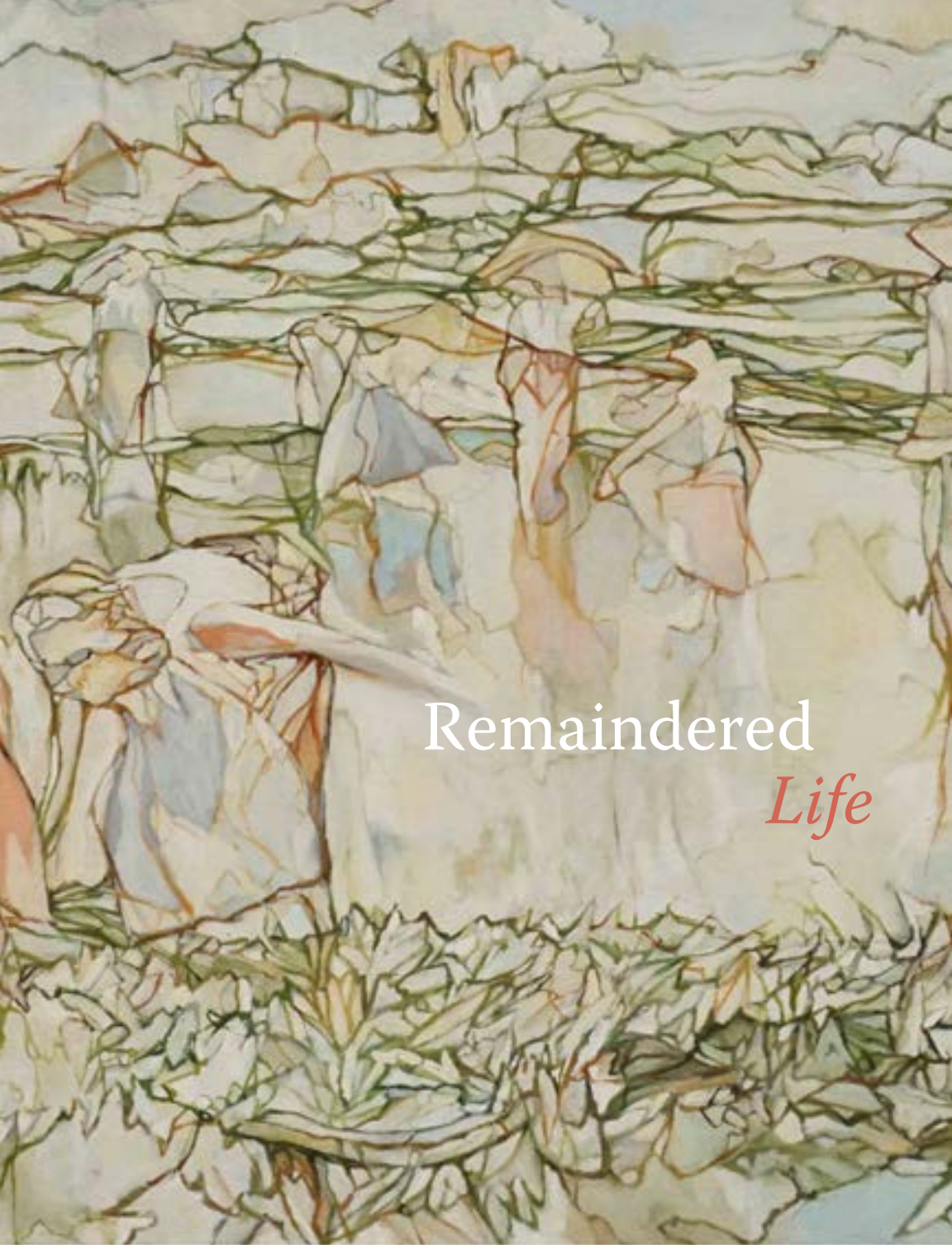




Remaindered
Life

NEFERTI X. M. TADIAR

Remaindered *Life*

BUY

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Remaindered Life is an extended meditation on disposability and survival in the world we live in today. It presents an analytical and political tale—a theoretical fiction—about our global present. It casts this moment as the aftermath and perdurance of decolonization, those processes and practices of quotidian as well as formal, organized social struggles among the colonized to live nevertheless and otherwise—beyond the constricted fates that Western European-American colonialism’s transfiguration into a dominant global mode of life continues to impose. Even as it is now perched on a precipice, seemingly stilled by a global pandemic, this moment we suffer and strive to live through continues to be an era of relentless war waged by the assumed and would-be inheritors of colonialism’s bequest—valued life—to retain, regain, or arrogate the rights to its enjoyments. It is an era of relentless expropriation of life, seeing not only to the upholding of valued life as a universal social ideal but also to its manufacture as the central object-medium of contemporary capitalist production, the MacGuffin, the lure-fetish, the commodity capital, of strategies of accumulation and aggrandizement, whose real end and present yield is more than enough riches and powers to command and consume all of earth and its futures.

In this telling, forms of living and survival among the dispossessed are certainly the conditions of possibility of these riches and powers, the “life” resources placed at their disposal. But they are more than this, more than life stolen, destroyed, consumed, expended. Creatively persistent and adaptive practices of sociality, which for so many peoples are the means and forms of their living, often indissociable from the very meaning and aim of their own personal “lives,” are—as much as the nonhuman natural world—*engines* of life-making and life organization that are made to serve as machines of production for capital, which capital neither creates nor pays for yet utilizes and depends upon for its own exponential growth and gain. But in acting beyond the role designated for them within this imperial relation—that is, beyond their role as the enabling milieu of proper human agency and achievement—the

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descendants and kin of “the damned of the earth” are turned into the instigators of punitive, disciplining wars against them.

