

Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy (Buy One, Get One Free)

by Arundhati Roy

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In these times, when we have to race to keep abreast of the speed at which our freedoms are being snatched from us, and when few can afford the luxury of retreating from the streets for a while in order to return with an exquisite, fully formed political thesis replete with footnotes and references, what profound gift can I offer you tonight?

As we lurch from crisis to crisis, beamed directly into our brains by satellite TV, we have to think on our feet. On the move. We enter histories through the rubble of war. Ruined cities, parched fields, shrinking forests, and dying rivers are our archives. Craters left by daisy cutters, our libraries.

So what can I offer you tonight? Some uncomfortable thoughts about money, war, empire, racism, and democracy. Some worries that flit around my brain like a family of persistent moths that keep me awake at night.

Some of you will think it bad manners for a person like me, officially entered in the Big Book of Modern Nations as an "Indian citizen," to come here and criticize the U.S. government. Speaking for myself, I'm no flag-waver, no patriot, and am fully aware that venality, brutality, and hypocrisy are imprinted on the leaden soul of every state. But when a country ceases to be merely a country and becomes an empire, then the scale of operations changes dramatically. So may I clarify that tonight I speak as a subject of the American Empire? I speak as a slave who presumes to criticize her king.

Since lectures must be called something, mine tonight is called: Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy (Buy One, Get One Free).

Way back in 1988, on the 3rd of July, the U.S.S. Vincennes, a missile cruiser stationed in the Persian Gulf, accidentally shot down an Iranian airliner and killed 290 civilian passengers. George Bush the First, who was at the time on his presidential campaign, was asked to comment on the incident. He said quite subtly, "I will never apologize for the United States. I don't care what the facts are."

I don't care what the facts are. What a perfect maxim for the New American Empire. Perhaps a slight variation on the theme would be more apposite: The facts can be whatever we want them to be.

When the United States invaded Iraq, a New York Times/CBS News survey estimated that 42 percent of the American public believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. And an ABC News poll said that 55 percent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein directly supported Al Qaida. None of this opinion is based on evidence (because there isn't any). All of it is based on insinuation, auto-suggestion, and outright lies circulated by the U.S. corporate media, otherwise known as the "Free Press," that hollow pillar on which contemporary American democracy rests.

Public support in the U.S. for the war against Iraq was founded on a multi-tiered edifice of falsehood and deceit, coordinated by the U.S. government and faithfully amplified by the corporate media.

Apart from the invented links between Iraq and Al Qaida, we had the manufactured frenzy about Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. George Bush the Lesser went to the extent of saying it would be "suicidal" for the U.S. not to attack Iraq. We once again witnessed the paranoia that a starved, bombed, besieged country was about to annihilate almighty America. (Iraq was only the latest in a succession of countries - earlier there was Cuba, Nicaragua, Libya, Grenada, and Panama.) But this time it wasn't just your ordinary brand of friendly neighborhood frenzy. It was Frenzy with a Purpose. It ushered in an old doctrine in a new bottle: the Doctrine of Pre-emptive Strike, *a.k.a.* The United States Can Do Whatever The Hell It Wants, And That's Official.

The war against Iraq has been fought and won and no Weapons of Mass Destruction have been found. Not even a little one. Perhaps they'll have to be planted before they're discovered. And then, the more troublesome amongst us will need an explanation for why Saddam Hussein didn't use them when his country was being invaded.

Of course, there'll be no answers. True Believers will make do with those fuzzy TV reports about the discovery of a few barrels of banned chemicals in an old shed. There seems to be no consensus yet about whether they're really chemicals, whether they're actually banned and whether the vessels they're contained in can technically be called barrels. (There were

unconfirmed rumours that a teaspoonful of potassium permanganate and an old harmonica were found there too.)

Meanwhile, in passing, an ancient civilization has been casually decimated by a very recent, casually brutal nation.

Then there are those who say, so what if Iraq had no chemical and nuclear weapons? So what if there is no Al Qaida connection? So what if Osama bin Laden hates Saddam Hussein as much as he hates the United States? Bush the Lesser has said Saddam Hussein was a "Homicidal Dictator." And so, the reasoning goes, Iraq needed a "regime change."

Never mind that forty years ago, the CIA, under President John F. Kennedy, orchestrated a regime change in Baghdad. In 1963, after a successful coup, the Ba'ath party came to power in Iraq. Using lists provided by the CIA, the new Ba'ath regime systematically eliminated hundreds of doctors, teachers, lawyers, and political figures known to be leftists. An entire intellectual community was slaughtered. (The same technique was used to massacre hundreds of thousands of people in Indonesia and East Timor.) The young Saddam Hussein was said to have had a hand in supervising the bloodbath. In 1979, after factional infighting within the Ba'ath Party, Saddam Hussein became the President of Iraq. In April 1980, while he was massacring Shias, the U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski declared, "We see no fundamental incompatibility of interests between the United States and Iraq." Washington and London overtly and covertly supported Saddam Hussein. They financed him, equipped him, armed him, and provided him with dual-use materials to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. They supported his worst excesses financially, materially, and morally. They supported the eight-year war against Iran and the 1988 gassing of Kurdish people in Halabja, crimes which 14 years later were re-heated and served up as reasons to justify invading Iraq. After the first Gulf War, the "Allies" fomented an uprising of Shias in Basra and then looked away while Saddam Hussein crushed the revolt and slaughtered thousands in an act of vengeful reprisal.

The point is, if Saddam Hussein was evil enough to merit the most elaborate, openly declared assassination attempt in history (the opening move of Operation Shock and Awe), then surely those who supported him ought at least to be tried for war crimes? Why aren't the faces of U.S. and U.K. government officials on the infamous pack of cards of wanted men and women?

Because when it comes to Empire, facts don't matter.

Yes, but all that's in the past we're told. Saddam Hussein is a monster who must be stopped *now*. And only the U.S. can stop him. It's an effective technique, this use of the urgent morality of the present to obscure the diabolical sins of the past and the malevolent plans for the future.

Indonesia, Panama, Nicaragua, Iraq, Afghanistan - the list goes on and on. Right now there are brutal regimes being groomed for the future - Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics.

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft recently declared that U.S. freedoms are "not the grant of any government or document, but....our endowment from God." (Why bother with the United Nations when God himself is on hand?)

So here we are, the people of the world, confronted with an Empire armed with a mandate from heaven (*and*, as added insurance, the most formidable arsenal of weapons of mass destruction in history). Here we are, confronted with an Empire that has conferred upon itself the right to go to war at will, and the right to deliver people from corrupting ideologies, from religious fundamentalists, dictators, sexism, and poverty by the age-old, tried-and-tested practice of extermination. Empire is on the move, and Democracy is its sly new war cry. Democracy, home-delivered to your doorstep by daisy cutters. Death is a small price for people to pay for the privilege of sampling this new product: Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy (bring to a boil, add oil, then bomb).

But then perhaps chinks, negroes, dinks, gooks, and wogs don't really qualify as real people. Perhaps our deaths don't qualify as real deaths. Our histories don't qualify as history. They never have.

Speaking of history, in these past months, while the world watched, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq was broadcast on live TV. Like Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the regime of Saddam Hussein simply disappeared. This was followed by what analysts called a "power vacuum." Cities that had been under siege, without food, water, and electricity for days, cities that had been bombed relentlessly, people who had been starved and systematically impoverished by the UN sanctions regime for more than a decade, were suddenly left with no semblance of urban administration. A seven-thousand-year-old civilization slid into anarchy. On live TV.

Vandals plundered shops, offices, hotels, and hospitals. American and British soldiers stood by and watched. They said they had no orders to act. In effect, they had orders to kill people, but not to protect them. Their priorities were clear. The safety and security of Iraqi people was not their business. The security of whatever little remained of Iraq's infrastructure was not their business. But the security and safety of Iraq's oil fields were. Of course they were. The oil fields were "secured" almost before the invasion began.

On CNN and BBC the scenes of the rampage were played and replayed. TV commentators, army and government spokespersons portrayed it as a "liberated people" venting their rage at a despotic regime. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said: "It's untidy. Freedom's untidy and free people are free to commit crimes and make mistakes and do bad things." Did anybody know that Donald Rumsfeld was an anarchist? I wonder - did he hold the same view during the riots in Los Angeles following the beating of Rodney King? Would he care to share his thesis about the Untidiness of Freedom with the two million people being held in U.S. prisons right now? (The world's "freest" country has the highest number of prisoners in the world.) Would he discuss its merits with young African American men, 28 percent of whom will spend some part of their adult lives in jail? Could he explain why he serves under a president who oversaw 152 executions when he was governor of Texas?

Before the war on Iraq began, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) sent the Pentagon a list of 16 crucial sites to protect. The National Museum was second on that list. Yet the Museum was not just looted, it was desecrated. It was a repository of an ancient cultural heritage. Iraq as we know it today was part of the river valley of Mesopotamia. The civilization that grew along the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates produced the world's first writing, first calendar, first library, first city, and, yes, the world's first democracy. King Hammurabi of Babylon was the first to codify laws governing the social life of citizens. It was a code in which abandoned women, prostitutes, slaves, and even animals had rights. The Hammurabi code is acknowledged not just as the birth of legality, but the beginning of an understanding of the concept of social justice. The U.S. government could not have chosen a more inappropriate land in which to stage its illegal war and display its grotesque disregard for justice.

At a Pentagon briefing during the days of looting, Secretary Rumsfeld, Prince of Darkness, turned on his media cohorts who had served him so loyally through the war. "The images you are seeing on television, you are

seeing over and over and over, and it's the same picture, of some person walking out of some building with a vase, and you see it twenty times and you say, 'My god, were there that many vases? Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?'"

Laughter rippled through the press room. Would it be alright for the poor of Harlem to loot the Metropolitan Museum? Would it be greeted with similar mirth?

The last building on the ORHA list of 16 sites to be protected was the Ministry of Oil. It was the only one that was given protection. Perhaps the occupying army thought that in Muslim countries lists are read upside down?

Television tells us that Iraq has been "liberated" and that Afghanistan is well on its way to becoming a paradise for women-thanks to Bush and Blair, the 21st century's leading feminists. In reality, Iraq's infrastructure has been destroyed. Its people brought to the brink of starvation. Its food stocks depleted. And its cities devastated by a complete administrative breakdown. Iraq is being ushered in the direction of a civil war between Shias and Sunnis. Meanwhile, Afghanistan has lapsed back into the pre-Taliban era of anarchy, and its territory has been carved up into fiefdoms by hostile warlords.

