

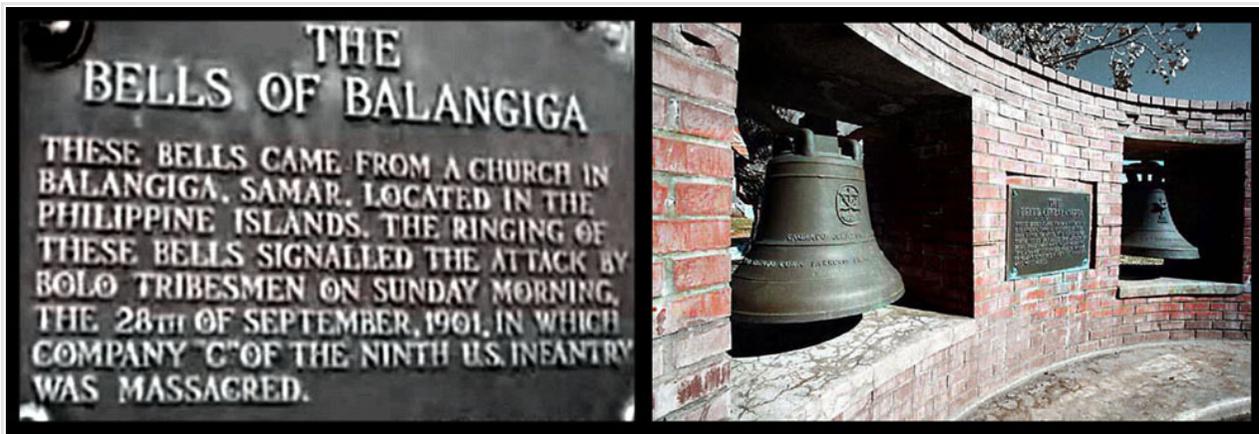
Salud y Benedicto

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THE BELLS OF BALANGIGA: RESONANCES OF THE ANTI- IMPERIALIST ARMED RESISTANCE

July 3, 2012 · by saludabenedicto · in *Philippine Society and Revolution* · 1 Comment

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The Bells of Balangiga. Two out of the three bells seized by American troops from Balangiga, Samar in 1901 have been displayed for more than a hundred years at the F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Han tuig Mil Nuebe Syentos Uno

Bulan han Setyembre bente otso

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An petsa nga quintalwasa hini nga aton bongto

Han pagmaltrato nga guinbuhat han mga Amerkano

Damo nga mga molupyo an nagkaurusa

Tikang ha Quinapundan, Giborlos, Lawaan ug Balangiga

Han magbagtingon na, tulo nga mga lingganay ta

Agud magmahimyang, pati kinabuhi iguinbuhis ta

Tungod han pagpasimuna ni Kapitan Valeriano Abanador

Na di pagraugdaugon lupiglupigon an mga Balangigan-on

Bisan kon mang-armado an mga Amerkano

Naperdi ta hira hin arnis, sundang ug bolo

(In the year Nine Hundred and One

Month of September, the 28th

The day of freedom of our town

From atrocities done by the Americans

Many townspeople united

From Quinapundan, Giporlos, Lawaan and Balangiga

At the signal of our three bells pealing

Embody confidence, we offer even our very lives

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Through the leadership of Captain Valeriano Abanador

Against the exploitation and oppression of Balangiga-ons

Even if the Americans were armed

We defeated them with arnis, blades and bolos)

– From a folk song played during festivities in Samar

THE BALANGIGA BELLS OF SAMAR have yet to be brought home, reclaimed so to speak by its rightful heirs. Left to the State's diluted discourse of heritage – cultivated by nostalgic and touristic motivations – the once powerful signal that came from the bells ring mute and dehistoricized.

Considered by the US as war booty from its counter-insurgency campaign during the 'Philippine Insurrection,' the three bells from the town church of Balangiga in Eastern Samar were seized by American troops in retaliation to the Filipino's bloody attack of an American garrison in Balangiga. Two of the bells are currently displayed at F. E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming (former base of the 11th Infantry Regiment), while another travels with the 9th Infantry Regiment museum based in South Korea.

The Balangiga Bells have been in the hands of the US for more than a hundred years. In the last few decades, campaigns were launched by various local groups calling for the repatriation of the bells. Worth noting is the appeal of then-Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos, himself a former general of the State's armed forces, to synchronize the bells' return with the official Philippine Centennial Celebrations extravagantly sponsored by the State in 1998.

According to **recent reports**, the Pentagon and the U.S. Department of Defense are re-assessing the Philippines' requests to return the Balangiga Bells. However, in a letter to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta last May 3, Governor Matt Mead of

Wyoming, made clear that:

“I strongly oppose any efforts to deconstruct our war memorials that honor our fallen soldiers,” says Gov. Mead. For them, the Balangiga Bells symbolize the valor of American soldiers fallen in a ‘massacre.’

Amid diplomacy and plain servility, the current Philippine vice-president Binay can only reply to Gov. Mead with this:

“While we respect the fact that the Bells serve as a war memorial for US soldiers who were killed in Balangiga, I hope that the United States will take into consideration that the Bells are a memorial as well to the many innocent civilians who were murdered in the wake of the indiscriminate retaliatory attack ordered by General Jacob H. Smith.”



State agents like Vice President Binay can only pay lip-service to the “special meaning” the bells hold for Filipinos, while mouthing empty recognition for the sacrifice made by the heroes of Balangiga in the name of ‘freedom.’ Binay partly mentions atrocities by the US. Evidently, even those familiar with the circumstances surrounding the controversial bells are equally confused as to which event is referred to as the “massacre.” Obscured is the plain massacre that American troops wrought not only in Balangiga but in the whole of Samar, the genocide of the whole archipelago – a failure to point out to the war of conquest launched by US imperialism and its puppets in the local ruling class against the Filipino people

composed mainly of peasants.

After more than a hundred years, the neo-colonial State remains indebted to benevolent assimilation. It is wary not to question US authority while propagating and condoning continued violence against the people. This is true in wars fought not only in armed confrontation, but also in the violent distortion of history's lessons – in the coercive molding of social consciousness to favor their class interests.

Over deconstruction of memorabilia, it becomes a serious obligation to tear down imperialist interpretation of the shared history between colonized and colonizer. Any serious student of history must engage in the project of destroying these pernicious myths. Above all this, what we owe history is the fulfillment of the lessons imparted by the past.

This article makes clear that the attack by Filipinos against American troops in Balangiga in September 28, 1901 is not a “massacre.” The word massacre can only refer to the brutal and indiscriminate killing especially of civilians or helpless individuals, and not usually of armed personnel or combatants actively engaged in hostilities. The surprise attack of Filipinos in Balangiga is a victorious assault which resulted in the annihilation of an American garrison – a victorious assault-prototype of the various forms of engagement found in the class-based anti-imperialist struggle launched by the New People's Army (NPA) today.

“Balangiga Massacre”



A piece of **news** on renewed efforts to be made supposedly by the US for the repatriation of the bells states that the Balangiga Bells “were taken as war

trophies from the Philippines town of Balangiga in 1901 after an **unprovoked** Filipino insurgent attack there that resulted in the death of at least 48 U.S. soldiers.”

This seemingly innocent description of the Filipino attack as “unprovoked” is a charged rearticulation of the dominant discourse forced upon the Philippines since America’s rise as an imperialist power in the last century. Local nationalist historians have been lamenting the popular reference to the Balangiga event as a “massacre” – indeed, it can also be questioned why it is being referred to as a mere “incident;” the US calls it an “affair:” more like a trivial difficulty or obstacle; or an isolated conflict with very particular grounds seemingly detached from the general context of war. The tendency of these narratives is to confuse or deny the fact that the attack is a legitimate act of resistance by Filipino patriots against US conquest.

This remains the popular perception in local mass media and other cultural institutions to this day:

“Two of the three bells, which have been on display at F.E. Warren Air Force Base—formerly an Army post— in Wyoming for more than a century, were taken because one or both had been used by the **Filipino insurgents to signal for the massacre of a whole company** (of American soldiers)”

On the one hand, the State says that participants in the attack are “heroes of freedom,” cultural institutions, on the other hand, officially refer to them as “insurgents” or isolated rebels. The State never fails to regularly commemorate “Balangiga Encounter Day” and to consistently make appeals or token statements for the return of the Balangiga Bells. Yet dominant institutions do not properly recognize the heroic battle.

