

RED-BAITING: A TOOL OF REPRESSION, THEN AND NOW



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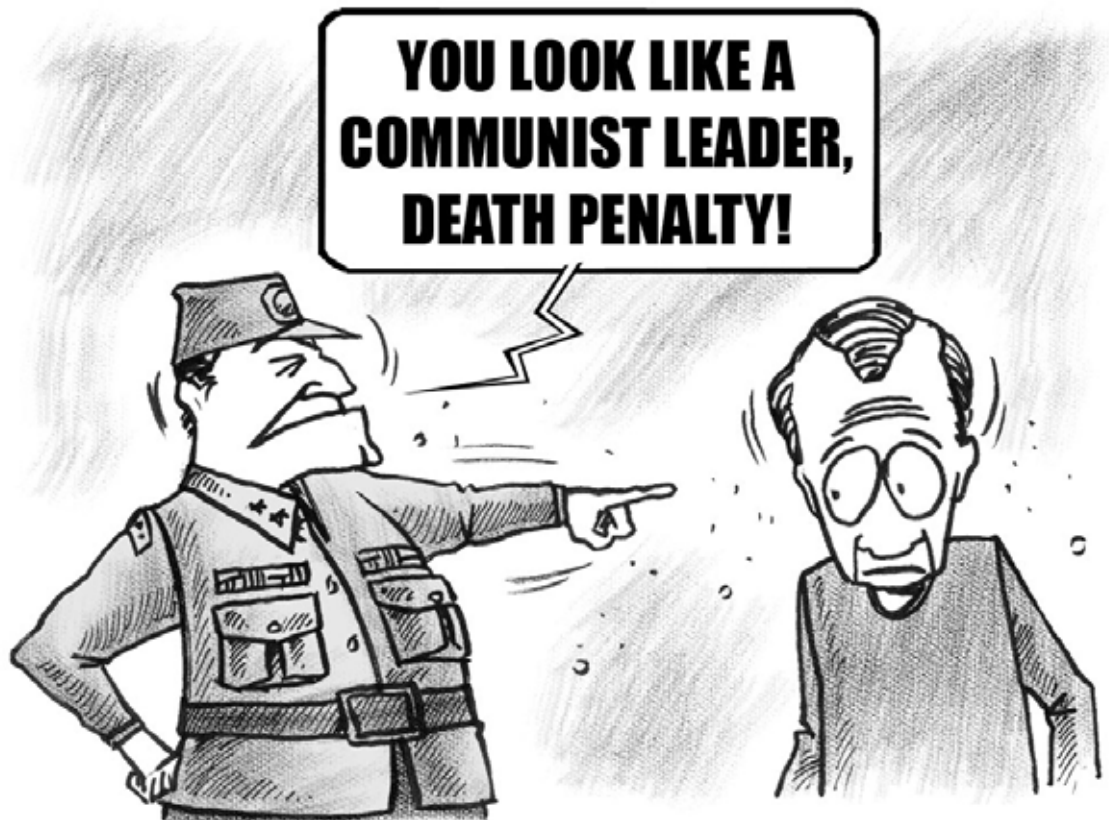
Red-Baiting or labelling by association has long been a tool used by the State in its efforts to protect and preserve itself against individuals and groups perceived to be posing serious problems to its stability and survival. In the Philippines, the security sector, primarily the military, has been the key institution which has consistently resorted to this strategy. Its persistent use of this repressive tool has resulted to human rights violations such as harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearance of suspected and/or alleged individuals and organizations considered as "enemies of the State".

The political landscape of the Philippines has not significantly changed especially when it comes to the State's dealings and treatment of its critics, both individuals and organizations. Similar to the martial law years, the State has continued to resort to the use of labelling, terror tactics and underhanded methods against those militantly exposing and opposing government policies, programs and system of governance which attack peoples' rights and freedoms.

Red-Baiting or the act of labelling, branding,

naming and accusing individuals and/or organizations of being left-leaning, subversives, communists or terrorists is a strategy used by State agents, particularly law enforcement agencies and the military, against those perceived to be "threats" or "enemies of the State". A key feature of the psychological operations (psyops) component of its counterinsurgency plan, Red-Baiting has primarily been directed against non-government organizations (NGOs), peoples' organization (POs), trade unions, and progressive party list groups, viewed as