Undaunted by all this, on the 2nd of May Bush the Lesser launched his 2004 campaign hoping to be finally elected U.S. President. In what probably constitutes the shortest flight in history, a military jet landed on an aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*, which was so close to shore that, according to the Associated Press, administration officials acknowledged "positioning the massive ship to provide the best TV angle for Bush's speech, with the sea as his background instead of the San Diego coastline." President Bush, who never served his term in the military, emerged from the cockpit in fancy dress - a U.S. military bomber jacket, combat boots, flying goggles, helmet. Waving to his cheering troops, he officially proclaimed victory over Iraq. He was careful to say that it was "just one victory in a war on terror ... [which] still goes on."

It was important to avoid making a straightforward victory announcement, because under the Geneva Convention a victorious army is bound by the legal obligations of an occupying force, a responsibility that the Bush administration does not want to burden itself with. Also, closer to the 2004

elections, in order to woo wavering voters, another victory in the "War on Terror" might become necessary. Syria is being fattened for the kill.

It was Herman Goering, that old Nazi, who said, "People can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders.... All you have to do is tell them they're being attacked and denounce the pacifists for a lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country."

He's right. It's dead easy. That's what the Bush regime banks on. The distinction between election campaigns and war, between democracy and oligarchy, seems to be closing fast.

The only caveat in these campaign wars is that U.S. lives must not be lost. It shakes voter confidence. But the problem of U.S. soldiers being killed in combat has been licked. More or less.

At a media briefing before Operation Shock and Awe was unleashed, General Tommy Franks announced, "This campaign will be like no other in history." Maybe he's right.

I'm no military historian, but when was the last time a war was fought like this?

After using the "good offices" of UN diplomacy (economic sanctions and weapons inspections) to ensure that Iraq was brought to its knees, its people starved, half a million children dead, its infrastructure severely damaged, *after making sure that most of its weapons had been destroyed*, in an act of cowardice that must surely be unrivalled in history, the "Coalition of the Willing" (better known as the Coalition of the Bullied and Bought) - sent in an invading army!

Operation Iraqi Freedom? I don't think so. It was more like Operation Let's Run a Race, but First Let Me Break Your Knees.

As soon as the war began, the governments of France, Germany, and Russia, which refused to allow a final resolution legitimizing the war to be passed in the UN Security Council, fell over each other to say how much they wanted the United States to win. President Jacques Chirac offered French airspace to the Anglo-American air force. U.S. military bases in Germany were open for business. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer publicly hoped for the "rapid collapse" of the Saddam Hussein regime. Vladimir Putin publicly hoped for the same. These are governments that colluded in the enforced disarming of Iraq before their

dastardly rush to take the side of those who attacked it. Apart from hoping to share the spoils, they hoped Empire would honor their pre-war oil contracts with Iraq. Only the very naïve could expect old Imperialists to behave otherwise.

Leaving aside the cheap thrills and the lofty moral speeches made in the UN during the run up to the war, eventually, at the moment of crisis, the unity of Western governments - despite the opposition from the majority of their people - was overwhelming.

When the Turkish government temporarily bowed to the views of 90 percent of its population, and turned down the U.S. government's offer of billions of dollars of blood money for the use of Turkish soil, it was accused of lacking "democratic principles." According to a Gallup International poll, in no European country was support for a war carried out "unilaterally by America and its allies" higher than 11 percent. But the governments of England, Italy, Spain, Hungary, and other countries of Eastern Europe were praised for disregarding the views of the majority of their people and supporting the illegal invasion. That, presumably, was fully in keeping with democratic principles. What's it called? New Democracy? (Like Britain's New Labour?)

In stark contrast to the venality displayed by their governments, on the 15th of February, weeks before the invasion, in the most spectacular display of public morality the world has ever seen, more than 10 million people marched against the war on 5 continents. Many of you, I'm sure, were among them. They - we - were disregarded with utter disdain. When asked to react to the anti-war demonstrations, President Bush said, "It's like deciding, well, I'm going to decide policy based upon a focus group. The role of a leader is to decide policy based upon the security, in this case the security of the people." Democracy, the modern world's holy cow, is in crisis. And the crisis is a profound one. Every kind of outrage is being committed in the name of democracy. It has become little more than a hollow word, a pretty shell, emptied of all content or meaning. It can be whatever you want it to be. Democracy is the Free World's whore, willing to dress up, dress down, willing to satisfy a whole range of taste, available to be used and abused at will.

Until quite recently, right up to the 1980's, democracy did seem as though it might actually succeed in delivering a degree of real social justice.

But modern democracies have been around for long enough for neo-liberal capitalists to learn how to subvert them. They have mastered the technique

of infiltrating the instruments of democracy - the "independent" judiciary, the "free" press, the parliament - and molding them to their purpose. The project of corporate globalization has cracked the code. Free elections, a free press, and an independent judiciary mean little when the free market has reduced them to commodities on sale to the highest bidder.

To fully comprehend the extent to which Democracy is under siege, it might be an idea to look at what goes on in some of our contemporary democracies. The World's Largest: India, (which I have written about at some length and therefore will not speak about tonight). The World's Most Interesting: South Africa. The world's most powerful: the U.S.A. And, most instructive of all, the plans that are being made to usher in the world's newest: Iraq.

In South Africa, after 300 years of brutal domination of the black majority by a white minority through colonialism and apartheid, a non-racial, multi-party democracy came to power in 1994. It was a phenomenal achievement. Within two years of coming to power, the African National Congress had genuflected with no caveats to the Market God. Its massive program of structural adjustment, privatization, and liberalization has only increased the hideous disparities between the rich and the poor. More than a million people have lost their jobs. The corporatization of basic services - electricity, water, and housing - has meant that 10 million South Africans, almost a quarter of the population, have been disconnected from water and electricity. 2 million have been evicted from their homes.

Meanwhile, a small white minority that has been historically privileged by centuries of brutal exploitation is more secure than ever before. They continue to control the land, the farms, the factories, and the abundant natural resources of that country. For them the transition from apartheid to neo-liberalism barely disturbed the grass. It's apartheid with a clean conscience. And it goes by the name of Democracy.

Democracy has become Empire's euphemism for neo-liberal capitalism.

In countries of the first world, too, the machinery of democracy has been effectively subverted. Politicians, media barons, judges, powerful corporate lobbies, and government officials are imbricated in an elaborate underhand configuration that completely undermines the lateral arrangement of checks and balances between the constitution, courts of law, parliament, the administration and, perhaps most important of all, the independent media

that form the structural basis of a parliamentary democracy. Increasingly, the imbrication is neither subtle nor elaborate.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, for instance, has a controlling interest in major Italian newspapers, magazines, television channels, and publishing houses. The *Financial Times* reported that he controls about 90 percent of Italy's TV viewership. Recently, during a trial on bribery charges, while insisting he was the only person who could save Italy from the left, he said, "How much longer do I have to keep living this life of sacrifices?" That bodes ill for the remaining 10 percent of Italy's TV viewership. What price Free Speech? Free Speech for *whom*?

In the United States, the arrangement is more complex. Clear Channel Worldwide Incorporated is the largest radio station owner in the country. It runs more than 1,200 channels, which together account for 9 percent of the market. Its CEO contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to Bush's election campaign. When hundreds of thousands of American citizens took to the streets to protest against the war on Iraq, Clear Channel organized pro-war patriotic "Rallies for America" across the country. It used its radio stations to advertise the events and then sent correspondents to cover them as though they were breaking news. The era of manufacturing consent has given way to the era of manufacturing news. Soon media newsrooms will drop the pretense, and start hiring theatre directors instead of journalists.

As America's show business gets more and more violent and war-like, and America's wars get more and more like show business, some interesting cross-overs are taking place. The designer who built the 250,000 dollar set in Qatar from which General Tommy Franks stage-managed news coverage of Operation Shock and Awe also built sets for Disney, MGM, and "Good Morning America."

It is a cruel irony that the U.S., which has the most ardent, vociferous defenders of the idea of Free Speech, and (until recently) the most elaborate legislation to protect it, has so circumscribed the space in which that freedom can be expressed. In a strange, convoluted way, the sound and fury that accompanies the legal and *conceptual* defense of Free Speech in America serves to mask the process of the rapid erosion of the possibilities of actually *exercising* that freedom.

The news and entertainment industry in the U.S. is for the most part controlled by a few major corporations - AOL-Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, News Corporation. Each of these corporations owns and controls

TV stations, film studios, record companies, and publishing ventures. Effectively, the exits are sealed.

America's media empire is controlled by a tiny coterie of people. Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission Michael Powell, the son of Secretary of State Colin Powell, has proposed even further deregulation of the communication industry, which will lead to even greater consolidation.

So here it is - the World's Greatest Democracy, led by a man who was not legally elected. America's Supreme Court gifted him his job. What price have American people paid for this spurious presidency?

In the three years of George Bush the Lesser's term, the American economy has lost more than two million jobs. Outlandish military expenses, corporate welfare, and tax giveaways to the rich have created a financial crisis for the U.S. educational system. According to a survey by the National Council of State Legislatures, U.S. states cut 49 billion dollars in public services, health, welfare benefits, and education in 2002. They plan to cut another 25.7 billion dollars this year. That makes a total of 75 billion dollars. Bush's initial budget request to Congress to finance the war in Iraq was 80 billion dollars.

So who's paying for the war? America's poor. Its students, its unemployed, its single mothers, its hospital and home-care patients, its teachers, and health workers.

And who's actually fighting the war?

Once again, America's poor. The soldiers who are baking in Iraq's desert sun are not the children of the rich. Only one of all the representatives in the House of Representatives and the Senate has a child fighting in Iraq. America's "volunteer" army in fact depends on a poverty draft of poor whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians looking for a way to earn a living and get an education. Federal statistics show that African Americans make up 21 percent of the total armed forces and 29 percent of the U.S. army. They count for only 12 percent of the general population. It's ironic, isn't it - the disproportionately high representation of African Americans in the army and prison? Perhaps we should take a positive view, and look at this as affirmative action at its most effective. Nearly 4 million Americans (2 percent of the population) have lost the right to vote because of felony convictions. Of that number, 1.4 million are African Americans, which

means that 13 percent of all voting-age Black people have been disenfranchised.

For African Americans there's also affirmative action in death. A study by the economist Amartya Sen shows that African Americans as a group have a lower life expectancy than people born in China, in the Indian State of Kerala (where I come from), Sri Lanka, or Costa Rica. Bangladeshi men have a better chance of making it to the age of forty than African American men from here in Harlem.

This year, on what would have been Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 74th birthday, President Bush denounced the University of Michigan's affirmative action program favouring Blacks and Latinos. He called it "divisive," "unfair," and "unconstitutional." The successful effort to keep Blacks off the voting rolls in the State of Florida in order that George Bush be elected was of course neither unfair nor unconstitutional. I don't suppose affirmative action for White Boys From Yale ever is.