According to the discourse of the neo-colonial State, it is still a “massacre” – a rearticulation of servility and pious confession — an official admission that the Balangiga attack is an unforgivable crime against US soldiers and US the itself.

Perhaps the most vulgar perpetuation of this prejudiced view is etched in the historical marker erected by the State’s National Historical Commission upon the very site of the Balangiga attack:



BALANGIGA MASSACRE

SA BAYANG ITO, NOONG IKA -28 NG SETYEMBRE 1901, NILUSOB NG MGA PILIPINONG NASASANDATAHAN NG GULOK ANG KUMPANYA 'C' NG IKA-9 IMPANTERIYA NG E.U. NAPATAY NILA HALOS ANG LAHAT NG MGA SUNDALONG AMERIKANO. BILANG GANTI AY NAGLUNSDAD ANG MGA AMERIKANO NG MAY ANIM NA BUWANG 'PAGPATAY AT PAGSUNOG,' ANG BAYAN AY NAGMISTULANG 'HUMAHAGULGOL NA KAGUBATAN,' DAHIL SA KANILANG KALUPITAN, SINA BRIG. HEN. JACOB H. SMITH AT MEDYOR LITTLETON W.T. WALLER AY NILITIS NG HUKUMANG MILITAR AT ITINIWALAG.

(BALANGIGA MASSACRE)

IN THIS TOWN, ON THE 28TH OF SEPTEMBER 1901, FILIPINOS ARMED WITH BOLOS ATTACKED COMPANY “C”, NINTH INFANTRY OF [THE] U.S. THEY KILLED ALMOST ALL THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS. IN REVENGE THE AMERICANS LAUNCHED A SIX-MONTH “KILL-AND-BURN” [CAMPAIGN]. THE TOWN BECAME LIKE A “HOWLING WILDERNESS.” BECAUSE OF THEIR CRUELTY, BRIG. GEN. JACOB H. SMITH AND MAJOR LITTLETON W.T. WALLER WERE TRIED BY COURT MARTIAL AND CASHIERED.”)

This example simply makes indistinct if in ‘massacre’ it is referring to the ‘Filipino attack’ or to the subsequent ‘kill-and-burn’ campaign launched by American troops in Samar. In popular works by some local historians like Agoncillo and Constantino, chapters on Samar are composed roughly of only a few sentences focusing on the “kill-and-burn,” “kill-everyone-over-ten” retaliatory order by Gen. Jacob Smith to defeat the insurrection in Samar. The Balangiga attack – and the whole period of the Filipino-American war – remains a controversial and debatable chapter in history usually denied extensive discussion. Aside from appeals for repatriation of the Balangiga Bells and some local commemorations, customary tribute and recognition come in historical excursion packages for students and tourists.

A recognized authority on the subject, Prof. Rolando Borrinaga of the University of the Philippines points out conflicting data in **historical accounts** of the Balangiga attack. This is the credence behind a “UP National Symposium on the Balangiga attack of 1901” convened by Borrinaga in Tacloban City in 1998, and another academic discussion on the subject that followed during campaigns for the return of the Balangiga Bells.

The following is the **version** of the event by the Filipino group in the symposium:

“In the morning of Saturday (not the mythic Sunday), Sept. 28, 1901, hundreds of native fighters armed with bolos, some of them disguised as churchgoing women, staged a successful surprise attack on US troops while most of them were eating breakfast in Balangiga at the southern coast of Samar Island.

Described as the ‘worst single defeat’ of the US military in the Philippines, that event became known in history as the ‘Balangiga Massacre.’

The natives fought to resist the destruction or confiscation and rationing of their food stocks and to free about 80 male residents who had been rounded up for forced labor and detained for days in crowded conditions with little food and water.

The US troops belonged to Company C, 9th US Infantry Regiment, who were stationed in Balangiga to keep its small port closed and prevent any trading. Their mission was to deprive the Filipino revolutionary forces of supplies during the Philippine-American War, which had spread to the Visayas.

An elite unit, Company C performed as honor guard during the historic July 4, 1901 inauguration of the American civil government in the Philippines and the installation as first civil governor of William Howard Taft, later president of the US.

They arrived in Balangiga a few weeks later, on Aug. 11.



The attacking force, coordinated by Valeriano Abanador, the local chief of police,

was composed of around 500 men in seven different companies. They represented virtually all families of Balangiga, whose outlying villages then included the present towns of Lawaan and Giporlos, and of Quinapundan, a town served by the priest in Balangiga.

Some of the leaders, notably Capt. Eugenio Daza, were revolutionary officers under the command of Brig. Gen. Vicente Lukban, the politico-military governor of Samar who was appointed by President Emilio Aguinaldo.

The ringing of the church bell signaled the attack. Fierce fighting ensued, resulting in one of the biggest number of American casualties in a single encounter.

Of the 74 men of Company C, 36 were killed during the attack, eight of the wounded died later during the escape by bancas to Basey town, and four were missing and presumed dead.

Of the 26 survivors, only four were not wounded.

The natives suffered 28 fatalities and 22 wounded.

The bell was taken from the church belfry a day after the attack by US reinforcement troops from Basey and was brought by the survivors to the US as war booty.”

Borrinaga offers a shorter **summary**, a hundred years after the actual event:

“In the morning of September 28, 1901, townspeople of Balangiga on the southern coast of Samar Island in the Philippines successfully attacked the garrison of Company C, 9th U.S. Infantry Regiment, which had been stationed here since August 11 that year.

About 500 native men mostly armed with bolos were involved in the surprise attack that cost the lives of about two-thirds of Company C’s 74 men, including all its commissioned officers (Capt. Thomas W. Connell, 1st Lt. Edward A. Bumpus, and Maj. Richard S. Griswold). More than 20 mostly wounded American survivors escaped by baroto (native canoes with outriggers, navigated by using wooden paddles) to Basey, Samar and Tolosa, Leyte.

The Filipino casualties in the attack were modest in comparison, about 50 dead or wounded.

Described as the ‘worst single defeat’ of the U.S. military during the Philippine-

American War, this event became known in history as the ‘Balangiga Massacre.’”

Historical Materialism

For all intents and purposes, it is important to critique historical scholarship’s tendency to single-mindedly present historical details as if they were reducible to trivia, or to interpret these as a series of unfortunate events, or the sheer outcome of the involvement of certain individuals.

Such an approach is akin to the mode of scholasticism whose ultimate aim, impulse or illusion claims that only through rigorous research can the Philippines finally present a rock-solid argument before the US for the repatriation of the Balangiga Bells.

With this idealist framework of historical study, the debate on whether it was a massacre or a legitimate battle can only be answered by supplying the following details: A few months before the attack in Balangiga, Gen. Aguinaldo, US-recognized president of the newly-established Philippine Republic which replaced the revolutionary government, had already pledged allegiance to the US. A few weeks before the deployment of Company C in Balangiga, the colonial civil government under Taft had already been established, and even Company C was witness to its inauguration.

But does the legitimacy of the attack rest on these technicalities and dates?

So long as historical study is divorced from serving the practical ideological needs of a people, these details can only be surplus to requirements.

Likewise, a sharp assessment and a historical summing-up can neither be confined nor fully achieved by utilizing a purely local point of view, or by using supercilious theories which tend to view Philippine history through a narrow “nationalism” devoid of class consciousness.

The historical materialist view of history is grounded on the thorough analysis of class relations behind existing modes of production in a definite period or epoch in history. The mode of production is the dominant mode of livelihood within a society and the labor expended for this. This translates to definite relations between individuals. These relations determine the division of individuals into social classes based on the nature of their participation in production and ownership, not only of petty possessions but of the means of production and labor itself. **Ebert and Zavarzadeh** concretely explain this for our contemporary times:

“In all class societies, people are reduced to what they own and, therefore, to classes: those who purchase and therefore own the labor of others during the working day and profit from it, and others who own only their own labor... Buying and owning the labor of others makes you an owner, but owning a home or car or refrigerator or Xbox – which are often mentioned as a sign that nowadays everyone is an owner and there are no classes – does not make you an owner. Using the labor of others brings you profit, owning Xbox returns your working wages back to the owners. There is no middle between the two: the middle class is an ideological illusion used to cloud class binaries and conceal the fact that under capitalism, society is breaking up more rigidly into two classes whose opposition cannot be dissolved into the hybrid of the playful in-between-ness of the middle class.”

