

How do We Begin to Mount our Resistance?

BY ARUNDHATI ROY

For the first time in history, a single Empire with an arsenal of weapons that could obliterate the world in an afternoon has complete, unipolar, economic and military hegemony. It uses different weapons to break open different markets. There isn't a country on God's earth that is not caught in the cross hairs of the American cruise missile and the IMF chequebook. Argentina's the model if you want to be the poster-boy of neoliberal capitalism, Iraq if you're the black sheep.

Poor countries that are geo-politically of strategic value to Empire, or have a 'market' of any size, or infrastructure that can be privatized, or, god forbid, natural resources of value – oil, gold, diamonds, cobalt, coal – must do as they're told, or become military targets. Those with the greatest reserves of natural wealth are most at risk. Unless they surrender their resources willingly to the corporate machine, civil unrest will be fomented, or war will be waged.

In this new age of Empire, when nothing is as it appears to be, executives of concerned companies are allowed to influence foreign policy decisions. The Center for Public Integrity in Washington found that nine out of the 30 members of the Defense Policy Board of the US Government were connected to companies that were awarded defense contracts for \$76 billion between 2001 and 2002. George Shultz, former US Secretary of State, was Chairman of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Bechtel Group. When asked about a conflict of interest, in the case of a war in Iraq, 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. But nobody looks at it as something you benefit from." After the war, Bechtel signed a \$680 million contract for reconstruction in Iraq.

This brutal blueprint has been used over and over again, across Latin America, Africa and Central and South-East Asia. It has cost millions of lives. It goes without saying that every war Empire wages becomes a Just War. This, in large part, is due to the role of the corporate media. It's important to understand that the corporate media doesn't just support the neo-liberal project. It *is* the neo-liberal project. This is not a moral position it has chosen to take, it's structural. It's intrinsic to the economics of how the mass media works.

But as long as our 'markets' are open, as long as corporations like Enron, Bechtel, Halliburton and Arthur Andersen are given a free hand, our 'democratically-elected' leaders can fearlessly blur the lines between democracy, majoritarianism and fascism.

Like Old Imperialism, New Imperialism too relies for its success on a network of agents – corrupt, local elites who service Empire. We all know the sordid story of Enron in India. The then Maharashtra Government signed a power purchase agreement which gave Enron profits that amounted to sixty per cent of India's entire rural development budget. A single American company was guaranteed a profit equivalent to funds for infrastructural development for about 500 million people!

Unlike in the old days, the New Imperialist doesn't need to trudge around the tropics risking malaria or diarrhea or early death. New Imperialism can be conducted on e-mail. The vulgar, hands-on racism of Old Imperialism is outdated. The cornerstone of New Imperialism is New Racism.

Do Turkeys Enjoy Thanksgiving?

The tradition of 'turkey pardoning' in the US is a wonderful allegory for New Racism. Every year since 1947, the National Turkey Federation presents the US President with a turkey for Thanksgiving. Every year, in a show of ceremonial magnanimity, the President spares that particular bird (and eats another one). After receiving the

Presidential pardon, the Chosen One is sent to Frying Pan Park in Virginia to live out its natural life. The rest of the 50 million turkeys raised for Thanksgiving are slaughtered and eaten on Thanksgiving Day. ConAgra Foods, the company that has won the Presidential Turkey contract, says it trains the lucky birds to be sociable, to interact with dignitaries, school children and the press. (Soon they'll even speak English!)

That's how New Racism in the corporate era works. A few carefully bred turkeys – the local elites of various countries, a community of wealthy immigrants, investment bankers, the occasional Colin Powell or Condoleezza Rice, some singers, some writers (like myself) – are given absolution and a pass to Frying Pan Park. The remaining millions lose their jobs, are evicted from their homes, have their water and electricity connections cut and die of AIDS. Basically, they're for the pot. But the Fortunate Fowls in Frying Pan Park are doing fine. Some of them even work for the IMF and the WTO – so who can accuse those organisations of being anti-turkey? Some serve as board members on the Turkey Choosing Committee – so who can say that turkeys are against Thanksgiving? They participate in it! Who can say the poor are anti-corporate globalisation? There's a stampede to get into Frying Pan Park. So what if most perish on the way?

Part of the project of New Racism is New Genocide. In this new era of economic interdependence, New Genocide can be facilitated by economic sanctions. It means creating conditions that lead to mass death without actually going out and killing people. Dennis Halliday, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq between '97 and '98 (after which he resigned in disgust), used the term genocide to describe the sanctions in Iraq. In Iraq the sanctions outdid Saddam Hussein's best efforts by claiming more than half a million children's lives.

