

Letters from the Underground

Ang Bayan and the Construction of a Counterhegemonic Subjectivity during the Anti-dictatorship Struggle

JOURNAL DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944>

Karlo Mikhail I. Mongaya

University of the Philippines Diliman

Abstract

Studies on the oppositional press that challenged the media monopoly of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship which ruled the Philippines with an iron-fist from 1972 to 1986 have mostly focused on small independent media locally known as the “mosquito press.” Yet less attention has been paid to the underground newspapers run by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) which waged a nationwide armed resistance against the dictatorship. This article critically interrogates 40 Letters to the Editor (Letters) published in the pages of *Ang Bayan* [*The People*], the CPP Central Committee’s publication.

Diverging from the focus of existing scholarship on the faithfulness of the underground press to mainstream journalistic conventions, the article instead locates its significance as a repertoire of contention that helps in the organization and mobilization of its community of readers composed of party members, guerrilla fighters, activists, and allies. Reading the Letters draws attention to the construction of a counterhegemonic subjectivity marked by a centralizing impetus and communist militancy. The Letters also give a glimpse of the ideological reevaluations that had engulfed the communist movement in the decade following the fall of the dictatorship.

Keywords

Letters to the Editor, Communist Party of the Philippines, Martial Law, Counterhegemony, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The scene of a “talakayang-dyaryo,” literally newspaper-discussion sessions and often abbreviated as TD in the curt coded language of the Filipino communist underground, opens the article entitled “Newspapers: Flag Bearers of the Mass Movement”: “Mang Sensio reads each word aloud while using his fingers to follow each line of the newspaper article... After a few moments of silence, a member of the organizing committee asked a question. The discussion has started” (CPP, “Newspapers” 13). The article describes these newspaper-discussion sessions as entailing the preparation of clandestine gatherings by small groups of people for the collective discussion of the contents of publications run by the CPP. It appeared in the December 1982 issue of *Ang Bayan*, the publication of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).-

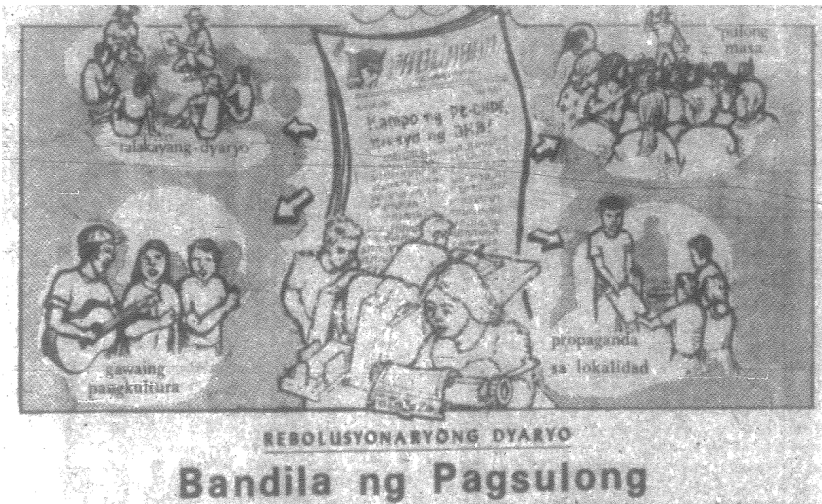


Fig 1. Illustration accompanying the article “Rebolusyonyong Dyaryo: Bandila ng Pagsulong” in the *Ang Bayan* December 1982’s illustrated Filipino edition. The English version “Newspapers: Flag Bearers of the Mass Movement” in *Ang Bayan*’s English edition does not carry the same illustration.¹

For the CPP, the revolutionary newspaper was considered the “leading propaganda form” elaborating the party’s stand, analyses, and policies thus guiding party members and activists in the conduct of their day-to-day revolutionary work (CPP, “*Ang Bayan Orientation*” 18). This privileging of the newspaper form is demonstrated in an illustration accompanying the article “Rebolusyonaryong Dyaryo: Bandila ng Pagsulong” [“Revolutionary Newspapers: Flag Bearers of the Movement”] (see Fig.1) which shows the revolutionary newspaper at the center of different forms of propaganda work from newspaper-discussion sessions [*talakayang-dyaryo*], mass meetings [*pulong masa*], cultural work [*gawaing pangkultura*], to propaganda in the localities [*propaganda sa lokalidad*].

The CPP had been at the core of the nationwide armed resistance movement to the regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. who ruled as dictator from 1972 until his fall in a popular uprising in 1986. This article argues that the CPP’s experience in producing revolutionary newspapers and building its readership to organize and mobilize working peoples during the Marcos dictatorship years and beyond is a concrete illustration of Antonio Gramsci’s theorization of ideological hegemony. Writing in his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci saw the challenge facing the subaltern classes and their party organization as one of not only countering the coercive apparatuses of the state but also its systematic efforts and organizing consent (257-264). Through the platform of the underground press, the CPP challenged the Marcos clique and sought despite shortcomings to build its own counterhegemony in the ideological terrain.

The CPP, with its Maoist doctrine, does not conceive of its radical project in Gramscian terms. In fact, Gramscian thought had inspired paradigm shifts among former CPP members and groups that left the party’s fold in the 1990s to counterpoise a privileged “war of position” for reforms in the realm of civil society against the classical Leninist focus on a “war of maneuver” aimed at direct assaults on the state (See Quimpo, *Contested Democracy* 108-115). Gramsci himself, however, did not call for the complete rejection of the latter but only for its reduction “to more of a tactical than a strategic function” in particular circumstances where civil society “has

become a very complex structure” (*Prison Notebooks* 235). There had also been intriguing attempts at creating productive engagements between the ideas of Gramsci and Mao Zedong (See Dirlik, “The Predicament of Marxist Revolutionary Theory” 202-205).

The martial law years saw the rise of an oppositional press that challenged the Marcos dictatorship’s control over the media and flow of information. Studies on the period’s media landscape have mostly focused on the “mosquito press,” the label given by then Information Minister Gregorio Cendaña to belittle anti-Marcos media outlets which include small independently-run newspapers, newsletters of human rights groups and social movements, and student publications (Encanto 79-80). Historical surveys of the anti-Marcos press typically provide general descriptions of the underground press run by the CPP² yet less attention has been paid to the operation and content of the clandestine communist press.

Tangi provides a comprehensive overview of the history and evolution of *Ang Bayan* but her otherwise insightful discussion is encumbered by its not making use of extensive archival materials and an analysis based on proving the newspaper’s faithfulness to journalistic conventions like nonpartisanship by eschewing, for example, “editorializing” and “politically-loaded” or “libelous” terms (48-57). Another study by Encanto essentially echoes this negative appraisal (a justifiable one) of the “rigid,” “grim,” repetitive, and insistent” tone of the underground press and its flouting of the “journalism standards and practices that were followed in the mainstream media” (101-105). A less dismissive account by Palatino emphasizes the role of *Ang Bayan* in “offering an alternative perspective on the country’s situation and the status of the people’s resistance” (77).³

Ang Bayan editors, however, were quite forthright about the role they wanted underground newspapers to play as conduits for CPP propaganda and the exercise of its political leadership over the masses it sought to mobilize for revolutionary ends. This article diverges from previous studies’ concern with the adherence to journalistic conventions of the underground press. I instead analyze the content and form of the revolutionary newspapers in their own terms as part of the communist movement’s repertoires of

contention (Tilly and Tarrow 236) as they sought to build in Gramscian terms a counterhegemonic bloc against its political and ideological opponents (see San Juan 179-180).

Fully unpacking this dimension demands looking into the reception of the underground press by its community of readers composed of party members, guerrilla fighters, activists, masses, and allies — a task best fulfilled via ethnographic fieldwork (Fairclough 15). Given the understandable temporal constraints, there is hardly any inquiry on the reception of the anti-Marcos press. This article hopes to fill this gap by critically interrogating and historically contextualizing the discourses in 40 Letters to the Editor (Letters) published in the pages of *Ang Bayan* from the years 1982 to 1985 to tease out traces of its readership's way of thinking and their interaction with the paper's editors during this period. In writing this article, I made use of the *Ang Bayan* issues and other related CPP documents found in the collection of the UP Diliman's Main Library called *Philippine Radical Papers* as well as a personal interview I conducted with Carolina Malay, one of the *Ang Bayan's* editors, in her Quezon City residence on September 29, 2020.

