

MICHAEL BURAWOY: Good evening. Welcome to you all. I believe that both sociologists and non-sociologists are in the audience. And this is--the theme of this conference, as you know, is public sociology, and therefore, I am glad to greet the non-sociologists, the public, from the streets of San Francisco.

[Applause]

Today is day three, thank you, day three of the ASA Conference for 2004. And the theme for today, if there has been a theme, is talking to publics. We had a great plenary earlier today, and tonight we have--we await with great expectation an address from Arundhati Roy. Let me tell you about the rules. Since we are quite numerous here, questions. We will do what we did on day one, two, whatever it was, the other night. There are the Marxist T-shirted Berkeley undergraduates.

[Applause]

Who will be surveilling and patrolling the isles, one on each isle. We've lost a few, but we have in it for one on each isle and one at the back. Questions should be therefore written on pieces of paper and handed to the side. And best if they're not too long those questions. Raka will actually take them, and we'll sort through them, and we'll present them to Arundhati Roy, and there will be little conversation at the front like we did before. Then we make an announcement tomorrow, which is the last day of this conference. There are two events I want to alert you to. There is a closing plenary. We never had a closing plenary before, but we are determined to have a closing plenary this time. And to keep you here off the streets of San Francisco, we have brought Paul Krugman and Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

[Applause]

To have a little conversation about the future of the world. [Laughter] And then after that, I'm afraid only for the registrants of this conference, there will be a closing reception at which former President Cardoso will talk about what it was like to be a sociologist as president of a country. [Laughter] Tonight, tonight, we are, I don't know, I cannot express it in words, so uniquely privileged and honored to have with us somebody who I think we all adore, Arundhati Roy.

[Applause]

And to introduce her, I introduce you to Raka Ray, my colleague from Berkeley who heads the Center for South Asian Studies and is in the Department of Sociology, Raka Ray.

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: Thank you, Michael. The public sociology initiative invites us not only to engage with the social world by using our work to try and defect change, but also to glean sociological insights from sources who may not be within the discipline, but who are in fact, profoundly sociological in their thinking. It is my privilege tonight to introduce you to one such figure, novelist, political activist, and public intellectual-at-large, Arundhati Roy. Born in Shillong in 1961, Arundhati grew up in the village of Aymanam in Kerala. Her Christian mother raised her. Her Hindu father was absent. Here is how she describes her childhood. "I thank God", she writes, "that I had none of the conditioning that a normal middle class Indian girl would have. I had no father, no presence of this man telling us that he would look after us and beat us occasionally in exchange. I didn't have a caste and I didn't have a class, and I had no religion. No traditional blinkers. No traditional lenses on my spectacles. I sometimes think I was perhaps the only girl in India who's mother said, 'Whatever you do, don't get married.'"

[Laughter]

[Applause]

This young girl growing up without traditional lenses entered our hearts and minds in 1997 with her book of prize winning novel, "The God of Small Things", a novel about castes, families, and the breaking of rules in the Indian State of Kerala. That novel marked her not only as a great storyteller, but also as a writer whose insights into the social world draw on a classically sociological imagination. Forgive me as we claim you as our own. [Laughter] The lives and events that filled the beautifully written pages of The God of Small Things represent a literary and ultimately tragic manifestation of C. Wright Mills' insights into how social structure shapes individual biographies. An architect who became a novelist and now political activist and public intellectual, Arundhati Roy is today's someone who writes about the urgent global social issues of our time. In her fourth coming essay, she says, "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." Since the publication of her novel, Arundhati Roy has chosen not to return to the world of fiction but rather has forge a path of active engagement with the actual social world which she and we inhabit. The worries that flit around her brain make their way to the printed page and resonate with millions of people around the world,