In the new era, Apartheid as formal policy is antiquated and unnecessary. International instruments of trade and finance oversee a complex system of multilateral trade laws and financial agreements that keep the poor in their Bantustans anyway. Its whole purpose is to institutionalise inequity. Why else would it be that the US taxes a garment made by a Bangladeshi manufacturer 20 times more than it taxes a garment made in the



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UK? Why else would it be that countries that grow 90 per cent of the world's cocoa bean produce only 5 per cent of the world's chocolate? ... Why else would it be that rich countries that spend over a billion dollars a day on subsidies to farmers demand that poor countries like India withdraw all agricultural subsidies, including subsidised electricity? Why else would it be that after having been plundered by colonising regimes for more than half a century, former colonies are steeped in debt to those same regimes, and repay them some \$382 billion a year?

Strategies of Resistance

No individual nation can stand up to the project of Corporate Globalisation on its own. Time and again we have seen that when it comes to the neo-liberal project, the heroes of our times are suddenly diminished.

Extraordinary, charismatic men – giants in Opposition – when they seize power and become Heads of State, they become powerless on the global stage. I'm thinking here of President Lula of Brazil. Lula was the hero of the World Social Forum last year. This year he's busy implementing IMF guidelines, reducing pension benefits and purging radicals from the Workers' Party. I'm thinking also of ex-President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Within two years of taking office in 1994, his government genuflected with hardly a caveat to the Market God. It instituted a massive programme of privatisation and structural adjustment, which has left millions of people homeless, jobless and without water and electricity.

Why does this happen? There's little point in beating our breasts and feeling betrayed. Lula and Mandela are, by any reckoning, magnificent men. But the moment they cross the floor from the Opposition into Government they become hostage to a spectrum of threats – most malevolent among them, the threat of capital flight, which can destroy any government overnight. To imagine that a leader's personal charisma and a [history] of struggle will dent the Corporate Cartel is to have no understanding of how Capitalism works, or for that matter, how power works. Radical change will not be negotiated by governments; it can only be enforced by people.

What we need to discuss urgently is strategies of resistance. We need to aim at real targets, wage real battles and inflict real damage. Gandhi's Salt March was not just political theatre. When, in a simple act of defiance, thousands of Indians marched to the sea and made their own salt, they broke the salt tax laws. It was a direct strike at the economic underpinning of the British Empire. It was *real*. While our movement has won some important victories, we must not allow non-violent resistance to atrophy into ineffectual, feel-good, political theatre. It is a very precious weapon that needs to be constantly honed and re-imagined. It cannot be allowed to become a mere spectacle, a photo opportunity for the media.

It was wonderful that on February 15th last year, in a spectacular display of public morality, 10 million people on five continents marched against the war on Iraq. It was wonderful, but it was not enough. February 15th was a weekend. Nobody had to so much as miss a day of work. Holiday protests don't stop wars. George Bush knows that. The confidence with which he disregarded overwhelming public opinion should be a lesson

to us all. Bush believes that Iraq can be occupied and colonised — as Afghanistan has been, as Tibet has been, as Chechnya is being, as East Timor once was and Palestine still is. He thinks that all he has to do is hunker down and wait until a crisis-driven media, having picked this crisis to the bone, drops it and moves on. Soon the carcass will slip off the best-seller charts, and all of us outraged folks will lose interest. Or so he hopes.

This movement of ours needs a major, global victory. It's not good enough to be right. Sometimes, if only in order to test our resolve, it's important to win something. In order to win something, we need to agree on something. That something does not need to be an over-arching pre-ordained ideology into which we force-fit our delightfully factious, argumentative selves. It does not need to be an unquestioning allegiance to one or

another form of resistance to the exclusion of everything else. It could be a minimum agenda.

If all of us are indeed against Imperialism and against the project of neo-liberalism, then let's turn our gaze on Iraq. Iraq is the inevitable culmination

of both. Plenty of anti-war activists have retreated in confusion since the capture of Saddam Hussein. "Isn't the world better off without Saddam Hussein?" they ask timidly.

Let's look this thing in the eye once and for all. To applaud the US army's capture of Saddam Hussein and therefore, in retrospect, justify its invasion and occupation of Iraq is like deifying Jack the Ripper for disembowelling the Boston Strangler. And that – after a quarter century partnership in which the Ripping and Strangling was a joint enterprise. It's an in-house quarrel. They're business partners who fell out over a dirty deal. Jack's the CEO.

So if we are against Imperialism, shall we agree that we are against the US occupation and that we believe that the US must withdraw from Iraq and pay reparations to the Iraqi people for the damage that the war has inflicted?

How do we begin to mount our resistance? Let's start with something really small. The issue is not about *supporting* the resistance in Iraq against the occupation ... We have to *become* the global resistance to the occupation.

Our resistance has to begin with a refusal to accept the legitimacy of the US occupation of Iraq. It means acting to make it materially impossible for Empire to achieve its aims. It means soldiers should refuse to fight, reservists should refuse to serve, workers should refuse to load ships and aircraft with weapons. It certainly means that in countries like India and Pakistan we must block the US government's plans to have Indian and Pakistani soldiers sent to Iraq to clean up after them.

The Project For The New American Century seeks to perpetuate inequity and establish American hegemony at any price, even if it's apocalyptic. [We] demand justice and survival.

For these reasons, we must consider ourselves at war.

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