So we know who's paying for the war. We know who's fighting it. But who will benefit from it? Who is homing in on the reconstruction contracts estimated to be worth up to one hundred billion dollars? Could it be America's poor and unemployed and sick? Could it be America's single mothers? Or America's Black and Latino minorities?

Operation Iraqi Freedom, George Bush assures us, is about returning Iraqi oil to the Iraqi people. That is, returning Iraqi oil to the Iraqi people via Corporate Multinationals. Like Bechtel, like Chevron, like Halliburton.

Once again, it is a small, tight circle that connects corporate, military, and government leadership to one another. The promiscuousness, the cross-pollination is outrageous.

Consider this: the Defense Policy Board is a government-appointed group that advises the Pentagon. Its members are appointed by the under secretary of defense and approved by Donald Rumsfeld. Its meetings are classified. No information is available for public scrutiny.

The Washington-based Center for Public Integrity found that 9 out of the 30 members of the Defense Policy Board are connected to companies that were awarded defense contracts worth 76 billion dollars between the years 2001 and 2002. One of them, Jack Sheehan, a retired Marine Corps general, is a senior vice president at Bechtel, the giant international engineering outfit. Riley Bechtel, the company chairman, is on the

President's Export Council. Former Secretary of State George Shultz, who is also on the Board of Directors of the Bechtel Group, is the chairman of the advisory board of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. When asked by the *New York Times* whether he was concerned about the appearance of a conflict of interest, he said, "I don't know that Bechtel would particularly benefit from it. But if there's work to be done, Bechtel is the type of company that could do it."

Bechtel has been awarded a 680 million dollar reconstruction contract in Iraq. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Bechtel contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to Republican campaign efforts.

Arcing across this subterfuge, dwarfing it by the sheer magnitude of its malevolence, is America's anti-terrorism legislation. The U.S.A. Patriot Act, passed in October 2001, has become the blueprint for similar anti-terrorism bills in countries across the world. It was passed in the House of Representatives by a majority vote of 337 to 79. According to the *New York Times*, "Many lawmakers said it had been impossible to truly debate or even read the legislation."

The Patriot Act ushers in an era of systemic automated surveillance. It gives the government the authority to monitor phones and computers and spy on people in ways that would have seemed completely unacceptable a few years ago. It gives the FBI the power to seize all of the circulation, purchasing, and other records of library users and bookstore customers on the suspicion that they are part of a terrorist network. It blurs the boundaries between speech and criminal activity creating the space to construe acts of civil disobedience as violating the law.

Already hundreds of people are being held indefinitely as "unlawful combatants." (In India, the number is in the thousands. In Israel, 5,000 Palestinians are now being detained.) Non-citizens, of course, have no rights at all. They can simply be "disappeared" like the people of Chile under Washington's old ally, General Pinochet. More than 1,000 people, many of them Muslim or of Middle Eastern origin, have been detained, some without access to legal representatives.

Apart from paying the actual economic costs of war, American people are paying for these wars of "liberation" with their own freedoms. For the ordinary American, the price of "New Democracy" in other countries is the death of real democracy at home.

Meanwhile, Iraq is being groomed for "liberation." (Or did they mean "liberalization" all along?) The *Wall Street Journal* reports that "the Bush administration has drafted sweeping plans to remake Iraq's economy in the U.S. image."

Iraq's constitution is being redrafted. Its trade laws, tax laws, and intellectual property laws rewritten in order to turn it into an American-style capitalist economy.

The United States Agency for International Development has invited U.S. companies to bid for contracts that range between road building, water systems, text book distribution, and cell phone networks.

Soon after Bush the Second announced that he wanted American farmers to feed the world, Dan Amstutz, a former senior executive of Cargill, the biggest grain exporter in the world, was put in charge of agricultural reconstruction in Iraq. Kevin Watkins, Oxfam's policy director, said, "Putting Dan Amstutz in charge of agricultural reconstruction in Iraq is like putting Saddam Hussein in the chair of a human rights commission."

The two men who have been short-listed to run operations for managing Iraqi oil have worked with Shell, BP, and Fluor. Fluor is embroiled in a lawsuit by black South African workers who have accused the company of exploiting and brutalizing them during the apartheid era. Shell, of course, is well known for its devastation of the Ogoni tribal lands in Nigeria.

Tom Brokaw (one of America's best-known TV anchors) was inadvertently succinct about the process. "One of the things we don't want to do," he said, "is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq because in a few days we're going to own that country."

Now that the ownership deeds are being settled, Iraq is ready for New Democracy.

So, as Lenin used to ask: What Is To Be Done?

Well...

We might as well accept the fact that there is no conventional military force that can successfully challenge the American war machine. Terrorist strikes only give the U.S. Government an opportunity that it is eagerly awaiting to further tighten its stranglehold. Within days of an attack you can bet that Patriot II would be passed. To argue against U.S. military aggression by

saying that it will increase the possibilities of terrorist strikes is futile. It's like threatening Brer Rabbit that you'll throw him into the bramble bush. Any one who has read the documents written by The Project for the New American Century can attest to that. The government's suppression of the Congressional committee report on September 11th, which found that there was intelligence warning of the strikes that was ignored, also attests to the fact that, for all their posturing, the terrorists and the Bush regime might as well be working as a team. They both hold people responsible for the actions of their governments. They both believe in the doctrine of collective guilt and collective punishment. Their actions benefit each other greatly.

The U.S. government has already displayed in no uncertain terms the range and extent of its capability for paranoid aggression. In human psychology, paranoid aggression is usually an indicator of nervous insecurity. It could be argued that it's no different in the case of the psychology of nations. Empire is paranoid because it has a soft underbelly.

Its "homeland" may be defended by border patrols and nuclear weapons, but its economy is strung out across the globe. Its economic outposts are exposed and vulnerable. Already the Internet is buzzing with elaborate lists of American and British government products and companies that should be boycotted. Apart from the usual targets - Coke, Pepsi, McDonalds - government agencies like USAID, the British DFID, British and American banks, Arthur Andersen, Merrill Lynch, and American Express could find themselves under siege. These lists are being honed and refined by activists across the world. They could become a practical guide that directs the amorphous but growing fury in the world. Suddenly, the "inevitability" of the project of Corporate Globalization is beginning to seem more than a little evitable.

It would be naïve to imagine that we can directly confront Empire. Our strategy must be to isolate Empire's working parts and disable them one by one. No target is too small. No victory too insignificant. We could reverse the idea of the economic sanctions imposed on poor countries by Empire and its Allies. We could impose a regime of Peoples' Sanctions on every corporate house that has been awarded with a contract in postwar Iraq, just as activists in this country and around the world targeted institutions of apartheid. Each one of them should be named, exposed, and boycotted. Forced out of business. That could be our response to the Shock and Awe campaign. It would be a great beginning.

Another urgent challenge is to expose the corporate media for the boardroom bulletin that it really is. We need to create a universe of

alternative information. We need to support independent media like Democracy Now!, Alternative Radio, and South End Press.

The battle to reclaim democracy is going to be a difficult one. Our freedoms were not granted to us by any governments. They were wrested from them by us. And once we surrender them, the battle to retrieve them is called a revolution. It is a battle that must range across continents and countries. It must not acknowledge national boundaries but, if it is to succeed, it has to begin here. In America. The only institution more powerful than the U.S. government is American civil society. The rest of us are subjects of slave nations. We are by no means powerless, but you have the power of proximity. You have access to the Imperial Palace and the Emperor's chambers. Empire's conquests are being carried out in your name, and you have the right to refuse. You could refuse to fight. Refuse to move those missiles from the warehouse to the dock. Refuse to wave that flag. Refuse the victory parade.

You have a rich tradition of resistance. You need only read Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* to remind yourself of this.

Hundreds of thousands of you have survived the relentless propaganda you have been subjected to, and are actively fighting your own government. In the ultra-patriotic climate that prevails in the United States, that's as brave as any Iraqi or Afghan or Palestinian fighting for his or her homeland.

If you join the battle, not in your hundreds of thousands, but in your millions, you will be greeted joyously by the rest of the world. And you will see how beautiful it is to be gentle instead of brutal, safe instead of scared. Befriended instead of isolated. Loved instead of hated.

I hate to disagree with your president. Yours is by no means a great nation. But you could be a great people.

History is giving you the chance.

Seize the time.

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TIDE? OR IVORY SNOW?

Public Power in the Age of Empire

I've been asked to speak about "Public Power in the Age of Empire." I'm not used to doing as I'm told, but by happy coincidence, it's exactly what I'd like to speak about tonight.

When language has been butchered and bled of meaning, how do we understand "public power"? When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neo-liberal capitalism, when reform means repression, when words like "empowerment" and "peacekeeping" make your blood run cold - why, then, "public power" could mean whatever you want it to mean. A biceps building machine, or a Community Power Shower. So, I'll just have to define "public power" as I go along, in my own self-serving sort of way.

In India, the word public is now a Hindi word. It means people. In Hindi, we have sarkar and public, the government and the people. Inherent in this use is the underlying assumption that the government is quite separate from "the people." This distinction has to do with the fact that India's freedom struggle, though magnificent, was by no means revolutionary. The Indian elite stepped easily and elegantly into the shoes of the British imperialists. A deeply impoverished, essentially feudal society became a modern, independent nation state. Even today, fifty seven years on to the day, the truly vanquished still look upon the government as mai-baap, the parent and provider. The somewhat more radical, those who still have fire in their bellies, see it as chor, the thief, the snatcher-away of all things.

Either way, for most Indians, sarkar is very separate from public. However, as you make your way up India's social ladder, the distinction between sarkar and public gets blurred. The Indian elite, like the elite anywhere in the world, finds it hard to separate itself from the state. It sees like the state, it thinks like the state, it speaks like the state.

In the United States, on the other hand, the blurring of the distinction between sarkar and public has penetrated far deeper into society. This could be a sign of a robust democracy, but unfortunately, it's a little more complicated and less pretty than that. Among other things, it has to do with the elaborate web of paranoia generated by the U.S. sarkar and spun out by the corporate media and Hollywood. Ordinary Americans have been manipulated into imagining they are a people under siege whose sole refuge and protector is their government. If it isn't the Communists, it's

al-Qaeda. If it isn't Cuba, it's Nicaragua. As a result, this, the most powerful nation in the world - with its unmatched arsenal of weapons, its history of having waged and sponsored endless wars, and the only nation in history to have actually used nuclear bombs - is peopled by a terrified citizenry, jumping at shadows. A people bonded to the state not by social services, or public health care, or employment guarantees, but by fear.

This synthetically manufactured fear is used to gain public sanction for further acts of aggression. And so it goes, building into a spiral of self-fulfilling hysteria, now formally calibrated by the U.S government's Amazing Technicolored Terror Alerts: fuchsia, turquoise, salmon pink.

