



**New World  
Academy**

New World  
Summit

—Reader #1

with the National  
Democratic  
Movement of  
the Philippines

---

# Towards a People's Culture

bak

basis voor  
actuele kunst

## Colophon

New World Academy Reader #1:  
Towards a People's Culture

Editor:  
Jonas Staal  
in dialogue with Jose Maria Sison

Associate Editor:  
Şeyma Bayram

Coordinator & Proofreader:  
Gwen Parry

Design:  
Remco van Bladel, Amsterdam  
in collaboration with  
Andrea Spikker

Lithography and Printing:  
Drukkerij Raddraaier, Amsterdam

ISBN: 978-90-77288-18-4

Every effort has been made to obtain copyright permission for images. We apologize for any inadvertent omissions and pledge to correct them in future editions. The texts in this reader are published according to individual agreements with the authors, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without written permission of the publishers.

© 2013 the artists, authors, BAK,  
and New World Academy

Published by:  
BAK, basis voor actuele kunst  
Postbus 19288  
NL-3501 DG Utrecht  
T +31 (0)30 2316125  
info@bak-utrecht.nl  
www.bak-utrecht.nl

in collaboration with  
New World Summit  
contact@newworldsummit.eu  
www.newworldsummit.eu

New World Academy  
Research, Development,  
and Realization Team:  
Şeyma Bayram (BAK), Younes  
Bouadi (NWS), Jan de Bruin  
(NWS), Vincent W.J. van Gerven  
Oei (NWS), Maria Hlavajova  
(BAK), Robert Kluijver (NWS),  
Paul Kuipers (NWS), Renée In der  
Maur (NWS), Arjan van Meeuwen  
(BAK), Kasper Oostergetel  
(NWS), Sjoerd Oudman (NWS),  
Gwen Parry (BAK), Merel  
Somhorst (BAK), Jonas Staal  
(NWS), and Ivo Verburg (BAK)

Cover and Chapter Images:  
Unless otherwise noted, all images  
in the reader are part of a 2013  
photo series of the preliminary  
designs, construction, use, and  
burning of effigies, the "protest  
puppetry" used by members of  
the National Democratic Move-  
ment in the Philippines to depict  
and critique governing forces.  
Photos: Jonas Staal

NWA has been made financially  
possible by Fentener van  
Vlissingen Fonds, Utrecht;  
K.F. Hein Fonds, Utrecht; and  
Mondriaan Fonds, Amsterdam.



kiHein,fonds

# Towards a People's Culture

New World Academy Reader #1

## Table of Contents

7	<b>Maria Hlavajova Foreword</b>	123	<b>Jose Maria Sison The Guerilla Is Like a Poet</b>
13	<b>Jonas Staal Introduction</b>	127	<b>Lisa Ito Protest Puppetry: An Update on the Aesthetics and Production of Effigy- Making, 2005–2012</b>
21	<b>Jose Maria Sison Cultural Imperialism in the Philippines</b>		
43	<b>Mao Tse-tung Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art</b>	151	<b>Alice G. Guillermo Definition of Terms</b>
65	<b>Jose Maria Sison The Bladed Poem</b>		
71	<b>Ericson Acosta Poems and Prose, with an Introduction by Jose Maria Sison</b>		
95	<b>Ericson Acosta Interviewed by Jonas Staal I Am a Cultural Worker</b>		
109	<b>Beatrice de Graaf Terrorist Trials as a Stage: Some Notes on Performativity</b>		



Connecting art, knowledge, and advocacy through long-term research projects on urgent issues facing the world today, BAK—in charting its discursive space within the realm of what is called “contemporary art”—has, time and time again, been challenged by a disturbing question: “What if democracy was not a show?” Amusing at first, but troubling in fact, this question inquires into the modes of representation employed both in politics and art. It might be that the ritual of representation is what conceals the real split between contemporary power and contemporary politics, in which the “democracy” we know is but a “show” to distract from our actual democratic deficit—a noble diversion offered to people as “bread and circuses.”

When I turned to artist Jonas Staal with this question, he immediately shifted the conversation into the realm of education, proposing that we join forces to establish *New World Academy (NWA)* as a way of challenging the erosion of the principles that underlie the democratic ideal. It is an extension of his project *New World Summit (NWS)* and its underlying philosophical motivation to combat what he calls “democratism”—that is, “the disastrous present of the world dominated by the condition of capitalist democracy.” *NWA* would bring together political organizations invested in the progressive political project—not without controversies within the given political constellations—to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in their respective political struggles. Gathering around concrete examples of transformative politics—models of cultural activism as both an imaginative and practical force in shaping the democratic project—teachers, artists, and students would then work together to realize collaborative projects that challenge the various frameworks of justice and models of representation. By activating civic imagination through newly forged, practical alliances between art and pro-

gressive politics, the project would reinvest in the possibility of art to propose an alternative articulation of the democratic project.

In only a brief few months, the tremendous efforts at BAK and NWS, and an extraordinarily enriching collaboration with various political organizations and artists, have made *NWA* a reality. Its three inaugural sessions, organized and developed in close collaboration with the cultural workers of the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines, the collective of refugees We Are Here, and the open-source advocates of the international Pirate Parties, all take place at BAK between 15 October and 22 December 2013. Each session is followed by public presentations, performances, advocacy campaigns, and exhibitions, hosted at BAK and other cultural institutions such as Centraal Museum in Utrecht and De Balie in Amsterdam. Participants in *NWA* include artists as well as students from ArtEZ Academy Of the Arts, Interactive Design Department, Arnhem; Dutch Art Institute (DAI), Arnhem; Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam; Theaterschool, Amsterdam; Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design (MaHKU), Utrecht; and Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam.

For each session, a reader with a selection of key texts related to the organization's core political concerns as well as actual strategies of artistic and cultural engagement with the political processes at hand is published. I am happy to present you with the first publication, titled *New World Academy Reader #1: Towards a People's Culture*. As a supplement to the curriculum of a three-day-long assembly of students, artists, theorists, activists, and artworks, we hope that this informal compendium of writings stays with you as an active reminder of art's possibility to initiate a rethinking of the notion of democracy away from its current post-democratic workings and toward the realization of its true potential.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the contributors to this project, including all of the authors, my colleagues, our partner institutions whose support has made this project possible, and Jonas Staal. Although the future iterations of *NWA* will take place in various geographical and political contexts throughout the world, I hope it will occasionally find its way back to its co-establishing base at BAK.

Maria Hlavajova is artistic director of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst.

# Introduction



---

Jonas Staal



What is today considered the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines consists of a variety of underground movements as well as (semi-)legal political parties and organizations with a strong leftist, Maoist signature. Nevertheless, its historic base can be found in the revolutionary figure of Andrés Bonifacio (1863–1897), who in 1896 declared Filipino independence from the Spanish who had occupied the country since the sixteenth century. Backed by the American promise of an independent Filipino republic, his successor Emilio Aguinaldo called to arms the Filipino resistance forces during the Spanish-American War of 1898. The United States, however, did not keep its promise and ignited the Filipino-American War of 1899–1902. The US occupied the country until 1946, after which it continued to instrumentalize its “independent” governments in the Philippines.

The National Democratic Movement gained its strength during the period of the US-backed Marcos dictatorship, from 1972 to 1986, as the Communist Party of the Philippines (founded in 1968) and its armed wing, the New People’s Army (founded in 1969), rose to power in many localities throughout the country by mobilizing the peasant and worker populations by means of guerrilla tactics. The Vietnam War had further fueled anger towards the ongoing colonial policies of the Americans who, despite the formal independence of the Philippines in 1946, continued to control the country by supporting puppet regimes.

It was around 1960 that Professor Jose Maria Sison, cofounder of both the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army, joined the call of Senator Claro Mayo Recto for a Second Propaganda Movement, a cultural uprising demanding independence. The First Propaganda Movement had manifested itself against the Spanish under the leadership of nationalists and revolutionaries, writers and journalists, among whom José Rizal, Marcelo H. del



Pilar, and Graciano López Jaena were central figures. The second movement was directed against the Marcos regime and its foreign backing. It is in the context of this second movement that the figure of the artist as cultural worker emerged, a figure central to understanding the role of art within the National Democratic Movement.

The cultural worker continues to exist today against the background of an ongoing guerrilla struggle in defense of landless peasants and the urban poor, who are still deprived of their right to self-determination. Since the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, subsequent governments have continued to sell off land to foreign investors and their private militias, thus characterizing Filipino politics, in Sison's words, as a "semicolonial and semifeudal ruling system under US imperialist control," with the "comprador big bourgeoisie, landlords, and bureaucrat capitalists" as the ruling classes.<sup>1</sup>

The Second Propaganda Movement declares the figure of the cultural worker to be the embodiment of the Filipino people's right to self-determination, continuing to inscribe through his or her words and images the collective symbolic universe that would otherwise have been an independent state. The cultural worker uses the tools of art to uphold the narratives and convictions of those who are marginalized, dispossessed, and persecuted through the militarized state. He or she is at once the educator, agitator, and organizer who continues to enact and perform the symbolic universe of the unacknowledged state, which functions not so much as an administrative entity, but as a collective condition.

This first reader of *New World Academy (NWA)* explores the figure of the cultural worker and the notion of a people's culture. Professor Jose Maria Sison's contribution,

*Cultural Imperialism in the Philippines*, discusses occupation in the form of cultural imperialism in relation to which the cultural worker organizes his or her counter-state resistance. Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* provide the theoretical basis from which the notion of the cultural worker has emerged, and insist on the importance of visual literacy and the demand that artists also be educated by the masses, with the artwork becoming a tool through which the two might be synthesized. The section devoted to poetry combines several key works written by Sison during his imprisonment from 1977–1986 under the Marcos regime with the writings of Ericson Acosta, who was also imprisoned from 2011–2013 after carrying out research on human rights abuses on the island of Samar, Philippines. Acosta further reflects on his time in prison, the commitment of art and artists to political struggle, as well as his work with the Concerned Artists of the Philippines in the interview *I Am a Cultural Worker*. Beatrice de Graaf's *Terrorist Trials as a Stage: Some Notes on Performativity* engages with the specific role that Sison played within the theatrical staging of so-called "counterterrorist" state strategies and pleads for a radical theatricalization of the law in order to make visible various conflicting notions of justice. Lisa Ito's *Protest Puppetry: An Update on the Aesthetics and Production of Effigy-Making, 2005–2012* offers an introduction to her research by historicizing the effigy in the Philippines as a form of protest puppetry first introduced by the Spaniards and then adopted by the Filipino people as a tool with which to mock and criticize corrupt leaders—a tradition that has largely been ignored by academia. Finally, Alice G. Guillermo's *Definition of Terms* presents a theoretical framework for protest and revolutionary culture and traces the development of Social Realism in the Philippines by providing the reader with a compact set of defi-

1. See Jose Maria Sison's contribution to this reader, pp. 21–41.

nitions unique to the different practices located within the National Democratic Movement.

On behalf of *NWA*, I would like to thank all of the contributors to this reader for their warm generosity and rigorous insights—without their combined enthusiasm and support, this reader would not have taken shape. I would also like to thank Professor Sison, as well as his many allies both in the Netherlands and in the Philippines, for the unparalleled hospitality and patience with which they have introduced me to the broad and different cultural practices developed in the course of the political struggle for Filipino independence.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Maria Hlavajova and her team at BAK—Arjan van Meeuwen, Gwen Parry, Merel Somhorst, and Ivo Verburg—for their incredible commitment in co-establishing *NWA*. Further, my special gratitude goes out to BAK's editor, Şeyma Bayram, for her tireless and precise work. It is an honor for *NWA* host this movement and its political and cultural representatives, all of whom I believe will be able to engage participants and readers in rethinking the specific ideological criteria through which we evaluate socially engaged art.

**Jonas Staal (born 1981) is a Rotterdam-based artist whose works include interventions in public space, exhibitions, lectures, and publications that interrogate the relationship between art, democracy, ideology, politics, and propaganda.**

# Cultural Imperialism in the Philippines

---

Jose Maria Sison



From a Eurocentric viewpoint, the Philippines is in the Far East. It is a group of 11 major islands and more than 7,000 minor islands. The islands total more than 300,000 square kilometers of land in the Pacific.

The archipelago has a configuration of being strung on a north-south axis, parallel to the coast of southern China and Vietnam, which are hundreds of kilometers away westward. Northward are Taiwan and Japan and southward are East Malaysia and Indonesia. East of the Philippines is the vast Pacific Ocean and some thousands of kilometers away in the same direction is the United States.

Ever since the Spanish-American war at the close of the nineteenth century, the US had eyed the Philippines as a prize colonial catch because of its comprehensive natural resource base and its strategic location. Procuring it would further the US imperialist design to turn the Pacific into an American lake for US big business and take a piece of the huge Chinese market.

The Philippines has a current population of 96 million. Its gross national income (GNI) is about PHP 3,089 billion. By averaging this, you get an average annual per capita income of around PHP 32,000.<sup>1</sup> This figure is dismal enough, but the reality is so much worse. Most of the income actually goes to the foreign transnational corporations and banks and to the local exploiting classes. Some 80 percent of the people, mainly workers and peasants, including urban and rural oddjobbers, fall below the poverty line.

Around 85 percent of the people may be considered Malay. The rest include the aboriginal Negritos, hill tribes of Austronesian origin, and mixed-blood descendants of Chinese and Caucasians, including Spanish, American, and Indian mestizos. Since 500 BC, the Malays have lived

1. At the time of this book's publication in October 2013, PHP 1 = 0.023 USD. This means that the annual average income

of PHP 32,000 in the Philippines equals approximately 742 USD. Eds.

along the seacoast and big riverine areas. They speak more than 170 languages and dialects. But the overwhelming majority speak 8 major Malay languages: Tagalog (29.7 percent), Cebuano (24.2 percent), Ilocano (10.3 percent), Ilonggo (9.2 percent), Bikol (5.6 percent), Kapampangan (2.8 percent), Pangasinan (1.8 percent), and Wáray-Wáray (0.4 percent).

The Malays were most vulnerable to the control and influence of Spanish colonialism and Catholicism from the late sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. They have also been the most exposed to the control and influence of American imperialism since the beginning of the twentieth century, yet they retain their ethnolinguistic diversity.

Around 4.3 percent of the Philippine population belong to 12 ethnolinguistic communities called the Moro people in southwestern Mindanao, with Islam as a rallying point in their culture since the thirteenth century. Around five percent belong to the hill tribes whose origins may be traced back to the Austronesian migrations in the Neolithic period. Only a fraction of one percent belongs to the Negritude clans whose origins date back to 25,000 years ago, according to archeological evidence.

Manila-based Tagalog is the national lingua franca. Comprehension and use of this language have been popularized mainly by nationwide radio networks, Tagalog cinema, comics, the public school system, and accelerated interisland migrations. But there is the regional lingua franca in various parts of the country.

Regional and local languages are retained by the people, despite the spread of Manila-based Tagalog, the preferred use of English as a medium of instruction in the school system, as official language in the bureaucracy and as the language of the major electronic and print mass media, and the use of Taglish (mixture of Tagalog and English)

mainly among the university-educated people in Manila.

Eighty-five percent of Filipinos are baptized or registered Catholics; 4.3 percent are Muslim; 3.9 percent belong to the Philippine Independent Church (a patriotic breakaway from the Roman Catholic Church in the aftermath of the old democratic revolution in the Philippines); 3.6 percent belong to the Protestant churches of US origin, and 1.3 percent belong to the Church of Christ, a Protestant sect of Philippine origin.

### **I. Brief Primer on the History and Culture of the Philippines**

Philippine history may be divided into five periods: the precolonial period up to the late sixteenth century; the Spanish colonial and feudal period from the late sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century; the brief but highly significant period of the old democratic revolution from 1896 to 1902; the period of US colonial and semi-feudal rule up to 1946, with an interregnum of Japanese colonial rule from 1942–1945; and the current period of semicolonial and semifeudal rule that started in 1946.

In precolonial Philippines, small autonomous societies of patriarchal slavery prevailed among the predominant Malays. There were slave owners, a large number of free men, full slaves, and half-slaves. The highest sociopolitical formation achieved was that of the Islamic sultanates in southwestern Mindanao, especially that of Sulu.

The Iron Age culture of the Malays persisted. However, the people absorbed the influences of neighboring Southeast Asian countries and China. There were no megalithic structures, but the sultans, rajahs, and barangay chieftains had large wooden houses and boats of varying sizes and capacities. The *balangay*, which could carry a few persons was commonplace. The *caracoa*, which could carry 50–100

persons, was used for trade and war on an interisland scale. The *joangga*, which could carry more than 300 persons, was used for trade on a grander scale.

Spanish colonialism came to the Philippines upon the impulse of European mercantilism and the drive to spread Catholicism. The process of colonial conquest started in the late sixteenth century. A colonial and feudal social system evolved in the course of more than 300 years, with the Spanish colonial administrators and religious friars extracting taxes from the colonized people, mainly in the forms of labor, rent from the land, religious tribute, commercial profits from the Manila-Acapulco trade until the early years of the nineteenth century, and finally from trade with the industrial capitalist countries during most of the nineteenth century.

In colonial and feudal society, the landlords comprised the highest class among the natives. They rode roughshod over the peasants who represented about 90 percent of the population. The artisan and manufacturing workers comprised a small minority. The native priests, professionals, and administrative clerks were even smaller in number until the end of Spanish colonial rule.

The overriding cultural force in colonial and feudal society was Catholicism propagated by the religious orders under royal patronage. The Spanish priests enjoyed social, political, cultural, and moral power over the colonized people. They used catechetical instruction, the pulpit, the confessional box, and rituals to control the people and legitimize the colonial and feudal system. In fact, they effectively shared power with the lay colonial administrators in what was veritably a theocratic state.

In the 1880s, the reformist leaders of the First Propaganda Movement of the indios and mestizos imbibed the rational philosophy and liberal political ideas of the French Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the Spanish

Enlightenment. In the 1890s, the leaders of the Philippine Revolution grasped the revolutionary ideas of bourgeois nationalism and liberal democracy. Thus the Philippine Revolution burst out in 1896.