Suffice to say that in the discourse of war, manifest contradictions such as armed encounters, colonial collaborations and capitulation all boil down to class struggle. War itself is a means to resolve class contradictions. While sifting through the accounts on Balangiga, it is important to emphasize the need for an open and thoughtful understanding of the historical context and the motivational forces behind this particular event.

Any historical study will be defeated if the same assumes the illusion of sovereignty while Philippine society remains semi-colonial; and while it supports and blindly condones the State’s denial of its essential role as an instrument for class rule and US hegemony. Hence, it must grasp Philippine conditions and history based on its actual place in a particular historical epoch. Only through this scientific method can one identify concretely the significant national issues to be resolved by historical study.

According to **Stalin**: *“a nation is not merely a historical category, but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism. The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of peoples into nations.”*

Accounts on Balangiga, as well as other disputed issues and events between the Philippines and its colonizers will remain empty and distorted unless we spell out the “ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the modes of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggles of these classes against one another (**Engels**).” This is the great legacy of historical materialism as the proletariat’s view of history, and as one of the pillars of Marxism.

Philippine Society and Revolution

The approach and perspective of Amado Guerrero's **PSR** remains a sharp guide to the understanding of history, and of US-PH relations in particular. It posits the transition of Philippine society from the clutches of different colonizers towards the current semi-colonial set-up. It summarizes essential points on economy, politics, culture and the military institution found in every important historical juncture within definite historical epochs.

PSR remains relevant to scholars, intellectuals, activists and revolutionaries with its historical materialist view of study that is not confined to recalling the past; instead it focuses on the practical grasp of the laws of history in order to serve the struggle for social transformation.

Before the outbreak of the Philippine-American War in 1899, the 1896 Revolution was the violent historical high point of the class struggle in Philippine society. The feudal system's forces of production under Spanish colonial rule reached full development, ready to dismantle fetters of the old relations of production.

Guerrero describes the 1896 Revolution as a national-democratic revolution of the old type—guided by the liberal-bourgeois ideology of the ilustrado leadership. In any case, the revolution fought for Philippine sovereignty, the protection and defense of civil liberties, abolition of theocratic domination, and the confiscation of property from the friars. The aspirations of the armed, anti-colonial and anti-feudal revolution were thwarted by US imperialism's swift and violent imposition of conquest.

