# Hunting Specters

**Purges in the Communist Party of the Philippines**

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# Contents

'But tell me this first. Is it not dangerous to live by yourself in this wild mountain?'

'What is there to fear? The beasts, birds, trees, storms, and tempests — would you be afraid of them? There is nothing to fear in the night, in the dark heart of the night. But in the daytime, among men, there is the greatest fear of all'

'Why is that, *apo lacay*?'

'In the savage heart of man there dwells the greatest fear of all creation.'

'But man has a marvelous mind. He can think, analyze, break apart and put things together.' 'That is the seed of all living fears. The mind. The beasts in the jungle with their ferocious fangs are less dangerous than one man with a cultivated mind in a civilized city.'

Carlos Bulosan, *The power of the people* (Quezon City 1986).

# Introduction

In 1986 a popular uprising ended the rule of Ferdinand Marcos, who had been dictator of the Philippines since declaring Martial Law in 1972 (officially lifted in 1981). The final years of Marcos' rule and the first years of restored 'democracy' were a period of disorientation and fracture for the principal anti-Marcos force, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which by the early eighties claimed an armed force of about fifteen thousand, a similar number of political cadres and about a million supporters, spread over the country's countryside and cities.[1] During these years, CPP members tortured and killed hundreds of their own comrades.

The torture and killings were part of campaigns against suspected government spies in the underground party and its armed wing, the guerrilla force New People's Army (NPA). The intra-party violence was most intense in Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippine archipelago. Mindanao had become a CPP stronghold during the eighties but the purges there, roughly lasting from halfway 1985 to halfway 1986, dealt a heavy blow to the organization. A quarter century later, many questions are still unresolved.

This essay will examine explanations for the purges offered by survivors and political and academic commentators. More fundamental than the question who was guilty is the question why this process happened. Many of the explanations for the purges offered so far — such as 'paranoia' fostered by the conditions of underground armed struggle, the instrumental use of humans by an authoritarian, 'Leninist' organization or the use of accusations to resolve political conflicts — offer only parts of an explanation because they don't take the specific historical context of the CPP in Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines into consideration. The CPP was not an isolated bubble or only defined by its purported ideology, clean of outside influences. It was part of the development of Philippine society and the purges were a consequence of both internal and external developments.

This essay will try to locate the wave of purges as a part and a product of the historical development of the CPP. The interaction between the party and its social and political context needs to be considered. The structure and ideology of the CPP are important elements of an explanation of the purges but are not sufficient: the purges came at a time of intense political and social crisis in the Philippines, a crisis that also afflicted the party and its supporters. On August 21, 1983, Marcos' gunmen killed opposition leader Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino when he returned from exile in the United States. Before the Marcos dictatorship, Aquino had been a governor and a senator and he was the figurehead of the liberal opposition. The assassination caused an uproar and the Marcos regime, already weakened by the CPP-led 'National-Democratic' movement, started to decompose. Large parts of the hitherto politically passive urban middle-classes moved onto the political field. The regime was out of balance and nearing collapse. Trying to regain the upper-hand, Marcos announced in late 1985 that he would forward the presidential elections to 1986. The CPP, misreading the political situation and underestimating the anti-dictatorship sentiment in the country, declared a boycott of the elections but the majority of the anti-Marcos camp rallied behind presidential candidate Corazon 'Cory' Aquino, widow of Benigno Aquino. The massive fraud that declared Marcos the official winner was transparent and too few were willing too support him any longer with even parts of the American government, long a supporter of Marcos, now backing Cory Aquino. Finally, on the 22 second of February 1986 a failed military coup sparked the 'People's Power' mass uprising in Manila that forced Marcos to flee the country.

This tumultuous sequence of events, taking place while the purges were going on, threw the CPP off balance. A surge of excitement went through the CPP as it expected the day the autocrat would fall to come quickly but almost simultaneously, debate broke out in the party on how to proceed in the changing circumstances. The party stuck to its strategy of boycotting the fraudulent elections and accumulating forces for its rural based guerrilla, which was supposed to be the principal force in bringing down the government. But developments left the party isolated: its call for a boycott received little attention. The party didn't play a decisive part in the urban mass-protest against

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[1] Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and society in the Philippines* (Oxford 2005) 219.

Marcos in which middle-class opposition leaders were more prominent. In a few short months the CPP had gone from 'vanguard' of the anti-Marcos movement to society's 'rear-guard'.[2]

The second major part of an explanation is the nature of the party itself. People 'make their own history' but under 'given and inherited circumstances', as Marx wrote.[3] The CPP was the product of Philippine society that was going through a protracted crisis, a crisis that shaped the form of the revolutionary movement that sought to resolve it. The situation of the CPP in Mindanao was highly peculiar: in about five years, the party developed from a small ragtag band of hunted activists into a formidable force, leading a series of mini-uprisings and commanding an armed force that engaged the national army in pitched battles. The rapid growth of the party meant the introduction of many raw recruits who were unfamiliar with underground work and who were ill prepared to respond to changing circumstances. The Mindanaon CPP was highly successful but also unstable, exactly because of its rapid growth. This growth was linked to a crisis of Mindanaon society that weakened social ties and attracted a large number of people to a revolutionary movement.[4]

An examination of the CPP in Mindanao shows that it was far removed from the idea of the 'Marxist-Leninist' party it liked to project.[5] But the disconnection between theory and practice was not complete and claims of authority and the supposedly unique role of the party did influence its policies. To compare the differences between its Marxist-Leninist theory and its practice on the ground, both need to be examined.

Finally, any explanation that seeks to present one single cause for the purges will not do justice to the complex realities of the CPP and Philippine society in the mid-eighties. Schematically, the purges pose two main questions. The first is what started the purges, the second why the purges were so damaging. I argue the CPP was unable to overcome a number of difficulties that have plagued the Philippine Communist movement for decades and that have their roots in the social make-up of its social base and its ideology. The CPP's theory failed to prepare its supporters for the challenges of the acute crisis and near civil-war circumstances of the mid-eighties. These weaknesses made the party susceptible to a process of self-destruction.

To illustrate this, a discussion of the purges is followed by a historical sketch of Philippine Communism as a movement and of its ideology in which the development of three key-themes are highlighted: a reduction of political struggle to violent confrontations, the notion the party had a 'correct' and 'objective' view of reality and a gap between the movement's rank-and-file and its national leadership. Together, these conditions made the purges possible. Finally, I argue that the purges begun as a failed attempt of the party to adept to the changing political circumstances.

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[2] The description is from Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines 1968 — 1993. A story of its theory and practice* (Quezon City 2001) 224.

[3] Karl Marx, 'The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in: Idem, *Surveys from exile. Political writings, volume 2* (Middlesex 1973) 143 — 250, there 146.

[4] Patricio N. Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory: *Operasyong Kampanyang Ahos* and the tragedy of Mindanao communism' in: Idem, *Fellow traveller. Essays on Filipino communism* (Quezon City 2001) 153 — 193.

[5] Patricio N. Abinales, 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy' in: Rosanne Rutten, *Brokering a revolution. Cadres in a Philippine insurgency* (Quezon City 2008) 144 — 188.

# I. Self-mutilation of a movement

## 1.1 The 'purges'

Like for many other revolutionaries, Cecil's involvement with the movement began at a young age.[1] She became active as a courier for the movement when she was still in high-school, transporting secret notes or maybe a gun between *kasamas* — comrades. In 1981 she was assigned to the area of Mountain Banahaw, working as an organizer in the urban area of Batangas. There she met her husband, Mario, a former student-leader who like others had joined the NPA. Mario would later tell her that already in 1985 suspected 'Deep Penetration Agents' (DPA's), government agents who had penetrated the organization, were detained in the area.

Cecile got pregnant in 1986 and when she returned to her party collective after an assignment to another area, she found them 'deep into the process of screening possible spies in the movement'. A hunt for spies called 'Oplan (Operation Plan) Missing Link' (OPML) was in full swing. In early 1988 a military operation by the NPA in Biñan Laguna had gone wrong: the failure was considered mysterious and led to speculation about spies. The speculation grew wider and brought an old case back to the surface: in 1977 the whole regional party-committee had been wiped out by the government. The movement had never found out how this happened and after the failure in Biñan speculation that a connection between the two setbacks existed started to circulate.

A relatively junior cadre, Kenneth, once the Political Officer (PO) of a collective of students in an urban area, was given the task of forming a Task Force to find 'the missing link' between the two debacles. Robert Francis B.Garcia, one of the students in Kenneth's collective and another survivor of OPML, drew the following picture of him in his book about his ordeal, *To suffer thy comrades;* Kenneth thought of himself as an intellectual and had enjoyed the prestige he had in the eyes of the young revolutionaries as their 'PO'. He was only a middle-level cadre but ambitious: he saw leading the Task Force as his 'big break'.[2] Kenneth gathered a group of other junior party-cadres around him and together they started to arrest people directly involved with the failed operation in Biñan.

Suspects were interrogated but since this delivered no revelations, the Task Force resorted to torture: punching and kicking at first, hanging from the wrists and searing of the skin later. Under pain and duress, the suspects had no other way of ending their suffering than giving answers the interrogators wanted to hear. Victims made up false confessions and named other 'infiltrators', crating a domino-effect that led to more and more arrests.

In late '88 Cecil came under suspicion and was ordered to report to a guerrilla-camp. Considering herself a good soldier of the movement, she had never expected to become a suspect herself. Cecil was arrested and accused of being a spy — even the comrade who had recruited her into the movement assumed she was guilty, refusing to have anything to do with 'people like her'. Another suspect was Ka (short for *kasama*) Lala, a high ranking veteran who had been with the movement from almost its beginning. They and other suspects were chained and tortured. During torture, Cecile was forced to listen to recordings of her children's voices. She would get to see them and her husband if she confessed, she was told.

The torture drove Cecil to make up a confession about how she and Mario had been DPA's from the early eighties on. Much of her story came from her interrogators as Cecil second-guessed what they wanted to hear. A few days after Cecil's 'confession' Mario was brought in, also in chains. Mario and Cecil were kept apart but sometimes had a chance to see or hold each-other when guards made fun of the prisoners and forced them to dance together. Dozens of suspects were killed. Cecil and Mario were relatively lucky: they survived until the party leadership ordered a review process. All of the suspects alive got the chance to retract their testimonies and were released one by one.

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[1] The description of Cecil's experience has been taken from Robert Francis B.Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades. How the revolution decimated its own* (Manila 2001) 44 — 46.

[2] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades* 22.

Even before the mid-eighties, internal violence in the CPP was not unheard of. A purge in 1982 in Southern Tagalog, the south of the northern island of Luzon, named *Oplan Takipsilim* (Twilight) cost the lives of dozens of people, about two hundred more were arrested and tortured. Still earlier a purge in response to *Kadena de Amor*, an anti-insurgency drive of the Marcos regime, cost around 30 lives. According to a former leading member of the party, the earliest purge took place in 1980, on the islands of Samar and Leyte.[3]

Operation Missing Link, which almost cost the lives of Cecile and Mario, and an operation led by a special committee called 'Olympia' hunting for spies nation-wide, cost around a hundred lives and seem to be the last two instances of widespread 'purging' in the party.

All victims of the purges in the CPP were executed for the same reason: they were suspected of being infiltrators. Cecil's experience was typical for the fate of suspects: most of them were asked, under false pretenses, to report to a guerillabase in the countryside. Others were 'arrested' by NPA-fighters.[4] They were imprisoned in camps in the countryside and tortured to force them to confess. Suspects were assumed guilty, whether they confessed or not, and killed as punishment for their 'treason'. It seems only those were still alive when the leadership ordered an end to a purge survived.

The number of victims of operations like Olympia and OPML was far surpassed by that of a purge less than two years earlier on the island of Mindanao which cost hundreds of lives. In July 1985 members of the party's top leadership of the region, the Mindanao-commission (Mindacom), were in Manila to attend the tenth plenum of the party's Central Committee. To take care of daily affairs while they were away, the leadership appointed a 'caretaker commission' of three high-ranking cadres. This commission received reports military agents had infiltrated the party, its armed wing and its united front of underground organizations, the National Democratic Front (NDF). Afraid of the damage these agents could do, the caretaker group did not wait for the return of Mindacom but ordered an immediate hunt for the infiltrators. Even before the plenum ended, Mindacom met to evaluate this campaign and estimate the threat.[5]

Basing themselves on an evaluation of the purge in Southern Tagalog that deemed the operation a success, Mindacom gave the green light to proceed with an island-wide purge and put the party in Mindanao under a state of emergency. Named *Operasyon Kampanyang Ahos* (Operation Campaign Garlic) or 'Kahos', the operation began in Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon and rapidly spread. The name *ahos* was not chosen on accident: folktales said garlic was effective against vampire-like creatures, monsters in human form.[6] The party's 'Political Officers' in charge of the collectives members were organized in, received permission to use 'hard tactics' (an euphemism for torture) to obtain information. The PO's were given the role of judge, jury and executioner. Accused had no right of appeal. It was easy to come under suspicion: being named once in a 'confession' meant being placed under surveillance, being mentioned twice was ground for arrest.[7]

The hunt for the military agents escalated: investigative teams were sent north, to Cebu, and even to Manila to hunt down suspects. Rumors of comrades torturing and killing each-other began to spread as NPA camps were used as prisons and graveyards. Others saw prisoners coming in but not leaving and heard cries of pain. Afraid of being the next victim, disillusioned or both, many party-members and sympathizers left the movement. These departures, often unannounced and unexplained, fed new feelings of distrust in the movement. Distrust and suspicions grew to such proportions that one top cadre in the Southern Tagalog region concluded the whole movement was 'fake'. He

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[3] Authors interview with 'Harry' (15 — 09 — 2011). Harry, not his real name, joined the CPP in 1977 or 1978 and was a senior partymember in Mindanao during the purges. A few years later, he took part in negotiations with the government. He left the party in the nineties because of political differences.

[4] Authors interview with 'Harry' (15 — 04 — 2011).

[5] Two essays by Patricio N. Abinales specifically deal with the purge in Mindanao and provide an overall picture of the sequence of developments: Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory', Abinales, 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy'.

[6] Garlic was also thought to repel snakes, another term used for infiltrators. Yet another name for infiltrators was 'zombies', creatures that are also said to be repell by garlic.

[7] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

set up an operation to save the few cadres he still considered 'genuine' and to start anew. The plan was canceled after the supposed leader of the operation shot himself in the leg.[8]

Three months later, Mindacom ordered an end to Kahos. But before this, even representatives of the leadership had become suspect and it would take another six months, until April 1986, for Kahos to end completely. By that time, the killings had cost hundreds of lives. How many is uncertain: the total number of victims of Kahos probably exceeded 800. Harry, at the time a leading cadre in central Mindanao and involved in organizing the purge, estimates the total number of deaths was about 2000.[9]

Like assessments of earlier anti-infiltration drives, an assessment of Kahos by Mindacom initially concluded 'mistakes' had been made but that the operation as a whole had been a success. Only in the early nineties did the party adjust this assessment and declared Kahos, OPML and Olympia to be 'criminal'. Responsibility for the killing was attributed to party-members who by this time had developed political differences with the CPP and were expelled for deviating from the party-line. The pre-Kahos purges were ignored.[10]

The following figure contains information gathered by a Human Rights group set up by survivors of the purges: 'Peace Advocates for Truth, Healing and Justice' (PATH). The figure shows purges occurred throughout the eighties but that Kahos was exceptional for the number of victims it caused.

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[8] This episode is discussed in Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 41, 42. Harry claimed this person shot himself on purpose to escape from this task.

[9] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

[10] The 'official' CPP-view of Kahos, OPML and Olympia can be found in Armando Liwanag, 'Reaffirm our basic principles and rectify errors', *Kasarinlan*, 1 (1992) 96 — 157.

**Figure 1: 'anti-infiltration' campaigns/operations[11]**

| Campaign/operation | Year(s) | Areas | Implementation | Number of victims |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *'Kadena de Amor'[a]*<br>*Oplan Takipsilim* | 1981–82<br>1984 | Quezon-Bicol Zone Southern Quezon towns of Lopez, General Luna and Calauag | CPP-NPA-NDF<br>CPP-NPA-NDF | Around 30 dead<br>Around 30 dead |
| Operation Zombie/ Cleaning | 1983–84 | North-Central Mindanao region | Six Mindanao Regional Party Committees | Over 1500 arrested and tortured, over 800 killed |
| *Kampanyang Ahos* (Kahos) | July 1985–86 | Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon; Southern Mindanao: Davao City, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, part of Cotabato | (MRPC's): North Central, North Eastern, Southern, South East, Western, Far South. Later, de Central Visayas Regional Party Committee | Over 1500 arrested and tortured, over 800 killed |
| Oplan Missing Link (OPML) | 1988 | Southern Tagalog: Quezon Laguna, Cavite, Batangas | Southern Tagalog Regional Party Committee, NPA 'Melito Glor Command', Maria Lorena Barros Brigade, and Southern Tagalog Commission | 112 arrested and tortured, 66 killed |
| Olympia | 1988–89 | Based in Metro Manila, involved nation-wide organisations | Metro-Manila Rizal Regional Party Committee, Alex Boncayao Brigade, National Organization Commission, and National United Front Commission | 20 killed |
| Eastern Visayas | 1988–89 | Cebu, Leyte, Samar | CPP Regional Party Committees | ? |
| Western Visayas | 1985–89 | Aklan | Regional Party Committee | ? |
| Cagayan Valley Region | Early 80's — '89 | Cagayan Valley Region | Regional Party Commitee and Front Guerilla Units | 300 dead |
| Central Luzon operation | 1988 — 89 (?) | Bulacan (?) | | ? |

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[a] The same name as that of the government anti-insurgency campaign in the Southern-Tagalog region at the time. Sometimes spelled 'Cadena de Amor'.

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[11] Based on 'Peace Advocates for Truth, Healing and Justice. Research, Education and Communication Project Final Report', may 2006. Numbers are approximate minimums.

Many of the purges were linked because they were organized on the basis of assessments of earlier operations. The assessment of '*Oplan Takipsilim*' in Southern Tagalog played an important role in convincing the Mindanao leadership to implement Kahos. Kahos itself was a continuation and escalation of the earlier 'Operation Zombie' or 'Operation Cleaning'.The wide range of party-organizations involved in the purges and their geographical spread indicate they were not the result of individual decisions but of policies and ideas present in the CPP as a whole.

As far as I can judge, all the purges followed a similar pattern of accusations — torture — more accusations — more executions. Accused who survived were released when the party organized a review-process of the guilt of the suspects. After every purge, an assessment was made that deemed the operation a success, leading party-leaders in the future to chose the same disastrous methods to deal with suspected infiltrators. The purges in Mindanao in 1985–86 stand out for the number of victims: chapter eight argues that the intensity of the war in Mindanao and the peculiar situation of the party on this island — especially its rapid growth — meant that a dynamic that cost dozens of lives elsewhere here made hundreds of victims.

Halfway 1984, the party's newspaper *Ang Bayan* (The People / The Nation) published an article under the title 'Busting a spy network: one region's experience' which gives an insight into how the purges were perceived in the organization.[12] The article describes the anti-infiltration campaign of 1981 in Quezon-Bicol as very successful. The article asserts the military organized a plan under the supposed name '*Lipulin ang Rebolusyonaryong Pilipino*' ('Annihilate the Filipino Revolutionaries') as part of its counter-insurgency drive. Supposedly launched in 1977 already, the plan aimed at sneaking a large number of agents into the movement, some of whom were 'Action Agents', tasked with assassinating revolutionary leaders, while 'Deep Infiltration Agents' were to concentrate on gathering information.

Still according to the article, the conspiracy was discovered when 'a ranking infiltrator made the mistake of telling one of [his] comrades that the enemy was recruiting him' and suggested this was a chance for the movement to infiltrate 'the other side'. But 'penetrating analysis' by 'responsible comrades' supposedly showed this story was meant 'to serve as a cover for the spy's contacts with his superior'. Those considered proven guilty were 'punished according to the nature and seriousness of their crimes' — we can assume this means execution. In an assessment of the campaign, the party 'affirmed' its correctness.