By 1899, the revolutionary forces of the Filipino people had wiped out Spanish colonial power throughout the country, with the exception of the walled citadel of the Spaniards in Manila, and established a nationwide revolutionary government. But also in the same year, after pretending to help the Philippine revolutionary movement against Spain, the US launched the Filipino-American war to seize the Philippines for itself.

The Filipino people and the revolutionary forces valiantly fought the militarily superior US forces. To effect the conquest of the Philippines, the US resorted not only to military force and genocide, killing off at least 10 percent of the population, but also to deceptive slogans of "benevolent assimilation," Jeffersonian liberal democracy, Christianity, and "free enterprise" in order to sow confusion among the ranks of the leaders of the revolutionary movement.

The US imposed its own colonial rule on the Philippines. But this was different from the old colonial system of sheer plunder by Spain. It was the colonial rule of a modern imperialist power, which was out to dump on the Philippines its surplus commodities and surplus capital. It was out to go through the motion of investing capital in the colony in order to extract superprofits.

From the outset, the US was willing to evolve a semifeudal society with the big compradors and landlords as the basic exploiting classes among the natives, with the middle social strata of the urban petty and middle bourgeoisie, and with the workers and peasants as the basic exploited classes.

To effect the shift from feudal to semifeudal society, the US broke up a portion of the much-hated landed estates of the religious organizations, allowed the free movement

of peasants to resettle on frontier lands or work in plantations, opened the mines, brought in more milling facilities in plantations and the mines, initiated the manufacturing of household products from local raw materials, improved transport and communications, and established a public school system to produce the personnel for expanding business and bureaucratic operations.

To achieve economic and political control, the US had to exercise cultural control over the Filipino people. It did so by superimposing itself on and penetrating the priorly existing colonial and feudal culture, as well as on the folk culture of precolonial Philippines.

After the brutal conquest of the Philippines, some of the American troops ingratiated themselves with the people by becoming public school teachers and teaching English. Then, shiploads of American teachers came. The development of the public school system came into sharp contrast with the lack of it in the Spanish colonial era. American Catholic and Protestant missionaries also came in.

English became the medium of instruction at all levels of the educational system. It became the means for propagating a pro-imperialist, liberal political philosophy and denigrating the patriotic and progressive ideas and values of the revolutionaries who themselves were being co-opted within the colonial and semifeudal system. At the same time, political power was exercised to suppress as criminal offense the mere display of the Philippine flag or any other manifestation of patriotism through written articles, theatrical performances, or mass actions.

School children were indoctrinated in the so-called "American way of life" and came to know more the anecdotes about George Washington than about the heroes of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 and the national and democratic aspirations of the Filipino people. At an early age, Filipinos were made to adopt ideas, attitudes, and

tastes receptive to US colonial rule and to commodities made in the US.

Teachers' schools of the colonial government propagated mainly John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy. The University of the Philippines was founded on a pro-imperialist kind of liberal philosophy and became the highest institution of learning for producing the leaders of the country in all fields. The so-called *pensionado* system of scholarship grants and assured job promotions involved the sending of bureaucrats and graduate students to the US for higher education. Not to be left behind in the Americanization of the Philippine educational and cultural system, the American Jesuits took the lead among the religious organizations to replace the Spanish priests with American priests in their upper-class academic institutions. While they babbled about the supremacy of the Catholic faith over capitalism and socialism in accordance with the social encyclicals of the Pope, they enthusiastically prepared their students to take their professional place in a society dominated by American monopoly capitalism.

In all the years prior to World War II, the US colonial rulers harped on subjecting the Filipino people to a "tutelage for self-government and democracy." The US steadily developed the semifeudal economic foundation, and the political and cultural superstructure for semicolonial or neocolonial domination. The political, economic, and cultural leaders were trained and prepared for the shift from a colonial to a neocolonial arrangement.

By 1936, the Commonwealth government was established to prepare for the establishment of a neocolonial republic 10 years hence. Also by this time, English had fully replaced Spanish as the official medium of communication in the civil service. Professional and technical training was done in the American way. Writers and artists patterned their works after US literary and artistic models.



Hollywood films, American pop music, dances, and clothing fashion—Philippine imitation of these became the craze in the archipelago.

## II. US Cultural Imperialism in Neocolonial Philippines

After WWII, the US granted nominal independence to the Philippines in 1946 and gave the politicians of the big compradors and landlords the responsibility for national administration. The Philippines became a neocolonial republic. Its social economy remained semifeudal and its political system semicolonial.

The US touted the Philippines as the show-window of democracy in Asia, proof of American “altruism” or “benevolence” until 1972, when—only 25 years later—Marcos imposed on the Philippines 16 years of fascist dictatorship, lasting until 1986.

Just as it retained the property rights of US corporations and citizens, parity rights in the exploitation of natural resources, its military bases and control over the Philippine armed forces through treaties and executive agreements, the US retained control over the Philippine educational and cultural system through the accumulated colonial mentality, and through new arrangements, new programs, and new techniques.

Anticommunism, which first became pronounced in the 1930s, became even more amplified as a crucial component of colonial mentality, intensifying after WWII in reaction to the communist-led national liberation movement in the Philippines and to the socialist countries and the national liberation movements in Asia and elsewhere in the world. The cold war became a driving force in American cultural imperialism in the Philippines.

Anticommunism has become the pretext for continuing US domination of the Philippines, preserving the unjust colonial system of the big compradors and landlords, and suppressing the national and democratic aspirations of the people. It has been a strong glue of the antinational and antidemocratic combination of US cultural imperialism and the feudal culture at various levels of Philippine society and in various fields of social activity.

Since then, the study programs and textbooks have been ideologically designed and directed by US educational advisors, visiting professors and their Filipino sidekicks, and have been financed by grants under the US Agency for International Development (AID) and its predecessor agencies, under US Public Law 480 (now known as the Food for Peace Act) and a variety of US foundations like Ford and Rockefeller.

Scholarships and study travel grants under the Fulbright and Smith-Mundt programs, the private US foundations, US-based religious organizations, and direct exchange relations between US and Philippine universities and other institutions have been exceedingly important in determining or influencing the mode of thinking of university professors and their students.

The US Information Agency and its predecessor agencies, the Voice of America, the Peace Corps, and American religious missionaries have been active in spreading anticommunist and pro-imperialist propaganda and biases against the national and democratic aspirations of the people.

Information from abroad is fed to the Philippines mainly by US wire services, like the Associated Press, United Press International, and the Voice of America. A recent powerful US source of information is CNN on television. In its shadowy ways, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) deliberately plants stories in the Philippine mass media in order

to slander and demonize personalities and movements considered anathema to US national interests.

The agents of US cultural imperialism always raise a hue and cry about objective reporting whenever they are confronted with the proletarian revolutionary stand and with the anti-imperialist line of national liberation. But in fact, news and features in the bourgeois mass media are characterized by selectivity and a slant against those who oppose the dominance of foreign monopoly capital and local reaction.

But the direct purveyors of US cultural imperialism do not have to be Americans. The print and electronic mass media have been nationalized since 1972 and are again under the pressure of denationalization. Nonetheless, Filipino owners, broadcast managers, and editors maintain colonial mentality and use either canned US-made or Filipino-made features and programs aping the current US trend or fashion.

In the first place, commodities in the market are prestigious and preferable because they are US-made or of US origin. Coca Cola, McDonald's and Marlboro are popular brands. Commercial advertising in electronic and print media popularize US goods. The biggest advertising firms in the Philippines are American, or if Filipino-owned, advertise US products and ape Madison Avenue style.

In the field of mass entertainment and pop culture, especially in the urban and semi-urban areas to town centers, the US has unquestioned supremacy over any other foreign influence, including even those who wish to give more play to Filipino cultural products or bring in more Filipino characteristics into cultural products and activities.

The agents of US cultural imperialism use the slogan of pure entertainment with regard to pop culture. Their objectives are to spread apathy, cynicism, and escapism by playing on the instincts and the ego, preempt the revolutionary message from spreading among the people, and

push ideas and sentiments directly or indirectly supportive of the position of US monopoly capitalism.

Hollywood films, canned US TV programs, musical pop hits, and modes of dressing dominate the cultural world of the upper classes, urban petty and middle bourgeoisie, the rural bourgeoisie, and even the urban poor. The poor and middle peasants and the ethnic minorities in the hinterlands are less bombarded by US cultural imperialism. But there is no escape from its influence through the radio, the entry of certain US products, or the occasional trip to the urban areas.

Even in sports, US cultural influence is excessively strong. Basketball is the number one popular male sport and spectator sport in the Philippines, despite the low height of the average Filipino. Filipinos are just as much acquainted with the names and playing styles of US basketball stars in the NBA as they are with Hollywood stars.

Since the 1960s, the US has promoted the multinational approach to foreign investments in the Philippines and the exploitation of the people. Since then, Japan has beaten the US in the sale of motor vehicles and consumer electronic products in the Philippines. But the Japanese cultural influence is of a far lesser weight than the American. The video players or compact disc players may be Sony, but the film and music are still American. The general run of Hollywood films are trash and the pop hits, saccharine love songs.

The gains made by the movement for a national and democratic culture, from the 1960s to the early 1970s, were reversed by the Marcos fascist regime, starting in 1972. For instance, the increasing preference of university teachers for Tagalog as medium of instruction and radio broadcasters for Philippine music in Tagalog were reversed. Of course, songs, films, and articles critical of the oppression and exploitation of the people by US imperialism and the

local exploiting classes were banned and their authors came under severe persecution, such as job dismissals, confiscation of property, incarceration, and torture.

Literature in English enjoys a higher stature than that in Tagalog among the university-educated, even if the latter enjoys a wider readership in Tagalog publications. In fact, the standards and canon of what is considered good creative writing are still determined by aesthetics and literary criticism derived from US bourgeois literature by the general run of university teachers, writers, and critics who are rotated on scholarships and travel grants to the US.

Whatever the sophisticated theories that revolve around art for art's sake or the so-called purity of poetry are among the university-educated, the fact remains that when they leave the classrooms, they buy mostly the mediocre American pulp novels or potboilers featuring sex and violence, comics and magazines featuring movie and athletic pop stars.

One very striking manifestation of the widespread and deep influence of US cultural imperialism in the Philippines is seen in the result of a poll survey among public school children collected for someone's doctoral dissertation in the 1980s. When children were asked what citizenship they would opt for had they been given the choice, the overwhelming majority opted for US citizenship.

US cultural influence, imperialist or otherwise, runs strong in the Philippines not only because of its superimposition on or penetration of the culture in the Philippines by American agencies and agents, but because of the heavy traffic of Filipinos between the US and the Philippines, and the fact that around two million Filipinos now reside in the US.

Ever since 1989, when the revisionist bureaucrat capitalist regime of China went into turmoil and similar regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union masquerading for

a long time as socialist began to disintegrate, the US ideological and propaganda machinery has gone into high gear in spreading the line that the struggle for national liberation and socialism is hopeless, and that history can go no farther than capitalism and liberal democracy.

A small section of the intelligentsia has tended to be carried away by the imperialist, ideological, and political offensive. And a handful of paid agents of the US and some unreliable elements have drummed up the idea that the anti-imperialist and class struggles have become marginalized and futile. They have prated that nothing can be done but to seek bourgeois democratic reforms within a "new world order" under the single hegemony of the US. The NGOs financed by US, West European, and Japanese funding agencies have misrepresented themselves as alternatives to the revolutionary mass movement led by the working class party.

The hegemony of US cultural imperialism in the Philippines is tightened by high technology in transport and communications, but it also rides on the persistent layers of feudal and folk culture due to the unchanged semicolonial and semifeudal character of Philippine society. There is resistance and collaboration between imperialist and feudal culture but it is mainly a schizophrenic collaboration, especially in the maintenance of the economic, political, and cultural status quo.

### III. Resistance to US Cultural Imperialism

There is strong and consistent resistance to US cultural imperialism by patriotic and progressive forces that take the general line of the national democratic revolution and call for a national, scientific, and mass culture. I count myself among these forces. Modesty aside, I have been known as an articulator of these forces since 1959 when I

was still a graduate student and lecturer at the University of the Philippines.

The current national democratic revolution may be considered as a resumption of the unfinished Philippine Revolution of 1896. It is a movement to complete the struggle for national liberation and democracy against foreign and feudal domination. This struggle has been frustrated by the US since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The ongoing national democratic revolution may be described as one of a new type. There is a shift of class leadership from that of the nascent liberal bourgeoisie in the old democratic revolution of 1896 to that of the working class. At the core of the revolutionary movement are the cadres who are guided by Marxism-Leninism, whereas at the core of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 were cadres who were guided by an anticolonial liberal bourgeois ideology.

The national democratic revolution now takes into account the objective and subjective conditions in the era of modern imperialism and proletarian revolution. While upholding the class leadership of the working class, it bases itself on the alliance of the working class and peasantry, seeks to win over the middle social strata, and tries to take advantage of the contradictions among the reactionaries in order to oppose and depose foreign monopoly capitalism, domestic feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.

The national democratic revolution programmatically takes up political, economic, and cultural issues to arouse, organize, and mobilize the people. It aims to replace the US-controlled big comprador-landlord state with a people's democratic state to dissolve the agrarian semifeudal economy with a program of national industrialization and land reform, and the antinational, feudal, and antipeople culture with a national, scientific, and mass culture.

Why must Philippine culture become national? It has long been captivated, burdened, and exploited by colonial

mentality under more than three centuries of Spanish colonialism and then by a colonial and neocolonial mentality imposed by US imperialism.

The local cultures and the developing national culture must be cherished and affirmed and integrated into a revolutionary national consciousness in order to serve national liberation and do away with the stultifying sense of subservience to foreign domination. Thus, the Filipino nation can take its place in the community of nations with dignity.

Why must Philippine culture be scientific? It must do away with the deadening weight of feudal and semifeudal culture, release the people from the bondage that is due to superstition, lack of education, and miseducation, and avail itself of the scientific advances in the world.

The scientific culture must release the working people and other creative forces from the forces of oppression and exploitation. Science and technology must serve the all-rounded development of the people. The scientifically educated men and women must no longer be the mere servants of the imperialists and the local reactionaries.

The people should not be regarded as a vapid mass. At this historical stage of the Philippine revolution it is clear that the working class leads the people, and that the people are constituted mainly by the workers and peasants in the overwhelming majority. The intelligentsia must take a choice in their favor against the exploitative owners of land and capital.

Before WWII, there were efforts to undertake the resumption of the Philippine Revolution by either the working class or the urban petty bourgeoisie. But these were always frustrated after some time until 1959, when something could be started and developed continuously up to the present.

The Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines was established in 1959 as an exponent

of the new democratic revolution and a culture along this general line. It included a secret core of Marxist-Leninists. This eventually became the main engine for the establishment of the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM) [Patriotic Youth], a comprehensive organization of young workers and peasants, students, and young professionals, on 30 November 1964.

The KM became the most outstanding organization promoting the legal democratic movement along the anti-imperialist and antifeudal line in most of the 1960s until 1972. It considered its educational program, its propaganda, and militant mass actions as constituting the Second Propaganda Movement, reminiscent of the First Propaganda Movement in the 1880s that paved the way for the Philippine Revolution of 1896.

The KM became in fact the training school of revolutionary cadres in the political and cultural fields. Among the mass organizations of various types, it was chiefly responsible for promoting a new democratic cultural revolution against the dominant pro-imperialist and reactionary culture since the latter half of the 1960s, and for carrying out the First Quarter Storm of 1970, which involved a series of mass actions ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 people and consequently inspired the formation of several cultural and literary organizations advocating a national, scientific, and mass culture.

From the 1960s to 1972 when Marcos proclaimed martial law, the KM promoted the adoption of the national language as the principal medium of instruction at all levels of the educational system, the reconstitution of study and reading courses to include progressive and revolutionary works, the program of sending teams of students, writers, and cultural workers to the factories and farms to conduct social investigation and learn from the masses, and the organization of cultural groups among the workers and peasants.

Why must Philippine culture have a mass character? It must serve the toiling masses above all. The people themselves must develop this kind of culture. The most vital knowledge is drawn by knowing their conditions, needs, and capabilities. Whatever higher knowledge there may be from any section of the people can and must be popularized.

The martial law regime forced KM and all the legal patriotic and progressive cultural organizations into the underground. But many of the cultural activists joined the revolutionary armed struggle in the countryside and continued the cultural revolution on a wider scale, and in a more profound way. Since 1969, when it was first established by the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army (NPA) has been promoting an anti-imperialist and antifeudal cultural revolution in the countryside.

Even during the harshest years of martial rule, anti-imperialist and antifeudal cultural activity could thrive even in the urban areas despite censorship and military suppression. The cultural cadres secretly wrote and circulated their poems, plays, short stories, and novels. Many dared to improvise stage performances among the workers and peasants. There were lightning cultural performances and lightning exhibits of visual artworks. When the fascist regime started to crumble and eventually fell in the 1980s, the revolutionary mass movement and the cultural movement that it nurtured came out strongly and brilliantly.

The cultural movement is a major component of the national democratic revolution. It is connected with the legal democratic mass movement based in the urban areas as well as with the people's war based in the countryside. The cultural cadres undertake cultural studies among the masses, create works such as music, paintings, poetry, plays, short stories, novels, and produce films, stage, and street performances.

There are specialized cultural associations both above-ground and underground. Aboveground are the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, *Bugkos*, *Panulat*, and the like. The most prominent and comprehensive cultural organization underground is ARMAS, which is an allied organization within the framework of the National Democratic Front. All the major legal mass organizations of workers, peasants, youth women, and many of their lower organizations have their own groups of cultural cadres and performers.

In the countryside there are also the cultural teams attached to the NPA and there are the countless cultural groups of the local communities. The benign content and forms of folk culture have been adopted and integrated into the proletarian revolutionary line of the working class, the national-democratic program, and the national, scientific, and mass culture. Revolutionary content is put into the traditional forms of art and literature.

You might ask whether the national democratic revolution and its cultural movement are adversely affected by the unprecedented globalization of production, the apparently unquestioned single hegemony of the US, the use of high technology for the extraction of superprofits, the collapse of the revisionist regimes ruled by bureaucrat capitalists masquerading as socialists, the apparent success of neocolonialism, and the unprecedentedly strong imperialist, ideological and political offensive since 1989.

