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Can Communists Laugh? Recalling Vanishing Leftist Ditties of the Marcos Era

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Research Note

PATRICIO N. ABINALES

Can Communists Laugh?

Recalling Vanishing Leftist Ditties of the Marcos Era

This research note puts into record ditties sung by communist cadres in the 1970s and 1980s that were never part of the melodies approved by the Communist Party of the Philippines. The songs range from those chanted during marches and demonstrations to ballads about love and sexual opportunism inside the movement. Their popularity among those who heard them was a source of pride for their composers and lyricists. They suggested that party life was not all that “grim-and-determined” and that, to slightly alter the famous statement of Mao Zedong, a revolution was no dinner party, but some cadres were able to picnic along the way.

KEYWORDS: COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES • REVOLUTIONARY SONGS • HERETICAL DITTIES • MARCOS ERA

Revolutionary songs have always permeated movements, and those of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) were no different. Teresita Gimenez-Maceda (1966) mentioned such songs in her book on its predecessor, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), while Thomas McKenna (1998, 170–96) discovered similar tunes in Campo Muslim, a section of Cotabato City under the influence of the Moro National Liberation Front. But the melodies Maceda and McKenna recorded were generally serious in tone and motivational in message, written to bolster commitment to the cause. Similarly, the CPP’s official catalog of songs sought to reinforce heroic themes.

Yet, conversing with cadres from the revolution of thirty years or so ago, I have discovered songs that bucked the politically correct themes. Distinguished by their irony and irreverence—and for being outright hilarious—these ditties did not gain approval from the guardians of party culture and so often had a limited reach. Some ditties did not even go beyond the party cells to which their composers belonged. But the impact on even the smallest of audiences was exactly what their authors intended: everyone laughed.

I have made these songs the subject of research for two reasons. First, I want to put into print what thus far have been preserved orally only, lest they fade from memory and be lost forever. In life, even events that have been emblazoned upon public awareness fade, eventually becoming only broadly memorialized for their most dramatic or heroic aspects. All else vanishes; and, often, ordinary but telling details are lost to obscurity. My apprehension over the ravages of time was confirmed of late in a conversation with one of the composers. He admitted that he had put his old melodies out of mind after being reassigned to the countryside. There “among the basic masses” he had discarded many of his petit-bourgeois proclivities, including the jokes and song composition of his earlier life. Later, discouraged by the 1992 split of the CPP, he shifted to NGO work. His university days of penning impious songs had been pushed into the distant warehouses of his memory until I showed up to shake off the cobwebs.

The second reason for putting these tunes to print is to record their youthful idealism and rebellion. The CPP did not take kindly to those who questioned its insistence that the revolution was “not a dinner party.” Indeed, the swell of memoirs by those who waged battles during the Marcos

years have staunchly celebrated cadre courage and commitment. A few chroniclers only recently have written more candidly about missteps of the revolution (Caouette 2004; Quimpo and Quimpo 2012; Maglipon 2012; Llanes 2012). To date none have mentioned the songs that snickered, and thus challenged not only the repressive reality under martial law but the party’s strictures as well.

While silly and often impious, these “cultural expressions” articulated anger with the dictatorship of Pres. Ferdinand Marcos. But they also voiced frustrations with the party’s ideological and moral prescriptions, presaging the internal dissent against the grim-and-determined CCP operations of the 1990s. Such criticisms were intermittent, “small-scale” operations that were highly localized in their impact. Still we can find in them youthful resistance—as well as the fun party members pursued against the odds. The struggle was no dinner party, but people found ways to picnic along the way.

The Paeon of Impish Militancy

The first three months of 1970 began with demonstrations and student–police confrontations, and that period has since then been inscribed in historical narrative as the First Quarter Storm (FQS). The FQS was seen by many as the cathartic explosion of a simmering youthful alienation toward the conservatism and pro-American sentiments of their elders, the reluctance of the same elders to reform the system from within. It was also the Filipino youth’s “contribution” to a global protest against “American imperialism’s” brutality in Vietnam and the servility (“puppetry”) of many Asian states, including the Philippines, to American interests. Most important of all, the FQS was the turning point in student protest, as a once-marginal group of radical organizations affiliated with the new (“reestablished”) CPP seized the center stage from its moderate rivals and began to propagate the “national democratic revolution of a new type.”