To outside observers, this merging of sarkar and public in the United States sometimes makes it hard to separate the actions of the U.S. government from the American people. It is this confusion that fuels anti-Americanism in the world. Anti-Americanism is then seized upon and amplified by the U.S. government and its faithful media outlets. You know the routine: "Why do they hate us? They hate our freedoms" . . . etc. . . . etc. This enhances the sense of isolation among American people and makes the embrace between sarkar and public even more intimate. Like Red Riding Hood looking for a cuddle in the wolf's bed.

Using the threat of an external enemy to rally people behind you is a tired old horse, which politicians have ridden into power for centuries. But could it be that ordinary people are fed up of that poor old horse and are looking for something different? There's an old Hindi film song that goes yeh public hai, yeh sab jaanti hai (the public, she knows it all). Wouldn't it be lovely if the song were right and the politicians wrong?

Before Washington's illegal invasion of Iraq, a Gallup International poll showed that in no European country was the support for a unilateral war higher than 11 percent. On February 15, 2003, weeks before the invasion, more than ten million people marched against the war on different continents, including North America. And yet the governments of many supposedly democratic countries still went to war.

The question is: is "democracy" still democratic?

Are democratic governments accountable to the people who elected them? And, critically, is the public in democratic countries responsible for the actions of its sarkar?

If you think about it, the logic that underlies the war on terrorism and the logic that underlies terrorism is exactly the same. Both make ordinary citizens pay for the actions of their government. Al-Qaeda made the people of the United States pay with their lives for the actions of their government in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The U.S government has made the people of Afghanistan pay in their thousands for the actions of the Taliban and the people of Iraq pay in their hundreds of thousands for the actions of Saddam Hussein.

The crucial difference is that nobody really elected al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or Saddam Hussein. But the president of the United States was elected (well ... in a manner of speaking).

The prime ministers of Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom were elected. Could it then be argued that citizens of these countries are more responsible for the actions of their government than Iraqis are for the actions of Saddam Hussein or Afghans for the Taliban?

Whose God decides which is a "just war" and which isn't? George Bush senior once said: "I will never apologize for the United States. I don't care what the facts are." When the president of the most powerful country in the world doesn't need to care what the facts are, then we can at least be sure we have entered the Age of Empire.

So what does public power mean in the Age of Empire? Does it mean anything at all? Does it actually exist?

In these allegedly democratic times, conventional political thought holds that public power is exercised through the ballot. Scores of countries in the world will go to the polls this year. Most (not all) of them will get the governments they vote for. But will they get the governments they want?

In India this year, we voted the Hindu nationalists out of office. But even as we celebrated, we knew that on nuclear bombs, neo-liberalism, privatization, censorship, big dams - on every major issue other than overt Hindu nationalism - the Congress and the BJP have no major ideological differences. We know that it is the fifty-year legacy of the Congress Party that prepared the ground culturally and politically for the far right. It was also the Congress Party that first opened India's markets to corporate globalization.

In its election campaign, the Congress Party indicated that it was prepared

to rethink some of its earlier economic policies. Millions of India's poorest people came out in strength to vote in the elections. The spectacle of the great Indian democracy was telecast live - the poor farmers, the old and infirm, the veiled women with their beautiful silver jewelry, making quaint journeys to election booths on elephants and camels and bullock carts. Contrary to the predictions of all India's experts and pollsters, Congress won more votes than any other party. India's communist parties won the largest share of the vote in their history. India's poor had clearly voted against neo-liberalism's economic "reforms" and growing fascism. As soon as the votes were counted, the corporate media dispatched them like badly paid extras on a film set. Television channels featured split screens. Half the screen showed the chaos outside the home of Sonia Gandhi, the leader of the Congress Party, as the coalition government was cobbled together.

The other half showed frenzied stockbrokers outside the Bombay Stock Exchange, panicking at the thought that the Congress Party might actually honor its promises and implement its electoral mandate. We saw the Sensex stock index move up and down and sideways. The media, whose own publicly listed stocks were plummeting, reported the stock market crash as though Pakistan had launched ICBMs on New Delhi.

Even before the new government was formally sworn in, senior Congress politicians made public statements reassuring investors and the media that privatization of public utilities would continue. Meanwhile the BJP, now in opposition, has cynically, and comically, begun to oppose foreign direct investment and the further opening of Indian markets.

This is the spurious, evolving dialectic of electoral democracy.

As for the Indian poor, once they've provided the votes, they are expected to bugger off home. Policy will be decided despite them.

And what of the U.S. elections? Do U.S. voters have a real choice?

It's true that if John Kerry becomes president, some of the oil tycoons and Christian fundamentalists in the White House will change. Few will be sorry to see the back of Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld or John Ashcroft and their blatant thuggery. But the real concern is that in the new administration their policies will continue. That we will have Bushism without Bush.

Those positions of real power - the bankers, the CEOs - are not vulnerable

to the vote (. . . and in any case, they fund both sides).

Unfortunately the importance of the U.S elections has deteriorated into a sort of personality contest. A squabble over who would do a better job of overseeing empire. John Kerry believes in the idea of empire as fervently as George Bush does.

The U.S. political system has been carefully crafted to ensure that no one who questions the natural goodness of the military-industrial-corporate power structure will be allowed through the portals of power.

Given this, it's no surprise that in this election you have two Yale University graduates, both members of Skull and Bones, the same secret society, both millionaires, both playing at soldier-soldier, both talking up war, and arguing almost childishly about who will lead the war on terror more effectively.

Like President Bill Clinton before him, Kerry will continue the expansion of U.S. economic and military penetration into the world. He says he would have voted to authorize Bush to go to war in Iraq even if he had known that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction. He promises to commit more troops to Iraq. He said recently that he supports Bush's policies toward Israel and Ariel Sharon 100 percent. He says he'll retain 98% of Bush's tax cuts.

So, underneath the shrill exchange of insults, there is almost absolute consensus. It looks as though even if Americans vote for Kerry, they'll still get Bush. President John Kerbush or President George Berry.

It's not a real choice. It's an apparent choice. Like choosing a brand of detergent. Whether you buy Ivory Snow or Tide, they're both owned by Proctor & Gamble.

This doesn't mean that one takes a position that is without nuance, that the Congress and the BJP, New Labor and the Tories, the Democrats and Republicans are the same. Of course, they're not. Neither are Tide and Ivory Snow. Tide has oxy-boosting and Ivory Snow is a gentle cleanser.

In India, there is a difference between an overtly fascist party (the BJP) and a party that slyly pits one community against another (Congress), and sows the seeds of communalism that are then so ably harvested by the BJP.

There are differences in the I.Q.s and levels of ruthlessness between this year's U.S. presidential candidates. The anti-war movement in the United States has done a phenomenal job of exposing the lies and venality that led to the invasion of Iraq, despite the propaganda and intimidation it faced.

This was a service not just to people here, but to the whole world. But now, if the anti-war movement openly campaigns for Kerry, the rest of the world will think that it approves of his policies of "sensitive" imperialism. Is U.S. imperialism preferable if it is supported by the United Nations and European countries? Is it preferable if UN asks Indian and Pakistani soldiers to do the killing and dying in Iraq instead of U.S. soldiers? Is the only change that Iraqis can hope for that French, German, and Russian companies will share in the spoils of the occupation of their country?

Is this actually better or worse for those of us who live in subject nations? Is it better for the world to have a smarter emperor in power or a stupider one? Is that our only choice?

I'm sorry, I know that these are uncomfortable, even brutal questions, but they must be asked.

The fact is that electoral democracy has become a process of cynical manipulation. It offers us a very reduced political space today. To believe that this space constitutes real choice would be naïve.

The crisis in modern democracy is a profound one.

On the global stage, beyond the jurisdiction of sovereign governments, international instruments of trade and finance oversee a complex system of multilateral laws and agreements that have entrenched a system of appropriation that puts colonialism to shame. This system allows the unrestricted entry and exit of massive amounts of speculative capital - hot money - into and out of third world countries, which then effectively dictates their economic policy. Using the threat of capital flight as a lever, international capital insinuates itself deeper and deeper into these economies. Giant transnational corporations are taking control of their essential infrastructure and natural resources, their minerals, their water, their electricity. The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank, virtually write economic policy and parliamentary legislation. With a deadly combination of arrogance and ruthlessness, they

take their sledgehammers to fragile, interdependent, historically complex societies, and devastate them.

All this goes under the fluttering banner of "reform."

As a consequence of this reform, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, thousands of small enterprises and industries have closed down, millions of workers and farmers have lost their jobs and land.

The Spectator newspaper in London assures us that "[w]e live in the happiest, healthiest and most peaceful era in human history." Billions wonder: who's "we"? Where does he live? What's his Christian name?

The thing to understand is that modern democracy is safely premised on an almost religious acceptance of the nation state. But corporate globalization is not. Liquid capital is not. So, even though capital needs the coercive powers of the nation state to put down revolts in the servants' quarters, this set up ensures that no individual nation can oppose corporate globalization on its own.

Radical change cannot and will not be negotiated by governments; it can only be enforced by people. By the public. A public who can link hands across national borders.

So when we speak of "Public Power in the Age of Empire," I hope it's not presumptuous to assume that the only thing that is worth discussing seriously is the power of a dissenting public. A public which disagrees with the very concept of empire. A public which has set itself against incumbent power - international, national, regional, or provincial governments and institutions that support and service empire.

What are the avenues of protest available to people who wish to resist empire? By resist I don't mean only to express dissent, but to effectively force change. Empire has a range of calling cards. It uses different weapons to break open different markets. You know the check book and the cruise missile

For poor people in many countries, Empire does not always appear in the form of cruise missiles and tanks, as it has in Iraq or Afghanistan or Vietnam. It appears in their lives in very local avatars - losing their jobs, being sent unpayable electricity bills, having their water supply cut, being evicted from their homes and uprooted from their land. All this overseen by

the repressive machinery of the state, the police, the army, the judiciary. It is a process of relentless impoverishment with which the poor are historically familiar. What Empire does is to further entrench and exacerbate already existing inequalities.

Even until quite recently, it was sometimes difficult for people to see themselves as victims of the conquests of Empire. But now local struggles have begun to see their role with increasing clarity. However grand it might sound, the fact is, they are confronting Empire in their own, very different ways. Differently in Iraq, in South Africa, in India, in Argentina, and differently, for that matter, on the streets of Europe and the United States.

Mass resistance movements, individual activists, journalists, artists, and film makers have come together to strip Empire of its sheen. They have connected the dots, turned cash-flow charts and boardroom speeches into real stories about real people and real despair. They have shown how the neo-liberal project has cost people their homes, their land, their jobs, their liberty, their dignity. They have made the intangible tangible. The once seemingly in-CORP-o-real enemy is now CORP-o-real.

