
“Of all the enemies to public liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes. . . .” James Madison, “Political Observations,” April 20, 1795.

“. . .the dominant interpretation of the past often enjoys its status not because of its superior historical accuracy but because of its proponents’ social power.” Karl Jacoby, Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History (p. 276).

An underlying theme of this newsletter and of all of the newsletters pertaining to war is the necessity of the US peace movement in all its local organization to be informed, to try to see through lies and secrecy, to think, and to act both locally and globally. Often the argument is made that peacemaking must begin with individual search for inner equanimity, steadiness, and strength, and nobody can deny that foundation for peace, but our leaders’ reckless lawlessness, making the world hostile and unstable and killing millions of people, destabilizes each and every one of us locally and individually, and must be stopped. In order to act, we are not compelled to wait until we have fully matured, and anyway a lifetime is seldom enough time to enable that ideal condition. –Dick

CHRIS HEDGES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BRADLEY MANNING

Manning provided to the public the most important window into the inner workings of imperial power since the release of the Pentagon Papers. The routine use of torture, the detention of Iraqis who were innocent, the inhuman conditions within our secret detention facilities, the use of State Department officials as spies in the United Nations, the collusion with corporations to keep wages low in developing countries such as Haiti, and specific war crimes such as the missile strike on a house that killed seven children in Afghanistan would have remained hidden without Manning. READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/off-site-opinion-section/369-wikileaks/16315-we-are-bradley-manning
US Imperialism Newsletters

#1 July 3, 2007
#2 Sept. 20, 2007
#3 April 7, 2008
#4 Nov. 30, 2008
#5 September 13, 2011
#6 October 16, 2011
#7 January 16, 2012
#8 June 3, 2012
#9 Oct. 20, 2012

My blog: It's the War Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/


Instead of Defense Department: War Department
Instead of War on Terror: War to Control Resources
Instead of Taliban: Afghan/Pakistan Pashtun Resistance to Occupation

A wide-ranging source of information is the Defense News Early Bird Brief: 

Nos. 7 & 8 below.
Here is the link to all of OMNI’s newsletters

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/  Laying the foundation for peace, justice, and ecology in knowledge.

Many books have been written prophesying the end of US Empire with titles like: Suicide of a Superpower; The Empire Has No Clothes; Taming American Power; Nemesis: the Last Days of the American Republic; Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire; and Selling Out A Superpower.

"To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." -- Robert H. Jackson, Chief U.S. Prosecutor, Nuremberg Military Tribunal

Verse for those who see no evil:
If we see right, we see our Woes,
Then what avails it to have Eyes?
From Ignorance our Comfort flows;
The only wretched are the wise. Matthew Prior

Nos. 7 & 8 below.

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Support Our Troops, Our War, and Our War Criminals  

by Edward S. Herman / April 1st, 2013

The call to “support our troops,” or “our boys,” is really an appeal to support the war in which the troops are engaged. Critics of the war would say that if the war is unjustified, possibly even a criminal enterprise in violation of international law at several levels, as was so clearly true of the Iraq war, supporting the troops and war is to support international criminality. The proper support of our troops and boys therefore is to oppose the war and fight to get our boys (and girls) out before they can kill or be killed while participating in such a criminal enterprise.

Naturally, this critical view of supporting our troops gets little play in the propaganda system, and the propaganda design of the formula “support our troops” is probably effective in the environment of patriotic fervor that wars engender. But the hypocrisy here runs deep. Many of the threads of hypocrisy woven into this propaganda fabric stem from the fact that the political and military establishments care very little about the welfare of our boys. The really bad thing about their deaths, injuries and suffering is the resultant negative publicity and possible increased financial costs of greater attention to their needs that might limit military budget size and flexibility. There has been a notorious struggle over the damage our boys have suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan from economies in the protective equipment provided to them; from the damaging psychological effects of multiple tours of duty; from the reluctance to recognize the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the seriousness of traumatic brain injury (TBI); and the scandals reflecting lagged and poor care of personnel back home and in need of medical care.

In earlier years, also, it was a long struggle to get recognition of the damage suffered by U.S. troops in Vietnam from the massive chemical warfare used there, where, of course, the damage to U.S. personnel was only a small fraction of that suffered by the Vietnamese people, still unacknowledged and unrectified by the responsible criminal state. The ironical usage of “MIA” to mean “missing in America,” referring to war veterans in a sad state of indigence and homelessness at home, also goes back at least to the Vietnam and post-Vietnam war days. There are many MIAs in the United States today, and a dramatic figure that did get some publicity was that more military personnel committed suicide than were killed in combat in Afghanistan in 2012 (349 versus 295).

It is enlightening also that there is an inverse correlation between aggressively supporting U.S.
wars and supporting our troops with generous funding of their medical care and post-service education and general welfare. This is plausible. The bulk of service personnel are drawn from that 47 percent of the population that Mitt Romney derided as government-dependent and not “job creators.” (The heads of Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics. Ratheon and Textron are job creators.) Romney, Paul Ryan, George Bush, John Boehner (etc.) and their monied base are fighting a major battle to diminish or terminate the welfare state, and many Democrats as well as Republicans are with them, so that containing what amounts to welfare state benefits to our boys with PTSD and otherwise in distress is entirely logical.

Of course, along with “support our troops” there is an implicit “support our torturers and higher level war criminals.” This flows from the overwhelming and increasingly centralized power in the hands of the dominant elite, including the military-industrial complex (MIC) and leading politicians, and an associated remarkable level of self-righteousness. Anything we do is tolerable because we are not only strong and the global policeman, but also good and always well-intentioned, and are therefore not to be questioned when we do abroad precisely what we condemn in target states. We can support Saddam Hussein and even provide him with “weapons of mass destruction”, when he is doing us a service in attacking Iran, even when he is using chemical weapons there; and with no seeming sense of shame or guilt we can quickly turn him into “another Hitler” when he disobeys orders. We can help the Shah of Iran build a nuclear capability, but threaten war when his successor regime tries to do what was encouraged with the Shah; and again, with utter self-righteousness. It testifies to the greatness of the Western propaganda system that these shifts and mind-boggling double standards can occur without the slightest pause or recognition or any need for explanation or apology.

The really high level war criminals like Bush, Blair, and Obama can get away with anything, not only because they are at the pinnacle of power and can set their own rules, but also because they dominate the external institutions that supposedly make the rule of law international, but fail to do so. One of the prettiest cases is, of course, the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, an act matching Hitler’s 1939 invasion of Poland, and resulting in a million or more Iraqi deaths. Although this was a blatant violation of the most fundamental principle of the UN Charter, while UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan did point out that the invasion was “illegal” he didn’t express great anger or suggest that the invaders be expelled or even reprimanded. He got on board the aggression ship, as did the Western great powers (with the Russians and Chinese essentially just sitting there watching).

