

4 Hunting Specters

Paranoid Purges in the Filipino Communist Guerrilla Movement

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In 1986, a popular uprising ended the rule of Ferdinand Marcos, who had been dictator of the Philippines since declaring martial law in 1972 (which was officially lifted in 1981). Despite defeating their enemy, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) – the principal anti-Marcos force – went through a period of disorientation in the 1980s. In that decade, it is estimated that the CPP had an armed forces of around fifteen thousand, political cadres also numbering some fifteen thousand, and about a million supporters.¹ During this decade, CPP members tortured and killed hundreds of their own comrades in an attempt to uncover Deep Penetration Agents (DPAs) or government spies in the underground party and in its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA) guerrilla. The intra-party violence was most intense in Mindanao, the southern island of the Philippine archipelago. The purges there, which lasted from mid-1985 to mid-1986, dealt a particularly heavy blow to the organization. This essay looks at the party's ideology to find explanations for this violence. I argue that the party's framework pushed it to explain unexpected difficulties as the work of spies.

The history of the communist movement is scarred by murderous purges of those deemed by party leaders to be a threat. However, the CPP's self-destructive behavior had a number of peculiar characteristics. One is that the purges took place within a party that was not in power. Purges in ruling communist parties were often part of attacks of a ruling group on an opposition or on a perceived threat to its power. In the Chinese and Cambodian communist parties, for example, purges took place before the seizure of state power but in a context that these parties formed the de facto government over substantial areas. The same could not be said of the CPP. The purges in the CPP were not the outcome of a faction fight or the removal of dissidents under the cover of fighting saboteurs and spies. Although the central leadership of the party could initiate purges or stop them, a purge

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

like the one in Mindanao started independently of the national leadership. The national leadership did not determine who were going to be the victims. At one point, even CC members and their emissaries were suspect because distrust had become so generalized.² The purges in the CPP were not a consequence of an internal power struggle, and victims did not belong to specific categories. Because of this, the term 'purge' could be considered a misnomer. But because the persecutors in communist purges tend to create the categories that are victimized, I have decided to use the term 'purge' here.

Self-Mutilation of a Movement

The first purges in the CPP seem to have taken place in the early 1980s. According to a former leading party member, the earliest purge took place in 1980, on the islands Samar and Leyte.³ Somewhat later, a purge called *Kadena de Amor* on the island of Luzon cost around 30 lives, and in 1982 a purge named *Oplan Takipsilim* (Operation Plan Twilight), also on Luzon, cost dozens of lives, while hundreds were arrested and tortured. At the end of the 1980s, a hunt for spies called Operation Plan Missing Link (OPML) was organized, and a special committee called 'Olympia' hunted for spies nationwide. These operations led to the loss of dozens of lives and seem to be the last two instances of widespread 'purging'.

The most lethal purge happened around the mid-1980s, just as the country's political crisis was reaching a climax, on the island of Mindanao. Here, the purge also included people in the mass base of the movement. In July 1985, regional party leaders, members of its Mindanao commission (Mindacom), were in Manila for a meeting of the party's Central Committee. To take care of affairs while they were away, they appointed a 'caretaker commission' of three cadres. This commission received reports that agents had infiltrated the movement. Afraid of the damage these agents could do, the caretaker group did not wait for the return of Mindacom but ordered an immediate hunt for infiltrators. Mindacom met to evaluate this campaign and to estimate the threat.⁴

2 Author's interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

3 Author's interview with Harry (15.09.2011). Harry, which is not his real name, joined the CPP in 1977 or 1978 and was a senior party member in Mindanao during the purges. He left the party in the 1990s because of political differences.

4 Patricio N. Abinales, 'When the revolution devours its children before victory: *Operasyong Kampanyang Ahos* and the tragedy of Mindanao communism' in: Idem, *Fellow traveller. Essays*

Basing themselves on an evaluation of *Oplan Takipsilim* that deemed it to be a success, Mindacom gave the green light for an island-wide purge, which was named *Operasyon Kampanyang Ahos* (Operation Campaign Garlic) or 'Kahos'. The operation spread rapidly. The political officers (POs) in charge of the collectives that members were organized in received permission to use 'hard tactics' (torture) to obtain information and were given the role of judge, jury, and executioner. Those accused had no right of appeal. It was easy to come under suspicion: being named once in a 'confession' meant being placed under surveillance, being mentioned twice was grounds for arrest.⁵ Rumors of comrades torturing and killing each other began to spread as NPA camps were used as prisons and graveyards. Afraid, disillusioned, or both, many members and sympathizers left the movement.