Inspired by the progress of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam and the reinvigoration of socialist politics by Mao Zedong and his Red Guards via the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, members of the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) and the Samahang Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK) took the lead in the street battles that began on 30 January 1970, soon after the reelected President Marcos made his speech to the nation in the halls of Congress. The KM and SDK cadres had worked ceaselessly and with

patience to win over, penetrate, and compete with the then larger moderate student groups, and on that day—when the police decided to attack the demonstrators—their efforts paid off. With state brutality in clear view of everyone, the red flag of armed struggle and a total radical overhaul of the system was regarded—at least by many a demonstrator—as the only way out of this increasingly polarized politics.

Nick Joaquin (1999, 329–34) describes this radicalization of the political atmosphere vividly in these terms:

In 1968 . . . we were singing *Hey Jude* and *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*. We were singing a very different tune when the 1970s began. 'Makibaka!' [Struggle!] became the cry of January evening in 1970 when Marcos and Imelda emerged from the Congress opening to find themselves being booed, rushed and stoned by youth picketers. The storm of demos had burst that would rage the whole year. . . . The demonstrator created a life style too. Early in the year, when the nights were cold, he marched in turtleneck. His weapons were stone and placard. After the initial riots, the use of the Molotov cocktail and the pillbox became more prevalent, provoked by police firepower. The demo itself become [sic] stylized into various varieties: picket, long march, living theater, people's tribunal, parliament of the streets. The chants of the year were: 'Down with imperialism, feudalism, fascism!' and '*Makibaka, huwag matakot!*' [Dare to Struggle!] . . . What Filipinos never thought to see in their lifetime, they saw this year: street fighting at barricades. Almost no month in Manila when no streets emptied, no stores closed in a hurry, and no pavement became a battleground between the youth marching with red flags and placard and helmeted troops marching with truncheon and wicker shield. The man on the street came to learn what tear gas smells like.

Commanded by CPP chairman Jose Ma. Sison to lead the Second Propaganda Movement, these organizations were the most passionate in advancing "Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse Tung Thought" (Lacaba 1982).¹ Their slogans, declarations, and presentations hewed closely to Maoist interpretations. Even the format of street demonstrations and musical plays became carbon copies of those emerging from the People's Republic of

China—from the way fists were clenched, to the grim-and-determined look, to the direct Filipino translations of Chinese songs and slogans. This popular marching song perhaps best reflects the temper of the FQS.

Ang masa, ang masa lamang	The masses, the masses alone
ay s'yang tunay na bayani	are the real heroes
Ang masa, ang masa	The masses, the masses
ay ang tagapaglikha	are the creators
Ang masa, ang masa lamang	The masses, the masses alone
ay ang tagapaglikha	are the creators
Ang masa, o ang masa	The masses, oh the masses alone
ay ang tagapaglikha	are the creators
ng Kasaysayan	of History ²

Songs like "Linyang Masa" (The Mass Line) signaled the shift from the morose appeals for reforms and a change in people's hearts—these coming mainly from youth associations influenced by the Second Vatican Council—to the more militant advocacy of the CPP's national democratic revolution. Even the maudlin tune of the Catholic Church youth group Khi Rho demonstrated a shift to greater political awareness:

I thirst for justice, not palliatives
I thirst for justice, not palliatives.
I thirst, I thirst for real love.
And real love means social justice.³

The CPP however made sure that its messages remained in tune with the "correct political line." Born out of an internal struggle with and split from the older Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas and believing in the Maoist invocation that real revolutionaries were those born out of a "two-line struggle" between what was correct (Mao) and incorrect (the "revisionist renegades" of various sorts), the new party was perennially conscious of defending its national democratic program and the protracted armed struggle that would bring this future into fruition. This policing applied not only to cadre development

and guerrilla training but also to the way the revolution projected its identity and ethos. The CPP cultural cadre officers were therefore perennially on alert lest the political line got diluted with “revisionism” and “reformism.”

But ideological policing could not be maintained 24/7, and “cultural weapons,” especially songs, became tainted. Curiously many of these deviant melodies were not Maoist copies but reworkings of beloved Western pop songs—the exact opposite of the prescribed anti-American sentiment that must come with every revolutionary ballad. When passions ran high during rallies, for example, politically incorrect tunes would compete with the approved standards, like this one that taunted the anti-riot squads of the Manila Metropolitan Command (Metrocom).⁴ The American song “Yellow Bird,” popularized by crooner Harry Belafonte, provided the melody:

Metrocom, may helmet	The Metrocom with their helmets
at may truncheon	and truncheons
Metrocom, may tear gas	The Metrocom, with their tear gas
at may Thompson	and Thompson [sub-machineguns]
Palo sa ulo,	They hit you on the head
palo sa paa.	They hit you on the legs
Palo sa likod,	They hit you on the back
palo sa harap.	They hit you on your front
Palo nang palo,	They hit and hit you
mga putang ina nyo	Your mothers are whores!!
Mamamatay din kayo!	You will be killed someday!