and we are grateful for those persistent moths. In her several books of essays: War Talk, Power Politics, The Cost of Living, and most recently An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire, Roy has written thoughtfully about the cost of war and newly brewed globalization and about the dangers of empire. In last night's talk, Michael Burawoy argued that sociologists study things from the standpoint of civil society. Arundhati Roy's work exemplifies this approach. Indeed, her essays reveal an almost Gramscian vision of democracy built on a vibrant civil society. It is critical, she argues, that social movements reclaim a space for alternative visions even as the space seems to be shrinking. She reminds us not to be seduced into learning about the world only through crisis framed by the media. She warns us not to be fooled when the word democracy is used, when neoliberalism is meant. And most of all, she reminds us that democracy, real democracy, is hard work and defies time, commitment, and courage from us all. Please join me now in welcoming Arundhati Roy who will speak to us tonight about Public Power in the Age of Empire.

[Applause]

Arundhati Roy : Thank you Raka and Michael. It's lovely to hear lovely things said about you 'cause I spent quite a lot of my life being insulted. [Laughter] But then as they say, what's dissent without a few good insults. [Laughter] So, today, as Raka said, I'll speak on "Public Power in the Age of Empire." I'm not usually used to doing what I'm told, but by happy coincidence, it's exactly what I have like to speak to you about tonight if I had to choose. When language has been butchered and bled of meaning, how do we understand "public power?" When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neoliberal 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 was magnificent, but by no means, revolutionary. The Indian elite stepped easily and elegantly into the shoes of British imperialists. A deeply impoverished, essentially feudal society became a modern, independent nation state. And even today, 57 years on to the day, yesterday was Independence 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. But either way, for most Indians, sarkar is very separate from public. But 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 the 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 the al-Qaeda. If it isn't Cuba, it's Nicaragua. As a result of 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 healthcare, 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" et cetera, et cetera. 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" which means "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 nations still went to war. So 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. But the crucial difference is that nobody really elected the al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or Saddam Hussein. But the president of the United States was elected. Well--

[Laughter]

In a manner of speaking, yeah.

[Applause]

The prime ministers of Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom were elected. Could it then be argued that the 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've 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, neoliberalism, 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 50-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 indicated 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 neoliberalism's economic "reforms" and growing fascism. As soon as the votes were counted, the corporate media dispatched the poor 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 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 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 further opening of Indian market. So, 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.

[Applause]

But the real concern is that in the new administration their policies will continue. That we will have Bushism without Bush.

[Applause]

Those in 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.

[Applause]

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 would 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 percent of Bush's tax cuts. So, underneath the shrill exchange of insults, there's almost absolute consensus. It looks as though even if Americans vote for Kerry, they'll still get Bush.

[Applause]

President John Kerbush or President George Berry.

[Laughter]

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.

[Applause]

But this doesn't mean that one takes a position that is entirely without nuance, that the Congress and the BJP, New Labor and the Tories, the Democrats and the 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.

[Laughter]

In India, there is a difference between an overtly fascist party, the BJP, and a party that slyly pits one community against another, the 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 an absolutely phenomenal job of exposing the lies and venality--

[Applause]

I'll give them a clap.

[Applause]

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 all of us in the 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 if that isn't an oxymoron. Is U.S. imperialism preferable if it is supported by the United Nations and European countries? Is it preferable if the 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 it 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 these are uncomfortable and 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 and 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" they call it - 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, the Asian Development Bank, and other financial institutions 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. And 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.

But The Spectator newspaper in London assures us that "We 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?

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[Laughter]

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, by a public who can link hands across national borders.

[Applause]

>> 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 doesn't always appear in the form of cruise missiles and tanks, as it has in Iraq or Afghanistan or Vietnam. Sometimes 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's 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 that they are confronting Empire in their own, very different ways. Differently in Iraq, differently 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 filmmakers 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 had shown how the neoliberal project has cost people their homes, their land, their jobs, their liberty, their dignity. They have made the intangible tangible. The once seemingly incorporeal enemy is now corporeal. 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. And 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 People's Movement in Brazil, the anti-dam movement in India, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Anti-Privatisation Forum in South Africa, and hundreds of others, are fighting their own sovereign governments, which have become agents of the neoliberal project. Most of these are radical struggles, fighting to change the structure and chosen model of "development" in 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 and 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 the 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 allows 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?