This is a huge victory. It was forged by the coming together of disparate political groups, with a variety of strategies. But they all recognized that the target of their anger, their activism, and their doggedness is the same. This was the beginning of real globalization. The globalization of dissent.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of mass resistance movements in third world countries today. The landless peoples' movement in Brazil, the anti-dam movement in India, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Anti-Privatization Forum in South Africa, and hundreds of others, are fighting their own sovereign governments, which have become agents of the neo-liberal project. Most of these are radical struggles, fighting to change the structure and chosen model of "development" of their own societies.

Then there are those fighting formal and brutal neocolonial occupations in contested territories whose boundaries and fault lines were often arbitrarily drawn last century by the imperialist powers. In Palestine, Tibet, Chechnya, Kashmir, and several states in India's northeast provinces, people are waging struggles for self-determination.

Several of these struggles might have been radical, even revolutionary when they began, but often the brutality of the repression they face pushes

them into conservative, even retrogressive spaces in which they use the same violent strategies and the same language of religious and cultural nationalism used by the states they seek to replace.

Many of the foot soldiers in these struggles will find, like those who fought apartheid in South Africa, that once they overcome overt occupation, they will be left with another battle on their hands - a battle against covert economic colonialism.

Meanwhile, as the rift between rich and poor is being driven deeper and the battle to control the world's resources intensifies. Economic colonialism through formal military aggression is staging a comeback.

Iraq today is a tragic illustration of this process. An illegal invasion. A brutal occupation in the name of liberation. The rewriting of laws that allow the shameless appropriation of the country's wealth and resources by corporations allied to the occupation, and now the charade of a local "Iraqi government."

For these reasons, it is absurd to condemn the resistance to the U.S. occupation in Iraq, as being masterminded by terrorists or insurgents or supporters of Saddam Hussein. After all if the United States were invaded and occupied, would everybody who fought to liberate it be a terrorist or an insurgent or a Bushite?

The Iraqi resistance is fighting on the frontlines of the battle against Empire. And therefore that battle is our battle.

Like most resistance movements, it combines a motley range of assorted factions. Former Baathists, liberals, Islamists, fed-up collaborationists, communists, etc. Of course, it is riddled with opportunism, local rivalry, demagoguery, and criminality. But if we are only going to support pristine movements, then no resistance will be worthy of our purity.

This is not to say that we shouldn't ever criticize resistance movements. Many of them suffer from a lack of democracy, from the iconization of their "leaders," a lack of transparency, a lack of vision and direction. But most of all they suffer from vilification, repression, and lack of resources.

Before we prescribe how a pristine Iraqi resistance must conduct their secular, feminist, democratic, nonviolent battle, we should shore up our end of the resistance by forcing the U.S. and its allies government to

withdraw from Iraq.

The first militant confrontation in the United States between the global justice movement and the neo-liberal junta took place famously at the WTO conference in Seattle in December 1999. To many mass movements in developing countries that had long been fighting lonely, isolated battles, Seattle was the first delightful sign that their anger and their vision of another kind of world was shared by people in the imperialist countries.

In January 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 20,000 activists, students, film makers - some of the best minds in the world - came together to share their experiences and exchange ideas about confronting Empire. That was the birth of the now historic World Social Forum. It was the first, formal coming together of an exciting, anarchic, unindoctrinated, energetic, new kind of "Public Power." The rallying cry of the WSF is "Another World is Possible." It has become a platform where hundreds of conversations, debates, and seminars have helped to hone and refine a vision of what kind of world it should be.

By January 2004, when the fourth WSF was held in Mumbai, India, it attracted 200,000 delegates. I have never been part of a more electrifying gathering. It was a sign of the social forum's success that the mainstream media in India ignored it completely. But now, the WSF is threatened by its own success. The safe, open, festive atmosphere of the forum has allowed politicians and nongovernmental organizations that are imbricated in the political and economic systems that the forum opposes to participate and make themselves heard.

Another danger is that the WSF, which has played such a vital role in the movement for global justice, runs the risk of becoming an end unto itself. Just organizing it every year consumes the energies of some of the best activists. If conversations about resistance replace real civil disobedience, then the WSF could become an asset to those whom it was created to oppose. The forum must be held and must grow, but we have to find ways to channel our conversations there back into concrete action.

As resistance movements have begun to reach out across national borders and pose a real threat, governments have developed their own strategies of how to deal with them. They range from cooptation to repression.

I'm going to speak about three of the contemporary dangers that confront resistance movements: the difficult meeting point between mass

movements and the mass media, the hazards of the NGO-ization of resistance, and the confrontation between resistance movements and increasingly repressive states.

The place in which the mass media meets mass movements is a complicated one.

Governments have learned that a crisis-driven media cannot afford to hang about in the same place for too long. Like business houses need a cash turnover, the media need crises turnover. Whole countries become old news. They cease to exist, and the darkness becomes deeper than before the light was briefly shone on them. We saw it happen in Afghanistan when the Soviets withdrew. And now, after Operation Enduring Freedom put the CIA's Hamid Karzai in place, Afghanistan has been thrown to its warlords once more.

Another CIA operative, Iyad Allawi, has been installed in Iraq, so perhaps it's time for the media to move on from there, too.

While governments hone the art of waiting out crisis, resistance movements are increasingly being ensnared in a vortex of crisis production, seeking to find ways of manufacturing them in easily consumable, spectator-friendly formats.

Every self-respecting peoples' movement, every "issue" is expected to have its own hot air balloon in the sky advertising its brand and purpose.

For this reason, starvation deaths are more effective advertisements for impoverishment than millions of malnourished people, who don't quite make the cut. Dams are not newsworthy until the devastation they wreak makes good television. (And by then, it's too late).

Standing in the rising water of a reservoir for days on end, watching your home and belongings float away to protest against a big dam used to be an effective strategy, but isn't any more. The media is dead bored of that one. So the hundreds of thousands of people being displaced by dams are expected to either conjure new tricks or give up the struggle.

Colorful demonstrations and weekend marches are vital but alone are not powerful enough to stop wars. Wars will be stopped only when soldiers refuse to fight, when workers refuse to load weapons onto ships and aircrafts, when people boycott the economic outposts of Empire that are

strung across the globe.

If we want to reclaim the space for civil disobedience, we will have to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of crisis reportage and its fear of the mundane. We have to use our experience, our imagination, and our art to interrogate the instruments of that state that ensure that "normality" remains what it is: cruel, unjust, unacceptable. We have to expose the policies and processes that make ordinary things - food, water, shelter and dignity - such a distant dream for ordinary people. Real pre-emptive strike is to understand that wars are the end result of flawed and unjust peace.

As far as mass resistance movements are concerned, the fact is that no amount of media coverage can make up for mass strength on the ground. There is no option, really, to old-fashioned, back-breaking political mobilization.

Corporate globalization has increased the distance between those who make decisions and those who have to suffer the effects of those decisions. Forums like the WSF enable local resistance movements to reduce that distance and to link up with their counterparts in rich countries. That alliance is an important and formidable one. For example, when India's first private dam, the Maheshwar Dam, was being built, alliances between the Narmada Bachao Andolan (the NBA), the German organization Urgewald, the Berne Declaration in Switzerland, and the International Rivers Network in Berkeley worked together to push a series of international banks and corporations out of the project. This would not have been possible had there not been a rock solid resistance movement on the ground. The voice of that local movement was amplified by supporters on the global stage, embarrassing and forcing investors to withdraw.

An infinite number of similar, alliances, targeting specific projects and specific corporations would help to make another world possible. We should begin with the corporations who did business with Saddam Hussein and now profit from the devastation and occupation of Iraq.

A second hazard facing mass movements is the NGO-ization of resistance. It will be easy to twist what I'm about to say into an indictment of all NGOs. That would be a falsehood. In the murky waters of fake NGOs set up or to siphon off grant money or as tax dodges (in states like Bihar, they are given as dowry), of course there are NGOs doing valuable work. But it's important to consider the NGO phenomenon in a broader political context.

In India, for instance, the funded NGO boom began in the late 1980s and 1990s. It coincided with the opening of India's markets to neo-liberalism. At the time, the Indian state, in keeping with the requirements of structural adjustment, was withdrawing funding from rural development, agriculture, energy, transport, and public health. As the state abdicated its traditional role, NGOs moved in to work in these very areas. The difference, of course, is that the funds available to them are a minuscule fraction of the actual cut in public spending. Most large funded NGOs are financed and patronized by aid and development agencies, which are in turn funded by Western governments, the World Bank, the UN, and some multinational corporations. Though they may not be the very same agencies, they are certainly part of the same loose, political formation that oversees the neo-liberal project and demands the slash in government spending in the first place.

Why should these agencies fund NGOs? Could it be just old-fashioned missionary zeal? Guilt? It's a little more than that. NGOs give the impression that they are filling the vacuum created by a retreating state. And they are, but in a materially inconsequential way. Their real contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right.

They alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance. NGOs form a sort of buffer between the sarkar and public. Between Empire and its subjects. They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators.

In the long run, NGOs are accountable to their funders, not to the people they work among. They're what botanists would call an indicator species. It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neo-liberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs. Nothing illustrates this more poignantly than the phenomenon of the U.S. preparing to invade a country and simultaneously readying NGOs to go in and clean up the devastation.

In order make sure their funding is not jeopardized and that the governments of the countries they work in will allow them to function, NGOs have to present their work in a shallow framework more or less shorn of a political or historical context. At any rate, an inconvenient historical or political context.

Apolitical (and therefore, actually, extremely political) distress reports from poor countries and war zones eventually make the (dark) people of those

(dark) countries seem like pathological victims. Another malnourished Indian, another starving Ethiopian, another Afghan refugee camp, another maimed Sudanese . . . in need of the white man's help. They unwittingly reinforce racist stereotypes and re-affirm the achievements, the comforts, and the compassion (the tough love) of Western civilization. They're the secular missionaries of the modern world.

Eventually - on a smaller scale but more insidiously - the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda. It turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples' movements that have traditionally been self-reliant. NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they're at it). Real political resistance offers no such short cuts.

The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary.

This brings us to a third danger I want to speak about tonight: the deadly nature of the actual confrontation between resistance movements and increasingly repressive states. Between public power and the agents of Empire.

Whenever civil resistance has shown the slightest signs of evolving from symbolic action into anything remotely threatening, the crack down is merciless. We've seen what happened in the demonstrations in Seattle, in Miami, in Göthenberg, in Genoa.

In the United States, you have the USA PATRIOT Act, which has become a blueprint for antiterrorism laws passed by governments across the world. Freedoms are being curbed in the name of protecting freedom. And once we surrender our freedoms, to win them back will take a revolution.

Some governments have vast experience in the business of curbing freedoms and still smelling sweet. The government of India, an old hand at the game, lights the path.