Three months later, Mindacom ordered an end to Kahos. But even representatives of the leadership had become suspect and it would take another six months, until April 1986, for Kahos to end completely. By that time, hundreds had been killed. How many is uncertain: the total number of victims of Kahos probably exceeds 800. I interviewed 'Harry', at the time a leading cadre in central Mindanao, who estimates the number of deaths to be around 2,000.⁶ Similar to assessments of earlier anti-infiltration drives, an initial assessment of Kahos concluded that 'mistakes' had been made but that the operation as a whole had been a success. In the early 1990s, the party adjusted this assessment and declared Kahos, OPML, and Olympia to be 'criminal'. The main responsibility for the killing was attributed to party members who by this time had developed political differences with the leadership. The pre-Kahos purges were ignored.⁷

The figure below contains information gathered by an organization set up by survivors of the purges.

on Filipino communism (Quezon City 2001) 153-193, Patricio N. Abinales, 'Kahos revisited: the Mindanao commission and its narrative of a tragedy' in: Rosanne Rutten, *Brokering a revolution. Cadres in a Philippine insurgency* (Quezon City 2008) 144-188.

5 Author's interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

6 Author's interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

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

Figure 4.1 'Anti-infiltration' campaigns/operations⁸

| Campaign/ operation | Year(s) | Areas | Number of victims |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Kadena de Amor</i> | 1981-82 | Quezon-Bicol Zone | Around 30 dead |
| <i>Oplan Takipsilim</i> | 1984 | Southern Quezon towns of Lopez, General Luna and Calauag | Around 30 dead |
| Operation Zombie/ Cleaning | 1983-84 July | North-Central Mindanao region Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental, | Over 1500 arrested and tortured; over 800 killed |
| <i>Kampanyang Ahos</i> (Kahos) | 1985-86 | Bukidnon; Southern Mindanao: Davao City, Davao del Norte, Davao del Sur, part of Cotabato | |
| Oplan Missing Link (OPML) | 1988 | Southern Tagalog: Quezon Laguna, Cavite, Batangas | 112 arrested and tortured; 66 killed |
| Olympia | 1988-89 | Based in Metro Manila, involved nationwide organizations | 20 killed |
| Eastern Visayas | 1988-89 | Cebu, Leyte, Samar | ? |
| Western Visayas | 1985-89 | Aklan | ? |
| Cagayan Valley Region | Early 1980s – '89 | Cagayan Valley Region | 300 dead |
| Central Luzon operation | 1988 – 89 (?) | Bulacan (?) | ? |

Their geographical spread and recurrent character indicate that the purges were the result of policies and ideas present in the CPP as a whole. Many of the purges were linked because they were organized on the basis of assessments of earlier operations, like the assessment of *Oplan Takipsilim* that helped to convince the Mindanao leadership to implement Kahos.

Halfway through 1984, the party's newspaper *Ang Bayan* (The People) published an article entitled 'Busting a spy network: One region's experience', which gives insight into how the purges were perceived in the organization.⁹ It describes the *Kadena de Amor* campaign of 1981 as very successful. According to the article, a conspiracy was discovered when an infiltrator told one of his comrades that the enemy was recruiting him, and suggested this was a chance for the movement to infiltrate 'the other side'.

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

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

But ‘penetrating analysis’ by ‘responsible comrades’ supposedly unmasked him and other infiltrators. Those considered guilty were ‘punished according to the nature and seriousness of their crimes’ – we can assume that this means execution. This article was published on the eve of Kahos, as rumors of spies circulated.¹⁰ The purges were deep, self-inflicted wounds costing hundreds of lives, following a similar pattern of accusations, torture, and more accusations and more executions. To explain this pattern, we need to examine the party’s world-view.