In mainstream newspapers, the Letter-to-the-Editor section is ideally viewed as a platform for readers to express themselves as active citizens in a “democratic” public sphere (Lewis and Wahl-Jorgensen 104). Letters from readers in an underground newspaper like *Ang Bayan* may very well be one concrete expression of a counter-public that calls into question the existence of a singular and universal sphere where competing voices vie for recognition (see Kluge and Negt 54-60). The Letters in *Ang Bayan* draw attention to the construction of a counterhegemonic subjectivity marked by the centralizing impetus and communist militancy of the Philippine Global Sixties. It also gives a glimpse of the ideological reevaluations that would engulf the communist movement in the decade following the fall of the dictatorship.

This focus on Letters has the added significance of foregrounding the dynamic organizational processes and cacophony of voices behind the curtain of clandestinity clouding the underground movement. Reading these letters takes one step closer to remedying an important gap in studies on

the Filipino communist movement, which Guillermo criticized for tending “to underemphasize the operations of the lived ideology of the movement ‘in action’ and to overemphasize the role of ‘important’ texts and thinkers” (166).

The communist “revolutionary press”

The CPP came of age in the Philippine Global Sixties, founded on December 26, 1968 by young radicals led by Jose Maria Sison who split from the older Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) or Philippine Communist Party over ideological disputes. The PKP has a longer history which stretches back to its founding in 1930 when the Philippines was still under American colonial rule, its leading of anti-Japanese guerrillas in Central Luzon from 1942 to 1945 during the Second World War, and its launching of the Huk peasant rebellion which was crushed by government forces in the 1950s (Kerkvliet 179-233; Mongaya, “Roger Felix V. Salditos” 118-122). Inspired by the example of the Chinese Revolution under Mao Zedong, the young CPP stalwarts reinitiated armed struggle in the Philippine countryside following a rural-centric protracted people’s war strategy in opposition to the PKP’s Soviet-aligned policy of seeking a peaceful road to socialism (Caouette 111-118).

The CPP’s revolutionary project had from the very beginning a strong propaganda component. *Ang Bayan*, the CPP Central Committee’s mouthpiece, was founded in 1969, the same year the CPP established its armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA). Following the Leninist dictum of the newspaper serving the role of “collective propagandist,” “collective agitator,” and “collective organizer” (Lenin 22), *Ang Bayan* was designed to provide political guidance to CPP members, NPA fighters, underground activists, mass organization members, and allies (CPP, “*Ang Bayan* Orientation” 18). Party Chairperson Sison served as the newspaper’s first Editor-in-Chief from 1969 to 1975 during which *Ang Bayan* had published both news and news analysis as well as theoretical treatises.

After martial law was declared on September 21, 1972, veteran journalists like Antonio Zumel, Satur Ocampo, and Carolina Malay went

By 1975, the CPP had weathered the initial martial law crackdown and began to reorganize its central leadership's national commissions, which included the creation of the National Education and Propaganda Commission [*Komisyon sa Edukasyon at Propaganda* or KOMEDPROP]. The Central Committee in 1976 formed a party group led by veteran journalist Zumel to oversee *Ang Bayan*, which promptly began regularly releasing bi-monthly issues in January 1977. Zumel served as *Ang Bayan* Editor-in-Chief from 1976 to 1986. Alongside the changes in *Ang Bayan*'s editorship was the creation of a separate theoretical journal, *Rebolusyon*, which also issued its first edition in 1977.

The CPP drew lessons from its experiences of running revolutionary newspapers under dictatorial rule to synthesize and institutionalize its conception of the principles behind the underground press and its operations. These efforts found their most developed formulation in the document *Maikling Kurso sa Rebolusyonaryong Peryodismo* [*Short Course on Revolutionary Journalism*] (see Fig.2), a primer issued by the KOMEDPROP in 1981 to give cadres involved in propaganda work a practical guide for running clandestine newspapers. The *Short Course* principally positions the importance of the underground press as a propaganda apparatus that shapes public opinion in favor of the revolution and “to counter the propaganda of the reactionary classes” (Komisyon sa Edukasyon 1). Explicitly designed for “use for introductory training to the staff of [party-run] mass newspapers,” the document is 90-page long and includes sections explaining the necessity of revolutionary newspaper work, newswriting, newspaper editing, visual art, newspaper production, legal propaganda, and newspaper staffing (1).

Carolina Malay, who was *Ang Bayan* Editor from 1977 to 1984 and was explained in our interview, that the KOMEDPROP's Translation Commission (Kawanihan sa Pagsasalin or KAWSA) issued the documents “Ilang Punto Tungkol sa Ispeling, Bokabularyo, at Balarilang Pilipino” [“Some Points on Spelling, Vocabulary, and Filipino Grammar”] and the “Gabay sa Pagsasalin” [“Guide to Translation”] in 1981. Taken together with the *Short Course*, these documents serve as CPP propagandists' stylebook for underground presswork. Based on the principles outlined in these documents, Malay

shared that she led the conduct of training across the country for the staff of new revolutionary newspapers which were already sprouting in different regions during this period (Personal Interview).⁴



Fig. 3. Mastheads of underground newspapers showcased in the *Maikling Kurso sa Rebolusyonaryong Peryodismo* (44).

While broadly sharing the same political orientation, these underground newspapers can be categorized according to their area of operation (nationwide, regional, provincial) and organizational representation in the CPP or its allied-organizations (see Fig.3). CPP-aligned organizations representing different sectors that had been driven underground by martial law published their own publications meant primarily for readers of their sectors. Some examples are *Kalayaan [Freedom]* by the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) for the youth and students, the *Balita ng Malayang Pilipina [Free Filipina News]* by the Makabayang Kilusang ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA) for the working women, and the literary folio *Ulos [Storm]* by the Artista at Manunulat para sa Sambayanan, among others. By the second half of the 1970, CPP regional or provincial committees were also able to publish their own underground newspapers depending on their relative strength: *Asdang [Forward March]* of Southern Mindanao, *Baringkuas [Uprising]* of Cagayan Valley, *Dangadang [Battle]* of Ilocos, *Himagsik [Revolt]* of Central Luzon, *Kalatas [Epistle]* of Southern Tagalog, *Larab [Blaze]* of Samar, among others (Malay, Personal Interview).

Given the underground character of the operations of revolutionary newspapers, the lack of finances and equipment and security considerations posed “a degree of restriction on the flow of supplies for production as well as on the flow of distribution and feedback” (CPP, “*Ang Bayan Orientation*” 14). Malay shared in our interview that her comrades in *Ang Bayan* barely escaped arrest in the hinterlands of Pampanga province in counterinsurgency operations that led to the arrest of NPA commander Bernabe “Ka Dante” Buscayno in 1976 (Gamos 1). Yet these difficulties did not stop party organizations from undertaking newspaper work: “This entailed training correspondents in the field, rigorous fact-checking, clandestine meetings with friends for political shoptalk, and always, disciplined adherence to the twice-monthly deadline. We took pride in ever missing an issue even in the midst of waves of arrests,” said Malay (“‘KP’ Goes Underground” 133).

***Ang Bayan's* readership under martial law**

The *Ang Bayan* editors say that the publication is written in a manner requiring “the minimum necessary comprehension of all members of the party and mass activists all over the country” (CPP, “*Ang Bayan* Orientation” 17). In our interview, Malay explained that the push to make *Ang Bayan* appeal to a more general readership among party members was achieved by not only concentrating on straight news articles but also carrying more news analysis, expository articles, and features as its main content (Personal Interview). The editors saw these efforts as a means to provide holistic content that helps its readers to “see beyond the limitations and particularities of their respective experiences” and fulfill the general task of “raising the level of consciousness and unity of the Party’s membership” (CPP, “*Ang Bayan* Orientation” 18).