Very often when sung, “Metrocom” would presage a bloody clash where tear gas and truncheons were met by pillboxes and stones.

It was President Marcos, of course, who became the favorite target of such songs. Activists produced another rousing marching song by changing the lyrics of the Christian hymn “Glory, Glory Hallelujah”:

Marcos, Marcos	Marcos, Marcos is a thief
magnanakaw (3x)	
Magnanakaw si Marcos!	Marcos is a thief!

Together with the slogan “Marcos, Hitler, Diktador, Tuta” (Marcos, Hitler, Dictator, Puppet”), this song resonated with the crowd as Marcos’s fidelity to American national security concerns and his propensity to employ violence to expand his power were becoming increasingly apparent.

Another popular song, adapted from the American protest standard “We Shall Not Be Moved” by folk singer Pete Seeger, likened Marcos to feces.⁵

Si Marcos ay inyo,	Marcos, you can keep him,
inyong-inyo na	yes, you can
Si Marcos ay inyo,	Marcos, you can keep him,
inyong-inyo na	yes, you can
Katulad ng tae	He is like the shit you see
sa ilalim ng poste	beneath the lampposts
Inyong-inyo na.	[Yes] he is all yours.

Activists then switched “Marcos” for “Imelda” and then to other political personalities, and the song’s last variation would have as its target the much-hated “imperialistang Amerikano!”⁶ Again, some cultural activists scorned the song’s popularity among the ranks—associating the president with human excrement was not exactly the way to project a Maoist moral high ground. But they could do very little once thousands on the march belted it out in rousing unison.

Cadres also rewrote melodies to praise CPP leaders. The original 1929 song “Tayo na sa Antipolo” enjoined Christian devotees to visit the statue of the Virgin of Antipolo (brought by the Spanish from Mexico in 1626 as part of the town’s annual religious pilgrimage).⁷ In the radical version the new shrine was found on the mountain ranges of Isabela province, where the CPP chairman and first commander of the party’s New People’s Army (NPA), Bernabe Buscayno (a.k.a. *Kumander* [Commander] Dante), were planning to replicate Mao’s Yenan stronghold and from there deploy revolutionary waves that would swarm the cities.

Tayo na sa Isabela	Let’s all march to [the mountains of] Isabela
at doon makipagkita	and there [we] get to see
Kay Dante at ang dakilang	[Kumander] Dante and the great

si A-A-Amado Guerrero . . . [Chairman] A-A-Amado
Guerrero!!⁸

As the NPA overcame initial setbacks and began expanding throughout the country—the first time ever for a local revolutionary organization—activists and cadres sang praises for their comrades in the New People’s Army, now employing local tunes. The comical Cebuano ballad “Magellan,” for example, written in the early 1970s by folk singer Yoyoy Villame, originally lampooned the “discovery” of the Philippines by Spanish conquistadores, which ended with the death of Ferdinand Magellan at the hands of Lapu-Lapu, Mactan island’s chieftain. The song went:

On March 16, 1521, when the Philippines was discovered by
Magellan.
They were sailing day and night, across the big ocean,
until they found the small Limasawa island.
Magellan landed in Limasawa at noon.
The people met him happily on the shore
They could not understand, the speaking they had done
because *Kastila gid ay waray-waray man*.
Magellan landed in Cebu City.
Rajah Humabon met them, they were very happy.
All people were baptized, under the Church of Christ.
And that was the beginning of our Catholic life
When Magellan landed in Mactan to Christianize them everyone.
But Lapu-Lapu met him on the shore and told Magellan to go back
home.
And Magellan got so mad, ordered his men to camouflage.
But Mactan island, they could not grab, because Lapu-Lapu is very
hard.
Then the battle began at dawn. *Bolos* and spears versus guns and
cannons.
And when Magellan was hit on his neck, he stumbled and cried and
cried.
“Oh Mother, Mother, I am sick, go call the doctor very quick.
Oh doctor, doctor, shall I die? Oh no Magellan do not cry.”⁹