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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, and so on. Of course, it's 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.

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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. So, 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 to withdraw from Iraq.

[Applause]

The first militant confrontation in the United States between the global justice movement and the neoliberal 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.

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In January 2001, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 20,000 activists, students, filmmakers - 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 World Social Forum was held in Mumbai, India, it attracted 200,000 delegates. I have never been part of a more electrifying gathering. It was the sign of the Social Forum's success that the mainstream media in India ignored it completely.

[Laughter]

But now, the WSF is threatened by its own success. The safe, open, festive atmosphere of the forum has allowed politicians and non-governmental organizations that are imbricated in the political and economic systems that the Forum opposes to participate in it and make themselves heard. And 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. And if conversations about resistance replace real civil disobedience, then the WSF could become an asset to those whom it was created to oppose.

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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 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 today: 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 needs 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 coming for time for the media to move on from there, too. But while governments hone the art of waiting out crisis, resistance movements are increasingly being ensnared in a vortex of crisis production, seeking ways to--find ways of manufacturing them in easily consumable, spectator-friendly formats. Every self-respecting peoples' movement, every "issue" is supposed 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 it's too late. Standing in the reservoir--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 it 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--

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And when people boycott the economic outposts of Empire that are strung across the globe.

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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 the state that ensure that "normality" remains what it is: cruel, unjust, and 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 preemptive 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.

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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. And 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 here 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.

[Applause]

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. But that would be a falsehood. In the murky waters of fake NGOs set up 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 context. In India, for instance, the funded NGO boom began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It coincided with the opening of India's markets to neoliberalism. 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 neoliberal project and demands the slash in government spending in the first place. Why should these agencies fund NGOs? Could it just be 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.

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NGOs alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edge of political resistance. They form a sort of buffer between the sarkar and the 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 are work amongst. They're what botanists would call an indicator species. [Laughter] It's almost as though the greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, 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.

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In order make sure their funding isn't jeopardized and that the governments of the countries they work in will allow them to continue 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 political or historical context. Apolitical, and therefore, extremely political, distress reports from poor countries and war zones eventually make the dark people of these 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.

[Applause]

They unwittingly reinforce racist stereotypes and re-affirm the achievements, the comforts, and the compassion, the tough love, of Western civilization.

[Applause]

They're the secular missionaries of the modern world. But 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're doing some immediate, creative good, and earning a living while they're at it. Real political resistance offers no such shortcuts. 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.

[Applause]

But real resistance has real consequences. And no salary. And this brings us to the 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 Gothenberg, 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.

[Applause]

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 or a militant. We have the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the Public Security Act, the Special Areas Security Act, the Gangster Act, the Terrorism 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 curtails 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 court 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 Bolivia, in Chile, and South Africa. In the era of neoliberalism, poverty is a crime and protesting against it is beginning to be 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. For example, 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. So in effect, torture replaces 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. But I'd be surprised if that happen before similar legislation under a different name is put in place. If it's not POTA it'll be MOTA or something. When every avenue of non-violent dissent is 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 northeastern provinces, large parts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh. Ordinary people in these regions are trapped between the violence of the militants and the violence of the state. In Kashmir, the Indian army estimates that 3,000 to 4,000 militants operate at any given time. To control them, the government deploys 500,000 soldiers. Clearly, it isn't 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 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 all of the northeast virtually and Kashmir. The documentation of instances of torture, disappearances, custodial deaths, rape, and summary execution by security forces is enough to make your stomach turn. In Andhra Pradesh, in India's heartland, the militant Marxist-Leninist Peoples' War Group - which for years has been engaged in a violent armed struggle and has been the principal target of many of the Andhra Pradesh police's fake "encounters" - held its first public meeting in years on the 28th of July in the town of Warangal. It was attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Under POTA, all of them would be considered terrorists. Are they all going to be detained in some Indian equivalent of Guantanamo Bay? The whole of the northeast and Kashmir 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. But 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 nonviolent dissent.