As I have earlier pointed out, only a small section of the intelligentsia is confused and disappointed. It is the same section that has always tended to be subservient to the US and the local exploiting classes. Some elements in this section of the petty bourgeoisie appeared to be Leftist in the past, especially in the fight against the Marcos fascist regime, but upon the frustration of their illusions of quick victory in the revolution they have openly taken a Rightist position.

As far as the masses of workers and peasants and most of the urban petty bourgeoisie are concerned, they say resolutely that there is no choice for them but to keep up their anti-imperialist and antifeudal struggle in the same manner that their revolutionary predecessors never gave up their struggle for national liberation and democracy despite centuries of Spanish colonial rule and decades of US imperialist domination. They look forward to the resurgence of the anti-imperialist movement and socialist movement precisely as a consequence of the current world disorder.

Professor Jose Maria Sison (born 1939) is a Utrecht-based poet, essayist, and teacher of political science who reestablished the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1968 and currently serves as Chairperson of the International League of Peoples' Struggle. This lecture was delivered on 23 November 1994 before a research class under the American Studies Program of the University of Utrecht, and was originally reproduced and distributed by the Philippine national democratic cultural organization *Alay Sining* and its counterpart, *Karatula*. This is an excerpted and altered version of the original reproduction by the aforementioned organizations.





---

# Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art

---

Mao Tse-tung



Comrades! Our forum has had three meetings this month. In the pursuit of truth we have carried on spirited debates in which scores of Party and non-Party comrades have spoken, laying bare the issues and making them more concrete.

What, then, is the crux of the matter? In my opinion, it consists fundamentally of the problems of working for the masses and how to work for the masses. Unless these two problems are solved, or solved properly, our writers and artists will be ill-adapted to their environment and their tasks and will come up against a series of difficulties from without and within. My concluding remarks will center on these two problems and also touch upon some related ones.

### I.

The first problem is: literature and art for whom?

This problem was solved long ago by Marxists, especially by Lenin. As far back as 1905 Lenin pointed out emphatically that our literature and art should “serve. . . the millions and tens of millions of working people.”<sup>1</sup> For comrades engaged in literary and artistic work in the anti-Japanese base areas, it might seem that this problem is already solved and needs no further discussion. Actually, that is not the case. Many comrades have not found a clear solution. Consequently their sentiments, their works, their actions,

1. See V. I. Lenin, “Party Organisation and Party Literature,” in *Collected Works*, Eng. ed., FLPH, Moscow, 1962, Vol. 10, pp. 48–49, in which he describes the characteristics of proletarian literature as follows: “It will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored “upper ten thousand” suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and

tens of millions of working people—the flower of the country, its strength and its future. It will be a free literature, enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the socialist proletariat, bringing about permanent interaction between the experience of the past (scientific socialism, the completion of the development of socialism from its primitive, utopian forms) and the experience of the present (the present struggle of the worker comrades).”

and their views on the guiding principles for literature and art have inevitably been more or less at variance with the needs of the masses and of the practical struggle. Of course, among the numerous men of culture, writers, artists, and other literary and artistic workers engaged in the great struggle for liberation together with the Communist Party and the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies, a few may be careerists who are with us only temporarily, but the overwhelming majority are working energetically for the common cause. By relying on these comrades, we have achieved a great deal in our literature, drama, music, and fine arts. Many of these writers and artists have begun their work since the outbreak of the War of Resistance; many others did much revolutionary work before the war, endured many hardships and influenced broad masses of the people by their activities and works. Why do we say, then, that even among these comrades there are some who have not reached a clear solution of the problem of whom literature and art are for? Is it conceivable that there are still some who maintain that revolutionary literature and art are not for the masses of the people, but for the exploiters and oppressors?

Indeed, there is literature and art that exists for the exploiters and oppressors. Literature and art for the landlord class are feudal literature and art. Literature and art for the bourgeoisie are bourgeois literature and art. Literature and art that exist to serve the imperialists, we call traitor literature and art. With us, literature and art are for the people, not for any of the above groups. We have said that China's new culture at the present stage is an anti-imperialist, antifeudal culture of the masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat. Today, anything that is truly of the masses must necessarily be led by the proletariat. Whatever is under the leadership of the bourgeoisie cannot possibly be of the masses. Naturally, the same applies to

the new literature and art which are part of the new culture. . . . Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past; in our hands, these old forms—remolded and infused with new content—also become something revolutionary in the service of the people.

Who, then, are the masses of the people? The broadest sections of the people, constituting more than 90 percent of our total population, are the workers, peasants, soldiers, and urban petty bourgeoisie. Therefore, our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and most steadfast of our allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants—namely, the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies and the other armed units of the people—who are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the laboring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and for the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term cooperation with us. These four kinds of people constitute the overwhelming majority of the Chinese nation, the broadest masses of the people.

Our literature and art should be for the four kinds of people we have enumerated. To serve them, we must take the class stand of the proletariat and not that of the petty bourgeoisie. Today, writers who cling to an individualist, petty-bourgeois stand cannot truly serve the masses of revolutionary workers, peasants, and soldiers. Their interest is mainly focused on the small number of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. This is the crucial reason why some of our comrades cannot correctly solve the problem of "for whom?" In saying this, I am not referring to theory. In theory, or in words, no one in our ranks regards the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers as less important than the petty-bourgeois intellectuals. I am referring to practice,

to action. In practice, in action, do they regard petty-bourgeois intellectuals as more important than workers, peasants, and soldiers? I think they do. Many comrades concern themselves with studying the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and analyzing their psychology. They concentrate on portraying these intellectuals and excusing or defending their shortcomings, instead of guiding the intellectuals to join with them in getting closer to the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, taking part in the practical struggles of the masses, portraying and educating the masses. Coming from the petty bourgeoisie and being themselves intellectuals, many comrades seek friends only among intellectuals and concentrate on studying and describing them. Such study and description are proper if done from a proletarian position. But that is not what they do, or not what they do fully. They take the petty-bourgeois stand and produce works that are the self-expression of the petty bourgeoisie, as can be seen in quite a number of literary and artistic products. Often they show heartfelt sympathy for intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin, to the extent of sympathizing with, or even praising, their shortcomings. On the other hand, these comrades seldom come into contact with the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, do not understand or study them, do not have intimate friends among them, and are not good at portraying them. When they do depict them, the clothes are the clothes of working people, but the faces are those of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. In certain respects they are fond of the workers, peasants, and soldiers and the cadres stemming from them. But there are times when they do not like them and there are certain respects in which they do not like them: they do not like their feelings, their manner, or their nascent literature and art (the wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folk tales, etc.). At times they are fond of these things too, but that is when they are hunting for

novelty, for something with which to embellish their own works, or even for certain backward features. At other times, they openly despise these things and are partial to what belongs to the petty-bourgeois intellectuals or even to the bourgeoisie. These comrades have their feet planted on the side of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals; or, to put it more elegantly, their innermost soul is still a kingdom of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Thus they have not yet solved, or not yet clearly solved, the problem of "for whom?" This applies not only to newcomers to Yanan: even among comrades who have been to the front and worked for a number of years in our base areas and in the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies, many have not completely solved this problem. It requires a long period of time, at least 8 or 10 years, to solve it thoroughly. But however long it takes, solve it we must and solve it unequivocally and thoroughly. Our literary and art workers must accomplish this task and shift their stand; they must gradually move their feet over to the side of the workers, peasants, and soldiers, to the side of the proletariat, through the process of going into their very midst and into the thick of practical struggles and through the process of studying Marxism and society. Only in this way can we have a literature and art that are truly for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, a truly proletarian literature and art.

This question of "for whom?" is fundamental; it is a question of principle. The controversies and divergences, the opposition and disunity arising among some comrades in the past were not on this fundamental question of principle, but on secondary questions, or even on issues involving no principle. On this question of principle, however, there has been hardly any divergence between the two contending sides and they have shown almost complete agreement; to some extent, both tend to look down upon the workers, peasants, and soldiers and divorce themselves

from the masses. I say “to some extent” because, generally speaking, these comrades do not look down upon the workers, peasants, and soldiers or divorce themselves from the masses in the same way as the Kuomintang does. Nevertheless, the tendency is there. Unless this fundamental problem is solved, many other problems will not be easy to solve. Take, for instance, the sectarianism in literary and art circles. This too is a question of principle, but sectarianism can only be eradicated by putting forward and faithfully applying the slogans, “For the workers and peasants!,” “For the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies!,” and “Go among the masses!” Otherwise, the problem of sectarianism can never be solved. Lu Hsun once said:

A common aim is the prerequisite for a united front. . . . The fact that our front is not united shows that we have not been able to unify our aims, and that some people are working only for small groups or indeed only for themselves. If we all aim at serving the masses of workers and peasants, our front will of course be united.<sup>2</sup>

We encourage revolutionary writers and artists to be active in forming intimate contacts with the workers, peasants, and soldiers, giving them complete freedom to go among the masses and to create a genuinely revolutionary literature and art. Here among us, the problem is nearing solution. But nearing solution is not the same as a complete and thorough solution. We must study Marxism and study society, as we have been saying, precisely in order to achieve a complete and thorough solution. By Marxism, we mean living Marxism, which plays an effective role in the life and struggle of the masses—not Marxism in words. With Marxism in words transformed into Marxism in real life, there will be no more sectarianism. Not only will the

problem of sectarianism be solved, but many other problems as well.

## II.

Having settled the problem of whom to serve, we come to the next problem: how to serve. To put it in the words of some of our comrades: should we devote ourselves to raising standards, or should we devote ourselves to popularization?

In the past, some comrades, to a certain or even a serious extent, belittled and neglected popularization and laid undue stress on raising standards. Stress should be laid on raising standards, but to do so one-sidedly and exclusively, to do so excessively, is a mistake. The lack of a clear solution to the problem of “for whom?” to which I referred earlier, also manifests itself in this connection. As these comrades are not clear on the problem of “for whom?,” they have no correct criteria for the “raising of standards” and the “popularization” they speak of, and are naturally still less able to find the correct relationship between the two. Since our literature and art are basically for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, “popularization” means to popularize among the workers, peasants, and soldiers, and “raising standards” means to advance from their present level. What should we popularize among them? Popularize what is needed and can be readily accepted by the feudal landlord class? Popularize what is needed and can be readily accepted by the bourgeoisie? Popularize what is needed and can be readily accepted by the petty-bourgeois intellectuals? No, none of these will do. We must popularize only what is needed and can be readily accepted by the workers, peasants, and soldiers themselves. Consequently, prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants, and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them. This is even more true of raising standards. There must be a basis from which to raise. Take a bucket of water, for instance:

2. Lu Hsun, “My View on the League of Left-Wing Writers,” in *Two Hearts, Complete*

*Works*, Chin. ed., Vol. 4.

where is it to be raised from if not from the ground? From mid-air? From what basis, then, are literature and art to be raised? From the basis of the feudal classes? From the basis of the bourgeoisie? From the basis of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals? No, not from any of these; only from the basis of the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers. Nor does this mean raising the workers, peasants, and soldiers to the "heights" of the feudal classes, the bourgeoisie or the petty-bourgeois intellectuals; it means raising the level of literature and art in the direction in which the workers, peasants, and soldiers are themselves advancing, in the direction in which the proletariat is advancing. Here again the task of learning from the workers, peasants, and soldiers comes in. Only by starting from them can we have a correct understanding of popularization and of the raising of standards and find the proper relationship between the two.

In the last analysis, what is the source of all literature and art? Works of literature and art, as ideological forms, are products of the reflection in the human brain of the life of a given society. Revolutionary literature and art are the products of the reflection of the life of the people in the brains of revolutionary writers and artists. The life of the people is always a mine of the raw materials for literature and art, materials in their natural form, materials that are crude, but most vital, rich, and fundamental. They make all literature and art seem pallid by comparison and they provide literature and art with an inexhaustible source, their only source. They are the only source, for there can be no other. Some may ask, is there not another source in books, in the literature and art of ancient times and of foreign countries? In fact, the literary and artistic works of the past are not a source but a stream; they were created by our predecessors and the foreigners out of the literary and artistic raw materials they found in the life of the people of

their time and place. We must take over all the fine things in our literary and artistic heritage, critically assimilate whatever is beneficial, and use them as examples when we create works out of the literary and artistic raw materials in the life of the people of our own time and place. It makes a difference whether or not we have such examples, the difference between crudeness and refinement, between roughness and polish, between a low and a high level, and between slower and faster work. Therefore, we must on no account reject the legacies of the ancients and the foreigners or refuse to learn from them, even though they are the works of the feudal or bourgeois classes. But taking over legacies and using them as examples must never replace our own creative work; nothing can do that. Uncritical transplantation or copying from the ancients and the foreigners is the most sterile and harmful dogmatism in literature and art.... [R]evolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and wholeheartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study, and analyze all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work. Otherwise, you will have nothing to work with and you will be nothing but a phony writer or artist, the kind that Lu Hsun in his will so earnestly cautioned his son never to become.<sup>3</sup>

Although man's social life is the only source of literature and art and is incomparably livelier and richer in content, the people are not satisfied with life alone and demand literature and art as well. Why? Because, while both are

3. See Lu Hsun, essay, "Death," in *The Last Collection of Essays Written in a Garret in*

*the Quasi-Concession, Complete Works*. Chin. ed., vol. 6.

beautiful, life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane: more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life. Revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward. For example, there is suffering from hunger, cold, and oppression on the one hand, and exploitation and oppression of man by man on the other. These facts exist everywhere and people look upon them as commonplace. Writers and artists concentrate such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them and produce works which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment. Without such literature and art, this task could not be fulfilled, or at least not so effectively and speedily.

What is meant by popularizing and by raising standards in works of literature and art? What is the relationship between these two tasks? Popular works are simpler and plainer, and therefore more readily accepted by the broad masses of the people today. Works of a higher quality, being more polished, are more difficult to produce and in general do not circulate so easily and quickly among the masses at present. The problem facing the workers, peasants, and soldiers is this: they are now engaged in a bitter and bloody struggle with the enemy, but are illiterate and uneducated as a result of long years of rule by the feudal and bourgeois classes, and therefore they are eagerly demanding enlightenment, education, and works of literature and art which meet their urgent needs and which are easy to absorb, in order to heighten their enthusiasm in struggle and confidence in victory, strengthen their unity and fight the enemy with one heart and one mind. For them the prime need is not "more flowers on the brocade" but "fuel in snowy weather." In present conditions, therefore,

popularization is the more pressing task. It is wrong to belittle or neglect popularization.

Nevertheless, no hard and fast line can be drawn between popularization and the raising of standards. Not only is it possible to popularize some works of higher quality even now, but the cultural level of the broad masses is steadily rising. If popularization remains at the same level for ever, with the same stuff being supplied month after month and year after year, always the same "Little Cowherd"<sup>4</sup> and the same "man, hand, mouth, knife, cow, goat,"<sup>5</sup> will not the educators and those being educated be six of one and half a dozen of the other? What would be the sense of such popularization? The people demand popularization and, following that, higher standards; they demand higher standards month by month and year by year. Here popularization means popularizing for the people and raising of standards means raising the level for the people. And such raising is not from mid-air or behind closed doors, but is actually based on popularization. It is determined by and at the same time guides popularization. In China as a whole the development of the revolution and of revolutionary culture is uneven and their spread is gradual. While in one place there is popularization and then raising of standards on the basis of popularization, in other places popularization has not even begun. Hence good experience in popularization leading to higher standards in one locality can be applied in other localities and serve to guide popularization and the raising of standards there, saving many twists and turns along the road. Internationally, the good experience of foreign countries, and especially Soviet experience, can also serve to guide us. With us, there-

4. The "Little Cowherd" is a popular Chinese folk operetta performed by only two actors, a cowherd and a village girl, who sing a question-and-answer duet. In the early days of the War of Resistance Against Japan, this form was used with new words

for anti-Japanese propaganda and for a time found great favour with the public.  
5. The Chinese characters for these six words are written simply, with only a few strokes, and were usually included in the first lessons of old primers.

fore, the raising of standards is based on popularization, while popularization is guided by the raising of standards. Precisely for this reason, so far from being an obstacle to the raising of standards, the work of popularization we are speaking of supplies the basis for the work of raising standards which we are now doing on a limited scale and prepares the necessary conditions for us to raise standards in the future on a much broader scale.

Besides such raising of standards as meets the needs of the masses directly—there is the kind which meets their needs indirectly, that is, the kind which is needed by the cadres. The cadres are the advanced elements of the masses and generally have received more education; literature and art of a higher level are entirely necessary for them. To ignore this would be a mistake. Whatever is done for the cadres is also entirely for the masses, because it is only through the cadres that we can educate and guide the masses. If we go against this aim, if what we give the cadres cannot help them educate and guide the masses, our work of raising standards will be like shooting at random and will depart from the fundamental principle of serving the masses of the people.

To sum up: through the creative labour of revolutionary writers and artists, the raw materials found in the life of the people are shaped into the ideological form of literature and art serving the masses of the people. Included here are the more advanced literature and art as developed on the basis of elementary literature and art and as required by those sections of the masses whose level has been raised, or, more immediately, by the cadres among the masses. Also included here are elementary literature and art which, conversely, are guided by more advanced literature and art and are needed primarily by the overwhelming majority of the masses at present. Whether more advanced or elementary, all our literature and art are for the masses of

the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants, and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants, and soldiers and are for their use.

Now that we have settled the problem of the relationship between the raising of standards and popularization, the problem of the relationship between the specialists and the popularizers can also be settled. Our specialists are not only for the cadres, but also—and indeed chiefly—for the masses. Our specialists in literature should pay attention to the wall newspapers of the masses and to the reportage written in the army and the villages. Our specialists in drama should pay attention to the small troupes in the army and the villages. Our specialists in music should pay attention to the songs of the masses. Our specialists in the fine arts should pay attention to the fine arts of the masses. All these comrades should make close contact with comrades engaged in the work of popularizing literature and art among the masses. On the one hand, they should help and guide the popularizers. On the other, they should learn from these comrades and, through them, draw nourishment from the masses to replenish and enrich themselves so that their specialities do not become “ivory towers,” detached from the masses and from reality and devoid of content or life. We should esteem the specialists, for they are very valuable to our cause. But we should tell them that no revolutionary writer or artist can do any meaningful work unless he is closely linked with the masses, gives expression to their thoughts and feelings, and serves them as a loyal spokesman. Only by speaking for the masses can he educate them and only by being their pupil can he be their teacher. If he regards himself as their master, as an aristocrat who lords it over the “lower orders,” then, no matter how talented he may be, he will not be needed by the masses and his work will have no future.