It was probably not a coincidence this article was published on the eve of Kahos, during 'Operation Zombie' when rumors of spies already circulated. The first rumors of police-spies in the party had started to circulate right after Aquino's assassination on the 21st of August, 1983.[13] After Kahos came Operation Missing Link (OPML) in Luzon and the organization of Olympia. These operations proceeded relatively more cautiously but still cost dozens of lives. Olympia was set up around the same time as OPML and oversaw the hunt for spies in Central Luzon, Cordillera, Leyte, Cebu and the National Capital Region around Manila, making the purges a nationwide phenomenon.

All in all, from late 1985 to almost the end of the decade, the party was in the grip of purges. Except from the hundreds of members and sympathizers killed, thousands more left the movement. Revelations of the purges heavily damaged the movement's image and the party struggled to recover from deep, self-inflicted wounds.

## 1.2 Particularities of the Philippine 'purges'

The history of the Communist movement is scarred by experiences of murderous internal purges of those deemed a threat by party-leaders. However, a comparison between the purges in the CPP and other in Communist parties shows the peculiar character of the CPP's self-destructive behavior.

The archetypical example of a Communist purge is that of the Communist Party of the Soviet-Union when Josef Stalin in the late thirties subjected the whole country to purges that almost completely wiped out the old revolutionary guard and countless others. Political differences, being perceived as a threat to the position of Stalin and his varying circle of allies, or just bad luck as intelligence services tried to meet their arrest quotas led to arrest, torture, imprisonment in labor camps and for many to death. Between 1936 and 1938 alone, between 4 and 7 seven

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[12] 'Busting a spy network: one region's experience', *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 13 -16.
[13] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

million people were arrested and transported to labor camps.[14] One and half million deaths were direct results of repression.[15]

Stalin's terror in Russia was preceded by purges in China that almost paralyzed the Communist movement there. In the early 1930's the Chinese Communist Party was fighting a civil war with the nationalists of Chiang Kaishek's *Guomindang*. Consolidating his forces after a number of defeats in which the *Guomindang* had crushed Communist attempts at urban uprisings, Mao Zedong — then a relative outsider among CCP leaders — established a base in southern Jiangxi in mid-1930. After the defeats in the cities in the cities Mao had further developed his thinking on the central role of the peasantry in social revolution, a break from the Communist orthodoxy that saw wage-workers as the central subject in a revolution, and was gaining more influence as a military and political leader. In Jiangxi however a Communist movement already existed before Mao's arrival. This indigenous movement was unwilling to submit to the Maoist line. Tensions build between Mao on one side and the Jiangxi Communists and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party that disagreed with Mao's course on the other side.

These tensions exploded in late 1930 in a 'bloody orgy of internal conflict'.[16] This so-called 'Futian incident' had several causes, including differences over the redistribution of land and over military tactics and the loyalty of the local Communists to party chairperson Li Lisan, a political opponent of Mao. That year, rumors started to circulate that the Nationalists had infiltrated the party. Mao ordered over four thousand members of the Red Army to be arrested on suspicion of betrayal: more than half of them were forced to confess their 'guilt' and executed.

The vast majority of those executed were local Jiangxi Communists. Another round of purges followed after Li Lisan's ouster. Li Lisan was made responsible for the party's defeats in failed urban uprisings in the late twenties, declared an 'anti-Leninist' and exiled and imprisoned in the Soviet-Union. Li Lisan was the victim of a struggle over control of the CCP with Stalin's emissaries from the Communist International or Comintern, the international network of Communist Parties based in Moscow. His removal brought a group of Chinese Communists, trained in Russia and selected for their loyalty to Stalin, to power in the Chinese party.[17]

The 'Nationalist infiltrators' who had been the targets of the first round of purging were now re-labeled 'Li Lisan loyalists'. Since Li Lisan was now considered an enemy of the revolution, his followers and those of Chiang Kaishek were deemed to be essentially in the same camp. The convoluted reasoning behind this was that Li Lisan's failures proved he was not a 'Leninist', and because of this he was not a true revolutionary but rather an enemy of the revolution. This placed his followers in the same camp as Chiang Kaishek. All signs of a lack of loyalty to Mao or of fealty to Li Lisan were collected under the label of 'counter-revolutionary' and thousands more were killed. We will later return to the question of why deviation from a political line was equated with treason in the ideology that — with modifications — was also adapted by the Maoists.

Mao used the hunt for infiltrators to break up a local site of resistance to his political influence and then seized on the occasion of Li Lisan's fall to further strengthen his position — just like Stalin used the purges to remove potential or suspected threats to his rule. There are other similarities between the two purges, including the conflation of political differences with conscious betrayal, that flowed from the similar worldview that dominated both the Chinese and Russian Communist parties. The purges in China and the Soviet-Union were part of the consolidation of ruling groups in the party and of their attacks against supposed enemies.

In the first round of purges in Jiangxi panic 'from below' about infiltration set off the process, just like in the Philippine case, but Mao seized the opportunity to go after a specific category of party-members that opposed him. Mao played an decisive role in the Chinese purges, expanding them and making sure any possible loyalty to Li Lisan, an old rival, was destroyed.[18] Likewise, Stalin and his Politburo carefully followed the purges. When the dynamic

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[14] Wolfgang Leonhard, *Kanttekeningen bij Stalin* (Houten 2009) 98.

[15] J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The road to terror. Stalin and the self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932 — 1939* (New Haven 1999) 591.

[16] Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the twentieth-century world. A concise history* (Durham 2010) 41.

[17] Pierre Rousset, 'The Chinese revolution. Part I: The Second Chinese Revolution and the shaping of the Maoist outlook', Notebooks for Study and Research 2, january 1987, 30.

[18] Karl, *Mao Zedong and China*, 43.

of accusations, distrust, torture and forced confessions threatened to spin out of control, they pulled back, found scapegoats for the 'excesses' and allowed the terror to diminish somewhat to re-stabilize the party.[19]

The purges in the CPP however, were not the outcome of a faction fight like in the Russian and Chinese examples, they were not another example of the removal of dissidents under the cover of the hunt for spies and saboteurs. Even though a questioning of the party-line could mean one fell under suspicion, victims of the purges in the CPP did not belong to specific categories and the purges were not the work of a faction or group of leaders aiming at strengthening its position. Because of this, the term 'purge' could be considered to be a misnomer. But since in examples of Communist purges it's most often the persecutors that create the categories that are victimized I decided to stick to the term 'purge'. After all, the claim the people killed by the CPP were 'DPA's' was not more fictitious than the one that Stalin's victims were, for example, 'trotskyite-bukhanarinite-fascists'.

In the Chinese and Russian purges, as in those in eastern Europa in the fifties, the persecution of prominent victims was widely published to make their cases into examples to others. In the CPP in contrast, the accusations and executions were unacknowledged, even hidden: the purges were apparently not meant to have a pedagogic effect on others. And, crucially, although the central leadership of the Philippine party could initiate purges or stop, purges like Kahos started on a local level, independently from the national leadership. Neither did the national leadership control who were going to be the victims. At one point, even CC-members and their emissaries were suspect and one alternate member of the CC was arrested — this was not because of a power-struggle in the leadership but because in the party distrust had become generalized.[20] The Philippine purges are a rare example were a dynamic 'from below' was decisive in causing and sustaining the process.

Another peculiarity of the purges in the CPP is they took place in a party that was not in power. The purges in the Russian and eastern European Communist parties were part of the attacks of a ruling group against an opposition or a perceived threat to its power. In both the Chinese and Cambodian Communist parties, purges took place before the seizure of state-power but in a context that these parties formed the de facto government over substantial areas of the country. Although the CPP at the height of its influence established parallel governments in areas it heavily influenced these were only shadow-governments, existing underground. Certainly, there existed struggles inside the CPP, as we will see later, but these were first struggles over what course it should take and only secondly over power.

The CPP's ideas and the shape of its organization grew from a longer history of Communism in the Philippines and circumstances that were in several ways similar to that of its predecessors. Sometimes decades old characteristics of the Communist movement and the society of which it was part came violently to the fore in the eighties. To understand how this movement could, in Garcia's words, 'decimate its own' in such a peculiar way we need to look at its history and how it developed two crucial conditions for the purges: a reduction of politics to violent conflict and an absolute faith in the correctness of its policies.

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[19] J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The road to terror,* 495.
[20] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

# II. The Communist movement in the Philippines 1930 — 1952

## 2.1 Birth of the movement

The original *Partido Komunista Pilipinas* (PKP) was formed in 1930. The PKP grew out of the *Congreso Obrero de Filipinas* (COF) or *Katipunan ng mga Anak Pawis ng Pilipinas* — a movement that in its turn was based on the earliest trade-union groups in the country. From the twenties on, the influence of Marxist ideas increased in the COF before it renamed itself into a Communist party and joined the Communist International. The young PKP was remarkable among Communist Parties in colonial countries in that wage-workers were far more dominant than peasants. It has been described as 'small, urban based collection of intellectuals and union activists' — in this collection the intellectuals were very much a minority.[1]

In 1938 the PKP merged, on insistence of the Comintern, by then firmly under control of Moscow, with another left-wing party, the *Partido Sosyalista ng Pilipinas* (Socialist Party of the Philippines, SPP). The SPP had been formed six years earlier, in 1932, the year the PKP had been officially banned as a subversive organization by the American colonial government. By this time the Philippines were no longer a direct colony of the USA but, since 1935, part of a 'Commonwealth'. Philippine president Manuel L. Quezon had negotiated with the Philippines 'big brother' that his country would receive full independence after a term of ten years to 'prepare' for independence.[2]

The SPP's leader, Pedro Abad Santos, had conceived of his organisation in part as a legal surrogate for the PKP. But it was a quite different party: its base was mostly agrarian, whereas the PKP's support had mostly come from the urban working class.

In terms of organization and ideology, the SPP was more radical populist than Communist. Santos was described by a future PKP-leader as 'a Marxist, but not a Bolshevik' and had applied, unsuccessfully, for affiliation to both the Comintern and the social-democratic Second International.[3] Organizationally, his party was far from the ideal type of a Bolshevik party as propagated by the Comintern: it almost completely lacked structure and it was practically impossible to distinguish between party-members and members of its peasant organization. It shared this with the PKP were lines between members of the party and its workers and peasant organizations were barely recognized.

At their peak, the PKP and the movements it led, strongest in central Luzon, consisted largely of tenant farmers. These farmers had a contractual relationship with landlords: the landlord provided a piece of land and an advance to pay for expenses, the tenant provided laborforce and tools. The harvest was shared between tenant and landlord. This relationship was embedded in a larger patron-client relation in which the landlord gave a degree of protection to 'his' tenants, who in turn showed their gratitude by providing various services. These relationships deteriorated from the twenties on as more landlords invested more in other branches of the economy, were less present on their estates and demanded a larger share of the harvest.[4]

Apart from strengthening the PKP's peasant-base, the merger of the SPP and the PKP reinforced an anti-reflective current in the new party which attracted only a few intellectuals and crucially failed to produce its own 'organic intellectuals'.[5] Those intellectuals who were part of the PKP didn't undertake research or theoretical work. Filipino

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[1] William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution. The New People's Army and its struggle for power* (New York 1987) 56.

[2] Abinals and Amoroso, *State and society in the Philippines*, 147.

[3] Ken Fuller, *Forcing the pace. The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas. From foundation to armed struggle* (Quezon City 2007) 96.

[4] Willem Wolters, 'Maatschappelijke bindingen in centraal Luzon. Staat, klasse en lokale samenleving in de Filippijnen', *Symposion. Tijdschrift voor maatschappijwetenschap* 2 (1980) 83 — 103, there 87. After the Second World War, the class structure of Luzon changed: the peasantry became more differentiated while owning just land was not anymore enough to be part of the ruling elite.

[5] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* chapter eight, 259 — 291.

Marxist, and ex-PKP member, Francisco Nemenzo wrote that 'anti-intellectualism was one of the PKP's most enduring traditions'. This lack of reflection went hand in hand with an unquestioning faith in a party-line based on categories borrowed from Soviet Marxism.[6]

Although the PKP was not known for intellectual liveliness, the SPP was even less developed theoretically. Even the PKP charged SPP members with being 'too lazy' to 'study' Marxist theory.[7] The attitude of SPP members was that revolutionary consciousness was best gained through involvement in struggle. Lino Dizon, a leader of the SPP, said 'bring Marx over here and I'll teach him socialism', implying that someone who was directly involved in struggle knew more about revolution than someone who spend his time writing about it in the confines of the British Library.[8] Attitudes like this fed a lack of reflection on its actions.

The struggle of the party was assumed to be in large part a violent one. PKP-members had in principle no objections to the use of force: Marxism-Leninism, their official ideology, regarded violence as a necessary part of social transformation. One of the reasons for the ban of the PKP in 1932 was its use of several rather grotesquely violent slogans, like, referring to the symbols of the Communist movement, 'the sickle on our flag is for cutting the throats of the bourgeois thieves, the hammer is for breaking the skulls of the bourgeoisie'.[9] Still, six year later many, PKP-members thought the SPP was needlessly violent while SPP-members thought the Communists were not 'militant' enough.[10]

In his book on the early history of the PKP, Ken Fuller links this taste for violence to a tradition of peasant uprisings that aimed to finish exploitation by the landlords with swift, violent acts.[11] Like the PKP, the rank-and-file of the CPP consisted largely consist of peasants and this heavily influenced the PKP and the CPP.

After Hitler's victory in Germany, Moscow formulated, through the Comintern, a new strategy for the Communist Parties. Instead of confronting social-democratic parties and attacking them as traitors, Communist Parties should establish 'Popular Fronts' in which all anti-fascist forces, from bourgeois democrats to the Communists, worked together. All political considerations should be subordinated to the struggle against fascism. Counseled by the Communist Party of the United States, the PKP followed this line and declared that international fascism — not the Philippine bourgeoisie or American imperialism — was the main-enemy. From 1938 on the PKP began to work as a legal party again.[12]

One the eve of the war, the ideology of the Communist movement in the Philippines had acquired two characteristics that would remain present in the tradition: a view of violence as a privileged political tool and an unreflected approach to its policies. A characteristic of the movement's social base was that it was largely of peasant origin, although its leadership was more urban and middle-class.

## 2.2 'Arise Philippines!' — the anti-Japanese resistance

The Japanese invasion of the Philippines was a turning point and crucial in reorienting the PKP to the path of armed revolution. The brutality of the Japanese army rather spontaneously produced armed resistance. This was strongest in the northern part of the country, the island of Luzon: the PKP had traditionally been strong there and it was home to a tradition of peasant movements. People here had become used to collective action and had experience in, at times violently, confronting the state. Luis Taruc, a PKP-leader who would become head of its armed wing, said: 'the resistance movement that sprang up in Central Luzon was unique among all the groups that fought against the Japanese. The decisive element of difference lay in the strong peasant unions and organizations that existed there

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[6] Francisco Nemenzo, 'The millenarian-populist aspects of Filipino marxism' in: Randolf S. David ed., *Marxism in the Philippines. Marx centennial lectures* (Quezon City 1984) 1 — 45, there 10 — 11.

[7] Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines. An introduction* (Manila 1969) 34. Saulo was a former leading member of the PKP.

[8] Francisco Nemenzo, 'The millenarian-populist aspects of Filipino marxism', 1 — 45, there 6.

[9] Fuller, *Forcing the pace*, 71.

[10] Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, 34.

[11] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* 334 — 341.

[12] Idem, 124.

before the war. It gave the movement a mass base, and made the armed forces indistinguishable from the people, a feeling shared by both the people and the fighters'.[13]

In March 1942, representatives of several groups of peasants fighting the Japanese and members of the PKP or its peasant organizations formed the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* or 'People's Army against Japan'. The name was quickly shortened to '*Hukbalahap*' and then to Huk. It is a matter of debate just how big the movement was at the end of the war when the Huks had become the most efficient anti-Japanese guerrilla-army in South Asia. According to Benedict J. Kerkvliet the growth of the Huk-movement was quite remarkable: from less than three-hundred in 1942 to over ten-thousand two years later, mainly concentrated in central Luzon.[14] Although the PKP was the leading group in the Huks, Kerkvliet makes clear the movement was more than just a insurgency led by the PKP: it was a movement with thousands of supporters, deeply rooted in the local population.

Like many of the peasant rank-and-file of the pre-war PKP, most Huks had little time for Marxist theory and the movement didn't break with the anti-reflective tradition of the pre-war PKP. Many members found the political education 'boring' and of little use in their fight. More popular lectures focused on the practical sides of guerillawar: 'Military Discipline' or 'Guerrilla Tactics' were names of some of the classes. The most important class was on 'The fundamental spirit of the Hukbalahap' which stressed the egalitarian character of relations within the army.[15]

The fight of the Hukbalahap was primarily but not only against the Japanese: the class contradictions that led to peasant movements before the war persisted and Huks seized land, implemented improvised land-reform programs and sometimes killed landlords. Social ties between landlords and the peasants had been deteriorating before the war. The support a majority of landlords gave to the Japanese invaders further eroded these ties. The *Hukbalahap* on the other hand became folk heroes in Central Luzon because of their resistance against the Japanese.

When the Japanese army after a series of guerrilla-attacks decided to launch an attacks against Huk strongholds, the guerilla's suffered heavy blows. This made the PKP-leadership decide to retreat — a decision not implemented on the ground and overturned by the party's congress in 1944.[16] In the meantime the Huks recovered and gained new strength.[17] By the end of the war, when American forces defeated the Japanese occupiers, the Huks had 'come close to establishing a de facto' government in Central Luzon.[18]

## 2.3 From resistance to revolution?

The post-war period of peace for the PKP and the Huks didn't last not long. Just as spontaneously as they had risen to fight the Japanese, most Huks simply went home after the defeat of the Japanese. Some talked of joining the new government army. All expected recognition and even reward for their services. The PKP was eager to maintain its Popular Front policy and reenter the electoral arena. However, the Americans were distrustful of the *Hukbalahap*: already during the war the American command had concluded they aimed at establishing a 'Communistic state', an assessment that overestimated the ideological role of the PKP and missed the fact that many peasants joined the movement out of self-defense against the Japanese.[19]

The Huks joined the rest of the Philippine nation in celebration after the American victory, but instead of re-warding them, American and Philippine troops forcibly disarmed and sometimes killed Huks. Leaders like Taruc were jailed. The landlords, many of whom had spend the war-years in the relative safety of Manila, found upon return to their estates that the peasant movement had grown and was demanding better wages and a larger share in the harvest. With help of American and Filipino forces, the landlords retaliated. Peasant leaders, often former *Hukbalahap* members, were arrested, evicted from their lands or even killed by the police.[20] Although the PKP's united front organization, the Democratic Alliance, won six congressional seats in the elections 1946, its candidates

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[13] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution*, 57.

[14] Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk rebellion. A study of peasant revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley 1977) 87.

[15] Vina A. Lanzona, *Amazons of the Huk rebellion. Gender, sex and revolution in the Philippines* (London 2009) 50.

[16] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* 197.

[17] Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines,* 41, 42.

[18] Lanzona, *Amazons of the Huk rebellion,* 67.

[19] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution,* 60.

[20] Kerkvliet, *The Huk rebellion*, 110 — 118.

were barred from taking their seats by the new Philippine president Manuel Roxas, who had been an official in the Japanese puppet-regime during the occupation.[21]

Just as unorganized as during the first phase of the anti-Japanese struggle, peasants began to retaliate and defend themselves. The first clashes took place while the PKP leadership, which had returned to Manila, was still hoping it could be part of the new congress. In June 1946, two main fronts were established in Luzon. The majority of the PKP-leadership refused to support offensive actions and demanded the Huks avoid armed encounters.[22] Again, the peasants didn't pay much attention to party-leadership and fought against the government forces on their own initiative. Huk squadrons reassembled on the initiative of their members: "no Huk command," said Luis Taruc later, "issued such a directive."[23] By 1948 Taruc revived the Huk's wartime general command and the Philippine government outlawed the Huks. Fighting increased.