[Applause]

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.

[Applause]

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

[Applause]

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.

[Applause]

Human society is journeying to a terrible place. But of course, there is an alternative to terrorism. It's called justice.

[Applause]

And 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 it's beautiful or bloodthirsty, depends on us.

[Applause]

MICHAEL BURAWOY: Can I ask the cameraman whether we can do it on the table?

[Laughter]

[Cheers]

Can we have a conversation on the table or should we--

[Laughter]

What's the answer?

Let's see if we can get another--if this mic will--

[Inaudible Remark]

You think it's well. Okay. We should let you rest first.

ARUNDHATI ROY: I hope yet. I'm fine. I've done ton of things.

MICHAEL BURAWOY: Is any--is it possible to get a mic quickly?

RAKA RAY: Okay, I'll find it.

MICHAEL BURAWOY: That's okay. I'm sorry but we have no--

RAKA RAY: Okay, the--can you hear me?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

RAKA RAY: Okay. How's this? Okay. So, the questions have started coming in and so I'm gonna make some of them a composite, okay. The first set of questions appears to be about globalization. The idea of some of the questioners is are you being too harsh on globalization? For example, if you ask many of the Indians who are working for the US companies, they are outsourced-- They love it.

Either the outsourcer, you know. They are certainly subjected by empire because of outsourcing, but indeed they are better off. Who actually wants to live in economic distress? And yeah, so.

ARUNDHATI ROY: Okay. So, this is a very interesting debate that's happening here too. I know about outsourcing and especially about call centers. Now, I think, you know, I'll deal with it just in terms of the economy and how it works. U.S. jobs, I mean people here feel that jobs are being lost to countries like India in call centers. And in India who are the people who get those jobs in call centers? Basically they are people who can speak some English, which means they are not the poor lower class people. And you have to look at this project as a whole. And you see that obviously some people are getting jobs, but huge amounts of the poorer people are losing jobs in the millions.

So, a few thousand people get jobs, but millions of farmers, millions of landless labor, millions of people in the agriculture sector, I mean 700 million people in India live in agriculture. So, you know, once again over there it's a question of: Is it better for a few better off people and of course it's better for them in a way. This is not taking into account what humiliations are heaped on their heads working in call centers, you know. I mean to be called the--whatever it is rocks, you know, for an Indian person and to learn to speak with that accent and the whole business of, you know, hiding your identity, of having to work strange hours to match the--so, in a way it's like an industry that's premised on lies and racism. You know, you have to--you have to pretend that you are not you.

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: The second set of questions is sort of a defense of U.S. democracy, however, troubled. And one person eloquently writes, surely in the meantime in the kingdom of the blind, the one eyed man is king. So, you know, could you comment on at least-- The good things about partial and troubled democracies.

ARUNDHATI ROY: Okay.

[Laughter]

Well look, I mean obviously, I know that this is a question that all of you are asking yourselves. And I'm not going to presume and I don't even want to tell you, you know, you must work for so and so or work for so and so. But I think, let me give you an example in India, okay. In central India is the state called Madhya Pradesh, which is where the--all the dams that are being built on the Narmada valley, on the Narmada River are being built. And for the last 10 years, Madhya Pradesh had a congress government and the chief minister of that state was building these dams. He wasn't a Hindu fascist, but of course, he was playing the game, you know, he's thicker than the BJP to band beef and to worship in temples and so on, anyway that's separate. But when the elections came up, here was a man who was building these dams, devastating peoples' homes, had privatized electricity, was--had taken huge loans from the ADB, the Asia Development Bank, loans like first 250,000,000 then 350,000,000. Written into these contracts were clauses tell him how the budget should be written, what the speaker should say in the assembly, how many jobs would be lost, how single connection users, which is the poorest people should have the electricity disconnected while huge companies like Coke were getting, you know, subsidized, big subsidy cuts. And so when the elections came, activists in the Narmada valley were faced with a choice. What should they say, you know? They know that Digvijay Singh of the Congress Party has devastated them-- choice was the BJP who were openly fascist and in whose regime earlier, these people had been physically attacked, beaten. You know, they really, I mean, friends of mine who are activists were fearing for their lives if the BJP came in. But they didn't campaign for the Congress Party, you know. They didn't say this one's better than that one. They just said we have to fight them whoever they are. You know, and this is--

[Applause]

This is the thing that every time you vote for the one-eyed man, the next time it will be a half-eyed man, and then it will be a fourth-eyed man and then, you know.

