

Marxism, the Peasantry and Agrarian Revolution in the Philippines

Saturday 4 September 2010, by [TADEM Eduardo C.](#) (Date first published: 4 May 2006).

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Introduction

Peasant communities are often characterized by recurring poverty, debilitating powerlessness, precarious productive systems, constant subjection to impositions and exactions from external forces, and persistent threat of extinction. [1] In response, they engage in various actions geared towards mitigating the impact of the above conditions or, at the extreme, radically transforming their lives.

On one hand, peasants have been described as passive and willing to endure and adapt to the most unequal of relations with outsiders. When their backs are against the wall, they either cut down on their consumption or intensify their farm work. In many cases, they simply leave the countryside and take on work in the urban areas or in other countries. In many cases, as a popular branch of peasant studies illustrates, they engage in “everyday forms of resistance” by employing what has been termed “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1985, Scott and Kerkvliet 1986). [2]

At the other end of the spectrum of peasant responses to external impositions and oppression are major acts of resistance such as rebellions and revolutions requiring collective action on the part of peasant communities. There are various theories on peasant participation either as main protagonists or adjunct players in revolutionary movements. One stems from placing “the subsistence ethic at the center of the analysis of peasant politics” and where recurring violations of a “moral economy” based on a “notion of economic justice and (a) working definition of exploitation” are thought to trigger spontaneous outbursts of uprisings and insurrections (Scott 1976).

Skocpol (1994) compares the arguments in the works of Wolf, Migdal, Paige, Scott, and Moore. [3] She raises three questions concerning the issue of what makes peasants revolutionary and examines each author’s responses. On the question of “which peasants are most prone to revolution,” Wolf and Scott declare that landholding peasants fit this category while Paige points to propertyless shareholders and landless farmworkers. On the role of political and military organizations, Moore, Scott and Paige view them as external to the peasantry’s autonomous mobilizations while Migdal asserts that peasantries have been largely propelled by revolutionary parties. Finally, as to whether capitalist imperialist development leads to peasant revolution, Wolf, Migdal, Paige and Moore agree that this has indeed been the case with the roots to be found in the modernization, commercialization and industrialization of agriculture set in motion by globalizing forces.

This paper is concerned primarily with the tradition that is rooted in various Marxist analyses of peasant participation in revolutionary agrarian social movements. It starts by looking at the

questions that have informed Marxist studies on peasant revolutions and how writers from this school of inquiry have attempted to answer them. To show how Marxists have in practice related to peasant societies, the paper then looks at an actual peasant community consisting of three villages in the provinces of Tarlac and Pampanga in Central Luzon, Philippines which have been the targets of organizing activities by armed Marxist guerrilla movements. As a way of further localizing and focusing encounters between Marxists and peasants, the third part presents a brief life story of an individual peasant from one of these communities who directly participated in the agrarian armed struggle. The fourth part brings the three previous sections together to see how Marxist theories on peasant revolutionary activities compare with actual experiences on the ground.

A principal argument of this study is that Marxist theories on peasant revolutions seem far removed from reality and that practitioners often find themselves pragmatically adjusting and revising the former to conform to the situation in the field. On the part of peasant societies and their members, on the other hand, the findings from the field show that different motivations (including personal considerations) in joining the armed struggle are at work and that participation in revolutionary struggles is only one of the options that individual peasants consider in responding to their abject conditions and improving their lives.

While the experiences of three peasant communities may not provide sufficient information to generalize on how Filipino Marxists related to the peasantry, these case studies nevertheless provide glimpses of reality that could very well have been replicated in other parts of the country. Indeed, scholarly studies at the macro level on Communist-led agrarian rebellions in the Philippines appear to validate (to a significant extent) the findings from the field.

Peasants and Revolutionary Movements

From a Marxist point of view, class analysis forms an important component of the notion of peasant revolutions. A primary question deals with the attitude of the peasant class towards revolutionary change. Corollary to this is the question of when and how peasants actually engage in revolutionary activities. A secondary issue is how peasants relate to what Marxists assume is the only innately revolutionary vanguard class – the urban proletariat, which in practice is invariably represented by a communist or socialist party or similar-type organizations.

Marx (1969:478-480) has two notions on these problems. First, he distinguishes between the revolutionary peasant and the non-revolutionary peasant. Briefly, the peasant who remains isolated from other peasants and forms no collective spirit either within or with other marginalized classes of society is a non-revolutionary peasant. This is the peasant who will cling at all costs to his smallholding even when it is no longer a viable undertaking and will resist socialist-oriented changes, e.g., collectivization. Worse, this peasant will often ally with reactionary forces against the revolutionary proletariat. On the other hand, the peasantry who attains a consciousness towards collective action, correctly identifies their class enemies, and unites with other oppressed classes is a revolutionary peasant.

Marx went on to declare that the non-revolutionary peasantry “consequently (are) incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name,” ... and being unable to represent themselves “must be represented. And that this “representative must at the same time appear as their master, an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above.” In such a situation, the peasantry becomes hostage to another political regime that would in Marx’s colorful language

“... represent not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant that strikes out

beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather the peasant who wants to consolidate this holding; not the country folk who ... want to overthrow the old order..., but on the contrary those who, in stupefied seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves and their small holdings saved and favored.... It represents not the enlightenment, but the superstition of the peasant; not his judgment, but his prejudice; not his future, but his past ..."

The conservative position of the peasantry towards revolutionary change is rooted in the family-based village economy, a "natural economy most unalloyed" which "produced everything it needed" and where "almost no money was necessary" (Engels 1970:460). "Each individual peasant family is (therefore) almost self-sufficient ... produces ... its consumption ... and thus acquires its means of life through exchange with nature rather than in intercourse with society" (Marx 1969:478). Moreover, "their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse" while their "field of production, the small holding, admits of no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no diversity of development, no variety of talent, no wealth of social relationships" (Marx 1969:478).

Capitalism, with "its money economy and large-scale industry," puts an end to the natural economy and thereby dooms the peasant mode of smallholder production (Engels 1970:460). But rather than going over to the side of the proletariat, the peasantry stubbornly clings to the land and is distrustful of socialist calls for nationalization of the land, which appear to them as nothing more than outright expropriation of their small farms. As such they are often susceptible to the designs of the bourgeoisie with its call for protection and preservation of private property.

What then should be the attitude of the revolutionary forces to the peasantry? On the eve of the October Bolshevik revolution, Lenin (1977a:217) wrote: "...the attitude of the proletariat to the peasants ... confirms the old Bolshevik concept, correspondingly modifying it, that the peasants must be wrested from the influence of the bourgeoisie. That is the sole guarantee of salvation of the revolution."

Marxist theory asserts that in both backward agrarian societies and capitalist societies with large peasant populations, an alliance between the working class and the peasantry is a necessary strategy. But this will not be an alliance between equals. The peasantry is to be under the leadership of the proletariat class which, in the struggle against capitalism, is alone a really revolutionary class (Marx and Engels 1973:77). Once the peasantry realizes that their smallholding has been "enslaved by capital" and is the principal cause of their ruin, they will gravitate to their "natural ally and leader," the urban proletariat (Marx 1969:480-482).

Lenin (1977b:269) echoed the above views as he pointed out that in "every capitalist country where there are peasants" the overthrow of an oppressive government "can only be accomplished by the proletariat." The peasantry, being an isolated and amorphous mass of independent producers, "much as potatoes in a sack forms a sack of potatoes" (Marx 1969:479), is to be organized by an outside force, the party of the proletariat.