Is this attitude of ours utilitarian? Materialists do not oppose utilitarianism in general but the utilitarianism of the feudal, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois classes; they oppose those hypocrites who attack utilitarianism in words but in deeds embrace the most selfish and short-sighted utilitarianism. There is no “-ism” in the world that transcends utilitarian considerations; in a class-based society there can be only the utilitarianism of this or that class. We are proletarian, revolutionary utilitarians and take as our point of departure the unity of the present and future interests of the broadest masses, who constitute over 90 percent of the population; hence we are revolutionary utilitarians aiming for the broadest and the most long-range objectives, not narrow utilitarians concerned only with the partial and the immediate. If, for instance, you reproach the masses for their utilitarianism and yet for your own utility, or that of a narrow clique, force on the market and propagandize among the masses a work which pleases only the few but is useless or even harmful to the majority, then you are not only insulting the masses but also revealing your own lack of self-knowledge. A thing is good only when it brings real benefit to the masses of the people. Your work may be as good as “The Spring Snow,” but if for the time being it caters only to the few and the masses are still singing the “Song of the Rustic Poor,” you will get nowhere by simply scolding them instead of trying to raise their level. The question now is to bring about a unity between “The Spring Snow” and the “Song of the Rustic Poor,”<sup>6</sup> between higher standards and popularization. Without such a unity, the highest art of any expert cannot help being utilitar-

ian in the narrowest sense; you may call this art “pure and lofty,” but that is merely your own name for it which the masses will not endorse.

### III.

Since our literature and art are for the masses of the people, we can proceed to discuss a problem of inner-Party relations, i.e., the relation between the Party’s work in literature and art and the Party’s work as a whole, and in addition a problem of the Party’s external relations, i.e., the relation between the Party’s work in literature and art and the work of non-Party people in this field, a problem of the united front in literary and art circles.

Let us consider the first problem. In the world today, all culture—all literature and art—belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from, or independent of, politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels<sup>7</sup> in the whole revolutionary machine. Therefore, Party work in literature and art occupies a definite and assigned position in Party revolutionary work as a whole and is subordinated to the revolutionary tasks set by the Party in a given revolutionary period. Opposition to this arrangement is certain to lead to dualism or pluralism, and in essence amounts to “politics—Marxist, art—bourgeois,” as with Trotsky. We do not favour overstressing the importance of literature and art, but neither do we favour underestimating their importance. Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn

6. “The Spring Snow” and the “Song of the Rustic Poor” were songs of the Kingdom of Chu in the third century BC. The music of the former was on a higher level than that of the latter. As the story is told in “Sung Yu’s Reply to the King of Chu” in Prince

Chao Ming’s *Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, when someone sang “The Spring Snow” in the Chu capital, only a few dozen people joined in, but when the “Song of the Rustic Poor” was sung, thousands did so.

7. See V. I. Lenin, “Party Organisation and Party Literature” in *Collected Works*, Eng. ea., FLPH, Moscow, 1962, vol. 10, p. 45. He writes: “Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat,

‘a cog and a screw’ of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class.”

exert a great influence on politics. Revolutionary literature and art are part of the whole revolutionary cause—they are cogs and wheels in it—and though in comparison with certain other and more important parts they may be less significant and less urgent and may occupy a secondary position, they are nevertheless indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine, an indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause. If we had no literature and art even in the broadest and most ordinary sense, we could not carry on the revolutionary movement and win victory. Failure to recognize this is wrong. Furthermore, when we say that literature and art are subordinate to politics, we mean *class* politics, the politics of the masses, not the politics of a few so-called statesmen. Politics, whether revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, is the struggle of class against class, not the activity of a few individuals. The revolutionary struggle on the ideological and artistic fronts must be subordinate to the political struggle because only through politics can the needs of the class and the masses find expression in concentrated form. Revolutionary statesmen, the political specialists who know the science or art of revolutionary politics, are simply the leaders of millions upon millions of statesmen—the masses. Their task is to collect the opinions of these mass statesmen, sift and refine them, and return them to the masses, who then take them and put them into practice. They are therefore not the kind of aristocratic “statesmen” who work behind closed doors and fancy they have a monopoly of wisdom. Herein lies the difference in principle between proletarian statesmen and decadent bourgeois statesmen. This is precisely why there can be complete unity between the political character of our literary and artistic works and their truthfulness. It would be wrong to fail to realize this and to debase the politics and the statesmen of the proletariat.

The petty-bourgeois writers and artists constitute an important force among the forces of the united front in literary and art circles in China. There are many shortcomings in both their thinking and their works, but, comparatively speaking, they are inclined towards the revolution and are close to the working people. Therefore, it is an especially important task to help them overcome their shortcomings and to win them over to the front that serves the working people.

#### IV.

In literary and art criticism. . . . there is the political criterion and there is the artistic criterion. What is the relationship between the two? Politics cannot be equated with art, nor can a general world outlook be equated with a method of artistic creation and criticism. . . . The more reactionary their content and the higher their artistic quality, the more poisonous they are to the people, and the more necessary it is to reject them. A common characteristic of the literature and art of all exploiting classes in their period of decline is the contradiction between their reactionary political content and their artistic form. What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. Therefore, we oppose both the tendency to produce works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency towards the “poster and slogan style” which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power. On questions of literature and art we must carry on a struggle on two fronts.

## V.

Today I have discussed only some of the problems of fundamental orientation for our literature and art movement; many specific problems remain which will require further study. I am confident that comrades here are determined to move in the direction indicated.

I believe that in the course of the rectification movement and in the long period of study and work to come, you will surely be able to bring about a transformation in yourselves and in your works, to create many fine works that will be warmly welcomed by the masses of the people, and to advance the literature and art movement in the revolutionary base areas and throughout China to a glorious new stage.

Mao Tse-tung (1893–1976) was a revolutionary and theorist who founded the People's Republic of China and served as Chairman of the Communist Party of China until his death. This version of Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art* has been edited and significantly shortened for the purposes of the reader. Due to the difficulties of accessing the original sources that Mao Tse-tung has cited, the editors have chosen to leave the citations in their largely unaltered forms.



# The Bladed Poem

Jose Maria Sison

Behold the bladed poem  
Tensile and razor-sharp  
Cold and glinting silver  
In the light or dark.

See how the blackbird  
Of a hilt flies  
Bedecked with pearls  
On the firm mobile hand.

Look at each face  
On the leaf of steel,  
The virile subtle flames,  
Images of incised gold.

On one face are toilers  
Varied with pike and ore,  
Crucible, hammer and anvil,  
Water and whetstone.

Plow and *carabao* on soil,  
The oyster in the sea,  
Carving and etching tools,  
Bowl of acid on a table.

On the other face  
Are the same workmen massed  
Upright and poised to fight  
Behind the radiant flag.

The uprising completes  
The figures of labor  
And urges another surge  
With the well-versed weapon.

Grasp well the bladed poem  
And let it sing in your hands.  
This *kampilan* is a talisman  
Of the people in red headbands.

[March 1982]







---

# Poems and Prose, with an Introduction by Jose Maria Sison

---

Ericson Acosta



## Defy the Oppressors and Fight for Freedom

Since Francisco Balagtas, the greatest of Philippine poetry has been written by poets who are unjustly imprisoned and who defy the oppressors and fight for freedom. Their poems reflect and at the same time illuminate the Filipino nation's struggle and aspiration for national and social liberation.

With the book of poems *Mula Tarima Hanggang At Iba Pang Tula at Awit* [From Cot to Yonder and Other Poems and Songs] (forthcoming) Ericson Acosta joins the ranks of Filipino poets who live up to a great tradition of poetry and continue to carry on the noble mission of serving the people in their struggle for freedom from foreign and feudal domination.

Acosta transforms his suffering in prison and his struggle for freedom as a metaphor for the intolerable conditions of the Filipino people who are captive in a semicolonial and semifeudal system, and for their irrepressible struggle for national independence and democracy.

The opening seven poems in the book serve as a prologue. They unfold the commitment of the poet to the peasant struggle for land, which is the main content of the democratic revolution. He shows how the peasant's knife can be used: for working the land, for preparing the food and for ambushing the oppressor.

As a former political prisoner, I am deeply moved by what Acosta had to suffer and endure in prison. I can also understand his sense of relief in certain poems. Indeed, a political prisoner has to retain both fighting spirit and sense of humor to prevail over the hateful and tedious conditions of imprisonment.

Acosta was physically in prison but his creative imagination, his political resistance and his awareness of moral support in his country and abroad soared above the dismal conditions of prison and made him free. His poems are not

only about his imprisonment. They include denunciations of the enemy and the celebration of the people's resistance in the past and at present, in various parts of the country. To the very end, the poems of Ericson Acosta condemn US imperialism and the local exploiting classes of big compradors and landlords for their system of oppression and exploitation, and for the torture and imprisonment, and worse, the murder of social activists and massacre of the working people. The poems seek to inspire hope among the broad masses of the people and the revolutionary forces and urge them to wage all forms of revolutionary struggle until total victory is won.

Jose Maria Sison

## And So Your Poetry Must

And so your poetry must  
be wary you say  
of its claims  
lest you waive art  
to us millions unworthy  
of taste and manner  
lest you be christened  
peddler of images  
alien in form  
pagan in content

lest your license  
be forfeited  
your ear for resonance  
your feel for the sublime.

And so while you summon  
the litany of worlds  
your own words fashion  
you annul my existence  
and those of millions  
whose narratives you say  
betray poetic tone  
make burlesque of beauty  
and thus like scarecrows  
set even the most heretic  
muses scurrying back  
to their sanctum of rules.

And so in recollecting  
your epiphanies  
you elude the void  
which is my hunger

the famine of millions  
the empty bowl of history.

And so with your eulogies  
to passion  
to rage against time  
to pledge with life's gift  
you lull the birth of noise  
of revenge  
of bloodshow  
that shall feed millions  
complete history  
and perhaps spare poetry.

[1994]

## Confession

One hot April night,  
a rain of smoke  
from a pyre of tires  
swept into our apartment—

bringing in along with it  
a clanging of pots,  
car honks,  
the whole unbearable tide  
of mass discontent—

and spoiled my dinner.

I was however undaunted.

My full allegiance  
belonged to the President  
and right away,  
as I remember it,  
I set out to defend  
his Excellency's name  
and on my own terms

went on hunger strike.

Politically or whatnot,  
I now reckon,  
we are all predisposed  
to totally mess ourselves up  
at about six years old.

## Prison makes us into poets

“Prison makes us into poets,” says National Democratic Front (NDF) peace consultant Alan Jazmines in one of his poems written in the early 1980s during the period of his second imprisonment (he is now on his third since February of last year). Jazmines is here however referring to poets mainly in the figurative sense. Prisoners, he suggests, in many instances, apprehend prison life in much the same way as poets usually set out composing their pieces. In rising above the adversities of a bounded, compact existence, for example, prisoners are just like poets who try painstakingly to achieve poignancy of meaning in the barest minimum amount of verse. Political prisoners are all poets, he says:

Who struggle everyday  
to break the dross confines  
of image of life outside  
compressed into a few such things  
as the iron bars  
you squeeze for thought.

Prison after all, is only  
a frugal, compact version  
of an outside world,  
bereft of so much verbiage  
and the prose of assumed life  
with somewhat freer movement

And yet quite self-evidently on account of this brilliant poem alone, and taking exception of the fact that Jazmines has barely had a literary background to speak of prior to prison, we are made convinced that prison does make poets in the most literal, practical and very important sense.

It is not simply out of tedium or for lack of anything else to do that political prisoners actually take to writing. For one thing, those who have been thrown in jail for the audacity of their written works are quite naturally expected, given their character, to employ nonetheless the very same methods of the pen as one of their more immediate, self-acting responses to defy imprisonment despite extremely difficult new challenges.

Accustomed to the general strain of a relatively busier “outside world,” writers may presumably have found forthwith in prison, and not without much irony, the prospect of freer time to devote to writing. But such in any case is just as quickly offset by the attendant weight of arbitrary restrictions, ill-treatment of various kinds, and the tense chaos that takes turns with the doldrums in defining the climate of misery behind bars. Far from being trivial, their frustrations over having been deprived of otherwise standard essential tools as a word processor or a dictionary or ready references to current events, are pretty intense and justified considering how much of their former competence or of the work process they have previously been inured to, is severely undermined.

Many times however, it is the emotional and psychological scars left by their abductors and torturers that prove to be the more daunting impediments. For some, it is the hounding dread from clear and present threats of murder by state agents—or what they call “accidents” around here—that makes it seem impossible to write altogether.

All these of course, in the viciously tiresome scheme it seems of things, are but stuffs themselves that beg to be written about in earnest. The urgency of writing under such circumscribed circumstances—of giving full account of the machinations of injustice no longer expounded from observation alone or from one’s sound grasp of theory, but as something that now grips one very tightly in the neck—

is so compelling that the imprisoned writers on the whole, despite all deterrents, are able to will themselves to write.

Though they may usually have to start from a practical non-guarantee that what they write could immediately reach their audience beyond prison walls, they write perseveringly just the same knowing that their works, as documentation of a continuing real social, human experience, should be able, in one way or another, to hold their relevance and cogency over time. Temporarily in such cases, the general inmate population becomes their immediate audience; which should serve them just as well and not in the least significant way given the political prisoner's task of organizing the imprisoned masses—themselves a collective embodiment of the extreme dehumanizing effects of social injustice—into politicized prisoners.

And always, the imprisoned writers are themselves their own works' necessary audience—they who at all times must be reminded of the true sociopolitical, even historic essence of their ordeal; they who continually must be strengthened in militancy, ideology and spirit. The urgency of writing in prison is such that even the previously non-writers among the political prisoners strive to learn to write and become people's artists and writers in their own right. In the history of state political repression, prison transformed as veritable workshops not only for but of writers has built its own living legacy of militant literature and culture.

I am still quite uninformed as to how precisely this category of the imprisoned writer is operationalized by PEN International. I see no reason, however, how it could possibly differ in any basic way from the progressive or militant sector's own definition. Anyway, I am very much thankful to PEN International and its Philippine Center for their continued support, especially those who just last November 15, led a successful forum in Manila on the International Day of the Imprisoned Writer—Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera,

Elmer Ordoñez, Jun Cruz Reyes and many others. I extend my gratitude as well to Katia Canciani of Canada and Tom Eaton of South Africa who represented me in their respective PEN events on the said date.

## The Countryside

The countryside is not just about moonlit backwaters  
Or hillside thickets holding a million stars like wicks.

It has of course its own flames, and not just those that  
are found  
In hearths or even in words that make the nights seem  
endless,

But in all the secret caves where lives have long been  
fired up  
By the morrow and the chance to slay darkness face  
to face.

## Resbak

April 19, 2011

No moment further could we have wasted  
I gave the orders, my men assaulted.  
It was all over in half a minute—  
The bag of crackers we all have finished.

It was only last year that I was introduced to Axel Pinpin's prison poetry and I must say I was blown away. I told myself, that's the way to do it. I wonder what he'd make of this pitiful poem above, my very first under detention and also in eight months. I wish Ka Axel could write me a letter and just tell me exactly how he did it. Here's the story, meanwhile, behind the bag of crackers, and more.

It has become a ritual of some kind for about a month now. Every time I would re-enter the cell coming from the *dalawan*, I would, at some imagined exact moment, give the *kakosas* the GO, and just like that, *selda dos* becomes a mosh pit. The *kosas* would spring from their *tarimas* straight into the narrow and slippery aisle, and in a few seconds of heavy, potentially injurious banging and grabbing would all try to outmuscle each other just to get a piece of my *pasalubong*—*hopia*, *mani*, (no, not popcorn) but it's usually that jumbo bag of pork crackers or chicharon. They would so uninhibitedly—almost desperately—get themselves involved in the ruckus that you'd think famine had just hit Calbayog City.

But they would all be so in it not exactly out of any urgent, gnawing hunger. The idea, rather, is simply to shake off numbness; or in a highfalutin sense, to assert a more real existence. *Buryong*, self-pity, or any of limbo life's damning feelings can be such a formidably creepy adversary, that to give it a good fight would at times require a coming togeth-

er of some pent-up raw energies or whatever is left of each one's juvenile compulsions. It's a collective kind of tripping basically, which the kosas resort to however spontaneously; especially when individual diversions or coping schemes such as crafting flowers out of plastic straws, reading the bible, or even masturbation seem to have already reached their numbing and damning levels themselves.

The brawl over *chicharon*, however, is only the ritual's *pasakalye*. As soon as the *melée* subsides, we would set ourselves up for our brief daytime educational discussion (ED). From primal adrenalin surge to political analysis—an outrageously sudden shift really, but it gives you an entire range already of human and social possibilities; try to think of it in reverse and you'd find yourself contemplating history and revolution.

We have previously set our EDs at night owing to the oppressive heat during the day. But since the third week of March, when access to materials on current issues became more regular through the efforts of my visitors, we have found a way to maximize a few minutes in the morning or in the afternoon for short sessions of *balitaan*. Last week, for example, it was about the Marcos burial at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* issue; and the commemoration of International Earth Day, both of which had a very pronounced angle of human rights. This morning, my visitors brought me an envelope containing copies of statements and messages read during last April 15's launch of the Free Ericson Acosta Campaign (FEAC), and so I thought of giving the kosas a FEAC progress report.

First up was the FEAC press release entitled "Artists, Journalists, Academe Call for Release of Detained Cultural Worker." I was just starting to paraphrase it in Filipino when Kosa R politely interrupted:

"Ka Eric," he said, "*Ingles ba ya'ng nakasulat d'yan o Tagalog?*"

I told him it's in English, and he at once followed up with, "*OK, sigé basahin mo 'yan sa amin sa Ingles.*"

A backstory is here needed. Yesterday, I was lying in my *tarima* trying to reread Elmer Ordonez' essay "Dissent and Counter-Consciousness in the Academe" from the book *Serve the People* (which was sent to me by Renato Reyes, Jr. on day three of incarceration). Extreme heat and *buryong* made for this strange impulse which suddenly pulled me to sit up and pushed me to read the essay out loud and in Shakespearean flourish. I finished the act and it felt as if I was relieved of something. I was a bit concerned though that the kosas, my audience and all, might think that I had finally flipped out.