Decolonization, our constant and historical struggle to live against and beyond the bounds set by an imperial, racial capitalist order, is thus made into the *casus belli* of relentless campaigns and programs of ruthless, insidious violence. Aimed at reproducing disposable captive life as material, instrument, collateral, and currency for the securitized production of valued life, these campaigns and programs—inflicting diminishment, pain, injury, and death—comprise what I refer to in this book as “the war to be human,” a revanchist war and global enterprise that reinstalls the tenets of colonial sex-gender and race orders as codes for the organization and continuous parsing of life-times between value and waste in what appears to be a new global political economy of life.

Remaindered Life thus retells the story of the global capitalist present that is often told as the story of capitalist restructuring in response to workers’ struggles in the Global North, with the resulting innovations of capitalist exploitation and value production spreading to the Global South. It recasts the global present as instead the aftermath and continuing effects of unfinished movements of decolonization against an extant imperial relation of dispossession that serves up enabling milieus for the labor-capital relation. Even as it might be relegated to no more than a supplementary fix in moments of capital crisis (a political-economic solution to systemic crisis), imperialism is in fact no less than a systemic dispossessive relation to the living and the life-making capacities of the colonized that operates in the debased service of the reproduction of capital in all its forms. Pressed to the limits posed by imperial dispossession at the “outer” edges of formal, proper capitalism (and therefore also within the interstitial peripheries of the most advanced capitalist social formations), the decolonizing struggles of the colonized—our striving and our strife—draw on and generate unconquered forces and resources of living, becoming in turn the object of new and continuing wars to subdue and subsume them under the global, racial capitalist order. Here in places where circumscribed and proscribed social being shores up the channels of capitalist flows, the inventive, adaptive practices of living by people of no account have propelled global forms of innovation, growth, and development that they are not meant to share—that, on the contrary, will see to their repeated privation and expiation. Here we find, for example, the elaboration of dynamic forms of life-time trading, value-extractive “happenings,” variable service commodities: highly liquid forms of petty enterprise and livelihood on the part of people with little to no property, making means of life (money, food, help) out of means of life (bodies, time, so-

ciality), informal and illicit economic practices that will come to figure more centrally in postindustrial capitalist modes of production, particularly in the capitalization of mediatic connectivity and the monetized expenditure of people's life-times, two features of the contemporary global order of derivative finance and permanent, counterinsurgent war.