Notwithstanding these iterations of the politically conservative nature of the peasant class, the practice of revolutionary Marxist movements showed considerable flexibility and adjustments. Before the outbreak of the October insurrection in the cities, a peasant revolt broke out spontaneously in the Russian countryside and Lenin immediately called on his Bolshevik party to support the peasants' struggle. When the 1917 insurrection brought the Bolsheviks into power, Lenin declared a "Workers' and Peasants' Government of the Russian Republic", cancelled all landlords' titles and ordered the transfer of the land to the peasant committees without compensation (Reed 1966:264, 350). [4]

In China, whose ancient and modern history has been replete with large-scale peasant revolts, widespread agrarian unrest and peasant movements were enveloping the countryside in the 1920s led by the Peasant Associations (Chesneaux 1973:82-100). The Chinese Communist Party, under cover of its tenuous alliance with the Kuomintang Party, provided political leadership as well as an agrarian program to these associations who had become the de facto local governing bodies in the rural areas. In 1927, Mao Tsetung (1971a:35) wrote about such associations and the role of the poor peasants in the province of Hunan.

"This great mass of poor peasants, ... are the backbone of the peasant associations, the vanguard in the overthrow of the feudal forces ... Without the poor peasant class ..., it would have been impossible to bring about the present revolutionary situation in the countryside, or to overthrow the local tyrants and evil gentry and complete the democratic revolution. The poor peasants, being the most revolutionary group, have gained the leadership of the peasant associations."

Mao waxed effusive by declaring that "leadership by the poor peasants is absolutely necessary" and that "without the poor peasants there would be no revolution."

"To deny their role is to deny the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. They have never been wrong on the general direction of the revolution" (Mao 1971a:36).

Despite Mao's profuse celebration of the peasantry, the ongoing Kuomintang-Communist alliance served to moderate the demands of the peasant associations. The two parties' agrarian program to which the associations adhered was limited to the reduction of land rents and usurious interest rates and provision of basic political liberties (Chesneaux 1973:89-100). [5] More radical measures such as land seizures and establishment of peasant cooperatives were discouraged and even criticized as "excesses." When the Kuomintang broke with the Communists in late 1927 and killed thousands of their former allies (thus decimating the Communist ranks), the landed gentry resurrected their armed militias which then conducted massacres of leaders and members of the peasant associations. Consequently, the peasant movement went into a hiatus.

In accordance with the prevailing balance of class forces in China and breaking with Marxist (and Soviet) orthodoxy on the subject, Mao would henceforth elevate the role of the peasantry in the Chinese revolution. Writing in 1939, he called the armed struggle in China as essentially a "peasant war" saying that the Communist Party's "relations with the peasantry and its close relations with the peasant war are one and the same thing" (Mao 1971b:166). [6] In place of the traditional Marxist stance that the peasantry is a vacillating partner of the workers' movement, Mao posited the view that "the peasantry is the firm ally of the proletariat."

At the launching of the "Cultural Revolution" in the late sixties, Mao would reiterate his idealization of the peasantry by emphasizing "learning from the peasants, rather than from the workers" (Schram 1974:29). [7] By doing so he practically debunked the thesis that the proletariat was the only truly revolutionary class.

It can fairly be argued that Mao has never completely accepted the Marxist postulate of a sharp qualitative difference between the political attitudes and capacities of the urban workers on the one hand, and the peasants, sunk in "rural idiocy", on the other. Indeed he went so far in 1926 to state that the peasants were more uncompromisingly revolutionary than the workers (Schram 1974:29-30).

After China, two other major peasant-based revolutionary movements that ended in victory were the Cuban revolution (1956-1958) and the Vietnamese revolution which spanned four decades from the 1930s to 1975. As is well known, the peasant masses (the *campesinos* in Cuba and the landless and

tenant farmers in Vietnam) provided the main support for these two movements and the agrarian question and its resolution were primary mobilizing elements as well as major government programs in the reconstruction and post-revolutionary period. [8] Commenting on the role of the peasantry in the making of the modern world, Moore (1966:453) concludes that

"No longer is it possible to take seriously the view that the peasant is an 'object of history,' a form of social life over which historical changes pass but which contributes nothing to the impetus to these changes. For those who savor historical irony it is indeed curious that the peasant in the modern era has been as much an agent of revolution as the machine, that he has come into his own as an effective historical actor along with the conquests of the machine."

Moore also notes that "the wellsprings of freedom" need not lie exclusively in social forces and classes "about to take power," as Marxist theory would put it, "but perhaps even more in the dying wail of a class over whom the wave of progress is about to roll" (p. 504). Writing in 1966, he however (like many scholars on peasant studies) prematurely sounds the death knell for the peasantry in the context of the global spread of industrial society which he sees as rendering anachronistic revolutionary radicalism.

While the actual role that peasants have played in contemporary revolutionary movements have far exceeded the limitations placed on it by classical Marxist analysis, the latter's view that the peasantry by themselves would be unable to overthrow the existing order has also seen its validation in the above instances. In the case of China, Chesneaux (1973:151-152) observed that the "external stimulation" that "set the peasantry in motion" was through the media of "ideas, men, and organizational forms" that came from the cities and industrialized towns. The same could be said of the Cuban and Vietnamese experiences whose principal leaders grew up in urban areas and were of middle class origin with some even arising from the upper class. In other words, the peasant movements were, for all intents and purposes, basically led by non-peasants.

Marxism and the Peasantry in the Philippines

To situate the above issues and concerns in the context of the Philippine situation, this study has chosen to focus on the direct experiences of three rural villages in the Central Luzon as case studies, the region being regarded as the traditional hotbed of peasant unrest. In doing so, the author deviates from the usual practice of radical scholars that looks at the peasant question from a larger national and aggregate perspective. While useful and necessary in providing a wider view of an important social phenomenon, national studies often marginalize the principal players in the struggle - the peasant masses themselves, how they have been affected by revolutionary activities and how they themselves relate to radical groups attempting to change their lives.

In addition, this paper also adopts the tradition of social historians who look at the experiences in struggle of the common people and argue that their history is not the same as, and cannot be replaced by, the history of social movements and mass organizations whether these be peasant- or worker-based. This is an all too often mistaken assumption that Marxist historians make (Hobsbawm 1997:203-204).

The Study Area

The villages (*barangays*) of San Vicente and Santo Niño in Bamban, Tarlac and Calumpang in Mabalacat, Pampanga comprise 5,612 hectares of rolling hills and mountains in the Central Luzon region in the Philippines. They were part of 41,000 hectares of American military baselands which reverted to the Philippine government in 1979. Prior to the Mount Pinatubo eruptions in 1991-1992,

the communities could be reached through a 5-kilometer-long uphill and winding road at the western end of the 300-meter-long Bamban Bridge across the Sacobia-Bamban River which marks the boundary between the provinces of Pampanga and Tarlac. [9]

The 4,795-foot Mount Pinatubo defined the area's southwestern boundaries. To the southeast and across the Sacobia River [10] had sprawled the famous American military complex, Clark Air Base, home of the U.S. 13th Air Force (until it was forced to close down in 1992). A strategic characteristic of the study area's location was that it straddled the boundaries of three provinces - Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales. Mount Pinatubo and the Cabusilan mountain range loomed over the triangle formed by the confluence of these three boundary lines.

To the northwest was the controversial Crow Valley, the 17,854-hectare bombing and air firing practice range of the 13th U.S. Air Force. Further north was the site of the sophisticated transmitter facilities of Clark as well as its Camp O'Donnell which was turned over to the Philippine government only in 1991. Government surveys in the seventies' had described the area as "generally characterized by rugged terrain, high elevation, and steep slopes (with) elevations ranging from 100 meters above sea level to 670 meters above sea level in its western portion."

The three villages are relatively newly-established peasant communities. Farmer-settler families from lowland areas moved here during the late 1940s and early 1950s due to the deteriorating economic and political conditions brought about by the destruction wrought by the war years, the return of landlordism, and the outbreak of a major armed peasant rebellion. The communities' population ranged from a low of 1,760 persons in the seventies to a high of 2,700 in the late nineties.

The area however was under the jurisdiction of the American-run Clark Air Base and the land itself was classified as a military reservation and thus was inalienable and indisposable. Thus, the settlers were disqualified from owning the lands they tilled or the houses they built. Informal land and housing market mechanisms were resorted to in order to get around these legal impediments. Technically however, the farmer-settlers were squatters and the situation has remained unchanged till today.