Underground newspaper distribution and circulation was not without its problems given, as discussed in the last section, the security risks and the exigencies of clandestinity that these compelled. The CPP Central Committee in 1984 had assessed that *Ang Bayan's* circulation is still far from the ideal ratio it set: “three times the total number of Party members, Red fighters and other advanced activists throughout the country and in every region” (20). The party leadership acknowledged challenges in the paper’s prompt distribution. This problem is illustrated from a passage in the memoirs of Lualhati Abreu from the year 1981: “when I went home to Manila, I would meet a comrade... tasked to receive the allotment of *Ang Bayan* for Mindanao...Three years’ issue of *Ang Bayan*, or about six big cigarette boxes, had accumulated in his house” (Abreu 199).

A 1984 questionnaire (see Fig.4) prepared by the *Ang Bayan* editors for its readers can help further shed light on the composition of the publication’s readers. After ascertaining personal details about the respondent’s area of work, sex⁵, age, economic status, educational attainment, and languages known, the questionnaire asks her the political or organizational status. The categories listed include sympathizer/ally under which it is further clarified if she is a member of an organization or has no organization; a member of a mass organization; a member of an organizing committee/group; a red

This questionnaire is being put out in line with AB's effort to get general feedback from its readers, especially at the basic level. (There are questions regarding the respondent himself/herself to help us in evaluating the trends of answers.)

This is for everyone who will receive a copy of our December 1984 issue. Answer by placing a check mark between the parentheses -- example: -- and/or writing on the blanks -- example: cultural -- and after answering, detach this sheet from the other pages of this issue, fold and give to the comrade who gives you your AB copies, so it will be sent back to us.

Every copy of all editions of this December 1984 issue of AB should have this questionnaire. We are relying on the valuable assistance and concern of the Party committees and organs, as well as the mass organizations, for the efficient collection and transmittal of the answered sheets. The sheets do not have to be sent back to us in one bundle; in fact, that would be too bulky for our communication lines to handle. You can send the answered sheets to us on monthly batches. We will begin evaluation immediately upon receipt of a substantial percentage of the answered sheets. Thank you very much!

1. Which issues of AB this year have you read?
 - January April July October
 - February May August November
 - March June September December
2. Usually, how long does it take for an AB issue to reach you?
 - Less than a month 2-3 months 4-6 months 6-12 months Longer
3. Do you usually read the entire issue?
 - Yes
 - No, but I read most of the articles
 - I just read some of the articles
4. Do you hold "talakayang dyaryo" (TD) discussion sessions on AB?
 - Yes, regularly Seldom
 - Yes, but not regularly No
5. On what topic(s) are the articles you like or find useful in your work?
 - The Party Lines of work Inter-national
 - Armed struggle Political situation
 - Mass Movement Economic situation
 - United Front Dictatorship; AFP
 - others: _____
6. Why the articles on those topics?
 - Rich with data Sharp analysis Lively
 - Clearly written Short but rich in content style
 - others: _____
7. What are the usual topics of articles you do not read or you do not enjoy reading?

Choose from the list in No. 5: _____
8. Why?
 - they say nothing new dull analysis too formal
 - Disorganized presentation Too lengthy
 - Others: _____
9. What specific topics do you want AB to discuss?

10. On what matters do you think we should put stress in improving AB?
 - Choice of topics Data gathering
 - Clear and organized presentation of ideas
 - Lively writing style
 - others: _____
11. Comments on the visuals:
 - Give information? Yes Medium No
 - Enhance points/topics? Yes Medium No
 - Summarize contents of articles? Yes Medium No
 - Realistic and lively Yes Medium No
 - Militant? Yes Medium No
 - Artistic? Yes Medium No
 - Lighten reading Yes Medium No
 - Liven up the pages Yes Medium No

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING ABOUT YOURSELF:

1. Area of work:
 - Region: _____ Province: _____
 - Town/City: _____
 - Place where you usually stay: barrio poblacion city
 - variable other(s)
2. Personal data:
 - Sex: Male Female
 - Age: 7-14 14-21 22-35 35-50
 - over 50
3. Economic () status or () origin:
 - Worker Poor/Middle Peasant National Bourgeois
 - Farmerworker Rich Peasant
 - Party Bourgeois Comprador-Bourgeois Landlord
 - _____
4. Studies outside the Movement:
 - not completed elementary started high school college
 - completed elementary completed high school vocational
5. Language(s) you know:
 - Filipino: conversational comprehension don't know
 - Regional language: conversational comprehension don't know
 - English: conversational comprehension don't know
 - _____ : conversational comprehension don't know
6. Political/organizational status
 - sympathizer/ally of the Movement: member of an organization no organization
 - Member of Mass Organization
 - Member of Organizing Committee/Group (OC/OG)
 - Red fighter
 - Party member: full member candidate member
 - Member of executive committee or its equivalent; level--
 - branch section/sub-section district
 - province/front region other: _____
7. Time status
 - full-timer almost a full-timer part-timer
8. Course(s) completed within the Movement:
 - General Mass Course Basic Party Course
 - Course for Activists Basic Cadre Course
 - Special courses
 - Others: _____

* * *

Fig. 4. A questionnaire released by Ang Bayan for its readers inserted in the newspaper's December 1984 issue.

fighter; a party member who can be a full member or a candidate member; or a member of a party committee. The questionnaire also asks respondents to specify the time they devote to revolutionary action either as a full-timer or a part-timer as well as the party courses they completed in the movement.

Big commercial media typically employs audience research in order to gather data about audiences who are treated as markets and objects of profit extraction. Following a long tradition of what Marcelo Hoffman calls “militant investigation” (*Militant Acts* 5-9), the CPP meanwhile employed a form of audience research to gather information on its readers to further encourage them to use the newspaper for their revolutionary work.

Table 1 Positive and negative qualities of *Ang Bayan* articles listed in its Editorial Board’s December 1984 questionnaire

Positive qualities	Negative qualities
Rich with data	They say nothing new
Sharp analysis	Dull analysis
Lively style	Too formal
Clearly written	Disorganized presentation
Short but rich in content	Too lengthy

The questionnaire’s first four questions have to do with the regularity and conduct of reading *Ang Bayan* issues. The first one asks which issue the reader has read. The second question is on the gap between the date of release and the date the reader received the issue. The third is a simple question asking if the reader actually read the entire issue. The fourth makes sure if group discussions based on the paper’s contents were conducted. The next series of questions are focused on interrogating the reader’s preferred topics based on their tasks in the revolutionary movement. The fifth question asks about “what topic(s) are the articles you like or find useful in your work?” (CPP, “Questionnaire” 19). It lists the following choices: the Party, armed struggle, mass movement, united front, lines of work, political situation, economic situation, dictatorship and AFP, and international [work].

While we no longer have any access to the responses to the questionnaire, it is clear that *Ang Bayan*'s efforts to conduct its own brand of "underground" audience research is linked to the aim of shaping among its readers a subjectivity for the effective carrying out of the CPP's political objectives. This endeavor exemplifies Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation (188-194), but in the context of a counterhegemonic project. While the horizon of Althusser's theorizing has been focused on the way the subject is interpellated by dominant ideology through state apparatuses, Gramsci's conceptualization views civil society as "never the exclusive product of the autonomy of one social group" while at the same time "never only the instruments by means of which the dominant, ruling classes exercise their hegemony" (Flippini 47). There is hence more space for anti-systemic articulations.

The general picture of the *Ang Bayan* reader that we conjured via the close reading of the questionnaire is given a more concrete face through the Letters that were published in its pages beginning in 1982. Sending letters between different entities within the underground is an integral part of the functioning of the revolutionary movement and requires the maintaining of a clandestine logistical infrastructure (Quimpo 268-273). Letters in the underground movement are mostly handwritten on paper that is folded into tiny pieces that couriers tasked with delivering them can literally eat to avoid detection in case they are searched in military checkpoints (*Wild*).