Philippine Maoism

The Communist Party of the Philippines was officially founded in 1968 on the birthday of Mao Zedong – December 26th – symbolizing the party’s adherence to Maoism. Mao’s China was then going through its most radical phase, the Cultural Revolution, and had broken with the Soviet Union. Many radicals perceived the Cultural Revolution to be an attempt to avoid the stultifying bureaucracy that burdened the Soviet Union. They were inspired by Maoism’s radicalism and the importance it gave to revolutionary movements in Third World countries like the Philippines.¹¹ The influence of Maoist thinking on the CPP was to remain deep.¹²

For large parts of its mass base of peasants and the urban poor, the official party ideology was not very important, but many cadres of the CPP were former students or came from the Catholic clergy. The CPP’s Maoism considered these ‘intellectuals’ to be relatively privileged and called on them to go over to the side of the proletariat, motivating them to follow the Maoist line strictly.¹³ A kind of division of labor developed within the CPP and its allied organizations; former students and clergy became leaders, organizers, and educators, while NPA fighters were mainly drawn from the poor peasantry. Thinking and writing remained the task of a selective few, in the first place that of founding chair Jose Maria Sison, who insisted rigidly on the Maoist framework.

10 Author’s interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

11 Lin Piao, *Vive la victorieuse guerre du peuple! – Pour le 20e anniversaire de la fin victorieuse de la guerre de Résistance du peuple chinois contre le Japon* (Peking 1965). Alexander C. Cook, ‘Third world maoism’ in: Timothy Cheek ed., *Mao. A critical introduction* (Cambridge 2010) 288-313.

12 Armando Malay Jr., ‘Some random reflections on Marxism and Maoism in the Philippines’ in: Randolph S. David ed., *Marxism in the Philippines. Marx centennial lectures* (Quezon City 1984) 45-99.

13 Author’s interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

At times, those 'above' and those 'below' talked past one another, making it difficult to develop effective education.¹⁴ One *Ang Bayan* article complained that even the party's own publications were not read widely among its members.¹⁵ The leadership was aware that political education was lacking, and appeals for further study and education were a recurring element in the party newspaper. That such calls were often repeated demonstrates that the official program of political education was not strictly implemented and that there were doubts about the ideological commitment of its members. These doubts proved to be justified as the movement fell apart in the late 1980s.

The CPP did modify Maoist strategy to some degree in texts like *Specific Characteristics of our People's War* (SCPW, 1974) and *Our Urgent Tasks* (OUT, 1976), both written by Sison under the pseudonym Amado Guerrero. The principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' was an important element in the development of the party's ideology. This principle was explained as follows: '[the party] must distribute and develop throughout the country cadres who are of sufficiently high quality to find their own bearing and maintain initiative not only within periods as short as one or two months, periods of regular reporting, but also within periods as long as two or more years, in case the enemy chooses to concentrate on an island or a particular fighting front and blockade it.'¹⁶

This meant that party units enjoyed relative freedom to experiment with different approaches as long as such experiments remained local, were successful, and could be combined with formal adherence to the Maoist framework. A range of opinions existed in the supposedly monolithic party, but a refusal to discuss anything that would not fit the Maoist paradigm made it impossible to arrive at a synthesis of various viewpoints and experiences. Local experiences 'rarely worked their way "upwards" as ideas that prompted a re-thinking of the central tenets of Party thought'.¹⁷ Cut off from practical experiences, the party's thinking became a reified ideology.

14 David Glanz, 'Confusion grows from the barrel of a gun. The Communist Party of the Philippines.' PhD dissertation, Monash University. 2001. 70.

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

16 Amado Guerrero, *Specific characteristics of our people's war* (Oakland 1979), Amado Guerrero, 'Our urgent tasks', *Rebolusyon* 1 (1976) 2-33.

