conflict of individual wills or passions. But, in the process of unfolding, the human *telos* becomes perverted by the means, by its instrumentalization.

Simone Weil's classic meditation argues the truth of that axiom: war, the quintessential expression of violence/force, "turns a human being into a thing while he is still alive" (6), ultimately reduces humans into objects. Not only the defeated or dead is crushed by it, but also the victor, the wielder of force, military or organized power. One powerful evidence is Michael Herr's uncompromising reportage of the Vietnam War experience of ordinary soldiers; the truth of that war defies narration or description: "Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it, all it could do was take the most profound event of the American decade and turn it into a communications pudding, taking its most obvious, undeniable history and making it into a secret history" (218). This secret history is what literary art seeks to disclose, adumbrate or approximate in diverse modalities of representation.

From Total War to Differential Engagements

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm calls the period 1914-1945 the age of total war and massacres. In contrast to the generally postmodernist speculations of western academics on the rhetoric/tropology of war (see *PMLA* October 2009). Hobsbawm's nuanced analysis of modern war as "waged for unlimited ends" allows us to distinguish the specific Filipino-American response to events such as the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the 9/11 sequence of "global wars on terrorism" (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan, the anti-Abu Sayyaf campaign). That response is unique and singular for one reason: the Philippines being the only direct U.S. Asian colony, Filipinos straddled the two worlds of savage foes akin

to American Indians requiring violent control, and of colonized subjects still to be “Orientalized” through disciplinary mechanisms. Suspect and inscrutable, the Filipino returned a mock-naive gaze eluding tutelage.

War came to twentieth-century Filipinos in the form of the 1896 revolution against Spanish power and resistance to the implacable onslaught of U.S. invasion. John Sayles’ recent film *Amigo* reminds us of the embryo of “total war” in the genocidal subjugation of Filipino revolutionaries between 1899 and 1913. U.S. “Manifest Destiny” and its “benevolent assimilation” policy begot schizoid subjects consenting to coercive domination (Hofstadter). Reflecting on the violence of that war, William T. Vollman noted how the Filipino revolutionaries “merely exchanged for Spanish masters American ones” (169). But the slaves did not remain passive, even when they were recruited by the Hawaiian sugar plantations in the first decade of U.S. rule. Filipino union activist Pedro Calosa was expelled from Hawaii only to lead the peasant revolt in Tayug, Pangasinan, in 1931 against the American-backed local landlords (Constantino 353-54). None of that pioneering horde of Filipino contract workers recorded their ordeals—it will take another ten to fifteen years for the first generation of Filipino writers in the United States to give intelligible pattern to their drifting, makeshift lives.

The socioeconomic crisis and depression of the Thirties reconfigured the shape of peasant resistance in the colony into proletarian rebellion in the metropole. Racism and ethnic prejudice articulated its sensible particulars in the contingent forms of Filipino oral and written expression. When Carlos Bulosan wrote *America is in the Heart* (hereafter *AIH*), his quasi-autobiographical chronicle of Filipino workers in 1943, he described the Colorum Party led by Calosa as “a fanatical organization of dispossessed peasants that terrorized Luzon. It professed to be semi-religious, but it was actually a vengeful sect of anarchistic men led by a college-bred peasant who had become embittered in the United States” (60). He was mistaken: the peasants were not anarchists, and one of their leaders was a worker educated by the collective discipline and resourcefulness of militant Japanese and Filipino strikes in the Hawaii plantations. He was already a graduate in the art of class warfare.

Class War: Trope of Decolonization

That experience of class war migrating from Hawaiian factories in the fields was transcribed by Bulosan from a child’s point-of-view. He witnessed peasants shooting policemen after hand-to-hand fighting in front of the municipal hall, with his mother and sister fleeing from the scene of carnage. At the end, the youthful Bulosan would make up for the child’s ignorance by suturing that episode

of peasant revolt in his narrative of Filipino migrants acquiring a sense of national consciousness just before the homeland was ravaged by the Japanese army. War catalyzed Filipino national-democratic solidarity under the aegis of the global fight against fascism and militarism.

Bulosan testified that “the revolt in Tayug made me aware of the circumscribed life of the peasants through my brother Luciano, who explained the significance to me....and if I were successful in escaping unscathed, I would go back someday to understand what it meant to be born of the peasantry. I would go back because I was a part of it, because I could not really escape from it no matter where I went or what became of me. I would go back to give significance to all that was starved and thwarted in my life” (62). Civil war in its anti-imperialist mode was the trauma that fertilized Bulosan’s imagination, making it a catalyzing agent for producing meaning and order out of the disintegrated and chaotic world known as Filipino “tutelage” under U.S. occupation. This war is continuing in the U.S. neocolony.