[Applause]

It would be a monster.

[Laughter]

So, the whole thing is how dare the Democrats not be anti-war and then not pulling out of Iraq.

[Applause]

KARA RAY: That was a fabulous answer.

[Laughter]

Let me ask sort of a--

[Laughter]

Oh, I thought you could say that.

[Laughter]

Okay. Back to objective questions.

[Laughter]

Another set of questions actually asks about--and I have to say that many of the questions actually ask the same questions from both sides, some critiquing you and some supporting you.

ARUNDHATI ROY: Not new.

[Laughter]

RAKA RAY: Yes, it's not new to you. And one of these questions is really the question of the responsibility of the U.S. to the Iraqi people. And some of--and some people have asked it in terms of pulling out or not. And some people are simply asking: "What is the responsibility?"

ARUNDHATI ROY: The responsibility is to pull out and pay reparations, you know.

[Applause]

[Laughter]

RAKA RAY: Okay. Another set of questions is about dissent and it's sort of something like again multipart question. So, one set of questions asks, how are we--how are dissenters to undercut the military corporate complex. It seems so impossible. Another set says, how do dissenters or how do people who think like you and like many people in this room engage if not the corporate military complex, but really get the U.N. and other institutions like U.N. to engage seriously with them. And finally, should people who are the dissenters today seek to move to the center with their dissent.

ARUNDHATI ROY: To the right. [Laughter] No.

RAKA RAY: To capture the center I think is what--

ARUNDHATI ROY: Well, you know, I believe that--I mean you take the case of President Lula of Brazil or take the case of Mandela of South Africa. What happened to them? You know, as soon as they--when they were in opposition they were giants. When they crossed over and became heads of state, they at once were victim to a kind of threat, which is the threat of capital flight which made them bow down to the newly brewed project, you know, almost before they were asked. And the point is that the amazing series of struggle don't help to dent the corporate cartel. You have to understand that. It's not about being a nice person. It's how the machine works which is why it's dangerous even though I know it's--I know it's easy, it's dangerous to just make George Bush into too much of a joke because it's not--

[Applause]

It's not about a stupid man and a clever man or the bad complexion and someone with better hair. You know, it's how does this machine work, how do you understand how this machine works. And so I don't think that personally the issue is how do you keep power on a short leash? You know, that is the issue.

[Applause]

How does the public force the state to really do its bidding 'cause they are servants, they are not kings, you know.

[Applause]

And how do we ensure that? By being as difficult, as troublesome as we possibly can. That's the thing, you know.

[Applause]

And that doesn't mean that we just sort of vaguely wonder onto this here. I mean it takes a serious amount of organization. It takes a serious amount of work, you know, to actually be a formidable dissenting public. But I don't think that we can keep changing into the state because it isn't about anybody's amazing personality, the whole thing. It's about how power works and how do you make public power work. That's the important question. And as to how do you actually specifically target the military industrial complex, I think, I hope they let me out at the airport.

[Laughter]

'Cause if I have to go to jail I'd rather go to jail in India but--[laughter]

[Applause]

But I think, I think it really is time. And it's not that hard to do.