Table 2 Letters to the Editor to in *Ang Bayan* from 1982 to 1985 and their letter senders⁶

Title	Issue	Page	Pseudonym	Area of Work
On the Role of Firepower	1982 June EN	14-15	Ka Mon	
Letter	1982 July EN	12	NPA Comrade	Central Luzon
Mga Arikulong may Kwentada	1982 Aug. FIL	2	Ka Selya	Southern Tagalog
Cadena de amor	1982 Oct. FIL	2	Ka Oca	
Japanese' o 'Hapones'	1983 Jan. FIL	2	Ka Luisa at Ka Cecille	
Sulat	1983 Jan. FIL	2	Ka Adela	
Giving humane treatment to captives	1983 May EN	16-17	Ka Nila	
Paying Party dues	1983 Nov. EN	14	Ka Nora	
Woman question	1983 Nov. EN	14	Ka Lucia	
'Kinikilala', hindi 'tinatanggap'	1983 Nov. FIL	16	Ka Momong	
Mail from Kalinga-Apayao	1983 Dec. EN	15-16	Ka Fiel	Kalinga-Apayao
Party recruitment	1984 Jan. EN	18-19	Ka Boboy	
What materials should we send?	1984 Jan. EN	18-19	Ka Eli	Quezon
Once more, on party recruitment	1984 Feb. EN	14	Ka Zelda	
From Bicol	1984 Feb. EN	14	Comrade Mar	Bicol
On the Cordillera economy	1984 May EN	18-19	Ka John	
Semifeudal exploitation in Vegetable farms	1984 June EN	20	Ka Dencio	
Views on boycott, 'crucial showdown'	1984 July EN	17	Ka Caloy	
Hindi produktibidad	1984 Aug. FIL	21	Ka Nene	
Sumpa		21	Ka Risa	
The principal contradiction	1984 Sep. EN	18-19	Ka Bernie	
On semifeudalism	1984 Oct. EN	18	Ka Victor	
On the toppling of Napocor towers	1984 Nov. EN	23	Ka Tinay	Negros Occidental
On 'Marcos: Case Study'	1984 Dec. EN	18	Ka Pat	
On the party newspaper	1985 Jan. EN	21	Ka Rosa	
On KM's history, small units	1985 Feb. EN	21	Ka Rogelia	
Many tasks, many forces'	1985 March EN	18	Ka Siera	Manila-Rizal
Second-class' comrades?	1985 March EN	18	Ka Macky	
Specific policies on the mass media	1985 April EN	21	Ka Boysie	Mass media
Some suggested topics	1985 May EN	19	Ka Labrador	Manila-Rizal
Some suggested topics	1985 May EN	19	Ka Lita	Health sector
Selections in Ilonggo	1985 May EN	19	Ka Berna	Panay
Pagkilos sa hanay ng mga Moro	1985 June FIL	22	Ka Julie	
Lash out at the USSR, too!	1985 July EN	16	Ka Sergio	
On gender oppression	1985 Aug. EN	14-15	Ka Mona	Teachers sector
On articles and sentences	1985 Aug. EN	15	Ka Ely	Samar
On the economy	1985 Sep. EN	17	Dodong	
Regular cultural section	1985 Oct. EN	15	Ka Paulynn	
Simple living and our comrades' health	1985 Nov. EN	17	Ka Jamilul	
Buhay-pampartido ng isang kasapi	1985 Dec. FIL	19	Ka Chito	

The Letters in *Ang Bayan* are thus passed through these underground channels. Party members and activists in revolutionary mass organizations operating in a locality, workplace, or institution typically submit their letters to the nearest party branch active in the area. The letters are then hand-carried by messengers to a higher party organs at the district or regional level that are typically based in safehouses in urban or suburban areas or guerrilla bases in the countryside. These party organs have cadres tasked with propaganda work that includes corresponding through a clandestine courier system with the committee in charge of *Ang Bayan*, as Malay explained (personal interview).

Given the clandestine nature of the CPP, the letter sender's actual identities are anonymized and hidden behind pseudonyms. Some letters, however, indicate the sector or area of work of the letter sender (see Table 2). As we will see in the next three substantive sections, a close reading of the Letters listed in Table 2 helps us tease out traces of its readership's way of thinking that draws out shared meanings particular to the ideological universe of the Philippine revolutionary movement.

The political task of underground presswork

A notice for readers by the *Ang Bayan* editors published in its May 1982 issue announced the opening of a Letter-to-the-Editor section that will publish readers' "commentaries and suggestions" (CPP, "Sa Mga Mambabasa" 2). It is important to note that other underground newspapers from the same period with a nationwide circulation like the *Balita ng Malayang Pilipinas* or *Kalayaan* did not publish letters.⁷ First Letter, which responded to an *Ang Bayan* article from the previous year, was published in its June 1982 Issue.⁸ Many of these Letters will share a political bent reflective of the CPP's political framework focused on various forms of political mobilization and collective action that seeks to build and maintain the political power of the subaltern classes (Atienza, "Filipino ng Kilusang Pambansa-Demokratiko" 175).

These letters from the underground bear witness to Gramsci's thinking on counterhegemony as tied to the class project of building a revolutionary

political party. This view hinged on what he thought to be historic shifts toward the growing importance of collective organisms and systematic standardization resulting from improved communication and growing urbanization, whereby “the pace of the molecular processes is faster than in the past” (Flippini 53). Some letters shared how *Ang Bayan* addressed the needs of local party cadres and activists in their region: “We have a standing policy of discussing selected articles of each *Ang Bayan* issue,” said Comrade Mar (14) in a letter explaining that local committees in Bicol choose particular articles that they discuss on the ground based on their helpfulness in advancing political tasks in their region.

A letter from Kalinga-Apayao meanwhile relays problems caused by literacy issues necessitating the ensuring of group discussions centered on newspaper issues: “Many comrades in the Party branches can hardly read” (Ka Fiel 16). The same problem was reported in Panay Island which remedied this challenge by translating selected articles into Hiligaynon and by stimulating “discussions on the contents among the mass organizations in the countryside” (Ka Berna 19). The case was also true for readers in Samar who had difficulties reading Filipino, thus necessitating translating selected *Ang Bayan* articles into Waray (Ka Ely 15).

The Letters to *Ang Bayan* discuss the political role played by the revolutionary newspaper in movement building. One letter emphasized the newspaper’s role in clarifying “the line, programs, tasks, policies and important questions to hasten the revolution’s advance” (Ka Rosa 21). Another letter asks for guidelines on sending information to the newspaper, which served as an opportunity for the editors to make a call for contributions: “We are calling on all our readers to share their experiences in revolutionary work” (Ka Eli 19).

There are also letters that mainly express appreciation for the existing contents of the newspaper. One such letter commends the publication of articles on “the building of support groups and staffs (intelligence, medical, and others), militia building, and the building of platoon-size and company-size formations” (Ka Dencio 20). Another enthusiastically shared: “We

produced many extra copies of the article and called for discussion among comrades” (Ka Siera 18).

Some Letters do share information about the situation of the insurgent movement in their areas. One letter (Ka Oca 2), for example, adds more details to an earlier *Ang Bayan* report about counterinsurgency operations in the Quezon-Bicol border area reported in an earlier news article (CPP, “Masses” 2). Another letter narrates the report of an NPA ambush in Lopez town in Quezon province (Ka Nila 16-17). This sharing of local conditions also takes the form of correcting erroneous reporting by *Ang Bayan* such as that seen in a November 1984 letter from Negros Occidental correcting the article “NPA blasts NPC towers” (CPP, “NPA blasts NPC towers” 9): “The towers were not blasted by the New People’s Army as erroneously reported. The revolutionary masses, numbering about 300 people, were the ones who undertook the destruction of the towers and posts” (Ka Tinay 23).

A number of letters give topic recommendations to the *Ang Bayan* editors. In her letter to the editor, Ka Selya suggests the writing of an article on the economic plight of the masses that are “simple and direct” (2). Another letter requests for articles detailing the tasks and responsibilities of party activists “working in legal organizations or who have a legal status” to dispel what he took to be the “second-class” treatment of such activists who are not directly involved in underground work (Ka Macky 18).