Unlike EuroAmerican citizens, Filipinos could not insulate themselves from worldwide emergencies. The Spanish Civil War generated a poignant resonance in the Philippines because of its Spanish inheritance: the Falangists of Generalissimo Franco operated through the feudal landlords and bureaucrat-capitalist oligarchs in the Commonwealth government. Bulosan was influenced by the anti-fascist stand of the Philippine Writers League some of whose officials attended the third American Writers Congress in June 1939 (Folsom 241). That Congress was initiated by Theodore Dreiser, Lincoln Steffens, James Farrell and Erskine Caldwell. Among the participants were John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes and Kenneth Burke whose paper, “Revolutionary Symbolism in America,” would provide the rationale for Bulosan’s united-front outlook evinced at the end of *AIH* and in his poems and public pronouncements.

Given the fragmentation, anomie, and alienation fostered by predatory capitalism, Bulosan’s conscientization (to use Paulo Freire’s term) could only lead to a populist—not sectarian workerist—mobilization that would transcend ethnic, racial, and class boundaries. As Michael Denning perspicuously argued in *The Cultural Front*, Bulosan’s “sentimental education” was not so much a celebration of populist Americanism as an attempt to resolve certain contradictions inherited from his kin-centered feudal-capitalist background into a transitional stage of awareness found in solidarity among multiethnic workers engaged in strikes and political agitation. Ultimately it was an attempt “to transcend a United States of violence,” to endow violence and blind rebellion with (in Bulosan’s words) a “broad social meaning” (Denning 274-75).

Strategy of the Popular Front

In the poems, fiction, and political discourses that Bulosan wrote between the Colorum uprising in 1931 and the outbreak of World War II, the solitary voice seeking an interlocutor predominates. In “Blood Music, 1939,” “Death and Transfiguration,” “Waking in the 20th Century,” and “Portrait with Cities Falling,” for example, the desolate urban environment frames the anguish of fugitive migrants: “And we hide in the cold room, silencing/All words of protest, praying for morning...while headlines are screaming war, squadrons/Of aeroplanes pouring liquid fire of destruction,/and bloody dictators flashing arms....” (*On Becoming*, 150). Death by bombs dropped from airplanes haunts the poet: “The night/Is like a trembling heart, beating louder and louder/to the distant murmur of planes and artilleries....” It was the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), especially the 1937 bombing of Guernica immortalized by Pablo Picasso, that fired Bulosan’s conscience, inducing prophetic visions:

And in the course of this my year, before the planes
sunk Spain under a sea of workers’ blood, swastikaed,
in the middle of my life a new discoverer came
and charted the island of my deams and nightmares.... (*On
Becoming* 164)

In poems such as “Biography Between Wars” and “If You Want to Know What We Are,” as well as in essays such as “Freedom from Want,” “The Growth of Philippine Culture,” and “The Writer as Worker,” Bulosan affirmed the need to satisfy not only physical want but also intellectual and spiritual needs denied by a racist, class-divided order. War precipitated an epiphany already germinating in stories such as “Be American” and “As Long as the Grass Shall Grow,” an epiphany captured in this pivotal passage in “My Education”:

....But as we moved rapidly toward the war with Japan, I realized how foolish it was to believe then that I could define roots in terms of places and persons. I knew, then, that I would be as rootless in the Philippines as I was in America, because roots are not physical things, but the quality of faith deeply [ingrained] and clearly understood and integrated in one’s life. The roots I was looking for were not physical but intellectual and spiritual things. In fact, I was looking for a common

faith to believe in and of which I could be a growing part. (*On Becoming* 128-29)

Overall, however, war's pedagogical resonance proved ambiguous. In "The Soldier," a moment of empathy between an American veteran of World War I and a Filipino soldier could not overcome years of racist ostracism. In "The End of the War," a Filipino's dream of the surrender of the Japanese and Germans becomes property shared by all: "It was a dream that belonged to no one now, yet it was a dream for every soldier" (*On Becoming* 104). What is learned is a sense of community, the virtue of disclaiming the right of private ownership of sentiments or hopes, that vanquishes solitude, shame and the feeling of guilt for a crime (as he confessed in a letter) of being a Filipino in America.