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

The Party in Mindanao

The island of Mindanao is the second largest of the country after Luzon. In the late 1970s, the party there became the fastest growing branch of the movement. Patricio N. Abinales described how the CPP there could grow so rapidly thanks to the ‘fluidity’ of local society: Mindanao had long been a frontier zone with large, unsettled stretches of land, but by the late 1960s this frontier had started to ‘fill up’.¹⁸ The frontier could no longer function as a safety valve absorbing the poor and the landless. At the same time, capital increasingly penetrated the island to tap rich agricultural and mineral resources. Marcos’ attempts to implement developmentalist policies increased social tensions. Great numbers of people were radicalized and joined the revolutionary movement. The period of the most rapid advance was between 1981 and 1984 with a severalfold expansion of guerrilla fronts, mass organizations, and party members. Abinales estimates that between 1981 and Kahos in 1985, the number of party members grew from 950 to 2396: a growth of over 250 percent.¹⁹

Early on, the party in Mindanao had low recruiting standards, meetings were chaotic and informal, often no notes were taken, and decisions were not implemented.²⁰ To organize the party, Mindacom was set up in the early 1980s and party work became better organized. But any organization going through as rapid a growth as the CPP in Mindanao was bound to have great difficulties in absorbing and training all the new members. Many cadres in Mindanao had only limited familiarity with Marxism. A 1980 party evaluation concluded in Mindanao that ‘party-building’ was weak.²¹ According to Harry, a large majority of CPP members in Mindanao did not go through basic political training (this was corroborated by notes for an internal discussion that I obtained in my research).²² Party leaders remained more interested in success stories about the expansion of the movement and neglected to implement security measures or consolidate its mass base.²³

18 Abinales, ‘When the revolution devours its children before victory’, 163.

19 Ibid., 166.

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

21 Kerkvliet, Ben J. Tria, ‘A different view of insurgencies’ HDN discussion paper series 5, Quezon City, n.d. 4.

22 Author’s interview with Harry (15.04.2011), ‘Remarks of Ka Nong at study session of January 19, 1992’.

23 Author’s interview with Harry (06.04.2011).

The Mindanaon CPP was weaker than it looked. The distrust that would tear it apart sprung up between people who were hardly familiar with each other. Even though they supported the same party, they often had little in common. Many party supporters were unprepared to deal with sudden political changes. They lacked political training and only had their experiences in a largely military struggle to build on.

After the August 1983 assassination of the figurehead of the liberal opposition, Benigno Aquino, the Marcos regime faced a crisis. Marcos tried to regain the upper hand by calling for early elections, but Benigno's widow – Corazon 'Cory' Aquino – stood against him in the elections and began to gather increasing support. The CPP unsuccessfully called for an election boycott and did not play a decisive role in the urban mass protests, known as the EDSA revolution (named after Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, one of the main roads of the capital and the epicenter of the political demonstrations). The revolution ultimately led to Cory Aquino becoming president in February 1986. In a few short months, the CPP went from being the vanguard of the anti-Marcos movement to society's rearguard.²⁴

Party forces decreased sharply as a result: between 1987 and 1990, party membership fell by 15 percent, the number of neighborhoods under its coverage dropped by 16 percent, the number of NPA fighters declined by 28 percent, and total membership in party-controlled rural mass organizations decreased by a staggering 60 percent.²⁵ To counter these developments, critics urged significant changes in the party's thinking and operating. Sison, who had re-assumed the position of chairman in 1987 following his release from prison in March 1986, went the other way.²⁶ Using a new alias, Armando Liwanag, he attacked those who criticized the Maoist model. The debate came to a head and led to splits within the party after Sison published in 1992 a document called *Reaffirm our basic principles and rectify mistakes* which called for a return to Maoism after the 'deviations' of the 1980s.²⁷ Sison was able to win over a majority of the party leadership. He and his supporters, now dubbed 're-affirmists' or RAs, started to expel the

24 Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines 1968-1993. A story of its theory and practice* (Quezon City 2001) 224.

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

26 Quimpo, 'The debacle of the Communist Party of the Philippines' 74. Sison denies that he is Armando Liwanag.

27 Armando Liwanag, 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors', *Kasarinlan*, 1 (1992) 96-157.

're-jectionists' (RJs) who rejected the Maoist model. At the end of 1992, the RAs had control of a unified but weakened party.²⁸

Ideological Causes

Schematically, the pattern of 'anti-infiltration operations' in the CPP poses three questions: 1) what caused them, 2) what made it possible for them to continue so long, and 3) why did they happen when they did? Evaluations of the purges by Paco Arguelles²⁹ (Ric Reyes, a member of Mindacom during Kahos), Walden Bello,³⁰ and Robert Francis Garcia³¹ provide some elements of answers, focusing on the party's instrumentalist view of people and the intolerance of difference. Abinales analyzes why Kahos was so much more devastating than the other purges.³² He discusses the increase in tensions in Mindanaon society during the 1980s and how this was reflected in the growth and self-destruction of the Mindanaon CPP. Another essay points to the institutional and ideological weakness of the Mindanaon CPP and interprets the purge as an attempt by a bewildered leadership to keep the organization together under the pressure of an intensifying civil war and rapid changes.