But the sick comedy of “international law” rode on, with the UN, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and International Criminal Court (ICC) playing their assigned role by applying it whenever the Big Aggressor or one of his leading allies felt the application of legal principles to be useful. The Big A and his Little Aggressor client Israel wanted a legal input for Darfur, but not for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, invaded by Rwanda and Uganda, whose leaders were Big Aggressor clients, and so it was—Sudan’s al-Bashir was indicted by the ICC, Rwandan and
Ugandan leaders were exempt. Big A and allies wanted legal authority for attacking Libya, but not Bahrain, so the ICC and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) obliged with indictments for Gaddafi and sons, silence on Bahrain. The Big Aggressor wants international law applied to Syria, so Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who along with her predecessor Louise Arbour didn’t lift a finger in the case of the Iraq invasion-occupation, which produced a million dead and 4 million refugees, now repeatedly urges the UNSC to call on the ICC to investigate Bashir al-Assad’s war crimes in Syria. Pillay played the same role in the case of Libya, in collaboration with the ICC, greasing the skids for a NATO military attack on Libya and the ouster and murder of Gaddafi.

The role of the “international community” (in the sense of the leadership of the Western great powers and their clients, not the underlying populations) was dramatically exhibited in giving the newly elected U.S. President Barack Obama the Nobel Peace prize in 2009. He hadn’t done anything whatsoever for peace at that time, but gave the appearance of a leader more moderate than Bush and Cheney. A silly award, but once again a giveaway on the supportive-groveling qualities of Western political/cultural institutions. (Can you imagine the Nobel Committee giving the award to Amira Hass, Malalai Joya, Kathy Kelly, or Richard Falk, people actually making genuine personal sacrifices in the interest of peace?) Honest analysis and morality would have recognized that Obama was going to be a major war criminal by structural necessity, embedded as he was in a permanent war political economy where political survival, let alone success, required the commission of war crimes. Obama soon found that political success demanded killing foreigners; that budget enlargement for killing was easy, but spending for progressive civilian needs was difficult and would anger powerful people. He quickly adapted to being a warrior president, his seemingly most proud accomplishment being the killing of bin-Laden.

Obama has played all the war cards. He has lauded the Vietnam War as a noble enterprise and is pleased to participate in and laud a memorial that celebrates it. Like Bush he loves to speak to military cadres where he can draw resounding applause with patriotic and war rhetoric, although increasing numbers of liberal Democrats have gotten on board his war-oriented ship of state and also find his warrior image and actions agreeable. He has gone somewhat beyond Bush in institutionalizing government rights to invade privacy, closing down information access, and criminalizing whistle-blowing. His drone war policy and claimed right to assassinate even U.S. citizens based on executive decision alone breaks new ground in criminality and in enlarging the scope of acceptable war crimes. He has also refused to prosecute U.S. torturers and high level war criminals, violating earlier promises but, more importantly, violating international law and effectively ending the rule of law. We need change we can believe in, but Obama is giving us compromise and literal regression that we must vigorously oppose.

• Article first appeared in Z Magazine April 2013

Edward S. Herman is an economist and media analyst with a specialty in corporate and
George McGovern lived his public life with an integrity that in these rancid political times, all of us might envy. He unfortunately is remembered most for his overwhelming defeat at the hands of Richard Nixon in the presidential election of 1972, but it is worth noting that Nixon resigned in disgrace, the only president to ever abandon his office. McGovern was a historian, undoubtedly with profound respect for the presidency; it is difficult to imagine his obstructing justice or abusing his power in the Nixon manner.
As we count the dwindling numbers of World War II veterans, we recall McGovern’s heroic service in that conflict. He piloted the lumbering B-24, the slowest of our combat bombers, through 35 hazardous missions over numerous targets in Nazi-occupied southern Europe. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for one mission in which his navigator was killed, yet he safely landed his crippled plane on a small Adriatic island.

After World War II, a combination of his religious background, his studies for a Ph.D. in history, and a rising call for American leadership in the world profoundly touched McGovern. He turned away from his parents’ Republican roots and embraced the idealism of Woodrow Wilson’s worldview. The American failure to assert a leadership role in world affairs after 1918 convinced him and so many of his generation that the United States had an obligation to lead a mission of collective security to ensure world peace. That notion served him well throughout the 1950s and 1960s as he rose to political prominence. He probably embraced John F. Kennedy’s clarion call in his 1960 inaugural address to “let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

In the late 1950s, South Dakotans elected McGovern to two terms in the House of Representatives, a somewhat remarkable feat for a Democrat. In 1960, however, the state stayed true to its form and McGovern lost his first bid for a Senate seat. The newly elected John F. Kennedy chose McGovern to direct the Food for Peace Program. He actively promoted the creation of the U.N.’s World Food Programme in late 1961, which distributed food throughout the world and became the largest agency fighting worldwide hunger. Near the end of his life, he suggested his own epitaph: “He did the best he could to end hunger in this country and the world.”

McGovern did not stay long in administrative work, and in 1962 he was elected to the Senate. He served three terms and from there, he catapulted into national prominence as a leading opponent to the Vietnam War. Throughout his subsequent political career, McGovern identified himself as an heir to the Kennedy legacy, but there is a certain irony for his Vietnam stance clearly put him at odds with Kennedy’s expansive posture. It is too late in the day to disentangle Kennedy’s role and responsibility in the Vietnam War from his successors’ policies.

In its obituary, the New York Times apparently did not believe that it was “fit news” to dwell on McGovern’s significant role in a bipartisan group of senators who sought an end to our intervention in Vietnam — “Mr. McGovern left no special mark in his three terms …” the newspaper said. Is it too embarrassing – too painful – to remember McGovern’s role and that of other opponents who helped force an end to our military role in Vietnam?

Alas! We forget and we foolishly repeat our mistakes — and at a cost. McGovern deserves our warm memory as among the precious few public figures to consistently and sensibly dissent from the reckless course of American foreign policy in the later Cold War years, and even afterward. He disavowed his vote supporting the Tonkin Gulf resolution in 1965, authorizing a large-scale expansion of American
involvement, and he was among the first to say that the Senate acted on the basis of misleading intelligence reports.

Presidents Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson (with an important assist from Dwight D. Eisenhower) justified the Vietnam adventure with the “domino” theory, insisting if Vietnam fell to the Communists, then nations throughout Southeast Asia would topple like dominoes – presumably then the “Reds” would be in Hawaii, if not on the beaches of La Jolla, Calif. Richard Nixon burnished his Cold War credentials and eagerly embraced the “domino theory” and insisted he, too, would prevent Communism from engulfing Southeast Asia.

For the past four decades, opposition to the Vietnam War has become a blurred, faded memory, exploited and belittled for self-serving partisan and policy reasons. The unspoken suggestion is that critics of the war had undermined desirable American interests, and advocated a diminished international role for the United States. What we seem to learn from history is to forget it. George McGovern’s opposition to America’s unrelenting imperial course consistently remained his message, but all too often he delivered it to an unsympathetic, even deaf, nation. McGovern’s efforts rested on the assumption that American foreign policy must recognize limitations of our power – a rejection of Kennedy’s determination to exercise American power anywhere. And no dominoes fell when we left Vietnam.