This book is therefore also a theoretical account of imperialism as a specific relation of reproduction of contemporary global capital and an argument for the tremendous role played by the social reproduction of surplus life, which imperialism secures, in the accumulation of stratospheric global wealth and power. It is also an account of the immeasurable role of this living that is precisely the power and capacity, the predicament and effort, the pain and joy, of life making and "becoming-human"—the status, condition, and work of disposable life that is the very basis of "global life."

In this book, I try to provide a conceptual vocabulary and a panorama of figures for rethinking the dynamics of contemporary global capitalism in these terms, most centrally, in terms of a notion of "life-times" that would encompass a broader range of social reproduction beyond the recognized value-producing "life as labor" of the socialized workers of post-Fordism, and that would include the social reproduction of disposable populations who are marked by global structures of racism and heterosexism for fates of diminished and minimized life. Beyond a critique of the state of disposability that particular social groups—identified by race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and religion—are structurally made to occupy, this is a theoretical account of the overlooked value-productivity *and* superfluous remainder of the life-making capacities of those who live such disposable life-times in their survival and livelihood. It is an account of life-times of disposability not merely as hidden labor but as an array of forces and resources of living that remain in most accounts of contemporary globality theoretically and politically diminished, if not altogether dismissed.

The analytical and political tale I tell is a feminist story long understood and told by the colonized, especially those harnessed by means of punishing exactions for sex-gendered reproductive labors put to the furtherance of capital life, who are at the same time left to see to the social reproduction and care of their own shared life of other belonging. It is a tale of indictment and lament, a record of the living we endure and abet, suffer and invent, in a time of war, even as we know quite well that *how* we live is not exhausted by the world we make and make possible nor by the interbraided political and economic antagonisms (between forces of the *already human* and forces of the *becoming-human*, between valued and disposable life) that I argue shape and

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constrict the everyday decisions and conditions comprising our lives. In this way, it is a tale told not *about* but rather *from* the side of remaindered life, the activity and sociality of living that is not exhausted in the expenditure of the life-times of others—leftover practices and forms of living that remain superfluous to the production of valued, and even of disposable life.

Remaindered life is not therefore simply an object to be found, identified, exemplified. What we are able to discern as remaindered life is as much the effect and expression of a mode of attention and method of interpretation as it is the by-product and excess of theoretical and material subsumption—life that escapes valorization. This is a heuristic that emerges out of contemporary political, artistic, and scholarly efforts to explore experiences that elude the codes of political and economic value that structure representation more generally. In the wake of successions of perceived political failures of socialist, Third World, nationalist, racial, and sexual liberation movements from the 1950s to the 1970s, and of urban democracy movements from the 1980s to the 2000s, diasporic and postcolonial filmmakers and writers as well as visual artists have grappled with the legacies of these failures and the unfinished or continuing histories of social struggle that permeate present, everyday life in ways yet to be reckoned with. They have endeavored in various ways to revise these continuing pasts in their intimate renderings of their own presents and the ambient and direct pressures limiting and shaping people's life efforts and desires (including the pressures of the global market that they, as artists, must also navigate and reflect upon). In the face of gross and insidious forces draining as well as demolishing people's lives in the aftermath of the freedom struggles of an earlier era, what remains—as inordinate excess, as untimely persistence, as unrecognizable potential—becomes an unrelenting question.

Remaindered life is thus also posed as an aesthetic problem and intellectual preoccupation of Global South artists attuned to the paradoxes of living in the contemporary world for those who must bear the burdens of its unresolved because inadmissible pasts. Such paradoxes are characteristic of a fully globalized world, which elaborates and intensifies old and new forms of unsettlement, prohibition, and dispossession at the same time that it beckons and welcomes an unprecedented level of participation and incorporation of those whom an earlier order had deemed not yet fully human. This book sees remaindered life as a political heuristic and aesthetic challenge that has arisen out of this very moment when the politics of a prior moment of decolonization confronts its insurmountable impasse. In my own analytical register, remaindered life approximates and emulates the practices of living

it seeks to render, remember, and redraw into another way of viewing and making the world (into all the ways we might remake the world).