“Magellan” delighted activists for its celebration of (putative) Filipinos’ victory over the hated colonizers and because it was written by someone who, with his urban poor background and heavily accented provincial English, epitomized the organic wit of the masses. An inspired Visayan cadre and poet, who shared class origins and Cebuano background with Villame, soon produced a “Magellan” radical equivalent:

On March 29, 1969, when the New People’s Army was organized.
The people were happy to have a new army,
under the leadership of the CPP . . .
It all began in the mountains of Central Luzon
when Red commanders under *Kasamang* [Comrade] Dante
decided to follow, the road to armed struggle
to liberate the whole Filipino people
But Marcos proclaimed 1081,
to prolong the misery of everyone
An era of darkness had begun,
all across our native land
But the people got so mad because martial law was very bad
The people’s war intensified and Mr. Marcos cried and cried,
“Oh my Imelda I am sick, go call Uncle Sam very quick!
“Oh Uncle, Uncle, shall I die?
“Oh no my *tuta*, do not cry.”¹⁰

Equally hilarious was a song that emerged from the KM chapter in Malabon that appropriated the tune of the popular 1906 US Army “Caisson Song” for this rendition.¹¹

‘Sandaang machine gun hawak ng makabayan	A hundred machineguns are in the hands of the nationalists
Lulusubin ang Malakanyang	Who are ready to assault Malacañang
Sa bundok, sa gubat	From the mountains and the forests
kami ay walang gulat	fearlessly we come

Lulusubin ang Malakanyang	To be ready to assault Malacañang
Ang aming chairman si Amado Guerrero	Our chairman is Amado Guerrero
Victor Corpuz ang Kumander	Victor Corpuz is [our] commander
Ang sigaw namin ibagsak ang pasismo piyudalismo, imperyalismo	Our slogan is “Down with fascism, feudalism, and imperialism!”
Ang suot namin pajama ng Vietcong	Our attire is the Vietcong's pajama
Pati jacket ni Mao Tse Tung	and Mao Tse Tung's jacket
Ang sigaw namin ibagsak ang pasismo, piyudalismo, imperyalismo!!	Our slogan is “Down with fascism, feudalism, and imperialism!!”

When I first heard “Isang Daang Machine-gun” in a gathering of old activists in the 1980s, one of them was not amused and complained, “Hindi tama yan, ah!” (That’s not right!). I was pleasantly surprised at his irritation since the critic, by then, had long resigned from the party. In fact, he had become one of its most potent ideological critics. Yet, hearing a song that was never part of the standard array of tunes brought out the old political officer in him (at one time, he was regional secretary of the CPP’s Manila–Rizal region) as he worried about its failure to conform to the “political line” and manifest the seriousness of the revolution.

Like many from this critic’s generation radicalized by the First Quarter Storm and Mao Zedong’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the themes and rituals of these two episodes had been strongly embedded into their psyche. So strong has Maoism penetrated their souls that songs like the KM-Malabon’s composition can never be accepted as politically correct, even after they had left “the movement.” Unfortunately for the former cadre, his censure was ignored; many of the jaded veterans in that reunion preferred the laughter to the lecture.

Finally, communist crooners were equally adept in transforming revolutionary songs that were not necessarily just Chinese in origin. “Bandiera Rossa” (Red Flag), an Italian communist classic, was translated

and sung enthusiastically in many rallies.¹² The Filipino version kept close to the tenor and passion that made the song one of the most remembered in international socialist and communist histories.¹³

Tamad na burgis na ayaw gumawa Sa pawis ng iba Nagpapasasa Pinapalamon ng manggagawa Hindi marunong mahiya Walanghiya! Bandilang pula iwagayway (3x) Ang anakpawis ay mabuhay!	The lazy bourgeoisie who do not work and live and enjoy off the sweat of others They are fed by workers These [fellows] are shameless So shameless! Let us wave the red flag (3x) Long live the working class!
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But the translation did not stop there. As radicals began setting up KM and SDK chapters in private schools after successfully appropriating the campaign for “school democratic reforms” from their reformist rivals, the composition of the new recruits began to reflect this attempt to reach out to a section of the students that was hitherto ignored by radicals.¹⁴ A “Maryknoll version” (named after one of the women’s colleges in Metro Manila, Maryknoll College, renamed Miriam College in 1989) was littered with “*colegiala* accent,” the argot associated with these schools of the elite and upper middle classes that mixed Filipino and English and was pronounced with a distinctively upper-class twang. When put alongside the above translation, the *Taglish* (for Tagalog and English) version’s shift from the serious to playful is quite apparent.