But no, they were just so amused, smiling and all praises for what they thought was a splendid performance. They asked me, in fact, to do another one. I thought it was definitely all about Hollywood; it was some aural cinematic enjoyment that they experienced hearing someone, a *kakosa* at that, sound so convincingly, authentically Anglo-American. I told them maybe next time.

This morning, I found it necessary to oblige to a belated encore. The impromptu plan was to read all the English statements first before I translate or explain them. I read the FEAC press release and I thought it really sounded like Liam Neeson in *Schindler's List*. This sort of gave me a boost, and so in reading the rest of the statements, I thought I could do some conscious character-pegging.

I delivered the fiery CEGP statement of support, "A Definition of Fascism," with Samuel L. Jackson in mind, particularly in his "righteous vengeance" monologue in *Pulp Fiction*. The brief message from Baguio of the panelists and fellows of the 50th UP National Writers' Workshop I did in Jude Law fashion. It was screaming Hollywood all throughout. But no matter, I thought I really had their attention.



In fact, by then *selda uno*, *selda tres*, and *selda cinco* had all joined in the audience (although only the kosas from *selda cinco* could see me since it's the cell opposite that of ours). I also saw a group of *pasilyo boys* (inmates who are allowed from time to time to roam around inside the compound) peeking in from the corridor.

It was the most opportune time to balance things out, I thought as I began explaining in Filipino, the contents of what I had just read. I guess I gave a good account of myself in my attempt to exude that distinct militant flare of a 1990s Nathaniel Santiago. The pauses were particularly effective and in one of them, an obviously agitated kosa from *selda tres* shouted, "*Palayain si Ka Eric!*"

The proud stage-kosas of *selda dos* gave the loudest applause. The heat was as harsh as the high noon sun of Liwasang Bonifacio—it all felt like Mayo Uno.

There were two more messages, both in Filipino, which I decided to present in style as well. The one from the Kilometer 64 Poetry Collective I approached with the plebeian stance of Pen Medina. Rody Vera's definitely gave me the goosebumps as I read it, imagining how Tito Rody himself would do it in Rajah Sulayman.

What we just did in fact—from Neeson to Vera—was *basa-talakay*, a rather dated and usually perceived to be boring form of educational discussion. But this one certainly was a blast.

Finally, I updated the kosas about my legal defense fund. I told them that a poetry group called High Chair had donated to it recently after a successful sale of their publications. Another group of artists, the Neo-Angono, had done the same by holding an art auction.

Kosa R said, "*Ang dami mo palang pasasalamatan.*"

Definitely, I told him, as I pulled out from the envelope a long list of supporters who had signed up for the FEAC.

Kosa D took the list from me. He looked at it intently.

I knew he was not reading. He actually can't. We're still working on it though; he's one of my students in our on-and-off literacy class in the cell. What Kosa D was doing was counting the lines on the list which filled up three sheets of long bond.

"*Ganyan,*" he finally said, "*dapat marami ang resbak at nagkakaisa.*"

*Resbak.* I liked it how he put it. The kosa not only gave the street slang such a surprisingly apt communal take, but he spiked a certain militant, no-nonsense edginess to it as well. It actually struck me like some earnest tribal wisdom. If we would only humbly allow it, we could always learn great things from the masses; with *resbak*, I found myself mouth agape doing a double take.

At any rate, I threw Kosa D a stinging high-five, confident that he and the kosas fully understood my report: that an otherwise loose but conscious community of urban intellectuals—writers, artists and cultural workers—has found common urgent cause in defending—indeed in coming out to *resbak* behind—one of its own.

Yet prior to my illegal arrest and detention, I had long and pretty much accepted that, for all its intents and purposes, I had already been a rather obscure, almost estranged member of this community. This had been a consequence among the many trade-offs, so to speak, in choosing to work fulltime in the anti-feudal, anti-fascist and cooperative movement of poor peasants and farm workers in the countryside.

Being uprooted from one's immediate and familiar milieu was, in fact, a sacrifice of considerable weight. I would, quite naturally in the beginning, spend sleepless nights in that proverbial tug-of-war somewhere within the petty-bourgeois quarters of the self. But all around me, the sheer realness, the undeniable concreteness of an utterly backward and god-forsaken rural world transforming itself into

a bulwark of all-round social change would just as soon prove to be too much of an irresistible pull.

There was romance to it too, of course, and as a poet, nothing of the earthy images of rice fields and barefoot children, nor the primal sounds of crickets and crows ever escaped me. There would be times, however—and these I think were moments of lucid self-appraisal—when it seemed as if I had somehow escaped poetry.

The countryside is not just a series of poignant images. It is, rather, a burning vision of class conflict and chaos as it is, at the same time, a clear and wide vista to an otherwise elusive genuine peace. It is not just a chorus of natural sounds—the fury of war escalates and resonates in high fidelity, even as the sure rhythm of emancipation ascends and becomes a most contagious beat. The countryside is a whirlwind and I had great difficulty finding the time to pull myself aside and render its movement in the most precise and powerful poetic language that it ultimately deserves.

More plausibly, though, it was not time alone that I had not enough of but simply the faculty and even the drive to pull it all off. It was a humbling realization—one of so many, in fact, that I certainly owe to the countryside—to learn that I was still quite far from being the dexterous and passionate revolutionary poet that I had once believed myself to be.

I had gone to the countryside not solely out of youthful passion anyway and definitely not just for the muse. More compellingly and in the first place, it was because a scientific knowledge of, and attitude to, society and history had told me to do so.

Red hymns and marches that so romantically exalt the toiling masses as a social and political force all sound true and beautiful precisely because the mass line is one of history's most scientific propositions. Agrarian revolution, the peasant war, more than just a source of great literature, are all part of an entire and ongoing historical project which,

according to concrete analyses of concrete conditions, is absolutely necessary and highly realizable even within my lifetime. The countryside is at the heart of an applied social science of the highest kind, the goal of which is food on every table and an unprecedented humanity that may just allow for, among other things, a more universal enjoyment of poetry.

In a very comprehensive way, the countryside indeed, was too much of a pull that soon, its far-flung villages, the emergent bastions of real democratic political power, would become my immediate and familiar milieu; soon, work would become home.

I would of course at times imagine myself—and even plan about it methodically—showing up unannounced at some gathering somewhere in Manila where friends and erstwhile colleagues would all be in attendance for old time's sake. But the ever-present demands of work and some other related considerations seldom offered me the chance. I just had to content myself with those few, very rare small-group reunions where I had managed to sort of sneak into over the years. There were no letters that I could now remember; online communication could always be cursory and somewhat awkward (lingering, lurking a group's thread I found too stalkerish and voyeuristic); text messages were almost exclusively for red-letter days. And so, it's just so incredibly awry and ironic for me, really, that it took a fascist act of the state to fling me back to the full mainstream consciousness of my former peers and erstwhile community.

Now I think the AFP never quite accurately anticipated how far this community would respond. They may have even arrogantly underestimated the sharpness of reason, the firmness of conscience that writers and artists are just too capable of articulating in the face of patent injustice. I guess the AFP and other concerned state agencies would

now have their hands full as it is not just me in particular that the community is standing and doing the resbak for, but the rest of the country's hundreds of political kosas and the thousands more who have fallen victim to various forms of state repression and terror.

U2's Bono has a rather fancy sounding Irish equivalent to resbak's community spirit. He once used the word "meitheal" to rally European business and civil society around his largely philanthropic and utopian campaign to end poverty and hunger in Africa. I have yet to research on the Irish peasant roots and context of *meitheal* which I'm sure it has, but what I'm fairly competent with right now is *tiklos* and *aglayon*—the Winaray terms for mutual aid and farm labor exchange. Both are at the forefront of the production cooperative movement of poor peasant associations which has long served as indispensable counterpart to the militant campaigns to distribute land, reduce land rent, raise farm workers' wages, eradicate usury, and end all other forms of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation.

This very same cooperative practice in production and rural economy is called *luyo-luyo* in the Bicol provinces. In the Tagalog regions, it's either *suyuan* or the more commonly known *bayanihan*. It is this kind of militant, collective struggle that has slowly but surely, been moving genuine land reform forward, independently of and fundamentally opposite to the state's deceptive programs in confronting the country's centuries-old agrarian problem.

It is this bayanihan movement of the masses that is, in fact, the main target of the current militarist "counter-insurgency" design to which the regime, for obvious demagogic reasons, has appropriated the exact communal name. I don't know where I stand chronologically, statistically, but surely the list of human rights violations (HRVs) under Aquino's *Oplan Bayanihan* is growing each day and with increasingly alarming pace, brutality and impunity.

It was my last job to comprehensively document military atrocities in Barangay Bay-ang in San Jorge, Samar, before I myself became an entry in the HRV roster. It is this tragic irony, I believe, beyond my being a writer and artist, that has given the community the clearest reason and the most urgent motive to call for my immediate and unconditional release.

To all my resbaks and those of other political prisoners, to all those who realize the true unadulterated meaning of bayanihan, I extend my gratitude straight from the heart. The poet Saul Williams's heart, as he had it printed once on his shirt right in the middle of the chest, was the African continent. I'm thinking we could actually start a fad by printing or embroidering the Philippine archipelago upside-down on T-shirts to symbolize the heart of the people yearning for justice in a social system gone topsy-turvy; or this could in fact allude to the historical task of the masses to invert the so-called social triangle. But I feel I'm just stalling the end of this jailhouse blog entry. What I'd like to say finally is that my heart, more than ever, has taken the shape of an unyielding clenched fist.

**November 13, 2011**

Nine months ago today the state took from me the following: a cellular phone the make and features of which my wife once described to be impossibly antediluvian; a computer notebook blamelessly made in China and functioning; and one particular non-gadget, belonging in fact to the category of the non-object yet whose loss can be so dreadfully concrete you'd swear never again to spell it in small unpunctuated letters—F!R!E!E!D!O!M!

Ericson Acosta (born 1972) is a Manila-based poet, songwriter, journalist, and activist who served as the first chairperson of the cultural youth organization, Alay Sining, and helped to launch the revival of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP).





# I Am a Cultural Worker

---

Ericson Acosta  
Interviewed by Jonas Staal

**Jonas Staal:** You're a singer, a scriptwriter, a poet. . . . Do you ever speak of yourself as an artist?

**Ericson Acosta:** Well, the easiest way to answer this question is by saying that I am a cultural worker. That brings together all of the elements contained within the fields of art and literature. A cultural worker is also an artist, but when you call yourself a cultural worker, you imply that you're connected to a political organization and consequently situate your work directly within the field of political struggle.

**JS:** So what consequences does this position hold for the work of an artist?

**EA:** Let me begin with saying that there are cultural organizations composed of artists from different fields. As a cultural worker you belong to one of these groups. Part of your practice takes place in the form of collective study or cultural training—the study of the political situation and social issues, and simultaneously, the collective study of culture and the arts. This goes very much against the stereotype of the artist who is wary of being part of a group. As far as cultural organizations in the Philippines are concerned, there is a rich historical tradition of creating art together. Collectively, one can face the kinds of problems that are inherent to the attitude of the individualistic artist who embodies the ideas of private property—or even the so-called “star complex” of artists who want to be stars and, in the process, outdo other artists.

The cultural organizations, especially those belonging to the national democratic alliances, have learned much about handling such issues. A crucial task they have undertaken in order to unite artists is to provide them with



a political education. The creation of regular programs and activities have brought the cultural organizations in contact with the masses.

JS: Here we arrive at an urgent question: How does a cultural worker influence the day-to-day struggle of the people through his or her political education and collective work?

**EA: The instrumentality of cultural work in expanding the membership of the organization, crystallizing workers' actions through artistic forms, or simply making the political education of workers more lively is demonstrated by the experience of the unions. It's about finding a way to use visual materials in union education or using songs to agitate their ranks. The revolutionary movement in fact has a strong tradition of revolutionary worker and peasant songs. We can attribute this phenomenon to the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the so-called Second Propaganda Movement was launched.<sup>1</sup> These activists immediately understood the decisive role of art, literature, and music in building resistance.**

JS: The First Propaganda Movement was a cultural movement that opposed the Spanish rule of the Philippines and the Second Propaganda Movement challenged US imperialist rule of the Philippines. The Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army, and the National Democratic Movement were all born of this second movement.

1. Around 1960, Senator Claro Mayo Recto called for a Second Propaganda Movement, a cultural uprising demanding independence. The First Propaganda Movement was formed in 1872 as a response to Spanish occupation and was led

by Filipino revolutionaries and intellectuals. The second movement was directed against the US-backed Marcos regime. It is in the context of the second movement that the notion of the artist as cultural worker emerged.

**EA: Exactly. Major mass organizations of the period each had their own cultural arms, which in only a few years would transform into separate cultural organizations. This was of course a period during which great inspiration came from the Cultural Revolution in China.**

JS: In general, the commitment of art to political organizations is easily considered "propaganda" in a very negative sense. This, I believe, has much to do with historical tendencies. Let us consider, for instance, the state of art during the early Russian Revolution, under the guidance of Lenin. During this period, substantial space and freedom was granted to avant-garde artistic expression and experimentation, which led to the development of Constructivism and Productivism. Yet only a few years later, and in marked contrast, Stalin's leadership installed Socialist Realism, which led to the persecution and deaths of many members of the avant-garde. This history has itself been mobilized as a form of propaganda to depoliticize artists, to create and perpetuate the idea that once artists engage with politics, it will inevitably lead them to gulags, mass persecution, censorship, et cetera. . . .

**EA: The academy embodies this depoliticization of art and artists. The training of artists in the university stresses that art should not be used for propaganda, yet in the context of the Filipino struggle, the movement has consistently enlisted those who belong to the best of the artist and writer communities throughout its different periods and iterations. This was especially the case in the 1980s, during the Marcos dictatorship, when the most prominent visual artists—the Social Realists—used their works for mass mobilization. But the effect of the regime**



change after Marcos led many of these artists to believe that it was no longer necessary to continue the work of Social Realism. Art historians usually refer to the 1980s as the period of Social Realism, but it in fact did not end there.

JS: Could you explain how you distinguish Social Realism from Socialist Realism, and according to what criteria you differentiate propaganda understood in the manipulative, repressive sense from the notion of propaganda as a progressive and emancipatory tool?

EA: There has been an ongoing debate on this question in the academies and art communities. One side claims that art should not be used for propaganda, while others are very firm in stating that those who claim that art should not be used for propaganda are in fact engaging in propaganda themselves, by silencing and disenfranchising the narratives of the oppressed. Practice has shown that the artists who have continued propaganda work in the service of the people and the oppressed have already moved beyond this debate. History has shown that art as part of the movements of reform and radical change has contributed greatly to the cultural wealth of society. One need only think of Amado Vera Hernandez, a union leader in the fifties.<sup>2</sup> He is now considered one of the best poets of the last century. Even academia cannot deny this fact—his intensity, power, and historical significance can never be denied.

JS: I agree with you that referring to so-called “totalitarian art” is itself a form of propaganda with the aim of depoliticizing artists. At the same time, I do recognize

the overdetermined role that is often assigned to art in the face of politics. But I also believe that politics is just as well an instrument of art.

EA: One of the basic theoretical documents within which most of the national democratic cultural organizations orient themselves is Mao Tse-tung’s *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*, which in the simplest of explanations defines art’s own criteria as well as the premise that there is no “art for art’s sake.” However sharp its critique and however correct it might be in following the political line, an artwork that depicts the position of the working class will never be effective if it fails in artistic criteria—that is one of the basic principles underlined by Mao. Indeed, I am aware of the discourse that warns the artist of becoming a mere peon of the commissars of culture. But Mao was very particular, not only about the need to popularize an artwork that positions itself along correct political lines, but also the importance of raising standards of form.

JS: This is something that numerous critiques of the Cultural Revolution have downplayed, so as to perpetuate the myth that there was no avant-garde in China. But the Rent Collection Courtyard sculptures<sup>3</sup> are proof that there was indeed a Chinese avant-garde. Moreover, this avant-garde was very different from that of the Soviet Union, even though people who are unfamiliar with its specific discourse tend to place it under the umbrella of Socialist Realism.

EA: Yes, and now I’d like to return to the question of form as raised by Mao. The challenge of cultural groups in the Philip-

2. Amado Vera Hernandez (1903–1970) was a Filipino writer and labor leader known for his political writings, which criticized various social injustices in the Philippines. Following his involvement in the com-

munist movement, Hernandez was imprisoned and subsequently found himself at the center of a landmark thirteen-year-long legal dispute.

3. The Rent Collection Courtyard (1965) comprises 114 life-size clay sculptures created by Ye Yushan and sculptors from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. The

collection is hailed as an important work of Social Realism and is located in the courtyard of the home of a rural landlord in Dayi County.

piners is that they face corporate media, Hollywood, and that which academia offers—all of which are in complete opposition to the principles of revolutionary or progressive art. But at the same time, this popular media as well as the historical developments in progressive culture are all useful materials for cultural workers. Some people think that revolutionary or progressive art must be dogmatic—that all music must bear the signature of a march, or that paintings should always be painted in red. But no, the groups of cultural workers are in fact incredibly open to all influences, especially as they concern employing the mass line and understanding what the masses are consuming and familiar with. For instance, in the countryside some revolutionary songs are performed in the style of hip-hop music.

JS: As you well know, the consequences of the type of art and engagement that you demonstrate as an artist and political activist can be highly severe. You have just spent two years in prison, yet you downplay your own story because there are many other political prisoners who are lesser known and who have less public support. As a Dutch artist, my own maximum time in prison was two days, and even that caused quite the stir in Dutch national media.

**EA: [Laughs] What was the circumstance?**

JS: I was prosecuted for threatening an extreme right-wing politician with death through an artwork.<sup>4</sup>

**EA: [Taps interviewer supportively on the shoulder]**

JS: So could you say something about the circumstances of your arrest?