The scarce cultivable land area limited farm sizes and created a relatively egalitarian distribution of land while precluding the growth of a full-blown landlord class. [11] The three villages' relatively inaccessible location and the vulnerability of the established farm households to government expropriation at any time created feelings of solidarity and collectivity among the residents that were probably greater than what can be found in other peasant communities in the lowland areas. The small farm-households were also relatively self-sufficient and to a large extent production was subsistence-oriented.

In short, it was a community which hewed closely to the essential features of a typical peasant society in the Chayanovian [12] tradition (Bernstein and Byres 2001) comprising of (a) "household farming organized for simple reproduction ('subsistence'); (b) the solidarities, reciprocities and egalitarianism of (village) community; and, (c) commitment to the values of a way of life based on household and community, kin, and locale (and harmony with nature...)." As the communities grew over the years, they shed some of their isolation and, as anticipated by Shanin (1987a), also engaged in the "daily exchange of goods and in labor markets."

Impositions and harassments, and later, expropriations of the surplus came from forces outside the villages: (a) the American-controlled Clark Air Base, (b) sugar capitalists who intruded into the area in the sixties', (c) a major state-initiated and high profile rural development project from 1979 to 1991, (d) a government rehabilitation and relocation program in the wake of the 1991-1992 Mount Pinatubo eruptions, and (e) a special economic zone established in the mid-1990s. In addition two generations of left-wing guerrillas tried to exert a political influence on the villages with

interestingly mixed results, as the discussion that follows shows.

Dealing with Huk insurgents

Conditions of the peasantry during the late forties and early fifties were becoming more oppressive. The end of the Second World War and liberation from Japanese rule did not translate into emancipation from the yoke of landlordism (Constantino 1975, Kerkvliet 1979). Coming in the wake of the devastation caused by the war, peasants felt unduly burdened by the reimposed sharing arrangements where one-half of expenses were borne by the tenant who in turn kept only half of the harvest. Political repression (including killings) aimed at members of peasant organizations and their leaders was also rampant.

Agrarian unrest soon escalated in the countryside with a full-scale peasant rebellion centered in the Central Luzon provinces. To a significant extent, it was led and guided by the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, Communist Party of the Philippines) and its armed wing, the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB, People's Liberation Army), or "Huks" for short. [13] Other peasant mass organizations also rose to confront the big landowners, the Philippine government and their military allies. [14] The armed rebellion erupted in 1946 and was at its peak between 1949 and 1951 when rebel guerrillas reached 22,000 men. [15]

In the plains and hills of Tarlac and Pampanga provinces, the armed insurgency found fertile ground and this included the three villages in this study. The HMB actively operated in this upland area. In an interview, former PKP-HMB leader Bartolome Pasion, who hails from Mabalacat, claimed that almost all the villages of Bamban and Mabalacat towns were organized by or came under the influence of the party.

Bart Pasion, who became a PKP Central Committee member, had his baptism of fire in the forests of the Sapang Cauayan area (in what became San Vicente) in late 1949. He was a young political officer of an HMB unit that was scouting the area when they were surprised by a Philippine Constabulary group that happened to be doing the same thing in the same place. They were immediately fired upon and unable to retaliate, scattered in all directions and left everything - their guns, ammunition, and documents. Luckily, no one was killed. Bart says it was the scariest moment of his life.

The attitude among the residents was "live and let live" with the rebels. San Vicente resident Zacarias "Apo Carias" Catli says that the HMB used to come and appropriate part of his crop harvest. He remembers offering them newly harvested eggplants and soon regretting it when they started picking out the best ones ("pinipili pa iyong magaganda").

Some settlers had relatives who were active in the HMB and PKP. Lucio Pasion, who settled in the area in 1951, is the younger brother of Bart Pasion and other brothers were also with the guerrillas. In the sixties' Apo Lucio would himself join MASAKA (Malayang Samahang Magsasaka), the PKP's legal peasant organization. San Vicente founder Vicente "Apo Bising" Narciso had nephews who were HMB commanders and instructors. Despite this, being the settlers' acknowledged leader, he was often under pressure by the guerrillas who once captured and threatened to shoot him. His negotiating skills saved his life. Later, a right wing death squad nicknamed the "Monkees" also sent him threatening notes, this time because of his family ties with the HMB.

Calumpang barrio captain Emiliano Mendoza talked of an important conference held in his village between the two rival HMB groups of *Kumander* Alibasbas and *Kumander* Sumulong. Bernabe "Kumander Dante" Buscayno (later to found the New People's Army, NPA) was then identified with the Alibasbas group and he operated in the Bamban-Capas area. Lucio Pasion recalled that as late as

1964, there was an armed encounter between the Philippine Constabulary (PC) and the HMB in Sitio Balacbac.

According to Bart Pasion, whose area of command included the three villages in this study, the PKP's bloody conflict with the renegade Sumulong group in the early sixties distracted their cadres from more intensive organizing work. [16] Thus the HMB never really made substantial and long lasting inroads in the place.

Of course by the time more permanent settlements in the three barrios had been established in the area in the mid-fifties, the HMB-PKP insurgency had already declined considerably (Kerkvliet 1979, Lava 2003). From 1952 to 1956, the armed rebellion had practically petered out and PKP-HMB cadres had to struggle simply to survive and avoid getting caught by government troops. Bart Pasion was captured in 1956 and released a year later. He said he tried to resume organizing activities in Sitio Balacbac and in what is now the Sto. Niño area in Bamban all the way to Capas, Tarlac but his progress was slow and hampered by the fact that he was already identified as a Huk leader and therefore closely monitored by the police. He was initially able to bring an armed group into Balacbac but its presence was shortlived.

From HMB to NPA

After 1956, the PKP-HMB rapidly declined as an effective revolutionary group, its ranks decimated by an intensive and brutal government counter-insurgency campaign heavily funded by the U.S. government which saw the capture of its Communist leaders and surrender or death in combat of many rank and file and general demoralization of its once formidable peasant mass base (Kerkvliet 1979, Lava 2002). [17] Many also died of illness or hunger and some top cadres were the victims of betrayal and treachery.

To make matters worse, in the sixties, the remaining HMB armed group split into two factions - the Alibasbas group headed by Cesario "*Kumander Alibasbas*" Manarang and the Sumulong group headed by Faustino "*Kumander Sumulong*" del Mundo. The former maintained a principled political struggle while the latter soon degenerated into a criminal underworld syndicate operating in Angeles City (Dizon 2003). [18]

Within the PKP, a major split occurred in 1966-1967 which saw the establishment in December 1967 of a rival party calling itself the Communist Party of the Philippines Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought (CPP-ML-MTT) under the leadership of former University of the Philippines English instructor Jose Ma. Sison (Weekley 2001: 20-41, Abinales 2001:117-125)). Dante Buscayno, who joined Sumulong's group following Kumander Alibasbas' death in 1966, broke away soon after and formed his own armed band which, upon linking up with Sison's fledgeling CPP, became the New People's Army (NPA), the new party's military wing. [19]

During the late sixties and early seventies, the Bamban-Mabalacat-Angeles area was the scene of intense and sometimes bloody confrontations between four armed groups - (1) the government troops (Philippine Constabulary, the Army, and Civilian Home Defense Force) and a notorious right wing paramilitary death squad nicknamed the "Monkees"; (2) the Sumulong Group which had degenerated into an underworld criminal syndicate nicknamed the "Beatles"; (3) the Maoist CPP-NPA under *Kumander Dante*; and (4) the remnants of the old PKP-HMB group under Mariano "*Kumander Diwa*" de Guzman. [20]

These rivalries were characterized by constant surveillance, street gun battles, assassinations, harassments, beatings, and kidnappings. Apo Lucio Pasion's PKP-HMB brothers had been identified with the Alibasbas group and later with *Kumander Diwa* and were thus on the hit list of Sumulong's

“Beatles” group. Apo Lucio would sometimes be captured and beaten up by Sumulong henchmen who were looking for his brothers. He recounted that he was once locked up in a closet in order to lure his brothers into a trap.