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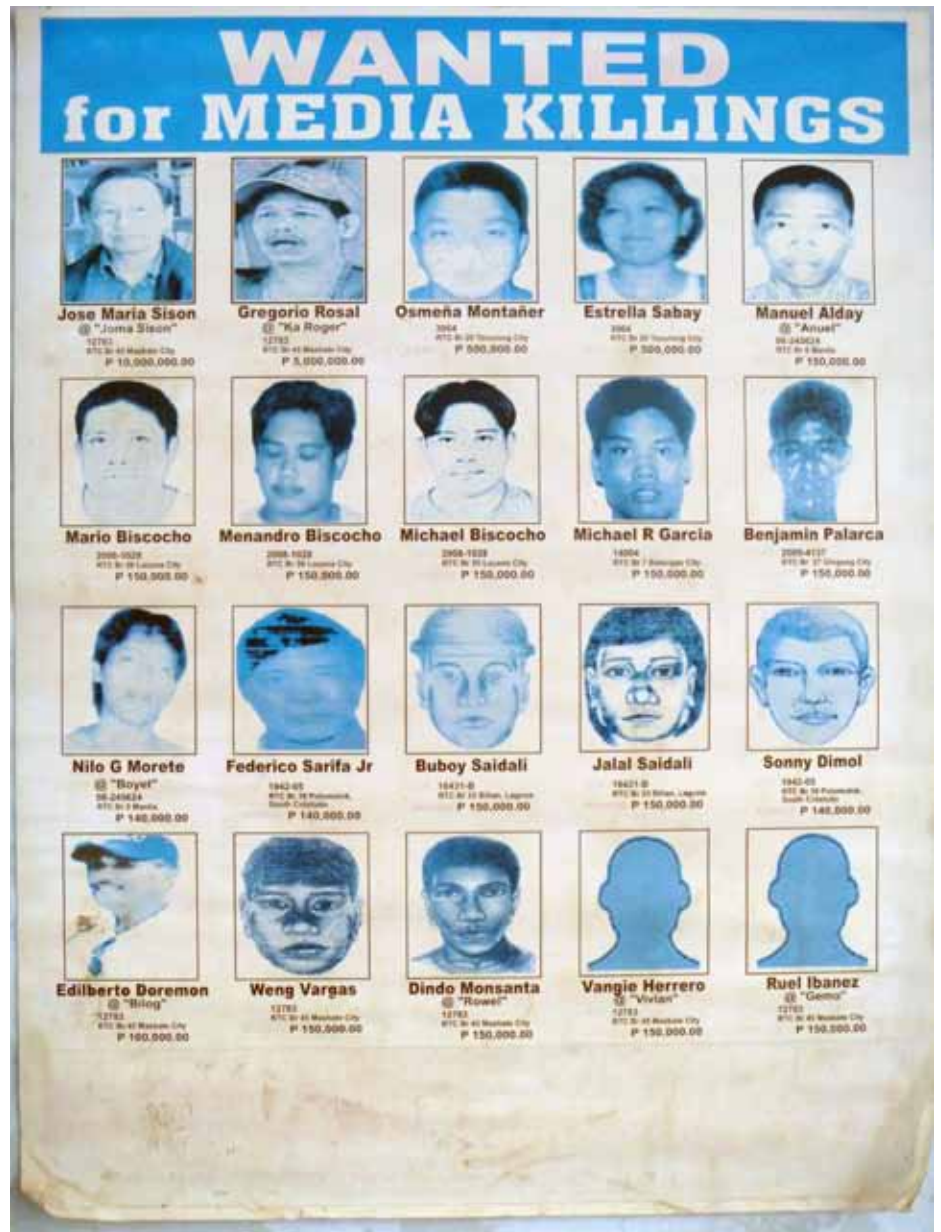
“front organizations” of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), National Democratic Front (NDF) and/or New People’s Army (NPA).

As pointed out by Prof. Philip Alston in his Mission Report to the Philippines, Red-Baiting or the vilification approach used by the military “involves the characterization of most groups on the left of the political spectrum as ‘front organizations’ for armed groups whose aim is to destroy democracy. The result is that a wide range of groups – including human rights advocates, labour union organizers, journalists, teachers unions, women’s groups, indigenous organizations, religious groups, student groups, agrarian reform advocates, and others – are classified as ‘fronts’ and then as ‘enemies of the State’ that are accordingly considered to be legitimate targets” (Alston 2007: 4).

Historically, Red-Baiting in the Philippines has taken such forms as the military’s Order of Battle (OB) list, and the naming of specific “leftist” NGOs, POs, trade unions, party-list groups, and individuals believed to be affiliated with the underground movement in public presentations made by the military in urban and rural poor communities, factories, and mass media, as part of its counterinsurgency activities.

The OB list is “an organizational tool used by military intelligence”(ibid., p.4) identifying top ranking officers and members of the various units/ departments of the CPP-NDF-NPA operating in specific areas or territories of the country and usually stipulating the monetary award to be given for the “arrest/capture/neutralization” of the personality (DND 1990).

As a counterinsurgency tool, Red-Baiting has primarily been intended



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by the State to achieve the following objectives:

1. Sow terror among the civilian population

Classifying individuals and groups into “friends” and “foes”, “supporters” and “destabilizers” of the State creates an environment of suspicion, fear and division in society. To avoid getting into trouble with the authorities, people are warned to distance themselves from individuals and groups considered by the State as “trouble-makers”.

Actions demonstrating agreement, support, familiarity and association with officers, members, activities and programs of these branded NGOs, POs, trade unions, political parties, etc. are often interpreted as being one with these groups and “tantamount to supporting “the enemy”” (Alston 2008:9). Consequently, this become a ground for the military to arrest, detain, torture and even murder activists, trade unionists, human rights defenders, peasant and community organizers, officers and members of progressive party-list groups, media practitioners, etc.