EA: I was arrested in 2011, one day before Valentine's Day. I was in one of the interior barriers of the island of Samar, carrying out research on human rights violations committed by the military. I was trying to consolidate all of the data. For example, I learned of a youth leader who was killed because he represented youth peasants. Upon his death, soldiers used his dead body as part of a pile to ignite a smoke signal in order to help a helicopter land. Similar atrocities were committed in the Vietnam War. I was heading back into town after conducting my research when a platoon of military men arrested me along the way because I was carrying a laptop. They wanted to see what was on it and I told them that the battery had lost its charge. I even tried to prove this to them by pushing the power button, but then they punched me due to suspicion that my pushing the button was actually a guise to make the laptop self-destruct or even explode—suspicions that were likely the cause of having watched too many Hollywood films. Then they brought me to their camp. It was an hour walk, and when I arrived there I was interrogated and tortured. They asked me for the location of my camp and what my position in the Communist Party was.

JS: From where did they obtain the information that you were a member of the Communist Party?

**EA: *Laptop plus forest equals rebel*: that is the equation. The arresting officer reported to a peer in his camp that he**

4. Between 2005 and 2008, Jonas Staal was prosecuted by Dutch authorities for threatening Party for Freedom politician Geert Wilders with his project titled *The Geert Wilders Works*. The project consisted of twenty-one so-called "memorial works," including a photo collage and framed portrait of Wilders, white roses, tea-light candles and a stuffed bear in

public spaces in Rotterdam and The Hague. Despite the ambiguous nature of the work—even police spokesmen could not distinguish whether the installations were a threat or the sign of public support for Wilders—Wilders decided to report the project on the grounds that it was a death threat.

had arrested someone and I listened to his conversation. I learned that his superior had used the phrase “charge it to an encounter,” which basically meant to eliminate me on the spot. It was to be reported as a rebel confrontation. It took the arresting officer three more phone calls and lobbying to not take my life, as he wanted to bring me to the camp alive in order to earn himself a higher ranking. It was not because he was kindhearted—he simply wanted a promotion. At the camp I was mentally and physically tortured, deprived of sleep. But my situation is not unique. This is what happens to most rebels and revolutionaries upon capture.

JS: What was the official charge against you?

**EA: Illegal possession of an explosive.**

JS: And the illegal explosive was your laptop?

**EA: The laptop was very explosive I suppose, as far as the theoretical content contained within it concerns.**

JS: So you were first placed in isolation?

**EA: Yes, for a few weeks, before being placed in the regular cells with the regular prisoners.**

JS: How many people are in a regular cell?

**EA: 12 to 16.**

JS: What kind of space are we talking about?

**EA: Eight by six meters.**

JS: And there you spent the days and nights.

**EA: Yes, we were all locked up all day, though exceptions were made when I would request to be part of a basketball game. I was deprived of many things, except for books and writing materials. I was able to receive visits as well, but most of my visitors were harrassed and questioned because of their relationship to me. Sometimes they were even followed. I was the only political prisoner in the cell.**

JS: How was your relationship with the other prisoners?

**EA: In many prisons, the regular inmates hold a very high regard for activists and revolutionaries. I was accorded that high respect. While in prison, I initiated a literacy class because a lot of inmates didn't know how to read or write. That was one of my projects at the time. One of my students was even a retired member of a paramilitary group.**

JS: Did you base your teaching on specific texts?

**EA: I'd had previous experience teaching peasants—simple ABCs.**

JS: And then you began to incorporate works of dialectical materialism into your class?

**EA: We had regular discussions in the afternoon, especially after new materials were allowed into the prison. Materials were brought in by visitors. We discussed political issues—Marxism, I guess. [Laughs]. I was also able to write a book of poetry. It was a great learning experience, of course. [Laughs].**

JS: So you essentially continued your work from prison.

**EA: Yes, I extended it in prison, even though it was difficult**

to write inside. I would start writing at night, when everyone was asleep. During the day it was too hot to work. The heat is oppressive and there were no windows, just air holes. There were coal ovens on all day in the prison. Of course, there were also lots of things going on with the inmates. However, there was a lot of pressure to keep on writing, both from my wife and the campaign, and packages containing writing materials continued to arrive.

JS: You yourself are part of the cultural organization Concerned Artists of the Philippines, and with some colleagues from the group you will soon release the film *The Guerilla Is a Poet*, which highlights the revolutionary movement in the Philippines and the central role of Professor Jose Maria Sison within it. With this upcoming project in mind, what do you consider to be the main challenges ahead of CAP?

EA: The screenplay of *The Guerilla Is a Poet* is the product of a wide-ranging and collaborative effort, including those of my wife Kerima Tariman, who herself is a former political prisoner and Keith Sicat, the producer of the film. My most active and direct participation with CAP took place in the mid-1990s. That period provided me with significant experience in forming national-democratic cultural mass organizations in the urban youth and student sectors, which involved cultural productions, the organizing of artists and writers, and theoretical studies on revolutionary aesthetics. This was very helpful in the work that I did as one of many who successfully revitalized CAP sometime between 2000 and 2001. After this period, I decided to go to the countryside to be part of the antifascist and cooperative movement in the peasant sector, which of course also has a clearly-defined revolutionary cultural orientation and program. Assisting with the film *The Guerilla Is a Poet* was just one

among many of CAP's efforts this year. A first challenge for CAP was to effectively encourage the film's crew, cast, and production team to delve further into the study of Philippine society's real conditions and the discourse of nationalist and militant struggle. The process of making the film itself has actually proved to be a very positive advantage. CAP should also be prepared to engage corporate media and the government's spinmasters who, in one way or another—I'm quite certain—will try to assail the film and use it to vilify and "red-tag" the progressive, independent cinema community.

JS: So, you consider the political education of the film crew to be as important as preparing for counterstrategy against possible government censorship of the film? In other words, the education of the artist must come through the people and not the other way around?

EA: Yes.

This is an edited version of the transcript of the interview that took place between Staal and Acosta on 14 July 2013 in Manila, the Philippines. The interview is reproduced here with the authors' permission.



---

# Terrorist Trials as a Stage: Some Notes on Performativity

---

Beatrice de Graaf

Today we are reviewing the case of Professor Jose Maria Sison. What I believe makes this case so special is the fact that it pertains to someone—a suspect—from the Philippines, to purported crimes carried out in the Philippines, and to a citizen of the Philippines, but to a trial which is staged here in the Netherlands. This is a trial for crimes that have not been committed in or against the Netherlands, crimes that, moreover, were not committed at all and lack substantial habeas corpus. Because of this, there is a huge disparity between what Professor Sison has been accused of and where and how he is accused.

I would argue that in the case of Professor Sison, we are witnessing a performative effect—not terrorism. One could consider terrorism as a performative act, occupying the space of theater, but one might also consider counterterrorism as a form of theater, with its own performative qualities. And today I would like to share with you some thoughts on the performative aspect, not of terrorism, but of counterterrorism.

Counterterrorists are stage players as well. They also produce theater. And in the case of Professor Sison, we are witnessing the performative effect of the war on terror in its most far-reaching form—a form that affects not only Professor Sison, but also the rule of law in the Netherlands, a country that has nothing at all to do with the New Peoples' Army.

For the past decade, European countries have severely criticized the United States for its extralegal war on terror and its persistent use of military repression in the form, for example, of drones. The time has come, however, to review how European democracies also deal with terrorism—perhaps not through wars or drones, but through their legal frameworks, which makes us more subtle and perhaps even more pervasive than the wagers of all-out war. We can see war in progress, we can judge war and we condemn war,

but what about legal measures? Who really knows everything about those legal measures, for instance, except for the highly specialized lawyers and prosecutors that carry out these cases?

I must admit that, as a historian without legal training, I always tend to forget the legal paragraphs in Dutch laws, so I challenge you all to go home to your tablets and read through the Dutch penal code, because that document plays the most crucial role in simultaneously supporting and potentially undermining our democratic rights in the Netherlands. So rather than focusing on the US, Iraq, or Afghanistan, I urge you to go home and study your penal code, and alongside it the small articles in newspapers, for example, on the extradition of acquitted terrorist suspects, of which there have been many cases in the last decade.

So allow me to relay to you three thoughts on the performative aspect of this legal war on terrorism that is being waged in the Netherlands as we speak.

First, I would like to address this performative aspect in more depth; second, I will address the notion of the terrorism trial as an instrument of risk management; and lastly, I wish to make some general evaluative remarks.

The performative power of the terrorism trial is a very important element in the legal war against terror. In debates concerning preemptive measures, criminal law is often regarded as the most effective means with which to deal with terror—not through drones or military means, as I have previously stated, but through trials.

But terrorism trials are a very serious business. Law is productive of reality, symbolic orders, and power. And trials are the very spaces—the theatrical spaces and the real theatrical scenes—through which these productions are enacted and contested.

So, terrorism trials are analogous to black boxes: first you have political behavior, and then it goes through the

black box of the trial, and in the end you have something criminal. Hence, through the terrorism trial, one is transformed from an ordinary citizen into someone without any status at all—into a refugee, for instance, or a convict. And it is during the actual terrorism trial that the meaning and the scope of new juridical provisions such as those laid out in the EU lists and their framework decisions are made real.

The purported crime and its object are acted out in the courtroom, evoked by the prosecution—the prosecutor is an actor, he has story to tell, he acts out his piece and it's either accepted or rejected by the defense and judged by the jury or judge. The public and the media are also present, thus rendering the trial a veritable theater of performance. Perhaps you will remember the trials against the Hofstad Groep.<sup>1</sup> There was a huge media presence surrounding that trial and the experience taught us how the media often already convicts suspects before the trial even takes place.

The notion of the trial as performance is not something I have invented. Indeed, it dates back to the pre-modern age, when trials were very much theatrical shows: the perpetrator was placed on the scaffold, he was quartered for example, he received bodily punishment in full view of the spectators. The aim of these performances was not only to carry out royal justice, but also to demonstrate the fate of sinners. The trial acted as a *memento mori*, as a reminder of how the gates of hell would open for anyone who trespassed divine and human rule. They were also theaters of

1. The Hofstad Network [Hofstadnetwerk] is a term coined by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), named after The Hague and used to define a group of more or less connected friends and acquaintances around Mohammed Bouyeri, the murderer of Theo van Gogh

in 2004. The members this so-called network were arrested and charged with constituting a terrorist network and preparing terrorist attacks. The investigation into this network was called the "Arles case" by the public prosecution.



horror, intended to inflict horror on the hearts and souls of the onlookers.

Trials have since lost some of their dramatic quality, as people are no longer physically punished in full view of an audience. I would argue, however, that they still retain much of their performative character. Modern trials are performative spaces in which reality is shaped and established by new punitive measures, where new sinners, so to speak, are produced, and where new divine powers—international powers—are acted out.

But how does this happen? Law and action are communicative processes, and law also offers a framework through which to interpret human action and communication. Trials provide the medium through which communication takes place, but they are also the production sites of new meaning. And this is especially true of terrorism trials. Public presentation and contestation of the narratives of justice and injustice are especially important, both for suspects and for the security forces.

Of course there are also “normal” trials, such as those involving murder or theft, but such cases often don’t revolve around competing ideas of justice. The murderer has murdered someone, and he or she does not want to make a show to different system of justice for example. The thief has stolen something, he does not want to make a case for a new kind of justice. However, during a terrorism trial, both terrorism suspects and the prosecutors communicate visions of justice and injustice, visions on the rearrangement of power relations and attempts to rebalance them. Counterterrorism and criminal justice offer their version of justice, according to the laws of the land, whereas the terrorist defendant has his or her story to tell, which involves possible alternative versions of justice and injustice. The crime of terrorism is essentially a political and contested concept, and terrorism trials, thus, almost inevitably

produce political disputes. A *performative perspective* on terrorism trials considers trials as the stage where these contestations play out, where narratives of (in)justice are established, and where subject positions are enacted and entrenched. Hence, a terrorist, or a person who has been labeled as a terrorist, is by definition someone who challenges the current political system, and offers a new vision of justice. That is what is staged in the trial of Professor Sison: competing images and ideas of justice.

Counterterrorism, too, is a form communication. So the crime of terrorism is essentially a political and contested concept, and the terrorism trial embodies this political debate.

This performative aspect of terrorism trials considers them as stages where these political contestations play out, where the narratives of justice are established, where the positions are enacted, overthrown or confirmed. This theatrical element provides the authority the platform to address, for example, popular demands for putting terrorists on trial. Trials can become a space in which the legitimacy of the disruptive actions of police and security services can both become contested or affirmed, as much as a space in which the defendants are tried. The “space of the terrorism trial” hence does not just include the courtroom proceedings, but also the wider processes of media attention, political pressure, and public outrage.

This is especially the case when concrete evidence that links a perpetrator to a crime scene is lacking, and the subsequent criminalization of ancillary and preparatory acts arguably adds a new dimension to the performativity of terrorism trials. By invoking premediated violent futures, the “terrorist intent” of otherwise mundane and legitimate activities such as transferring money, borrowing library books, or giving someone a lift in a car is made real as a present criminal act. Of key importance to the work of premediation within legal proceedings, then, is the way in

which it has a bearing on the *legal basis for prosecution*. Thus, mundane acts of information gathering and money sending have to be drawn into a narrative of violent futures so as to become reconfigured as criminal acts that form the basis of sentencing. Rather than assessing different versions of truth about a past incident, judges are confronted with competing mediations of potential futures. The trial thus becomes a theatre of premeditation in a dual sense: it serves both to produce present criminal acts through premediated violences, and to demonstrate a mediated response that serves to neutralize risk and placate political or public fears. Depending on the assessment of preparatory evidence, the moment of culpability and the moment of the violent deed are severed. The sword of justice has been “securitised.”<sup>2</sup>

However, it is not only a negative story I wish to tell. Trials can also provide the stage on which the legitimacy of the actions of police and security forces can be contested and overthrown. They can also be the space where the defendant can successfully defend his or her case. Thus, the space of the terrorism trial can serve as the site where an alternative vision of justice is produced.

Yet I believe that there are still three problematic aspects to current terrorism trials. Of course, if the trial occurs after a real terrorist attack, after a real bomb has exploded, for example, the system of justice invoked by the formal trial has to deal with the explicit claim to justice stated by the terrorists, who are often suspected terrorists prior to the trial. The terrorism trial competes with terrorist’s system of justice. The prosecutor, the judge, and the jury all have to deal not only with the crime, but also with the political statement implied by the terrorist’s attack. And they have

to try to legitimize their own system of justice by attempting to delegitimize his. So, they have to do more than just produce, or reproduce, the laws of society. They have to defend their laws against this other claim to justice.

The second and even more problematic aspect of current terrorism trials involves trials that occur before or without an actual attack. If the terrorist suspect is apprehended without a proof of a real attack, the trial becomes a virtual show: there is no smoking gun, only rumors, allegations, associations, lists, deliberations, and taped conversations, with no victims. And so the state steps into the position of the victim because the suspected terrorists purportedly attacked the state system. But where are the bodies of the dead? It is hard to convict the suspect for something that only exists in conjecture and in future projections.

The third aspect, which is very problematic for these performative trials, involves trials that are held within the context of a still prevailing threat. Consider the Hofstad Groep trials, for instance. Despite the prosecutors’ best efforts, the suspects were first convicted and then their convictions were overthrown, after which they were convicted again. The higher appeals of three out of thirteen suspects from the Hofstad Groep are being overturned by the high court as we speak. The Hofstad Groep trials are a clear example of how changes in the political climate often lead to changes in the mindsets of the judges and the higher court. For if no attack has taken place, how do we judge whether someone is a terrorist or not? That very much depends on the political climate and political pressure within a given society, and this, we know, can drastically change overnight. So I want to emphasize that trials do not take place in a vacuum—criminal law is not an absolutist entity, it has to constantly be filled with new meanings.

This brings me to my second point: what, then, is the function of such a trial when there is no habeas corpus,

2. For a more elaborate argument, see Marieke de Goede and Beatrice de Graaf, “Sentencing Risk. Temporality and Precau-

tion in Terrorism Trials,” *International Political Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2013), pp. 313–331.

when there is no body with a knife in it? Trials, I want to suggest, are instruments of risk management. Let us think back: what is the function of a trial, why do we need trials in a democracy? To find out who committed the crime, deterrence of the criminals, prevention of future crimes, restoration of social order, retribution—these are all the classical functions of the rule of law and trials within a democratic society. What, then, is the function of the terrorism trial in particular? I would argue that it's more often than not sheer risk management. And if we take the case of Jose Maria Sison, was his trial about finding a truth? Yes, in fact it was, it was first of all about the question as to whether or not Professor Sison participated in the assassinations of Romulo Kintanar, Arturo Tabara, and Stephen Ong.<sup>3</sup>

But there were no witnesses to be found, and yet the trial still went on. So was the trial the about deterrence, to deter Sison from further crimes? Was it about retribution? No, because it was highly unlikely that any terrorism suspect in the Philippines—members of Professor Sison's party—would be deterred from carrying out possible attacks by a trial taking place in the Netherlands. So then did the Dutch public prosecutor initiate the trial for reasons of retribution? No, because Professor Sison committed no crimes against the Netherlands. Did the prosecutor pursue the case for the Philippines? Perhaps. The Netherlands claims that it started its investigation and prosecution against Professor Sison for reasons of humanity. Rather than extraditing Sison to his home country, where he would likely be tortured or killed, the Dutch authorities claim that they decided it would be more humane to prosecute him here. That may be so, but I want to suggest that the Dutch authorities might have had a more compelling reason to

prosecute Professor Sison: to demonstrate their solidarity and support for the international law on terrorism launched by the US administration. And it is in this sense that the terrorism trial against Professor Sison was an instrument of risk management.

But not even primary risk management, as Sison did not pose any threat to the Dutch legal order of society. He was rather, according to the US, an alleged suspect from the Philippines, and so the Dutch authorities decided to support the perspective of the US and began to perform the show of international solidarity in the War on Terror through this trial. So the Netherlands was the workhorse, so to speak, of the US.

Sison's trial was not merely a ritual aimed at reasserting Dutch traditions and conventions. It was also a performance, and it was referential in the sense that it generated new meanings that defined Sison as an international terrorist who was exerting influence on a global scale and who could only be combated within the international legal order. And by PR-mediation on behalf of the Philippines government, images of impending doom were produced if Professor Sison were acquitted.