McGovern’s wartime experience provided a certain authority as he became increasingly critical of American foreign policy during his years in Congress and beyond. When he assailed George W. Bush’s decision to attack and invade Iraq, McGovern bravely rejected the ludicrous proposition that Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction,” with mushroom clouds looming on our horizon. There was no national interest to be served, McGovern said. Vice President Dick Cheney – the Bush administration’s leading dissembler – mocked McGovern’s softness in foreign policy, and for his “defeatist” opposition to the Vietnam War. McGovern, always with a disdainful eye for chicken hawks, retorted by reminding us that Cheney “had other things to do” than serve in Vietnam. He noted that Cheney had five deferments and never served a day in the military.

History is memory, and what we remember and what we choose to forget tells us much about ourselves. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger – he of the Nobel Peace Prize – connived and purposefully avoided a peace settlement in Vietnam before the 1972 election. Nixon in one voice used his Quaker upbringing to declare “blessed are the peacemakers,” while in another voice he resolutely declared he would not be the first president “to lose a war,” however unwinnable the war had become, as he well knew. We celebrate McGovern for he actively sought to force the president’s hand to end that costly war in lives and treasure, and which, above all, had diminished American power and influence.

Nearly a half-century later, we pursue more monsters abroad, and we have political candidates who favor more American expansionism. The lessons and meaning of the tragedy of Vietnam are all too apparent; yet we have learned no lessons or meaning. We ignore George McGovern’s message at our peril.
Stanley Kutler is the author of the "The Wars of Watergate" (Norton), and with Harry Shearer has written the forthcoming television series, "Nixon's the One." MORE STANLEY KUTLER.

FIVE APPARENTLY RELEVANT ARTICLES TO WHICH I COULD NOT GAIN ACCESS--DICK

"'Our (New) Terrorists' the MEK: Have We Seen This Movie Before?"
By Coleen Rowley, Huffington Post, posted September 27

"Boykinism: Joe McCarthy Would Understand"
By Andrew J. Bacevich, TomDispatch.com, posted September 25
The author teaches history and international relations at Boston University

"New Stanford/NYU Study Documents the Civilian Terror from Obama's Drones"
By Glenn Greenwald, The Guardian, posted September 24

"The Siren Song of American Imperialism"
By William Astore, History News Network, posted September 24
The author is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who teaches history at the Pennsylvania College of Technology

"How Hawkish Are Americans?"
By Lawrence S. Wittner, History News Network, posted September 24
The author is a professor of history emeritus at SUNY Albany


“Foreign Affairs rule Pre-Debate Discourse.” ADG (Oct. 22, 2012). The debate over Party foreign affairs policies functions on the shallowest of issues—for example, Romney supporters assail O. over the deadly attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi. The truth is that on the large policies—invasion and occupation, torture, and so on- the two candidates are indistinguishable. --Dick

Obama-Romney foreign policy debate
World Socialist Website <http://www.sws.org>
October 22, 2012 | In the final debate of the US presidential election, to be held Monday night in Boca Raton, Florida, President Barack Obama
and his Republican challenger Mitt Romney can be expected to tout their contrasting "visions" on US foreign policy. However, on the fundamental issues of concern to the American corporate and financial elite, the two candidates are entirely united.

They will both declare themselves defenders of "democracy" and "freedom," even as American money and weapons prop up dictatorships like the Saudi monarchy, the kleptocratic rulers of Congo and other resource-rich African states, and military-backed regimes from Honduras to Egypt. They accept unquestioningly the necessity to use military force and political subversion to safeguard the economic and strategic interests of the American financial aristocracy anywhere in world.

Full story...
<http://evergreenedigest.org/two-defenders-american-imperialism>

**US INTERVENTION IN AFRICA: MALI**

**Clinton presses Algeria on Mali intervention plan**

Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (L) shakes hands with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as she arrives for meetings at the Mouradia Palace in Algiers October 29, 2012.

Credit: Reuters/Saul Loebi/Pool

By Andrew Quinn
ALGIERS (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pressed regional power Algeria on Monday to support an Africa-led military intervention in northern Mali, a senior U.S. official said.

Clinton's one-day visit comes amid mounting international pressure on Algeria over the crisis in Mali, where a March military coup was followed by a revolt that has seen Tuareg rebels and Islamist militants, some linked to al Qaeda, seize control of the northern two-thirds of the country.

The senior U.S. official said after the talks that Clinton argued strongly that counter-terror efforts in Mali could not wait for a political resolution to Mali's problems.

"The secretary underscored ... that it is very clear that a political process and our counter-terrorism efforts in Mali need to work in parallel," the official said.

"We have an awful lot at stake here, and an awful lot of common interests, and there's a strong recognition that Algeria has to be a central part of the solution," the senior U.S. official told reporters traveling with Clinton.

"They are going to be supportive of a major effort in Mali to both restore democracy and restore order in the North. Everyone has their favorite institutions to work with, and there's a lot that has to be sorted out in the geometry of the thing," the official said before Clinton's talks with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Africa's biggest country, and a top oil and gas exporter, Algeria shares a 2,000-km (1,250-mile) border with Mali and sees itself as the major regional power, wary of any outside interference.

It fears military action in Mali could push al Qaeda militants back into southern Algeria as well as triggering a refugee and political crisis, especially among displaced Malian Tuaregs heading north to join tribes in Algeria.

Algeria repeatedly has advocated a diplomatic solution to the Mali crisis, and ruled out intervention itself.

Although Algiers would not be able to veto an intervention operation by other countries, it would be diplomatically risky for African states backed by Western powers to intervene in Mali without its consent, especially as the conflict could drag on for many months.

"TACIT" AGREEMENT

Clinton's visit to Algiers came after a high-level meeting in the Malian capital Bamako on October 19 that brought regional and international players to the negotiating table, and after which French and Algerian sources said Algeria had "tacitly" agreed to intervention.

France, the region's former colonial power, drafted a U.N. Security Council resolution urging Mali to engage in dialogue with Tuareg Islamist rebels Ansar Dine if they cut links with radical groups, a move that satisfied Algiers' calls for dialogue.

Paris had until now considered Ansar Dine among the al Qaeda-linked groups and refused to negotiate with them.

The resolution also asked African states and the United Nations for a Mali military intervention
plan led by the West African ECOWAS block within 45 days.

U.S. officials said Clinton planned to underscore that Algeria would be crucial to any future mission in Mali, noting both its military power and the strength of its intelligence gathering network in the region.

A second official said it appeared Algeria was "beginning to warm to the idea" of an ECOWAS-led military intervention, but this would be contingent on the West African block putting forward a fully-developed plan which it has yet to do.

(Reporting By Lamine Chikhi; Editing by Michael Roddy)

The ADG (10-30-1012) published a condensed version of this Reuters report, “Clinton Sees Algeria Having Mali Role.”

The US role can be summarized as: US going to war to restore military dictatorship.

Mali’s Democratic gov’t. overthrown by military coup.

N. Mali Tuaregs broke away.

Islamists ousted Tuaregs.