When the Cold War broke out after the end of World War II, Bulosan and his compatriots in the trade union movement were targeted by the McCarthyite witch-hunts. This persecution by fascist agencies hounded him until his untimely death in 1956. His sympathy for the Communist-led Huk rebellion and for activist intellectuals such as Amado V. Hernandez, Chris Mensalvas, and Ernesto Mangaong compelled him to complete his masterpiece, *The Cry and the Dedication* (not published until 1977 in Canada) while editing the 1952 *ILWU Yearbook*. What is notable about this novel is the use of the contingencies of guerilla warfare in rural Philippines as the stage or arena for re-enacting the vagaries of exile and deracination in the course of a risky quasi-pilgrimage, thus converting the picaresque structure of *AIH* into a charted itinerary with a *telos* or overarching purpose. But the *telos*—Dante's attempt to fuse his two personalities (the injured American "self" and his residual Filipino identity)—is left unrealized. Instead of a Virgilian epic hero refounding his origin in a new society of rational order and harmonious *pietas*, Dante could not transcend nor sublimate his role as a fugitive-victim. Before he dies, his mind lingers on "the animal roar of the howling mob that had pursued him down the streets of San Diego, when vigilantes chased him out of town because of his organizational work" (291).

As I observed in a synoptic review of Bulosan's achievement, *The Cry* refracts the leitmotif of homecoming that threads his fiction and poetry from 1930 to 1950. This novel of guerillas passing through their villages toward a final rendezvous "enacts the return: one traumatized character (Dante), already home from the US, awaits the coming of another one, the 'wounded' messenger (Felix Rivas) who never appears, suspending the denouement, converting this expectation of the advent of the legendary bearer of "Good News" into a permanent condition" (San Juan,

“Internationalizing” 139). Is this Bulosan’s metaphor for home, the “Not-Yet” future pregnant in the womb of the present, fulfilling if only vicariously his responsibility for caring for kins, neighbors, and anyone in need?

Inventory of the Bifurcated Psyche

One can now discern a ruptured core in the Filipino imagination about the US involvement in war, whether that of colonial occupation of the homeland or the Cold War between antagonistic ideological camps. Because of his specific history, the Filipino was always a profoundly colonized subaltern torn between the conqueror’s alleged democratic ideals and its sordid practice of racist oppression and exploitation. This is what distinguishes the Filipino worker-writer from his Chinese, Japanese, Korean counterparts before the Vietnam War and its aftermath. As colonial subjects, the first transplanted writers--chiefly Bulosan and Philip Vera Cruz-- acquired a united-front outlook toward war in the course of their participation in union organization and mobilization. In the war against monopoly capital, Bulosan explored in his art the dialectic of colonized subaltern and the united-front solidarity of peoples against fascist barbarism.

Vera Cruz started as a student in the Thirties but became involved in the National Farm Labor Union, AFL-CIO, in the Fifties. After thirty years, he summed up his life as “always just a matter of survival. It was always an emergency and I was never ready to go back” (Scharlin and Villanueva 30). Like Bulosan, Vera Cruz opposed the Vietnam War and US intervention in supporting the oligarchic despot in the Philippines as part of his daily struggles against corrupt, exploitative agribusiness in the West Coast and Hawaii. It was class war against corporate agribusiness during the historic Delano grape strike in 1965 and against Cesar Chavez’ support of the Marcos regime in the late Seventies. Both Bulosan and Vera Cruz became writers, used language as a weapon to forge anti-militarist and anti-war mongering politics in trade-union struggles.

After WWII, Filipino writers pursued the dialectics of an emergent collective organism (the neocolonized homeland) and the existential experience of commodified/racialized bodies in the United States. Conceptualizing war no longer as explicable in terms of innate belligerence, territorial instinct, honor/prestige, Vera Cruz reconstructed Filipino peasant militancy in his engagement in ethnic/class conflict. Its puzzling ambiguities would be transposed later on by the exiled veteran-writer N.V. M. Gonzales into fables of stoic peasants and moralistic anecdotes of the opportunist Filipino intelligentsia. The field of ideological confrontations then shifted from the farms into the global cities of the planet as the

Filipino diaspora exploded from the ruins of the Marcos regime and the retooling of the Pentagon's "low-intensity warfare" under the US-backed Corazon Aquino administration.

When the Philippine Commonwealth government went into exile, another group of Filipino writers emerged, among them Bienvenido Santos and Jose Garcia Villa, whose "take" on war reflected their more precarious, ever-shifting petty bourgeois milieu. This intermediate phase of colonial life witnessed the absorption of radical ideas into a more generalized liberal-democratic stance against fascist extremism. Aestheticist in orientation and temperament, Villa, though employed by the exiled government, declined to commit himself publicly—except for an anti-Hitler/Mussolini poem (201). Santos, however, felt himself thoroughly displaced, unable to fully adjust to the chaos of urban America. During the Korean and IndoChina wars, Santos re-membered or sutured into nostalgic patchwork the fragments of deracinated memory in *The Scent of Apples* and in novels such as *What the Hell For You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*.