The CPP conducted an evaluation of the purges in *Reaffirm our basic principles* and *General review of significant events and decisions (1980-1991)*.³³ These documents were part of the debates in the movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It should be noted, however, that this analysis, written by party ideologue Sison, was motivated by the wish to attack opposing tendencies in the movement and should be treated carefully. To summarize, it stated that the party had deviated from the 'correct' (Maoist) line, which led to exaggerated hopes of victory. Confronted with setbacks caused by this deviation and unable to explain these, the 'deviationists' started to look

28 Kerkvliet suggests its possible that since the 1990s, 'CPP members today are more united around a Communist ideology.' Kerkvliet, 'A different view of insurgencies', 4.

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

30 Walden Bello, 'The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement', *Kasarinlan*, 1 (1992) 166-177.

31 Robert Francis B. Garcia,, *To suffer thy comrades. How the revolution decimated its own* (Manila 2001).

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

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

for spies, leading to the purges. Sison left open the possibility that there were real Deep Penetration Agents, or DPAs, but suggested that it was the 'deviationists' themselves who spread rumors of DPAs.³⁴

Looking at the CPP's ideology, two characteristics help to explain why the purges occurred and became so widespread: the idea that the party made possible a higher form of knowledge and the CPP's reductionism of political struggle to violence and identities to class.

Carrier of truth

One characteristic of the CPP's Maoism was its certainty that it would win. As Sison put it in *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the handbook of CPP ideology: 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought [was] the acme of proletarian revolutionary ideology in the present era when imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is marching toward worldwide victory'.³⁵ This confidence was linked to the Maoist idea that the party is not just a political tool but an organization with an epistemological function that makes it possible to know universal truths. Adopting Josef Stalin's ideas about the party, the Maoists held that there was a qualitative difference between the consciousness of the party and that of its social base.³⁶ Stalin argued that knowledge is a reflection of material reality but since reality comes before any reflection, knowledge inevitably lags.³⁷ It is only the party that is able to 'rise above the momentary interests of the proletariat' by directing all organizations of the working class as 'auxiliary bodies' and by 'linking the Party with the class', enabling a superior consciousness.³⁸

The Maoist party is what psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan called the 'subject supposed to know'. According to Lacan, humans form their personality by comparing themselves with other, often imagined, subjects – 'the Other' – just like a child who becomes familiar with its body by looking at others. The 'subject supposed to know' arises through transference: in the context of therapy, the analyst is supposed to know the meaning of the patient's symptoms. The 'subject supposed to know' is assumed to have access to a higher form

34 Jose Maria Sison, Rainer Werning, *The Philippine revolution. The leaders' view* (New York 1989) 106-108. Jose Maria Sison, and Ninotchka Rosca, *Jose Maria Sison: at home in the world. Portrait of a revolutionary. Conversations with Ninotchka Rosca* (Greensboro 2004). 125.

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

36 J.V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Peking 1976) 98.

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

38 Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, 99.

of knowledge.³⁹ The CPP was ‘the subject supposed to know’ for many of its supporters who lacked a clear idea of its ideology but trusted its guidance. Since crisis ensues when the chain of transference breaks down, people insist on maintaining it, even when the subject supposed to know obviously does not ‘know’ – such as when the party starts killing its own members.

Cadres were taught unquestioning loyalty and faith in the party and told that ‘absolute devotion’ to ‘the cause of the proletariat and its party’ was ‘foremost’.⁴⁰ The purges were motivated by a certainty that spies and saboteurs were active in the party on a large scale. It was not investigations that led to the conviction that enemy agents were active, but the other way around: the conviction that spies were active led to investigations and purging. The conviction that the party enabled a superior kind of knowledge and was the instrument of history was crucial in convincing activists to accept this premise.