The PKP was pressured to change its course and organize armed resistance from below, by the Huk rank-and-file, from the outside by repression and from inside by a minority in the party. A new PKP leadership finally made a dramatic turn. Not only did it decide in 1950 to support armed struggle, it declared the Philippines was in a 'revolutionary situation' and formulated a two-year timetable for seizing power. This approach overestimated the potential support for the Huks and underestimated how far the United States government would go to support the Philippine government. PKP leaders used to part by saying 'see you in Malacañang' (the presidential palace) — but instead the rebellion was forcibly suppressed a few years later.

However, even though the fight was now against a Philippine government, and not a foreign occupation, the Huk army, now renamed the *Hukbong Mapapalaya ng Bayan* (HMB, People's Liberation Army) reached between 1949 and 1951 a peak of between 11.000 and 15.000 armed men and women, roughly equal to that of the *Hukbalahap*, although with less social support than during the occupation.[24]

The Huks hadn't expanded beyond certain parts of the northern island of Luzon. To prepare the party to seize power, its leadership gave orders for a drastic expansion. They specified HMB membership had to increase from 10,800 in July 1950 to 172,000 in September 1951. Party-membership had to increase at the same ratio. Huk members were made into party-members, simply by asking them to carry out the party-program, and each Huk member was told to recruit a minimum of three new members in the first quarter of the year, starting in July 1950. In the second quarter, each Huk-member, old and new, would again recruit at least three new members. The scheme turned out to be a disaster. The party, whose grip on the development of the situation was shaky already, was flooded with new, untested and raw recruits. The army seized the opportunity to infiltrate the organization — in contrast, during their resistance against Japan the Huks had once had a remarkably effective intelligence system.[25][26]

With American aid, the government organized a successful counter-insurgency. The Philippine army was re-organized and equipped by the US Army and engaged in a brutal campaign against the rebels. Villages considered Huk strongholds were burned down, prisoners were executed, terror was used methodically to sap Huk support. The PKP described it as 'far exceeding any punitive actions by the Japanese fascists'.[27]

One of the biggest coups of the Philippine army was thanks to a traitor in the PKP. Tarciano Rizal, a former Huk commander, informed the government of the location of the PKP politburo and on the 18th of October 1950, the police arrested a large part of the PKP leadership. Other intelligence failures followed: teams send out to expand the Huks support beyond Luzon were betrayed, the commanders of one area were almost all killed when a traitor led the military in the camp. Supporters of the party living above ground started to lay low, afraid they would be next.[28]

Military operations were combined with reforms, mostly symbolically, that aimed to weaken the Huks' social support. The governments of Roxas, who died in 1948, and his successor Elpidio Rivera Quirino had become deeply unpopular because of their brutality and corruption. Quirino's secretary of defense, Ramón del Fierro Magsaysay,

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[21] Kerkvliet, *The Huk rebellion*, 150.

[22] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution,* 62.

[23] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* 243. Kerkvliet, *The Huk rebellion*, 143.

[24] Ibidem, 278.

[25] Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines*, 56.

[26] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* 182.

[27] Ibidem, 261.

[28] Ibidem, 312.

instead cultivated an image of a clean and honest politician. This helped him win the 1953 elections and undermine Huk propaganda. One of his initiatives was a resettlement program: surrendered rebels and even ordinary peasants were given land and some rich-landowners were induced to trade their large farms for public lands in the southern island of Mindanao so their lands could be cut up and the rented out to small peasants. Only a small number made use of the program, but it made for effective government-propaganda.[29] When Luis Taruc himself surrendered in 1954 the backbone of the Huk rebellion had already been broken. The PKP-leadership ordered party-members to lay low and the few dozen of surviving Huk fighters were ordered to avoid clashes with government forces.

With the suppression of the Huk rebellion, a cycle of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines came to an end. But this powerful movement left behind memories and experiences of armed struggle and showed the potential of mobilizing the peasantry. When the CPP was formed in the late sixties, it's motivation to launch armed struggle was based partly on the Huk experience.

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[29] Fuller, *Forcing the pace*, 307.

# III. Peasant rebellions from the Huks to the CPP/NPA

Direct connections between the PKP and the CPP are weak: only a few members of the CPP and its armed wing were ever PKP-members or Huks, although these included individuals that played a crucial role in the CPP/NPA. Some similarities between the parties are striking: a distaste for what Mao called 'book-learning', a lack of reflection on its practice, and a conception of political knowledge as springing unmediated from participation in struggle are also prominently present in the CPP. These similarities were caused by similarities in the social base of the insurgencies, consisting mainly of peasants and often lead by middle-class intellectuals both eager to prove their revolutionary credentials and maintain their monopoly on theory. A third similarity is the privileged place given to violence as part of the revolutionary struggle.

Anti-intellectualism and the idea that knowledge springs directly from 'struggle' are related since this idea makes theory appear superfluous. The emphasis on violence flows from the unreflected idea of revolutionary struggle as a direct confrontation with the oppressor. Rather than based on a theory, ideas like these are part of the spontaneous ideology of rebelling peasants. In peasant rebellions, the primary motivation of the rebels is the wish to have land of their own, thus they tend to conceive of revolutionary struggle as a direct confrontation with those control who the lands.

Emphasizing the exceptional nature of peasant revolts, James C. Scott said; 'to speak of rebellion is to focus on those extraordinary moments when peasants seek to restore or remake their world by force. It is to forget both how rare these moments are and how historically exceptional it is for them to lead to a successful revolution; It is to forget that the peasant is more often a helpless victim of violence than its initiator'.[1] Peasant rebellions are not only the result of gradual increase of exploitation but of a combination of exploitation with sudden shocks that break the social ties underpinning a moral economy based on mutuality. The breakdown of the patron-peasant relationship in the commercializing Philippine countryside of the thirties, the violence with which the Japanese occupiers confiscated foodstuffs to supply their troops and their overall intimidation and abuse of the population were grounds for the Huk rebellion. The later NPA insurgency would likewise be a combination of structural causes, like land shortage, and conjunctural ones like the military brutality during and after Martial Law.

This is because generally peasants are 'cultivators with a set of pressing needs rather than ideologues with a long view' that seize 'the opportunities that are available to [them]'.[2] The Huk rebellion was in many ways a defensive movement, literally protecting the rice-harvest — peasant engagement in the CPP/NPA was also often part of a survival strategy. Membership in the NPA was for many landless peasants a way to survive and a hope for acquiring land of their own after the revolution.

It's obvious the Huk rebellion was born from local circumstances, not from the ideological commitment of Communists and to a large degree independent of this. It has even been disputed by Benedict Kerkvliet if the PKP was the actual leadership of the Huk movement. Kerkvliet examined the movement from the viewpoint of the participants, interviewing members of the PKP rank-and-file and its mass-organizations. The gap between the PKP's ideology and the ideas of its mass base he found and the denial of many participants that they were involved with the PKP led Kerkvliet to conclude the party 'added little to the resistance' and it did 'not control the *Hukbalahap*, although individual Communists participated actively in it'.[3]

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[1] James C. Scott, *The moral economy of the peasant. Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia* (London 1976) 203.

[2] Scott, *The moral economy of the peasant*, 204.

[3] Kerkvliet, *The Huk rebellion,* 99.

Francisco Nemenzo criticized this conclusion by pointing out that many former rebels had good reasons to deny involvement with the PKP when Kerkvliet did his research in 1970: the party was still banned. In fact, Nemenzo points out, the leaders of the HMB and the PKP's peasant-organization had been PKP members down to the lowest level. Kerkvliet conceived of the PKP as it liked to see itself, Nemenzo argues; 'as a unified organization of Marxist-Leninist cadres'. But there is 'a vast discrepancy between party documents and propaganda material on the one hand and the governing ideology of the mass movement on the other'. PKP-members led the rebellion but they, including leaders of the party, were Marxists 'only in the sense that they belonged to a party which confessed to be so', Nemenzo argues. The Huks were led by members of a Communist party but their ideology was not determined by this.

The effective ideology of the PKP and the Huks was what Nemenzo calls 'millenarian populism': the outlook of rebelling peasants who seek to turn the world upside-down. This outlook appealed to peasants but also caused the movement to collapse 'like a pack of cards' the moment its apocalyptic vision was disproved.[4] This spontaneous ideology of revolting peasants remained an important influence on the Communist movement in the Philippines.

'Always ruled over, never the ruler, peasants are mostly familiar with the state and its representatives as a source of violence — a rebellion against it will be likely be a violent attempt to replace this "cold monster" in short thrift by their own "homemade" social order'.[5] Writing about Indian peasants, Sanjay Seth pointed out the 'insignia of domination and subordination' are 'everywhere inscribed — in the naked use of force, in dress, in language and body language, as well, of course, as in economic exploitation'.[6] In such a context, and that of the Philippine peasants is similar in many ways, it is not enough to strip the landlord of the legal rights to his land. This is why peasant rebellions often seek to turn the world upside down trough force. Kevin Fuller sums up the desire of the peasant rebels of the Philippines to 'settle accounts with the landlords with one violent blow'.[7]

The reasons of the peasant involvement also explain why, when it seemed like an easier route to satisfy the pressing needs had opened up, many peasants left the revolutionary movement. The reforms of the Philippine government during the fifties sapped the Huk movement of support, the fall of Marcos convinced many former NPA-fighters and supporters that a less risky strategy than continued armed struggle had become possible.[8]

Neither the PKP-leadership nor that of the SPP 'exerted significant ideological influence over the rank-and-file'.[9] Citing the rapid rate at which supporters left the movement after Marcos' fall, Kerkvliet writes 'the degree of commitment to a Communist ideology' was probably 'shallow'.[10] Despite the existence on paper of a sophisticated program for ideological training, in reality many cadres in Mindanao had only 'limited familiarity with Marxist tools'. A 1980 party evaluation concluded that in Mindanao, were growth of the party was particularly quick, 'party-building' was weak.[11] According to Harry and notes for an internal study session by a cadre called 'Nong', a large part of the CPP-members in Mindanao did not receive any formal political education at all.[12]

A NPA commander in the early nineties, discussing reasons for the decline of the movement in the late eighties, confirmed many peasants were primarily motivated by 'pressing needs'; "peasants are shrewd. You cannot expect them to keep fighting indefinitely if they cannot taste the fruit of their struggle — their own land — except in the distant future. They weigh the costs exacted by their revolutionary participation — which might include children who were recruited into the NPA — against this promise, and you can understand why many might scale down their commitment."[13]

[4] Francisco Nemenzo., 'The millenarian-populist aspects of Filipino marxism' in: Randolf S. David ed., *Marxism in the Philippines. Marx centennial lectures* (Quezon City 1984) 1 — 45, there 8 -10.

[5] Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* (New York 1969) 295.

[6] Sanjay Seth, 'From Maoism to postcolonialism? The Indian 'Sixties' and beyond', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7 (2006) 589 — 60, there 595.

[7] Fuller, *Forcing the pace,* 334 — 341.

[8] Authors interview with Harry, April 15th 2011.

[9] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution,* 56.

[10] Ben J. Tria Kerkvliet, 'A different view of insurgencies' HDN discussion paper series 5, Quezon City, 3.

[11] Kerkvliet, 'A different view of insurgencies' 4.

[12] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011), 'Remarks of Ka Nong at study session of January 19, 1992'.

[13] Walden Bello, 'The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement', *Kasarinlan,* 1 (1992) 168.

Despite ideological differences, similarities in their social base contributed to similarities between the PKP and CPP. A gap between the outlook of its supporters and the party's supposedly marxist ideology was notable in both and the CPP continued the PKP's legacy of anti-intellectualism. The PKP, Kevin Fuller argues, was unprepared to deal with setbacks in its struggle, to make an analysis of these and place them in a evaluation of the political situation.[14] A similar inability would contribute to the purges that wrecked the movement when the search for an explanation of setbacks fostered a hunt for spies.

The emphasis on violence as a method for political struggle and the inability of the movement to formulate political answers to the rapidly changing circumstances of the mid-eighties — a result of both its theoretical weakness and the gap between the official ideology and the everyday consciousness of its supporters — are important to understand the murderous and self-destructive character of the purges.

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[14] Fuller, *Forcing the pace*, chapter 10, 331 — 346.

# IV. A second cycle of the Communist movement

The Philippines had been, after the Second World War, the most developed country in Southeast Asia but started to experience serious social and economic problems in the mid-1960's. In a context of rising unemployment and a rising cost of living, Ferdinand Marcos won his first election as president of the republic. Marcos used all the tricks in the arsenal of a traditional Filipino politician from the elite to win; a campaign fund filled with money accumulated when he was senator and pacts with wealthy businessmen and political dynasties. Still, this doesn't mean Marcos was not also adept at responding to the popular mood.[1]

Marcos used the public's yearning for stability and disgust with a corrupt and inefficient Congress to concentrate more power in his own hands. Bypassing Congress, he revived executive agencies established by his predecessors and extended the state's presence into the countryside, often with help of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The use of the army and loyal technocrats enabled him to concentrate more and more power in his own hands.

In the second half of the sixties, Marcos ran the risk of falling victim to the problems that had prevented his predecessors from winning reelection: economic difficulties and public dissatisfaction with a corrupt and inefficient government. Taxing was lax — representatives of powerful businessmen for example prevented a tax on the export of sugar — and corruption bled the state of funds. Still, in 1969 Marcos won his reelection. By this time, Marcos had become the most powerful 'cacique' in the country. A cacique or 'political boss' refers to those who concentrate economic and political power in their hands through the use of patronage politics, corruption and often through private armies. Caciques are a persistent feature of Philippine political live.[2]

To compensate for his decreasing popularity, Marcos used the tools of a cacique: 'guns, goons & gold'. Marcos was not the only one intimidating opponents, buying votes and using public money for propaganda — but he was exceptionally brazen in it and as president he had unequaled access to resources. As much as 50 million dollars went into his campaign, much of it public money.[3] The increase of power in Marcos hands and political instability fed fears he would try to stay in power beyond the limit of two terms by declaring Martial Law.

Against this backdrop of increasing social tensions and an increasingly authoritarian president, the Communist movement in the Philippines was reorganized. After being introduced to the party, a young intellectual, Jose Marie Sison, was tasked with creating a new youth-organization. He set up the *Kabaatang Makabayan* (KM, Nationalist Youth) which would quickly make a name for itself. After joining the PKP Sison became an activist in several organizations but KM was the most important one. Although it was not openly Communist, it had a very radical appeal.

The KM soon broke with the PKP and Sison and 12 or 13 others went on to 're-establish' the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1968 along Maoist lines. They felt the old PKP was not longer a revolutionary party: after the Huks had been defeated, the PKP was afraid to take radical action. But exactly that was what Sison and his companions believed was necessary. Calling the formation of the CPP a 're-establishing' of the Communist party was an attempt to claim the heritage of the Huks.

The experiences of the Huks were transmitted to the CPP not only through the study of its history but also directly — the CPP's armed wing, the New People's Army was formed a few months later out of one of the last surviving Huk groups that hadn't degenerated into an armed gang. The PKP leadership in Manila had very little contact with the remaining Huks, afraid of police repression. Looking for a political party to ally with and break its isolation a groups of Huks, led by Commander Dante, born Bernabe Buscayno, made contact with the CPP in 1969. The connection

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[1] Unless noted otherwise, information on Marcos' presidency and campaigns before 1972 is based on: Abinales and Amoroso, *State and society in the Philippines*, chapter eight 193 — 230.

[2] Benedict Anderson, 'Cacique democracy in the Philippines' in: Idem, *Spectre of comparisons. Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the world* (Quezon City 2004) 192 — 227.

[3] Abinales and Amoroso, *State and society in the Philippines,* 198.

between the fledgling party and Dante's Huks was mediated by elite politicians opposed to Marcos, among them Benigno Aquino.[4]

In early 1970 Marcos was pelted with stones by protesters after leaving Congress. The events of the following months became a turning point. Called the 'First Quarter Storm' (FQS), a series of riots and turbulent protests against the government of Ferdinand Marcos took place in the first three months of the year. The protests targeted Marcos' corruption, his close alliance with the United States, the American war in Vietnam and the attempts by Marcos to concentrate power in his hands. Radical groups like the KM played an important part in the movement. Although it would take two more years for him to declare Martial Law on September 21 1972, the unrest of the FQS was one of the justifications invoked by Marcos.

On the other side of the barricade, for many of the protesters the FQS was a major step in their radicalization. Confrontations between the police and protesters, many of whom were students, rapidly became intensely violent. Protesters responded to police truncheons, teargas and bullets with stones, Molotov-cocktails and 'pillbombs', home-made explosives. Police violence cost the lives of several students. Commenting on the violent protests, the president of the University of the Philippines, the prestigious academic institution where many of the young radicals studied, said they were a 'grave portent for the future of the nation. It has brought us face to face with the fundamental question: is it still possible to transform our society by peaceful means so that the many who are poor, oppressed, sick and ignorant may be released from their misery?'[5] Many answered the question in the negative. Messages on the placards acquired a 'definite tenor'; 'People's war is the answer to martial law' and, quoting Mao Zedong, 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.'[6]

The young CPP and its NPA became heroes for the protest movement: protesters chanted 'Ka Dante for president'. Using the umbrella-term for the Maoists and allied groups, the 'National-Democratic' movement, a reporter on the FQS stated that in the months after January 1970 'a new political force would come on the scene: the national democratic movement. All others would acquire meaning only in juxtaposition with it'.[7] Many of the members of radical youth-organizations like KM would become leaders in the CPP. And not only they. The chairperson of the moderate National Union of Students of the Philippines, Edgar Jopson, went underground after the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. He joined his erstwhile political rivals, becoming a CPP member.

The events of the First Quarter Storm protests, growing social contradictions and the wave of radicalization sweeping the world in the late sixties left the PKP and its front-organizations behind. The PKP was bigger than the radical youth-groups and more implanted among the poor peasants and the poor — but it lacked dynamism, the will to actually use its resources.

When the CPP was organized, it drew a number of lessons from the Huk experience. The PKP leadership was condemned for both its 'adventurist' attempt at a quick military victory after 1950 and its later refusal to re-start armed struggle. Two of the most important conclusions the CPP drew from the experience of the Huks and their reading of revolutionary theory were armed violence was necessary but that this struggle should be spread over the whole country and that it should slowly built up strength before an attempt at seizing power was made. The Huks had shown, they reasoned, the willingness of the Filipino people, especially poor peasants, to support an armed insurgency. It was up to the party to organize this insurgency in such a way that it could seize power. The debacles of the PKP, including its security failures, were the subject of Sison's *Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party*, one of the CPP's founding documents.[8]

One of the lessons Huk-veterans conveyed to the NPA was the need to be on guard against infiltration. Many of the new NPA commanders were former students who had 'gone to the mountains', convinced of the need of armed resistance. They were hesitant to use violence against suspected spies since these were often poor peasants, manipulated and pressured by the military. There was an idealistic notion that with enough guidance, these peasants

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[4] It was not uncommon for elite politicians to be in contact with armed groups that could provide useful muscle and votes. Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution*, 79.

[5] Jose F. Lacaba, *Days of disquiet, nights of rage. The first quarter storm and related events* (Manila 2003) 58.

[6] Lacaba, *Days of disquiet,* 130.

[7] Ibidem, XXIII.

[8] Amado Guerrero, 'Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party', ratified by the CPP founding Congress, December 26, 1968.

could be convinced to stop cooperating with the army, a NPA veteran called 'Jes' recalled.[9] According to Jes, the NPA learned the hard way as several highly motivated leaders were lost due to police-spies. The guerillas most likely to survive were those trained by veteran Huk fighters who taught that liquidating informers was necessary to stay alive.

As time passed, more peasant-born fighters became commanders. These peasants were, according to Jes, less hesitant in using force. Jes doesn't give an explanation why peasants were more willing to use violence, but coming from the peasantry themselves, they maybe had a more realistic notion of the motives and potential to change of peasants turned into infiltrators than students with romantic notions about 'the masses'. It's likely that coming from communities that had suffered from the counter-insurgency campaigns against the Huks and the violence of the corrupt, repressive Philippine security apparatus, peasants had a clearer idea of the risks of armed struggle than students with relatively privileged backgrounds.