Over the years the Indian government has passed a plethora of laws that allow it to call almost anyone a terrorist, an insurgent, a militant. We have

the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the Public Security Act, the Special Areas Security Act, the Gangster Act, the Terrorist and Disruptive Areas Act (which has formally lapsed but under which people are still facing trial), and, most recently, POTA (the Prevention of Terrorism Act), the broad-spectrum antibiotic for the disease of dissent.

There are other steps that are being taken, such as court judgments that in effect curtail free speech, the right of government workers to go on strike, the right to life and livelihood. Courts have begun to micro-manage our lives in India. And criticizing the courts is a criminal offense.

But coming back to the counter-terrorism initiatives, over the last decade, the number of people who have been killed by the police and security forces runs into the tens of thousands. In the state of Andhra Pradesh (the pin-up girl of corporate globalization in India), an average of about 200 "extremists" are killed in what are called "encounters" every year. The Bombay police boast of how many "gangsters" they have killed in "shoot outs." In Kashmir, in a situation that almost amounts to war, an estimated 80,000 people have been killed since 1989. Thousands have simply "disappeared." In the northeastern provinces, the situation is similar.

In recent years, the Indian police have opened fire on unarmed people, mostly Dalit and Adivasi. Their preferred method is to kill them and then call them terrorists. India is not alone, though. We have seen similar thing happen in countries such Bolivia, Chile, and South Africa. In the era of neo-liberalism, poverty is a crime and protesting against it is more and more being defined as terrorism.

In India, POTA (the Prevention of Terrorism Act) is often called the Production of Terrorism Act. It's a versatile, hold-all law that could apply to anyone from an al-Qaeda operative to a disgruntled bus conductor. As with all anti-terrorism laws, the genius of POTA is that it can be whatever the government wants. After the 2002 state-assisted pogrom in Gujarat, in which an estimated 2,000 Muslims were savagely killed by Hindu mobs and 150,000 driven from their homes, 287 people have been accused under POTA. Of these, 286 are Muslim and one is a Sikh.

POTA allows confessions extracted in police custody to be admitted as judicial evidence. In effect, torture tends to replace investigation. The South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center reports that India has the highest number of torture and custodial deaths in the world. Government records show that there were 1,307 deaths in judicial custody in 2002

alone.

A few months ago, I was a member of a peoples' tribunal on POTA. Over a period of two days, we listened to harrowing testimonies of what is happening in our wonderful democracy. It's everything - from people being forced to drink urine, to being stripped, humiliated, given electric shocks, burned with cigarette butts, having iron rods put up their anuses, to being beaten and kicked to death.

The new government has promised to repeal POTA. I'd be surprised if that happens before similar legislation under a different name is put in place. If its not POTA it'll be MOTA or something.

When every avenue of non-violent dissent is closed down, and everyone who protests against the violation of their human rights is called a terrorist, should we really be surprised if vast parts of the country are overrun by those who believe in armed struggle and are more or less beyond the control of the state: in Kashmir, the north eastern provinces, large parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh. Ordinary people in these regions are trapped between the violence of the militants and the state.

In Kashmir, the Indian army estimates that 3,000 to 4,000 militants are operating at any given time. To control them, the Indian government deploys about 500,000 soldiers. Clearly, it isn't just the militants the army seeks to control, but a whole population of humiliated, unhappy people who see the Indian army as an occupation force.

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act allows not just officers, but even junior commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers of the army, to use force and even kill any person on suspicion of disturbing public order. It was first imposed on a few districts in the state of Manipur in 1958. Today, it applies to virtually all of the north east and Kashmir. The documentation of instances of torture, disappearances, custodial deaths, rape, and summary execution by security forces is enough to turn your stomach.

In Andhra Pradesh, in India's heartland, the militant Marxist-Leninist Peoples' War Group - which for years been engaged in a violent armed struggle and has been the principal target of many of the Andhra police's fake "encounters" - held its first public meeting in years on July 28, 2004, in the town of Warangal.

It was attended by about hundreds of thousands of people. Under POTA, all of them are considered terrorists. Are they all going to be detained in some Indian equivalent of Guantánamo Bay?

The whole of the north east and the Kashmir valley is in ferment. What will the government do with these millions of people?

There is no discussion taking place in the world today that is more crucial than the debate about strategies of resistance. And the choice of strategy is not entirely in the hands of the public. It is also in the hands of sarkar.

After all, when the U.S. invades and occupies Iraq in the way it has done, with such overwhelming military force, can the resistance be expected to be a conventional military one? (Of course, even if it were conventional, it would still be called terrorist.) In a strange sense, the U.S. government's arsenal of weapons and unrivalled air and fire power makes terrorism an all-but-inescapable response. What people lack in wealth and power, they will make up with stealth and strategy.

In this restive, despairing time, if governments do not do all they can to honor nonviolent resistance, then by default they privilege those who turn to violence. No government's condemnation of terrorism is credible if it cannot show itself to be open to change by to nonviolent dissent.

But instead nonviolent resistance movements are being crushed. Any kind of mass political mobilization or organization is being bought off, or broken, or simply ignored.

Meanwhile, governments and the corporate media, and let's not forget the film industry, lavish their time, attention, technology, research, and admiration on war and terrorism. Violence has been deified.

The message this sends is disturbing and dangerous: If you seek to air a public grievance, violence is more effective than nonviolence.

As the rift between the rich and poor grows, as the need to appropriate and control the world's resources to feed the great capitalist machine becomes more urgent, the unrest will only escalate.

For those of us who are on the wrong side of Empire, the humiliation is becoming unbearable.

Each of the Iraqi children killed by the United States was our child. Each of

the prisoners tortured in Abu Ghraib was our comrade. Each of their screams was ours. When they were humiliated, we were humiliated. The U.S. soldiers fighting in Iraq - mostly volunteers in a poverty draft from small towns and poor urban neighborhoods - are victims just as much as the Iraqis of the same horrendous process, which asks them to die for a victory that will never be theirs.

The mandarins of the corporate world, the CEOs, the bankers, the politicians, the judges and generals look down on us from on high and shake their heads sternly. "There's no Alternative," they say. And let slip the dogs of war.

Then, from the ruins of Afghanistan, from the rubble of Iraq and Chechnya, from the streets of occupied Palestine and the mountains of Kashmir, from the hills and plains of Colombia and the forests of Andhra Pradesh and Assam comes the chilling reply: "There's no alternative but terrorism." Terrorism. Armed struggle. Insurgency. Call it what you want.

Terrorism is vicious, ugly, and dehumanizing for its perpetrators, as well as its victims. But so is war. You could say that terrorism is the privatization of war. Terrorists are the free marketers of war. They are people who don't believe that the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.

Human society is journeying to a terrible place.

Of course, there is an alternative to terrorism. It's called justice.

It's time to recognize that no amount of nuclear weapons or full-spectrum dominance or daisy cutters or spurious governing councils and loya jirgas can buy peace at the cost of justice.

The urge for hegemony and preponderance by some will be matched with greater intensity by the longing for dignity and justice by others.

Exactly what form that battle takes, whether its beautiful or bloodthirsty, depends on us.

**Transcription of Arundhati Roy reading at
Lensic Performing Arts Center
Santa Fe, New Mexico
18 September 2002**

My talk today is called "Come September."

Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I'm beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it's actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the

private narrative – they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told. Fiction and nonfiction are only different techniques of story telling.

For reasons that I don't fully understand, fiction dances out of me, and nonfiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning.

The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as nonfiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they're engaged in. John Berger, that most wonderful writer, once wrote: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one." There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing. So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing.

Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories; it's about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a State or a country, a corporation or an institution - or even an individual, a spouse, a friend, a sibling - regardless of ideology, results in excesses such as the ones I will recount here.

Living as I do, as millions of us do, in the shadow of the nuclear holocaust that the governments of India and Pakistan keep promising their brain-washed citizenry, and in the global neighborhood of the War Against Terror (what President Bush rather biblically calls "The Task That Never Ends"), I find myself thinking a great deal about the relationship between Citizens and the State.

In India, those of us who have expressed views on Nuclear Bombs, Big Dams, Corporate Globalization and the rising threat of communal Hindu fascism – views that are at variance with the Indian Government's – are branded 'anti- national.' While this accusation doesn't fill me with indignation, it's not an accurate description of what I do or how I think. Because an 'anti-national' is a person who is against his or her own nation and, by inference, is pro some other one.

But it isn't necessary to be 'anti-national' to be deeply suspicious of all nationalism, to be anti-nationalism. Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's brains and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead. When independent – thinking people (and here I do not include the corporate media) begin to rally under flags, when writers, painters, musicians, film makers suspend their judgment and blindly yoke their art to the service of the "Nation," it's time for all of us to sit up and worry.

In India we saw it happen soon after the Nuclear tests in 1998 and during the Kargil War against Pakistan in 1999. In the U.S. we saw it during the Gulf War and we see it now during the "War Against Terror." That blizzard of Made-in-China American flags. Recently, those who have criticized the actions of the U.S. government (myself included) have been called "anti-American." Anti-Americanism is in the process of being consecrated into an ideology. The term "anti-American" is usually used by the American establishment to discredit and, not falsely – but shall we say inaccurately – define its critics. Once someone is branded anti-American, the chances are that he or she will be judged before they are heard, and the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised national pride.

But what does the term "anti-American" *mean*? Does it mean you are anti-jazz? Or that you're opposed to freedom of speech? That you don't delight in Toni Morrison or John Updike? That you have a quarrel with giant sequoias? Does it mean that you don't admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam? Does it mean that you hate all Americans?

This sly conflation of America's culture, music, literature, the breathtaking physical beauty of the land, the ordinary pleasures of ordinary people with criticism of the U.S. government's foreign policy (about which, thanks to America's "free press", sadly most Americans know very little) is a deliberate and extremely effective strategy. It's like a retreating army taking cover in a heavily populated city, hoping that the prospect of hitting civilian targets will deter enemy fire.

But there are many Americans who would be mortified to be associated with their government's policies. The most scholarly, scathing, incisive, hilarious critiques of the hypocrisy and the contradictions in U.S. government policy come from American citizens. When the rest of the world wants to know what the U.S. government is up to, we turn to Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Howard Zinn, Ed Herman, Amy Goodman, Michael Albert, Chalmers Johnson, William Blum and Anthony Amove to tell us what's really going on.

Similarly, in India, not hundreds, but millions of us would be ashamed and offended if we were in any way implicated with the present Indian government's fascist policies which, apart from the perpetration of State terrorism in the valley of Kashmir (in the name of fighting terrorism), have also turned a blind eye to the recent state-supervised pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat. It would be absurd to think that those who criticize the Indian government are "anti-Indian" – although the government itself

never hesitates to take that line. It is dangerous to cede to the Indian government or the American government or *anyone* for that matter, the right to define what "India" or "America" are or ought to be.