We can even go alphabetically and decide who these companies are. We don't have to do all of them, you know, but so many of them who are in Iraq, you know, have also been in Bolivia, had also with Enron in India, are also in South Africa privatizing the water. So, the interesting thing about Iraq is they're engaging the forces of empire, in a way because of Iraq, other countries, you know, attack because they are engaging the army of empire there. And these corporations that are profiting and raping Iraq are also hard at work in many of our countries that gives us a foothold, you know. So, in a way, it's a perfect scenario that of course that has incredible military power but the economic outpost are vulnerable and open to Iraq, and open to boycott, and open to--and we can't take all of them on together, but certainly we can pick them off, you know.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: Okay, two specific questions about India, the first I'm going to read out. Would you comment on Thomas Friedman's thesis and forthcoming book that India represents the model of modernizing and transformation that should be emulated by Palestine, Iraq--

[Laughter]

And other underdeveloped countries.

ARUNDHATI ROY: You mean work in a call center instead of being a suicide bomber?

[Laughter]

I don't know.

[Laughter]

It's--I mean, you know, it's corny because what is happening in Palestine and what is happening in the outskirts of Delhi are two different political issues, so how can you compare them, you know. If America was occupied, would Thomas Friedman be working in a call center?

[Laughter]

I don't know, you know. So, it's hard to compare those two struggles, but I think I've already answered the call center, you know, and obviously, you know, the fact is--the fact to understand about corporate globalization is that it isn't just increasing the rift between rich countries and poor countries, but between rich people and poor people. You know, within America, like we say that--

[Applause]

You know, what is the project that in which rich Western countries in Europe and America which pay their farmers one billion dollars a day in subsidies are asking poor countries like India to cut subsidies, but that one billion dollars a day, if you look at how it's broken down, it doesn't go to poor American farmers, it goes to the big corporate farmers.

[Applause]

It cuts in every direction and, you know, the same countries that were colonized for centuries and plundered for centuries are today paying back some--82 billion dollars a year in debt to the same countries that colonize them, you know. I mean today America taxes a garment made by a British tailor 20 times less than it taxes a garment made by someone in Bangladesh. These systems are being entrenched. And of course, people are going to say, oh it's very nice for us and why don't you go and work in a call center and be well-behaved, you know.

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: The second India question was how the common citizen in India reacts to your brilliant insights which are amazingly well-received here.

[Laughter]

ARUNDHATI ROY: Well, interestingly enough, I don't know what you mean by common Indian citizen, but in India, my writing is actually translated into many, many languages and, you know, it's published in little pamphlets in little villages, and you know, it's quite widely read by the non-English speaking elite. And when I wrote "The God of Small Things", I was in some ways, you know, even people who hadn't read the book, sort of the fairy princes who has, you know, brought national pride. I was part of that national pride parade. But when I started writing the political stuff, I was quickly disowned by the middle class. And so now I face quite a lot of hostility from like in the national press and quite a different world in the local and regional press, you know. So, and I think it's also often, you know, even when people, you know, one has to understand that being a writer in a country where so many people can't read or write is also strange thing. But you are seen because there are very, I think very few people who will say, I know, I mean, a lot of you are academics, but you know, the fact is that sometimes you have to say with no caveat, "I'm on your side."

[Applause]

And sometimes you have to be vulgar about it, and I'm quite vulgar about it, you know. So, I think, I hope that answers that question.

RAKA RAY: I've been asked to announce that The Hugo Chavez has just won the election.

[Applause]

ARUNDHATI ROY: Great.

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: Okay. A lot of questions actually ask you for solutions. So, here's one of them. Well, one is an opinion, the other is yeah--okay. What do you think of the strategy of boycott and economic divestment

from Israel and if you think it's a good strategy, how can we strategize to effectively organize divestment from Israel?

ARUNDHATI ROY: Well, I mean, you know, I don't know how this country works to advise you about how exactly you can do that, you know, but obviously, the amount of military aid and political aid and subsidies and all that that goes to Israel is just--I think once worked it out, it was like 10 times the average per capita income in India or something, or more even. So, you know, obviously, I think that that should be addressed but how exactly you go about it, I really can't. I mean I'm really not qualified to say, I'm sorry.

RAKA RAY: There's a set of questions about really affecting mass media and changing mass media.