War for this beleaguered cohort was either a catastrophic Minotaur that one can wrestle with, or a grotesque nightmare from which only laughter, verbal wit and rhetorical cunning can wake us. Bulosan and Vera Cruz grappled with the Minotaur with polemical analysis and humanistic critique. Santos could only respond to the Japanese destruction of his homeland with agonistic gestures and affects, a token of his vestigial pacifist inclination. The viscerally-felt brotherhood of victims afforded the luxury of stoic pride masking "the hurt men": "Most of us boys kept a smarting hurt beneath our brown skin, a personal tragedy of the war zealously kept, as we walked the streets of the big cities of America, seemingly gay, and uncaring; eager for friendship, grateful for the kind word, the understanding look, the touch of love" (44).

Exiled from 1941 to 1946, Santos never directly elaborated on the horrors of war except through its impact on Filipino "old-timers" (the term used for sojourners who postponed their promised return). In "The March of Death," Santos addressed his compatriot "brother" as they walked the "crowded streets of America," with the poet evoking the Bataan "death march" as memory resisting dilution by visionary projections:

And we would walk those roads again one April morn,
Listen to the sound of working men
Dragging tree trunks from the forests,
Rebuilding homes—laughing again—

Sowing the fields with grain, fearless of death
From cloudless skies.

You would be silent, remembering
The many young bodies that lay mangled by the roadside;
The blood-soaked dust over the bloody rage of men;
The agony and the moaning and the silent tears;
The grin of yellow men, their blood-stained blades opaque in
the sun;
The many months of hunger and torture, and waiting.
("March" 80)

When Santos was forced into exile again in 1972 with the censorship of his novel *The Praying Man* by the US-backed authoritarian behemoth, he returned to the metropole to chronicle "the smell of decay and death in the apartments of the old-timers," their grins becoming "twisted in a grimace of pain close to tears" (xx).

Civil war in the Marcos "martial law" regime drove Santos' psyche deeper into a search for the vanished idyllic past in images of "sweat and sun on brown skin or scent of calamondin fruit and fresh papaya blossoms" (xxi). In 1981, Santos addressed the second Asian Writers Conference held in Manila, Philippines, with his post-exilic reaffirmation of the writer's task to expose human failings, "to titillate the conscience of mankind into awareness" and thus prove worthy of "the gift [also a curse] of vision to see the truth and say it well" ("Words" 11-13).

The Beat Generation and After

With the new generation maturing in the Sixties, WWII became simply a yellowed Hollywood film clip starring Robert Taylor and John Wayne. War against "third world" communist partisans in IndoChina, Latin America and Africa was the overriding mass-media preoccupation. It was the renewed guerilla warfare led by the re-founded New People's Army in 1969 (sprung from the rubble of the Magsaysay counter-insurgency campaigns) accompanying the worldwide demonstrations against the Indochina wars that over-determined the cultural climate for Jessica Hagedorn, Ninotchka Rosca, Gina Apostol, and others. Influenced by the Asian American protests to the Vietnam war and its aftermath, Hagedorn and Rosca tried to reconstitute the damaged sensibilities of new migrants fleeing the Marcos dictatorship and the fierce resistance mounted by the impoverished majority.

For this post-Civil Rights era group, civil war appeared as a tragic-comic, often farcical, sequence of events that could only provide materials for postmodern pastiche made up of exoticized landscapes and transmogrified characters. For Hagedorn, the neocolonial setting and atmosphere of the Marcos regime's "New Society" can only be satirized and burlesqued in *Dog-Eaters*, or rendered into operatic escapades and melodramatic montage in the virtuous performance of *Dream Jungle*. In *Dogeaters*, Hagedorn tries to make sense of counter-insurgency warfare through a medley of diverse styles, clichés, rhetorical registers, and hyperreal hallucinations. This parodic bricolage of Western high postmodernism, however, "blunts whatever satire or criticism is embedded in her character portrayals and authorial intrusions" (San Juan, *After* 128). Counter-insurgency warfare is grist to the mill of the asute impresario of sardonic performances for the sophisticated metropolitan audience consuming *Village Voice* and off-Broadway shows.