The people feared the “Beatles” and “Monkees” death squads the most for they did not appear to be accountable to anyone for their actions. Many town residents wishing to escape the conflicts and avoid being caught in the crossfire moved to the interior barrios of San Vicente, Calumpang, and Sto. Niño. But as the conflicts spread, even these barangays were not spared.

Within this socially volatile situation, unrest in the three villages of this study entered a period of resurgence with the NPA gaining adherents among the peasant-producers. The NPA had by this time gained the upper hand over its rival groups in the area and in the eyes of the Tarlac and Pampanga peasantry, would subsequently take the place of the HMB as the primary radical armed group operating in Central Luzon.

The NPA saw the relatively inaccessible barrios of San Vicente, Calumpang, and Sto. Niño as natural sanctuaries. [21] The absence of large and wealthy landowners who would feel threatened by their presence also facilitated their entry into the area. [22] Still another reason for the NPA’s interest in the place was that, in case of military pursuits, it provided them a westward escape route across the mountains towards less-turbulent towns and villages in Zambales province.

According to Apo Lucio Pasion, Dante Buscayno’s group first entered the villages in 1968. Both Apo Bising Narciso and his wife, Marcelina “Apo Celing” Soriano Narciso vividly recall Dante’s frequent visits to their farm beside Sapang Cauayan in Sitio Balacbac, San Vicente. The NPA leader would arrive with a group of men and women as often as two or three times a month. Sometimes, they would stop for a whole week. Apo Celing was pleased to note that they would help around the house, scrub the floor, cook meals, and work in the fields. They were also so self-assured that they sometimes engaged in target shooting practice. They never asked for anything and took only what was offered to them explaining that “we are forbidden to ask for anything” (“bawal po sa amin ang mang-hingi”). Nevertheless whatever they took, they paid for. One time fifty (50) guerrillas showed up and stayed for a few hours. The couple had to slaughter several chickens to feed the famished rebels.

Apo Celing recalls that Dante looked so small and so thin that she was astonished to learn that this was the legendary NPA chief. His men however were tall and fair-skinned (“matatangkad at mapuputi”) and the women, “pretty” (“magaganda”). She would also see him being carried on the shoulders of his men when crossing Sapang Cauayan. For his part, Apo Bising remembers the guerrilla leader as a “kind person” (“mabait na bata”).

During one of Dante’s visits, Apo Celing learned that her sister had met a vehicular accident and was in an Angeles City hospital. As the couple prepared to leave for the city, Dante offered some money to help defray the medical expenses. Apo Celing refused to take the proffered amount however, saying she had enough for her needs. When they came back a week later, the NPAs were still around but the house was clean and well-kept.

Ruben Sison, an Ayta resident of Calumpang says the NPAs dressed better than the government soldiers (“daig pa ang mga sundalo kung magbihis”). Rodolfo David, a Sto. Niño resident who first came to the area in 1954, said that the NPA practically functioned as the local government cum police (“Ang NPA ang military namin dito”). The residents seemed to appreciate the way the rebels managed affairs. What impressed Rodolfo the most was that when the NPAs were in control, the farmers could leave their houses for days, even weeks, and nothing would be missing when they returned. The farm tools and sacks of stored *palay* (unhusked rice) would be intact and not a single

chicken, egg, pig, goat or work animal would be lost. He contrasted this with the past and after the NPAs left when you could not leave your house for even a single night without finding your chickens gone.

The rebels were young, of college-student age and Rodolfo describes them as “good, like lawyers” (“mga estudyante, magagaling, parang mga abogado”). They organized regular three-day live-in seminars in Angeles City where San Vicente residents would attend. As many as 200 persons from different barangays and towns would be in the closed-door sessions listening to lecturers on topics that “would drive you crazy” (“masisira ang ulo mo”) such as an intensive course on Philippine history.

Romance also bloomed in the midst of the unrest. I met two San Vicente women residents who had fallen in love with and married NPA guerrillas. One of them described her husband as a former student from the University of the Philippines (UP). [23] They had three children.

Dante explained to the farmers that the NPA was a movement for equality and aimed at ending all oppression (“magkakapantay-pantay, walang mang-aapi at walang inaapi”). He also described a society where there would be no rich and no poor (“walang mahirap, walang mayaman”). A strong sense of voluntarism was imparted among the people as represented by slogans like “Strengthen Our Resolve” and “Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win”. On the more practical side, the NPAs also campaigned for rent reduction - from 70-30 in favor of the landowner to 60-40 in the tenant’s favor.

The NPA was able to recruit members from among the peasant-settlers. One of Apo Celing Narciso’s sons became a high-ranking NPA commander. Apo Sinang Gomez Catli’s only brother, Zoilo “Ilong” Gomez, was also an NPA commander and the object of a manhunt by PC troops. She herself was often asked to hand carry underground messages for her brother to and from his comrades. Members of an indigenous ethnic community, the Aytas, also joined the rebel army and took such “noms de guerre” as “Kumander Tricycle” and “Che Guevara”. [24]

Armed Encounters in San Vicente

Roberto Gonzales, former San Vicente barangay captain, says that there was an encounter in 1977 between the military and the NPA where a certain Kumander Roger Buscayno was killed along with two others. Other residents volunteered this same information but could not agree on whether Roger was Dante’s brother, nephew, or just another NPA leader.

The story I was able to piece together was that what took place was more of an ambush rather than an encounter. It appears that Roger and his group were having breakfast and mending their clothes when they were surprised by a PC unit that immediately fired on them. Roger and one other guerrilla were killed on the spot. The others managed to escape.

An immediate reaction of the PC to this incident was to call the barangay officials to an “emergency meeting.” [25] However, only Apo Sinang Catli and Roberto Gonzales showed up. The others (including the barangay captain) were too scared to appear. A PC lieutenant demanded to know why the other officials were not present and was simply told that they were not available. The angry PC officer questioned why the barangay officials never reported the presence of the NPA guerrillas in their barrio even if they knew who they were. Apo Sinang replied that if they did that, they would surely be killed. She later realized that the PC had an informer in the village since the soldiers obviously knew what was going on when their backs were turned.

Another incident took place in 1979 and this was recounted by a member of the PC military unit that took part in it. Edgar Frente, [26] was part of a PC battalion assigned to the three villages. His

superiors told them that it was a “critical area” thus their presence was required. Their orders were that if they see anyone carrying unauthorized firearms, looked different or acted suspiciously (“kakaibang itsura at kilos”), they were to fire on them (“babanatan daw namin”).

The battalion had received information about an armed group that was spotted in Sitio Batson between San Vicente and Sto. Niño (“padaan-daan daw diyan”). Edgar was part of a 12-man unit headed by a Sergeant that was sent to the area. On a quiet evening with a bright moon, they situated themselves behind the bushes by the river bank and prepared a “stay-in-ambush.” At about 11 p.m., they spotted six armed guerrillas crossing the shallow river only a few meters from where the soldiers lay in wait. The soldiers immediately opened fire causing the guerrillas to split into two - four had moved further from them while the other two unknowingly moved closer. Gunfire was concentrated on these two closest who had no chance to retaliate and were immediately killed. The four on the other side returned sporadic fire and were able to escape. The PC unit suffered no casualties.

Edgar says they never bothered to find out the identities of the slain NPAs, only that the guerrilla group was composed of outsiders (“mga taga labas”) and that at least two were Aytas (“mga kulot”). After the successful mission, the Sergeant was given a promotion but everyone else, including Edgar, got nothing.

Not all encounters had the guerrillas at the receiving end. Ruben Sison recounted a spectacular NPA operation where twenty (20) guerrillas disguised in government military uniforms showed up in Calumpang and disarmed the local paramilitary unit (CHDF) of its armory of 22 rifles. The residents later learned that this was part of simultaneous disarming operations in five (5) other Mabalacat barangays.