ARUNDHATI ROY: See, I think, you know, that is very important issue especially in America, you know. It's very difficult for some of us who haven't lived here, who can't actually believe the extent to which the propaganda machine works.

[Applause]

It's like, I keep having to kind of shake my head really, you know, because if you look at--I mean obviously now, my experience is in India, that's where I grew up, that's what I know, and there isn't, you know, it's not as though the mainstream corporate media in India is not equally propaganda-ist but the differences that the people are not, you know. People are so anarchic. People are so--I mean, just the fact that you can't get to them also means that you can't indoctrinate them, you know.

[Laughter]

So, and then I was thinking, do we waste too much time trying to alter the mainstream media because I don't think it's--I think it's a mistake to think that the mainstream media supports the neoliberal project, it is the neoliberal project.

[Laughter]

So, it's like saying, you know, should we--I mean it is one of the main institutions that neoliberalism and this kind of democracy masquerading, I mean neoliberalism masquerading democracy depends on. So, I think the important thing to do is to contextualize it, to expose it for the Bodrum Bulletin that it is, you know. To use its energy against itself, you know, which is the fact that when you read what you read, you just laugh, you know. You say, look what they're saying--

[Laughter]

And to look elsewhere. You know, we--all of us read and write to impress very avidly 'cause we know it's almost like there's a cricketer in India, an Indian team sometime ago, who for some reason, I don't know why, he just--everybody hated him, you know. So, when he batted well people would used to go into his house, when he batted really badly, people just stoned his house. You know, you just learn to read the scores depending on the condition of his windowpanes, you know. [Laughter] So, you--I think, you know,

we got to learn to decode the mainstream press and use its energy against itself. You know, like adbusting. You go to read what it says and then understand what it means, you know. And--I mean. Sorry, that was one part of it. The other part of it is you've got to encourage some fantastic independent media that you have in this country, I mean, you have--

[Applause]

You have democracy now. You have--

[Applause]

And you just have to listen to what they are saying instead of what the corp of media says. It's quite simple in a way.

[Laughter]

RAKA RAY: Okay. Now, we have three questions about you.

ARUNDHATI ROY: About me.

RAKA RAY: The first is well, how do you stay informed about globalization and what gives you the sustenance and the inspiration for creating a better world. The second is what will--when will we read your next work of fiction, and the third is about the film DAM/AGE. The question says, in the film DAM/AGE, I noticed that you had a copy of John Berger's selected essays in your book bag. Has Mr. Berger's writing influenced your writing? And I should say at this point that tomorrow at 8:30, we are in fact going to show the film DAM/AGE here.

ARUNDHATI ROY: And the filmmaker is here.

RAKA RAY: And the filmmaker is here

[Applause]

I'll figure out exactly where. You can figure it out, it's in the program. [Laughter]

ARUNDHATI ROY: DAM/AGE. It's--well, in 2002, I was accused of criminal contempt of court by the Supreme Court of India for--I mean mainly because of my critic of court judgments and so on about the dam. But the actual complaint was filed by some thugs who said that I had tried to kill them outside the gates of the Supreme Court. [Laughter] And so I, you know, initially refused to get a lawyer and responded to the court myself because this whole court thing, I don't know if it's the same here, but in India, you know, every activist is just entwined in legal cases and legal gobbledegook and you can't understand even if you speak English what those affidavits mean. And so I just said I'm going to, you know, reply myself. And when I replied, they kind of got really angry and I faced prison centers. And I wasn't sure like how long they would sentence me for. And so a film was made, you know, in the run up to that trial because I thought that if I went to jail for sometime, I would like, you know, people to know what I felt about it and thought about it and why and so on. As it turned out, they sentenced me to one