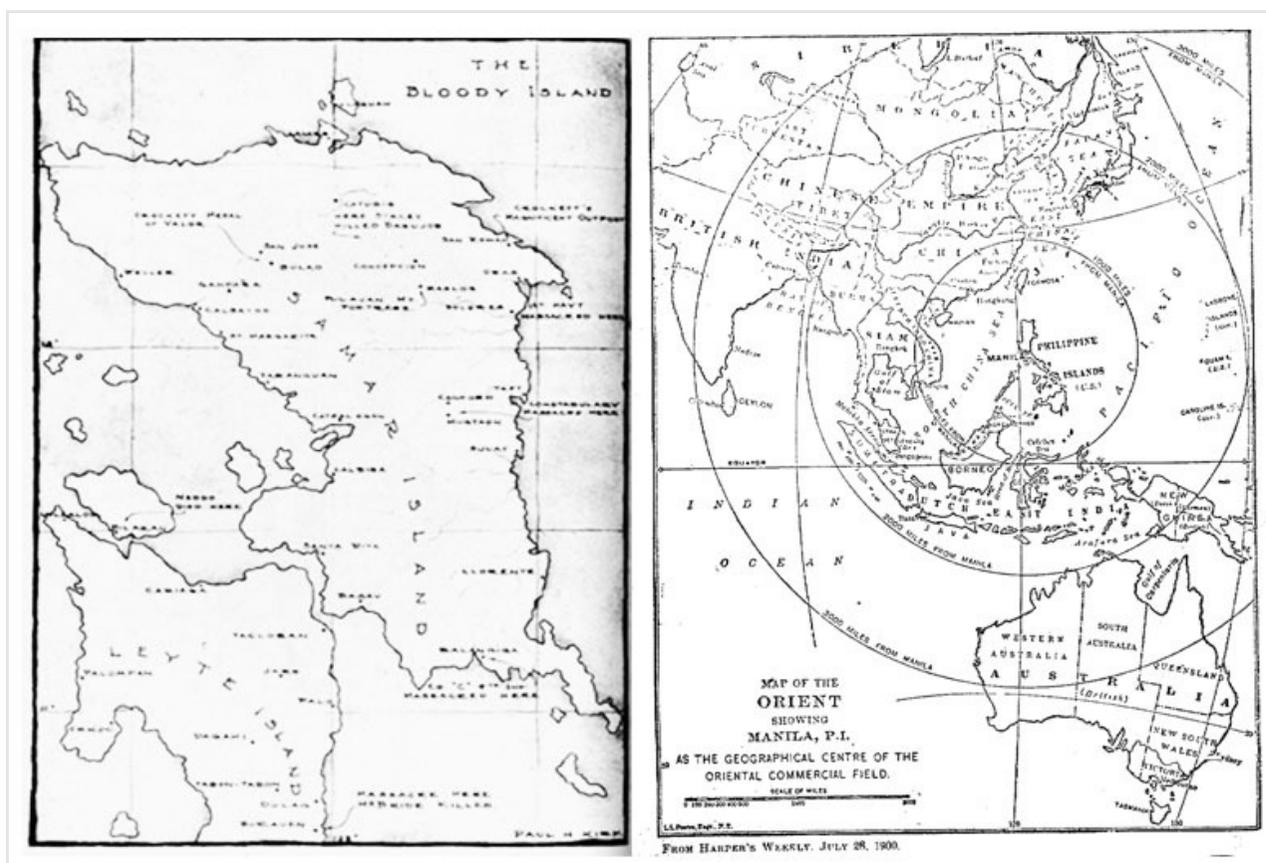


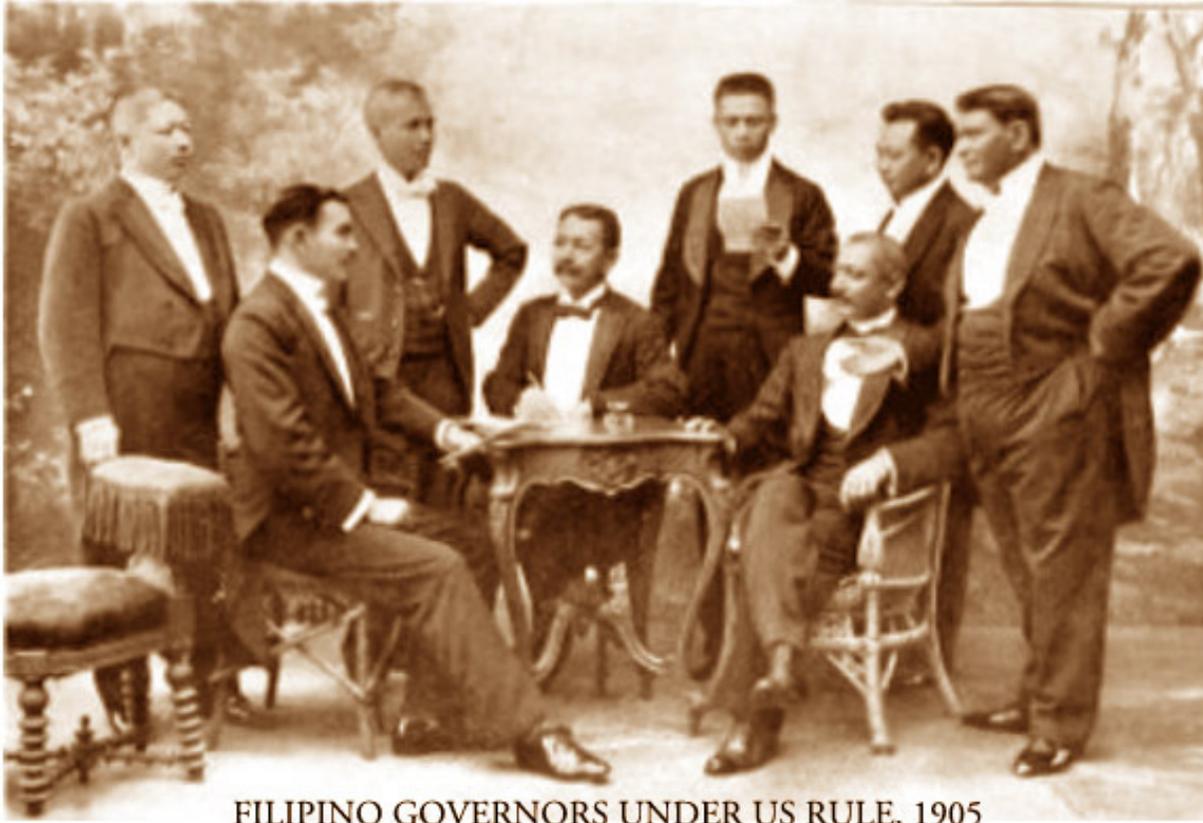
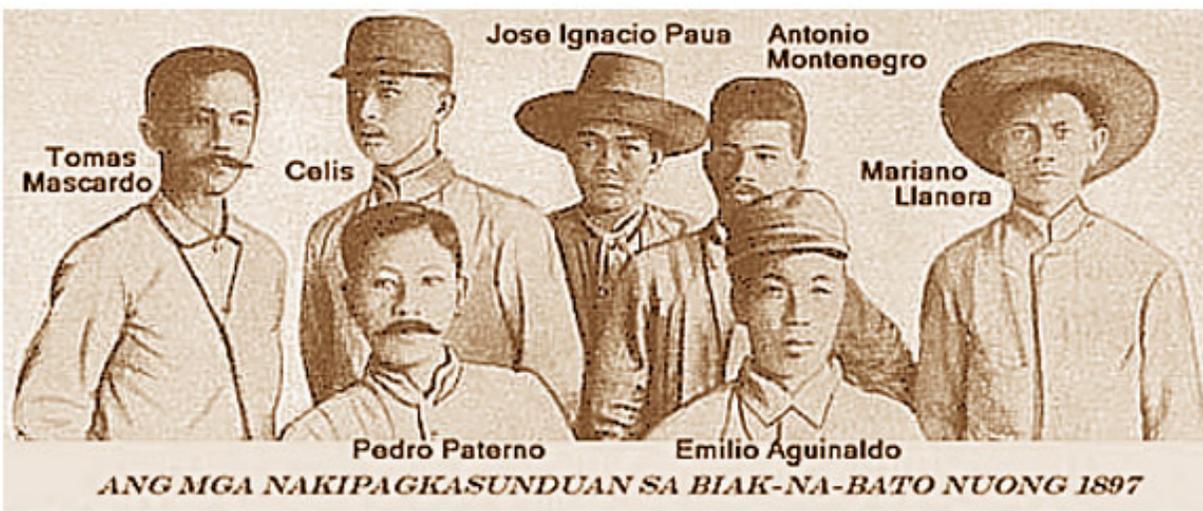
Photo: A map of Samar as a “bloody island,” and a map of the Philippines as a center of commerce in the Orient. Catering to imperialist demand for new markets for surplus products, source of cheap raw materials and labor power, and launch pad in the Asia-Pacific “American lake” since the US emerged as an imperialist superpower in the past century, and up to the present, which the US claims as the “Pacific Century.”

Guerrero correctly points out that the US has already reached imperialism, its monopoly capitalist stage. In the early 20th century, the US utilized feudalism as a social base of imperialism in the Philippines. On account of the globalization of capital, feudalism became fertile ground for supplying the demands of the global market.

This context provides for a sharp analysis of Philippine semi-feudal mode of production – the relations of production remain feudal while the goal of production has changed, along with the particular role of the propertied class: from the landlords to big comprador bourgeoisie. The comprador bourgeoisie acts as a middleman for the extraction of value by global capital which previously was exclusive to industrial nations. This same class has been engaged in the creation and implementation of laws that hinder genuine land reform to allow monopoly-capitalism to extract profits from its feudal base. The semi-feudal character of Philippine society by no means reduces feudal exploitation – it signals a reinforcement of feudal relations for the absolute benefit of US imperialism and the local ruling class. We are now witnessing global capital’s caricature of internationalism, a basic character of any semi-feudal nation.

According to **Lenin**: *“Imperialism is the epoch of finance capital and of monopolies.. an extreme intensification of antagonisms in this field. Particularly intensified become the yoke of national oppression and the striving for annexations, i.e., the violation of national independence (for annexation is nothing but the violation of the right of nations to self-determination).*

Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations—all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism— a parasitic or decaying capitalism.”



The deceptive political maneuvers of the US through the Treaty of Paris with Spain, and the promise of support to the ilustrado leaders of the revolution in Biak na Bato were crucial but not sufficient to enforce its imperialist project in the Philippines. “Colonization itself is an act of violence of the stronger against the weaker. (Ho Chi Minh)” The bloody US campaign against the Filipino people was deliberate and necessary: such is the nature of colonialism made worse by imperialist expansion. The US unleashed counter-revolutionary violence against the Filipino people to suppress the persistence of the revolutionary war for national liberation.

This mode of historical positioning is demonstrated in E. San Juan’s analysis of the genocide that took place during the Filipino-American War:

“Because of the historical specificity of the Philippines emergence as a dependent nation-state controlled by the United States in the twentieth century, nationalism as a mass movement has always been defined by events of anti-imperialist rebellion. U.S. conquest entailed long and sustained violent suppression of the

Filipino revolutionary forces for decades.”

Guerero cites: “(From 1899-1902)126,468 U.S. troops had been unleashed against the 7,000,000 Filipino people. These foreign aggressors suffered a casualty of at least 4,000 killed and almost 3,000 wounded. Close to 200,000 Filipino combatants and noncombatants were slain. In short, for every U.S. trooper killed, 50 Filipinos were in turn killed. More than a quarter of a million Filipinos died as a direct and indirect result of hostilities. However, an estimate of a U.S. general would even put the Filipino death casualty to as high as 600,00 or one-sixth of the population in Luzon then.” Further, according to historian William Henry Scott: “in a landscape in which all resistance was “insurgency” and insurgency was punishable by death, the best and the brightest of a generation of Filipino men and women were exiled, excommunicated, imprisoned tortured, hanged, shot, starved and blown up with artillery.”