Refining her experimental techniques and edgy playfulness, Hagedorn's third novel, *Dream Jungle*, returns to the theme and topos of *Dogeater*. This time she deploys a schizophrenic mode of fabulation to weave Spanish, aboriginal and Anglo-Saxon cultural motifs in an effort to rehearse the sordid circumstances surrounding the filming of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. In the novel, the American director Peirce reveals his fascination for what's going on in the Philippines: "The Vietnam War makes us uneasy. It's a dirty little war, full of dirty little secrets... [In contrast] this particular war is not heroic, not simple, and that's why I'm obsessed by it" (215). His script of the Marcos interlude deals with "drugs, rock and roll, the unknown." Civil war in a neocolony, with its moral-ideological burden, is reduced to a matter of character idiosyncrasies and gratuitous turn of events. What results is a virtuous performance demonstrating the stylistic mannerisms typical of high modernist art, an expedient vogue whose import resides in somehow communicating to us "the ideological aura of finance capital in the age of globalization" (San Juan, *Interventions* 209).

A product of her activist experience and exile during the Marcos dictatorship, Rosca's *State of War* attempts a panoramic depiction of the various cultural strands constituting the fabric of Philippine history. The tragicomic atmosphere of personal dilemmas in the Seventies is juxtaposed to the chaotic years before and after the Japanese Occupation only to end up in gratuitous schemes of reconciliation: the Philippines, Rosca reminds us, is the country of beginnings, and morning lasts a long time. Is this an apologia for the neocolony's backwardness? The attempt to elaborate a genealogy of clans as the key to the nation's predicament seems to founder in a cynical game of reducing politics into a matter of family squabbles

(even though clans may be read as indices of class and ethnic disparities), filtered through magical-realist landscapes and carnivalesque happenstance episodes.

Rosca wants to make sense of history's carnage (inflicted by the Spaniards, Americans, Japanese, and their collaborators) by locating its meaning in individual psyches with their obsessions and quirks. The calculus of good and evil, and its balancing of reason and disorderly passion (the Virgilian ratio of *humanitas*/reason bracketing savage violence/*hubris*), is supposed to be read from the kaleidoscope of private fantasies, unfathomable motives, and intuitions. But the scheme breaks down into hackneyed melodrama and a formulaic juxtaposition of familiar tropes, motifs, images. The major characters seem overwhelmed by the brutality they are made to witness, as shown in Luis Carlos' attitude to the U.S.-directed massacre of peasant guerillas who fought the Japanese: "Shivering, not knowing what this new war was all about, he wondered if he had known any of the dying and the dead down there—a good two hundred men, still sunburnt and brawny from the four-year War of Resistance against the Japanese, spilling blood, urine, and vomit on the golden dust" (313). Rosca's novel ends with an anticlimactic denouement, with the insurgent's bombing of the concluding festival rite and Ana Villaverde's pregnancy meant to reconcile the plebeian and oligarchic classes in a mythical celebration of Woman harmonizing with unspoiled Nature. This poetic emblem is supposed to resolve all the political-ideological contradictions of the neocolony.

Exoticism and fetishism are old colonizing tactics. There is a sense in which both Hagedorn and Rosca unwittingly fall under the influence of the Eurocentric habit of surrounding their women characters with the aura of the sacred, as the Chinese interlocutor confesses to his Western friend in Andre Malraux's *The Temptation of the West*: "Europe was for me the only place in the world where Woman existed" (10). On the other hand, a poet such as Nick Carbo can always maintain an ironic, bemused stance, using the schematic frames and methodology of Eurocentrism to expose the reflexive nature of the colonial gaze: "I've always wanted to play the part of that puckish pubescent Filipino boy/in those John Wayne Pacific-War movies...." (49). As Sayles acutely observed as his reason for making *Amigo*, previous Hollywood films devoted to the Philippines have all distorted, caricatured, and inferiorized the Filipino in the service of a stigmatizing "Manifest Destiny" that claimed to redeem the natives through enlightened, even cathartic, violence ("Director's Statement"). War, for the self-appointed civilizing missionaries, has so far been not only just but also charitable, peace-oriented, and liberating.

From Peasant Naivete to Narcissistic Cunning

Meanwhile, N.V.M. Gonzales, a late exile from the decadent phase of the Marcos dictatorship, discovered Fanon and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his comfortable retreats in California. The scope of his journalistic career spans the period from the Commonwealth years of the anti-fascist Philippine Writers League to the anti-Huk campaigns of the first years of the Philippine Republic. His testimony of the horrors of WWII and the anti-Huk campaigns is submerged in the pathos of mediocre village lives, with the most sensitive among them acquiring a moment of wisdom that compels resignation, as in the father's epiphany in "On the Ferry": "You could fashion make-believe to order; but, oh, not life, complete with its mystery and loneliness" ("Ferry" 109).