When the CPP grew into in a nationwide mass-movement in the second half of the seventies, it was an organization that combined cadres and leading members that often had a background as students with a peasant mass-base. The political turbulence of the early seventies had radicalized many students-activists. For many peasants it had been clear already they could not count on the government for help. From the earlier Huk-experience, the young movement had learned the potential of armed struggle and the need for a strict policy of security to protect itself. Its ideology would not only emphasize the need for violence against its enemies — it would also reinforce the conviction of the students that became its leadership that they were making the right decisions. To understand why this ideology fitted the social composition of the movement and traditions of anti-reflectivity and the use of violence so well, we need to look at this in more depth.

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[9] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution,* 188.

# V. The ideology of the CPP

## 5.1 Maoism comes to the Philippines

The Communist Party of the Philippines was officially formed on the seventy-fifth birthday of Mao Zedong: December 26th, 1968. The date symbolizes the party's adherence to the Maoist interpretation of Marxism. Mao's China was then going through its most radical phase, the so-called 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' and had broken with the Soviet Communist Party, citing ideological differences. Many radicals perceived the Cultural Revolution to be an attempt at avoiding the stultifying bureaucracy that burdened the Soviet-Union. They were inspired by what they thought was a more dynamic Communist current than the one aligned with the Soviet-Union.

Political differences between the Moscow and Peking aligned currents of the Communist movement were debated heatedly from the early sixties on. The cautiousness of PKP in this period, after the crushing defeat of the Huks, had more in common with the course of the Soviet-Union but this approach had little appeal to young radicals. A CPP party cadre, remembering his early days as a student in the movement, said: 'it was easy to be a Maoist; aside from its being trendy, nobody wanted to be associated with [the Soviet-Union] kind of conservatism, even if that were Communist. Young ones, almost without effort, were drawn into [Maoism] and I was one of them.'[1]

Mao's insistence on the importance of the 'subjective factor' — for him: the Communist party and its supporters — in making revolution appealed to many in the Third World where, according to Soviet marxism, the low level of the development of the economy — the 'objective factor' — precluded a peasant and proletarian lead revolution. Internationally, the Soviet-Union counseled national liberation movements in the Third World to compromise with, and make concessions to, bourgeois nationalist movements and governments. This meant demands of poor workers and peasants were sidelined in order not to antagonize bourgeois nationalists who were seen as the driving force in further developing capitalism and the forces of production. This economic development would, according to Soviet theories, open the way for socialism by strengthening the working class and the productive potential in the country.[2]

Against this policy, Mao Zedong formulated a theory of a 'New Democratic revolution'. In countries dominated by foreign imperialism, this theory argued, the first task of a Communist movement was the so-called 'national-democratic' phase of the revolution: land-reform to abolish pre-capitalist ('feudal') influences in the economy and national sovereignty. Only after this could socialism be introduced. In this Mao agreed with the Soviet Communists — but he differed with them on the pace of this process and most importantly on who should lead it: for Mao this was not the national bourgeoisie but the proletariat, in alliance with the peasantry, petty-bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie. The 'proletariat' or working class here refers not to a social-economic category in the sociological sense but to a group with a certain political line — in effect the Communist Party.

A third element in Maoist ideology that appealed to radicals in Third World countries was its stress on revolutions in countries dominated by imperialism. During the Cultural Revolution Lin Piao, Mao's designated successor before he fell from grace in the early seventies, formulated the idea that Mao's concept of revolution through guerrilla-war had universal value. Mao had written that to win, a rural based guerrilla-movement would have to encircle and isolate the cities. Lin Piao argued this model of 'people's war' could be applied on a global scale: Third World countries were the 'countryside' and the rich, imperialist countries the 'cities'.[3] Whereas in orthodox Marxism countries with

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[1] Quoted in Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines 1968 — 1993*, 36.

[2] A discussion of the split of the world Communist movement and Maoism's appeal in the Third World can be found in: Henning Böke, *Maoismus. China und die Linke — Bilanz und Perspektive* (Stuttgart 2007), chapter 4: Das Schisma der kommunistischen Weltbewegung 86 — 96, and Alexander C. Cook, 'Third world maoism' in: Timothy Cheek ed., *Mao. A critical introduction* (Cambridge 2010) 288 — 313.

[3] Lin Piao, *Vive la victorieuse guerre du peuple! — Pour le 20e anniversaire de la fin victorieuse de la guerre de Résistance du peuple chinois contre le Japon* (Peking 1965).

a low level of economic development were considered to be the furthest away from socialism, they became in this theory the revolutionary vanguard.

Maoism was appealing because it reflected the radical mood among many young people, seemed applicable to a largely rural country like the Philippines and spoke to the perceived increase of radical sentiments among the country's poor. Mao's ideas were appealing to student radicals who didn't see any future in subordinating themselves to moderate forces and who didn't see a Philippine bourgeoisie that could play a revolutionary role on its own. Maoism's embrace of anti-imperialist nationalism and armed struggle connected with the older traditions in the Philippine left of the anti-Japanese resistance and the Huk-rebellion.

For a long time, it was difficult to get hold of Mao's writings in the Philippines. 'Maoism' was often more an attitude and a collection of slogans that people could identify with than a coherent ideology. One participant in the movement recalled the attraction of Mao's famous 'little red book' — a small compilation of quotes from Mao, originally intended for soldiers — was its radical tone and at least a number of activists felt that reading it 'spared' them from having to read Marx and Lenin.[4] The student radicals who formed the CPP had a somewhat better grasp of Maoist theory which gave them a lot of credit. For tactical reasons, the CPP has not always been very open in claiming itself to be a Maoist party: Maoist implied being pro-Chinese or even depending on foreign support, which could clash with the often rather xenophobic nationalism of the movement — but in terms of strategy and organization, the influence of Maoist thinking has been deep.[5]

One of the channels through which Maoism reached the Philippines was through CPP founding chairman Jose Maria Sison who in the early sixties had close ties with the Indonesian Communist party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia,* PKI).[6] At the time, the PKI was the largest Communist party that was not in power and it was influenced by Maoist ideas. The Indonesian influence on Sison is clearly visible in his most important work, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (often referred to as PSR) which is very similar in 'organization, terminology and substance…[to] the analysis of Indonesian society and revolution written by the late chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party, Dipa Nusantara Aidit'.[7]

When Sison and a few comrades established the CPP in 1968, it was only three years after the PKI had been annihilated by the Indonesian army. Between 200.000 and one million (suspected) PKI-members and sympathizers had been killed in a wave of mass-violence after the army accused the party of trying to seize power in a *coup d'etat*. The PKI and its mass-organizations were completely unprepared for a violent confrontation and put up only minimal resistance. The insistence of the new CPP on having an armed wing and on the need for a violent overthrow of the government was not based solely on theoretical considerations but on the tragic fate of what was once one of the most powerful Communist movements in the world.[8]

## 5.2 Violence and voluntarism in the Maoism of the Cultural Revolution era

When trying to explain the purges in the CPP, two elements in its Maoist ideology stand out: its evaluation of violence and the idea of the role of the party. The first encouraged the use of violence, while the second demanded CPP-members had absolute faith in the party's decisions.

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[4] Raul E. Segovia, *Inside the mass movement. A political memoir* (Pasig City 2008) 49.

[5] Armando Malay Jr., 'Some random reflections on Marxism and Maoism in the Philippines' in: Randolf S. David ed., *Marxism in the Philippines. Marx centennial lectures* (Quezon City 1984) 50. Malay discusses the removal of some of the more outspoken Maoist rethoric in new editions of party-documents in the mid-seventies and the proposal to drop the reference to 'Mao Zedong-thought' from the *Ang Bayan* masthead. These were however more based on considerations of image, in the light of rather strong sinophobic sentiments in the country, the reconcialiation between China and the United States and Chinese support for Marcos, than on a programmatic break with Maoism.

[6] Ninotchka Rosca, Jose Maria Sison, *Jose Maria Sison: At home in the world. Portrait of a revolutionary* (Greensboro 2004) 13.

[7] Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines,* 21.

[8] The events in Indonesia also made a deep impression on others in the region. Chandler writes in his biography of Pol Pot that the destruction of the PKI was an important event in the development of the Khmer Rouge. David P. Chandler, *Brother number one. A political biography of Pol Pot* (Chiang Mai 1993)78 -79.

Political violence was a drastic step in Philippine society but certainly not unheard of. There was the tradition of the Huks, some of whom kept their arms long after the rebellion was defeated. Many establishment politicians had their own private armies and elections were bloody affairs. That an establishment politician like Benigno Aquino had no qualms in bringing Dante's Huks into contact with the young radicals of the CPP, about four years before Marcos declared Martial Law, shows how accepted political violence was. The violence of the police during the FQS made peaceful protests difficult from the beginning. Although officially a democracy, the country was ruled by caciques, many of them coming from landholding families that had cooperated with the US to crush the Huk rebellion.

Because of the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the government of Marcos, space for peaceful protest declined further. For activists who saw the willingness of their rulers to use violence and were aware of the history of the Huks, the question was not so much why a movement that claimed it wanted to change society, like the PKP, would embrace violent methods but why it choose nót to do so. The answer was, Sison charged, that the PKP was no longer revolutionary in any sense and its leadership was even reactionary: the defeat of the Huks had not only turned them into cowards, they were in the service of counter-revolutionary forces.[9]

Maoism's emphasis on the role of violence is remarkable. Marx saw 'force' (violence) as 'the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one.'[10] This means violence can have a progressive role during certain historical conjunctions. In itself it can not create a new society, only be a part of giving, as it were, the last push. Contrast this with a statement like: 'In the more than one hundred years from Marx to Mao Zedong, revolutionary violence was the essence of Marxism in both theory and practice.' CPP chairman *Amado Guerrero* — ('Beloved Warrior', *nom de guerre* of Sison) — wrote this in a polemic against the PKP.[11]

This privileging of violence was also present in other Maoist movements that had their roots in the international attraction of the Cultural Revolution. The leader of the Peruvian *Sendero Luminiso* (Shining Path) claimed the revolution must 'cross a river of blood'.[12] The same years as the CPP was organized a Maoist movement took shape in India that not only stressed the killing of landlords but also that this be done not with guns but with knives, spears and sickles. It was thought this would 'embolden' the peasants. 'He who has not dipped his hands in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a Communist', Indian Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar wrote.[13] Mao's party was an organization build for and through war — something he, confronted with the armies of Chiang Kaishek and Japan, had not much choice in. In the context of the Philippines, Maoist ideas about violence blended well with the tradition of peasant uprisings.

Some years after its founding the CPP would adjust an earlier, very militarist orientation. The new orientation stressed the importance of popular support as the basis of military strength. The extraordinary endurance of the CPP can only be understood when its emphasis on building social support for its struggle is recognized. But for the CPP, social revolution remained in essence a military struggle: the NPA is defined as 'the most important organization for defeating the reactionary state' and armed struggle as the primary method of struggle. Legal, above-ground front-organizations were led by 'underground' cadres in the interest of the guerilla-struggle, movements in the towns supported the rural guerillas.[14]

Aside from the emphasis on violence, a second characteristic of Cultural Revolution-era Maoism was the heavy emphasis on voluntarism; 'nothing in the world is difficult for the one who sets his mind to it' — a Chinese saying

[9] After 1971 the PKP would definitely choose the Soviet-Union over China. This 'Russian turn' was combined with a capitulation to the Marcos government which became definitive in 1974 when the party signed a treaty of reconciliation with the government. Francisco Nemenzo, 'An irrepressible revolution: the decline and and resurgence of the Philippine Communist movement.' Work-in-Progress seminar, Department of Political and Social Change, The Australian National University, 1984, 75.

[10] Karl Marx, *Capital. A critique of political economy* (London 1990) 916.

[11] *Ang Bayan*, 15 June 1971, page 23, quoted in: Randy Malay Jr., 'Some random reflections on Marxism and Maoism in the Philippines' in: Randolf S. David ed., *Marxism in the Philippines. Marx centennial lectures* (Quezon City 1984) 58.

[12] Orin Starn, 'Maoism in the Andes: the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path and the refusal of history', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2 (1995) 399 — 421, there 408.

[13] Quoted in: Sanjay Seth, 'From Maoism to postcolonialism? The Indian 'Sixties' and beyond', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7 (2006) 589 — 60, there 595.

[14] Dominique Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries: Armed struggle in the 21st century, exploring the revolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines. PhD dissertation, Cornell University. 2004. 183 — 220. The new orientation was outlined in two important documents: Amado Guerrero, *Specific characteristics of our people's war* (Oakland 1979) and 'Our urgent tasks', *Rebolusyon* 1 (1976) 2 — 33.

approvingly quoted by Mao and reproduced in the 'little red book'.[15] This kind of optimism was based on a an assessment of the world-situation that imperialism and capitalism were in irreversible decline and the revolutionary forces had 'history on their side'. As Sison put it in *Philippine Society and Revolution*, 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought' was 'the acme of proletarian revolutionary ideology in the present era when imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is marching toward worldwide victory'.[16] According to the orthodox Communist concept of history, society develops according to certain laws, from capitalism to socialism to communism. In this teleological vision of history people's actions receive meaning in light of the final judgment of history: defense of Stalin's actions usually center on their supposed 'historical necessity' and the progressive role Stalin supposedly played in world history.[17]

Since the Communist movement is supposedly on the side of history, knowledge of the historical laws ensures success. Reflecting on the growth of the NPA from a force of 60 men with 35 rifles in 1969 to one that was active in over 40 provinces in the early eighties, *Ang Bayan* wrote; 'because the Party implements the correct line, it was certain that from being small and weak at the start, the people's army would grow big and strong'.[18] History was framed as struggle between the forces of revolution and of a dying capitalism. However, when the movement was confronted with difficulties in the eighties, this kind of confidence flipped over in panic and the search for the ones responsible. Because of the role this organization plays in maoist ideology, blame for for setbacks was placed on enemies out to sabotage the party.

## 5.3 The Party is always right?

Assuming history is on their side, the Maoists still needed an organization to make use of the opportunities offered by history. This for them is the revolutionary party. The extraordinary significance of such an organization in Maoist thought can hardly be overstated. It's telling Maoist documents consistently refer to 'the Party' with a capital 'P'. For Maoists the Communist Party is the force uniting the most consistent revolutionaries and coordinating the different emancipatory movements in a country. Since a movement is based on the interests of a specific social group (workers, peasants, students…) they supposedly lack revolutionary potential. Only if the sectional movements are united by a Communist Party, a revolutionary movement is possible according to Maoism.

Maoist ideas about the role of a party are partly based on those of Stalin who said that failing to build a party is 'to doom oneself to hopeless despair, to inevitable defeat'.[19] After defeating the government, it is the Communist party that 'exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat' in order 'to protect the revolution'. This is because for Maoists, there is a qualitative difference between the consciousness of the party and that of the working class, which is supposed to be the leading force in a united front leading a revolution. The working class has to be directed by the party because only the party can 'rise above the momentary interests of the proletariat'.[20]

Stalin argued that knowledge is simply a reflection of material reality — but since reality comes before its reflection, knowledge lags behind reality. The popularity of this worldview has a lot to do it with its simplicity and 'common sense' character — note how close it comes to SPP-leader Lino Dizon's statement he would teach socialism to Marx because he, unlike the scholar, had actually seen a lot of 'struggle'. Only a privileged, higher consciousness like that of the Party can overcome the lag of knowledge behind reality.[21] For Stalin, the party is 'the General Staff of the proletariat' and it has the duty to direct all other organizations of the working class which should function as 'auxiliary bodies' and 'transmission belts', 'linking the Party with the class' to enable this higher consciousness.[22]

In this worldview, the party is not just a political tool — it is, quite literally, what psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan called the 'subject supposed to know'. According to Lacan, humans form their personality through comparing themselves

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[15] Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from chairman Mao Tsetung* (Peking 1976) 309.

[16] Amado Guerrero (Jose Maria Sison), *Philippine society and revolution* (np, 2005) 59.

[17] An example is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanismus und Terror* (Frankfurt am Main 1966).

[18] Editorial, *Ang Bayan* 6 (1981) 1 — 5.

[19] J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Peking 1976) 98.

[20] Ibidem, 183.

[21] Henri Lefèbvre, *Probleme des Marxismus, heute* (Frankfurt am Main 1967) 118.

[22] Stalin, *Problems of Leninism,* 99.

with other, often imagined subjects, 'the Other'; like the child who first becomes familiar with its body by looking at others and their movements. The 'subject supposed to know' arises through transference: in the context of a psychoanalytic session, the analyst is supposed to know the meaning of the patient's symptoms.

According to Lacanian thought, this structure of transference is a more general structure 'in which a figure of the Other is not only supposed to know, but can also believe, enjoy, cry and laugh, or even NOT know for us.'[23] The 'subject supposed to know' is assumed to have access to a higher form of knowledge. Placebos work for their patients because doctors are 'the subject supposed to know'. In politics, the government often has this position ('I don't know why the government does this or that but I suppose that they know best, so I'll do what they say').

The CPP was 'the subject supposed to know' for many of its supporters who lacked a clear idea of what routinely invoked phrases like 'petty-bourgeois revisionism' or 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' actually meant or why an analysis of the Philippines as 'semi-semi' should be the bedrock of a correct strategy — but who still followed its guidance. Because crisis ensues when the chain of transference breaks down, people insist on maintaining it, even when the subject supposed to know 'obviously' doesn't know — like when the party starts killing its own members.

As the carrier of historical knowledge and the incarnation of the revolution, the Communist Party is not just a political tool, it also has characteristics of a Church (it is the highest carrier of 'truth') and of the government: the CPP controls the National Democratic Front that is supposed to be the embryonic revolutionary government. The party also controls the NPA which is not only the army but also functions as a police-force and punishes crime. The party also enforces a moral order, for example by punishing adultery and by codifying 'regulations pertaining to courtship, establishment of relationships, marriage and divorce' and insisting sexual relationships must be monogamous and lead to marriage and family.[24]

The Party should, Stalin wrote, be instilled with 'iron discipline' meaning unity of both 'action and will'. With this, Stalin made a significant modification to the older Bolshevik idea of 'democratic centralism'. Democratic centralism meant that once the party had arrived at a decision, everybody, including those who disagreed with it, had a duty to carry it out ('freedom of discussion, unity of action').[25] According to Stalin, the party must consistently purge itself of 'opportunist elements'. Where do these 'elements' come from? They can not be reflections of differences in the working class since this class is presumed to be homogeneous. Differences must then come from the outside: Stalin declared they were the result of capitalist influences.[26] This meant dissent made one an enemy of the revolution and political discussion in the party was impossible (Stalin's lip-service to internal debate not withstanding). This principle would have a strong impact on the Philippine Communist movement and its inability to accommodate a variety of views.

The demand of 'unity in will', essentially introduced the category of thought-crimes. It makes it possible to victimize party-members not on the basis of their actions but on basis of their supposed ideas when the leadership decides these disrupt the unity of the party. A 'disruption of will' might not even be the consequence of certain political ideas but just be a matter of attitude.[27]

To the ideas of Stalin on the party, Maoism made two contributions. The first is the idea of the mass-line. Mao described this as 'taking the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrating them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas) and going to the masses and propagating and explaining these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own'.[28] This means the party has a decisive role in formulating the 'correct' ideas that should lead the movement in all its aspects.

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[23] Slavoj Zizek, *Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute*, online at `http://www.lacan.com/symptom8_articles/zizek8.html`

[24] Kaira Zoe Alburo Kintanar, 'Brothers and Lovers in Arms: Negotiating Male Homosexuality with Military Masculinity in the New People's Army, Philippines'. A Research Paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of Master of Arts in Development Studies. 2008. 27.