Bu-lat-lat (boo-lat-lat) verb: to search, probe, investigate, inquire; to unearth facts

Vol. VI, No. 14 May 14-20, 2006 Quezon City, Philippines

Approaching Imperial Neoliberalism

Imperial neoliberalism, the rationale of actual political and economic globalization, reveals itself most lucidly in the “Project for New American Century,” the manifesto of advisers closest to President George W. Bush. The designers of this new aggressive U.S. foreign policy premised on an unprecedented military buildup were participants in the invasions of Panama and Grenada, counter-insurgency wars in Central and South America(particularly Colombia, Peru), the Cold War showdown with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and the arming of Iraq to counter radical Islamists in Iran and elsewhere. Basically, the project centers on a doctrine of unilateral pre-emptive war against any nation or power seeking to rival the U.S. rather than containment and multilateral internationalism of terrorist groups. The goal is total war, endless war, premised on accelerated militarization of society and “moral clarity.” What the last phrase means may be grasped by quoting portions of the manifesto: “American foreign and defense policy is adrift…As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world’s pre-eminent power….Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?” This domination of the planet is based on “unquestioned U.S.
military preeminence” beefed up with new generation of nuclear weapons and sufficient combat forces deployed to a wider network of forward operating bases to fight and win multiple wars, including forces for “constabulary duties” with American rather than UN leadership. Are we facing here an aberrant act committed in a moment of absent-mindedness?

In a blueprint entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century” released last September 2000, this neconservative group outlined its grand plan for world hegemony: “The United States is the world’s only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world’s largest economy. America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible. Yet no moment in international politics can be frozen in time; even a global pax Americana will not preserve itself. The presence of American forces in critical regions around the world is the visible expression of the extent of America’s status as a superpower…” The report urges the control of the Persian Gulf region by the U.S., proceeding through the conquest of Iraq, followed by Syria and eventually Iran. For this plan to be “saleable” to the public, a catastrophic and catalyzing event “like a new Pearl Harbor” was needed; this was promptly supplied by September 11, 2001. While the ostensible excuse for the invasion of Iraq included Hussein’s tyranny, putative weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism, it was in effect the desire of the US ruling elite for a permanent role and base in this strategically important region of the world, rich in resources but also geographically situated in a way that would provide springboards for intervention into Europe, Russia, China and the Indian subcontinent.

In President George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union address, the doctrine of “preemptive war” as the lynchpin in the endless war against terrorism, against rogue states that form the axis of evil (Iraq, Iran and North Korea), was announced. The right to act preemptively, using nuclear strikes and other “operational capabilities,” was no longer being exercised to punish the perpetrators of the crime of September 11 by the savage onslaught on Afghanistan where Al-Qaeda and Osama bin laden had strongholds, but it was a measure necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.” The fantasmatic danger of terrorism scattered around the world now justifies this militarization of foreign policy and the willingness to intervene and engage even in “lots of small, dirty fights in remote and dangerous places” in the process of “draining the swamp” of civil society (to quote Defense Secretary Rumsfeld; Mahajan 2002, 97; Shank 2003). In addition to the “shock and awe” war against Iraq, endless and borderless war against anyone perceived or declared as “terrorist,” that is, anti-American, seems overreaching and out of proportion to the catastrophe of September 11 (Ullman and Wade 1996). The aim of fighting and winning multiple, simultaneous major theater wars seems a postmodernist avant-garde invention. But the reality of events appear to confirm the intent: Afghanistan was subjugated at the expense of some 20,000 lives, Iraq at more than triple the number and still counting.

What strikes most people as sinister is the plan of a secret army or “super-intelligence support activity” labelled as the “Proactive Pre-emptive Operations Group, or P2OG. It will combine the CIA and military covert action, information warfare, and deception to provoke terrorist attacks that would then require U.S. “counterattack” against countries harboring the terrorists. But this is humdrum routine for the “civilizing mission” since the conquistadors landed in the “New World” and the European traders-missionaries began the merchandising of the bodies of African slaves.

In retrospect, one can discern an uncanny similarity with the events before the war against Iraq in 1991, which inaugurated the era of “total war.” The depressed economic situation and the scandals of corporate criminality cannot be remedied by further dismantling of the welfare state, so the public must be diverted. Noam Chomsky’s analysis of that situation sounds prescient and historically grounded in a well-defined pattern of political sequences that condense half-a-century of postcolonial interventions:

Two classic devices are to inspire fear of terrible enemies and worship of our grand leaders, who rescue us just in the nick of time. The enemies may be domestic (criminal
Blacks, uppity women, subversives undermining the tradition, etc.), but foreign demons have
natural advantages.... As the standard pretext [Communists] vanished, the domestic population
has been frightened—with some success—by images of Qaddafi’s hordes of international
terrorists, Sandinistas marching on Texas, Grenada interdicting sea lanes and threatening the
homeland itself, Hispanic narco-traffickers directed by the arch-maniac Noriega, after he
underwent the usual conversion from favored friend to Attila the Hun after committing the one
unforgivable crime, the crime of disobedience…. The scenario requires Awe as well as Fear...
(1992, 408)

The terrorizing sublime

Awe as well as fear—this “structure of feeling,” which postcolonial critics have so far ignored, frames
the situation of the war against terrorism carried to the imperial margins, this time in the Philippines. I
would now like to call the attention of the reader to the Philippines, a former colony of the United
States (now arguably a genuine U.S. neocolony) and the continuing 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.

Since the seventies at the time of the Marcos dictatorship, the severely impoverished Muslims in the
southern Philippines called “Moros” (who were never actually subjugated by the Spaniards, Americans
or Japanese throughout their history) have mounted a fierce struggle for autonomy and dignity, for
some measure of self-determination. While the Moro National Liberation Front has compromised with
the government, another more formidable group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, has continued its
struggle. But its fighters are now branded “terrorists” and their legitimate cause criminalized. It is
expected that the MILF will be classified as a “foreign terrorist organization”—foreign, of course, to
Americans, but not to Filipinos. When President Arroyo allowed the U.S. Special Forces to participate
in the pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf, a bandit-group that is really 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.

The Abu Sayyaf has been represented in the U.S. mass media as an awesome and fearful force,
mysterious yet intelligible. It is now public knowledge that the Abu Sayyaf, like the MILF, was set up
by the Philippine government to split the Moro struggle for self-determination and pressure the MNLF
into capitulation. But since 1995 the Abu Sayyaf has turned into a Frankenstein’s monster devoted to
hostage-taking for ransom and terrorizing civilian communities. In the midst of U.S. intervention last
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 where this group operates. 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.

Engaging the neocolonial return

Given this context, let us examine how metropolitan wisdom has employed “postcolonial” resources to represent this whole conjuncture to the academic public. One example is Charles O. Frake’s article “Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities among Philippine Muslims” in a 1998 issue of American Anthropologist. 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 postcolonial 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. Empire, class and nation have all been expunged from the functionalist, cooptative frame of analysis.

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 opaque ruses 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).

Recalling Said’s critique of Orientalist scholarship cited earlier, 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. A few postmodernist scholars 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 orientalizing supremacy of Western knowledge-production and its hegemonic influence. Of course it is now commonplace to note that all disciplinary research performed in state 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.