The drive to educate and raise the political consciousness of underground activists also goes side by side with suggestions of a more practical bent as seen in a letter asking the *Ang Bayan* editors to write an article on “the importance of regular and prompt payment of monthly dues to the Party” (Ka Nora 14). These kinds of topic recommendations are common: Ka Labrador requests for articles on “finance work in the cities, especially during mass campaigns; organizing and mobilizing the masses on the municipality level; and correct leadership over legal organizations, especially unions” (19). Another letter recommends the writing of an article that also deals with “the question of more actively relating with publishers and mediamen under the present circumstances” (Ka Boysie 21).

Interestingly, not all suggestions are entertained by the *Ang Bayan* editors. One letter recommending the opening of a regular cultural section for the newspaper that will contain poems, stories, and other literary works was outright rejected (Ka Paulyn 15). The editors maintained that “[i]t is difficult to start and maintain a regular section devoted entirely to cultural work or to other fields of work” even as the newspaper sometimes “come(s) out with articles bearing on culture” (15). That the letter sender was instead referred to *Ulos*, the underground magazine focused on revolutionary culture and literature, speaks about the remarkable demarcation made by the editors between the primarily political bent of *Ang Bayan* vis-à-vis more “cultural” concerns.

Abreu’s memoir also shared her “unpleasant” encounters with a KOMEDPROP official when she was editor of the Mindanao regional newspaper *Insureksyon*. The official insisted on this point about the exclusion of literary works from CPP-run newspapers despite the fact that the cultural section “was one of the most read by... readers and the Red fighters” (198). In a way, this overemphasis on the overtly political over content considered to be merely cultural also speaks of an instrumental view that has not gone beyond a crude appreciation of the Maoist epithet that “political power grows out of the barrel of the gun” (Mao 206). This instrumentalism hinders a better grasp of the necessity of building hegemony in the Gramscian sense of “intellectual and moral leadership” beyond the level of “direct domination” (Gramsci 57).

An organizational frame’s centripetal force

Being the CPP mouthpiece whose Editorial Board is under the direct supervision of the party’s Central Committee keeps *Ang Bayan* occupied not only with explaining the political viewpoints of the Party but also in clarifying organizational concerns. The Letters in *Ang Bayan* partake in this clarification, as framed by the organizational principle of “democratic centralism” (Atienza 176). The communist method of leadership and decision-making involving free debate and discussion at all organizational levels after which everyone involved in the movement are expected to collectively implement

the group's resolutions regardless of their prior position before the decision was made.

The conceptual apparatus of democratic centralism guiding the organizational dynamics in the communist underground, no doubt amplified by the necessity of clandestinity and centralized collective action in the repertoires of contentions developed to resist dictatorial rule, also feeds into a centripetal interest in having the same interpretation of party statements and pronouncements. After all, unity of action as prescribed by the underground movement also necessitates unity of thought.

Some letters, for example, seek to elucidate questions of organizational processes within the party and its allied organizations (Ka Boboy 18-19; Ka Selya 2). Other letters sift through the layers of ideological meaning and comment on the articulations of revolutionary theory and practice in the pages of *Ang Bayan*. A September 1985 letter, for instance, comments on what the letter sender believes to be an article's failure to emphasize the Marcos dictatorship's subservience to foreign dictates in the crisis of the economy (CPP, "Contrary to Marcos' claims" 8-10; Dodong 17). One letter intriguingly comments on the character of the revolution itself, a letter which represents a self-reflexive critique from within its own ranks of the CPP's "instrumentalism" that treats "all people's struggles and organizations in an instrumental fashion, always subordinating these to the party and its goal of seizing state power" (Quimpo 83):⁹

We should not say "The-longer the Marcos clique stays in power, Philippine society becomes a more fertile ground...." The basic point' here is that the dictatorship itself is the best teacher, by negative example, of the necessity of armed revolution. It is not the length of stay in power. Such a formulation creates the wrong impression that we would wish Marcos to stay on in power, longer so that the revolution can further intensify (Ka Pat 18).

Apart from the content of the letters themselves, the editors' responses can also be entertaining to read, as in the response to Ka Nene's letter, because of its mix of wit and humility: "Ka Nene is right. We slipped" (Ka Nene 21).¹⁰

'Kinikilala' hindi 'tinatanggap'

Sa tanging bilang ng AB noong Agosto 25, 1983 (pahayag ng Komite Sentral tungkol sa pagpatay kay Aquino), sinasabi sa p. 6, ikalawang paragrah sulat sa dulo: "May pagkakaiba kami ng dating senador hinggil sa usapin ng pagpapabagsak sa pasingang rehimenang Marcos. Tinatanggap namin iyon." Hindi ba mas wastong sabihin na kinikilala natin ang pagkakaiba?

Dito naman sa hawak kong isyu ng Oktubre 1983 ("Ibagsak ang pasistang diktadurang US-Marcos, buuin ang rebolusyonaryong gubyrnong koalisyoni"), sigurado ako na di ninyo sinasadya ang genitong pangungusap sa p. 12: "...pinalalampas ng rehimen ang laganap na pang-aabuso't pagkasamtala ng mga manggagawang ito sa abrod." Ang tamang sabihin ay: "...pang-aabuso't pagkasamtala sa mga manggagawang ito." May iba ring daplis ng makinilya sa isyung ito ng AB.

Ka Monong

Tama ka sa parehong punto. Pinapuna namin ang sarili para sa kahalagaan ng sinop sa paghahanda ng mga isyu ng AB, at sinikapin naming mabawasan ang bilang ng gamitong mga pagkakaiba.

Magbayad ng butaw

Sana'y sulatin ninyo sa AB ang tungkol sa kahalagaan ng regular at maagap na pagbabayad ng buwanang butaw sa Partido. Isaang kahinaan ito ng ilang mga kasamang kinikilusan namin, at sa palagay ko'y kahinaanang matatagpuan din sa iba pa.

Ka Noro

Nabanggit ang paksaang ito sa artikulong tumatalakay sa ating gawain sa pinanaya ("Finahubusay ang gawaing pinanaya," Setyembre 1983). Salamat na rin sa magkahi.

Usapin ng kababaihan

Sa paglalahad ng rebolusyonaryong pananaw sa relasyon ng mag-asawa ("Sabelasyon at pag-ibig," Hunyo 1983), dapat sana'y nabanggit ang mahalagang naitulong ng artikulong "On the Relationship Between the Sexes" lalo noong panahong wala pa tayong Alituntunin sa Kasalan at Ligawan. Haraning kasama ang gumamit at/o sumangguni dito banggang nitong bago ilabas ang pinal na teksto ng Alituntunin. Kung sa kahinaan ay may kahinaan din ang artikulong iyon na sa tingin ko'y natural na prosesong dagaanan ng isang bagong ideya. At banggang sa kasalukuyan ay wala pa ring artikulo na naglalayong bigyan ng batayan sa ideolohiya, sa isang komprehensibong paraan, ang hinggil sa relasyong mag-asawa. Matatandaan ko na ang artikulong ito ay sinulat ng isang kasama sa dating Kawanihan ng Kababaihan (WB) noong 1972-73. Inatasan siyang gumawa ng burador na magbibigay ng proletaryong pananaw sa relasyon laluna sa konteksto ng kalagayang pang-organisasyon noon. Hindi na naipalal ang burador dahil sa mas mahalagang mga gawain at suliraning kinakaharap noon.

Hanggang ngayon ay binabagabag pa rin ako ng di pagkakaroon ng pag-aaral sa usapin tungkol sa kababaihan, na pagmumulan ng isang programang pangpolitikang hinggil sa kababaihan sa rustong ito (pambansa-demokratiko) ng rebolusyon.

Ka Lucia

Fig. 5. The Letters section in the Filipino (above) and English (right) editions of *Ang Bayan's* November 1983 issue.