During his exile in the Seventies and Eighties, Gonzalez read Achebe, Edward Said, and D. H. Lawrence's comments on Multatuli's [Edward Douwes Dekker] novel *Max Havelaar*. Gonzalez compared the Dutch's exposure of colonial excesses to Rizal's demystifying satires. He concluded that "colonization lulls the writer into accepting the status quo, and attributing to the human condition the travails of his or her people" (253). But Gonzalez could not escape the Western hubris of exalting art as bearer of universal truth, beauty and goodness far above the nasty tumult of class/race conflicts. Gonzalez might be the only one among the older Filipino writers in English who fully understood that there is no alternative to using the indigenous vernacular to negotiate the quest for recognition as a unique people in a world torn by ethnic dissensions, even by a ruthless "clash of civilizations," a quest that Gonzalez located in the tension between creativity in response to inspiration and expediency in response to situation ("Between" 176).

Only perhaps in Apostol's *Gun-Dealer's Daughter* and the Mayi Theater's plays (collected in *Savage Stage*) do we encounter a less exhibitionistic and more ethically committed grappling with the moral and political issues of colonial war and its offshoot in civil war in the neocolony. The reason for this is the rampant neoconservatism of the Reagan-Thatcher period that followed the end of the Vietnam War. This was worsened by the ruthless repression of mass movements in Chile, Argentina, and Central America; capitalist restoration in China; the collapse of the Soviet Union and the genocidal devastation of the Middle East beginning with the first Gulf War.

In Apostol's novel, the killing of the American Colonel Grier testifies to the rearticulation of war as a deadly game conforming to Clausewitz's instrumentalist view. In 1981, a CIA officer advising the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) was killed by urban guerillas; while earlier, in 1974, three US Navy officers were

gunned down in Subic Naval Base by suspected leftists (Jones 247). However, the theme of revenge and its ambiguous repercussions in Apostol's fiction complicates the picture. Whose will is being imposed on whom, remains blurred since the enormity of destruction resulting from secret government maneuvers eludes the traumatized psyche of the central protagonist, the mentally unhinged narrator of the novel:

...a list of the colonel's talents was alleged in the press. "Sponsored low-intensity conflicts...an instructor at the School of the Assassins in Fort Benning...projects sowing confusion and conflict in rebel-taken areas...CAFGU was his brain child...proposed and trained head-hunting vigilantes...Alsa Masa, Bantay Bayan...troops that gouged the eyes of children after they were killed...littered he countryside with Garands and carbines...dead women...dead children, their severed heads..." (227)

Before 11 September 2001, the futurologist Alvin Toffler expatiated on the preponderant role of "Force: The Yakuza Component" in twenty-first century global affairs. With knowledge linked to wealth and violence, Toffler anticipated an impending, decisive powershift in which "global gladiators" will cross nation-state boundaries in pursuit of hegemony. War becomes permanent, "an inescapable social fact" (468). No longer can we afford relishing the nostalgic refrains in Bulosan, Vera Cruz, and Santos, nor the metaphoric/symbolic pyrotechnics in Hagedorn and Rosca. War has become a permanent feature of everyday life, particularly after 9/11, the catastrophic slaughter in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya—the intractable vicissitudes of the "global war on terrorism" overloading the human sensorium and imploding the limits of quotidian reality.

Spectacle of a "Howling Wilderness"

The consensus among Asian historians is that the Filipino-American War (from 1899 to 1913) in which 1.4 million Filipinos and several thousand American soldiers died anticipated the brutal record of the IndoChina wars. In 1980 Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* recalled this almost forgotten episode in the Spanish-American War at the turn of the nineteenth century; and Stuart Creighton Miller elaborated on the personages and policy debates surrounding the horrors of the battlefield. Only when the legality of torture, especially "waterboarding" in the Iraq War, hit the headlines was its progenitor, the "water cure" administered

by Americans on Filipino prisoners, recognized as a moral and political problem (Kramer; Leopold; Warrick)

Just a year earlier, however, the “water cure” and other war crimes received artistic treatment in the Ma-yi Theater’s presentation of “Project: Balangiga” (hereafter “Project”) in August 2002, at the height of the bloody skirmishes in Iraq and Afghanistan. The play utilized a combination of techniques from Brecht’s epic theater, Noh scenario methods, and ritualized courtroom/forum dramaturgy. The play sought pedagogical and sensational effects. Rehearsing the facts of the Balangiga episode in the Philippine-American War where 59 American soldiers were ambushed by Filipino insurgents (Miller 199-204), “Project” focused on the imprisonment and torture of Filipino prisoners.

Narration and spectacle alternated in this revisit of a painful past. In the interrogation of suspects captured during the war, the American troops employed the “water cure” described in quotes from eyewitnesses and re-enacted in the play:

(A man is administered the water cure. A prisoner lies on the table, held down by two men. Another holds up a jug from which a rubber hose extends.)