How to Read This Book

Remaindered Life comprises five extended parts, each dwelling on a major theme or situation and foregrounding a set of conceptual figures and interpretive codes for understanding the phenomena of disposability and surplus life-making in particular contemporary sociohistorical contexts. Each part can be read independently of the others, as an exploration of one aspect of a larger global situation. Together, the five parts are intended to provide a layered picture of connections across the particular phenomena and social groups they cite or describe—human smugglers on the US-Mexico border, refugee detention centers in Australia, slum dwellers in Metro Manila, urban migrant workers in China, former US military bases converted into microcities (which I call city emulants) and special economic zones in the Philippines, “third country nationals” working on offshored US military bases in West Asia, overseas Filipino contract workers in the domestic and seafaring industries, the US prison and punishment industry, Duterte’s “war on drugs,” extrajudicial killings in the Philippines, and feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. These connections are also to be thought as suggesting submerged political lineages shared across given social groups and formations, some of which I attempt to trace but most of which are yet to be uncovered, grasped, or further understood as part of the making and living of our worlds. These too might be considered traces of remaindered life.

Part I, “In a Time of War” (chapters 1–3), is a panoramic exposition of the political antagonism between “the war to be human” and “becoming-human in a time of war” shaping our global situation. Drawing on select examples from diverse yet connected social contexts in the United States and the Philippines, from the late twentieth century to the present, I describe the way this revanchist war of punishment in the aftermath of decolonization is made into a global enterprise, incorporating reproduction into global value-production through a strategy of the active wasting of life. I describe the imperial conscription of the modes of living and survival of wasted life as enabling milieus for the productive life of capital, arguing for the role of unreckoned forces of sociality among the becoming-human as unaccounted machines of production in a new political economy of life. And I argue for the importance of both the subsumption of reproduction and the reproduction that exceeds

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this subsumption for understanding our present moment. As an excess of reproductive activity beyond the necessary reproduction of disposable life, remaindered life is broached as a place and view from which we might reimagine and remake the world.

Part I draws out the broadest outlines of the relations and tendencies defining what I understand to be our global situation. It thus serves as an overview of many of the conceptual themes and analytical propositions animating the other parts, acting as a kind of theoretical overture for the rest of the book. But as such it can be read either before or after the other parts, which dwell longer and more closely on concrete contexts for understanding the relations and tendencies it identifies.

Part II, “Life-Times” (chapters 4–6), focuses on the notion of *life-times* as a way of understanding the vital role of redundant or excess populations (“idled,” “abandoned,” and “warehoused” in late liberal societies, targeted for injury and elimination in policing wars or for “rescue” in humanitarian campaigns), in the order of global capitalism today. Beginning with a critique of the notion of “life as labor” in the new political economy of life, it argues for a distinction between life-times of value and life-times of waste as crucial to understanding another side of capitalist production, which centers not so much the productive activity of life but its expenditure. It proposes how we might attend to other life-times that remain unabsorbed by such a theoretical and material subsumption of social reproduction within global capitalism by way of exploring fate-playing practices among Filipino and Filipina overseas workers and slum dwellers.

This part goes on to argue for a related distinction between different forms of money (money as capital vs. money as exchange) for understanding another side of the changes in rationality and subjectivity that are attributed to and defined by the project of neoliberalism. In contrast to the entrepreneurial or investor model of the self through which neoliberal subjects in the Global North are enjoined to imagine themselves (as capital subjects), surplus populations in the Global South are treated as a pool of disposable life-times that can serve as liquid reserves (soft currency) for speculative maneuvers of the state. The latter are produced as such through the state’s instrumental use and control of land. I then turn to the structuring of life-times of disposability and the life-times of survival of surplus peoples as they are rendered in films responsive to the specific neoliberal contexts of China and the Philippines (Jia Zhang-ke, Brillante Mendoza) as a way of understanding remaindered ways of living, beneath the threshold of subjects centered in Global North critiques of neoliberalism.