Reductionism

With the intensification of the armed struggle in the early 1980s, the military aspect of the revolutionary movement gained importance. The NPA had to grow to win, and as the war continued it tended to become more and more like its opponent, the government army. For the CPP, revolution was primarily a military act: the NPA was defined as ‘the most important organization for defeating the reactionary state’ and armed struggle ‘the primary method of struggle’.⁴¹ Sison said that ‘in the more than one hundred years from Marx to Mao Zedong, revolutionary violence was the essence of Marxism in both theory and practice.’⁴² One outcome of this was what one member of the caretaker committee, the group that set Kahos in motion, Frank Gonzales (aka Ka Taquio or Takyu) described as ‘a tendency towards a narrow interpretation of class struggle as the physical elimination of the perceived enemy’.⁴³

39 Slavoj Žižek, *How to read Lacan* (New York 2007) 27-29.

40 ‘There’s need to systematize development of party cadres’, *Ang Bayan* 10 (1984) 9-11, there 9.

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

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

43 ‘Annotations on the article by Taquio entitled “Comments on the current polemics within the party”’.

The purges can be seen as a form of class struggle because of the party's reductionist view of individuals. The party was supposed to represent the interests of the working class, which was presumed to be homogeneous. Differences inside the party were assumed to be the result of outside, capitalist influences.⁴⁴ Maoism is in agreement with Stalin that contradictions within the party are 'reflections of class contradictions'.⁴⁵ The idea that differences in the party were caused by alien class influences made it possible to regard fellow party members as tools of the enemies. Mao made a distinction between different kinds of contradictions: 'antagonistic' and 'non-antagonistic' ones. But non-antagonistic contradictions change into antagonistic ones if the minority persists in 'erroneous thinking'. Since it is the party leadership that decides when this change occurs, any opposition is at the mercy of the leadership.

For the CPP's worldview, individuals and their actions were reduced to their 'class identity': 'the political moves of each [individual or group] is actually in pursuit of its own class identity'.⁴⁶ Garcia, a former party member and survivor of the purges, shows how differences caused by different class backgrounds persisted in the movement. Those who made up the 'educational committee' of his unit all came from the city and had been students.⁴⁷ They were recognizable by the kind of work they did: their priority was not fighting but political education, a division of labor that on occasion caused resentment. Most of the time, this resentment only led to teasing remarks.⁴⁸ But in the dynamic of a hunt for infiltrators, with people tortured to give names, why not name the ones you dislike anyway? One cadre said that sometimes 'interpersonal conflicts were affecting these investigations'.⁴⁹ During the purges, the party cracked along similar lines as existed in the rest of society. Other lines along which the party fractured were sexuality and gender. Especially female suspects were subjected to sexual abuse, and a non-heterosexual orientation could be reason for suspicion.⁵⁰

But in the CPP's thinking, there was no room for differences other than class, and class in turn was defined by one's relationship to the CPP, since it

44 Bruce Franklin (ed.), *The essential Stalin. Major theoretical writings 1905-1952* (London 1973) 276.

45 Mao Tse-Tung, 'On contradiction' in: Idem *Selected works I* (Peking 1967) 311-347, there 344.

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

47 Garcia, *To suffer they comrades*, 8.

48 Garcia, *To suffer they comrades*, 3.

49 Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries', 239.

50 Ibid., 239.

could explain differences only with the argument of alien class influences. In Maoist literature, including that of the CPP, one finds many references to 'remoulding': through study, work, and 'struggle', activists are supposed to turn themselves into 'proletarians' with certain ideas, habits and values. Deviation from the party ideal was seen as proof of the influence of enemy class influences. Because of the reduction of individuals to 'class', there was also no guarantee of human rights of the accused.⁵¹

The methods that so-called 'confirmed spies' caught during Kahos supposedly used according to Mindacom's initial assessment are curious: 'distorting the political line during educational sessions', 'mismanagement of money', 'breaching party discipline' and 'embezzling funds' are named as ways to sabotage the party.⁵² Mindacom was not the first to believe that spies would use such impractical methods. The article on '*Kadena de Amor*' states that spies 'neglected political education to the masses', 'displayed liberalism in their work', and neglected security.⁵³