**Perseverance in commitment**

In my recent work (San Juan 2002; 2004), 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. 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 for the postcolonial critic. 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 (Filipinos, Americans) 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. We should also keep in mind the new historical milieu characterized by what Alain Badiou calls “the disjunctive synthesis of two nihilisms,” capitalist nihilism and the anonymous fascist nihilism manifested in the 9/11 attack (Badiou 2003, 160). This ethical challenge sums up, to my mind, the riposte that postcolonial agency must pose to neoliberal imperialism (instanced by Frake’s discourse, among others) if it is to sustain its tradition of critique, that uncompromising questioning of absolutisms and sacralizing mystifications that Edward Said initiated at the beginning of his exemplary intellectual adventure.

REFERENCES, Go To:  [http://www.bulatlat.com/news/6-14/6-14-globalized-printer.html](http://www.bulatlat.com/news/6-14/6-14-globalized-printer.html)

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Solitite of an Internationalist

**Our Leningrad by ANDRE VLTCHEK**

“No one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten”. That is what is engraved in Gold on the granite stone, right behind the statue of the Motherland, spreading her arms in grief.

The Piskariovskoye Memorial Cemetery is in the city of St. Petersburg –186 mass graves and about
half a million people are buried there, including most of my family from the maternal side.

During World War II, for 900 days (2 and a half years), the city of Leningrad stood firm, defying the most horrific siege in modern history. It stopped the advance of the Nazi troops, withstood constant aerial bombardments, bitter cold, hunger and the lack of all basic necessities. Almost half the population vanished, was burnt by bombs, frozen in trenches and in unheated flats, or was starved to death.

This cultural capital of Russia performed the ultimate sacrifice: rising in defiance and courage, playing an important role in defeating Nazism, and thus in saving the world.

All of this while most of the West, either collaborated with Nazism or tried to ‘appease’ it.

Naturally the USSR in general and Leningrad in particular, did not save the world that belonged to the white race; it saved the world of “non-humans”, according to the German Fascists, of exterminable beings: people from Indian sub-Continent, Africans, Jews, Roma (Gypsies), Slavs, most of the Asians and Arabs.

And by smashing Fascism, colonialism also received a decisive blow (as Fascism and colonialism are made of the similar stuff), allowing dozens of nations in Asia and Africa to gain independence, and freedom. At least for some time; at least until the Western nations managed to regroup.

This was, naturally, never forgiven in the European and North American capitals. The Soviet Union and all its ideals and principles had been dragged through the dirt and vilified. Although it saved the world from Nazism, it became common to compare it to Fascist Germany, and many progressive Western intellectuals adopted this twisted and insulting judgment.

As I sat on a bench near the Statue Of The Motherland, I was in the company of Artem Kirpichenok, one of the leading Russian historians; a Jew who lived in Israel for 15 years, but decided to return to his native St Petersburg after becoming disillusioned with racism and the institutionalized discrimination of the minorities living in the Jewish State.

“It is incredible that Western propaganda succeeded in making most people all over the world believe that Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism are comparable”, I said. “Even some progressive intellectuals are pronouncing both ‘–isms’ in one single breath.”

“Nazi Germany, the same as England, USA and France, was based on racist and colonalist mindset, widely accepted principles among the Western bourgeoisie in the 1930s”, uttered Artem Kirpichenok. “Hitler was building his empire in Eastern Europe on the British colonial design in India. Nazi racial theories did not differ too much from the racism in the US South or from the racial theories of French, Belgian, British or Dutch empires implemented in the colonies. The collapse of the Third Reich hit hard on all those ideals of colonialism and racism. And the Soviet Union was mainly to ‘blame’ for that collapse. The ideological basis of the European dominance over Asia, Africa and Latin America had been damaged.”

That could of course never be forgiven.

* * *

During the siege, my maternal grandmother dug trenches on the outskirts of the city. She fought the Germans, and was decorated for her courage on several occasions. I have no idea how she did it, how she managed to fight and to survive – she was so gentle, fragile and very shy. Many years after the war, years after I was born, whilst she was reading me poems and fairy tales, I would find it very difficult to imagine her holding a Kalashnikov, hand grenades or even a shovel. But she did; she fought, and she was ready to die for what she then thought, was the epic battle for the survival of humanity. And she
came very close to dying on several occasions.

She was an Orthodox Christian lady, but also a firm supporter of Communism, a rare combination. She married my grandfather, a brilliant Muslim man from the Chinese minority in Kazakhstan, Husain Ischakov, a linguist and a Commissar of Health and later for Food Supply (basically a ministerial post in the old days).

What followed was a fragment that appeared as if it had been cut directly from official Western propaganda. My grandfather fell out of favor with Stalin, was arrested and executed. In 1937, (the first earliest memory my mom had from her ‘childhood’) this tall and elegant man was bent over the cradle, lifting my mom in his arms, and pressing her against his chest, before being led away by the agents of the State, to oblivion and eternity. He cried as he looked at her face; he knew exactly what was ahead. He never came back.

My grandmother fought. She was decorated. But nonetheless, after the War was over, she was arrested and thrown into jail for ‘marrying an enemy of the State”. She spent years in prison, while my mother went through hell, virtually an orphan. When my grandma was released from prison, she said to my mother: “It was so terrible that I thought; two more weeks and I would hang myself there”. But she never betrayed my grandfather: all she had to do was to sign that she ‘regretted’ marrying him. She never did. Obviously, her loyalty was more important to her, than her own life.

She left that jail, still an Orthodox Christian, and still a Communist!

My grandfather’s name was eventually ‘cleared’; he was made a ‘hero’ again posthumously. Books were written about him, and my mother was allowed to study architecture.

* * *

What happened to my family was of course brutal and terrible. And to claim that the USSR was some paradise on Earth would be insane.

But we are talking about 1930s and 1940s. And in that context, the USSR was definitely more humane than Western Europe or the United States. To dispute that would be to deny the most basic statistics.

“Let us compare”, I was repeatedly told by the greatest Southeast Asian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who was nominated countless times for the Nobel Prize for literature but never received one because, unlike Solzhenitsyn, he was imprisoned in the wrong – pro-Western – concentration camps.

“Let us remember that everything occurs in some historical context.”

Western propaganda managed to put to work some tremendously effective lies, half-truths and outright fabrications, that could not be checked or disputed (not that most of the people would even try): the number of victims in the gulags were exaggerated, and were regularly combined with the numbers of both political and common criminals (in the Stalin era, everybody convicted of any crime was put to work, in some sort of labor camp with terrible conditions, as the country was still poor. Many prisoners never returned).

Some members of the Soviet intellectual and military elites (including my grandfather) were executed. But was it just because of ‘Stalinist terror”? Many analysts (Russian, Chinese and others) now claim that the Nazi spy apparatus thoroughly infiltrated Soviet intelligence. Germany wanted to get rid of the most talented, loyal and tolerant Soviet leaders and Generals. They identified them, and then began injecting and spreading the most damaging, but fabricated information about their disloyalty. My grandfather was, for instance, executed on the charge of ‘spying for Japan’, a ridiculous but somehow ‘logical’ charge as he was a linguist, and spoke several Asian languages.