LETTERS

Paying Party dues

We suggest that you write about the importance of regular and prompt payment of monthly dues to the Party. Some comrades fail to do so, and I believe that this is not an uncommon shortcoming.

Ka Nora

This topic was touched upon in the article discussing our finance work ("Intensified warfare requires systematic finance work," September 1983). Thanks for your suggestion anyway.

Woman question

In presenting the revolutionary viewpoint on the marriage relationship ("Proletarian principles govern Party marriages," June 1983), you might have mentioned the valuable help given by the article "On the Relationship Between the Sexes," specially when we did not yet have the Rules on Marriage and Courtship. Many comrades were still using it as a guide and /or reference up to the time the final text of the Rules was released. Of course, the article had its weaknesses, but I think these are part of a natural process that new ideas go through. Besides, until now we still haven't produced an article that aims to lay the ideological basis of the marriage relationship in a comprehensive way. If I remember right, this article was written by a comrade from the former Women's Bureau in 1972-73. This comrade had been directed to write a draft putting forward the proletarian viewpoint on the relationship between men and women, specially in the context of organizational conditions at the time. The draft was never finalized due to the pressure of more important tasks and problems.

I must confess that until now I am bothered by the lack of studies on the woman question, which will serve as the source of a political program of the women's movement in the current (national-democratic) stage of the revolution.

Ka Lucia

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The concern with clarity of meaning in the context of setting the stage for centralized contentious politics can be seen in a letter criticizing the use of imprecise language in a Central Committee statement on the assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. which came out in the paper's August 25, 1983 issue: "The second to the last paragraph of page 6 says: 'We have differences with the former senator on the matter of overthrowing the fascist Marcos

regime. We accept those differences.' Isn't it more correct to say we recognize those differences?" (Ka Momong 76).¹¹

While seemingly innocuous, differentiating acceptance (*pagtanggap*) and recognition (*pagkilala*) is important here because the underground may have recognized its differences with Aquino without necessarily accepting the validity of the other's stance. It is also interesting to note that Ka Momong's letter "*Kinikilala, hindi tinatangap*" which deals with Filipino language usage, is only available in the Filipino edition (see Fig.5). I notice this editorial practice a few other times such as that in an August 1984 letter inquiring about changes in text of the Filipino version of the CPP oath (Ka Risa 21). Another letter even contrasts the phraseologies used in the Filipino and English editions: is "mapagpasyang labanang pampulitika" or is "crucial political showdown" the better formulation? (Ka Caloy 17).

Here we see the importance given to the realm of language as an important field of this ideological elucidation to raise the "class consciousness" of party activists to guide and galvanize them into organized revolutionary action (Atienza 174-175). One of the first published letters from an NPA fighter, for example, commended the use of Filipino hence making the newspaper more accessible to the average reader: "If we can't avoid using English in the Filipino edition, mention the word in Pilipino first, followed by the English translation in parenthesis. For example: *kasunduan ng kapitalista at manggagawa* [collective bargaining agreement or CBA]" (NPA comrade 12).

Another letter criticizes the inconsistent use of Filipino in referring to foreign countries: "Japanese o Hapones?" (Ka Luisa and Ka Cecille 2). Still another letter in the same issue also clarifies why the Filipino edition refers to the United States as US rather than EU for *Estados Unidos* (Ka Adela 2). The *Ang Bayan* editors apologized for inconsistencies. The editors also explained their decision to use the English names of foreign countries as they are already popularly used and because it lessens their workload of creating separate letterings for maps included in the Filipino and English editions.

The exchange between readers and editors also demonstrates how language serves as one important site of ideological articulation, negotiation, and contestation (Lecercle 183-198). These letters show concretely the

communist movement's language policy of propagating and developing the use of the national language (Atienza 61-64). We also see from these interactions the importance given in the underground press on ideological clarity to avoid wrong interpretations that may deviate from a unified line. As Hau notes, there was always an implicit emphasis to the concept of epistemic certainty in radical political struggles since the ability to transform society is in a large part founded on the ability not only to correctly analyze society but also to propagate this analysis to those who can act on this knowledge (258).

Yet the history of the Philippine communist movement also shows that when driven to extremes, the intermingling of a centripetal dynamic and ideological certainty also tends toward dogmatism, groupthink, and self-righteousness that makes it unable to flexibly confront fluid situations and new conditions. Coupled with siege mentality, paranoia, lack of due process, and militarized culture in particular contexts, such centralizing impetus had led to the conduct of "violent purges" against suspected military spies from among the ranks of party members, activists, and sympathizers (Garcia 135). Some of the most notorious of this conduct such as anti-infiltration campaigns include the 1988 Operation Missing Link in the Southern Tagalog region and the 1985 Kampanyang Ahos in Mindanao (see Abinales 144-187).

Ideological questions and post-Marxist openings

Perhaps some of the most remarkable Letters in *Ang Bayan* are those that touch on themes that will form the subject of the rethinking of the CPP's Marxist-Leninist doctrine following the fall of the Marcos dictatorship. While the editorials, features, news analysis, and other articles published in the pages of *Ang Bayan* throughout the martial law period exude the appearance of ideological unity, some of the letters give us a foretaste of the intellectual fault lines that erupted into a split in the CPP in 1992.

The CPP's Marxist-Leninist doctrine, as articulated by Sison in foundational documents that were penned between 1968 and 1977, rationalized the conduct of a peasant-based armed revolution based on the characterization of Philippine society as "semi-feudal and semi-colonial" (see Sison and De Lima 25-31). Following Mao's analysis of 1930s China, Sison

described the Philippines as an agrarian society whose march to capitalist modernity is shackled by foreign imperialism and domestic comprador-landed elites. The mobilization of the peasant class described by Sison as constituting “75 percent of the entire Philippine population” is key to the resolution of this impasse through a “people’s war” strategy that accumulates military forces over time to eventually result in the encirclement of the cities from the countryside (Mao 201-207; Sison 144).¹²

In the early 1980s, however, the rapid growth of popular dissent amidst the worsening political and economic crisis in the waning years of martial law had nurtured the meteoric rise of the politico-military strength of the communist movement. After about a decade of slow and painstaking work, many party cadres and revolutionary activists in different areas around the country began to feel that “the old doctrines were proving insufficient for the new situation” (Weekley 101). Some leading cadres from the Mindanao and Visayas Commissions of the CPP, for example, adopted “adjustments” inspired by the revolutionary experiences in Vietnam, Nicaragua, and El Salvador: they tried to put more weight on struggles in urban areas and making rural military operations meet the exigencies of the overall politico-military equation (Quimpo 2012).

Outside the CPP, a “mode of production” debate had also raged among Filipino intellectuals in the 1970s and the 1980s. Echoing similar debates in other parts of the world,¹³ the discussions centered on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the Philippine context (Constantino 1982). For example, scholars associated with the University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center used dependency and world-systems theories to illuminate the capitalist transformation of the economy (Abinales, “Marxism under Marcos and Beyond” xiii-xiv). While these intellectual exchanges had been conceived by some quarters as a challenge for the CPP to enrich its theoretical foundations, the introduction of dependency arguments was in the main perceived as “a backhanded attempt” to question the semi-feudal thesis and its privileging of a rural-centric people’s war strategy (xiv-xv).

There was hence an understandable unease by the Party faithful over the correct interpretation of the semi-feudal thesis and possible deviations from

this framework which also surfaced in some of the Letters in *Ang Bayan*. One letter, for instance, objected to an article (CPP, “Semifeudalism in Central Luzon” 6-9) for not clearly explaining the nature of the “semifeudal mode of production in agriculture” (Ka Victor 18). Another letter also took the form of a correction of what the sender took to be the mislabeling of vegetable farms in Central Luzon as capitalist rather than semifeudal: “The peasants are victimized by high land rent, usury and manipulation of prices of farm products” (Ka Ruth 20).