Walking the Tightrope

Despite the generally positive attitude the settlers had of the NPA, they were often caught between the two contending forces in the struggle and frequently had to walk a tightrope. Apo Celing Narciso narrated an incident when an NPA unit happened to be resting inside the family’s farmhouse. Suddenly, a neighbor came to warn that a PC unit was heading their way after raiding a nearby village. The NPAs hurriedly left by wading through the shallow river. To cover their tracks, and showing remarkable presence of mind, she took the carabao (water buffalo) to wallow in the river.

When the government troops arrived, they started interrogating Apo Celing who stubbornly denied that the NPAs had just been there. When the soldiers inquired about the muddied waters, she answered that it was because she had just bathed the carabao. Determined not to lose her composure, she argued with the PC saying that she feeds everyone, so long as they were people (“basta tao”).

The soldiers were initially suspicious and, talking among themselves in Ilocano, called her “untrustworthy and a liar”. But Apo Celing, who originally hails from Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija, understood them and adamantly defended herself in the same language. Realizing that she was after all a fellow Ilocano (“kababayan”) and obviously intimidated by her aggressiveness, the soldiers apologized and left.

Emiliano Mendoza recounted an incident in either 1973 or 1974 when four NPA guerrillas spent the night in his Calumpang farmhouse. In the morning, while the rebel soldiers were still resting, a platoon of Philippine Army soldiers suddenly appeared and surrounded his house. The platoon lieutenant told the farmer that an NPA group had been sighted in the vicinity. Mendoza admitted seeing the rebels pass through but that they had already gone. To show he was sincere, he invited

them inside for coffee. Fortunately for him, the soldiers declined and soon left. Back inside the house, the relieved NPAs told him: "For a moment, we thought your balls had risen to your throat" ("Akala namin, umakyat na ang bayag mo sa lalamunan).

Once when Apo Sinang's NPA brother was visiting, Philippine Constabulary (PC) troops swooped down on Sitio Balacbac accompanied by two helicopters. The soldiers, some of whom were known to Sinang, told her that they received information that her brother, *Kumander* Gomez, was in the village. She of course denied this but challenged them to look for him in their house. Since she showed no fear or hesitation, the PC believed her and did not proceed upstairs. In fact her brother was really hiding in a closet upstairs. Upon leaving, the soldiers offered her a 45 caliber pistol which she refused, saying that having a gun would just provoke others and that this would only shorten her life.

When Apo Bising Narciso was barrio captain, the PC offered him 10 rifles to fight the NPA. He asked for 30 rifles instead and reasoned that the barrio folk needed more guns to resist their oppressors, whether they are PC or the "hukbo". Word however got around that Apong Bising was preparing to fight the NPA. A guerrilla unit confronted him but the old man explained his side and pointed out that he had always helped the guerrillas with food, shelter, and other things. Convinced of his sincerity, the NPA let him go free. But the harassments did not stop. After receiving a handwritten note from the dreaded "Monkees" death squad accusing him of pretending to discipline the barrio people while secretly aiding the NPA, he and his wife moved to Angeles City and stayed there for one year.

Apo Sinang's NPA brother was eventually captured and detained at the PC stockade in Camp Olivas, San Fernando. She naturally visited him frequently and these would soon arouse suspicions among the NPA about her loyalty particularly when it became known that she had made friends with PC officers and enlisted men.

She was then suspected by the NPA of being the informant who had tipped the PC of the presence of Roger Buscayno's group. Apparently, based on this mere suspicion, a decision was made to kill her and this was relayed to her by a relative who told her she was being given a grace period of two weeks to set her personal affairs in order. Sinang however relayed the message that whoever it was that wanted her killed should first confront and investigate ("litisin") her to determine whether she was really guilty.

Apo Sinang declared to the messenger that she only serves the people, and was not a turncoat ("balimbing"). She added that she was not afraid to die but requested that the sentence be carried out in her house so her family would not have a problem locating her body. Luckily for Sinang, within the two-week period, the alleged informer was discovered and killed. It was an Ayta woman who was incidentally also a godmother to one of Sinang's children.

Towards the late seventies, the CPP-NPA had suffered several reversals in Central Luzon and Northern Luzon (Weekley 2001:83). Aside from military setbacks which killed several of the first generation of cadres, prominent leaders were captured such as Sison and Dante in 1977. Expansion however was going on in other regions of the country including the Visayas and Mindanao provinces.

In the villages of San Vicente, Sto. Niño and Calumpang, a new crop of CPP-NPA cadres had appeared. Details are somewhat hazy but some settlers have intimated to me that this new batch was different in that they were more militaristic in their approach [27] and paid less attention to political work, not to mention economic reforms. From villagers' accounts, I gathered that sympathies among them for the rebel forces were considerably reduced as a result.

Summarizing the years of insurgency and disquiet in the area, Ruben Sison remarked: “It was an infernal season. For the fainthearted this was not the place to live in” (“Kainit-initan ng panahon. Kung mahina ang loob mo, hindi ka titira dito”).

The “infernal season” came to an end in 1979 when the Philippine government initiated an integrated rural development and resettlement project that exclusively covered the three villages. [28] Aware of the presence of the left wing rebels in the area, the first item on the project implementors’ agenda was a massive counter-insurgency campaign with the objective of purging the area of the NPA and neutralizing its mass base.

All known NPAs and their sympathizers were rounded up and many were tortured and jailed. The whole area was fenced in and countless military checkpoints were set up. As many as three army battalions were stationed in the area with a combined strength of 2,000 men. The soldiers’ camps and the checkpoints dotted the area all the way up to the mountainous parts. The overbearing presence of the state’s military forces made the area look more like a military camp than a rural development project. Faced with the massive show of military strength and the now lukewarm attitude of the residents, the NPA soon found the area less hospitable to its forces and significantly scaled down its presence. [29] It was at this point that the three villages became collectively known as Sacobia, after the major river that flows along the area’s southern flank.

Marciano Guevara, A Life Story

The locally specific and unique characteristics of interactions between Marxist rebels and peasant communities are further reflected in the life stories of village residents who participated in the movement. Given the dearth of documentary evidence of the history of the community, these life stories serve as alternative sources for describing and explaining the motivations and the dynamics of the encounters. At the same time, they also lend a more human and compelling face to the analysis. Finally, the life stories combine to recount a perspective of history from below as distinct from a history based on the actions of the privileged and powerful (Ileto 1988; Hobsbawm 1997). One such life story is briefly presented below.

Marciano “Marcing” Guevara [30] was an eighteen-year-old farmer in San Vicente and a first-year high school drop-out when he joined the NPA in 1972. He claims to have been personally recruited by Dante Buscayno himself. He also says that he had met prominent leftist leaders such as Jose Ma. Sison (from whom he got his political education), Rodolfo Salas, [31] and many others.

At first Marcing was placed under the command of Juanito Rivera (Kumander Juaning). Then he was assigned as one of Dante’s personal bodyguards. He was with the NPA chief in Sto. Rosario, Mexico, Pampanga as part of a ten-man security squad when Dante was captured in January 1977. Marcing says the movie version of the NPA leader’s arrest was wrong. According to him, soldiers led by Gen. Gatan first entered the house where Dante, his wife, and newly-born child were staying but did not recognize the rebel chief. Dante then went out the back disguised as a woman but an informer, an ice cream vendor, recognized him and pointed him out to the military. Marcing says they did not engage the troops in a firefight because they were badly outnumbered. Having taken Dante, the troops did not bother with the other NPAs and immediately left.

Marcing was next sent to Nueva Ecija where he was promoted to the rank of “Kumander” and took the *nom de guerre* of “Celdran.” He says that he once led company-sized (102 persons) and platoon-sized (36 persons) guerrilla units while operating in the province. His exploits soon earned him a place in the military’s “order of battle” and the government put out an Php80,000 reward for his capture dead or alive.