On top of that, Stalin and those around him, had plenty to be ‘paranoid’ about: the hostility of the West
towards the young Communist state was apparent. The USSR was attacked by the US, UK, and ravaged by brutal Czech Legions and other invading forces.

* * *

Anyone with a drop of objectivity would have to admit (unless he or she would be set on denying the basic principle of humanism, which declares that all people are equal, regardless of their race and or nationality) that the Communist Soviet Union committed much lesser amounts of crime than the Western countries under the banner of ‘constitutional monarchies’ or ‘multi-party democracies’.

While the Soviets were busy pulling tens of millions out of poverty (and we are talking, for instance, about the Muslims of the Middle East, the areas where the standard of living eventually reached that of the European parts of Russia, as well as the other countless minorities inhabiting this enormous country), in approximately the same era the Belgians managed to kill around 10 million people in Congo, chopping off their hands and burning women and children in their huts alive.

The Germans committed a monstrous genocide (or call it Holocaust) against the Herero tribe in Namibia, for no other apparent reason than because they seemed to dislike their members. The first concentration camps on earth were built by the British Empire in Africa, and the French colonial onslaughts are well documented in Southeast Asia, in West and North Africa and elsewhere. The Dutch plundered, raped, killed and enriched themselves on a great archipelago that is now called Indonesia.

The genocides, mass murder and terror that were spread by the West, in the rest of the world, have been countless, but of course under-reported, as ‘foreign aid’ for education and the media, managed to train and discipline collaborators in the poor world, securing that the truth about the past would be generally omitted.

Even the end of World War II did not bring to an end, the bestial treatment of ‘the natives’ at the hands of the European and North American colonialists. One should recall the treatment of the people of the Middle East, by Winston Churchill and other glorified British leaders. All this is of course well documented, including in the books written by Churchill himself, but hardly mentioned by the disciplined and reliable mainstream media and academia, in both the colonizing and colonized nations.

There are countless statues of Winston Churchill or the Belgian King Leopold II, all over capitals of Europe.

In the second half of the 20th Century, during the so called ‘Cold War’, the Soviet Union stood firmly on the side of the oppressed, on the side of the liberation struggles, for freedom in Africa, Asia and Latin America. One has to wonder how mighty has been the propaganda that has made it all to be forgotten?

While Europe and the United States (and their constitutional monarchies and multi-party ‘democracies’) cultivated despots in Iran, Egypt, the Gulf, the Middle East, South Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Brazil, Kenya, South Africa, Indonesia and so many other unfortunate places, the Soviet Union stood by the Cuban, Nicaraguan, Tanzanian and North Vietnamese revolutions, it supported the leaders, true heroes and liberators like Patrice Lumumba and President Salvador Allende.

And both of us – Noam Chomsky and I – came to the conclusion during our recent debate at MIT, that the standards of living in Riga, Prague or East Berlin were allowed to be significantly higher than in Moscow, while those of Tashkent or Samarkand were just marginally lower. The standard of living in the colonies and the client states of the West were ten, twenty, even a hundred times lower than those in Washington, Paris or London, often resulting in the loss of millions of human lives.

I calculated that some 55 million lives have been lost since World War II as a result of Western
colonialism, neocolonialism, direct invasions, sponsored coups and other acts of international terror. I am probably grossly under-estimating the numbers, as there were lives lost to famines, terrible mismanagement, and the outright misery triggered by Western imperialism.

Tens of millions of lives were further lost as a result of the terrible seeds planted by imperialism and colonialism, the most obvious case being the Partition of the Sub-Continent.

I would suggest that instead of comparing Fascism and Soviet Communism, the Left and the entire thinking world would begin comparing what is truly comparable: the Fascism, Western colonialism and market fundamentalism (the most violent fundamentalist faith on earth today), served and represented by “Western multi-party systems” and “Constitutional monarchies”.

* * *

When I meet a new person, which happens with a great frequency, to me there is nothing more frightening than the most simple and natural question: “Where are you from?”

I don’t know what to say, I cannot answer and even if I could, the reply would be too blurry, too complex, and too philosophical. On top of that, unless I would opt for some long and detailed answer, the information I would give would be very inaccurate.

I am a dedicated Internationalist, but it is not taken as an identity by the majority of those that I meet. My interviewers and reviewers often choose Prague, the former Czechoslovakia or the present day Czech Republic as my identity, but it is thoroughly false. Prague was never my home. Czechoslovakia was where I endured a hellish childhood, where during the winter, I had my shoes filled with urine and then the other kids would let them freeze outside the school or gym, one of countless punishments for my having an “Asian mother”. It is where I had to fight after each class, from the age of six for my life, simply because my mother was not just half Asian, but because she was also half Russian.

My true identity is truly spread all around: it lies deep and high in the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes where I faced death on several occasions while covering the Peruvian “Dirty War”. It is in Chile, bouncing from the walls of the narrow, winding and often haunted streets of the coastal city of Valparaiso – it lies with Chilean poets and with the songs of fishermen at its coast. My identity is spread throughout that enormous body of water of the South Pacific Ocean dotted with tiny specks of land – now ‘island nations’ that were colonized and utterly destroyed by the traditional colonial powers.

My identity is from the Swahili coast of Africa and around the Great Lakes of the continent, in all those places that underwent the worst genocide in modern history, the genocide triggered by the European and North American political and economic interests. My identity also lies in the deserts of the Middle East, and if I knew the Sub-Continent in just a bit more in detail, it would be there as well. I am at home in Havana, Caracas, Buenos Aires, Onomichi, Beijing, Cape Town and Kuala Lumpur. And I also live in Japan, Indonesia and Kenya.

It is a total mess, I know, it is very confusing and I cannot explain it, but that’s how it is.

For years, even decades, my home was where there was a struggle for justice and independence; I have been writing books and articles, making films or getting directly involved in the struggle. I can hardly identify my race, culture or national identity, anymore and I don’t even try to. I go where I am needed. And at the end, also, as Garcia Marquez wrote: my home is where they read my books.

* * *

I was born in Russia, in Leningrad (I am sorry, but I simply cannot call it St. Petersburg, as it is called now, it will always remain Leningrad to me). I had never lived there, because my parents took me to Czechoslovakia when I was just a few months old. But every year, my mother would put me on a
plane, one of those old Soviet Tupolev jets with mahogany tables, lampshades and black caviar served on all the international flights, in just one single class, to send me to Leningrad where my grandmother would be waiting for me, armed with a set of keys to some humble rented room in the Bay Of Finland, a room which, for me, was like a paradise. My grandmother was always armed with endless tickets and passes to the opera houses, ballet performances and art exhibitions. In the Communist days they cost nothing, but it was not easy to get them.

And she had piles of books waiting for me. I let her read to me, even though I was able to read myself. She read to me until it was late into the night and when it rained outside, the moments were especially magic.