Tamad na bourgeoisie
na ayaw mag-work
Sa sweat ng others
Nag-eejoy-enjoy
Pinapa-eat, eat ng mga workers
Hindi marunong, ma-ashame

No ashame!!

Bandilang red . . . i-wave, wave, wave (3x)

Ang sons of sweat ay long, long live!¹⁵

Was this early version of Taglish a criticism of the new recruits for their class origins? Perhaps, but it was also a recognition of how difficult the transition of the petit-bourgeois was because that cultural transformation also involved shedding of a particular kind of English identified with the upper classes. It poked fun at the *pretty* bourgeoisie (as colegiala recruits were later referred to), while respectfully recognizing the difficult cultural and political transition they were undergoing.¹⁶

When Marcos declared martial law, a period that saw the detaining and killing of activists and cadres and sent many to the underground and the countryside, the singing stopped. It took the CPP a couple of years before it could set up a well-oiled urban underground network among students, workers, and the urban poor. By 1976 this network had begun to test the political waters; small groups of activists staged “lightning strikes” that gradually expanded into open “multisectoral democratic” protests. New songs were written for these occasions, although unlike their pre-martial law counterparts these were not as upfront about supporting the CPP and the NPA because of martial law. For example, excerpts from the most militant presentation of that period, *Pagsambang Bayan*, performed by the University of the Philippines Repertory Company, closed with a song that hinted at revolution but stopped short of mentioning the vanguard party and its army. One of its most memorable lines went:

Luha'y pawiin na, Inang	Wipe your tears, Mother
Pilipinas	Philippines
Pagkat sa bukirin ngayo'y	For from the mountains a
namamalas	movement grows
Mamamayang pilit ginupo ng	of people who were once
dahas	repressed
pawang nakatindig	have stood up
at may hawak na armas	with arms in hand
ang mga pasakit pilit na	to confront the suffering that
kinakalas	befell them
mapagsamantala'y alisan ng	and forcibly end it. ¹⁷
lakas.	

Almost immediately some imp from the audience whispered a line that others picked up later on, to wit:

ang mga pasakit pilit na	to confront the suffering that
kinakalas	befell them
mapagsamantala'y aalisan ng	and soon after cut off the
bayag	testicles [of the oppressors]

These lines had echoes of associating Marcos to human excrement, albeit this time it was accompanied by the desire to emasculate him by cutting off his genitals.

The irreverence did not stop there. There were other lyrics that were revised for the sake of radical laughter. I only recovered one such song from that period, and it was likewise an adaptation from the noel “Winter Wonderland.” Written by the scholar and civil society activist Francisco “Pancho” Lara, it went like this:

Gone away, the demonyo
Here to stay, rebolusyonaryo
We'll sing our war song as we go along
Walking down the path of people's war
From the valley we'll surround the cities
Then pretend that we are NPA
From the bushes we will build our base [pronounced: baaa-siii]
And that is where we'll bury the enemy
Long-a-live the revolution
Down with all kinds of reaction
Let's sing our war song as we go along
Walking down the path of people's war
Let's sing our war song as we go along
Walking down the path of people's war

The inspiration here was neither Christian nor Christmas, but Latin American. As the 1970s began to close, stories of Vietnamese triumphs were being muddled up by sporadic tales of Khmer Rouge brutality and of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam expelling Chinese Vietnamese, leaving them to survive the ordeals of sea travel with rickety boats that often fell prey

to pirates. The fall of the Gang of Four in China and the resurrection of the “revisionist renegade” Deng Xiaoping signaled that not all of those stories of socialist rejuvenation spurred by the Great Helmsman’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution were true. CPP intellectuals continued to defend Pol Pot and argued that Jiang Qing and her cohorts needed to be praised for their enduring commitment to Mao.¹⁸

But clearly Maoism had been in the wane even in the Philippines by the time the Gang of Four were ousted and Deng took the first steps to bring China out of the destruction caused by the Cultural Revolution to the road of recovery. The new beacon of the socialist future was shining from way across the Pacific, as the Sandinistas overthrew the dictator Anastacio Somoza and showed remarkable tenacity in resisting American-led counterrevolutionary onslaught.¹⁹ The attraction to Latin American radicalism peaked with the rise of new cultural groups, prominent of which was the ensemble Patatag. The activists who belonged to the group were younger, became radicalized under martial law, and had very little connection with their pre-martial law elders. They prided themselves as the “martial law babies,” i.e., radicals who had their baptism of fire in the most repressive of conditions. Their musical inspiration then was to be found elsewhere: in the *Nueva Canción* of the Chilean communists Victor Jara, Quilapaún, and Sergio Ortega as well as the Uruguayan folk singer Daniel Viglietti.