In 1982, he was visiting his sister in Pangasinan when she contacted a neighbor-friend who was an Army lieutenant. The sister urged this friend to talk Marcing into giving up. Instead, the lieutenant contacted his unit in Baguio City. When the reinforcements came, Marcing offered no resistance and went with them peacefully. He says that at that moment, he felt a sense of relief that his days as a hunted man were over. He was tired of running and hiding and wanted to live a peaceful life once again. He adds that he bears no ill feelings towards his sister who turned him in.

Marcing was brought to Camp Olivas in San Fernando, Pampanga where he was detained for one month. He said that he was treated well and did not suffer any torture. He even got to talk to then President Marcos on the phone who offered him amnesty which he accepted. Shortly after, Marcos paid a visit to the Sacobia development project and the military took Marcing along on the same trip. While at the project site, he was given a loaded gun and brought to the house of one of the residents where he was asked to point out who among the villagers were NPAs or sympathizers. This was the first time it dawned on him that he was being utilized as a government informer. He strongly maintained however that he never informed on anyone and that he has not turned against his former comrades.

In 1983, Marcing married his long-time sweetheart and went back to live in San Vicente. He first worked for two months with a seed farm managed by the Bureau of Plant Industry before being hired by the rural development project as an emergency laborer.

Given his good grasp of issues of the day, Marcing must have had an intensive political education which he internalized well. During my interview with him in 1991, he frequently repeated slogans of the revolution and Marxist terms such as “imperialism”, “petty bourgeois”, “lumpen proletariat”, etc. He also tried to explain to me the foreign debt issue as a context of the then Cory Aquino government’s economic problems. He said that Cory was finished and would not win in San Vicente if she should run again. In 1986, she won by a landslide in the village only because people then perceived Marcos to be corrupt.

Marcing seemed to be resigned to his present situation and the consequences of his decision to leave behind the life of a guerrilla leader. He was also aware of the corresponding constraints on his everyday life. He said that knew what things were wrong and why but he could not do anything about it for fear of losing his job. For example, he realized that something had to be done about the low wages of emergency laborers like himself but he hesitated to act as he should. Otherwise, he may as well go back to the hills, he reasoned. While he has never denounced his former comrades, he appeared also to have cut off all ties with them and simply wanted to be left alone in peace.

Peasants and the Agrarian Revolution

One prominent feature of the peasant movement in Central Luzon under both the old communist party (PKP-HMB) and the later Maoist group (CPP-NPA) was the leadership role played by non-peasants. In short the theories and the main leaders of the agrarian revolution originated from outside peasant society and representation was being made on its behalf by outsiders bearing the ideology of the proletariat even if these outsiders actually came mostly from other social classes, including the middle and upper classes.

Pedro Abad Santos, founder and chairman of the peasant-based Socialist Party organized in 1932 and later PKP Vice Chairman in 1938, was a member of the landed aristocracy and had been elected twice to the legislature. [32] Other known leaders were Mateo del Castillo, a businessman son of a Spanish landowner who was at the same time a Protestant minister (Kerkvliet 1979:142 and Allen 1983:9); Casto Alejandrino and Vivencio Cuyugan, both of whom came from the landlord class and

were former town mayors, the popular Juan Feleo, former teacher and son of a small landowner (Kerkvliet 1979:51); Jose de Leon, also from a small landowning family; and Luis Taruc, who despite his immediate humble beginnings, was actually descended from a prominent family in the 19th century who happened to fall upon hard times (Larkin 1993:310).

There were however other top leaders who came from the peasant and lower classes such as Jacinto Manahan and Mariano Franco. Furthermore, Kerkvliet and Constantino both point to the spontaneity and grassroots origins of many of the peasant organizations as well as the autonomy exercised and independent actions often undertaken by grassroots members and cadres including more radical and violent actions which were reportedly frowned upon by their organization's national leaders.

The particular Marxist theory that views peasants as incapable of self-organization for a revolutionary (as compared to a reformist) purpose also seemed to have been validated among the second generation of communist rebels represented by the CPP-NPA group. All the thirteen original founding members of the CPP in December 1968 came from the middle class - intellectuals and students. Five months later, Bernabe "Kumander Dante" Buscayno and seven of his peasant guerrilla leaders were included in the party's central committee (Caouette 2004:120). But Buscayno, who reached 3rd year high school in Angeles city and attained proletarian (and later intellectual) consciousness as a worker in Manila, may have had already transcended his peasant roots at this time. Furthermore, he later developed a patronizing attitude towards the peasantry. [33]

The weak presence of the PKP-HMB in the three villages had been attributed by a former leading cadre to the distractions posed by the internal conflicts with a renegade faction (the Sumulong group). With respect to this, it should however also be noted that many of the settlers had moved to the area in the late forties and early fifties to avoid being involved in the peasant rebellion that had broken out in the lowland areas of Pampanga and Tarlac. But if one searches for ideological factors, Nemenzo (1984) offers such an explanation. He argues that the PKP-HMB organization (especially in the rural areas) was heavily permeated by what he calls a "millenarian-populist syndrome" brought about by the merger of the Socialist Party (SPP) of Pedro Abad Santos with the original PKP in 1938. While the PKP was grounded in the working class and had firm trade union roots, the SPP was peasant-based and exhibited tendencies and practices anathema to Marxism. [34] But since the experience of peasant revolutions in other countries show that successes were achieved mainly by setting aside Marxist orthodoxies, it is highly questionable whether a more rigorous grounding in and faithful adherence to Marxist theory would have helped the PKP-HMB's revolutionary undertaking in Central Luzon.

The years of CPP-NPA activities in the villages of San Vicente, Sto. Niño, and Calumpang did heighten the political consciousness of the peasant settlers compared to previous encounters with the PKP-HMB group. This was achieved through intensive political education seminars as well as by the exemplary behavior and ethical conduct exhibited by the guerrillas and their leaders. It could be said however that different motivations were also at work that made barrio residents' lend assistance to the NPAs. Certainly many were genuinely attracted to the NPA's vision of an egalitarian and just society. For those with relatives in the guerrilla movement or had been involved in past agrarian struggles, the motivations were clear. But even those who expressed admiration for the rebels' high ethical standards also say they knew they would be killed if they did not cooperate. They did however compare and contrast the NPA's behavior with that of government troops whom they would also feed but would never pay for what they would take.

The ambivalent attitude of the settlers toward the NPA was perhaps manifested subconsciously by their reference to the guerrillas as "people from the outside" ("taong labas") or simply the "armed group" ("hukbo"). Rodolfo David thought that the promised equality was unattainable because the rich and powerful would always be what they are ("Ang mayaman, mayaman talaga; ang may

kapangyarihan, may kapangyarihan talaga”).

By all accounts, the CPP-NPA units that operated in the three villages addressed only political concerns and did not substantially take on pressing economic concerns such as the land issue. Thus a form of local administration was put in place that took care of peace and order issues while political education through intensive seminars was undertaken as well.

Although the issues of rent reduction and more equitable tenant sharing arrangements were discussed, [35] these could not be implemented in the areas. For one, landlordism per se did not exist in the villages and the relatively well-off settlers (middle peasants) who employed seasonal labor or had “tenants” were also supportive of the NPA and thus were exempted from coverage of these programs. [36] A second possible reason was that, based on the settler-peasants’ accounts, the NPA also regarded the three villages as a “rest and recuperation” place or as a passageway to their Zambales field of operations and therefore the implementation of revolutionary economic programs would attract unwanted government attention. This point became moot however because the mere NPA presence did attract the Philippine military’s attention and the place before long became a critical hotspot. [37] Thus the opportunity for a sustainable and lasting leftwing influence among the villagers was passed by.

This concentration on law and order issues in areas under the NPA influence appeared to have been widespread enough to generate a pointed criticism in a major CPP strategy document “Our Urgent Tasks” (OUT) written by Sison in 1975 (Weekley 2001:86-87). According to the OUT document, not enough attention was paid to undertaking minimum land reform programs such as rent reduction, elimination of usury, and establishing peasant associations. The document thus called on their cadres to do more than “punishing cattle rustlers and disturbers of local peace.”