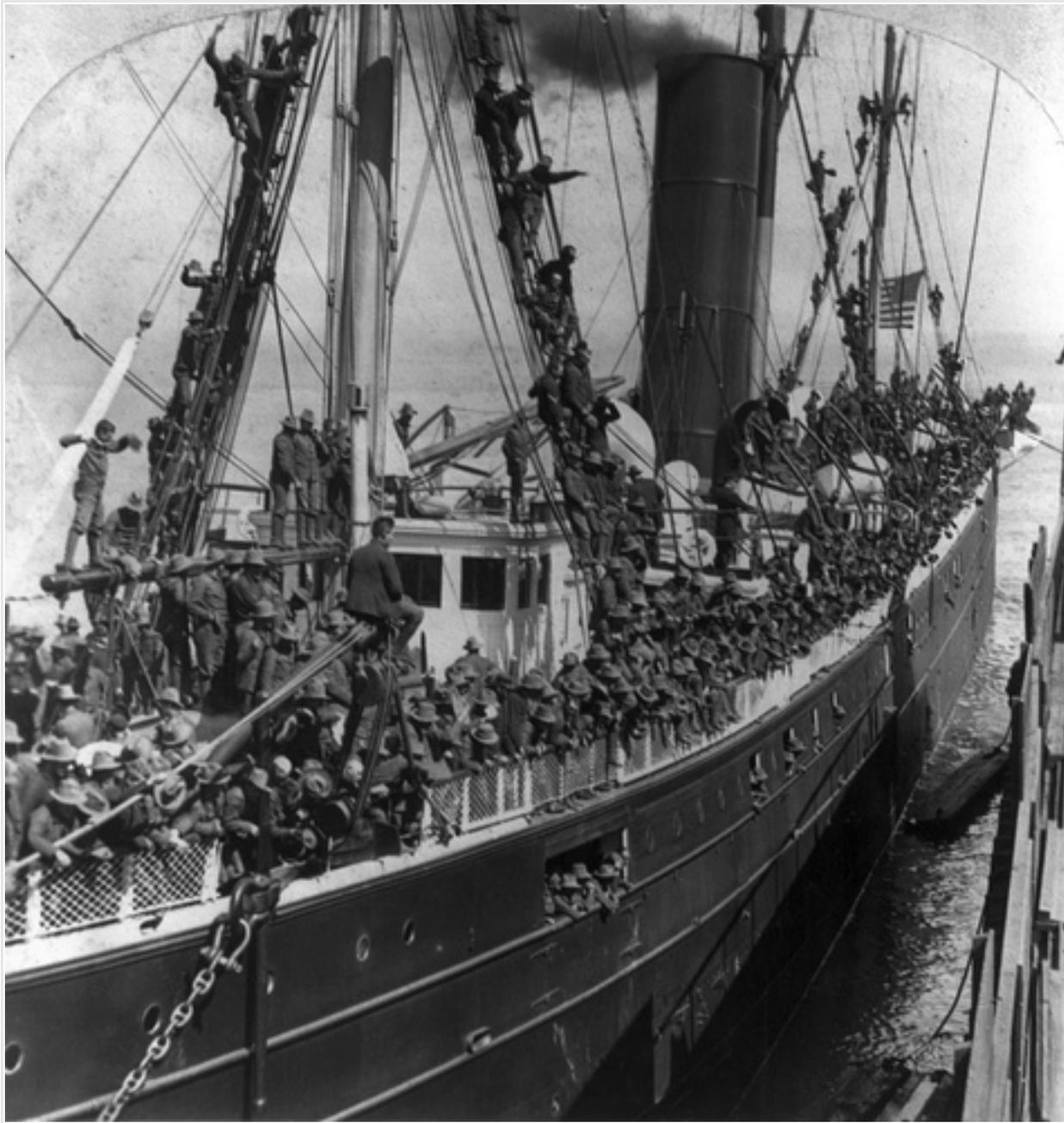
In Samar, the retaliatory attacks ordered by Smith meant sustained and widespread massacres of the unarmed population. To starve the revolutionary forces, food and trade supplies were cut. A report by Littleton Waller indicates that in a span of only 11 days, his men torched 255 homes, shot 13 carabaos and killed 39 people. By the end of the last kill-and-burn campaign in Samar in 1905, 5 barrios have been completely erased from the island.

The anti-colonial and anti-feudal aspirations of the 1896 Revolution remain unfulfilled to this day, while current conditions are most favorable to the persistence of the anti-imperialist struggle of the Filipino people.

The Filipino working class was only in its infancy towards the end of Spanish colonial period, but was already openly denouncing imperialism in as early as May 1903, during a labor day march joined by 100,000 workers. From the growth of labor unions to the establishment of a vanguard party, and the renewed calls to wage armed struggle, the Filipino working class confronted constant challenges to learn the harsh lessons from the people’s struggle so that they may perform their revolutionary role in history.

To a class conscious worker, it is clear that the Philippine Revolution remains unfinished, and is, in fact, raging.

Counter-insurgency



Imperialism means war. Following wars of aggression, imperialism ascertains its own consolidation of power through the establishment and creation of neo-colonial states and its local armed forces by training the local ruling class in the ways of the Commonwealth, the establishment of the Philippine Constabulary, and the current regime's charge over the armed forces' implementation of its counter-insurgency programs based on imperialist designs.

The class basis of war and violence is the most important lesson to be grasped from the Balangiga attack. According to a new study entitled "Culture and Counter-insurgency (2011) by Bryan Ziadie: "The counterinsurgency operation enables state violence to present itself as being in the service of the public, while it is utilized for private interest. The counterinsurgency operation's goal of maintaining legitimacy for the state is also the cultural project that naturalizes this interpretation of state violence."

Thwarting the revolution's victory, inflicting violence, repression and suppression upon the people in different parts of the country were more than just provocations for the Balangiga attack. The continued and

persistent engagement of the armed Filipino forces during the US colonial period demonstrates that resistance is not only borne out of a decision to fight but also of an urgent need for defense. Counter-revolutionary violence – the counter-insurgency program enforced by the US with strategic firmness and tactical brutality laid down the conditions for yet another battle in Samar. This is the four-day **Battle of Catubig**, according to descendants and witnesses to the battle:

THE FIGHT AT CATUBIG.

Gen. MacArthur Confirms the Report of the Attack on the American Garrison.

WASHINGTON, May 16.—The officials of the War Department, after waiting for nearly a week to hear something from Gen. MacArthur, at Manila, confirmatory of the press report of the bloody three days' engagement at Catubig, which resulted in the heaviest loss of life the American Army has sustained in any one engagement in the Philippines, yesterday cabled Gen. MacArthur a request for information.

The answer was received to-day, confirming the press reports and adding some interesting details. Gen. MacArthur transmitted a report from Henry T. Allen, a Major of the Forty-third Volunteers, who commanded the United States forces on the Island of Samar.

It appears that this force was divided among several ports on Samar, and, while details are still lacking, it is believed that this particular force, which was besieged at Catubig, was commanded, not by a commissioned officer, but by a Sergeant, either George or Hall, both of whom were killed. Catubig, where the engagement occurred, is a seaport town of nearly 10,000 inhabitants. Gen. MacArthur's cablegram is as follows:

“With reference to your telegram of 14th, the rumored engagement in Samar reported in cablegram of Gen. Otis May 4 has been confirmed by reports recently received from Henry T. Allen, Forty-third Regiment, United States Volunteer Infantry, commanding Samar Island. That detachment of 31 men, stationed at Catubig, was attacked April 15 by 600 men with 200 rifles and 1 cannon. Our men were

quartered in a convent, which was fired next day by burning hemp thrown from adjoining church.

“Detachment attempt escape by river. Men getting into boat were killed; remaining men intrenched themselves near river and held out two days longer, facing most adverse circumstances, until rescued by Lieut. Sweeney and ten men.

“Over 200 of attacking party, many of them are reported having come from Luzon Island, reported killed and many wounded. Lieut. Sweeney reports streets covered with dead insurgents.

“Iloilo cable is broken by earthquake. Difficult to procure more definite information.”

The New York Times

Published: May 17, 1900

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“...in February 1900, Americans started coming posing as private surveyors. Within weeks the “surveyors,” were already wearing military uniforms, and more men were pouring in, ferried by a gunboat.

The soldiers were of Company H, 43rd Volunteer Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army. Their real mission was to deny General Lukban access to the rice harvest and to prevent the General from making the lush and rice-rich Catubig Valley headquarters of the Army he was raising in Samar and Leyte for the Philippine Revolution, which had already metamorphosed into the Philippine-American War.

*The people of Catubig naturally resented the deceptive presence of the Americans. A 300-man strong, fighting force was easily raised. Knowing that the men were ill-trained and ill-equipped, well-off families donated their mousers and revolvers. Local blacksmiths worked overnights to make **palteks** (locally manufactured guns) and **baidis** (the Samarnon’s counterpart of the Samurai blade).*

General Lukban likewise assigned one of his chemists to the fighting men of Catubig to ensure that they had adequate and steady supply of gun powder. Above all, the General assured that he will immediately reinforce the Catubig militia with at least 500 men.

April 15, 1900: At 7:30 a.m., the bells of Catubig tolled unusually fast. All able-bodied men ran toward the convent (where the Americans were based) and

volunteered to fight. But unarmed they instead ended up rolling the hemp bales around the convent to serve as shields to the militiamen.

*As Americans were forced themselves out into their two small motorized boats, the militia, assisted by civilians, poured kerosene on the abaca bales and set them afire. Americans who dared to leave the convent were thus forced to negotiate their way through the towering inferno of abaca bales, then through the **baid**s and guns of the militia. Fifteen of the 36 Americans perceived to be in the garrison tried to flee to safety, and fifteen burnt alive or were cut down by Catubignon fires or bolos.*

The Americans did not easily surrender to buy time for reinforcement to arrive. Early on the third day of the siege, the 600 men of General Lukban arrived. A great battle immediately erupted after a lull of almost two days.

The Americans recorded their casualties at 22, 19 dead and three wounded. But the Lukban forces believed there was a cover up by the Americans of their actual casualties. Other published accounts recorded 31 American deaths. The Filipinos accounted 150 deaths.