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Thus, people are encouraged to prevent putting themselves in such predicament by dissociating and reporting immediately to authorities suspicious individuals and activities observed in the community.

2. Immobilize officers and members of branded groups

Red-Baiting is meant to jolt and cause panic within the ranks of individuals and groups perceived as "threats or enemies of the State" to the extent of immobilizing them. The release of an OB list, for instance, is expected to weaken the resolve of the wavering and less committed officers and members of "leftist organizations". Engulfed with fear and imagining the serious consequences of being arrested and experiencing prolonged detention, these individuals will lay-low and ultimately end their membership and involvement in the organization.

3. Destroy the progressive people's movement

Red-Baiting, especially if it results to the arrest, collaboration and/or neutralization of those labelled "enemies of the State" can seriously undermine the integrity and cripple the operations of NGOs, POs and other groups legitimately working for peoples' rights and welfare. Activists, advocates and their supporters may find themselves working in an environment

dominated by fear, distrust and lack of confidence.

Prof. Philip Alston, in his mission report to the Philippines in 2007 has identified Red-Baiting or what he referred to as "vilification, labelling or guilt by association" (Alston 2007: 3 et seq.) as a major factor in the persistence of human rights violations in the country. According to Alston, the practice of the military to accuse a wide range of organizations such human rights NGOs, trade unions, peasants groups, student formations, religious congregations, and professional groups like human rights lawyers, journalists and teachers, as "front organizations" working to destabilise and overthrow the government, has made these groups legitimate targets of the military (ibid., p. 4) Thus, it is not surprising for the leaders, members and individuals affiliated with these organizations to experience various forms of human rights violations ranging from surveillance, harassment, illegal arrest and detention, torture, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing.

As a tool of repression, we can expect the use of Red-Baiting by the military to continue and intensify, especially with the Aquino government's involvement in the war against terror and its deep commitment to protect foreign investments and multinational interests in the country. The recent pronouncements of President Benigno Aquino III endorsing and giving full support to the military's proposal

to create Special Civilian Active Auxiliaries (SCAA) to beef up the defense forces for mining and logging companies in the country against rebel attacks is a clear illustration of this commitment (Pazzibugan 2011). Following the simultaneous raids launched by the NPA in three mining companies in Surigao del Norte, Mindanao, namely the Taganito Mining Corporation, Taganito HPAL Nickel Corp. and Platinum Group Metals Corp. last October 3, 2011, and resulting to the destruction of P3 billion worth of mining equipment and infrastructure (Conde 2011), the military saw the need to extend support to mining firms operating in the country through the recruitment, training and

supervision of special militias tasked to provide security to mining companies.

Indifferent to the plight of indigenous peoples and rural poor communities whose rights to ancestral domain, livelihood, healthy environment, among others, have been seriously threatened and/or violated due to large scale mining operations, the Aquino government has clearly positioned itself to the side of big business and multinational interests. While human rights violations continue unabated in the country, the culture of impunity, likewise, remains a major stumbling block in the struggle of the Filipino people for truth, justice and lasting peace in the country.

Conclusion

There is no doubt the use of Red-Baiting as a tool of State repression will persist for as long as the military institution continues to approach the insurgency problem in the Philippines from a militarist framework. When the State focuses on the alleged illegal affiliations of its critics rather than on the bases and substance of their criticisms; when the State preoccupies itself with self-preservation at any cost, it is expected that all forms of repressive tools, including Red-Baiting will be resorted to. With the continued use of Red-Baiting, human rights violations follow and consequently peoples' struggles and resistance will surely be expected responses. ■

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LANDREFORM-RELATED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS – A PROBLEM BEYOND TASKFORCE MAPALAD

Human rights abuses in the context of the land reform in the Philippines also occur to non-members of IPON's partner organisation Taskforce Mapalad: In 2009, the farmer Gregorio Saldua was awarded a land title for the five hectares of land he used to be tilling. Despite his rightful ownership, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) never officially transferred the land to him. Instead Saldua was portrayed as land grabber. In 2009 Ali Arib, a neighbouring farmer, who had recently moved there, bulldozed a road right through Saluda's land, causing enormous destruction. Consequently, Saldua installed a roadblock on his land to prevent Arib from causing further destruction. Since Arib destroyed the roadblock several times, Saldua had to renew it. The DAR legal officer wrongfully ordered him to remove it from his land. Later Saldua received death threats from Arib. The lock of his house was destroyed, his water supply line chopped and his fishpond emptied. In the beginning of 2011, Arib fired shots in the vicinity of Saluda's house. Arib also sabotaged a close-by lemon grass oil mill and blocked public roads, causing the withdrawal of German volunteers for security reasons from the area. While the local police fail to prevent these crimes or to persecute Arib, the conflict is rooted in the omission of the DAR officials to inform Arib about Saluda's right to install roadblocks on his own land. A local DAR official, Marilou Tubesa, officially complained about the case at the level of DAR Undersecretary Nieto.