The dilemma for the CPP-NPA as well as for the legal mass organizations influenced by it however is that the principal form of struggle of their “national democratic revolution” has always been the armed struggle with all other forms (legal and electoral) subordinated to it (Borras 2004:223 and 225). Thus the stress was on developing political and military cadres, not development workers who could carry out economic programs such as rent reduction. This was starkly shown during the unilateral land occupations of 1986-87 conducted by CPP influenced peasant groups where an estimated 75,000 hectares of land were seized and yet only 10 percent of it was made productive. [38]

Experiences such as these have led Putzel (1996:136) to conclude that an instrumentalist policy towards the peasantry has long characterized the CPP’s work and that such a policy, which to him “is rooted in the very foundations of Marxist-Leninist theory and historical practice ... sets severe limitations on the extent to which the party ... can contribute to, on the one hand, the promotion of the long term interests of the rural poor and, on the other, the process of creating a more just, equitable and democratic society.” Putzel claims that such a policy led to a CPP strategy of “managing” the peasantry rather than empowering them.

That being said, the fact was, conditions in the three villages in the seventies were not exactly conducive to the development of a revolutionary situation much less an upheaval. Being a peasant village in the essentialist Chayanovian sense, solidarity rather than conflict characterized the existing organization of society. [39] In this situation, no blatantly oppressive classes arose within the villages that unjustly extracted the agricultural surplus or engaged in abusive behavior. In addition, family and kinship ties strengthened the “feeling of community.” Whatever resentment of a class nature the villagers exhibited was reserved for outsiders.

There was, as Engels characterized it, a “stubborn” attachment to the land and obsession with its control and ownership. Whether this trait makes for a conservative and non-revolutionary peasant is

open to question although it was possible for them to be receptive to any bourgeois blandishments on private property, as Lenin's theory foretold. However, no such form of agitation and advocacy by propertied classes took place in the three villages as they did in other areas of the country.

In the current field study's case, there was no clear dichotomy between revolutionary peasants and non-revolutionary peasants as Marxist theories would have it. Attitudes and responses to the rebel group were varied, multiple, and flexible. The peasant settlers did not display any open hostility or antagonism to the two revolutionary movements that came their way but, except in rare cases, neither have they gone out of their way to extend unqualified support for them. It would thus be difficult to ascribe to them a "vanguard" role from whom one would learn the rudiments of class struggle (as Mao put it) or identify them as Moore's "agent of revolution."

What the peasants had instead was the ability to creatively and spontaneously undertake "everyday forms of resistance" to impositions and exactions from outsiders. To the more common list of everyday resistance forms, one might add excuses made by those who were hesitant about formally joining the CPP-NPA. A typical excuse was to point to a large family to support and feed but that they would readily sign on if the rebel organization would take on this responsibility. As cleverly anticipated by the prospective recruit, the guerrillas were unable to give such an assurance, thus letting the potential peasant cadre off the hook.

One however can only speculate on a link between certain everyday forms of resistance and participation in armed insurgencies. The political consciousness raising that the CPP-NPA conducted among residents of the three villages through live-in seminars, community meetings, and individual encounters may have somehow emboldened and inspired them to resist exactions imposed later on by government authorities tasked with implementing a high-profile integrated rural development (IRD) project's confiscatory policies and projects. But that is another story.

Conclusion

It would of course be presumptuous to generalize from the experiences of three villages and form definite conclusions about the issues and concerns that inform encounters between Filipino Marxist revolutionaries and peasant communities. Nevertheless other studies at the macro level cited in this paper indicate that what transpired in the villages of San Vicente, Sto. Niño, and Calumpang during two generations of Marxist proselytizations were not altogether unique and far removed from comparative experiences in other areas in the country despite the exceptional socio-economic characteristics of the said communities.

The agrarian-based revolutions waged by the PKP-HMB and the CPP-NPA affected large sections of the Philippine population, exacted a heavy human toll in terms of lives lost, incarcerated, and disabled, necessitated the use of the most potent weapons in the state's repressive arsenal to contain them, and consequently forced an otherwise insensitive ruling class to initiate programs to reform the countryside. At the same time, these insurgencies were heroic and passionate attempts by sincere and idealistic individuals and groups to change rural societies and bring a lasting end to poverty, human suffering, and social injustice.

As such these peasant-based revolutions constitute important and critical chapters in Philippine history that deserve more study and analysis than what is currently available. Most of the literature on the two rural rebellions have been studies that utilize a "broad canvas" - painting a bigger picture and providing a longer view of social phenomena. Without abandoning such macro studies, it is also necessary and essential that more attention be paid to the local and direct experiences of peasant communities and peasant individuals and families and their roles in the struggle. In a small

way, this study is meant to contribute to such an endeavor.

Eduardo C. Tadem

4 May 2006

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* This article is excerpted (with revisions and additions) from the author's PhD dissertation (final draft) submitted for examination to the National University of Singapore, Southeast Asian Studies Program in December 2005. It is part of a 2010 publication by the UP Third World Studies Center as their "Marxism in the Philippines: Part Three" volume.

* Eduardo C. Tadem is Professor of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

Footnotes

[1] Based on discussions in various literature, I use the term "peasant" to refer primarily to small and lower middle-sized cultivators who are either share tenants, indentured serfs, leaseholders, owner-cultivators, or any other similar classification. In some cases, it can also refer to those rural wage workers or rural semi-proletariat who either still maintain their small farm holdings or their ties (kinship or otherwise) with small scale rural production units or a rural community in general.

[2] Everyday forms of resistance "stop short of collective outright defiance" and included "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, evasion, flight, false or passive compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, subtle sabotage, squatting and encroachment, and so on" (Scott 1985:29).

[3] The works referred to are Eric R. Wolf. 1969. *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, Joel S. Migdal. 1974. *Peasants, Politics, and Revolutions: Pressure Towards Political and Social Change in the Third World*, Jeffery M. Paige. 1975. *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*, and James C. Scott. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, and Barrington Moore, Jr. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

[4] Nevertheless, Lenin had earlier declared that support for the peasant movement was contingent on its being a "revolutionary democratic movement" but that the moment it becomes "reactionary and anti-proletarian", the workers' party would fight it (Wolf 1966:92-93). He further warned that upon reaching its goal of land acquisition through land reform and redistribution (i.e., the bourgeois democratic revolution), it will cease to be a revolutionary class.

[5] The Communists later adopted a more radical "land to the tiller" policy, but this exempted many officers in the Kuomintang Army who were big landowners (Chesneaux 1973:99).

[6] For a detailed account of cadre and peasant relations in China during the revolution, see Hinton 1972 and Selden 1969.

[7] Belying his practice and some of his own assertions, Mao would in his writings nevertheless continue to pay lip service to the dictum that the proletariat is the leading force in the Chinese revolution. But within the party, he would continually struggle against traditionalists who, based in the cities, adhered strictly to the letter of the Marxist orthodoxy of workers' leadership and control.

[8] See Selden 1969:357-358, 372-380; Chaliand 1978:89-98; Kerkvliet 1997; Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars 1970; Gonzales 1988; Alexandre 1968; Castro 1969.

[9] After the volcanic disaster, this road became impassable and access to the villages is now

through the Clark Special Economic Zone (site of the dismantled Clark Air Base) managed by the Clark Development Corporation (CDC).

[10] The Sacobia River, after whom the settlement site was collectively named when a government rural development project was initiated in 1979, is a major Pampanga river system flowing northeastward from the slopes of Mount Pinatubo.

[11] Farm sizes ranged from one to three hectares each. A few landholders however had bigger farms and employed seasonal farm labor and occasionally had “tenants.” But these were not landlords but middle peasants as they also did farm work, engaged in productive activities, and did not rely on rent for their livelihood.