Still related to the question of the country’s productive mode is a letter responding to an article (CPP, “Cordillera people fight for their land” 5-8) which the letter sender criticizes for “misplaced emphasis, inadequate research in other cases and in some historical details, plain inaccuracy” (Ka John 18). The letter argues against the idea that a primitive communal system remained in place in the Cordilleras up to the period of Spanish colonization and that the transformation of the natural economy in the region only took place with American rule. The letter saw the need to emphasize the existence of prior connection between the Cordillera highland communities and the Christianized lowlanders through trade to counter views that it took to be an exaggeration of the division between the indigenous struggles and the wider countrywide struggle for national liberation within which it is subsumed in CPP doctrine (see Castro 191-238). Another letter meanwhile suggests that *Ang Bayan* editors conduct more research regarding the Bangsamoro struggle in Mindanao (Ka Julie 22).

These specific exchanges articulate the brewing schisms within the movement regarding the question of national minorities. Such differences in views would result in the breakaway in 1986 of some Cordillera-based NPA units to form the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army which rejected the CPP’s revolutionary framework in favor of autonomy for the region (Castro 191-238) Issues relating to the correct handling of the right to self-determination of the Moro and Lumads of Mindanao would also figure in the CPP’s Central Mindanao Regional Party Committee splitting from the party in 1994 and eventually forming the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Mangagawa-Mindanao (Salomon and Mongaya 19).

Contending appreciations of revolutionary politics were also reflected in a letter dealing with international affairs. The letter “Lash out at the USSR, too!” (Ka Sergio 16) condemns an *Ang Bayan* article (CPP, “US imperialist foreign policy” 12-16) for failing to weigh in on the matter of Soviet interventionism in Afghanistan and other parts of the world. It can be recalled that the CPP’s understanding of radical politics was partly shaped by the Sino-Soviet split, the “Great Debate” between Maoist China against the former Soviet Union which was accused by the former of “capitalist restoration” and turning towards “social imperialism.”¹⁴ Yet in the 1980s, the exigencies of gathering more firearms for a planned strategic counteroffensive made the CPP leadership more open toward gaining military support from the former Soviet Union (see Quimpo, “CPP-NDF members in Western Europe” 361-367; Quimpo, “Revolutionary Taxation” 4 273-276).¹⁵

Another crucial flashpoint is the issue of women oppression and forms of feminism that envision forms of autonomous women’s struggles not subordinated under the umbrella of a broader movement for social liberation. This matter is brought up in a letter that, while agreeing with an *Ang Bayan* article’s emphasis on the inseparability of women’s conditions from class oppression, expresses unease for the lack of any deeper discussion of the particularity of gender oppression (CPP, “Movement fights to free women” 9-12). The letter sender asks if gender oppression is simply the product of class society and if yes, does this mean that under communism, when class relations are abolished, “the gender aspect of oppression automatically vanishes?” (Ka Mona 15)

The *Ang Bayan* editors replied that “gender oppression will *gradually* (not automatically) vanish along with the gradual, historical transition of society towards communism” but adds that this will be further elaborated in another article. This framing of the gender oppression as just one aspect of the wider struggle for national and social liberation had been challenged by the rise of divergent feminist perspectives that privileged the fight against patriarchal systems as the primary focus of the women’s movement, a perspective that articulated critical views of the inadequacies of Marxism

and the revolutionary movement in combating “patriarchal discourses” (Aguilar 42-58).

Several interlocutors have indicated how questions opened by the emergence of struggles of minorities anchored on the axes of race, gender, sexuality, and a broad array of identity-based issues in the last quarter of the 20th century was inadequately addressed by many Marxist-Leninist movements whose rigidity led them to the path of preserving revolutionary canon as opposed to “creatively rearticulating revolutionary theory to account for the aforementioned questions” (Moufawad-Paul 139). The theoretical void this left, amidst the backdrop of the general retreat of anti-systemic movements and ascendance of neoliberal globalization (Amin, et al. 96-138), paved the way for ideological shifts from “Marxism to post-Marxism” (Therborn 165-168). Such tectonic shifts unsurprisingly resulted on most occasions to the questioning of the revolutionary option altogether but in other cases also the persistence amidst the reinvention of their radical commitments.

Interestingly, apart from the CPP’s Mindanao Commission that had expressed an interest in their “strategic implications” (Abinales “Marxism under Marcos and beyond” xvi), the radical intellectual exchanges outside the CPP did little to actually enrich the Party’s theoretical grounding in the 1980s. The Letters in *Ang Bayan* nevertheless give a glimpse of the subterranean rumblings that will later come out in open debates within the CPP and the wider Philippine Left bringing about a significant re-envisioning of the semi-feudal formulation and its prescribed peasant war strategy (Franco and Borras 206-226). Wider currents within the CPP that exited its fold in the 1990s emphasized the waning of the rural agrarian economy and privileged either a more civil society approach on the one hand or a more “workerist” emphasis as a preferred means of social transformation on the other (Caouette 2004 609-648).¹⁶

Conclusion

The themes broached in the Letters to the Editor in *Ang Bayan* point to the way they serve as markers of ideological interpellation, the shaping of

individuals by ideologies according to the requirements of the institutions or communities in which they are embedded. The Letters often partook in the construction of a picture of the ideal revolutionary as illustrated by a letter that suggested viewing the issue of women's oppression as part of the holistic shaping of new non-oppressive values among revolutionaries: "It is only right that those in the vanguard, with the most advanced outlook and standpoint on all social issues, should take the lead in forming correct ideas and attitudes (on the matter) and in putting these into practice" (Ka Lita 19).

Ideological interpellation however, following Stuart Hall, is not a one-way street but involves dominant, negotiated, or oppositional receptions (128-138). The letters show in the concrete how readers either reiterate the views encoded in *Ang Bayan*, negotiate, or consciously oppose these positions. The intricacy of ideological interpellation as a process that involves not only the shaping of the individual by the underground but also of personal agency as can be read in a letter from "a new party member from the medical profession" (Ka Chito 19). Here the sender admits that he had difficulties finding time to fulfill tasks in the underground because of his work: "It's hard to match my schedules with the collective, and even just allocating time for individual ideological study" (19).

Such negotiations can also be read in a letter responding critically to an article on "simple living and self-reliance" (CCP, "Let's practice simple living" 5-8): while agreeing with the underground movement's exhorting of *kasamas* to live frugally and embody the life of the toiling masses, the letter sender questions the scrimping on food expenses as an example of "simple living" championed in the article: "Comrades who lack protein in their diet and have too much salt in their bodies will be too weak to carry out their arduous tasks" (Ka Jamilul 17).

Ultimately, the Letters along with the organizational practices initiated on the ground such as the "talakayang-dyaryo" and mass meetings among underground activists described at the start of this article speaks of the way its reception serves to make the revolutionary newspaper embody the role, in the words of one letter sender, of a center for unifying party forces: "a center for the unification of party forces" (Ka Rosa 21). This vision is no

idle talk, too. Christopher Collier gives a glimpse of the feats made by the revolutionary underground in Mindanao in the systematic propagation of its ideological worldview:

To many villagers in Mandug, and throughout export-oriented Mindanao, phrases like 'bureaucrat capitalism' were not meaningless abstractions, but condensed and forcible summations of the causes of their privation. Villagers became well-versed in the vocabulary of National Democracy, often expressed in clipped, biting acronyms as their difficult condition was attributed to 'the double-dealing of foreign monopoly-capitalists, big bureaucrat-capitalists and big landlords (mga binuangan sa mga LMK ug DBKDAY)' — a view with systemic, rather than merely personal or local implications (Collier 223-224).

For me, the opening of *Ang Bayan* to Letters at the onset of the 1980s speaks much of the strength that the underground movement has attained and the sophistication that its presswork operations has reached. Here we have a community of readers from across different classes and sectors brought together in a common undertaking to put forward revolutionary social transformation articulating and sharing their thoughts in an alternative media platform despite the repression, security risks, and other difficulties this entailed. In my view, this shows despite its limits the extent of the development of a national-popular counterhegemony against the Marcos dictatorship, an advance that has not been seen again in the history of revolutionary movements in the Philippines.