We have to ask ourselves whether the trial against Sison signifies a turn towards the securitization of justice. Rather than waging a physical war against terrorism, the EU is waging a different kind of war through legal means, and this, we must not forget, can significantly impact the future of the democratic rule of law as such.

I have argued today that Sison's trial was performative in the sense that it attempted to create a new reality by branding Professor Sison an international terrorist. Moreover, we have laid out the possibility that the aims of trying Sison depended upon the impossibility of extraditing him, on the one hand, and the attempt to support the American and Philippine war on terror, on the other.

3, On 28 August 2007, Jose Maria Sison was arrested by a Dutch International Crime Investigation Team for his purported involvement from the Netherlands in three

assassinations carried out in the Philippines: the murder of Romulo Kintanar in 2003, and the murders of Arturo Tabara and Stephen Ong in 2006.

When Sison was removed from the UN's list of designated terrorists in 2007, and then again in 2009, and no further incriminatory evidence was found, the prosecution's case fell apart. The performative power of this particular terrorism trial was neutralized by the delisting procedure initiated by Sison and his lawyers, and subsequently enforced by the European General Court.

And now I'd like to give a brief recapitulation of some key points, and a few concluding remarks.

First, terrorism trials always run the risk of supporting a permanent state-of-emergency and of becoming instruments of risk management, thereby undermining the democratic legal order. In sentencing terrorism suspects without habeas corpus, state prosecutors have to rely on hearsay, intelligence, and speculation, but in some cases these unreliable protocols undermine the individual's right to a fair trial.

Second—and this is a positive remark—the current system of justice is better equipped to deal with terrorism suspects than we think, through a series of court proceedings, appeals, and various other procedures. The law itself can still apparently overturn one-dimensional, political definitions of terrorism: Sison has been acquitted for lack of evidence, and the prosecution has terminated their case.

Lastly, trials do not restore breaches in society—on the contrary, they make them more explicit. Hence my plea for more trials—more open trials—as they provide an institutionalized way of discussing conflicting concepts of justice and different ideas about security.

Trials are open-ended theater plays, open-ended narratives of justice and injustice, in which not only the state has its say, but so do the defendants, public pressure groups, the media, and human rights organizations. Terrorism trials can be performative spaces where competing stories of justice are presented and upheld, but they

can also be performances of justice, as long as all we pay them close attention.

**Beatrice de Graaf (born 1976) lives in The Hague and is historian and professor for conflict and security history at the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism, Leiden University. This is an edited transcript of her spoken lecture delivered on 29 December 2012 in the context of the second New World Summit held in Leiden, the Netherlands. It appears in this reader with the permission of the author.**



---

# The Guerrilla Is Like a Poet

---

Jose Maria Sison

The guerrilla is like a poet  
Keen to the rustle of leaves  
The break of twigs  
The ripples of the river  
The smell of fire  
And the ashes of departure.

The guerrilla is like a poet.  
He has merged with the trees  
The bushes and the rocks  
Ambiguous but precise  
Well-versed on the law of motion  
And master of myriad images.

The guerrilla is like a poet.  
Enrhymed with nature  
The subtle rhythm of the greenery  
The inner silence, the outer innocence  
The steel tensile in-grace  
That ensnares the enemy.

The guerrilla is like a poet.  
He moves with the green brown multitude  
In bush burning with red flowers  
That crown and hearten all  
Swarming the terrain as a flood  
Marching at last against the stronghold.

An endless movement of strength  
Behold the protracted theme:  
The people's epic, the people's war.

[1968]



# Protest Puppetry: An Update on the Aesthetics and Production of Effigy-Making, 2005-2012

Lisa Ito



## Introduction

Constructed spectacles of both pomp and parody proliferated during the occasion of President of the Philippines Benigno Aquino III's third State of the Nation Address (SONA) in July 2012. Inside the halls of the *Batasang Pambansa* [National Legislature], the president himself appears addressing the imagined body politic in front of the camera. For several hours, the public witnesses a ceremonial affirmation of state power unfolding live on the red carpet of Congress.

Outside in the streets of Quezon City, effigies move along with thousands of protesters. Scattered around the crowd are puppets that serve as unflattering caricatures of the president: different likenesses all united in the mockery of the personas they denote. Most prominent among all of these is a 14-foot-tall effigy, perched atop a bulldozer and donning two faces—each alternately conveying the Aquino administration's "charming and menacing" sides.<sup>1</sup> Most of these puppets later end up burned to stumps, grotesquely distorted as the conflagration tears apart the effigy. Dozens, if not hundreds, of cameras and devices document these performative deaths that bring the spectacle to the same public that consumes state-controlled images of the president.

Effigies are known in Philippine popular culture as well in other parts of the globe as fabricated puppets that embody or represent personalities, often as subjects of satire and parody. Historically, they have been appropriated as potent forms of popular ritual and radical puppetry, employing the potency of caricature and satire as a gesture of subversion. As objects of art historical inquiry, effigies generally reflect

1. Jamie Marie Elona, "Protesters burn Aquino effigy," *Inquirer News*, 23 July 2012, online at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/234213/protesters-burn-aquino-effigy>.

social realities defining specific milieus and fulfill practical, visual, and ritual functions in contributing to the spectacle of political struggle in the country's history.



The *Two-Face* (2012) effigy of President Benigno Aquino III is burned at the 3rd SONA protest, Quezon City, 2012, photo: Tudla Productions

The etymology of the word “effigy” has changed throughout different periods and contexts, its denotation ranging from an imitative or mimetic figure to a specific representation of a reviled person. The former has conceptual parallels in pre-Hispanic Philippine culture, such as funerary sculpture. The latter, however, seems to have originated as part of the religious pageantry assimilated from Spanish colonial practices from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

After they arrived in the archipelago in 1521, the Spanish colonizers introduced different forms of religious pageantry as “attraction strategies”<sup>3</sup> to facilitate the processes of colonial resettlement into enclosed localities and conversion of the locals from animist beliefs into Christianity.

*Gigantes*, large figures made from papier-mâché, would be used in some *fiestas* [festivals] and religious playlets in provinces such as Angono in Rizal as well as Quezon.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the ritual burning of an effigy of *hudas*, representing the apostle Judas Iscariot of the New Testament, was documented in several towns in the Central Luzon and Central Visayas regions. The *gigantes* of Angono, on the other hand, are believed, according to oral tradition, to have served as subtle parodies of the ruling landlords, paraded during the town’s annual fiesta. In the span of a few centuries, the use of effigies would shift from forms of folk art and popular pageantry to a form of radical puppetry and political protest.

### Practical and Symbolic Mediations

Since the twentieth century, effigies have been produced in the context of what Alice G. Guillermo has termed “Philippine protest and revolutionary art,”<sup>5</sup> simultaneously reflecting and helping to shape the political campaigns of the national democratic movement in the Philippines. Belonging to the wide range of media employed by activist artists and social realists, the effigy is a form used alongside street murals, masks, posters, and the like, mediating between what W. J. T. Mitchell defines in his essay “Word and Image” as “institutions of the visible” and “institutions of the verbal” that have historically complemented the political mobilizations—a visual counterpoint to the entire repertoire of speeches, manifestos, songs, and slogans used in the course of political struggle.<sup>6</sup>

2. See Lisa Ito, “Dissident Puppets: The Effigy in Philippine Radical Politics.” Undergraduate Thesis, University of the Philippines, Diliman, 2005, p. 32.

3. Reinhard Wendt, “Philippine Fiesta and Colonial Culture,” *Philippine Studies* 46, no. 1 (1989), p. 3.

4. See Jaime Laya and Lulu Tesoro Castañeda. *Prusisyon: Religious Pageantry in the Philippine* (Makati City: St. Paul’s Press, 1995).

5. See Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*

(Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001).

6. W. J. T. Mitchell, “Word and Image,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 51-61.

Effigies were present in varying degrees of popularity in political protests that marked major transitions in Philippine politics. For instance, straw, papier-mâché, and cardboard effigies were used as agitational propaganda in Manila-based demonstrations as early as 1964 and up to the days preceding the imposition of martial law in the Philippines on 21 September 1972. During the latter period, the effigy all but disappeared from public view, resurfacing later in the mid-1980s in demonstrations and street plays as the legal democratic movement against the dictatorship grew in both strength and number.<sup>7</sup> From the early 1990s up to the present, several generations of progressive organizations and artist collectives such as *Artista ng Bayan* (ABAY) and *UGATLahi* would produce increasingly larger effigies to be used in demonstrations during the next four presidential administrations under Corazón C. Aquino, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and Benigno Aquino III. As puppets of mostly presidential figures, effigies became increasingly complex in both concept and execution: from simple straw figures to elaborate floats.

The practical and symbolic functions of the effigy as a form of Philippine protest art have persisted and affirmed in practice throughout the last several years. This paper highlights developments and changes in the themes, imagery, and forms used in effigies since 2005 and affirms the value of the processes of collective production in creating the effigy as an object and site of struggle, from its conceptualization to the execution and display of the image. It argues that effigies caricaturing former President Macapagal-Arroyo and incumbent President Aquino, between 2001–2009 and 2010–2012 respectively, have effectively served as both iconic barometers and propaganda images that convey the rising public disgust at the various

failures of these two administrations. It explores the notion that the ritual of burning or immolation provides not only a practical way of disposing the effigy, but also expresses the call to destroy prevailing structural inequalities that the personified image stands for. An exception was the decision to temporarily desist from burning President Aquino III's effigy in 2010, which was viewed as a strategy complementing the challenge issued by the broad political spectrum for the government to pursue its electoral promises. This, however, also served as a precedent to lay the basis for claiming rising public disillusionment at the state of governance during the next two years.

### Major Protest Puppets from 2005 to 2012

In an earlier study, the effigies documented during the four decades from 1964 to 2004 number about 60.<sup>8</sup> These were generally commissioned by major progressive or people's organizations based in the National Capital Region (NCR). At least nine more works of similar scale and prominence have continuously been produced since 2004 by the artist collective *UGATLahi* in cooperation with the umbrella alliance *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN).<sup>9</sup> More systematic archiving and documentation of effigies under the Arroyo and Aquino III administrations have been undertaken in the last few years by BAYAN, the internet activist resource website [www.arkibongbayan.org](http://www.arkibongbayan.org), and *UGATLahi* through its Facebook account. Media reports and press releases alike routinely take note of the different effigies produced over the past 10 years. Finally, individuals such as incumbent Congressman Raymond V. Palatino have also cited the progression of different effigies in speeches reflecting on the SONA. All of these different resources constitute a body of growing information, available online, about effigies.

7. See Lisa Ito, "Dissident Puppets: The Effigy in Philippine Radical Politics."

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

## Parodies of Presidents as Puppets

Operating on the iconic level are the particular likenesses, symbols, and references employed by effigies. The most common personality represented in Philippine protest effigies from 1964 to present is the president: the Head of State, Chief Executive, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces elected into office for a six-year term. In the current political structure, the president is a figure who wields tremendous influence, but who, at the same time, is an emblem of more complex structural inequalities that have persisted throughout different administrations.

The parody thus threads through both personality and ideology: the effigy is constructed not only as a mockery of the person represented, but also of the larger system that his or her likeness embodies. It is conceived not merely as an ornament to the protest action, but as a vital part of imaging dissent and projecting this image to the larger populace whom these movements aim to reach. Visual artist Iggy Rodriguez sums up UGATLahi's attitude and philosophy towards the creation of effigies:

The effigy is a component so that people will be able to visualize the issues. . . . It's not just a way to dress up a mobilization. . . . For artists, it's a form of expression. If it's effective, then that's our reward. But at the same time, we are able to broadcast a message as part of a mass movement.<sup>11</sup>

The effigies produced after 2004 have thus taken on the challenge of representing an increasingly unpopular President Arroyo and President Aquino III. Year after year, the visual artists involved in the SONA effigy production originate from more or less the same organizations and sectors: members of UGATLahi Artist Collective, volunteers of BAYAN and its affiliate organizations in the United States,

Effigies assume the character of works that are reflective, emblematic, or generally representative of their original time, place, and circumstances of production, taking on the nature of historical documents whose appearances provide evidence for the character of the milieu in which they were produced. They operate as representations on varying planes where image encounters audience. Guillermo's *Image to Meaning: Essays on Philippine Art (2001)* defines several levels where meanings can be produced in a work of art: the semiotic plane (comprised of the visual elements of the works); the iconic plane (denoting the specific imagery and symbols); and the contextual plane (historical and political contexts).<sup>10</sup>

The representations in question span the transitional period between two presidential administrations and cabinets, from August 2004 to December 2012: the end of a highly unpopular administration under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the start of an increasingly tenuous term under President Benigno Aquino III. The former was elected with a comparatively higher degree of public trust than his predecessor, thrust into the position in the wake of former President Corazón C. Aquino's death. But Aquino III remains a president deemed wanting when weighed, as many policies and socioeconomic problems from the former administration persist under his. Thus, these works were produced in the context of responding to a public that has had little remaining trust or belief in the credibility of President Arroyo while becoming increasingly disillusioned with the succeeding administration under President Aquino III.

10. Alice G. Guillermo, *Image to Meaning: Essays on Philippine Art* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press 2001), pp. 5-9.

11. Tarra Quismundo, "Arroyo effigy is larger than ever," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26

July 2009, online at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090726-217234/Arroyo-effigy-is-larger-than-ever>.

## 2004–2009: Capturing President Arroyo’s Last Term in Effigies

as well as students from nearby schools such as the University of the Philippines in Diliman and a regular pool of carpenters. Individual artists who exhibit work in galleries and museums have also volunteered at various points.

While the artists continue to explore different materials, they still generally employ cheaper and readily available materials or alternatives in order to make the effigies accessible and more affordable to replicate. In 2009, for instance, media reports quoted the artists as saying that they used recycled paper, coco lumber, processed clay, and an eight-year-old steel platform that was repeatedly used as a mount or base for previous effigy centerpieces during protest actions. Costs are estimated at around PHP 10,000 for SONA effigies.<sup>12</sup> Whenever possible, banners and smaller effigies are “recycled,” and this was especially the case during the protests against the Arroyo administration. According to UGATLahi, “[e]ven making the effigy is affected by the rising prices. Art supplies now cost more. But we do not feel like it’s a waste that we just burn it because it was made for that purpose.”<sup>13</sup>

The process of conceptualizing the effigy is foremost a part of systematic consensus-building among the artists and the organizations that support the protest actions. On another level, it also upholds the principle of “unity of form and content” which UGATLahi deems important when creating works of art. This is echoed in a news report that quotes UGATLahi’s artists as asserting that the “ideas for the effigy [are] a collective process every year. . . [coming] from our experiences with [the presidential administration]. . . .”<sup>14</sup>

After former President Estrada was ousted by a popular revolt in 2001, President Arroyo—herself a daughter of former President Diosdado Macapagal and a government official under two previous administrations—assumed the office with a public pronouncement that her administration would “heal” and “reconcile” a nation. This was a pronouncement that would be dismissed by progressive groups as an empty promise, as many remaining problems and policies did not differ drastically from that of the previous administration. Arroyo also recanted another declaration made early in her term to not seek a second term in office during the 2004 national elections. The compounded effects of the worsening socioeconomic condition of the country and successive political scandals led to massive calls for President Arroyo’s resignation from office beginning in 2004.

More effigies of President Arroyo proliferated after 2005 as public discontent with her administration grew. These ranged from life-size productions produced as the central images for massive multisectoral mobilizations, such as the annual SONA rallies, to smaller effigies made by different organizations. These effigies were large-scale yet mobile works, generally ranging from 12 to 15 feet high to fit with the vertical clearance cap of traffic overpasses.<sup>15</sup> Most of them also used varying degrees of mechanization, using a simple internal system of customized pulleys and levers to animate the effigy and make simple movements, such as swaying and waving, during the protest march.

12. At the time of publication in October 2013, PHP 10,000 amounts to roughly 232 USD. 14. *Ibid.*  
13. UGATLahi quoted in Quismundo, “Arroyo effigy is larger than ever.”

15. Lisa Ito, “Art for Oust’s Sake,” *Bulatlat*, vol. V, no. 24, 30 July 2005, online at:

<http://bulatlat.com/main/2005/07/30/art-for-oust-s-sake/>.



*Kapit-Tukong Gloria* (2005) paraded along Commonwealth Avenue, Quezon City, 2005, photo: Arkibong Bayan

The *Kapit-Tukong Gloria* effigy (2005) represented President Arroyo as a “*Gloriang Tuko*,” a gigantic gecko clinging to a replica of Malacañang Palace.<sup>16</sup> The effigy was made to move from side to side, a feature inspired by moving toy snakes commonly sold by sidewalk vendors.

The effigy’s symbolism is summarized by BAYAN Secretary-General Renato Reyes, Jr. as an illustration of President Arroyo’s “insistence on holding on to power despite widespread calls for her resignation,” and a visual translation of the Tagalog idiom *kapit-tuko*, which denotes a person clinging insatiably to position of power. This term has often been used to describe *trapos* (traditional politicians) in the Philippine political context. Many media commentators and laymen of those years did dub President Arroyo as an example of *kapit-tuko* in their critiques. Other articles from this period also note the repeated references, both intended and accidental, to the imagery of the *tuko*:

[Prior to the 2005 SONA effigy], the women’s alliance Gabriela came up with a small effigy of [Arroyo] as a smiling *tuko* stubbornly sticking to the Malacañang seal for the June 30 rally at Liwasang Bonifacio. *Inquirer* columnist Conrado de Quiros even ironically recalls in a column on Dec. 1, 2003 an anecdote about one of [Arroyo’s] speaking engagements at a school in Lucena City south of Manila, where a *tuko* “loudly made itself heard, while she was speaking, to the laughter of students.”<sup>17</sup>

The *tuko* effigy appeared in what was described as among the largest SONA rallies since 1986.



UGATLahi artists and volunteers pulling *Reyna ng Kadiliman* (2007), photo: Arkibong Bayan

16. Ito, “Art for Oust’s Sake.”

17. Ibid.



In 2007, President Arroyo signed into law the Republic Act 9372 (Human Security Act), which was questioned by civil society organizations for many repercussions on human rights and civil liberties. The representation of state repression under the Arroyo administration was re-emphasized in this year's SONA protest effigy, *Reyna ng Kadiliman* (2007), with a figure presumably more familiar to most Filipinos: President Arroyo as a folkloric *manananggal*, a mythical blood-sucking monster terrorizing rural folk in the countryside. The resulting effigy represented President Arroyo as the "real terror," portraying her as a cross between the *manananggal* and a "queen of darkness," draped in jewel-toned taffeta robes and wielding a mace in her right hand.