“The prisoner was tied and placed on his back under a water tank holding probably one hundred gallons.”

(The torturer takes the end of the hose and lets the water dribble into the nose of the prisoner, who thrashes in agony.)
(340)

The play quotes more graphic descriptions of the torture, interrupted by the interpolation of parallel events dealing with football games in Boston, King C. Gillette’s factory of shaving razors, and the sentencing of Leon Czolgosz, the anarchist murderer of President McKinley. The bulk of the play narrates in vivid scenes the Filipino ambush, the disguises used by the natives to carry out the attack, the futile resistance of the soldiers, the tally of the dead, followed by the merciless retaliation ordered by General Jacob Smith and Major Littleton Waller. Smith ordered that no prisoners be taken, to burn villages, and to kill anyone over the age of ten capable of bearing arms against the United States. Such a reprisal was the performance of justice and pedagogical example.

Unleashing the Furies

What stands out from the barbarity of the war, as theatricalized here, is the racist logic subtending the occupation and subjugation of about ten million inhabitants of the Philippine Islands. This is evidenced in the background of the military officials in the brutal pacification of the American Indians, and in Major Waller's linking the Chinese and Filipino as targeted enemies: "In eleven days, my men have burned 255 dwellings, slaughtered 13 carabaos and killed 39 insurgents. We have also to avenge our late comrades in North China, the murdered men of the Ninth US Infantry. The Chinese and the Filipinos are of the same stock and nature. There's no difference between these Asiatics" (347). Waller was court-martialed for executing 11 native guides he hired; he was subsequently acquitted. No American official was sentenced to jail or discharged from service for war crimes in the conquest of the islands—except for about a dozen African-American soldiers who joined the Filipino resistance against the Yankee invaders (San Juan. "African American").

Up to now, no investigation of the Balangiga event has ever been conducted by the US government; only individual accounts exist. So that, even after a century of total and partial wars, this incident in the fraught relations of the imperial master and the neocolonized subject remains unresolved, with its ethical and moral resonance suspended in several mutating versions and interpretations. The play explores the polarized opinions of the time, extrapolating them into the contemporary attitudes toward the 9/11 disasters and the debate on the use of torture as a method of fighting Islamic extremists and other "terrorists" labeled by the US State Department and Homeland Security agencies. In short, Balangiga becomes the "primal scenario" for the wars afflicting our world today.

It is against this 9/11 background that the play recalls the Balangiga "massacre" and its aftermath. The initial trigger was the 1998 centennial celebration of Philippine independence against Spain and the request of the Philippine government for the return of three bells of the Balangiga Church captured by the US army and kept in the Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, Wyoming. The US government refused to heed the Filipino request.

To appease all partisans of this volatile issue, the playwrights stage a forum or panel discussion consisting of an Asian American Studies professor, a literary deconstructionist, a retired US officer, and a writer. No professional historian participates in the exchange. Verbal scuffles and comic insinuations follow. What ultimately results seems to me to contradict the polemical-didactic thrust of the first half, since the exchanges divide into equally plausible or at least ethically viable

positions: the patriotic versus the aggrieved, the value of a Filipino life weighed against that of an American. In short, the lesson of the Balangiga incident in the horrendous panorama of the Filipino-American War becomes a conundrum. Perhaps this was not anticipated by the whole ensemble. In any case, distance/detachment becomes salient when the tombstone of a single Filipino victim is dissolved into larger concentric circles of generality until, from a cosmic point of view of “the planet earth,” the specific moral gravity of that war is nullified, negated, volatilized. *Sub species aeternitatis*, everything becomes trivial or laughable.

Taming the Minotaur?

Whether war can really be represented except through individual pain and collective affliction, remains a moot question. Reflecting on Homer’s *Iliad*, Weil contends that war is what turns humans into things, both victor and victim in the fray. Since humanity cannot avoid war, Sun Tzu advises the scientific study of war as the quintessential embodiment of deception. Despite its apparent uniformity, Hobbes and other canonical texts warn us of the complex faces of war, its tricky ramifications and cunning metamorphosis. Indeed, the postmodern mutation of war into an educational reconfiguration of the human sensorium via new technologies (TV, computers, radar, satellites) was outlined by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore during the Vietnam War. That war ended “the dichotomy between civilian and military” (134), revolutionizing music (Beatles, John Cage) and our global cultural habitat, generating “a new macrocosm or ‘conubium’ of a super-terrestrial kind” (190) based on the cybernetic “retribalization of the West” and the meeting of East and West. Twentieth-century wars functioned as their inaugural rite.