To call someone "anti-American", indeed to *be* anti-American, (or for that matter, anti-Indian or anti-Timbuktuan) is not just racist, it's a failure of the imagination. An inability to see the world in terms other than those the establishment has set out for you. If you're not a Bushie you're a Taliban. If you don't love us, you hate us. If you're not Good, you're Evil. If you're not with us, you're with the terrorists.

Last year, like many others, I too made the mistake of scoffing at this post-September 11th rhetoric, dismissing it as foolish and arrogant. But I've realized it's not foolish at all. It's actually a canny recruitment drive for a misconceived, dangerous war. Everyday I'm taken aback at how many people believe that opposing the war in Afghanistan amounts to supporting terrorism, of voting for the Taliban. Now that the initial aim of the war – capturing Osama bin Laden (dead or alive) – seems to have run into bad weather, the goalposts have been moved. It's being made out that the whole point of the war was to topple the Taliban regime and liberate Afghan women from their burqas, we are being asked to believe that the U.S. marines are actually on a feminist mission. (If so, will their next stop be America's military ally Saudi Arabia?)

Think of it this way: in India there are some pretty reprehensible social practices against "untouchables", against Christians and Muslims, against women. Pakistan and Bangladesh have even worse ways of dealing with minority communities and women. Should they be bombed? Should Delhi, Islamabad and Dhaka be destroyed? Is it possible to bomb bigotry out of India? Can we

bomb our way to a feminist paradise? Is that how women won the vote in the U.S? Or how slavery was abolished? Can we win redress for the genocide of the millions of Native Americans upon whose corpses the United States was founded by bombing Santa Fe?

None of us need anniversaries to remind us of what we cannot forget.

So it's no more than coincidence that I happen to be here, on American soil, in September – this month of dreadful anniversaries. Uppermost on everybody's mind of course, particularly here in America, is the horror of what has come to be known as 9/11. Nearly three thousand civilians lost their lives in that lethal terrorist strike. The grief is still deep. The rage still sharp. The tears have not dried.

And a strange, deadly war is raging around the world.

Yet, each person who has lost a loved one surely knows secretly, deeply, that no war, no act of revenge, no daisy-cutters dropped on someone else's loved ones or someone else's children, will blunt the edges of their pain or bring their own loved ones back.

War cannot avenge those who have died. War is only a brutal desecration of their memory. To fuel yet another war – this time against Iraq – by cynically manipulating people's grief, by packaging it for TV specials sponsored by corporations selling detergent and running shoes, is to cheapen and devalue grief, to drain it of meaning. What we are seeing now is a vulgar display of the *business* of grief, the commerce of grief, the pillaging of even the most private human feelings for political purpose.

It is a terrible, violent thing for a State to do to its people. It's not a clever-enough subject to speak of from a public platform, but what I would really love to talk to you about is Loss. Loss and

losing. Grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming. The absolute relentless, endless, habitual, unfairness of the world. What does loss mean to individuals? What does it mean to whole cultures, whole people who have learned to live with it as a constant companion?

Since it is September 11th we're talking about, perhaps it's in the fitness of things that we remember what that date means, not only to those who lost their loved ones in America last year, but to those in other parts of the world to whom that date has long held significance. This historical dredging is not offered as an accusation or a provocation. But just to share the grief of history. To thin the mists a little. To say to the citizens of America, in the gentlest, most human way: "Welcome to the World."

Twenty-nine years ago, in Chile, on the 11th of September 1973, General Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in a CIA-backed coup. "Chile should not be allowed to go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible," said Henry Kissinger, Nobel Peace Laureate, then the U.S. Secretary of State.

After the coup President Allende was found dead inside the presidential palace. Whether he was killed or whether he killed himself, we'll never know. In the regime of terror that ensued, thousands of people were killed. Many more simply "disappeared". Firing squads conducted public executions. Concentration camps and torture chambers were opened across the country. The dead were buried in mine shafts and unmarked graves. For seventeen years the people of Chile lived in dread of the midnight knock, of routine "disappearances", of sudden arrest and torture. Chileans tell the story of how the musician Victor Jara had his hands cut off in front of a crowd in

the Santiago stadium. Before they shot him, Pinochet's soldiers threw his guitar at him and mockingly asked him to play.

In 1999, following the arrest of General Pinochet in Britain, thousands of secret documents were declassified by the U.S. government. They contain unequivocal evidence of the CIA's involvement in the coup as well as the fact that the U.S. government had detailed information about the situation in Chile during General Pinochet's reign. Yet, Kissinger assured the general of his support: "In the United States as you know, we are sympathetic to what you're trying to do," he said. "We wish your government well."

Those of us who have only ever known life in a democracy, however flawed, would find it hard to imagine what living in a dictatorship and enduring the absolute loss of freedom means. It isn't just those who Pinochet murdered, but the lives he stole from the living that must be accounted for too.

Sadly, Chile was not the only country in South America to be singled out for the U.S. government's attentions. Guatemala, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, El Salvador, Peru, Mexico and Colombia – they've all been the playground for covert – and overt – operations by the CIA.

Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been killed, tortured or have simply disappeared under the despotic regimes that were propped up in their countries. If this were not humiliation enough, the people of South America have had to bear the cross of being branded as people who are incapable of democracy – as if coups and massacres are somehow encrypted in their genes.

This list does not, of course, include countries in Africa or Asia that suffered U.S. military interventions – Vietnam, Korea,

Indonesia, Laos, and Cambodia. For how many Septembers for decades together have millions of Asian people been bombed, and burned, and slaughtered? How many Septembers have gone by since August 1945, when hundreds of thousands of ordinary Japanese people were obliterated by the nuclear strikes in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? For how many Septembers have the thousands who had the misfortune of surviving those strikes endured that living hell that was visited on them, their unborn children, their children's children, on the earth, the sky, the water, the wind, and all the creatures that swim and walk and crawl and fly?

Not far from here, in Albuquerque, is the National Atomic Museum where Fat Man and Little Boy (the affectionate nicknames for the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) were available as souvenir earrings. Funky young people wore them. A massacre dangling in each ear. But I'm straying from my theme. It's September that we're talking about, not August.

September 11th has a tragic resonance in the Middle East, too. On the 11th of September 1922, ignoring Arab outrage, the British government proclaimed a mandate in Palestine, a follow-up to the 1917 Balfour Declaration which imperial Britain issued, with its army massed outside the gates of Gaza. The Balfour Declaration promised European Zionists a national home for Jewish people. (At the time, the Empire on which the Sun Never Set was free to snatch and bequeath national homes like a school bully distributes marbles.)

How carelessly imperial power vivisected ancient civilizations. Palestine and Kashmir are imperial Britain's festering, blood-drenched gifts to the modern world. Both are fault lines in the raging international conflicts of today.

In 1937, Winston Churchill said of the Palestinians, I quote, "I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place."

That set the trend for the Israeli State's attitude towards the Palestinians. In 1969, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir said, "Palestinians do not exist." Her successor, Prime Minister Levi Eschol said, "What are Palestinians? When I came here (to Palestine), there were 250,000 non-Jews, mainly Arabs and Bedouins. It was a desert, more than underdeveloped. Nothing." Prime Minister Menachem Begin called Palestinians "two-legged beasts." Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir called them "grasshoppers" who could be crushed. This is the language of Heads of State, not the words of ordinary people.

In 1947, the U.N. formally partitioned Palestine and allotted 55 per cent of Palestine's land to the Zionists. Within a year, they had captured 76 per cent. On the 14th of May 1948 the State of Israel was declared. Minutes after the declaration, the United States recognized Israel. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan. The Gaza strip came under Egyptian military control, and formally Palestine ceased to exist except in the minds and hearts of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people who became refugees. In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

Over the decades there have been uprisings, wars, *intifadas*. Tens of thousands have lost their lives. Accords and treaties have been signed. Cease-fires declared and violated. But the

bloodshed doesn't end. Palestine still remains illegally occupied. Its people live in inhuman conditions, in virtual Bantustans, where they are subjected to collective punishments, twenty-four hour curfews, where they are humiliated and brutalized on a daily basis. They never know when their homes will be demolished, when their children will be shot, when their precious trees will be cut, when their roads will be closed, when they will be allowed to walk down to the market to buy food and medicine. And when they will not. They live with no semblance of dignity. With not much hope in sight. They have no control over their lands, their security, their movement, their communication, their water supply.

So when accords are signed, and words like "autonomy" and even "statehood" bandied about, it's always worth asking: What sort of autonomy? What sort of State? What sort of rights will its citizens have? Young Palestinians who cannot control their anger turn themselves into human bombs and haunt Israel's streets and public places, blowing themselves up, killing ordinary people, injecting terror into daily life, and eventually hardening both societies' suspicion and mutual hatred of each other. Each bombing invites merciless reprisal and even more hardship on Palestinian people. But then suicide bombing is an act of individual despair, not a revolutionary tactic.

Although Palestinian attacks strike terror into Israeli citizens, they provide the perfect cover for the Israeli government's daily incursions into Palestinian territory, the perfect excuse for old-fashioned, nineteenth-century colonialism, dressed up as a new fashioned, twenty-first century "war".

Israel's staunchest political and military ally is and always has been the U.S. The U.S. government has blocked, along with Israel, almost every U.N. resolution that sought a peaceful,

equitable solution to the conflict. It has supported almost every war that Israel has fought.

When Israel attacks Palestine, it is American missiles that smash through Palestinian homes. And every year Israel receives several billion dollars from the United States - taxpayers money. What lessons should we draw from this tragic conflict? Is it really impossible for Jewish people who suffered so cruelly themselves –more cruelly perhaps than any other people in history – to understand the vulnerability and the yearning of those whom they have displaced?

Does extreme suffering always kindle cruelty? What hope does this leave the human race with? What will happen to the Palestinian people in the event of a victory? When a nation without a state eventually proclaims a state, what kind of state will it be? What horrors will be perpetrated under its flag? Is it a separate state that we should be fighting for or, the rights to a life of liberty and dignity for everyone regardless of their ethnicity or religion?

Palestine was once a secular bulwark in the Middle East. But now the weak, undemocratic, by all accounts corrupt but avowedly nonsectarian P.L.O., is losing ground to Hamas, which espouses an overtly sectarian ideology and fights in the name of Islam. To quote from their manifesto: "we will be its soldiers and the firewood of its fire, which will burn the enemies."

The world is called upon to condemn suicide bombers. But can we ignore the long road they have journeyed on before they have arrived at this destination? September 11, 1922 to September 11, 2002 – eighty years is a long time to have been waging war. Is there some advice the world can give the people of Palestine? Should they just take Golda Meir's suggestion and make a real effort not to exist?