Part III, “Globopolis” (chapter 7), explores the defining tendencies of urban expansion in an emergent global platform economy. Largely attending to urbanist developments in Metro Manila (but also attentive to connected developments in other globalist metropolises), I describe the projects of construction of channels and platforms to host the value-productive life activity and movements of globopolitical urban life, a fractal enterprise whose animating program involves the mediatization of human capacities in technologized forms of servitude. Such mediatized capacities can be understood as comprising a kind of vital infrastructure, demonstrating in the contemporary moment the role of servitude or *serviceable life* as life-time-saving and life-time-producing machines of production in capitalist industries organized around activity and connection rather than around the manufacture of goods. I highlight the figurative codes of city everywhere, exemplified in the incorporation of the logic of war into the metropolitanist enterprise, not only in urban platforms’ provision of capitalist freedoms (liberated movement, total access) as exemptions from servitude and punishment but also through the active production and use of the liquidity of disenfranchised people’s lives to lubricate, accommodate, and enhance valued life. In this chapter, I discuss the distinction and relation between vital infrastructure and vital platforms, organized and organizing programs of livelihood and life-making through which humans function as media for other humans. By understanding the vitality of human practices of living in terms of infrastructure and platforms, I seek to underscore the other kinds of human life (ghostly only to the already human) animating the machines and machinic “base” of global metropolitan life.

Part IV, “Dead Exchanges” (chapters 8–10), foregrounds two related powers that the war to be human claims. Chapter 8 dwells on the powers of defending freedom by depicting the varying fields of exchange through which freedom and democracy operate as code-scripts in the making of the global infrastructure of capital. I use the case of Philippine democracy-making from its founding in US colonialism to its deployment in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods to demonstrate the role of these code-scripts in the making and maintenance of US security architecture, particularly in the Asia-Pacific and West Asia. I then turn to a shift in governmentality and political economy, a separating off and raising to another (derivative or more highly abstracted) level of exchange, whereby these code-scripts operate not simply as ideological signs but as skeuomorphs (image-metaphors) serving as sign-command functions in an integrated sovereign capitalist platform system. It is under this “new” global dispensation of state power and capitalist accumulation that the anti-liberal, authoritarian regime of the Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte can

be understood as continuous with the liberalism it opposes. In chapter 9, I discuss this higher, financialized political order under which Duterte's war on drugs exemplifies the logic of and aspirations to powers of expending life, a derivative enterprise that creates and trades on the absolute expendability of the lives of the urban poor. Understanding the rise of Duterte as the emergence of an insurgent urbanist national political platform, I demonstrate the intertwining of disposability and survival through the relationship between the political-police machine undertaking extrajudicial killings as a derivative enterprise and the kin networks of the poor that they prey upon. Finally (chapter 10), I discuss the struggle of a coalition of artists (RESBAK) to resist this authoritarian command and impunity in the wasting of lives, and the live politics of their word- and image-making against the fatal signifying practices of the Duterte regime and against the centrality of waste in the entwined valorizing capitalist enterprises of global art and war.

Part V, "By the Waysides" (chapters 11–12), dwells on the perceptual and sensorial forms that a few artists offer for attending to the excess of survival over disposability. I try to delineate a method of reading that follows one effort to represent and elude the violence of capitalist value-making exemplified in the work of a particular artist, Lyra Garcellano. In the work of Garcellano as well as that of a few Global South filmmakers (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Tsai Ming-liang) I see examples of a mode of attention and practice of time attuned to, and indeed, yielding to remaindered life—a kind of biding one's own life-times of refuse, a form of idling that makes, rather than kills, time, a remaking of the political landscape of one's expulsion into a place of other belonging. This political-aesthetic heuristic allows us to look more closely at the landscape by the wayside of capital's urbanizing pathways and make out another outcome and horizon for remaindered life. Here in the wasteland is to be found the time of expectation for a thorough change in the global order, for that flourishing of life that we might expect upon capitalism's end.

The three chapters in part I—corresponding to value, waste, remainder—prefigure a structure and a method that are repeated at different scales within the parts and across the book. They trace a movement of thinking that tends, with a little more weight and amplitude as the book progresses, toward the last of those terms. The movement at any point is itself, however, never simply linear (as in a three-step procedure), for each of the terms is a moment that implies the others. This is a movement of thought that I believe is both immanent and excessive to the movements comprising global capital. It exemplifies my own method of following while also departing from the various pathways through which the life-times of people are subsumed in the machi-

nations of capitalist accumulation yet are never quite fully consumed or exhausted, even at that most painful and seemingly final point of death.