War’s impact was viewed dialectically from early on. Following the Enlightenment and the growth of a meliorist, progressive sensibility, the believers in a just war seem inspired by the Virgilian outlook that fate, as well as the violence and unspeakable (*infandum*) cruelties incarnate in war, can be transcended by the eventual triumph of reason, rational order, and peace, as Anchises described Rome’s future to his son Aeneas in the *Aeneid*: the rulers must remember “to impose the habit of peace, to be merciful to the vanquished, and to overcome the mighty” (Commager 8-9). In general, the Filipino writers I referred to above seems to have responded by saying that the colonizers have failed to enforce “the habit of peace,” nor have they really showed mercy and subdued the mighty who continue their ravenous exploitation of the laboring masses both in the imperial center and in the colonial hinterlands. Power remains loose, a wild dangerous beast overwhelming conscience, reason, and humane community.

Civil war between the New People's Army and the Philippine government rages on with ferocious intensity. This time it is complicated by the more formidable Moro separatist rebellion led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Thus, for Filipino writers in the diaspora, the unremitting war on terrorism (the last one being the NATO campaign against Libya's Col. Qadaffy) offers challenges that supersede the "War or Peace" political binary. Not that the stakes are more enigmatic or aporia-ridden; in fact, the choice has become simplified into "socialism [people's democracy] or [fascist] barbarism"—Rosa Luxemburg's slogan of last century. Proof of this barbarism surfaced in the case of Melissa Roxas, tortured by state security agencies in 2009 during President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's administration. The affidavit of Roxas' horrendous ordeal (posted online) may be treated as a contemporary *testimonio* or documentary text, resembling an episode from now classic testimonial models such as those by Rigoberta Menchu and Domitila Chungara (Tatum)—except that Roxas is a U.S. citizen visiting her parents' homeland. Since the "super-terrestrial connubium" McLuhan predicted in 1968 has not yet materialized to adjudicate the rights and wrongs of the "dirty war," the lawyers of Roxas can only appeal to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to safeguard the possibility of redress and justice due to the civil-war's victims (Schonbrun et al).

We are confronted daily with the drama of people's war versus the corporate elite symbolized by "Wall Street." We witness everyday images of police violence against peaceful members of the "Occupy Wall Street" movement. Nor are events happening thousands of miles away considered foreign, given the rapid transmission of information in cyberspace. When 19 soldiers of the neocolonial Philippine army were ambushed by Moro Islamic Liberation fighters in Basilan last October 18, there was an outcry for revenge in Washington. President Aquino ordered a retaliatory bombing uncannily reminiscent of the "total war" his mother pursued against communist insurgents in the Eighties and Nineties. Indiscriminate bombing by the Armed Forces of the Philippines immediately dislocated twenty thousand civilians and killed untold numbers (Salamat; Santolan). We are witness to the continuing struggle of the Moro peoples against colonial domination, dating back to the Spanish conquest in the 16th century up to the present (see San Juan, *U.S. Imperialism*) Except for scattered fiction and eyewitness testimonies, we still await a serious literary or artistic rendition of this tragic holocaust similar to what Bulosan attempted in *The Cry and Dedication*, and what Sayles' tried to represent in *Amigo*.

We noted at the outset the challenge that the experience of war presents to its narrators and interpreters. This has become particularly acute with the wily prevarications of “the shock doctrine” (Klein) and the State use of drones and assassinations, together with the systematic use of legal pretexts to disguise U.S. aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other regions. It is more and more difficult to distinguish warlike deeds from pacifying actions.

Contrary to Jameson’s view that war, at least its total configuration, defies representation, Filipino artists today are discovering ingenious semiotic modes of articulating what C.S. Peirce calls the “logical interpretant”—the barbaric Others—whose signs of alterity and negativity exceed the referent or semantic objects of imperial torture, smart bombs, drones, and unlimited surveillance. Today, when nuclear war is bound to damage the whole ecosystem and guarantee the human species’ extinction, the question of “just war,” so eloquently argued by St. Thomas Aquinas and others, becomes untenable, even unconscionable. We need to discriminate again the complex interaction of means and ends when politics and morality become entangled in the ideology of technologism and scientism (Somerville). In short, the repertoire of mimetic and allegorical strategies invented by Filipino writers in the diaspora need to be reconfigured to interrogate more rigorously the Western metaphysics of war as a violent contestation of states, even as their ambitiously totalizing vision endeavors to articulate and prefigure the nascent, smoldering solidarity of the wounded, injured, and victimized arising from the rubble of Empire.

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