As expected, their seniors criticized their music and lyrics for being “too complicated to be listened to and played by the masses” (Ramillo 2013) but the censure possessed no sting anymore: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was already widely discredited, and these martial law babies could no longer identify with the Maoist China.²⁰ When Lara penned his hysterical rewrite of “Winter Wonderland” to describe the NPA as a merry band of rebels then, he was quite aware of this distinctiveness of his generation.

The Pains of Sexual Opportunism

Yet there is nothing quite like taboo to energize and shock, as several of the songs I have collected demonstrate, filled as they are with deliciously racy elements and the subject of sex.²¹ One of the challenges for an underground movement like the CPP was the policing of sex. “Sexual opportunism” ranked high among the major sins that a communist could commit, standing alongside even “revisionism” and “reformism.” Acts covered under this transgression ranged from abuse of women including rape and violence

against partners (perpetrators were often executed for these violations), to—and this was the most popular—sex before marriage.

Until very recently the CPP had demanded that its single women cadres be chaste, and that they lose their virginity only on the night after their revolutionary wedding. Cadres had been repeatedly reminded to avoid all conditions that would lead to premarital sex, and those caught were either suspended or expelled from the party, depending on the frequency of their dalliances (the second punishment usually reserved for instances in which the end result was a pregnant cadre). The sternness with which political officers oversaw “On the Relation of Sexes” (ORS; CPP Women’s Bureau 2004) and the severity of penalties against those who violated the rules inexorably led to complaints from cadres and activists, which, in turn, led to irreverent melodies, especially among the “youth and student sector.”

In this ballad Lara employed the lyrics of the popular song by the popular pop group Apolinario Mabini Hiking Society, more popularly known as APO Hiking Society—“Mahirap Talaga Magmahal ng Syota ng Iba” (It’s Really Difficult to Love Someone Else’s Girlfriend)—to voice his discontent with the ORS. The song goes:

Mahirap talagang magmahal ng isang kasama Hindi mo mabisita 'pagkat may pulong siya	How difficult it is to love a comrade You can't visit her because she has all these meetings
Mahirap, oh, mahirap talaga	Oh how difficult, so difficult indeed!
Maghanap na lang kaya ng sympa Ngunit kapag nakita ko ang kanyang mga mata Nawawala ang aking pulitika Sige lang, sugod lang	Perhaps I should just look for a sympathizer But every time I looked into her eyes My political commitment goes out the window So I shall just plunge into this
oh, bahala na Bahala na kung	and face the consequences Even if it ends up

magka-punahan pa	in many a criticism session
Refrain: I-dial mo ang	You dial her number
number sa telepono	in your telephone
Huwag mong ibigay	You do not give her
ang tunay na pangalan mo	your real name
Pag nakausap mo siya,	When you talk to her
sasabihin sa iyo	she'll tell you
Tumawag ka mamaya	"Call me later,
nanditong P.O. ko	my political officer is here!"
Mahirap, oh, mahirap talaga	Oh how difficult, so difficult
	indeed
Oh sakit ng ulo	What a headache,
maniwala ka,	I tell you
Ngunit kahit anong	But whatever they say
sasabihin nila	about me
Hindi pa rin ako magbabago	I can never change (for love)
(Repeat last line three times)	

Here Lara complains of party regulations that make it difficult for cadres in a relationship to spend some intimate time together because of the endless meetings that their political officers demand they attend. Lara muses that he might be better off with just a sympathizer who will not be bound by these strictures. What he also hates the most is how much living a double life can affect romance. One has to be constantly ready with aliases and alibis, fibs, and falsehoods because of the perennial threat of arrest and torture. But what is most scary is that every time he or she looks at his/her partner's eyes, he or she would be ready to throw radical politics on the side.

For urban cadres the ORS definitely was a drawback, "cramping their styles," as it were, when it came to entering into relations with cadres in a setting where it was "normal" to hold hands, be intimate and horny in public, and even engage in premarital sex. There were grumblings over party bosses' imposing of regulations that seemed to fit more the peasantry, where communists and guerrillas had to tread carefully so as not to offend the alleged conservatism of the CPP's "main force." There were also questions over why this superior worldview of the proletariat—the supposedly "most advanced" class in the era of global capitalism—sounded more like the

antiquated feudal order in which sexuality and freedom were systematically being suppressed by clerics and kings. And since the document was party law, and hence must be adhered to under the principle of democratic centralism, one of the few ways of expressing dissent and also getting away with it was through a funny song.