Also worth noting are smaller effigies that different sectoral organizations have produced as part of their own contributions to the SONA protest. The Promotion for People's Church Response (PCPR), for instance, brought to the protest their own set of papier-mâché effigies that represented a government soldier and a mother grieving over her dead son. The entire tableau is an allusion to the *Pietà* figures of Christian art, but it also represents a real life incident: the scene is based on the testimony of Maxima Punzal, mother of activist and community leader Ledegario Punzal who was killed on 3 September 2005 in Bulacan by unidentified gunmen who barged into their home. The effigy is accompanied by a text written by one of PCPR's members, Brother Gilbert Billena:

In this effigy, we see the gun of the Arroyo fascist regime pointed at the people, threatening us to be silent in the face of her oppressive policies. Then, who will be the next victim of this barbaric act in the guise of her "war on terror" and anti-insurgency campaign?

Media reports also noted that more organizations were making their own effigies for the SONA in order to complement the main image. *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported that labor organization *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU) had its artistically endowed members and supporters prepare a smaller effigy from paper and wood, named *VAT-Girl*, in reference to President Arroyo's imposition of the Value Added Tax.<sup>18</sup>



The *Gloria Forever* effigy (2009), photo: Arkibong Bayan

President Arroyo's final year in governance was marked by an effigy that media reports described as "the largest effigy yet," one that "[captures] eight years of discontent in papier-mâché."<sup>19</sup> Titled *Gloria Forever* (2009), the work portrayed her as a *nabubulok* [decaying] leader, perched atop a throne mounted on a bulldozer, half-eaten by worms

18. Jerome Aning, "Protesters create ugliest Arroyo effigy for SONA," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 July 2008, online at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/na->

[tion/view/20080726-150903/Protesters-create-ugliest-Arroyo-effigy-for-SONA](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/na-tion/view/20080726-150903/Protesters-create-ugliest-Arroyo-effigy-for-SONA).  
19. Quismundo, "Arroyo effigy is larger than ever."



and maggots and reliant on life support. This capped an entire repertoire of images chronicling nine years under the Arroyo administration. By this time, both mainstream and alternative media would regularly cite the different “incarnations” and representations that have been used to lampoon the president. The text of a press release by the militant women’s organization GABRIELA captures the spirit of satire, rage, and festivity that this last protest embodied:

“*She’s the longest burning President. Gusto talaga manatili sa pwesto! (She really wants to keep her post)*” Gabriela party-list Rep. Liza Maza joked, as protesters repeated lighting up the bulkiest of all effigies that militants from the umbrella Bayan built for the SONA rallies. . . . The “Gloria Forever” effigy seemingly repelled fire amid a drizzle at around 3:45 p.m. Monday. It took roughly 10 minutes before the flames finally overpowered it, razing the disfigured head first. As the rap-rock band Datu’s Tribe played heavy rock, protesters took turns throwing bottles and trash at the figure, and chanted “Gloria sinungaling! (Gloria liar)” in an outpouring of discontent.<sup>20</sup>

Different organizations were by then regularly bringing their own effigies of the president. Some organizations even produced press releases to accompany these images in the same manner that BAYAN releases a set of annual press releases to draw attention to the SONA effigy:

In response to the police’s plan to use water cannons against protesters, members of the militant group Bayan Muna said it has constructed a water-resistant effigy of President Arroyo made entirely of styrofoam. The group said that unlike the usual carton-made effigies of the President they made in the past, the image that

will be used on Monday and will be able to withstand the battering of the water cannons. The effigy will be placed in a garbage can to signify the group’s call for the government to junk moves to amend the 1987 Philippine Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

## 2010–2012: Chronicling Disillusionment

Recent years have been marked by a change in political administration with the election of President Benigno Aquino III in 2010 and the pursuit of charges against the former President Arroyo. However, progressive organizations are increasingly growing critical of the new administration as many unresolved problems, many of which were articulated in the different effigies of the past years, continue to persist.



Noyonoy Magician effigy (2010), photo: Arkibong Bayan

Artists made an effigy titled *Noyonoy Magician* for President Aquino III’s first SONA in July 2010, representing the new president as a magician waving a wand while surrounded by people bearing placards on which many of the country’s various problems and issues—sovereignty, worsening poverty and hunger, economic crisis, corruption, human rights violations, environmental degradation, and intensified strife—were written.

20. Inquirer Staff, “She is longest burning President,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 28 July 2009, online at: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/>

[view/20090728-217559/She-is-longest-burning-President](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20090728-217559/She-is-longest-burning-President).

21. Mark Merueñas, “Militants to use ingenuity at anti-SONA rallies.”

The portrayal of President Aquino III as a magician drew attention to the many promises made in the course of the then-recent electoral campaign period. UGATLahi artist Max Santiago expressed caution and skepticism at the public jubilation following President Aquino III's electoral victory: "There exists an illusion that Noynoy's victory will signal the end of all of our problems. But the people must realize that at this point, everything is just [a] PR job, just an illusion."<sup>22</sup>

Effigies have been traditionally burned as a symbolic way to end the life of the subject portrayed as the adversary. This is why they are often constructed from easily flammable materials such as papier-mâché. However, an interesting aspect to the *Noynoy Magician* effigy was the conscious decision to not burn it during the program. Following a series of consultations, BAYAN and other allied organizations agreed to desist from burning the effigy so as to challenge the current administration rather than condemning the newly-sworn in president.<sup>23</sup>

Both the press releases and media reports from this period emphasized the organizations' decision, as the three following excerpts indicate:

The magician-themed effigy that symbolized Aquino's promise of change was not set on fire as progressive groups wanted to give Aquino a chance to make good on his promise.<sup>24</sup>

"It's too early to 'burn' him (Aquino)," said visual artist Max Santiago of UGATLahi, which has been making

effigies of the country's top leaders in the last 12 years. Effigy-burning had been a regular spectacle during the SONAs of Aquino's predecessors. For this year, militants made an Aquino effigy not to condemn his month-old administration, but to pose challenges and remind him of the promises he made when he wooed voters in this year's presidential campaign.<sup>25</sup>

Aquino will be receiving a "kinder treatment" from militant groups who are preparing his effigy as a magician in a protest rally with a "Harry Potter" theme. The group said its portrayal of Aquino will be "kinder" than those of former president and now Pampanga Rep. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had been portrayed as an "anay" (termite) and "manananggal" (a mythical creature). . . Reyes gave the assurance that unlike the effigies they built for former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Aquino's effigy will not be burned. Instead, they will give the President an opportunity to prove himself.<sup>26</sup>

This effigy of President Aquino III was later "recycled" and reused in the 2011 SONA protests.



Giant PeNoy effigy (2011), photo: Arkibong Bayan

22. Max Santiago quoted in Jerrie Abella, "First in 9 years: No effigy burned during SONA," *GMA News Online* (July 2010), online at: <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/197050/news/nation/first-in-9-years-no-effigy-burned-during-sona>.

23. Abella, "First in 9 years: No effigy burned during SONA."

24. BAYAN, "Artists to parade giant 'Penoy' for PNoy's 2nd SONA," BAYAN News Release, 24 July 2011, online at: <http://www.bayan.ph/site/2011/07/artists-to-parade-giant-penoy-for-pnoy%E2%80%99s-2nd-sona/>.

25. Abella, "First in 9 years: No Effigy burned during SONA."

26. Jorge Cariño, "Activists' Noynoy effigy looks like Harry Potter," ABS-CBN News,

24 July 2010, online at: <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/07/24/10/activists-noynoy-effigy-looks-harry-potter>.

While the effigy produced for the first SONA of President Aquino III conveyed the message that progressive groups were giving the new administration a chance despite their initial skepticism, the effigy *Giant PeNoy* (2011) produced for the Aquino administration's second SONA reflected a change of perspective towards the president. As the "magic" (an allusion to the term "Cory magic") wore off, more and more organizations began to point out the increasing failure of governance even under a new set of personalities and cabinets.

The effigy for the SONA on 25 July 2011 took on the form of a *PeNoy*, a premature duck egg considered an exotic but popular Filipino delicacy. This image contained multiple references and messages: a pun poking fun at the president's well-publicized nickname, a symbol for the perceived state of leadership manifested so far by the new administration (i.e., "bad as a rotten egg" and "itlog—'egg' or zero—rating").

In 2011, the press release issued by BAYAN expounds on the analogy of portraying President Aquino III as a "giant rotten egg," alluding to popular public perception of his performance during the first year of the presidency:

Parodying the president's nickname PNoy, artists and people's organizations created a "penoy"-inspired effigy for the July 25 SONA. The effigy is comprised of the egg with Aquino's face and a US-made Hummer jeep. The "penoy" is mounted on the camouflage-painted jeep. The egg appears to break or crack to let out the issues that have hounded the administration in the past year, such as rampant oil price hikes, public-private partnerships, unemployment and demolition of communities.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike in 2010, this effigy was burned to the ground in the middle of the SONA protest.

The effigy produced to mark the second year of President Aquino's term attempted to unmask what BAYAN and UGATLahi described as the Aquino administration's use of deception to quell discontent among the people. A reference to the comic villain in the Batman series, the effigy was titled *Two-Face*: the president as a villain with a half-charming, half-menacing face riding atop a bulldozer. This representation was both an indictment and a response to the media-savvy machinery and "soft approach" taken by the Aquino administration, where old policies and programs persisted alongside more visible and intense marketing strategies used to prop up the new administration.

### Conclusion

Effigies have evolved considerably as a form of popular protest art in the Philippines, utilized by progressive people's movements not only to entertain, but also to arouse, mobilize, and capture the sentiments of the people. The examples discussed in this essay are but a fraction of the increasing number of effigies produced by progressive organizations for use in their mobilizations since 2005. From 2005 to 2012, UGATLahi made five effigies of President Arroyo and three effigies of President Aquino for the annual SONA mobilizations. Of these, the effigies cited in this study are significant, primarily due to their function as central symbols of the largest annual mass demonstration staged by activist groups: images that synthesize and give visual form to the people's issues which these groups seek to address.

Little seems to have changed in terms of the artists and groups responsible for the effigy's conceptualization and execution. A possible factor that might explain the level of continuity that characterizes their practice is that the process of collectively producing, assessing, and learning

27. BAYAN, "Artists to parade giant 'Penoy' for PNoy's 2nd SONA."

from their past experiences has enabled this bloc to create increasingly complex yet systematic and dramatic works.

Another development that occurred between 2005 to 2012 is the increased production of “decentralized” effigies by BAYAN’s affiliate organizations from different regions or representing various social sectors (e.g., Church, women’s, and environmentalist organizations). Some examples are smaller effigies made by KMU, PCPR, and *Bayan Muna* in the National Capital Region as well as organizations based in the Southern Tagalog and Southern Mindanao regions. Many of these have yet to be comprehensively documented. These examples indicate that the effigy is a form of protest art alongside a wider range of visual art forms such as street graffiti, murals, and T-shirt graphic design.

A survey of how the SONA effigies have been covered by print media leads one to the conclusion that the production of effigies and the rituals of protest that follow have increasingly and systematically been packaged as a combination of parody, political ritual, and public spectacle. The act of burning the effigy remains among the strongest of symbolic actions associated with this form of protest art. BAYAN’s experience with the decision to refrain from burning the 2010 effigy on the occasion of President Aquino III’s first SONA also reflects this level of political acumen and analysis: that the process and elements of the effigy as protest art are intertwined with the ways a political movement also creates, defines, and pursues political discourse. On the other hand, the artists who produce the effigies seem to accept the process of destruction as integral to the completion of the effigy as a work of art, as demonstrated in their repeated statements captured by mass media. This attitude is not merely limited to artistic production itself, but also mirrors the artists’ growing political conscientization as activists. Repeated statements, such as “our artists wish that this [will] be

the last effigy we make,”<sup>28</sup> convey their desire for wider structural and social changes.

A development that must be studied further is the increasingly influential role of technology and social media in the reception, archiving, and distribution of images of effigies in the last few years. The proliferation of digital and cellular phone camera technologies has created more avenues through which to document the works, in addition to the reportage by both mainstream and alternative media. These technological changes create faster systems and channels for the wider distribution of images to the Filipino public and beyond. These technologies constitute a compelling means to document and revisit these images of protest to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of both art and society.

Lisa Ito (born 1980) lives in Quezon City, where she teaches art history and theory at the College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines, Diliman and is a member of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP). This is an edited and shortened version of the author’s original text, focusing on six effigies.

28. Amita Legaspi, “Effigy 5 times President Arroyo’s size to grace SONA protests,” *GMA News Online*, 25 July 2008, online at: <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/>

[story/109342/news/nation/effigy-5-times-president-arroyo-s-size-to-grace-sona-protests](http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/109342/news/nation/effigy-5-times-president-arroyo-s-size-to-grace-sona-protests).

# Definition of Terms

---

Alice G. Guillermo



## Political terms

*Protest* is a social phenomenon or movement which is oppositional in nature vis-à-vis the state and which seeks economic and/or political reforms within the system, but which can be radicalized towards a revolutionary movement for change.

*Revolution* is a social movement usually involving the large masses of the people who seek to overthrow the prevailing system. It involves armed struggle, as well as legal forms of struggle, such as the parliamentary.

All revolutions involve two sets of contradictions. The first is the anticolonial or anti-imperialist contradiction, which is based on the colonial/neocolonial relationship between the colonizers and the indigenous population. The second is the class contradiction, which is based on the conflict of social classes, such as landlords versus peasants, and capitalists versus workers. In general, these two sets of contradictions form the two aspects of a revolution that has both an anticolonial/anti-imperialist aspect and a class aspect as interrelated contradictions, primary and secondary depending on the nature or stage of the revolution. The Philippine Revolution of 1896 was both an anticolonial and bourgeois revolution that saw the emergence of the native bourgeoisie or *ilustrados*. The present revolution that began in the sixties is a national democratic revolution—uniting the people from the peasants, workers, petty bourgeoisie, to the national bourgeoisie against US imperialism and its local agents.



## Art Terms

*Political art* bears a content touching upon the prevailing political/economic system. Relative to this, political art takes an oppositional stance towards the system by exposing its ills and advocating change, on one hand, or by simply reflecting or even supporting the system on the other hand.

*Protest art* sets itself against the prevailing social, political, and economic conditions. It is an art that is primarily one of exposure, showing striking images of the inequitable, unjust, and inhuman conditions in which people live. On the first level, protest art, which is often related to particular issues, may deal with current social issues in the form of sociopolitical commentary. Secondly, it may react against a particular regime, such as the Marcos dictatorship, which it perceives to be the main cause of the deplorable social conditions; thus, following this logic, the overthrow of the regime would necessarily change conditions for the better. On a third level, protest art may react not only against a particular regime, but against the political/economic system which institutionalizes such inequitable, unjust, and inhuman conditions; thus, it may go beyond protest to proffering revolutionary alternatives.

*Proletarian art* espouses the cause of the proletariat, the wage laborers, or the working class engaged in industrial or agro-industrial production under exploitative conditions. This term came into currency during the Depression in the US that gave rise to militant political art and literature espousing workers' causes. Brought over to the Philippines, it became a vital artistic concept from the thirties to the postwar fifties when it was used in opposition to "art for art's sake."

*Realism* is a style based on the keen observation of reality. In the nineteenth century, the French artists Courbet, Daumier, and Millet consciously called themselves Realists who, in addition, espoused the socialist ideas of their time and chose workers and peasants, whose dignity they upheld, as the subjects of their work.

*Social Realism* is a school or movement in art that exposes the true conditions of society, as based on the artist's keen observation of reality, and proffers alternatives for human betterment. In the Philippines, as in other countries such as the United States and Mexico, social realism in art is not a particular style but is a commonly shared sociopolitical orientation which espouses the cause of society's exploited and oppressed classes and their aspirations for change. Underlying social realism is the perception of conflicting interests in society and of the need for organization. Thus, social realists have formed or joined political art organizations or have been associated with popular mass organizations.

*Progressive art* espouses the interest and cause of the people. Unlike conservative or reactionary art, which espouses the status quo, progressive art is forward-looking and seeks social change. In the Philippines, progressive art is basically antifascist or anti-dictatorial, anti-imperialist, and pro-people in orientation.

*Revolutionary art* espouses the peoples' struggle for radical social change—not a mere change of regimes within the traditional political/economic system, but a dismantling of the system itself which institutionalizes and perpetuates exploitation and inequality to be replaced by a system of popular and sovereign government which shall ensure human rights and an equitable distribution of the country's wealth.







## Towards a People's Culture

*New World Academy (NWA)* invites progressive political organizations to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in political struggles.

Together, they engage in critical thinking through concrete examples of transformative politics and develop collaborative projects that question and challenge the various frameworks of justice and existing models of representation. *NWA* proposes new critical alliances between art and progressive politics, as a way to confront the democratic deficit in our current politics economy, and culture.

The National Democratic Movement of the Philippines consists of a variety of underground guerilla movements as well as (semi-)legal political parties and organizations with strong leftist and Maoist affinities. Its development can be traced back to resistance movements against the Spanish and United States occupations in the Philippines. Today, the movements continue their struggle against US influence in the Filipino government. Central to the movements' understanding of art is the figure of the cultural worker, whose task is both to educate, and to be educated by, the masses of landless peasants and the urban poor.

Texts by: Ericson Acosta (activist and poet, Manila), Beatrice de Graaf (head of the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism, The Hague, Leiden University), Alice G. Guillermo (theorist, Quezon City),

Lisa Ito (theorist and member of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, Quezon City), Jose Maria Sison (founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, Utrecht), and Mao Tse-tung (revolutionary, theorist, founder of the People's Republic of China and former Chairman of the Communist Party, Beijing).

*NWA* is established by artist Jonas Staal in collaboration with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, and functions as a department of the New World Summit, an artistic and political organization dedicated to developing alternative parliaments for organizations banned from democracy. Future iterations of *NWA* will take place in a variety of political and geographic contexts throughout the world.