In another part of the Middle East, September 11th strikes a more recent cord. It was on the 11th of September 1990 that George W. Bush, Sr., then President of the U.S., made a speech to a joint session of Congress announcing his government's decision to go to war against Iraq.

The U.S. government says that Saddam Hussein is a war criminal, a cruel military despot who has committed genocide against his own people. That's a fairly accurate description of the man. In 1988, Saddam Hussein razed hundreds of villages in northern Iraq, used chemical weapons and machine guns to kill thousands of Kurdish people. Today we know that that same year the U.S. government provided him with \$500 million in subsidies to buy American farm products. The next year, after he had successfully completed his genocidal campaign, the U.S. government doubled its subsidy to \$1 billion. It also provided him with high quality germ seed for anthrax, and helicopters and dual-use material that could be used to manufacture chemical and biological weapons. So it turns out that while Saddam Hussein was carrying out his worst atrocities, the U.S. and the U.K. governments were his close allies.

So what changed? In 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. His sin was not so much that he had committed an act of war, but that he had acted independently, without orders from his master. This display of independence was enough to upset the power equation in the Gulf. So it was decided that Saddam Hussein be exterminated, like a pet that has outlived its owner's affection.

The first Allied attack on Iraq took place on January '91. The world watched the prime-time war as it was played out on T.V. (In India in those days you had to go to a five-star hotel lobby to watch CNN.) Tens of thousands of people were killed in a month

of devastating bombing. What many do not know is that the war never ended then. The initial fury simmered down into the longest sustained air attack on a country since the Vietnam War.

Over the last decade American and British forces have fired thousands of missiles and bombs on Iraq. In the decade of economic sanctions that followed the war, Iraqi civilians have been denied food, medicine, hospital equipment, ambulances, clean water – the basic essentials.

About half a million Iraqi children have died as a result of the sanctions. Of them, Madeleine Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, famously said, "It's a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it." "Moral equivalence" was the term that was used to denounce those of us who criticized the war on Afghanistan. Madeleine Albright cannot be accused of moral equivalence. What she said was just straightforward algebra. A decade of bombing has not managed to dislodge Saddam Hussein, "the Beast of Baghdad". Now, almost 12 years on, President George Bush, Jr. has ratcheted up the rhetoric once again. He's proposing an all-out war whose goal is nothing short of a regime change.

The New York Times says that the Bush administration is following, quote, "a meticulously planned strategy to persuade the public, the Congress, and the Allies of the need to confront the threat of Saddam Hussein." Andrew. H. Card, Jr., the White House Chief of Staff, described how the administration was stepping up its war plans for the fall, and I quote, "From a marketing point of view", he said, "you don't introduce new products in August." This time the catch-phrase for Washington's "new product" is not the plight of Kuwaiti people but the assertion that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. "Forget the feckless moralizing of peace lobbies", wrote Richard

Perle, a former advisor to President Bush, "We need to get him before he gets us."

Weapons inspectors have conflicting reports of the status of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and many have said clearly that its arsenal has been dismantled and that it does not have the capacity to build one. However, there is no confusion over the extent and range of America's arsenal of nuclear and chemical weapons. Would the U.S. government welcome weapons inspectors? Would the U.K.? Or Israel?

What if Iraq *does* have a nuclear weapon, does that justify a pre-emptive U.S. strike? The U.S. has the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world and it's the only country in the world to have actually used them on civilian populations. If the U.S. is justified in launching a pre-emptive strike on Iraq, why, then any nuclear power is justified in carrying out a pre-emptive strike on any other. India could attack Pakistan, or the other way around. If the U.S. government develops a distaste for, say, the Indian Prime Minister, can it just "take him out" with a pre-emptive strike? Recently the United States played an important part in forcing India and Pakistan back from the brink of war. Is it so hard for it to take its own advice?

Who is guilty of feckless moralizing? Of preaching peace while it wages war? The U.S., which George Bush has called "the most peaceful nation on earth", has been at war with one country or another every year for the last fifty. Wars are never fought for altruistic reasons. They're usually fought for hegemony, for business. And then of course there's the business of war. Protecting its control of the world's oil is fundamental to U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. government's recent military interventions in the Balkans and Central Asia have to do with oil.

Hamid Karzai, the puppet President of Afghanistan installed by the U.S., is said to be a former employee of Unocal, the American-based oil company. The U.S. government's paranoid patrolling of the Middle East is because it has two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Oil keeps America's engines purring sweetly. Oil keeps the Free Market rolling. Whoever controls the world's oil, controls the world's market. And how do you control the oil? Nobody puts it more elegantly than *The New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman. In an article called, "Craziness Pays", he said, "The U.S. has to make it clear to Iraq and U.S. allies that ... America will use force without negotiation, hesitation or U.N. approval." His advice was well taken. In the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in the almost daily humiliation the U.S. government heaps on the U.N.

In his book on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman says, and I quote, "The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist. McDonalds cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas...and the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps."

Perhaps this was written in a moment of vulnerability, but it's certainly the most succinct, accurate description of the project of corporate globalization that I have read. After the 11th of September 2001 and the War Against Terror, the hidden hand and fist have had their cover blown – and we have a clear view now of America's other weapon – the Free Market – bearing down on the Developing World, with a clenched, unsmiling smile.

The Task That Never Ends is America's perfect war, the perfect vehicle for the endless expansion of American imperialism. In Urdu, the word for Profit, as in "p-r-o-f-i-t", is *fayda*. *Al Qaida* means The Word, The Word of God, The Law. So, in India, some

of us call the War Against Terror, *Al Qaida* versus *Al Fayda* - The Word versus The Profit (no pun intended.)

For the moment it looks as though *Al Fayda* will carry the day. But then you never know... In the last ten years of unbridled Corporate Globalization, the world's total income has increased by an average of 2.5 percent a year. And yet the numbers of poor in the world has increased by 100 million. Of the top hundred biggest economies, 51 are corporations, not countries. The top 1 percent of the world has the same combined income as the bottom 57 percent and that disparity is growing. And now, under the spreading canopy of the War Against Terror, this process is being hustled along. The men in suits are in an unseemly hurry.

While bombs rain down on us, and cruise missiles skid across the skies, while nuclear weapons are stockpiled to make the world a safer place, contracts are being signed, patents are being registered, oil pipe lines are being laid, natural resources are being plundered, water is being privatized, and democracies are being undermined.

In a country like India, the "structural adjustment" end of the Corporate Globalization project is ripping through people's lives. "Development" projects, massive privatization, and labor "reforms" are pushing people off their lands and out of their jobs, resulting in a kind of barbaric dispossession that has few parallels in history.

Across the world, as the "Free Market" brazenly protects Western markets and forces developing countries to lift their trade barriers, the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer. Civil unrest has begun to erupt in the global village. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia and India, the resistance movements against Corporate Globalization are growing. To contain them, governments are tightening their control.

Protesters are being labeled "terrorists" and then being dealt with as such. But civil unrest does not only mean marches and demonstrations and protests against globalization. Unfortunately, it also means a desperate downward spiral into crime and chaos and all kinds of despair and disillusionment which as we know from history (and from what we see unspooling before our eyes), gradually becomes a fertile breeding ground for terrible things - cultural nationalism, religious bigotry, fascism and of course, terrorism.

All these march arm-in-arm with corporate globalization. There is a notion gaining credence that the Free Market breaks down national barriers, and that Corporate Globalization's ultimate destination is a hippie paradise where the heart is the only passport and we all live happily together inside a John Lennon song. ("Imagine there's no country...") But this is a canard. What the Free Market undermines is not national sovereignty, but *democracy*. As the disparity between the rich and poor grows, the hidden fist has its work cut out for it. Multinational corporations on the prowl for "sweetheart deals" that yield enormous profits cannot push through those deals and administer those projects in developing countries without the active connivance of State machinery – the police, the courts, sometimes even the army.

Today Corporate Globalization needs an international confederation of loyal, corrupt, preferably authoritarian governments in poorer countries to push through unpopular reforms and quell the mutinies. It needs a press that pretends to be free. It needs courts that pretend to dispense justice. It needs nuclear bombs, standing armies, sterner immigration laws, and watchful coastal patrols to make sure that it's only money, goods, patents, and services that are being globalized – not the free movement of people, not a respect for human rights, not international treaties on racial discrimination or chemical and

nuclear weapons, or greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, or god forbid, justice. It's as though even a *gesture* towards international accountability would wreck the whole enterprise.

Close to one year after the War against Terror was officially flagged off in the ruins of Afghanistan, in country after country freedoms are being curtailed in the name of protecting freedom, civil liberties are being suspended in the name of protecting democracy. All kinds of dissent are being defined as "terrorism". All kinds of laws are being passed to deal with it. Osama bin Laden seems to have vanished into thin air. Mullah Omar is supposed to have made his escape on a motorbike. (They could have sent TinTin after him.) The Taliban may have disappeared but their spirit, and their system of summary justice is surfacing in the unlikeliest of places. In India, in Pakistan, in Nigeria, in America, in all the Central Asian republics run by all manner of despots, and of course in Afghanistan under the U.S.-backed, Northern Alliance.

Meanwhile down at the mall there's a mid-season sale. Everything's discounted – oceans, rivers, oil, gene pools, fig wasps, flowers, childhoods, aluminum factories, phone companies, wisdom, wilderness, civil rights, eco-systems, air – all 4,600 million years of evolution. It's packed, sealed, tagged, valued and available off the rack. (No returns). As for justice – I'm told it's on offer too. You can get the best that money can buy.

Donald Rumsfeld said that his mission in the War Against Terror was to persuade the world that Americans must be allowed to continue their way of life. When the maddened king stamps his foot, slaves tremble in their quarters. So, standing here today, it's hard for me to say this, but "The American Way of Life" is simply not sustainable. Because it doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.

But fortunately, power has a shelf life. When the time comes, maybe this mighty empire will, like others before it, overreach itself and implode from within. It looks as though structural cracks have already appeared. As the War Against Terror casts its net wider and wider, America's corporate heart is hemorrhaging. For all the endless, empty chatter about democracy, today the world is run by three of the most secretive institutions in the world: The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, all three of which, in turn, are dominated by the U.S.

Their decisions are made in secret. The people who head them are appointed behind closed doors. Nobody really knows anything about them, their politics, their beliefs, their intentions. Nobody elected them. Nobody said they could make decisions on our behalf. A world run by a handful of greedy bankers and C.E.O.'s whom nobody elected can't possibly last.

Soviet-style communism failed, not because it was intrinsically evil but because it was flawed. It allowed too few people to usurp too much power. Twenty-first century market-capitalism, American style, will fail for the same reasons. Both are edifices constructed by the human intelligence, undone by human nature.

The time has come, the Walrus said. Perhaps things will become worse and then better. Perhaps there's a small god up in heaven readying herself for us. Another world is not only possible, she's on her way.

Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.