It is unlikely that infiltrators used such methods to sabotage the party – it is more likely that such behavior was the result of the raw, untrained nature of many activists. Political education was lacking, and the CPP in Mindanao in particular took in large numbers of new recruits. Distortions of the political line likely had more to do with unfamiliarity with the ideology than with a complicated plan to destabilize the party. But its reductionist ideology provided the CPP with a framework in which incompetence and various weaknesses were characteristics of the enemy. Obviously referring to this mechanism, one member of the Mindanao leadership talked about a 'tendency to lump up alleged criminal violations with ordinary cases of organizational violations'.⁵⁴

When certainty of the guilt of the accused was combined with torture, a process with a dynamic of its own was unleashed. Torture of the accused led to made-up 'confessions', more torture, and more executions. What is puzzling is how a movement with so many members familiar with torture – they had been victims themselves or knew victims – thought it could be an effective way to combat infiltration. The kind of information produced by torture is to a high degree shaped by the wishes of the torturers: many

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

52 Abinales, 'Kahos revisited' 152.

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

54 Draft on the Kahos question (n.p., n.d.) 5.

victims will formulate answers they think their torturers want to hear, using frameworks provided by their interrogators.⁵⁵

Since the accused were assumed guilty, denial only made their crime worse. Those that maintained their innocence were executed, the only way to survive longer was to enter into a perverse pact with the interrogator, implicating oneself further and further with new 'confessions'.⁵⁶ Inexperienced interrogators, eager to discover enemy agents, asked loaded questions: 'How much was your salary?', 'A thousand', 'The truth!', 'Two thousand', 'I said: the truth! Or else...'⁵⁷ The combination of suggestive questions and punishment for deviating from the path laid out by these questions led to a spiral of escalating accusations, convincing interrogators there were many spies still to be discovered.

The spiral of interrogation, torture, and killing was able to continue for so long partly because of the lack of well-organized mechanisms to deal with accusations and investigation.⁵⁸ If the party is the carrier of truth, an independent judicial system seems superfluous. Organizational weaknesses were noted repeatedly but too little was done to improve this situation. As late as November 1988, one cadre felt it necessary to emphasize basic principles like the necessity of strong evidence before making arrests, the distinction between investigation and interrogation, and the assertion that arrest and interrogation should not 'preclude the possibility of eventual release'.⁵⁹

The circumstances in which the NPA operated, that of a guerrilla movement without a secure hinterland, certainly hindered the development of a sophisticated justice system. The ramshackle justice system of the CPP was put under heavy stress as the war intensified. One CPP member described it as follows: 'Because it is a life-and-death struggle, when you are always tense, you are always living in the risk; you don't have the luxury of verification of data.'⁶⁰

Paranoia: A Symptom of Crisis

The Standing Group, Visayas Commission – part of the anti-Sison opposition in the CPP – wrote that it was 'painful for all of us when the anti-infiltration campaigns in the history of the Party are dredged up – from what happened

55 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison* (London 1991) 3-32.

56 Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 17.

57 Ibid., 18.

58 Bello, 'The crisis of the Philippine progressive movement', 174.

59 Bong, 'Suggestions re sanitation campaign' (mimeograph, 23 november 1988).

60 Caouette, 'Persevering revolutionaries' 398.

in ST [Southern Tagalog] in the early 1980s to Kahos in Mindanao to the anti-infiltration hysteria in Luzon including the OPML in Southern Tagalog in 1988... Many innocent comrades, red fighters and masses paid with their lives because of the insanity [*kahibangan*] that happened. These campaigns caused serious political and organizational setbacks.⁶¹ Where did this 'insanity' come from?

Certainly, the attitudes of comrades affected each other. When rumors of the purges started to circulate, many activists broke contact with the party, fearful that they might be next. Parts of the membership were in the grip of panic, while the persecutors saw the defections and the sudden instability of the party as proof of sabotage. This reaction could be described as paranoid if we take the word to mean not just 'irrational fear of prosecution' (there was no question that intelligence services were trying to infiltrate the party) but the 'invention' of spies to explain reality. What is to be explained is the leap from a level of anxiety that is 'healthy' for an organization like the CPP to the frantic search for saboteurs and spies.