But it was not always the case. The coercive powers of the ORS was such that one also had to be constantly reminded of the stigma that one who violates it would have to carry throughout the rest of his or her career in the revolution, and even beyond. Lara (re)wrote a popular religious song revived in the 1970s by the tawdry balladeer Rico J. Puno from one talking about God and life's mysteries to the enigmatic world of the sexual opportunist:

Mahiwaga ang buhay ng S.O.	The sexual opportunist's life
	is a mystery
Kung sino ay di natin piho	For whoever he dates we will
	never know
At manalig lagi sana tayo	But rest assured my
	comrades
Tuwing linggo may kasama	He changes partners every
syang bago	week
Pag-ibig wala sa bokabularyo	Love is not in his vocabulary
At pang-pasakit lang daw ito	This only gives him
ng ulo	headaches
Yan ang buhay at ligaya	This is the kind of life and
	pleasure
ng isang S.O.	of a sexual opportunist

Compared to their pre-martial-law predecessors, the reach of these songs was limited. Martial law created cramped public spaces where political expression was muted or suppressed. There was no chance to sing them with the same consistency as in the past and with a large sideline public listening sympathetically to the activists. With most of its personnel operating underground and in the countryside, passing irreverent melodies from one party cell to another was difficult, all the more because of the very nature of these songs. The above tune, for example, would never go as far as the cadre and his close comrades, especially after lower-level cadres and activists realized that those who wrote and implemented the directive were

also the first to violate it.²² Besides, why talk about what happens behind the bedroom door or underneath the blanket, especially if these involved some of your top leaders?

By the 1980s, however, *history* began to move at a faster pace, sweeping everyone—dogmatics, heretics, and resigned cadres—into the whirlwind of a protest movement unlike the ones of the past. The assassination of former senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr. was the catalyst, as it brought out hitherto apolitical professional and middle classes, segments of the anti-Marcos elites, and social forces from the underprivileged that were unreachable by the CPP. New organizations of various ideological orientations began to compete with the party in the propaganda war, and they too had their marching songs and funny comedies. The CPP held its own against these groups, but its urban-based “cultural groups” now had to share the limelight with others.

In 1987 the CPP’s organizational coherence began to unravel as internal debates began to factionalize the movement. The debates inevitably led to a split and an inside coup, with Sison and his allies regaining control of the leadership and in 1992 declaring the start of a “second great rectification campaign” to “reaffirm” the party’s Maoist foundations. Among those who were removed from their posts, or who resigned after the coup, were some of the composers of the songs I remembered. Freed from the Leninist constraints restricting them, these composers looked back to recall the tunes and lyrics of the irreverent melodies they wrote and sang; and poignantly corrected Mao by saying revolution could be a serious as well as a funny adventure.

Closing Notes

Many joined political movements inspired not so much by the deep philosophy of texts, such as Mao’s “Five Golden Rays” or Lenin’s *What is to Be Done?* More accessible works, like a rousing song stamped out by hundreds on the march, could also sway passions—particularly when denouncing Marcos as “a piece of shit.” Shouted during marches, sung in snatches, or hummed during lulls between meetings when the political officers were absent, these highly localized, subversive songs are now pieces of ephemera, today only vaguely recalled during reunions. But start a bar or two of a favorite and you might spark a flame of remembrance in old hearts. Surely it is worthwhile to continue to seek to recover and memorialize these songs.

Revolutions are thus not simply the product of a politically sophisticated and organizationally adept vanguard that simplifies complex ideological theories to propagate “Marxism-for-Dummies” for the people. They may also be the result of subversive ideas deployed through “improper” tabloids, romantic *novellas*, and songs, which empower otherwise powerless people in expressing their dissatisfaction. This deployment of subversive ideas brings to mind the historian Robert S. Darnton (1995), who in his brilliant and funny *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* suggests that, while the philosophes Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot certainly galvanized the overthrow of Louis the XVI and ushered in the “Age of Reason,” the French public was as much inspired by salacious eighteenth-century tales, which were equally critical but more accessible than the philosophers’ tracts.