[25] V. I. Lenin, 'Report on the unity congress of the R.S.D.L.P. A letter to the St. Petersburg workers' (1906) in: Idem *Collected works* X (London 1972) 317 — 383, there 380. The degree to which either 'democracy' or 'centralism' was emphasized in Lenin's writings depended on whether the party was legal or underground and whether criticism (like that of the reformist socialist Eduard Bernstein) attacked the basic fundamentals of Marxism or not. Needless to say, under Stalin these kinds of nuances were obliterated. See Lars T. Lih, *Lenin rediscovered. What is to be done in historical context* (Chicago 2008) for a discussion of Lenin's conception of democratic centralism.

[26] Bruce Franklin (ed.), *The essential Stalin. Major theoretical writings 1905 — 1952* (London 1973) 276.

[27] Lefebvre, *Probleme des Marxismus, heute,* 121.

[28] Mao Tse-Tung, 'some questions concerning methods of leadership' in: Idem *Selected works* III (Peking 1967) 117 — 123, there 214.

The second contribution by Mao on thinking on the party regarded the question of differences within the party. Mao agreed with Stalin that contradictions within the party are 'reflections of class contradictions'.[29] Unlike Stalin, Mao made a distinction between different kinds of contradictions: 'antagonistic' and 'non-antagonistic' ones. This was supposedly a change from Stalin's insistence on purging the party of people with 'incorrect' ideas since non-antagonistic contradictions can be resolved through discussion and persuasion. Because non-antagonistic contradictions however may change into antagonistic ones if the minority persists in 'erroneous thinking' and it is the party-leadership which decides when this change in contradiction occurs, the distinction is almost meaningless.

This may seem to be all so much empty verbiage — but put into practice in the Philippines, it became literally a matter of life and death. The use of violence to settle differences in both the old PKP and the CPP may have happened without these theories — but it is the worldview that is contained in these theories that helped justify these acts and convince others of their inevitability, no matter how deplorable their necessity. The idea that differences in the party were caused by alien class-influences made it possible to regard fellow party-members as enemies and tools of the bourgeoisie. The gap between the ideas of the rank-and-file and those of their leaders in the PKP persisted in the CPP but it were cadres like the Political Officers and higher, those who underwent political education, who played a crucial role in starting and carrying out the purges.[30]

It's also important that many cadres of the CPP were either former students or, somewhat later, came from the Roman Catholic clergy. Since for many of them their involvement in the CPP was motivated by its ideology, they evaluated their actions according to ideological criteria. The CPP's Maoism considered these 'intellectuals' to be relatively privileged and called on them to go over to the side of the proletariat, further motivating them to always follow strictly the Maoist line to prove they were loyal party-members and true revolutionaries. As time passed, more and more CPP-members with a proletarian or peasant background became cadre members but the party's top leadership remained dominated by former students and clergy.[31]

For large parts of its later social base, official party-ideology was not very important but the disconnection between the ideology of the leadership and the ideas of the rank-and-file and its social base didn't mean the leadership didn't enjoy credibility. In fact, such disconnection can even contribute to a higher level of respect for the ideologues since they seem to have access, thanks to their education and familiarity with the writings of admired revolutionary leaders, to privileged knowledge.

The cadres of the CPP who drew up balance-sheets of the purges and judged them to be successful, leading to new purges, were familiar with these Stalinist-Maoist ideas. The CPP had some advantage over the 'old party' attracting educated members but it never went beyond Stalinism. It also inherited the PKP's anti-intellectualism and political education stagnated in the party. The simple, vulgar materialism of Stalinism was attractive because it fitted the worldview of underground activists who, for understandable reasons, tended to privilege directly practical work over theoretical reflection.

In many cases, it is possible to argue the Stalinist-Maoist theories were only invoked as cover for more prosaic interests of political leaders. For example, when the PKP-leadership in the early seventies decided to enter into a 'political settlement' with Marcos, dissenters unwilling to surrender to the dictator were denounced as 'anarcho-trotskyites' and tortured and killed.[32] It's easy to see this as part of thoroughly cynical maneuvering to secure a comfortable life for the party-leaders as supporters of the dictator. But to always reduce people's 'real' motives to only their direct self-interest (itself a kind of 'vulgar Marxism') is of little use when trying to explain purges that brought no benefit, real or imagined, to an organized group in the party — like those in the second half of the eighties in the CPP.

The CPP's ideology saw history as a violent struggle with only two sides: on one side the party, on the other side the forces of reaction. The party was assumed to be the carrier of the knowledge and skills necessary to defeat reaction. Any weaknesses or setbacks the party experiences must then be the work of enemy agents or of the failure to live up to one's 'historical role'. Confronted with a deep crisis, a hunt for those preventing 'the Party' to play its

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[29] Mao Tse-Tung, 'On contradiction' in: Idem *Selected works* I (Peking 1967) 311 — 347, there 344.
[30] For example, a survivor of OPML remembers the persecutors spoke English. Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 110.
[31] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).
[32] Nemenzo, 'An irrepressible revolution' 75.

'historical role' was opened. But the limits on the effectiveness of the party had more to do with its internal defects, as we will see in the next chapter.

# VI. Instabilities in the party

## 6.1 Fragile unity

The CPP was not a party known for its innovative thinking — Sison's *Philippine Society and Revolution* has since publication in 1970 remained the handbook of the party and still is the basis of its political education. The party's educational courses mainly consisted of work by Mao Zedong and texts by Sison. In 1975, it was decided to launch an internal theoretical magazine, *Rebolusyon,* as part of one of several attempts to higher the level of debate in the party. In 1977 it ceased publication until it was relaunched in 1990.[1]

A kind of division of labor, quite similar to that of society at large, developed in the CPP and its allied organization; NPA-fighters were mainly drawn from the poor peasantry, former students and clergy — a major pool of recruits, especially in Mindanao — became organizers and educators. A description of the eight plenum of the Central Committee in 1980 by a participant shows this division was visible all the way to the top: 'we were half military people and half coming from city-oriented, we respect each other once the "big guys" [NPA commanders] talked. They were there, Kintanar, Calubid, Capegsan, De Vera, Bilog, Tabara. (…) all from military and CS [countryside] background. (…).'[2]

At times, those 'above' and those 'below' were talking past one another, making it difficult to develop effective education. The CPP was aware political education was lacking and in the early eighties appeals for further study and education were a recurring element in editorials and articles in the party newspaper *Ang Bayan.* One article for example complained that even the party's own publications were not distributed and read well among its members.[3] That such complaints and calls to improve political education were repeated so often show the official program of political education was not strictly implemented and that there were doubts about the ideological level of members. We will see how in the case of Mindanao especially these doubts were justified.

When the CPP in Mindanao was flooded with new recruits in the first half of the eighties, some attempts were made to raise their political thinking but these ran into great difficulties. A number of Mao's essays were translated for study by the new members but these were of little use: the translations were too formal was one complaint.[4] But no matter the quality of the translation, it is hard to see what use the members could have made of a text like '*The foolish old man who removed the mountain*', one of the texts used, in dealing with political obstacles. This short essay, originally a speech, is a homily on the virtues of perseverance: an old man is rewarded for his determination to remove a mountain with the intervention of two angels (symbolizing 'the masses') that carry the mountain away for him.[5]

A romantic notion of the revolutionary potential of the 'basic masses' (to use CPP jargon) and the division of labor between former-students-turned-ideologues and peasants-turned-guerrilla's obscured just how brittle ties between the party's ideology and the motivations of its rank-and-file and social base could be. The communication-breakdown between the cadres and the party's supporters sometimes led to darkly funny misunderstandings. David Glanz relates how in 1993 one party member told him of her experiences organizing slum dwellers in Tondo, a poor neighborhood in Manila and the historical home of a strong movement of slum dwellers. People responded well to her lectures against 'imperialism', one of the three 'basic problems' facing Philippine society according to the CPP's textbook. (The other two are 'feudalism': the existence of large landed estates with tenants and sharecropping

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[1] Editorial 'On resuming publication', *Rebolusyon. Theoretical & political journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines* 1 (1990) 3 — 4.

[2] Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries', 273. Maoism insists the party should always command the army, not the other way around.

[3] 'Newspapers: flag bearers of the mass movement' *Ang Bayan* (12) 1982, 12 -14.

[4] Abinales, 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy',167.

[5] Mao Tse-Tung, 'The foolish old man who removed the mountian' in: Idem *Selected works* III (Peking 1967) 271 — 275.

— and 'bureaucrat-capitalism': Philippine capitalists that supposedly owe their economic success to an alliance with the state and imperialism). The party-organizer was disappointed when she realized the local population 'understood imperialism to be the ethnic Chinese traders in the neighbouring thoroughfare'.[6]

Just how brittle the party's mass-support could be can be illustrated by the example of Davao. In the eighties, parts of the poor neighborhoods of Davao had become NPA strongholds. These neighborhoods became no-go areas for the authorities as the party experimented with urban guerrilla-war. The neighborhood Agdao where the NPA was particularly active was nicknamed 'Nicaragdao' in reference to Nicaragua where insurrections had driven away the Somoza dictatorship a few years earlier. A few years later, exactly the same neighborhoods would be the home of *Alsa Masa* (Risen Masses), an anti-Communist vigilante group.

According to local tales, *Alsa Masa* was formed after the killing on the 22sd of March 1986, in the midst of the anti-DPA hunt, of a popular local party-cadre by his former comrades. This killing led to a series of defections to the army by activists who were afraid they would be next. Together with the military and local criminals, these defectors created a violent anti-Communist vigilante group that drove even legal leftist groups underground.[7] Except from fear and government support, a major reason for the CPP's decline in Davao was that he party's experiments with urban warfare had invited repression and people objected to violence like the killing of unarmed traffic cops or of neighborhood-police for no other reason than to obtain their pistols. Developments like these fed feelings of distrust and suspicion. As the hunt for traitors created treason and defection, the persecutors thought they saw their suspicions affirmed.

Thinking in concepts and writing has remained the task of a selective few, in the first place that of Jose Maria Sison, who insisted rigidly on the use of the Maoist framework for analyzing society. However, on the level of the practical application of these ideas, the CPP made a number of inventions. One of these is the shift from building 'red base areas' to several 'guerrilla fronts' that move around in certain areas. Sison's idea of mobile guerilla-fronts modified the Maoist model of building 'base areas' that serve as the center of operations of the revolutionary forces. This model had earlier proved to be inapplicable in the Philippines: since the country is an archipelago, the movement of guerrilla's is limited. The CPP, unlike the Thai Communists or the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, also lacked large hinterlands or the border of a friendly country behind which they could retreat beyond the grasp of the government army.

A second modification was the principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations': the party 'must distribute and develop throughout the country cadres who are of sufficiently high quality to find their own bearing and maintain initiative not only within periods as short as one or two months, periods of regular reporting, but also within periods as long as two or more years, in case the enemy chooses to concentrate on an island or a particular fighting front and blockade it.'[8] These principles were laid out in the texts *Specific Characteristics of our People's War* (SCPW, 1974) and *Our Urgent Tasks* (OUT, 1976), both written by Sison.

The principle 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' meant regional party-units enjoyed relative freedom to experiment with different approaches. But since the principle of 'central leadership' included adherence to the Maoist line, these experiments remained at a local level, tolerated as long as they were successful and could be combined with a formal adherence to the Maoist strategy.

An example is the approach of the party in Manila-Rizal were the regional party committee (KR-MR) proposed in 1974 to form an alliance with anti-Marcos bourgeois forces for the elections. The goal was to try and draw these forces 'into a broader…anti-fascist [meaning anti-Marcos] legal front', to help divide the bourgeoisie and diffuse national-democratic ideas. The KR-MR did not doubt the principle that they could only seize power through the Maoist strategy of a 'people's war' but were of the opinion that Manila, the bloated capital city could, by helping to create a revolutionary situation in the country, play a more important role than is assumed in the principle of 'surrounding the cities from the countryside'.

The plan was vetoed by the centralized leadership who enforced the idea that the tempo of the urban movement had to be subordinated to the rural guerrilla-struggle. Obviously, this veto didn't convince the 'decentralized' activists

[6] David Glanz, 'Confusion grows from the barrel of a gun. The Communist Party of the Philippines.' PhD dissertation, Monash Univerity. 2001. 70.

[7] Jones, *Red Revolution*, 269 — 270.

[8] Guerrero, *Specific characteristics of our people's war* (Oakland 1979), 'Our urgent tasks', 2 — 33.

of the movement in Manila since only a year later the KR-MR proposed the idea to campaign for elections. This proposal was again vetoed and Sison made his criticisms explicit in Our Urgent Tasks.

When Marcos in 1978 called elections it was again the Manila-Rizal branch that deviated from the national course: it participated by standing candidates in the campaign run from prison by Benigno Aquino.[9] The rationale behind this was similar to the reasons given four years before to form an alliance with the anti-Marcos bourgeoisie. The Manila-Rizal leadership had obviously not been convinced by the insistence on the orthodox 'protracted people's war' or 'PPW' model. This time, the Manila-Rizal leadership went as far as defying explicit, last minute instructions to boycott the elections: such a boycott would have, in their assessment, damaged the movement.[10] In an extended meeting with national leaders in the countryside in 1979 tensions ran high. According to one account, the Manila-Rizal leaders even feared they would be executed.[11]

Long before the outbreak of open disagreements and splits in the nineties then, a range of opinions existed in the supposedly monolithic party. The principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' accommodated the existence of these differences but the refusal to discuss anything that could not be made to fit the Maoist paradigm made it impossible to arrive at a synthesis of the various viewpoints and experiences. Local innovations 'rarely worked their way "upwards" as ideas that prompted a re-thinking of the central tenets of Party thought'.[12] Instead, differences were buried, only to resurface later.

The party's high level of involvement in political work could not function as a guarantee against dogmatism: the view of a theory as absolute, instead of relative knowledge and as abstract, isolated from further input and not affected by experience. On the level of short-term, locally applied tactics militants had to respond quickly and flexible to their direct surroundings. But since there was no mechanism to synthesize these local experiences, lessons from daily experience didn't prevent theoretical reification. The CPP was, despite its tactical brilliance, unable to modify its strategy. Its political thinking became a reified ideology that could explain setbacks only by assuming the work of enemies.

## 6.2 The party in Mindanao

The other region that became notorious for its dissenting views was the branch in Mindanao. The principle of decentralized operations would here lead to the kinds of 'deviations' that Sison later held responsible for the purges. As we have seen, the purges were not limited to Mindanao and his analysis that it was their 'wrong line' that led to the purges is unable to explain why the first purges took place on the Visayas and Luzon, and why after the purges in Mindanao, new ones took place in other parts of the country. It is however true that because of the number of victims Mindanao takes an exceptional place in the history of the purges.

The southern island of Mindanao is the second largest of the country, after Luzon, and has in Davao, a sprawling city, the second largest urban area outside Manila. The party had been almost completely wiped-out in the early seventies but in the late seventies it was the fastest growing branch of the movement. To better regulate the party, a special commission ('Mindacom') was set up. Edgar Jopson, who had been the chair of the largest moderate student organization of the country during the First Quarter Storm protests, had been radicalized by Marcos' destruction of parliamentary democracy and his declaration of Martial Law in 1972. Jopson joined the CPP somewhere in 1973. Soon, he made a name as a talented organizer and in late 1979 'Edjop' was sent to Mindanao to help reorganize the party there.

The reality he encountered in Mindanao was far from the typical cliché image of a Leninist party. Recruiting standards were low, meetings were chaotic and informal, often there were not even notes being taken, decisions were not implemented.[13] Thanks to the efforts of Jopson and Mindacom, party-work became better organized and

[9] Gregg R. Jones, *Red revolution. Inside the Philippine guerilla movement* (Boulder 1989) 115.

[10] Glanz, 'Confusion grows from the barrel of a gun' 148.

[11] Ibidem, 150.

[12] Kathleen Weekley, 'From vanguard to rearguard, The theoretical roots of the crisis of the Communist Party of the Philippines' in: Patricio N. Abinales ed., *The revolution falters: the left in Philippine politics after 1986* (Ithaca 1996) 28 — 60, there 36.

[13] Benjamin Pimentel, *U.G. An underground tale. The journey of Edgar Jopson and the First Quarter Storm generation* (Pasig City 2006) 147 — 166.

more professional but any organization going through such rapid growth as the CPP in Mindanao would have great difficulties in absorbing and training all the new members. Obviously, the rapid growth meant the introduction of many new recruits and little time to vet and train all of them. The pernicious distrust that would tear the Mindanao-branch apart a few years sprung up between people who were hardly familiar with each-other and that, even though they all supported the same party, often had little in common.

One of the reasons that made it possible for the Mindanao CPP to grow so quickly was that it was not the only force confronting the government: a powerful secessionist movement of the Muslim-minority (called 'Moros', a name given to them by the Spanish) had also taken up arms against Marcos. Partly as an effort to defuse the political unrest in the north of the Philippines, the national government had organized migration of peasants from Christian Luzon to the relatively sparsely populated southern island of Mindanao in the fifties and sixties. Without effective land-registration or control on the immigration of Christian settlers into Mindanao, tension over land increased as new settlers displaced people from territory they had been living and working on. The social unrest from below this created was combined with conflicts inside the ruling class. Local leaders in Mindanao who were politicians and *datus* (Muslim aristocrats) were losing substantial amounts of power as Marcos from 1965 on attempted to centralize the state, 'bringing it directly to Mindanao', and overruling the local elite.[14]

By 1970, these tensions had intensified to the point that a virtual civil war broke out in Mindanao between Christian and Muslim militia. Marcos send in the national army, bypassing local leaders, in some cases disarming and neutralizing their private armies. Radical Muslim students, weapons from the politicians and Libya and a training-ground in Malaysia combined in the formation of the secessionist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the early seventies.[15] After fierce fighting in 1973 — 77 caused more than thirteen thousand deaths, violence declined to the level of skirmishes and guerrilla-war. Militarily, the Muslim secessionist movement was a lot stronger than the CPP — in no small part thanks to its foreign support.

The Islamic secessionists didn't compete with the Communists, who mostly won supporters from among the Christian population, for support. The CPP and the MNLF and its split, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), were on friendly terms: sometimes NPA fighters played basketball with their Islamic counterparts in guerrillacamps. The war between the MNLF and the Marcos regime involved at its height more than half of the government-army, giving the CPP much needed 'breathingspace' and making violence a familiar phenomena in society.[16]

Patricio N. Abinales, an expert on Mindanao, described how the CPP could grow so rapidly on the island thanks to the 'fluidity' of society there: Mindanao had long been a frontier-zone with large, unsettled stretches of land but by the late 1960's this frontier started to 'fill up'.[17] The frontier could no longer function as a safety-valve, absorbing the poor and landless. At the same time, capital increasingly penetrated the island: to tap the island's rich agricultural and mineral resources, existing industries were expanded and new ones opened up. These developments increased class-tensions in Mindanaon society. Marcos' attempts to incorporate the frontierzone and implement developmentalist policies increased these tensions and meant the marginalization of communities of indigenous people and settlers from the north of the country.

The social tensions radicalized great numbers of people and created a stream of new recruits to the movement. Membership in Davao alone jumped between 1978 and 1985 from 50 to 1000.[18] Abinales estimates that between 1981 and Kahos in 1985, the number of party-members grew from 950 to as many as 2396: a growth of over 250 percent in about four years.[19] The period of the most rapid advance was between 1981 and 1984 — about a year before the start of Kahos — with a 'severalfold expansion of the guerilla fronts, mass organizations and the Party'. According to Harry, the party neglected security-measures and the political consolidation of its mass-basis. He described how armed propaganda-teams would visit communities in new areas at night to make contact with the local population; 'imagine when armed people ask you to let them in and listen to their propaganda. Of course you

[14] Abinales and Amoroso, *State and society in the Philippines,* 216.

[15] Mara Stankovitch ed., 'Compromising on autonomy. Mindanao in transition', *Accord. An international review of peace initiatives* 6 (1999) 93.

[16] Patricio N. Abinales, 'Marcos and Mindanao' in: Idem, *The joys of dislocation. Mindanao, nation and region* (Pasig City 2008) 34- 36

[17] Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory', 163.