From the moment I left Leningrad, I began counting the days left till my return. I had my special secret book where I marked each day that had passed. The cold deep water of the Neva River, its bridges, the open spaces, the beauty of this former Russian capital so often covered by fog, the pathos of Russian and then Soviet history, the pathos of the history of my own family – all this captivated my mind, made me dream, made me prematurely adult.

In Czechoslovakia, my mother missed Russia terribly. She cried almost every night. She read books to me, too, and a lot of poetry.

Like this, I had no childhood naturally, but they managed to make a writer out of me at an extremely early age. I inherited their struggle, their 900 days of Siege, their war, their Russia.

Both women passed everything on to me, but it was not just the suffering, the prisons and the wars, but also great hope, the ability to dream, enthusiasm, optimism, as well as great solidarity. They taught me that one could always build from nothing or rebuild from the ashes. And that love, if it is true love, is not something that does disappear, nor does it vanish in one month or even in several years.

They also passed on to me the love for their city; their lost but never forgotten love.

* * *

Now, after all those years I came back to Leningrad. By now I was much more Latin American or Asian, than Russian. My native tongue was suddenly feeling so heavy and rusty: it was still perfect in terms of pronunciation but archaic and over-polite.

I returned exhausted, after launching my big book in London – the book about Indonesia, and how the West had ruined it after the 1965 US-sponsored coup. I returned after just finishing my 160 minutes documentary film on the genocide in DR Congo, and after working at the Ugandan and then on Turkish-Syrian border.

I suddenly felt lonely and I was desperately longing to tell my story to someone dear to me. But it so happened that no one joined me in Leningrad.

I wandered through the streets, so beloved and yet so foreign.

I went to the old beach at Zelenogors, but it had changed, the marina was dotted with private boats and yachts instead of my old tugboats and patrol vessels.

I went to visit the forest where the dead body of my grandfather was thrown from the train. Now it was the memorial cemetery, in fact a haunted forest with the names and photographs nailed to the trees. I did not want to travel here from the city where I was born, from Leningrad. I wanted to come here from Helsinki, from a neutral place, but it was not meant to be.

The forest was quiet. There were a few mourners, but otherwise total silence. My Muslim, Communist, Chinese grandfather was here. My grandfather, a linguist, the Minister of Health of Kazakhstan, a man who gave his entire life to the revolution, but fell out of favor and was killed, thrown into this quiet
forest, without any respect or any rituals.

It was easy to draw conclusions, to condemn everything. But I had heard enough about him to know that he would not betray his beliefs, just as my grandmother had never done.

Before she died, I asked my grandmother: “You never re-married. You remained beautiful for decades after my grandfather died. Why?”

She smiled her unpretentious smile: “Your grandfather”, she said, “Was a very big man. It is extremely rare to meet a man like that. Others never even came up to his shoulder”. And she did not mean my grandfather’s height.

He was a Communist, and what it meant to him, was simply the process of building a much better world than the one he knew from his childhood.

In the forest, I sat on the grass. It was cold. After all those wars that I had covered, after the 145 countries I had visited, the dozens of books and films I had produced, after all that struggle, I suddenly felt the need to cling to someone, just for this moment; I needed to speak, to be held, to tell the story, from the beginning to the end. I was never the one into autobiographies, but now I needed to be understood. But in the end I came alone, with just my Leica and a tiny book of poetry written by Antonio Guerrero Rodriguez, one of the Cuban 5 – patriots imprisoned brutally in Miami.

My entire maternal family was broken and scattered. But we were all fighters. Like my grandmother and grandfather I had to go on: I had to struggle and fight for what I believe in. Like them I knew how short life is, how little time there is, how precious it is and how mighty the enemy is.

* * *

Later I travelled on the legendary Leningrad metro, with all those underground palaces, and the old Soviet-era dilapidated carriages.

I kept reading Antonio Guerrero Rodriguez, the bi-lingual Spanish and Russian, edition that was given to me in Kiev, by the translator of my writing.

El amor que expira no es amor
El verdadero amor pertenece
A todo el tiempo, a la tierra toda,
Sin temor enfrenta tempestades,
Resiste hasta el filo de la muerte
Y, como la natura, eterno.

In this stunning poem written in a Miami prison, Rodriguez argues that love that can pass is not really love. That true love could resist even death itself and is, like nature, eternal.

I noticed that a young lady was reading over my shoulder. After a while, she asked me in passable Spanish: “Is it true what it says?” Also in Spanish I replied: “Yes, they are in prison, all of them. It is terrible.”

“It is not what I mean”, she said with certain urgency. “Is it true what it says? That love is eternal or it is not love?”

I was stunned, as this would not have happened even in Buenos Aires, this exchange could only take place in Havana… and here. Then I realized that after all, this was my city, the city where poets were read by the millions, and the city that made me a writer. I looked at the girl, looked her straight in the
eyes and replied in Russian: “My grandparents thought so. I don’t know if it is truth but I always lived as if it is.”

The girl nodded. She said nothing, but as she was leaving the car at the next station, she gave me the most brilliant smile I have received in years. Obviously the city had its way to give me strength.

Outside, on the bank of Neva River, I briefly put my forehead on the granite wall that separated the sidewalk from the enormous waterway. The stone was cold, refreshing.

Leningrad did not try to hold me. It was too proud, too enormous. But I felt it was embracing me, before sending me back to war, to the battle. I had to carry on the legacy of those who were fighting for the survival of the humanity in the 1940s. I knew all those places that were under siege; I knew so many places on this earth that were worse than any hell professed by religious theories. I really knew so many of them. I was obliged to fight and to work, day and night.

As Rodriguez and others realized, one has to fight when men, women and children are being slaughtered, when entire nations and cultures are being destroyed. When injustice is called justice and in the name of it, cruelty reigns.

With the deep waters of the Neva in front of me, I whispered as I had when I was a child addressing the city: “Now I will go, but I will come back. Please wait for me.”

Andre Vltchek is a novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific – Oceania – is published by Lulu. His provocative book about post-Suharto Indonesia and market-fundamentalist model is called “Indonesia – The Archipelago of Fear” (Pluto). After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and Africa. He can be reached through his website.
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The Anthropology Wars  Eliza Jane Darling

more on Education, Imperialism, US Politics/Economy

This article will be posted in full on December 31, 2012.

Colonial Crucible:  Empire in the Making of the Modern American State, Edited by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano

“The superb essays in this volume admirably provide a broad approach to understanding the centuries-long growth of American power.”—Walter LaFeber, author of The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898

At the end of the nineteenth century the United States swiftly occupied a string of small islands dotting the Caribbean and Western Pacific, from Puerto Rico and Cuba to Hawaii and the Philippines. Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State reveals how this experiment in direct territorial rule subtly but profoundly shaped U.S. policy and practice—both abroad and, crucially, at home. Edited by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, the essays in this volume show how the challenge of ruling such far-flung territories strained the U.S. state to its limits, creating both the need and the opportunity for bold social experiments not yet possible within the United States itself. Plunging Washington’s rudimentary bureaucracy into the white heat of nationalist revolution and imperial rivalry, colonialism was a crucible of change in American statecraft. From an expansion of the federal government to the creation of agile public-private networks for more effective global governance, U.S. empire produced far-reaching innovations.