One of the survivors, Cpl. Anthony J. Carson (later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor), openly admitted that the Battle of Catubig was a total defeat for the American forces.

The battle of Catubig is glossed over in the study of the Philippine-American war. It had not appeared even in footnotes of Philippine history books.”

Many Filipinos remain unaware of the struggle against US imperialism, of numerous uprisings and movements in the Tagalog region, the Visayas and the defiant Muslim people in Mindanao. Sakay's Republikang Tagalog, the Sakdalista, pulahanes, kolorum and others were met with violent suppression, tagged as bandits or religious fanatics.

DEATH SENTENCE FOR BANDITS

Natividad (20 years)

De Vega (death)



Montalvo (death)

Carrion (20 years)

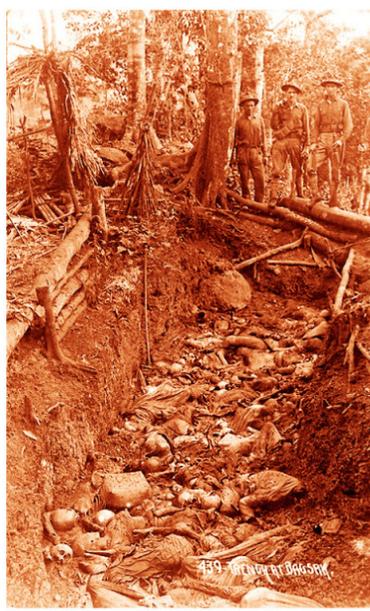
Bakay (death)

Villafuerte (death)

FILIPINO BANDIT LEADERS CONVICTED.

Despite the violent assault of US troops in communities in Mindanao, the Muslims demonstrated fierce armed resistance against colonialism. Held hidden like Balangiga, the Moro people will never forget its intense hostilities against US, such as in Bud Dajo, Jolo in 1906, where 1,000 Moros were killed, (each one, they say bore around 50 wounds), followed by a second encounter in 1911. During the battle of Bud Bagsak in 1913, 500 Moros, including women and children were killed.

An [article](#) on these events insightfully asserts: “Indeed, both the Bud Dahu’ and Bud Bagsak encounters were not really massacres of weak, innocuous and helpless natives; rather, they were fierce struggles of brave resistance; knew they were up against a vastly superior force but still they firmly decided to oppose it; they preferred to die fighting for the values and principles they believed in rather than surrender to a perceived foreign oppressor, whose aim was ‘to continue the unfinished goal of Spanish colonialism.’” However, too much stress on cultural and religious conflicts as the root of hostilities blur class contradictions in the historical struggle of the Moro people.



Historical distortions have manifested themselves as obscure debates or the conundrum of dates involving the exact end of the 1896 Revolution, and formal start of the Filipino-American War, the accurate closure of the Filipino-American War and the commencement of US campaigns against isolated uprisings, and the Moro rebellion. One wonders why Filipino historians differ in establishing the exact chronological scope of the Filipino-American War.

Meanwhile, the perspective of imperialist conquest can only view this whole period of resistance from the Spanish times up to arrival of the US as the Philippine Insurrection. The standpoint of colonial power can only interpret this period within the horizon of its hegemonic position and the maintenance of this as a superior civilization and occupying force. As a powerful military force, the US has since the applied a strategy to protect its interests in the Philippines and elsewhere, this is none other than its strategy of counter-insurgency or COIN.

Counter-insurgency — a comprehensive campaign of violent suppression against forces regarded as threats to US hegemony – was brutally imposed by the US upon its hijack of the 1896 Revolution and the ruthless destruction of all forms of anti-imperialist defiance. It must be stressed that in the Philippines, this led to the genocide of whole populations.



Counter-insurgency as a military design is still being imposed by US imperialism in the Philippines. It is at the core of the internal security policy of the State and its armed forces to this day.

In 1998, a paper presented at the Balangiga Round-Table Conference attempted to place the Balangiga attack from a proper military perspective. According to a military officer of the State's armed forces, Emmanuel C. Martin (then Capt. of the Philippine Army), argues in his paper that **"Balangiga was Not a Massacre"** but "an honorable combat by Filipino revolutionaries-guerrillas that achieved complete surprise which resulted to the virtual annihilation of C Company, 9th US Infantry."

According to Martin, the event was not a 'massacre' but a 'raid,' in military terms: "a surprise attack on a stationary or temporarily halted military unit characterized by swift violent action followed by a quick and orderly withdrawal." Instead of calling it a 'massacre' Martin suggested that the attack be called "The Victorious Raid at Balangiga."

In any case, it must be the State's armed forces who are most afflicted with grave historical confusion, among all the native victims of US colonial indoctrination.



The headquarters of the 8th Infantry Division in Catbalogan, Samar, for example, — once turf of the most-avid fanatic general, the “butcher” Jovito Palparan during the height of the vicious Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) counter-insurgency campaign of the last regime – is ironically named after the most prominent anti-imperialist general Vicente Lukban. Is he recognized by the military establishment for directing the ‘insurgent attacks’ in Catubig and Balangiga, or because he pledged allegiance to the US after his capture? How does capitulation to the US weigh in conceding recognition to previously anti-imperialist generals Miguel Malvar and Simeon Ola? Police headquarters in the cities of Batangas and Legazpi in South Luzon are named after these generals.

Filipino military officials in Samar today say that the “heroism of the soldiers before (is) still being demonstrated by the present breed of soldiers,” while the State’s armed establishment implements one operation plan after another, patterned after the COIN military design imposed by US troops in Balangiga and the whole archipelago during the Filipino-American War.

If the Balangiga attack is to be viewed from a proper military perspective, one must grasp the counter-insurgency policy refined by the US from its practice of global intervention and military hegemony. The confused, duplicitous, or plainly treacherous distortion of the historical struggle of the people by the AFP merely exposes its own bankruptcy and mercenary tradition. Wide-scale corruption and criminal abuses inside the AFP is an open secret in Philippine society – leading to demoralization, defection and rebellion of several honest, enlightened or nationalist officials and even of those in the lowest in the chain of command, the State’s pawns in waging an unjust war against the Filipino people as directed by US imperialism.



After the US military bases and structures in Clark and Subic were pulled-out in 1991, military treaties between the US and the Philippines continue on the basis of the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951. Through the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), accompanied by a massive campaign of disinformation in the mass media, the State is able to justify direct control of the US on the AFP – launching of joint-military exercises and war games, increased presence of US troops, weapons and military equipment including drones or spy planes and nuclear-powered vessels, and the direct participation of US troops in intelligence and combat operations against local armed groups targeted by counter-insurgency.

Understood from the perspective of counter-insurgency, the discourse of heroism and the appeal to return the Balangiga Bells mouthed by state representatives prove empty. Ziadie rightly argues that “What is lost is the understanding that the lives of those Balangigans at this historical moment were not simply ‘given up,’ but were instead forcibly taken from them as they resisted very particular forms of oppression characteristic to the counter-insurgency paradigm of which the VFA represents one of many continuations.”



In 2005, Palparan launched a “Howling” Smith-type “kill-and-burn” campaign in Samar and Leyte within the framework of the counter-insurgency OBL and Oplan Phoenix implemented by the US in Vietnam. The appalling number of cases of extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, internal refugees and other military abuses relate not just to isolated incidents of human rights violations but form part of a comprehensive terror campaign by the State whose ultimate aim is to deny the people of the logical and historical need to join and support the armed struggle today. Despite fierce implementation of the “Palparan model” which the butcher himself imposed in Mindoro, Samar-Leyte and Central Luzon, the OBL failed in its goal to “crush the insurgency” before the end of Gloria Arroyo’s presidency in 2010.

When the State says “insurgency,” it usually refers to the armed

secessionist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) concentrated in certain areas in Mindanao; and the New People's Army (NPA) which has been carrying out a four-decade 'communist insurgency.' The NPA is an anti-imperialist peasant army formed by the Communist Party of the Philippines a few months after it was established in December 1968 upon the foundations of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The armed anti-imperialist resistance is patent in the non-compromising assertion of national sovereignty and the broad physical scope of the NPA nationwide. The National Democratic Front (NDF) is a league of underground sectoral organizations that are part of the people's democratic revolution. It directly supports the NPA, the armed struggle and the people's war.