Many a Filipino communist would surely be amused to find that they were not alone in making the revolution also a comical dinner party.

Notes

These songs were first presented in an 8 August 2007 forum sponsored by the Ateneo de Manila University’s Kritika Kultura. It lay dormant for a while until a revised version was presented in the panel “Laughing Across Asia” at the Association for Asian Studies Meeting, 28 March 2014. The author is grateful to the Philippine Studies editorial staff, especially Filomeno Aguilar and Angelli F. Tugado, for helping him improve the text. He also thanks Robin Tatu for her comments and criticisms on the second version.

- 1 There is now an Internet-based database on the First Quarter Storm containing among other things, the statements of the various student organizations and analyses by pundits, radical intellectuals, and activists themselves. See *The First Quarter Storm Library* 2010.
- 2 Anonymous, “Linyang Masa” (The Mass Line). Bong Wenceslao 2012 presents a poignant reflection on this and other songs.
- 3 I learned this song in 1971 as a member of the high school choir; it was taught to us by a seminarian from the San Jose Seminary in Quezon City.
- 4 The lyrics were sung to the tune of “Yellow Bird,” written by Marilyn Keith and Alan Bergman, and popularized by crooner Harry Belafonte. I am grateful to Maya Bans Cortino for recalling the lyrics and sharing these with me. Authorship of the song remains unknown to this very day.
- 5 Seeger’s song is preserved in Seeger and the Song Swappers 2013.
- 6 I thank the members of the T’bak-Pilipinas Facebook group for helping me recover this song.
- 7 On the Virgin of Antipolo, cf. Salangsang 2010.
- 8 Amado Guerrero was Sison’s nom de guerre. I was never able to get the full lyrics of this radical version, alas.
- 9 See “Yoyoy Villame – Megellan” [sic] in YouTube, complete with lyrics (Villame 2006).

- 10 Cebuano-Mindanawon writer Dom "Bai" Pagusara wrote this version. I asked Bai whether he tried to popularize the song, but he answered in the negative. When he began singing it, martial law was already consolidating in the Visayas and Mindanao. He would bring it out for the first time in the early 1980s.
- 11 The US colonial army in the Philippines first popularized the original "The Caissons are Rolling Around." See William E. Studwell 1996, 8–9.
- 12 For the lyrics see *Bandiera rossa* n. d.
- 13 A poignant recollection of the song and its impact on young student radicals can be found in Pio Verzola (2012), "The summer radio kid grows up," in *Pathless Travels* blog.
- 14 On the successful arrogation of this reformist campaign by radicals, see Abinales 1988, ch. 6; 1985, 41–45.
- 15 Prof. Karina David of the University of the Philippines and the other member of the singing duo *Inang Laya* frequently sang this melody in the 1980s.
- 16 Communists never ceased to eulogize two of such members of the pretty bourgeoisie who rose to prominence initially as "national beauty queens" but who, upon discovering the writings of Sison and joining radical associations, abandoned their class and joined the proletariat. To this very day, communists preface their descriptions of the late Maita Gomez and Nelia Sancho with the phrase "beauty queens" before praising their radicalism. See, e.g., Pagaduan-Araullo 2012.
- 17 The complete lyrics can be found in Ilagan 2011. Bonifacio Ilagan penned the entire musicale.
- 18 On 28 Sept. 1981, Prof. Alfred W. McCoy shared some of his insights on what was happening in Vietnam and Cambodia to members of the University of the Philippines Department of Political Science. McCoy was in transit back to Australia as part of a delegation that was invited by the Vietnam Social Science Commission. In his talk, titled "Transition to Socialism in Vietnam," McCoy pointed out problems that the two socialist states faced and argued that "Cambodia was reeling from a disastrous attempt at Oriental restoration" while Vietnam's socialist economy was "stagnating and in need of integration into the global economy." CPP sympathizers among the UP faculty were quick to accuse McCoy (2013) of naively falling into the trap of "imperialist propaganda," and insisting that Pol Pot and his Paris-educated Foreign Minister Khieu Samphan would never countenance repeating what Stalin did in the Soviet Union.
- 19 This "Sandinista current" inside the CPP eventually revealed itself in the writings of Nathan Quimpo, who wrote using the nom de plume Marty Villalobos.
- 20 Bong Ramillo, a former activist, wrote and performed *tibak* (activist) songs in the 1980s.
- 21 I explored this issue in Abinales 2004.
- 22 On CPP chairman Sison's dalliance, cf. Feria 1993.

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