Moving well beyond theory, this volume takes the next step, adding a fine-grained, empirical texture to the study of U.S. imperialism by analyzing its specific consequences. Across a broad range of institutions—policing and prisons, education, race relations, public health, law, the military, and environmental management—this formative experience left a lasting institutional imprint. With each essay distilling years, sometimes decades, of scholarship into a concise argument, Colonial Crucible reveals the roots of a legacy evident, most recently, in
“Brilliantly illustrates the myriad ways in which the costs of empire-building are borne, although neither equally nor obviously, by both colonizers and the colonized.” —Franklin W. Knight, Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University

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Walter LaFeber’s “The New Empire” proposes that American foreign policy from 1860-1898 was framed by extra-continental expansion based upon an economic need to find foreign markets in which to sell American surpluses. By examining the early theorizing of this economic cause of expansion, its formulation through intellectual, strategic, and economic channels, and the reaction of policymakers to changing economic situations through the use of expansion from 1893-1898, LaFeber claims that the “New Empire” established by 1899 was the culmination of an American foreign policy whereby policymakers such as Seward, Blaine, Mahan, and Cleveland used American expansion to establish an economic chain of markets beneficial to the growth of the United States. LaFeber begins with the origin of the idea and the policymakers, such as William Seward and James Blaine, who he claims set the economic driven expansion in motion. He uses quotes from Seward such as, “The Nation that draws most materials and provisions from the earth, and fabricates the most, and sells the most of productions and fabrics to foreign nations, must be, and will be, the greatest power of the earth,” to showcase early calls for economic expansion. He presents Blaine’s ability to take the idea to a broader level when he quotes him as saying, “wherever a foothold is found for American enterprise, it is quickly occupied, and this spirit of adventure, which seeks its outlet in the mines of South America and the railroads of Mexico, would not be slow to avail itself of openings for assured and profitable enterprise.” He claims the formulation of the idea of economic driven expansion occurred on an intellectual, a strategic, and an economic level through the work of men such as Mahan, Blaine, and Patterson. LaFeber uses Mahan to
show the intellectual realization that too much surplus lowered prices in the U.S. and would create farmer turmoil, “Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it.” LaFeber uses James Blaine to point out the strategic need to protect American access to foreign markets when he quotes him as saying, “You know I am not much of an annexationist; though I do feel that in some directions, as to naval stations and points of influence, we must look forward to a departure from the too conservative opinions which have been held hithertofores.” He points out the economic formulation during the debate in the House over tariffs in 1894 of the call for lower tariffs and trade expansion in order to pull the country out of a depression by men like Josiah Patterson of Tennessee who said that “free trade points the way to achieve the manifest destiny of the American people.” LaFeber supports his economic driven expansion thesis by describing direct manifestations of expansion caused by this idea, including the Venezuelan Border Crisis of 1895-96 and the Spanish-American War of 1898.

LaFeber quotes a State Department official who claims that after the Venezuelan Border Crisis of 1895 it was clear that “when our manufacturers must help to swell the volume of our export trade…It has been the task of Mr. Cleveland’s foreign policy to prepare the way for them, to insure a hospitable reception for them.”

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He then uses an excerpt from the Banker’s Magazine to show the economic push toward war with Spain over Cuba, citing that “so many of our citizens are so involved in the commerce and production of the island, that to protect these interests…the U.S. will have eventually to force the establishment of fair and reasonable government.”

The problems with LaFeber’s thesis begin in his presentation of how economic driven expansion was developed by men like Seward and Blaine in the 1850s and 60s. While Seward and Blaine were expansionists, Seward was distracted by the Civil War and out of a position of power by 1869 and Blaine would not become Secretary of State in a full capacity until 1889 and thus both were incapable of putting into action any sort of concrete foreign policy initiative from 1860 leading up to 1889. There is also the question of what else could be driving expansion such as religion, as men like Josiah Strong proclaimed that Anglo-Saxon America was the pure race of Christianity and that “this powerful race will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America…And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition of races will be the “survival of the fittest.”

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1. Alice Walton - Crystal Bridges Museum

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Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art welcomes all to celebrate the American ... We explore the unfolding story of America by actively collecting, exhibiting, ...
THE AMERICAN SPIRIT? By Dick Bennett

That’s not easily defined. Is it unified? And more complex, who is to report that Spirit, or must it be inevitably reports plural, diverse commentators reporting on a diverse history?

“The Story of America through the Art at Chrystal Bridges” (the magnificent museum building by Moshe Safdie and art collection purchased by Alice Walton located at Bentonville, AR). Whose story? I have begun to make notes about what is there, and I urge you to do the same (and let me know what you perceive).

For example, the collection contains many drawings of Native Americans. What story does this collection tell? Some 400 Indian nations were destroyed and millions of Indians displace or killed by the conquest of the continental USA by European settlers. Is that the story? Is it represented adequately at Chrystal Bridges? Is it represented?

The collection is arranged chronologically and begins with a portrait of a noble General George Washington. Is the story of America at CB one of “great men,” leaders military, political, scientific? It was this “story of America” that Howard Zinn rebelled against in his book A People’s History of the United States. Rebecca Stefoff adapted it as A Young People’s History of the United States: From Columbus to the War on Terror packed with photos and drawings. In his Introduction to the adaptation for young people, Zinn discusses the question: “Isn’t it unpatriotic to emphasize slavery and racism, the massacres of Indians, the exploitation of working people, the ruthless expansion of the United States at the expense of the Indians and people in other countries?” His reply includes the importance of truth and justice both to a democracy and to informed citizens necessary to a democracy. Democracy requires the questioning search for reality and young people must learn to question power if we are to avoid totalitarianism. In the Declaration of Independence we are enjoined to “alter or abolish the government” when it fails to provide “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (This is a good moment—but what moment is not?—to stop using the word America, since it arrogantly dismisses the proper distinctions of North and South and Central America.)

101 Changemakers are about people who challenged established ideas and practices, people who “shaped struggles for social justice,” the “unsung heroines and heroes of US history.” The book opens with Crispus Attucks, Tom Paine, Tecumseh, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and David Walker, and closes with Tony Kushner, Chuck D, Bhairavi Desai, Elvira Arellano, Laila Al-Arian, and Constance McMillen. Each profile is told by an especially motivated and talented writer.

From the opening page of *The Untold History*, the importance of studying history with new lenses is crystal clear: “Historical understanding defines people’s very sense of what is thinkable and achievable. As a result, many have lost the ability to imagine a world that is substantially different from and better than what exists today.” The book is based upon the authors’ documentary film series by the same title. The two depict the struggle for “a more just, humane, democratic, and equitable world” particularly by tracing the development of US militarism and empire and rationalizing myths, which is to say the “ways in which we believe the country has betrayed its mission.”

Chrystal Bridges gives the “story of America”? Let’s be asking the question. Perhaps our questions will lead to the full story “through the Art at Chrystal Bridges.” And some day perhaps their wording will be “The Story of the United States at Chrystal Bridges.”

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END IMPERIALISM NEWSLETTER #10
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