[12] Alexander V. Chayanov’s *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (first published in English in 1966) utilized rural surveys gathered from 1870 to 1911 in Russia to develop “a theory of peasant behaviour at the level of the individual family farm” that gives rise to an economy “with its own growth dynamic and economic system” and driven by subsistence needs rather than by profit (Kerblay 1987:177 and Bryceson 2000:11). Chayanov’s approach was to claim for the peasant economy the characteristics of “a general (and generic) ‘type,’ akin to a mode of production ...” the core elements of which “produce (or express) a distinctive internal logic or dynamic, whether cultural, sociological, economic, or in some combination” (Bernstein and Byres 2001). Furthermore, subordinate relations with “external groups such as landlords, large capitalist farms, merchants, the state and urban forces ... lie outside the sphere of the essence of peasant society.” Peasants therefore form an “an independent class” with the logic of their “peasantness” unchanging while the forms of their “external relations are variable and contingent.” By centering the peasant economy in the family household where both production and reproduction take place, Chayanov takes issue with orthodox Marxist views that the peasant economy is “a form of incipient capitalism, represented by petty commodity production” (Kerblay 1987:177).

[13] The HMB was actually a reorganized and reconceptualized version of a war-time guerrilla outfit also organized by the PKP that fought the Japanese. It was called the Hukbalahap (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon, or People’s Anti-Japanese Army), also called “Huks” for short.

[14] These included the PKM (Pambansang Kaisahan ng mga Magbubukid or, National Peasants Union) whose membership reached 500,000 by 1945, the KPMP (Katipunang Pambansa ng mga Magbubukid ng Pilipinas, National Confederation of Peasants in the Philippines), and other peasant groups of pre-war origins (Kerkvliet 1979:121).

[15] Henson (1963) estimated the HMB strength in 1951 at 21,800 composed of 9,000 active combatants and 12,800 reserve forces. He also claimed that the HMB troops were supplied with arms and ammunition by the truckload from Clark Air Base through collusion with corrupt American GIs and Filipino employees. This is somewhat confirmed by former Clark employee and San Vicente resident Zacarias Catli who spoke of rampant theft going on inside the base.

[16] In January 2003, Bart Pasion accompanied me to San Vicente. Though he hadn’t been in the area since the fifties, some older residents, including Carias Catli, immediately recognized him as the former Huk political officer who did organizing work in their village half a century earlier.

[17] Kapampangan historian Mariano N. Henson (1963) reports on the intensity of the rebellion in Pampanga by citing government reports of Huk “atrocities” in 1948-49 as follows: “326 raids on barrios and towns, 215 kidnappings, 122 ambushes, 51 murders, 4 rapes, 3 arson cases and 571 civilians killed.” Government abuses in the form of kidnappings, summary executions,

massacres, and illegal imprisonment. Bodies of “liquidated” Huk suspects were not returned to their families. Any one found dead was automatically labeled a Huk. Paramilitary civilian guards perpetrated the infamous Maliwalu, Bacolor massacre on 15 April 1949. See also Shalom (1986:68-95) for an account of American-funded and American-directed operations against the Huks.

[18] *Kumander* Alibasbas, with nine of his men and relatives, would soon be trapped and massacred allegedly by Sumulong’s men in February 1966 in Concepcion, Tarlac (Dizon 2003). The peasantry in the area where he operated mourned his death as he was viewed as a Robin Hood-type of rebel “who gave help to poor families ... in the form of clothing, food, and even money” and defended them against their class and state oppressors and common criminals.

[19] Weekley (2001:26-27), quoting CPP leader Rodolfo Salas, describes this linkage between the CPP and Dante’s armed group as “some kind of a merger” for which the latter secured “substantial representation in the Central Committee.” The initial meeting between Dante and Sison was also said to have been arranged by then Tarlac opposition Congressman Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr.

[20] Interview with Bartolome Pasion, 7 January 2003. The people named the armed groups after the two most popular and rival rock groups of the day because just like the singers, members of the former also wore their hair long.

[21] On the inaccessibility of the area, there was a dirt road to Calumpang from the MacArthur Highway in Dolores, Mabalacat which crossed the Bamban River at its shallowest point. This was difficult to negotiate and would be washed away by rising waters during the rainy months. There was another route from the Bamban part of the highway to Sitio Balacbac, San Vicente. Built at a time when sugar commercial crops were introduced, it was also rough and negotiable only during the dry season by four-wheel vehicles or heavy duty trucks carrying harvested cane from the fields to the mills.

[22] Judging from their personal accounts of the NPA years, even the few “well-off” farmer-settlers were not exactly hostile to the NPA.

[23] I was unable to verify this claim but the state university’s reputation as the breeding ground for left-wing radicalism preceded it everywhere so that rural folk often assume that students turned guerrillas had to come from UP.

[24] The Aytas, the area’s original inhabitants, comprised approximately one-fourth of the population of the three villages.

[25] As was the usual practice, in this “meeting,” the PC soldiers were also fed by the villagers.

[26] Not his real name.

[27] For example, some older settlers reported that arbitrary killings of suspected government informers or rebel-returnees were taking place without the usual social investigation being undertaken. The experience of Apo Sinang Catli however shows that tendencies towards such abuses were not altogether rare in the past (see above).

[28] This project was known as the Sacobia Integrated Rural Development Project and was directly under the Ministry of Human Settlements (MHS) headed by Imelda R. Marcos.

[29] From all indications, the CPP-NPA never totally abandoned the area. Six years later, the “peace and order situation” remained “rather critical” and the Philippine Army continued to provide “necessary security measures” (Alferez 1983). In the mid-eighties, the Philippine Army’s “Task Force Dalan” stationed its headquarters in the area. This military presence was maintained until the late eighties with the stationing in Sacobia of the 70th Infantry Battalion under Lt. Col. Jovencio Mendoza. In 1991, some CPP-NPA presence continued to be felt in the villages.

[30] Not his real name.

[31] Rodolfo Salas, also known as *Kumander Bilog*, took over as CPP Chairman when Sison was captured in 1976.

[32] For brief biographical sketches of Pedro Abad Santos, see Larkin 2001, Tan 1983, Kerkvliet 1979, and Allen 1985.

[33] Years later Dante Buscayno would criticize peasant consciousness and practices as backward, conservative, patronage-dependent and religion-obsessed (Encarnacion 1997, Encarnacion 1993b).

[34] Among these millenarian-populist traits Nemenzo attributes to the SPP influence within the merged PKP were “1) transposition rather than negation of feudal relationships” and blurring of class differences, 2) role of superstition and use of religious rituals, 3) “distaste for book learning and penchant for direct action”, 4) “emphasis on group solidarity” and, 5) “an apocalyptic view of history.”

[35] The CPP-NPA’s “Revolutionary Guide for Land Reform” (RGLR) produced in 1972 and revised in 1977, has provisions for minimum and maximum goals (Padilla 1988:34). The minimum goals are the reduction of land rent and the end of usury while the maximum goals are the expropriation of large estates and their free distribution to landless tenants and farmworkers (Morales 1986:65, Padilla 1988:34, and Weekley 2001:56).

[36] The CPP’s RGLR notes that “landlords who helped the revolutionary movement, are not exploitative, and who participate in the production process” will be granted concessions and privileges by the revolutionary forces (Padilla 1988:34-35). In a similar vein, CPP Chair Sison (writing as Amado Guerrero) wrote: “... in opposing and overthrowing the landlords,... we give special consideration ... to the enlightened gentry who endorse and follow our policies and support our revolutionary war” (cited in Borras 1999:52).

[37] When the armed conflicts escalated, some settler-peasants who could not take the heat moved back to the towns, thus depriving the NPA of some of their mass support.

[38] These land occupations came in the aftermath of the ouster of President Marcos in a popular uprising. Aside from the lack of competent cadres, there were other reasons for the non-productivity of the occupied lands - militarization, inability to access government credit, and unsuitability for agriculture (Borras 2001:225). In the end, the lands were reoccupied by the legal owners with the aid of private armies and the military and the peasants made no effort to stay on.

[39] That is, solidarity mainly in the face of outside interventions that were seen as expropriatory. This does not imply that there were no internal conflicts. Such internal divisions however did not stem from issues that would have precipitated class-based and therefore revolutionary action.