Interspersed within the main parts are three detours or eddies. “Interregnum” follows the work of the artist, filmmaker, and activist Kiri Dalena as she strives to make art respond to and help undo the spectacular violence of the ongoing wars of the Philippine state against its own people. “Excursus” reflects on the social conditions and genealogies of contemporary global servitude, its work as vital infrastructure for the global life economy, and its role as a hinge, or gate, between valued life and absolutely expendable life. “Thresholds” dwells on the liminality of the urban poor produced by an urban ideal of life worth living and the role of humanizing stories in maintaining a limit on our perception of the vitality of people’s life-making. Each of these interstitial chapters—or “excursions”—is a lingering over the life-times of people casually placed at the disposal of power, value, and humanity.

This book does not set out to make a case about our contemporary reality through the presentation of new evidential material but rather intends, by means of synthesis and articulation of much radical decolonizing critique, to provide a way of seeing and interpreting abundant empirical cases and reports across diverse contexts, and to offer a conceptual vocabulary and syntax for understanding them and their connections to one another in order to mount a perspective and narrative of our global moment from the side of the historical experiences of the becoming-human. It is not an explanation of the world but an interpretation of its workings from the side of remaindered life. In this writing, I try to make connections among the political expressions and social experiences and senses of survival of peoples with whom I feel the people I belong to are deeply tied, even if they are not already affectively bonded. It is my attempt to link the historical experiences of the becoming-human in diverse contexts—peoples who are my interlocutors and inspiration, their members my intimates and associates, those who love with me and mine, those who are political kin, relations in colonialism, even as we might find ourselves opponents, rivals, enemies, masters, and servants to one another in a world where that is what peoples are made to be. My effort to provide serviceable connections, through arguments and examples, proper routes of understanding and occasional meanderings, will aid, I hope, in conjuring or presencing immanent and possible relations of another kind. In this tale, Filipinos are a transnational zone of social life that figures in all the categories of life worth living and life worth expending. They are also the in-between, “wild cards” in the political antagonism between the war to be human and the becoming-human in a time of war, whose diasporic and local practices of

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living form the tissue of this tale and bear the heart of my own story. In this way, they are my case and medium for the remnants of a collective project, a nation and a people both exploded and never one to begin with, creatively persisting and revising our own ways of being human into vital platforms. In us, I also see the media and milieu of another mode of life.

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This book was written with the kindness, support, and brilliance of many people. Its inception was a new global war declared in 2001, with many of its central ideas as well as structures of feeling issuing from my efforts since then to understand this long period of unceasing military and police campaigns against peoples in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Iraq, Palestine, the United States, Mexico, and too many other places, even as movements everywhere rose in the names of peoples and lands and lives being depleted and taken outright for powers of a rapaciousness the world is hard-pressed to truly see.

This was not the book I meant to write after finally publishing *Things Fall Away*. World events overpowered whatever writing I had planned to follow that last book, commandeering my writing attention in ways that are manifest in this book before you. I wrote to mark moments of witnessing the vile atrocities of states toward countless peoples considered enemies and threats to the people they defined as their own, as proper to them, as well as the movements that have simmered and erupted, rising against the violence of these states and the capitalist powers they defend and arrogate to themselves. Though some of this writing took the form of talks and teach-ins not included in this book, I thank the people and organizations who invited me to think and feel with them during these years, providing the occasions for my reflections on our global situation, which have made their way into this book. Thank you to members of the Research Cluster for Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict, Incite! Women of Color against Violence, the Feminisms against War Group of the Institute for Advanced Feminist Research, and the Culture against War Committee, all at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Thank you especially to Anna Tsing, Lisa Rofel, Anjali Arondekar, Maylei Blackwell, Michelle Erai, Nadine Naber, Needra James, Nicole Santos, Terry Valen, Mariko Drew, Janine Lim, and Eden Jequinto for the galvanizing intellectual-political engagement in organizing events against the global war on terror, in particular. Thank you to Sarah Raymundo and Roland Tolentino of *CONTENT* (Congress of Teachers and Educators for Nationalism and Democracy), and to Sunaina Maira, Magid Shihade, and

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