[18] Jones, *Red revolution*, 135.

[19] Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory' 166.

cooperate and say you agree with them. With four or five squads of about five people we could cover an area and after a few weeks we declared it solid, reliable.'[20]

This way the party expanded rapidly but on a weak basis. But party-leaders were, according to Harry, more interested in success stories about newly won areas and communities. This period saw the rapid promotions of cadres and the formation of many new committees composed of inexperienced cadres — things the party later admitted 'brought within their train some new weaknesses and further aggravated old ones'.[21]

Despite Jopson's work, training and education of the new members was weak. According to one cadre who was a member of the National Propaganda committee even the party's newspaper *Ang Bayan* was not distributed in large parts of the island and cadres assigned with political eduction were reassigned to 'more important tasks'. According to this 'Ka Nong', in 1987 or 1988 Mindacom reported that only about a third of the total number of party members had gone through the just the 'Basic Party Course' and many of those who did only followed part of the course.[22]

Many party supporters were unprepared to deal with the coming political changes. My hypothesis is that, lacking education in the party's ideology, they acted on the basis of a 'radicalized every-day peasant consciousness' and their experiences in a largely military struggle. One outcome of this was what one member of the caretaker committee, the group that was responsible for the daily affairs while Mindacom attended the CC meeting in Manila and set Kahos in motion, Frank Gonzales (aka Ka Taquio or Takyo) described as 'a tendency towards a narrow interpretation of class struggle as the physical elimination of the perceived enemy'.[23] What was needed for this tendency to victimize other comrades was the conviction that they were in the service of the enemy.

Before the purges and the governments counter-attacks crippled the movement, the Mindanao-CPP used its new found strength to experiment with new techniques. In 1982 it introduced Armed City Partisan Units (ACPU's) in Davao, making the city and not only the countryside a site for guerrilla war. After the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983 anti-Marcos protests in the cities increased and the party became more active in urban settings. The Mindanao-branch adopted the tactic of the *welgang bayan* ('people's strike') where people in certain areas would stop working while guerrilla's enforced roadblocks and workstoppage. By 1985, 'the combination of urban partisan warfare, the demonstrated capability to paralyze the city [of Davao] with transport strikes and CPP/NPA control over most of the poor neighborhoods in the urban area of Davao City had come close to defeating government power in the Philippine's second largest city'.[24] This experience led Mindanao cadres to formulate theories that on the basis of urban insurrections the fall of the government could be hastened and maybe even power might be seized without militarily defeating the government army.

But even before Kahos, the Mindanaon CPP was weaker than it looked; its base was unconsolidated, its members hardly educated or prepared for coming challenges. But apparent successes and rapid growth gave the impression of strength, making the shock of future setbacks even stronger.

When the CPP entered into a crisis in the second half of the eighties, differences that had been more or less hidden behind the principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' became public. For a few years, the CPP saw intense debates about strategy and over the evaluation of its past, its mistakes and its successes. Broadly speaking, two camps took shape: those who defended the Maoist orthodoxy and those who rejected it. Many in the second camp agreed with each-other that the city and social movements other than the guerrilla should play a more important part in the party's strategy than the Maoist orthodoxy allowed them but except from that, they agreed on little else.

After the decision of the CPP to boycott the elections that made Cory Aquino president and after the 'EDSA revolution' (named after Epifanio de los *Santos* Avenue, one of the main roads of the capital and the location of huge crowds) that drove Marcos from power, a furious debate erupted in the party. The boycott decision itself was heavily criticized — and the leadership admitted this was a mistake — but there were also disagreements on the party's strategy, the lack of democracy in the organization and the control the party sought to exercise over above-ground organization and alliances. These differences were compounded by the implosion of the eastern-bloc in the

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[20] Authors interview with Harry, April 16th 2011.

[21] 'Revolution in Mindanao: recovery and advance', *Ang Bayan* 6 (1988) 2 -6, there 2.

[22] 'Remarks of Ka Nong at study session of January 19, 1992'.

[23] 'Annotations on the article by Taquio entitled "Comments on the current polemics within the party"'.

[24] Joel Rocamora, *Breaking through. The struggle within the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Pasig City 1994) 28.

late eighties. Although the party had little ties with these countries and Maoists generally considered the eastern-bloc to be capitalist anyway, the implosion of the Soviet-Union and the other nominally socialist regimes in Europe made a number of cadres question CPP goals like a single party-state and a state-led economy.

The party's forces decreased sharply: between 1987 and 1990, party-membership decreased by 15 percent, the number of barrios under its coverage by 16 percent, the number of NPA fighters with 28 percent and the total membership in party-controlled rural mass-organizations with 60 percent.[25] To counter these negative developments, critical voices urged deep going changes in the party's strategy and ways of operating — which way these changes should go they often disagreed on, but there was a shared feeling in the opposition that the old Maoist model should be discarded and that the party needed more internal democracy.

Sison, who after his release by Aquino in March 1986 re-assumed the position of chairman in 1987, went the other way.[26] Under a new alias, Armando Liwanag ('Arming with Light') he started to attack those who criticized the Maoist model and Stalinist conception of the party. The debate came to a head and led to splits after Sison published in 1992 a document called *Reaffirm our basic principles and rectify mistakes* which called for a return to Maoism after the 'deviations' of the eighties.[27] Sison won over a majority of the party-leadership and he and his supporters, now dubbed 're-affirmists' or 'RA's', started to expel the 're-jectionists' ('RJ's') who rejected the Maoist model. At the end of 1992, the RA's had control of a unified but weakened party.[28]

On the eve of Kahos then, the CPP was a party filled with contradictions and tension. Long standing internal differences deepened as Philippine society underwent deep social and political changes in the early and mid eighties. Despite great progress, the CPP had reproduced many of the same weaknesses of the earlier revolutionary movements: a gap between existed its cadre and rank-and-file, reproducing in many ways the inequalities of Philippine society. Its Maoist ideology was not enough to close this gap, leaders and followers often still lived in different mental worlds. This gap made it difficult to change the party's thinking and contributed to its disconnection from its daily experiences. However, the leadership and the party enjoined a great deal of prestige because of the organization's successes in fighting the Marcos dictatorship.

We can now identify three necessary but not sufficient conditions for the purges in this decade. One was a reduction of politics to violence — this reduction was encouraged by two, seemingly opposed, worldviews; official Maoist ideology and the 'radicalized every-day peasant consciousness'. A second condition was an ideology that declared the party to posses a higher level of knowledge. A third condition was the reification of the CPP's thinking into an inflexible ideology as result of the gap between the worldviews of the activists and official thinking and the refusal to question Maoism itself. This combination made a crisis of the movement unavoidable. In the following chapter, we will look at reasons why this crisis took the specific shape it did: repeated and murderous hunts for fictive infiltrators.

[25] Nathan F. Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines. A complete failure of the maoist paradigm' (n.p., n.d.) 10.

[26] Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines' 74. As a leading member of the CPP at the time, Quimpo was well placed to know of these developments. Sison denies that he is Armando Liwanag but Weekely, Rocamora and Caouette al agree with Quimpo that Sison and Liwanag are the same person.

[27] Liwanag, 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors '.

[28] Kerkvliet suggests its possible that since the nineties, 'CPP members today are more united around a Communist ideology.' Kerkvliet, 'A different view of insurgencies', 4.

# VII. Elements of an explanation for the 'purges'

## 7.1 Existing explanations

Schematically, the pattern of violent 'anti-infiltration operations' in the CPP poses two questions. The first is what caused these hunts, the second is what made it possible for the purges to continue for so long. The most substantial evaluations of the purges by Paco Arguelles[1] (Ric Reyes, a member of Mindacom during Kahos), Walden Bello,[2] Robert Francis Garcia[3] and Patricio N. Abinales[4] all provide elements of the answers to these questions but focus on explaining why the purges could last so long, not on why they started.

Arguelles, Bello and Garcia for example all discuss the lack of a judicial system in the movement and an instrumental view of individuals (linked by Bello to the CPP's 'Leninism'). Garcia especially draws attention to the CPP's intolerance towards dissenting views and its militarism. The dehumanization, ideological intolerance, the use of torture and the weakness of the internal justice-system these authors discuss are important to explain why the purges lasted as long as they did.

In two important essays on the purges in Mindanao, Abinales pointed to reasons why the purges here were so much more devastating than elsewhere. In the first essay, he discusses the increase of tensions in Mindanaon society during the eighties and how these were reflected in the growth and self-destruction of the Mindanaon CPP. The second essay is an analysis of the assessment of Kahos made by the Mindanao leadership. It points to the institutional and ideological weakness of the Mindanaon CPP and interprets the purge as the attempt of a bewildered leadership to keep the organization together under the pressure of an intensifying civil war and rapid political changes.

The CPP made an official evaluation of the purges in documents like *Reaffirm our basic principles* and *General review of significant events and decisions (1980 — 1991)*.[5] These documents were written and published as part of the intense political debates and splits in the National-Democratic movement in the late eighties and early nineties. Their analysis of the purges is obviously motivated by the desire to attack and discredit opposing tendencies in the movement. They should be treated carefully but contain useful information and are revealing of the mindset of the CPP. The CPP's analysis, again written by party-ideologue Jose Maria Sison, can be easily summarized; the party deviated form the 'correct' (Maoist) line, leading to militarism and exaggerated hopes of victory. Confronted with setbacks caused by this deviation and unable to explain these, the 'deviationists' started to look for spies, leading to the purges.

*Reaffirm* and a 1989 booklength interview with Sison left open the possibility there were real DPA's — because of the carelessness of the Mindanao leadership — but that Mindacom overreacted because of its 'petty-bourgeois' nature.[6] Sison later suggested it were the 'Left opportunists' themselves who spread rumors of DPA's.[7][8]

My argument is that the purges were a reaction to the political and social instability of Philippine society in the eighties. Using its familiar but reified political framework, the CPP was unable to make sense of this crisis since the CPP's political ideas had become inflexible dogma. This created cognitive dissonance between ideology and

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[1] *Paco Arguelles*, "'Kahos': A *Soul Searching*," *Human Rights Forum*, 5 (1995).

[2] Bello, 'The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement'.

[3] Garcia, 'To suffer thy comrades'.

[4] Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory' and 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy'.

[5] Armando Liwanag, 'Reaffirm our basic principles and rectify mistakes', Communist Party of the Philippines, '*General review of significant events and Decisions*, *1980-1991*', *Debate* 7 (1993) 33 — 95.

[6] Jose Maria Sison, Rainer Werning, *The Philippine revolution. The leaders view* (New York 1989) 106 — 108.

[7] Sison, Rosca, *At home in the world*, 125.

[8] Authors interview with Jose Maria Sison (29 — 4 — 2011).

external reality. To make reality 'ideologically consistent' again it needed to be reinterpreted in such a way it could fit the expectations.[9] The only way CPP-members who were unwilling to reject or alter their ideology could make such a reinterpretation was by looking for people in the party that stopped it from playing 'its historical role'. These 'saboteurs' could only be seen as traitors and enemies.

This chapter first looks in more detail at how three elements of the CPP's worldview (the tendency to reduce politics to armed violence, its class-reductionist and economistic view of individuals and its belief the party is the carrier of truth) played out during the purges. After this, it discusses two factors internal to the CPP's functioning that were important in creating the dynamic of the purges: its organizational weakness, including the lack of a sophisticated judicial apparatus, (especially in Mindanao) and its use of torture. Finally, we consider how in the party during the crisis of Philippine society in the period 1983 (the assassination of Aqauino) to the end of the decade a mindset was created that has been described as 'paranoid'.

## 7.2 Militarism: 'All things grow out of the barrel of a gun'[10]

The insistence on violence as the primary form of struggle, shared by Maoist ideology and the tradition of peasant revolts, became more important as the war between government and CPP intensified. A conception of political struggle as the physical killing of opponents and a belief the party was always right formed an explosive mixture that exploded as the party began running against the limits of its ideology and practice.

One shouldn't make a caricature out of the NPA fighters, as if they were just ruthless fighters. In an earlier phase of its struggle the fact the NPA was more than a fighting organization was one of the causes that enabled it to grow. Of the students that joined the guerrilla, those that had studied medicine for example gave basic aid to people who had no access to healthcare, others would maybe learn the peasants they worked among to read and write. NPA units helped peasants with their daily tasks. New recruits were taught to always be respectful and honest to 'the people'.

But with the intensification of the armed struggle in the early eighties, it was inevitable the military aspect would become more and more dominant. War, no matter what kind, has a logic of its own. Mao, who often used ideas of ancient warlords and commanders of the ruling classes in his writing on military affairs, knew this. Armies can survive and win when they act quickly in applying force where the enemy is weaker. To be able to do this, armies need discipline, regimentation of knowledge and tasks and a command structure.

A guerrilla-army can't escape from this logic but finds itself in a complicated double-bind: it has to grow bigger to win and as the war continues, it will tend to become more and more like its opponent. At the same time, it's *raison d'etre* is that it is different from the government army. Specialized soldiers are more efficient in combat than NPA members who are part-time fighters and part-time doctors or educators — but they are not as efficient in winning support. It's no accident that Sison, who wanted to 're-affirm' the party's Maoist line, ignored that one of the signs of Mindacoms' 'militarism' he criticizes — the formation of company-sized armed units — was pioneered by party-units in Samar and Northern Luzon that stuck closely to the Maoist model.

The overemphasis on the military side of the struggle was hardly unique to the Mindanaoans. According to the Maoist theory of 'protracted people's war' ('PPW'), revolutionary wars go through three stages: a strategic defense, where the guerrilla is weak and limited to hit and run attacks, strategic stalemate, characterized by the formation of larger units of full-time fighters and the creation of liberated zones, and the strategic offensive in which the revolutionary forces defeat the government army through conventional warfare. Since the overall movement is subordinated to the development of the guerrilla-war, there can be no significant step forward in the revolution without an escalation of the military struggle from one phase to another.

The militarism of the CPP in Mindanao was not caused by a deviation from Maoism, rather the Maoist 'PPW model' itself was militarist. One reason militarism as a political strategy, and more general a reduction of politics to violent confrontation, could take hold in the CPP was its view of individuals.

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[9] Patricia G. Steinhoff, 'Death by defeatism and other fables: the social dynamics of the Rengō Sekigun purge' in: *Takie Sugiyama Lebra, Japanese social organization* (Honolulu 1992) 195 — 225, there 207.

[10] Mao Tse-Tung, 'Problems of war and strategy' in: Idem: *Selected Works* II (Peking 1967) 219 — 237, there 225.

## 7.3 Class-reductionism

In the CPP's conception of the world, individuals and their actions are reduced to their class-identity: 'the political moves of each [individual or group] is actually in pursuit of its own class-identity'.[11] And class-identity is equated with political ideas: for or against 'the Party'.

The methods some supposed enemies, the so-called 'confirmed spies' caught during Kahos, used according to Mindacom's initial assessment of the Kahos are curious: 'distorting the political line during educational sessions', 'mismanagement of money', 'breaching party-discipline' and 'embezzling funds' are named as ways to sabotage the party.[12] Mindacom was not the first leading body in the party that thought police-spies would use such impractical methods. In the article on the anti-infiltration drive in 1981 in Quezon-Bicol it is written that spies 'neglected political education to the masses', 'displayed liberalism in their work' (Maoist jargon for a lack of discipline) and neglected security.[13]

It is unlikely infiltrators used methods like these as part of a plan to sabotage the party — it is much more likely these were the result of the raw, untrained nature of many new activists. We saw there was a lack of political education and the CPP in Mindanao in particular took in large numbers of new, raw recruits — it is likely that distortions of the political line had more to do with unfamiliarity with the theory and with the anti-intellectual current in the movement than with a complicated plan to destabilize the party.

Likewise, the other 'sabotage-methods' mentioned in the assessment of Mindacom and the in *Ang Bayan* article can easily be explained by incompetence, opportunism and a plain lack of experience. But its Manichean ideology, that saw reality as a struggle of the Party versus capitalism, provided the CPP with a framework in which these weaknesses were characteristics of the enemy. Obviously referring to this mechanism, one member of the Mindanao-leadership talked about a 'tendency to lump up (*sic*) alleged criminal violations with ordinary cases of organizational violations'.[14]

Garcia narrates how differences caused by different class-backgrounds persisted in the movement. He and the others who made up the 'educational committee' of his unit all came from the city and had been students.[15] People like him, Garcia writes, were instantly recognizable: by their skin, their demeanor, their difficulties in climbing the mountains, et cetera. They were also recognizable by the kind of work they did in the movement: their priority was not fighting but political education, a division of labor that on occasion caused resentment. Most of the time, this resentment only led to teasing remarks and jokes, Garcia writes.[16]

But in the dynamic of a hunt for infiltrators, with people being tortured to give names, why not name the ones you dislike anyway? At least one cadre said that sometimes 'interpersonal conflicts were affecting these investigations.'[17] The *Ang Bayan* article 'Busting a spy network' relates how spies supposedly 'sought out those with grievances' against the leadership.[18] Garcia writes that under torture he too was tempted to name members that had accused him, to give them 'a taste of their own medicine'.[19]

When the purges came, the party cracked along similar lines as existed in the rest of society. When Garcia was arrested, it was together with the other former students and two peasant guerrillas who happened to share their sleeping quarters. Weren't people like Garcia more suspect from the beginning? A DPA is a tool of the bourgeoisie, a 'p-b (*petty-burgis*) element', like students after all. According to Ka Nong's remarks on Kahos the victims came 'especially from the White Areas' — the party term for cities.[20] The majority of the NPA-fighters were peasants

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[11] 'Cadres should grasp principles, methods for political analysis', *Ang Bayan* 2 (1985) 2 -5, there 2.

[12] Abinales, 'Kahos revisited' 152.

[13] 'Busting a spy network: one region's experience', *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 13 -16.

[14] Draft on the Kahos question (n.p., n.d.) 5.

[15] Garcia, *To suffer they comrades*, 8.

[16] Ibidem, 3.

[17] Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries', 239.

[18] 'Busting a spy network: one region's experience', *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 13 -16, there 14.

[19] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 18.

[20] 'Remarks of Ka Nong at study session of January 19, 1992'.

and leading members had noted that it was hard for party-members who stayed for a long time in the countryside to understand what was going on in the cities.[21]

Other pre-existing lines along which the party fractured were sexuality and gender. Especially female suspects were subjected to sexual abuse and several party-members later said a non-heterosexual orientation could be a reason for suspicion.[22] This comes as no surprise in an organization that in many ways reproduced the (hetero-)sexist, Catholic morals of Philippine society.[23]

In the CPP's thinking there was no room for attention to these fault-lines: joining the movement was supposed to obliterate all differences between comrades. A proletarian supports 'the Party' because this organization is supposed to be the carrier of the revolution. Of course, the CPP was aware unifying people with diverse backgrounds in a common struggle and in a shared movement is not an easy process. This is why in Maoist literature, including that of the CPP, one finds many references to the process of 'remoulding'; through study, work and 'struggle', activists are supposed to turn themselves into 'proletarians' with the 'correct' ideas, habits and values.

