Problema ng Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo /The Problem of the Poet in a Time of Terrorism

E. SAN JUAN, JR.

Introduction

E. San Juan, Jr., previously a fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University, is an internationally renowned Filipino literary scholar, cultural critic and public intellectual whose large body of work (over forty books and two hundred articles) in the fields of English, Ethnic Studies, and Comparative Literature has been translated into Chinese, Russian, French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Japanese. The recipient of numerous awards including Outstanding Book Awards from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in the United States (1992 and 2001), the National Book Award in Cultural Studies from the Association for Asian American Studies (1993), and the Centennial Award for Achievement in Literature from the Cultural Center of the Philippines (1999), San Juan is recognized by literary and cultural theorist Fredric Jameson for his “remarkable commitment to literature and culture as vital areas of contemporary social life.”

In addition to bringing attention to the horrific consequences of the “global war on terror” on Philippine society, where forms of dissent are criminalized and thousands have been brutally silenced by extrajudicial violence, San Juan’s poem in Filipino and English titled Problema ng
Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo/The Problem of the Poet in an Age of Terror sheds light on the responsibility of the exiled Filipino writer/artist/poet in our post 9/11 era. It is within the context of U.S.-Philippine colonial and neocolonial relations (the Philippines became a U.S. colony in 1898) that the Filipino poet discovers how the act of reclaiming a Filipino national language is simultaneously an act of claiming freedom—the right to self determination. This decolonizing aesthetic of San Juan’s poem in the Filipino language—in form and content—contributes to the unique unfolding of Philippine subaltern struggle within the realm of a “Filipino praxis of alter/native writing.”

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Problema ng Makata sa Panahon ng Terorismo

Nangangulila Tila luho’t karangyaan

Habang patuloy ang kabuktutan kasamaan
Terorismo ng Estado ng neokolonyal Dabas ng militar at pulis

Patuloy ang pandarukot pagpaslang
Han libong biktima ng Oplan Bantay Laya—di na mabilang

Kamakailan 57 biktima ng masuker sa Maguindanao
Pinagbabari ang mga mukha't katawan
Nilapastangan pa ang maselang bahagi ng mga babaeng pinatay

Wala na bang hiya    Wala na bang dignidad ang taumbayan?

Karumal-dumal    Kahindik-hindik    Nakaririmarim    Kasuklam-suklam

Pagkatapos ng Auschwitz    Buchenwald    Intramuros
Barbaridad ng mga pasistang Aleman at Hapon
Sampu ng mga namatay sa Hiroshima at Nagasaki

Fayo ni Theodore Adorno, pantas sa sining at pilosopiya,
Wala na'ng kabuluhan ang sining at tula—
Ang tutula pa, talagang tulala?

Ngunit lahat ba'y sakop na ng politika ng oportunismo't dahas ng Estado?
Ng gahasa't pangungulimbat?

Kasama, pwede ba'ng lumahis sa linyadong programa at paradigma?

Pwede ba'ng ipakawalan ang isang buntong-hininga
Pagtutol sa kabukturang umiral?

Habang pinakikirondaman ang ngiti sa matang pamilantik
Hinagka't suminsim
Saglit lamang

Luwalhating kay tamis tumutusok sumisirit
Saglit lang

Nanuot sa bawat himaymay tumagos labos labis
Saglit lang

Nangalisag sa bangis ng kalmot at kagat kurot ngatngat
Saglit lamang

Sagad-sagad sumisidhing labis labos namumuro
Saglit lang

Umabot sa kasukdulang putok ng nasa't pananabik
Pagkatapos
Lumbay ng paalam hapis sa pagkaalam

Munsan lamang tumuturok ang salagmsim

Kaluluwa'y nagkabuhol-buhol sa braso't hinti
Sa lalamunan sugat na kay hapdi

Kusang-loob na pagtatalik mula sa paraisong
Bagamat walang kamotaya'y tinalikdan

Saglit lamang
Ay naku, muling hagkan

Apoyn ng halik walang tares walang awa kung saan-saan

Walang hinto walang wakas walang katapusan

The Problem of the Poet in a Time of Terrorism
[Translated from the original Filipino by the Author]

Mourning alone. This looks like ostentation luxury
While wickedness obscenities continue
Terrorism of the neocolonial State. Violence by the police and military
Forced “disappearances” and extra-judicial murders continue
So many victims of the regime’s Oplan Bantay Laya—impossible to count

Recently, 57 victims in the Maguindanao massacre
Their faces and bodies mutilated by gunfire
Even the genitals of women slain were not spared
Do Filipinos still have any shame any dignity?

Terrible atrocities. Horrendous
After Auschwitz Buchenwald Intramuros
Theodore Adorno, sage of art and philosophy, counseled us:
Poetry is useless, worthless—He who dares to declaim an ode is an imbecile!
But is everything dominated by the politics of opportunism and the State's barbarism? By rape and plunder?

Comrade, may I be permitted to deviate from the party line?
May I release a sigh from the heart
In protest against the horrors prevailing?
While intuiting the smile from eyes flicking
Embraced and sucked
For only an instant

Bless so intense hissing
For only an instant

Penetrating to every fiber of the flesh to the bone reaching beyond
For only an instant

Hair bristling ferocious scratch and bite
For only an instant

Up to the edge screeching beyond over-reaching
For only an instant

Mounting to the climax flesh's desire exploding
Grief at goodbye to our knowing each other

Once only this premonition
Souls knotted together limbs and arms entwining
In the throat how bitter and painful

Without any intent this coupling from a paradise
Refused despite intimations of immortality

Only for an instant

Ay god, embracing you again
Fire from kisses without pity without mercy everywhere
Seeking endless