The CPP-NPA-NDF has gained international prestige for its four decades of revolutionary practice. It is an open secret that the NPA enjoys wide political, moral and material support from the masses in its bases and guerilla zones, and wherever the CPP, NDF and underground movement is present: "In the whole of Philippine history, the NPA has emerged as the largest, broadest and most powerful army that has fought for national and social liberation of the people." This is a fighting army that is involved in the anti-feudal agrarian revolution, as well as in establishing organs of democratic political power and revolutionary culture. There is no other army that can claim this historical place in Philippine society (of possible similar significance are the Katipunan of the 1896 Revolution; and the Hukbalahap and People's Liberation Army of the old Communist Party) despite the status of "insurgents" granted upon them by state propaganda and mainstream mass media, and the latest classification of the CPP-NPA-NDF as "foreign terrorist organization" by the US.

The global market mechanisms of capitalism require methods that are not confined strictly with those of the market. The fundamental contradictions that plague the very mechanisms of the market, time and again, require temporary resolutions crafted and implemented by the ruling class imperialist countries and their allies in the local ruling elite. In the Philippines, the semi-feudal and semi-colonial character of the mode of production is reflected and further reinforced in the operations of the bureaucracy, a machine that solicits consent at the same time that it deploys brute force. This bureaucratic machine mired by imperialist and comprador interests directly intervenes in protecting a monolithic national agenda by decisively and swiftly arresting and preventing an alternative national agenda of which the CPP-NPA-NDF are known for advancing in all fronts of struggle. In an effort to secure its "home markets" the imperialist-comprador alliance with its mercenary army recruits from the national army whom the former have mobilized for its narrow class

interest, impose restrictive measures, containment strategies and direct atrocities. The objective consequence of which is the cementing of class and national oppression.

Fanon explains: *“Understandably, violence is a desperate act, only if it is compared in abstracto to the military machine of the oppressors. In the other hand, violence in the context of international relations, represents a formidable threat to the oppressor... a greater threat, as far as imperialism is concerned is that socialist propaganda might infiltrate the masses and contaminate them. It is already a serious risk during the conflict’s cold period; but what would happen to the colony, rotted by guerilla warfare in the event of a real war?”*

Capitalism then realizes that its military strategy has everything to lose if national conflicts were to break out. In the framework of peaceful coexistence, therefore, every colony is destined to disappear and, taking it to the extreme, neutrality will command capitalism’s respect. What must be avoided at all costs are strategic risks, the espousal by the masses of an enemy doctrine and radical hatred by tens of millions of men. The colonized peoples are perfectly aware of these imperatives which dominate international politics. This is why even those who rage against this violence always plan and act on the basis of this global violence.”



Oplan Bayanihan is the new counter-insurgency program of the administration of Benigno Aquino III patterned after the newly issued Counter-Insurgency Guide of the US Defense Department. A fine-tuned version of the old colonialist formula combining violence and deceit, Oplan Bayanihan is currently perpetrated by the State through its population-

centric and enemy-centric operations.

More than a hundred years after the attack in Balangiga, the Philippine revolutionary guerilla force not only in Samar but in the whole of the nation remains to be a threat to US imperialism. In order to promote and defend imperialist interests in the country, the neo-colonial State has been launching sustained COIN operations from the Marcos' "nip-in-the-bud" Oplan Katatagan to Arroyo's OBL. Its comprehensive approach includes not only combat operations against armed groups but intelligence and psychological operations aimed at civilian populations. In Samar, the so-called soft approach in civil-military operations is now being used directly by American troops as we speak.

'Development programs' have been an integral part of the deceptive and repressive counter-insurgency measures in target communities. The extensive road network in Samar constructed from funds of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation and dole-outs to indigent families through Conditional Cash Transfer scheme (CCT) or "Pantawid ng Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)" are examples of this. From June 15-July 1 the US Navy's biggest "floating hospital," the USNS Mercy arrived in Calbayog City, allowing US personnel to directly provide medical services to the people of Samar under the Pacific Partnership 2012 program of the US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific. After two weeks of 'socio-civic service,' the USNS Mercy went for rest and recreation (R&R) in Subic, where another US vessel, a nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine of the US Navy, the USS Louisville, has docked since June 25.



The showcasing of counter-insurgency's "benevolent" face does not mean that it loosens its focus on combat operations, militarization, and the terror campaign, especially in the communities. The enhancement of strategies,

tactics and the overall design of counter-insurgency using non-conventional warfare is an admission that they face a formidable enemy despite the latter's deficiency in terms of arms and advanced war technology.

For this reason, it is important to grasp revolutionary practice—the essence of the Balangiga attack referred to by Capt. Martin as the “victory of the Filipino revolutionary guerillas.” The use of mobile warfare and guerilla tactics, and the undeniable mass support and mass character of the Balangiga attack must be seen as a sharp feature of the anti-imperialist class war in Philippine history, as well as in the victorious anti-colonial and anti-imperialist armed struggles waged by the oppressed peoples of the world.

The Signal of Resistance and Victory



The course of the struggles in Vietnam and North Korea are examples of the victory of anti-colonial revolutionary armed struggles within a specific historical period. The people's war in these countries were not only won through purely military strategy and tactics. Foremost in this model is the decisive role of a political organization culled from the Leninist model of establishing and strengthening the role of a vanguard party of the working class that is none other than the Communist Party (CP). The ideological and politico-military victory in the people's war of Vietnam and North Korea was guided by the CP. A revolutionary party must emerge from the process of waging an anti-imperialist class war.

In Mao Zedong's assessment, the same role of the CP needs to be identified as an important condition with regard to the heroic resistance of the people of the Paris Commune. This is none other than the actuality of a revolutionary upheaval of the working class, on the one hand, and absence of a revolutionary party of the proletariat of the workers movement, on the other. This point cannot be overemphasized on account of the current raging war between reactionary states and the revolutionary peoples of the world. For social revolutions serve as signposts if not milestones for a social praxis that is keen on social transformation based on the people's

revolutionary engagement.

The wager being laid on the matter by some academics and even radical philosophers like Alain Badiou is strangely to the contrary. For Badiou, the challenge of the Paris Commune in relation to our time is not what he identifies as the classical interpretation of the Commune's failure from the point of the party-state point of view or that the event was "outside" of the framework of the Leninist party of the state. For Badiou, "the Commune was a political sequence that was a political sequence that, precisely, did not situate itself in such a subjection or in such a framework...The method will thus consist in putting to one side the classical interpretation and tackling the political facts and determinations of the Commune using a completely different method (193:2009 The Communist Hypothesis.)" Given that democratic people's wars with a socialist perspective are raging in different parts of the world as we speak, for what and for whom is Comrade Alain Badiou's challenge being posed?

While counter-insurgency is being showcased from irregular warfare toward the new global norm of war, the revolutionaries continue to apply and enrich study and practice of mobile warfare, guerilla tactics, and the theory of people's war in the light of the victories of the wars for national liberation in China, Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea, etc.

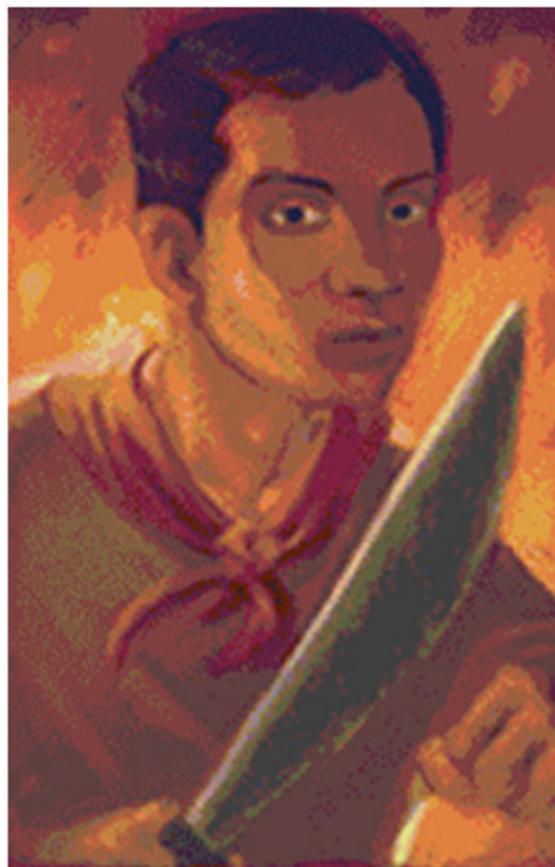
For Chussodovsky, the method and style of so-called globalizers must not escape us: "To preach the people the illusion of democracy, imperialists and their allies in the ruling class must fake dissent. In other words, they need to create, appropriate, and fund their own political opposition. In order to appear legitimate, they need to actively encourage the type of criticism that will not challenge their domination."