Deviation from the majority-view is seen as a result of incomplete remoulding, of the continuing influence of alien class-influences. Remoulding is supposed to correct both ideas and behavior — an idealist notion that could take on bizarre extremes. Regarding romantic relationships between party-members, for example, *Ang Bayan* wrote, that those 'shall always be guided by and subordinated to love for the working class'. This was 'easier said than done' but a 'struggle of ideas' would lead to 'gladly accepting sacrifices'.[24]

Since ideas and behavior are assumed to be caused by one's 'class', the wrong kind of behavior, irregardless of stated political opinions, could mark one as a suspect. Because of the reduction of people to their 'class', there was also no guarantee of the Human Rights of the accused, like the right to defend oneself, not be tortured and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. The attitude of the Communists towards Human Rights was at best ambivalent, even though the CPP and its front-organizations played a major role in creating a Human Rights movement in the Philippines.[25] But they approached Human Rights activism initially as only a tool to further discredit the Marcos regime and bring more international pressure to bear on him — Human Rights were not recognized as such. National Democratic Front-chairperson and CPP-leader Rafael Baylosis declared in the eighties; 'the struggle for "human rights" is a legitimate and necessary part of the overall national democratic struggle. In my opinion, however, it should be confined to the sphere of tactical struggle or the struggle for reforms, used as only one of the means or forms of organization in working or forging alliances'.[26]

According to the CPP's Maoism, there existed no universal Human Rights, only 'class-rights'. One of the activists interviewed by Bello explained what this meant for those considered class-enemies: '[I]ndividuals have rights…only by virtue of their membership in the right classes or, failing that, in their holding the right politics. Thus, if an individual is suspected or judged to be a class-enemy, he or she has no innate rights to life, liberty, and respect, what happens to him depends purely on the tactical needs of the movement'.[27] This neglect of Human Rights had disastrous consequences when torture was accepted as a method of investigation.

The violence against the victims of the purges was, to CPP-members, just another example of justified struggle against 'enemies of the people'. Abinales has correctly criticized Bello's assessment that it was the party's 'Leninist', instrumental vision of people that led to the torture and killing by pointing out that especially in Mindanao the CPP was actually very far from the Leninist idealtype.[28] Paraphrasing Nemenzo's criticism of Kerkvliet's view

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[21] 'Annotations on the the article by Taquio entitled "Comments on the current polemics within the party"'. (mimeograph, n.p., n.d.).

[22] Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries' 239.

[23] Kaira Zoe Alburo Kintanar, 'Brothers and Lovers in Arms: Negotiating Male Homosexuality with Military Masculinity in the New People's Army' and Patricio Abinales, *Love, sex and the Filipino Communist* (Pasig City 2004). Into the eighties, a non-heterosexual orientation was seen as an 'ideological failing'. Sunny Lansang, 'Gender issues in revolutionary praxis', *Debate. Philippine Left Review* 1 (1991) 41 — 52.

[24] 'Proletarian principles govern party-marriages' *Ang Bayan* 15 (1983) 9 -11, there 9.

[25] Milabel Cristobal, 'Mensenrechten en de nationaal-democratische beweging' in: Evert De Boer, Huub Jaspers and Gerard Prickaerts, *Wij leerden mensenrechten niet uit boeken.* (Enschede 2000) 37 — 51.

[26] Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, 'The use of Human Rights for the protraction of war', *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 21 (2006) 34 — 54, there 39, 40.

[27] Walden Bello, 'The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement', *Kasarinlan*, 1 (1992) 166 — 177, there 51 — 52.

[28] Abinales, 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy'. The essay gives a detailed overview of the organizational weakness of the Mindanaon CPP.

of the Huks, Bello made the mistake of perceiving of the CPP as it wánted to be perceived, not as it really was. Leadership was often individualist and informal, procedures were not followed. It's even possible that had the party been more tightly organized, the kind of self-destruction as occurred in Kahos could have been avoided.[29] But this 'un-Leninist' organizational weakness didn't contradict an instrumental view of individuals. A former leader of the National-Democratic coalition BAYAN, Lidy Nacpil-Alejandro explained: '[P]er se, I find nothing wrong with [the principle of doing anything and everything for the revolution]'.[30]

The economistic view that reduced people to their 'class' circumstances was one reason the party stubbornly clung to the notion there was a revolutionary flow in the country until the end of the eighties and even in the early nineties. Because of the deep economic difficulties there had to be, in the CPP's thinking, an upsurge of the revolutionary movement.[31] But the second half of the eighties saw larger and larger numbers of supporters and activists break with the party. Either the party's analysis was incorrect, a conclusion only few members were willing to draw, unfamiliar with strategic thinking and loyal to the Party as they were, or the movement was being sabotaged…

## 7.4 The assumption of treason

All the campaigns were motivated by a certainty that spies and saboteurs were active in the party, and on a large scale. It was not investigation that led to a growing certainty enemies agents were active, it was the other way around: the conviction spies were active led to investigations and purging. A view of the party as a site of superior knowledge and the instrument of historical development was crucial in making torture seem an acceptable choice and in convincing members to continue with the purges.

Even when activists with the mindset of Lidy Nacpil-Alejandro were willing to 'do anything and everything to save the revolution and to save the people' they needed to be convinced that the killing and torture of the purges was 'saving the revolution and the people'. A large part of the CPP's political education was aimed at instilling in members unquestioning loyalty and faith in the Party.[32] This certainty was combined with the reduction of people to either friends or enemies, a blindness for other factors than 'class' and the denial of Human Rights.

Its remarkable how long the purges could go on and how little resistance there was against the killings. The position of unquestioned authority the Party had for its militants was a factor in this. Party cadres had been told 'absolute devotion' to 'the cause of the proletariat and its party' was 'foremost'.[33] One survivor of the purges remembered how before her arrest she had doubts about the guilt of the accused but: 'much as I wanted to disagree, I could not because I did not have full knowledge of the persons they were investigating'.[34] Of course, neither the interrogators had such knowledge — but they enjoined prestige on behalf of the party. The Party was supposed to be a guide towards the future and have the 'correct ideas': how could one presume, on the basis of mere 'subjective' reasoning, the Party was making such catastrophic errors?

Resistance against the purges mostly took a more quiet shape than going openly against the party-leaders. Although the party tried to keep the purges out of view rumors started to circulate. Prisoners were kept in camps were others could see them pass and hear their cries. Friends and comrades from urban areas were summoned to NPA-camps in the countryside but never returned. People started talking and speculating, putting pieces of information together and deciding to leave. A leader of the NPA in Luzon, Ka Roger, says that in 1998 'our guerrilla front committee

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[29] The Peruvian Maoist movement *Sendero Luminoso* was much more willing than the CPP to use violence against non-combatants: it was responsible for about half of the civilian casualties during the civil war. Still, it never saw anything like Kahos: its extremely authoritarian and centralized organisation was probably a factor in avoiding such a development. See Steve J. Stern ed., *Shining and other paths. War and society in Peru 1980 — 1995* (Durham and London 1998), especially Carlos Basombrío Iglesias, 'Sendero Luminiso and Human Rights: a perverse logic that captured the country'.

[30] Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines' 74.

[31] Ibidem, 24.

[32] 'There's need to systematize development of party cadres' *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 9 — 11 states: that 'foremost' in education is 'absolute devotion to the cause of the proletariat and the party'. The article 'Ideological work is essential to army building' *Ang Bayan* 12 (1982) doesn't mention politics but describes how NPA members were taught virtues like willingness to sacrifice, bravery and putting the collective first.

[33] 'There's need to systematize development of party cadres', *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 9 -11, there 9.

[34] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 45.

was almost wiped out because everybody had left'.[35] In Mindanao, the purges led in nine months to a decline of party-membership of 9000 to 3000 due to resignation, surrender to the government or simply breaking contact; the NPA shrank from fifteen or sixteen companies to two companies and 17 platoons. Half of the party's mass-base was lost.[36]

Once the willingness to use torture, no matter how 'selectively' in theory, was combined with the certainty of the accused's guilt, a process with a dynamic of its own was unleashed. The cycle of accusation, torture of the accused until confession, the revealing of so-called co-conspirators, execution and the torture of the new suspects was repeated over and over again, claiming hundreds of lives. This cycle went through an ebb and flow with each separate campaign, one campaign leading indirectly to the next.

## 7.5 Functional torture and 'useless' cruelty

One of the questions raised by the purges in the CPP is why it sanctioned the use of torture (called 'hard tactics') since the kind of information produced by extensive torture is to a high degree shaped by the wishes of the torturers: many victims will formulate answers they think their torturers want to hear, using frameworks provided by their interrogators.[37] Information extracted through torture is not always unusable but the extended use of torture against a large group of accused is best seen as part of a wider strategy of repression, in which torture functions as means to extract knowledge, as punishment and as a warning against potential dissenters. This is the pattern familiar from regimes like several Latin-American military dictatorships and that of Marcos.

Torture is 'a tool of regimes seeking to govern by the "reign of terror."' Political torture, 'the systematic use of violence to obtain information from opposition and dissident suspects, to destroy the individual's personality and/or to create terror into the hearts of opponents and dissidents or potential opponents and dissidents' became 'part of Philippine politics during the Marcos regime'.[38] Torture that seems at first 'irrational' — torture without questions asked or until the point of death, killing the source of information — becomes intelligible if it is seen as part of a strategy of repression.

But these motivations don't seem to apply to the CPP — here torture was meant initially to gather information and rumors of torture were doing great damage to the movement. The decision to use torture was taken under the pressures of underground struggle that, so the leadership thought, didn't allow time for other, slower methods to discover the 'truth'.

What is puzzling, is how a movement with so many members familiar with the character of torture — they had been victims themselves or knew victims — still thought it would be an effective way to combat police-infiltration. To put an end to their suffering, many victims mentioned names of completely innocent people and made up stories to satisfy their torturers. One survivor called it 'the standard mode of survival': 'to invent your story as a true deep-penetration agent, so that they would stop hurting you'.[39]

These 'confessions' led to new victims and more torture (and eventually executions) and the cycle repeated itself. This mechanism will be familiar to readers of studies of medieval witch-hunts, so much that the term 'witch-hunt' itself more or less consciously refers to it.[40] But the CPP-leadership let this self-destructive dynamic occur repeatedly throughout the eighties. The 1984 *Ang Bayan* article about the anti-infiltration drive in 1981 makes no mention of

[35] Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 172.

[36] Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory' 155. A company normally consists of three to five platoons, each counting between 25 and 55. In guerrilla-armies these numbers can vary.

[37] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison* (London 1991) 3 — 32.

[38] Aurora A. Parong a.o., 'Rehabilitation of Survivors of Torture and Political Violence: The Philippine Experience', *Economic and Political Weekly* 33 (1992) 1755 — 1761, there 1755.

[39] Earl G. Parreño, 'Comrade vs. Comrade, *Newsbreak* 31 March 2003.

[40] See for example Carlo Ginzburg, 'Hekserij en volksreligositeit. Aantekeningen bij een proces te Modena uit 1519' in: Idem: *Omweg als methode. Essays over verborgen geschiedenis, kunst en maatschappelijke herinnering* (Nijmegen 1988) 16 — 44, a study of a suspected witch who confessed under torture, only to withdraw her confession later, and then was tortured again to make her repeat the confession.

'hard tactics' but it is likely the same dynamic claimed innocent lives here as well: without going into details, the article states many supposed spies 'were uncovered through confession of those who had been arrested'.[41]

The accused were already assumed guilty and denial only made their crime worse. Those that withstood the torture and maintained their innocence were executed: the only way to survive a while longer was to enter into a perverse pact with the interrogator, implicating yourself further and further by making new 'confessions'.[42] The interrogators, eager to discover enemy agents and inexperienced, asked leading questions, guiding the answers in already presumed directions: 'how much was your salary?', 'A thousand', 'The truth!', 'Two thousand', 'I said: the truth! Or else…'[43] The combination of suggestive questions, punishing deviating from the path laid out by these questions — by for example insisting one is innocent — and torture lead to a spiral of escalating accusations and new, made-up 'revelations' about infiltrators. In its turn, this convinced the interrogators more spies still had to be discovered.

The torture brought out a previously unknown potential for cruelty among a number of party-members. Certain 'creative means' of torture and mock-executions served no other purpose than satisfying the sadism of the guards and interrogators. One tortured suspect was given a strange haircut by his tormenters to make him look ridiculous — a small example of sadism. Forms of torture except from humiliation and beatings were burning, sexual molestation, rape, forceps used on genitalia, denial of food and water, mock-executions, 'water cure' and suffocation. Tranquillizers and drugs were used as 'truth serums'.[44] The arrested were bound by chains, placed in cages or tied to trees. According to Harry, in his party-unit it was decided to stab the condemned to death instead of shooting them to save bullets and avoid the noise of gunshots.[45] Other methods of killing were beheading, starvation, crushing the skull, breaking the neck or stabbing with sharpened bamboo sticks.

If cruelty was the result of anger at suspected treason, the assumption of guilt was crucial in causing anger against the accused and in providing the interrogators with a framework to base their suggestive questioning on. There is an additional, more general explanation for the kind cruelty that is so familiar from 'witch-hunts' and purges. The torturers and the guards placed themselves in service of a cause, of a Party that was supposed to have a privileged insight into society and history. This position makes it possible to inflict suffering on victims while at the same not having to accept any responsibility for it: the torture and abuse are 'Historical Necessities'. Even more, if I regard myself as a mere tool in the hands of History, I can inflict suffering and at the same time be angry at my victims for creating a situation in which I have 'no choice' but to break my own ethical rules.

The torturers were not only free from responsibility and able to direct any feelings of guilt they might have in the form of anger towards their victims — they could even regard themselves as exemplary people, strong enough to set aside their 'petty subjective morals' and engage in horrible violence — all in the in name of a noble cause.[46]

## 7.6 Desensitization to violence

The unquestioned authority of the party and the certainty of the guilt of the accused must be considered when trying to explain the start and duration of the purges in the CPP. These factors help to answer the question why it was possible that so many people so long accepted or even participated in a witch-hunt that was in hindsight so obviously misguided. Reducing opponents to less than human beings is a major part of the explanation why the violence of the purges and the use of torture was accepted or even embraced so easily by so many.

Like any other army, the NPA-fighters dehumanized its opponents to make it easier to kill them. When talking about military operations of the NPA, *Ang Bayan* would refer to killed enemy troops as 'fascist elements' who were 'wiped out'. In the early eighties, *Ang Bayan* ran an article on a family of which both mother and father were active

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[41] 'Busting a spy network: one region's experience', *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 13 -16, there 15.

[42] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades,* 17.

[43] Ibidem, 18.

[44] PATH. Peace Advocates for Truth, Healing and Justice. 'Research, education and communication project final report', 2006.

[45] Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

[46] Slavoj Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism? Five interventions in the (mis)use of a notion* (London 2002) 112.

in the movement. Lisa, the eight year-old daughter of the couple, was asked if she would cry if her father died in combat. 'No, I won't', she supposedly said; 'I'll be angry and kill our enemies'.[47]

The accused were dehumanized from the beginning. Trying to explain the cruelty of Kahos one party-leader rhetorically asked; '[…] can we not trace this to our old view of class-enemies as "non-people" that therefore do not have rights at all as human beings?'[48] Alleged spies were seen as the lowest of the low, the 'lowest existing mammals' in the words of one party-member: exactly because they had shared so much with their accusers they were seen as devious, despicable. Another term used for the 'anti-infiltration drives' was 'sanitation campaigns', literally designating spies and infiltrators as filth. Remember the name *ahos*, garlic, was chosen on the basis of folktales that garlic was effective against monsters: suspects were 'zombies' or *demonyos* (a term already used by the Huks to designate infiltrators), they were non-human. The supernatural terms seem out of place in the rigid, 'materialist' discourse of Stalinism — Stalin referred to the targets of purges as 'elements'. That sounds more scientific but it served the same purpose: deny the accused their humanity or any shared basis with the accusers.

Like almost all humans, CPP-members had to overcome internalized taboos against hurting other people. It was one thing to have made the choice that revolutionary violence was necessar — but another thing to use violence themselves. The goal of dehumanization was to encourage members to transgress the internalized taboos of harming other humans. A number of the CPP-cadres who engaged in torture could probably be accurately characterized as sadistic — how else to explain the more 'creative' means of torture, torture that didn't provide any information? But this was only a minority. Writing about the *Khmer Rouge*, Alexander Laban Hinton describes how to overcome the taboo against hurting other people a person must make a series of 'psychological moves, like changing the understanding of what they are doing, altering their behavioral norms or learning new cognitive models for action'.[49]

In the case of the CPP, the belief the party was right and the victims enemies, legitimate targets of violence, facilitated these changes.[50] Another mechanism was the use of euphemisms that permit perpetrators to avoid acknowledging the full reality of their acts. In the Philippine case, torture was called 'hard tactics'. The *Khmer Rouge* said those who had been executed, 'went to *Angkar*', CPP-cadres claimed people that were about to be executed were 'rehabilitated'.

Except from its worldview, the nature of the CPP's struggle and the condition of Philippine society over time contributed to a numbness towards, and acceptance of, violence. The seventies and eighties were a violent time: even compared with other military dictatorships of the period, the Marcos regime was brutal. A few statistics compiled by Alfred McCoy for a 1999 speech at the Ateneo de Manila University show this: between 1975 and 1985, there were 3,257 extra-judicial killings, 35,000 tortured, and 70,000 incarcerated. Some 2,520, or 77 percent of all casualties, were 'salvaged': tortured and left in the open for public display.[51] The continuous violence of the 'low-intensity conflict' in the Philippines must have had a numbing effect on the population. An American journalist writing about the NPA in Davao city, the largest city of Mindanao, was shocked by the ease with which people accepted and even applauded their executions by saying 'the NPA, they know who to kill'.[52]

Mindanao, where the purges were most intense, was also the part of the country hit hardest by war. Ronald Edgerton gave the following description of the Bukidnon province in Mindanao — where Kahos would erupt a few years later — in 1983; 'soldiers are everywhere, tearing around in ramshackle jeeps. Civilian Home Defence Forces (CHDF) encamp for training on random hillsides, New People's Army (NPA) 'night visitors' haunt barrios as well as the dreams of the rich (who hire armed guards and accumulate small but lethal arsenals […]), armed sects terrorize barrios in the south, Manobos and Bukidnons (the two 'tribal minorities' in the province) conduct sporadic raids[…],

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[47] 'Participation in struggle molds revolutionary families', *Ang Bayan* 6 (1981) 11 — 12, there 12.

[48] Draft 'On the Kahos question' 13.

[49] Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the shadow of genocide* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 2005) 236.

[50] Harry himself compared the CPP's attitude towards percieved enemies to that of the *Khmer Rouge*. Authors interview with Harry (15 — 04 — 2011).

[51] Alfred W. McCoy„ 'Dark Legacy: Human Rights Under the Marcos Regime', paper presented at *Memory, Truth-Telling and the Pursuit of Justice: a conference on the legacies of the Marcos Dictatorship*, Ateneo de Manila University, 20 September, 1999.

[52] Chapman, *Inside the Philippine revolution,* 179.

Army renegades locally known as 'Lost Commands' maraud along the southern border, and bandits — posing as NPA, Army or 'Lost Commands' — still further confuse this picture of growing violence and insecurity'.[53]

In his attempts to integrate Mindanao, a frontier-zone wealthy in natural resources, in the Philippine state and discipline its population Marcos used brute force. In 1983, disappearances due to military arrest and execution reached a high of 115 in Mindanao, compared to 13 in Luzon and 15 in the Visayas, the cluster of islands in the middle of the country. In 1984, there were 93 disappearances in Mindanao (34 in Luzon, 24 in the Visayas) and these rose to a new high in 1985, on the eve of Marcos' ouster: Mindanao 129, Luzon 28, Visayas 43. From 1977 to 1985, 490 people were 'salvaged' in Luzon, 371 in the Visayas and 1511 in Mindanao.[54] As fighting with the Muslim secessionists declined, the army turned its attention to the CPP. By this time, the early eighties, the Philippine army was led in the field by officers who enrolled and had been trained under Marcos' rule and during Martial Law.[55] These were men who were willing to fight his dirty wars and employ extremely brutal methods.

The accusations against comrades were plausible because of the worldview of the CPP but also because the war itself had blurred distinctions between friends and enemies. In a guerrilla-war civilians can be part-time combatants and ties between the guerrilla's and their supporters in the local communities are tight. Rebels fight against their 'own' soldiers and police: people that speak the same language, some might even be relatives. The government army reacts by treating whole communities as enemies, convincing more civilians to join the struggle. Civil wars for control of the state in general tend to be exceptionally brutal since there are no borders behind which a party can retreat. Either a revolutionary movement is defeated — militarily or because it gives up — or the state is destroyed, no other end is possible. In these circumstances, for many CPP-members violence had become a familiar part of live and distinctions between friends and enemies were blurred.