day in prison and a fine of something, you know. So, I was thinking of asking them whether I could pay in advance on the fine so that I could keep insulting them for some more. [Laughter] Yeah. So that's the film. DAM/AGE is about that whole trial and so on. I mean, honestly, the fact is that it's a very serious thing this contempt of court in India because the Supreme Court today micromanages our lives. It decides where the dam should be built, whether the privatization is good, what should be in the history books, the garbage should be cleaned once a day or three times a day. You know, every decision is taken by the court because we have this contempt of court law who says that you can't criticize the court. So, it's like this flow trap. All the decisions flow into the court and then you just have to shut up because it's a court order. You know, so I was trying to make a point that you cannot have an undemocratic institution in a democracy. You have to scrap the Contempt of Court Act, at least this part of the act which says that you can't criticize the court. And so even though they actually sentence me only for a day, the fact is that the trial lasted for a period of over a year and the message that went out to journalists especially was that if you criticize the court, you will be held up in a criminal court. You will have to hire exorbitant criminal lawyers. You will lose your job. You could go to jail, so the best thing is to keep quiet, you know. So, it was a--I mean even though eventually, you know, obviously the mainstream press sort of try to make it sound like, "Oh, here's this cheeky woman who's at it again." You know, but actually it's a very serious issue. This--and it's really about gagging a whole people and not allowing them to critic or comment on the most powerful institution in the country today.

RAKA RAY: Did you answer all the questions?

ARUNDHATI ROY: Oh, oh. I've forgotten them.

RAKA RAY: About your next work of fiction and John Berger.

ARUNDHATI ROY: How do I keep up with what's happening? Well, you know. It's a strange combination of obviously reading and stuff, but also just traveling around and talking to people. And like recently, meaning just two weeks ago, I just witnessed one of the most extraordinary things I've seen in my life, which was one of the dams being built on the Narmada is called the Indira Sagar Dam. You know, the Narmada is a very long 180 km long river, so the movement contralaterally spanned all the dams. They're building 3,000 dams on this river of which some four to five big mega dams. So, this Narmada Sagar had been built and there wasn't really a resistance movement there, you know. And suddenly without warning like the monsoons were coming and a month before the monsoon, they were telling people, you know, that they had to leave. And there's a big city, not a city, well, a little town called Harsud about 20,000 people. And they were just--it was incredible, you know, what was done to them. They were given notices to leave, the people didn't. So, the government was scared the water would rise, there would be an emergency. So, had the police and horses and staging this flag marches, and paying people small amounts of money and saying "If you don't demolish your own house by tomorrow,

you won't even get this." So, overnight, this city was demolished by its own people. You know when I went there, I've never seen anything like that. You know, when you go in you think, "Oh, there's been an earthquake or something" and then you just realize that people are hammering at their own houses, breaking their own town. And the supposed resettlement site more or less doesn't exist. You know, I went there too. There was just nothing there. And of course, the government was lying to the press about how they had so many facilities and et cetera was a complete lie. And--but to see a new stage in something happening, which wasn't that the police are demolishing, it isn't that you're being force to move, but you're being forced to do it to yourself, you know. It was just absolutely chilling to watch it. And you know, this kind of things really hunt you because that's what's happening in the world today, you know, that people are being forced to brutalized themselves which is somehow even more brutal than being brutalized, you know. It's like in the call centers, you humiliate yourself because you are being paid, and then they say, but isn't it better that you are being paid than you had nothing, you know. But that's not the choice that human being should be faced with. It's like saying--

[Applause]

RAKA RAY: One last question. How do you view the differences or similarities and how do you effectively work against an empire from the seat of empire rather than from the colonies?

ARUNDHATI ROY: Well, I think that, you know, this I have actually written about the last time I spoke in America because I must say this, I know that very often I'm called anti-American and I am not, you know.

[Laughter]

Because I actually have a deep and abiding respect for the kind of dissent that there is in this country, you know, and--

[Applause]

And I do--and I do believe--I do believe that the only thing that is stronger than the American government is the American people. And--

[Applause]

And I don't believe that there is even an iota less humanity in you than there is in any of us anywhere else, but you leave in the palace grounds, so you have the power to change more than we do, you know. So, I really think you must cease the time, you know. But it is a very, very important role that you play in the world today and a very huge responsibility rests on your shoulders.