This leap came from the combination of an intensifying civil war, shifting political circumstances, and, crucially, a worldview that could not answer the challenges these developments posed in terms other than infiltrators. Party leaders were convinced they had an objective view of reality, making it hard for them to accept that the movement's setbacks were caused by their own mistakes; 'How could that happen to us? After all, we thought we were well-trained Marxists, we should have prepared for this.'⁶²

As long as the party was successful, Maoist ideas were not put into question. The principle of 'centralized leadership and decentralized operations' and the gap between rank-and-file and cadre helped to reify this ideology. The crisis of the CPP is usually traced to the 1985 snap elections, its unpopular boycott decision, and the subsequent People's Power uprising that sidelined the party. But, behind a façade of glowing health, the party's worldview entered into a crisis that was parallel to that of the Marcos regime after the assassination of Benigno Aquino.

The following months saw the explosive growth of anti-Marcos sentiment and the blossoming of anti-Marcos movements in regions and among strata that were always considered secondary in the CPP's framework: the cities and what it considered 'the middle classes' (which included large parts of the somewhat better paid working class), and the United States which

61 Joel Rocamora, *Breaking through. The struggle within the Communist Party of the Philippines* (Pasig City 1994), 122.

62 Author's interview with Harry (15.04.2011).

withdrew its support of Marcos. The CPP was surprised by these developments; it had assumed that ‘the middle classes’ were not capable of playing an autonomous role in politics and that the United States would be unable to drop its support of Marcos.⁶³

The timing of the purges was partly in response to this instability in Philippine society in the 1980s. Garcia describes the leadership as being in disarray in 1986, going from hesitating to continuing the purges to wanting to extend them.⁶⁴ This confusion was part of the overall political confusion that gripped the party in the mid-1980s. The CPP was unable to make sense of the crisis, since its political ideas had become inflexible dogma. This led to a form of cognitive dissonance between ideology and reality. To make reality ‘ideologically consistent’ again, it had to be reinterpreted in such a way that it would fit expectations.⁶⁵ The only way CPP members who were unable to alter their ideology could adopt such a reinterpretation was by looking for traitors in the party who stood in the way of the CPP playing its ‘historical role’.

Conclusion

The purges were a symptom of a crisis in the CPP’s ideological framework. This framework could only be left intact by assuming the existence of enemy spies. Its ‘paranoia’ was an attempt to make sense of the world and its development. As far as the label ‘paranoid’ can be applied to a collective process like the purges in the CPP, we should see it as part of an effort to create a new cognitive map by forcing unexpected developments in the familiar framework. Purges were responses to pressures on the party, like government counter-insurgency campaigns or the failure of NPA operations.

Because of the CPP’s claim to truth, its prestige as the ideology of the party, and the low level of political debate inside the movement, many activists were unwilling or unable to change their Maoist framework. The growing isolation of the CPP, with parts of its periphery breaking away and the party being caught by surprise during the People’s Power uprising,

63 In the period 1983-1986, *Ang Bayan* regularly featured articles on the non-CPP anti-Marcos opposition. A typical article is ‘Bourgeois reformists: facing a cross road’, *Ang Bayan* 14 (1983) 6-9.

64 Garcia, *To suffer thy comrades*, 22.

65 Patricia G. Steinhoff, ‘Death by defeatism and other fables: the social dynamics of the Rengō Sekigun purge’ in: *Takie Sugiyama Lebra, Japanese social organization* (Honolulu 1992) 195-225, there 207.

meant that either the Maoist framework was incorrect (or at the very least needed drastic modifications) or dark, hidden forces were active. This was a tempting conclusion for members who had been told that the party is always right. When complex social processes were simplified to conspiracies, comrades became targets of violence. This unleashed, time and time again, a murderous dynamic.

The tragedy of the purges in the Communist Party of the Philippines is that of twentieth century communism: a movement that inspired people with a vision of equality and freedom turned on the very people it had set out to liberate. The following chapter by Korstjens examines how communism in Cambodia produced similarly destructive results. The victims of the 'anti-infiltration drives' dedicated their lives to a movement they hoped would bring freedom and justice but were killed while pursuing a noble vision. Their deaths will become a little less meaningless only if the movement succeeds in drawing lessons from what happened to the victims of the 'anti-infiltration purges'.