Characteristic of this example are discourses and factions that preach flawed ideas. The injunction to choose between the bolo and the pen is beyond deciding on who the rightful hero is between Bonifacio (bolo) and Rizal (pen). That the state has appointed Rizal as the Philippine national hero points to the reality that any discourse that legitimizes or counters this is strategically contained by the discourse already laid down by the state.

The same discourse showcases the State's malicious scheme behind the illusion that there is neither knowledge nor wisdom to be gained from resorting to arms. The pen, on the other hand, is tied up with reform or with gradual change as if to say that at no point will a revolutionary change be desirable, while paying lip-service to the possibility of change in society at

the same time.

The revolution is portrayed as the solution preferred by the badly informed, with no future whatsoever, those who are cursed because of their own impetuous and thoughtless engagement with history. Reform, on the other hand, is allegedly for the educated, those who can think and think independently, for the analytical and the critical. The bias and function of the binarism revolution versus reform—bolo versus pen are clear—these are for the stability of the status quo that harbors the state which yanks this false dilemma to begin with.



This injunction to choose can be gleaned from the current disposition of political forces which are either for or against the US-Aquino regime. The national democratic movement is referred to as ND (National Democracy), the side that is against the regime; Akbayan, on the other hand, is patently on the regime's side. The latter is a faction that has been formed from the renegade forces of the national democratic movement during the Split in the Left that only became marked in 1992. 'Reaffirmists' (RA) versus 'rejectionists' (RJ) were more familiar labels for these two forces in the '90s.

The RA or ND block reaffirmed the protracted people's war as a strategy of revolution, the same strategy that the RJs turned against as they also labeled it obsolete, no longer applicable to the 'new conditions' in Philippine society.

A social investigation of objective conditions will show that no qualitative

change has taken place in Philippine society. The basic features of oppression and exploitation that were exposed by the movement in its establishment up until the Split remain. Hence, any accusation of obsolescence coming from the rejectionists and their fellow reactionaries can only be a consequence of their dull and compromised stance rather than a thoughtful consideration of the objective conditions for revolution.

At this juncture, it is crucial to identify the false binarism which reverberates through the modality bolo or pen, revolution or reform. But it is more crucial to demonstrate the corruption in this stance especially since those who esteem themselves as actors for reform are in fact agents of the reactionary state's machinery. The forces that are within and who run the bureaucratic machinery of the state are by no means reformists. Those who implement the counter-insurgency program of the state and its policies structured by the imperialist interests of the IMF-WB are reactionaries, not reformists. This is not simply due to a change in political positioning. Any thoughtful and sharp political analysis takes into consideration the actual and dynamic relationship between reform and revolution.

Reforms do not occur easily even in polarized societies where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. The condition of polarization becomes a fertile ground for the exploitative class to amass superprofits. They do this by maintaining a backward economy through repression and impoverishment of the people who are actual and potential forces of labor-power and revolutionary change.

This struggle forms the dynamic shape that materializes reform and revolution in society. Reforms can only be achieved when there is a strong engagement from below. And this is none other than a revolutionary force that has the capacity to engage the state without compromise, based on its force and strength at a given time. The ruling class is forced to concede to demands from below when these are asserted with revolutionary threat and challenge to their power. Therefore, reform and revolution always go hand in hand. A true revolutionary paves the way for reforms, and the genuine reformist knows that a revolutionary force is necessary to realize his/her objectives.

This exposes how dominant 'reform packages' are practices that have nothing to do with reformist ideals. So-called reform strategies and its attendant anomalous projects of the State are nothing but reactionary schemes backed by imperialism—CCTs, microcredit and microfinance, and Public-Private Partnerships brandished by Akbayan and its allied NGOs. Housing projects by Gawad Kalinga (GK) aim to provide middle class aspirations to poor Filipinos through 'decent housing,' while Habitat for

Humanity (HH) uses the poor to showcase foreign corporations that are in the field of infrastructure to clinch big contracts. Moreover, CCT and microcredit are imperialist schemes advanced by the IMF-WB while the former two (GK and HH) are characterized as initiatives of 'civil society.' Allegedly, these institutions are autonomous from the State but they play a significant role in implementing—directly or indirectly—the State's strategies of containment imposed upon the poor in order to repress them from participating in the people's war. And instead lure them into the ideology that they can change their lives through hard work and positive thinking amid conditions of oppression and absence of opportunities.



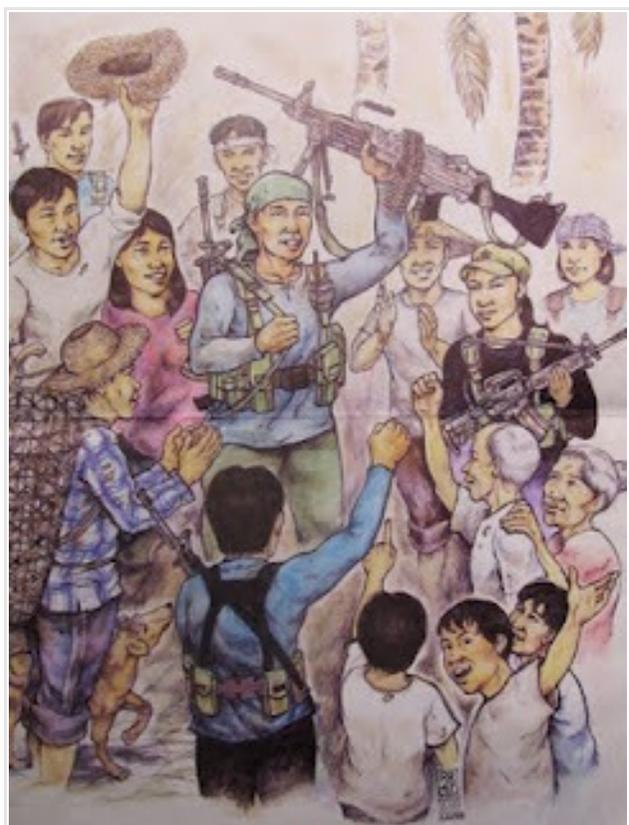
The communards of the Paris Commune then and the Filipino people now share the ripe conditions for revolution in different historical epochs. The Filipino people are in the position to achieve victory by learning from the revolutionary lessons of history. As for the lessons to be learned from failure which otherwise involve revolutionary conditions, it is important to take into account the role of the revolutionary party of the proletariat. Through the leadership of the party, "the bad thing of *failure* turns into the *combative excellence* of knowledge (Claudel)."

The dismissive argument that entails the idea that neither wisdom nor knowledge is to be developed in taking up arms is once more discredited: Mao emphatically reminds us that an army without culture is a dull-witted army, and a dull-witted army cannot defeat the enemy.

The bells of Balangiga embody the class struggle whose body and spirit the state is keen on crushing. The bells of Balangiga and its symbolic weight that point to the victorious uprising of the people of Samar signal the destruction of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society.

The clamor for the Balangiga bells can never be reduced to a simple issue of diplomacy between friendly states for it is a picture of the ruling class' abuse and of the daring resistance of the oppressed. The US' denial to return the bells is an attempt to deny the people of their rightful struggle for a new social order and the possibility of a new world.

The persistence of the 1896 Revolution and the anti-imperialist resistance of the people can only be fulfilled through armed struggle—this is a historical lesson that is as clear as the mighty resonance of the bells. Wherever this truth explodes into a rage in the whole archipelago, it is certain that the people's war is ablaze, and those who dare in this just war portend to a new world, one that patiently unfolds as we struggle.



Waray bisan ano an katawhan kun waray hukbong bayan!

(Without the people's army, the people have nothing!)

Dare in the protracted people's war!

Dare to win!