## 7.7 Organizational weakness and the role of the leadership

The two internal causes of the purges discussed, the use of torture and the attitudes that allowed the use of torture to take place were made possible, although not caused, by weak organization and the failures of its leadership.

The spiral of interrogation, torture and killing was allowed to continue so long in part because of the lack of well-organized mechanisms and procedures to deal with accusations and investigation.[56] A weak organization and the failures of a leadership that was unable to control the situation had grave consequences. By the mid-eighties, the organization in Mindanao had grown big and unstable and came under heavy stress — the leadership of the party didn't intervene in time to remedy this situation.

Organizational weaknesses were noted repeatedly by people in the party and recommendations to deal with this problem were made in the assessment of '*Oplan Takipsilim*' but, as later developments showed, little was done improve this situation. Even in late November 1988 one party-cadre felt it necessary to re-emphasize basic principles like the necessity of strong evidence before making arrests, the distinction between investigation and interrogation and that arrest and interrogation should not 'preclude the possibility of eventual release'.[57]

Many people in remote areas supported the NPA because they were the only kind of justice-system around. The NPA functioned for example as their protectors against cattle-rustlers and thieves or punished men who beat their wives. The Philippine police was either absent or not interested in these kinds of cases. It was up to the NPA to enforce order and secure safety, it was part of the ideal of 'serving the people'.[58] The lack of due process and the mistake of mixing of the roles of prosecution, judge and executioners in one body were already present here.

The circumstances in which the NPA operated certainly hindered the development of a sophisticated justice system. A guerrilla movement that lacks a secure hinterland can not have prisons where suspects are held while their cases are examined. The Argentine-Cuban revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara wrote the guerrilla should not take

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[53] Ronald Edgerton, 'Social disintegration on a contemporary Philippine frontier: the case of Bukidnon, Mindanao', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 13 (1983) 151 — 175, there 151.

[54] Patricio N. Abinales, *The joys of dislocation. Mindano, nation and region* (Pasig City 2008) 36.

[55] McCoy, 'Dark Legacy: Human Rights Under the Marcos Regime' deals with the 'legacy' of torture these men left behind.

[56] Bello, 'The crisis of the Philippine progressive movement', 174.

[57] Bong, 'suggestions re sanitation campaign' (mimeograph, 23 november 1988).

[58] Kerkvliet, 'A different view of insurgencies', 4, 5.

prisoners but release captured soldiers. But this is not an option with infiltrators whose knowledge can be lethal. With no place to keep them and unable to release them, execution becomes an option.

The already ramshackle justice system of the CPP was put under heavy stress as the war intensified. One CPP-member described it like this; 'because it is a life and death struggle, when you are always tense, you are always living in the risk; you don't have the luxury of verification of data.'[59] What this meant in the context of the anti-DPA hunts was declared by one party-member, referring to the Geneva convention regarding the protection of victims of non-international conflicts; '*wala munang* Protocol II!' ('no Protocol II for now!').[60]

The CPP's judicial system had remained rudimentary even when during the Marcos-era in certain areas it was the only force fulfilling a police-function, because in the field of justice and legality too, it drew almost exclusively on Maoist examples. The CPP claimed to have organized 'people's courts' after the example of the Chinese Communists in the 1930's and '40's. One of the goals of these courts was to involve people in fighting alleged counter-revolutionaries and the Chinese 'people's courts' were rudimentary organizations, with little protection for the accused.[61] The claim that the party is the carrier of universal truth made an independent judicial system superfluous. With no institutional framework to give shape to judicial procedures and an ideology that implicitly and explicitly went against guarantees of the rights of accused, it's no surprise that repeated recommendations to improve the movement's judicial system fell flat.

Still, it was not unavoidable that the party's judicial system would spin as much out of control as it did. When they party's national leadership intervened, they could stop the purges and we can assume that if they had intervened earlier in the process, before distrust became generalized, it would have been easier for them to stop Kahos. Why didn't they do this?

Although disagreeing on details, commentators on the purges agree that from the beginning, opposition to the purges in the CC was marginal.[62] According to Paco Arguelles, a member of Mindacom at the time, not one member of the Central Committee, the party's highest decision making body between congresses, was opposed to the purges. Only one CC-member, Ka Thomas, objected to the purges as the number of suspects increased. The dynamic of the purge silenced his objections: when his own wife fell under suspicion, Ka Thomas fell silent, afraid that his objections would be seen as a sign of his partner's guilt.[63] Former chairperson and NPA commander Rodolfo Salas claims that he, together with NPA commander Romulo 'Rolly' Kintanar, stopped Kahos but the Executive Committee of the CC later instigated OPML and Olympia.[64]

According to Robert Francis Garcia CC members were present in the same NPA camp where he and other suspects were imprisoned and tortured.[65] Although their earliest decisions were based on faulty information — each evaluation of a purge deemed the operation a success — these CC members were aware of the reality of the purges. Unlike the lower-ranking CPP members and sympathizers who were swept up in the purges from the beginning and for whom dissent would have meant being suspected themselves, the CC leaders were — at least in the early phase — not suspects themselves. It was the CC and especially the Executive Committee of the CC that could have stopped the purges.

Garcia describes the CC as being in a state of disarray in 1986, going from hesitating to continuing the purges to wanting to extend them even further.[66] I suggest that this confusion, resulting in a failure to put an end to the purges, was part of the overall political confusion and intense pressure that gripped the party in the mid-eighties. For many of its peasant supporters, nothing much seemed to fundamentally change, even with the fall of the dictatorship and restoration of so-called 'democracy': the army continued or even intensified its counter-insurgency war, land was still

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[59] Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries' 398.

[60] Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines' 74.

[61] Ibidem, 66.

[62] Walden Bello, 'The crisis of the Philippine progressive movement' writes that one CC member was opposed to the extension of the purges outside of Mindanao. Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, writes one CC member was initially opposed. Indicative of the role of the CC, the CPP hasn't had a single meeting of its congress, the only party-organ higher than the CC, since its founding in 1968.

[63] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 42.

[64] Rodolfo Salas, 'RK was a true hero of the masses' online at `http://www.philsol.nl/A03a/Kintanar-Salas-feb03.htm`.

[65] Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 23.

[66] Ibidem, 22.

scarce, and they remained as poor as ever. But the national leadership saw its whole paradigm of revolution come apart and important sections of the movement break away.

Crucially, confusion and indecision at the top and a weak judicial system gave middle-level cadres wide room to manoeuvre. Kenneth, the cadre who organized the Task Force responsible for Operation Plan Missing Link, was ambitious and thought success in ferreting out spies could mean promotion. People like Kenneth were more motivated to find people guilty, no matter how flimsy the evidence, than admit nothing was wrong. With no effective higher leadership monitoring him, Kenneth's ambition cost lives. In Mindanao, the low-ranking cadres conducting the purges had little idea of earlier purges or of the size of the purge on the island. Harry explained information was compartmentalized — a sensible measure in an underground organization.[67] But the leadership that should have kept an overview of the situation failed to do this and didn't intervene when an impossibly high number of alleged spies was 'discovered'.

One of many unanswered questions is why the purges finally stopped. The decision of the CC to review the whole process was experienced by Garcia as if it had been suddenly jolted awake and realized what was going one — the speed with which the review-process forced a turnaround showed again how thin evidence against the accused were: as far as is know, everybody was released. But what gave the central leadership the 'sudden jolt' that made them stop the purges?

Harry explained that — although he was forced to participate — he started to voice doubts about the process long before it ended.[68] As time passed and the party and the movement in Mindanao fell apart, more cadres must have started to feel doubts; the conclusion the purges were a mistake became impossible to avoid for those who saw the consequences. But even after Kahos, at the end of the eighties, the Luzon-based leadership probed the possibility of 'continuing Kahos'.[69]

It was only after open and highly acrimonious debates and splits broke out in the party that Kahos and the following purges where declared not simply 'mistaken' but 'criminal'. The official documents declare that Kahos, OPML and Olypmia were linked to 'deviations' from the Maoist line. They put the major part of the blame on opposition leaders like Nathan G. Quimpo, Ricardo Reyes and Benjamin de Vera. Perpetrators from the RA camp are not named, it's only claimed they already have been adequately sanctioned.[70] This, and the ignoring of pre-Kahos purges, shows the CPP-leadership was less interested in explaining these events than that it was in looking for a stick to beat the opposition with.

The CPP's worldview predisposed it to look for infiltrators to explain set-backs. Neither it's judicial system nor its leadership prevented the outbreak of violence against other comrades. But why did the purges reach their peak when they did, in the mid to late eighties? What gave, at that moment, the push that set the internal mechanisms described above in motion? The decisive factor in this is what commentators, witnesses and survivors have called 'paranoia' or 'madness'. To understand the use of these psychological terms, we need to look at the way the party responded to the crisis of Philippine society.

## 7.8 Paranoia — a symptom of crisis

The 'Standing Group, Visayas Commision', part of the anti-Sison opposition in the CPP, wrote that it was 'painful for all us when the anti-infiltration campaigns in the history of the Party are dredged up — from what happened in ST [Southern Tagalog] in the early 1980s to Kahos in Mindanao to the anti-infiltration hysteria in Luzon including the OPML in Southern Tagalog in 1988…Many innocent comrades, red fighters and masses paid with their lives because of the insanity [*kahibangan*] that happened. These campaigns caused serious political and organizational setbacks.'[71]

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[67] Authors interview with 'Harry' (15 — 04 — 2011).

[68] Authors interview with 'Harry' (15 — 04 — 2011).

[69] Draft 'On the Kahos question' 6. This information was confirmed by Harry.

[70] PATH, 'Research, education and communication project final report', names a number of RA-cadres involved in OPML and Olympia who were punished by demotion or suspension.

[71] Rocamora, *Breaking through*, 122.

By including the purges outside of Mindanao, the writers made clear their rejection of Sison's thesis that Kahos was linked to Mindacom's errors of 'adventurism' and 'insurrectionism'. Instead, they blamed 'paranoia' and lack of trust in comrades.[72] They are not the only ones using such terms.[73] Where did this 'paranoia' and 'insanity' come from?

The CPP was a tightly knit group, bound together by a common cause and the dangers of underground struggle. Certainly, the attitudes of comrades affected each-other — it's useful to speak of a collective psychological condition when its done to describe this kind of mutual influence. When rumours of the purges started to circulate, long before the first official revelations, large numbers of activists broke contact with the party, fearful they might be next. Parts of the membership were in the grip of panic, the persecutors saw the large scale defections and the sudden instability of the party as proof of sabotage.

This reaction could be described as paranoid if we take the word to mean not just 'irrational fear of prosecution' (the purges were looking for infiltrators in the wrong places but there is no question that the Philippine intelligence services were trying to infiltrate and sabotage the party) but the 'invention' of spies to explain reality. Paranoia is linked to fear and anxiety — the attention of the intelligence services to the party and military operations were certainly sources of anxiety for even the most seasoned cadres, especially in the mid-eighties when the war intensified and government violence reached a peak.

What is to be explained is the leap from a level of anxiety 'healthy' for an organization like the CPP to the frantic search for saboteurs and agents. I suggest this leap came from the combination of an intensifying civil war, shifting political circumstances and, crucially, a world-view that could not explain for the problems these circumstances posed in other terms than infiltrators. Once the conclusion infiltrators were active was reached, the mechanisms discussed above became active.

Those responsible for making decisions in the party were convinced they had a superior, objective view of reality. According to Harry, it was hard for them to accept setbacks were caused by their own mistakes; 'how could that happen to us? After all, we thought we were well-trained Marxists, we should have prepared for this'.[74] This world-view could explain setbacks only by blaming saboteurs. It is striking how Sison in his criticism of the Mindanaon CPP reasons along the same lines as the purging 'deviationists' themselves by blaming class-influences from outside the correct, 'proletarian' consciousness for Kahos. Supposedly, it was the 'unremoulded petty-bourgeois mode of thought' of the Mindanaon leadership that led, according to him, to the purges: just like Mindacom at the time, he refused the possibility that the party was confronted with unforeseen difficulties or that its way of analyzing the world was incomplete or even incorrect. Instead, he blamed 'outsiders' — in his case meaning people with supposedly 'non-proletarian behavior'.[75]

For the CPP, Maoism provided the model of its party and strategy. As long as the party grew and membership increased, these ideas were not put into question. The principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' and the unacknowledged gap between rank-and-file and cadre helped to reify their Maoist ideology. The crisis of the CPP is usually traced to the 1985 snap elections, its impopular boycotdecision and the following People's Power uprising that sidelined the party. But, behind a façade of glowing health, the party's worldview had entered into a crisis parallel with that of the Marcos regime after the assassination of Benigno Aquino.

The following months saw the explosive growth of anti-Marcos sentiments and the blossoming of anti-Marcos movements in region and strata that had always been considered secondary in the CPP's framework: the cities and what it considered 'the middle classes' (which included large parts of the somewhat better educated and better paid working class). Marcos' support among army, technocrats, cronies and the US government fractured. The CPP was

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[72] Ibidem, 123.

[73] Bello uses 'collective paranoia': Bello, 'The crisis of the Philippine progressive movement' 172. CPP, 'General review' describes Kahos as 'hyteria' (63), Garcia also talks about paranio: *To suffer thy comrades*, 78.

[74] Author's interview with 'Harry' (15 — 04 — 2011).

[75] The formulation is from 'Annotations on the the article by Taquio entitled "Comments on the current polemics within the party"'. The article is anonymous but it's very likely the author is Sison — official documents by Sison/Liwanag use the same way of reasoning. Another example is Sison description of the development of Kahos as the result of a 'cover up', Ninotchka, Sison, *At home in the world*, 125.

surprised by these developments since it had always assumed that 'the middle classes' were not capable of playing an independent role in politics and the US would not drop their support for Marcos.[76]

The CPP had no answer to these developments. For a large part of its supporters, the struggle of the party had been identified with that against 'the US-Marcos regime' — a regime that had been in power for over a decade. Hopes were high that with the removal of Marcos himself, large gains could be made. For the leadership it was clear the Marcos-regime was not just the work of one man and that it had deep social roots. But the leadership was unable to communicate this warning to its followers. More seriously, it had no answer to the developing crisis. In a rapid chain of events, the CPP lost it's dominant position in the anti-Marcos movement.

Maoism lacks a theory of revolutionary crisis, of what Lenin described as a time when 'those below *do not want to live in the old way*' and 'those above cannot carry on in the old way'. In such times a 'national crisis', including bóth rulers and ruled, develops as the population no longer accepts the government and the government is unable to maintain control because of the loss of legitimacy and disunity among the ruling classes.[77] Instead Maoism assumed countries in the underdeveloped world to be in a more or less permanent revolutionary situation. In a Third World country like the Philippines a revolutionary situation was supposed to be 'inherent, chronic and constant'.[78] When after the assassination of Aquino a real revolutionary crisis developed, the CPP was unable to formulate an adequate response, instead organizing hunts for fictitious spies.

[76] In the periode 1983 — 1986, *Ang Bayan* regularly featured articles on non-CPP anti-Marcos opposition. A typical article in March 1983 argued that 'the organized forces of the bourgeois reformists are small' and that 'the prospects of the bourgeois reformists becoming strong depends on the push and support of US imperialism' — using the bourgeois-reformists as a 'reserve option' for Marcos — but US imperialism is 'on very good terms with the Marcos clique', 'Bourgeois reformists: facing a cross road', *Ang Bayan* 14 (1983) 6 — 9, there 8.

[77] W. I. Lenin, De 'linkse stroming'; een kinderziekte van het communisme (Amsterdam 1978) 85.

[78] Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines' 23.

# Conclusion

The purges were an 'indirect' symptom of a crisis of the ideological framework of the CPP. The framework was left intact (unlike other armed movements in the late eighties, the CPP did not change its ideology or give up armed struggle) but this framework could only be left intact and explain reality by assuming the work of enemy spies. 'Paranoid behavior' might be irrational but is not without a logic of its own: it is an attempt to make sense of the world and its development. In as far as the label 'paranoid' can be applied to a collective process like the purges in the CPP, I suggest we see it as the result of an effort to create a new cognitive map by forcing unexpected developments in the familiar Maoist framework. Even before the assassination of Aquino, purges were responses to pressures on the party, like government counter-insurgency campaigns or the failure of NPA operations.

Because of its claim to complete truth, its prestige as the ideology of the party and the low-level of political debate inside the movement, many activists were not willing or able to change the Maoist framework. The isolation of the CPP, with parts of its periphery breaking away to join the Aquino campaign and the party caught by surprise during the People's Power uprising, meant that either the Maoist framework was incorrect, or at the very least needed drastic modifications — or dark, hidden forces were active.

From 'above', this must have been a tempting conclusion for cadres who had been trained in the tradition that the party is always right. The daily motivating ideology from 'below' was very different from the party's official ideology. The rank-and-file often only had haphazard knowledge of the ideology, but this however didn't meant that ideology was unimportant: what kept the movement together was a shared ideology among the rank-and-file, compatible with and linked to the ideology of the leadership.

The kind of unspoken, daily 'common sense' that guided that guided the bulk of the party's practical work was just as unable to deal with an intense crisis as the reified, official models of the leadership. When complex social process were simplified to conspiracies, comrades became targets of violence.

As different the mental worlds of many people in the movement were, they shared the idea that setbacks must be the work of people who were enemies and thus legitimate targets of violence. This unleashed time and time again a murderous dynamic that ended only after it, in the context of a weakly organized party-branch and war-wrecked society in Mindanao, reached such proportions that its foolishness and criminality could no longer be ignored.

# Epilogue

In an interview in 2003 CPP-spokesperson Gregorio 'Ka Roger' Rosal criticized the organization of survivors of the purges, PATH, by saying their work served the interests of the government. He called the activists 'counterrevolutionaries masquerading as advocates of truth and justice for the sake of the purge victims'.[1] A few months later, *Ang Bayan* published an article laying the blame for Operation Missing Link on individuals who have since then formed the rival Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines and, in a sinister twist, on two survivors of the torture; PATH activists Manuel Quiambao Pena and Robert Francis Garcia, writer of *To suffer thy comrades*.[2] Once again Garcia was, without a shred of evidence, declared an enemy of the revolution.

That this kind of allegation is not just empty talk the party proved with a series of assassinations of former members who were deemed guilty, on the basis of evidence nobody outside the CPP saw, of crimes against the revolution and the people. The most high profile case was the assassination in 2003 of Romulo 'Rolly' Kintanar, the former head of the NPA who had been so instrumental in stopping the purges. Sison had started accusing Kintanar among others of being 'renegades', 'enemy agents' and 'gangsters' in the early nineties and the CPP announced Kintanar and other 'rejectionists' would be tried by 'people's courts' and meted out death sentences.[3] Since Kahos, the CPP has not seen purges on the scale comparable to those in the eighties. For Sison, this proves their causes have been 'rectified' — the policy of threatening Human Rights advocates like Garcia and killing political opponents tells a different story.

The tragedy of the purges in the Communist Party of the Philippines is that of 20th century Communism: a movement that inspired people with a vision of equality and freedom turned on the very people it had set out to liberate. The victims of Kahos, OPML, Olympia and the other 'anti-infiltration drives' dedicated their lives to a movement they hoped would bring freedom and justice. Like Edgar Jopson (shot by police in 1982, aged 34), labour leader Rolando Olalia (tortured and murdered in 1986, aged 52), student-leader Leandro Alejandro (assassinated in 1987, aged 27) and thousands of other Filipino's they were killed while pursuing a noble vision. Only if the movement draws its lessons from what happened to the victims of the 'anti-infiltration purges' their deaths will become a little less meaningless.

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[1] Delfin T. Mallari, 'Get over purges of 80s, Reds urge former comrades', *Inquirer News Service* May 17, 2003.

[2] PATH will not be silenced (draft press release, 2004).

[3] Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, Why Kintanar was killed — the true story' *Philippines Daily Inquirer*, January 28, 2003 online at `http://www.philsol.nl/A03a/Kintanar-Quimpo-jan03.htm`.

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