Reading the Letters to the Editor in the pages of *Ang Bayan* bears how readers partake in the political task of the underground press in terms of expanding the readers' imagination about the specific characteristics of revolutionary struggle in various parts of the country. The Letters also embody the centripetal force of the underground movement's militant and centralizing organizational frame. Yet they also posed ideological questions that presaged post-Marxist radical horizons that would bloom after the fall of the dictatorship. In the 1990s, the CPP and the wider revolutionary

movement it led split and directly embroiled *Ang Bayan* in the ideological and political rifts of the time.¹⁷ After reduced presence throughout the decade, the newspaper will resume regular operations by 1998 but will not publish Letters again.¹⁸

Acknowledgments

Parts of this article are culled from my master's thesis, "*Ang Bayan sa Ang Bayan: Rebolusyonaryong Peryodismo at Representasyon ng Panlipunang Aktor sa Rurok ng Anti-Diktadurang Pakikibaka, 1982-1985*" ["*The People in Ang Bayan: Revolutionary Journalism and Social Actor Representation during the Height of the Anti-Dictatorship Struggle, 1982-1985*"], which received a thesis research grant from the University of the Philippines Diliman, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Development. I thank the UP Diliman Main Library for giving access to the *Philippine Radical Papers*. I thank my thesis panelists Alwin Aguirre, Diosa Labiste, Ramon Guillermo, and Raniela Barbaza as well as my wife Sheila Mae Pagurayan for the critical insights and encouragement. Finally, I express my gratitude to Tomas Talledo for inspiring me to undertake research on this topic.

Notes

1. Between 1982 and 1992, *Ang Bayan's* Filipino language editions were illustrated while the English editions did not contain any illustration apart from the masthead. This changed by 1998 when *Ang Bayan* was revived after a brief hiatus for much of the 1990s. Since then, all the *Ang Bayan* editions in English, Filipino, Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, and Waray carried identical illustrations and newspaper layout.
2. See, for example, Ambrosio (172-83), Encanto (79-111), Labiste (91-105), and Ocampo.
3. Also see Mongaya ("Models of Revolutionary Action" 458-497) and Mongaya ("Sosyo-Semyotiks ng Welgang Bayan" 34-73) for my other studies focused on the ideological discourses articulated by *Ang Bayan*.
4. Salditos (78) talks of one such conference among revolutionary journalists from Daba-Daba of Panay, Paghimakas of Negros, and Pakigbisog of Central Visayas in the 1981-1984 period. Abreu (197-199) also writes about the KOMEDRPOP holding a workshop for the propaganda staff of the Eastern Mindanao underground newspaper *Insureksyon*.
5. The lack of distinction between sex and gender and the use of only two categories for male and female is reflective of the lack of an official stand by the revolutionary movement during that period on the question of the plight and struggles of the LGBTQA+. This question was officially addressed by the CPP in the 1990s (Briones 498-519).
6. I read both the Filipino and English language editions of *Ang Bayan* but chose to cite the English versions of the Letters for this article. There are letters, however, pertaining to Filipino language issues that are only published in the Filipino edition. For the October 1982 and December 1985 issues, only the Filipino editions have extant copies available at the UP Diliman Main Library.
7. The NDFP's *Balita ng Malayang Pilipinas*, which had 49 issues accessible in UPD's *Philippine Radical Papers* collection for the years 1973 to 1980. The same repository had archived copies of 78 issues of KM's *Kalayaan* during the martial law period from the years 1972 to 1985. The NDFP's *Liberation* meanwhile published letters from readers only in its March-April 1985 issue as part of the efforts to generate discussion on its new draft program.
8. See Ka Mon, "On the Role of Firepower." The letter sender criticized the article "From Luzon to Mindanao, NPA Scored Many Victories in 1981" published in *Ang Bayan's* December 31, 1981 issue for what he took to be the overestimation of the role of firepower in the revolution at the expense of mass base building and agrarian reform efforts. The *Ang Bayan* staff replied that while weapons are

- not the primary factor in the growth of the revolutionary movement, “it would be a mistake not to give proper importance to the role of weapons” (Ka Mon 15).
9. The CPP’s instrumentalism has been the subject of much scholarship and mainstream discourse on Philippine communism. See, for example, Abinales (115-192), Quimpo (83), Putzel (645-671), and Garcia (102-108).
 10. Translation is mine.
 11. Translation is mine.
 12. Interestingly, no source is given to account for the claim that 75 percent of the entire population are from the peasant class. This figure seems to approximate the country’s rural population in the immediate post-war period yet it would be arbitrary and sweeping to simply conclude that this category is equivalent to the peasantry as such.
 13. See, for example, Amin (13-22) for attempts to supplant what is taken to be the Eurocentrism of the traditional notion of the linear succession of productive modes from primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, to socialism with a theorizing grounded in Third World experience. Also see Patnaik (13-118) for an account of the 1970s modes of production debate in India which is perhaps closest to the terms of the debates in the Philippine context centered on semi-feudalism and capitalism.
 14. See Communist Party of China, *The Great Debate* (51-88). The Chinese communists in the 1960s and 1970s labeled the former Soviet Union as social imperialist, i.e., socialist in name but imperialist in practice. Also see Scalice (1-26) for a Trotskyist perspective on the impact of the Sino-Soviet split in the Philippine context.
 15. This drift away from Maoist-style anti-revisionism was also articulated in the interview-format book *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader’s View* (Sison and Werning 183): Sison declared the former Soviet Union to be “a country in the process of building socialism” rather than a “social imperialist” and “revisionist” one. Maoist-inspired parties centered around the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (1988) took notice and criticized Sison’s perceived slide to revisionism. Steinhoff and Abinales (176-201) offers a fascinating account of the efforts of the New People’s Army-General Command to secure arms from alternative sources including the Japanese Red Army (JRA), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Gaddafi’s Libya, and North Korea, among others, in the wake of the crisis of the former Socialist bloc. JRA leader Shigenobu Fusako’s assistance was central to these efforts by the NPA-GC.
 16. The revolutionary movement was split between the “reaffirmist” faction that reaffirmed the CPP’s basic ideological, political, and organizational principles that were established during its founding years in the late 1960s and the “rejectionist” factions that called for innovations in the movement’s basic analyses of the country as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, protracted people’s war strategy,

- and tactics. The reaffirmists denounced the rejectionists for “revisionist” and “opportunist” deviations, which were presented as the cause for the insurgency’s decline in that period. The rejectionists meanwhile criticized the reaffirmists’ dogmatic adherence to Sison’s thought for the movement’s inability to adapt to qualitatively changed socio-economic conditions. Interestingly, some recent interventions on the character of the Philippine social formation continue to echo this reaffirmist-rejectionist divide (See Docena 138-170; Valila 199-221).
17. Zumel ended his tenure as Editor of *Ang Bayan* in 1987 and was replaced by Ricardo Reyes who led the paper from 1988 to 1991. The *Ang Bayan* under Reyes was accused of publishing articles that opposed “the decisions of the central leadership and against the anti-revisionist line of the Party” (Liwanag 132). Reyes, however, explains that his actions were part of the general reorientation of *Ang Bayan* approved by the party leadership before the split. Apart from serving as mouthpiece of the party central committee, *Ang Bayan* was reoriented to serve as platform for discussing and organizing debates on major issues relating to the analysis of Philippine society and revolutionary strategy and tactics (CPP, “*Ang Bayan* sa dekada ’90 11-14”).
 18. Reflecting the turbulence of the communist movement in the 1990s, *Ang Bayan* went from publishing irregularly between 1992 and 1997 to again publishing regularly every two months by 1998 up to August 2000 based on extant copies available at the online repository Bannedthought.net.
 19. Beginning September 2000, *Ang Bayan* began publishing monthly (CPP, “Uphold the AB!” 1) and then bimonthly starting March 7, 2003 (CPP, “Mula sa Komite Sentral” 1-5). The newspaper continued clandestine operations without disruption until 2015 when its national machinery was raided by state forces resulting in the ceasing of regular publication from March to May 2015 (CPP, “On *Ang Bayan*’s resumption” 1-2).

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