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## Benigno Ramos and the Sakdal Movement

MOTOE TERAMI-WADA

An earlier article (*Philippine Studies* [1988]:131-50) outlined the growth of the Sakdal Movement from 1930 to 1934. This present article discusses the life of Benigno Ramos, who was largely responsible for the success of the Sakdal Movement, which left its mark on the 1930s.

### FORMATIVE YEARS: 1892-1910

Benigno Ramos was born on 10 February 1892 in the small barrio of Taliptip, Bulacan, in the province of Bulacan.<sup>1</sup> He was the second child of seven children, the four boys and three girls of Catalino Ramos and Benigna Pantaleon. The eldest child was Gabino, followed by Benigno, Asuncion, Marcos, Enriqueta, Felisa, and Francisco.

Catalino Ramos was said to have been a member of Andres Bonifacio's *Katipunan*, and had reportedly fought against the Spaniards. Benigna Pantaleon had also participated in the revolution as a volunteer nurse at the battle front. Catalino used to lament that the youth of Benigno's generation had no guts, while during his time his contemporaries had battled against the enemy with only bamboo spears and bolos.<sup>2</sup> When the

1. Libro de Bautismo, [vol.] 24, Bulacan Parish Church, cited in Delfin L. Tolentino, Jr., "Ang Panulaan ni Benigno Ramos," M.A. thesis, Ateneo de Manila University, 1980, p. 12. Information on Ramos's early life, unless otherwise indicated, came from interviews with Leticia Ramos-Uyboco, daughter of Benigno Ramos; Amada Ramos, widow of Francisco, and Luwalhati Samonte, daughter of Enriqueta. The interviews took place on 14 April 1983, 6 August 1985, and 18 September 1985, respectively.

2. A certain Hayase wrote "Ganap to ni Kansuru Kenkyu" [Study on the Ganap Party], which was published by the 31st Garrison of the Japanese Imperial Army in 1944. This document can be seen in the Military History Department, National Institute for Defense Studies, Tokyo. See also Nippi Irei Kai, ed., *Huo Senki* [Record of the Battle in the Philippines] (Tokyo: Nippi Irei Kai, 1958), p. 241, which is based on Hayase's work.

Spaniards had left and relative peace and order had returned under the U.S. colonial government, Catalino worked as a fishpond guard of Don Jose L. Perez, who later assisted in young Benigno's education. Meanwhile, his mother Benigna supplemented their meager income by selling fish and vegetables in the nearby market.

The family managed to send Benigno through intermediate school. Apparently his academic performance was of note, so that a Thomasite teacher offered to send young Ramos to Manila for further studies. But this did not materialize since Benigno had to help his family.<sup>3</sup> Ramos did not finish high school. Nevertheless, he obtained a teaching position in an elementary school in Pandi, Bigaa, Bulacan. He qualified for the job by passing the necessary language examination. While at Pandi, he wrote a play which the students presented during their first school program. Since it ridiculed the local Pandi priest, Ramos was thrown into the local jail for twenty-four hours. This incident occurred two years after he had started teaching, and he left for Manila to seek his fortune as a poet and writer.<sup>4</sup>

His interest in writing started early. He narrates in an autobiographical poem, that as a child he would jot down whatever he saw in his surroundings and read these aloud to his friends, much to their enjoyment.<sup>5</sup> But his mother was not very happy because this activity was not conducive to study. She eventually banned his writing, remarking that he should concentrate on his school work because they were planning to send him to Manila for further studies. In spite of his mother's admonishment, he wrote for the *Plaridel*, a local literary magazine, as well as for a vernacular daily, *Taliba*. In Manila, he was fortunate enough to be employed on the weekly magazine *Renacimiento Filipino* as early as 1911.<sup>6</sup> Thus his career as a poet-writer started, although he was always hungry. He wrote of his daily life as "walang inumin kundi tinta lamang, pluma ang tabako," and "accro'y tinapay" (nothing to drink but ink, ink plume for tobacco, and pen for bread.)

3. See Isaac Cruz, "Benigno Ramos: Founder of the Sakdalista," *Philippines Free Press*, 4 February 1961, p. 16; and an interview with the late Francisca Ramos, cited in Tolentino, "Panulaan ni Ramos," pp. 15-16.

4. Cruz, "Benigno Ramos," p. 16.

5. Benigno Ramos, "Bata ka Pa," *Renacimiento Filipino*, 7 July 1912.

6. According to Ramos-Uyboco, he was first employed as a court clerk, translating Spanish documents. Interview with Ramos-Uyboco.

## CAREER AS POET AND WRITER

Ramos quickly earned a reputation in literary circles as a fiery poet. When the literary organization Aklatang Bayan was established in 1910, he was one of the members, who were among the most prominent literary figures of the time. Ramos was named as one of the five poets who were looked up to as models of aspiring poets.<sup>7</sup>

Soon Ramos was one of the young poets with bright prospects invited to various literary get-togethers. For instance, at the end of March 1911, at the celebration of the one hundred twenty-third birth anniversary of Francisco Baltazar (Balagtas), Ramos was one of the fifty-nine guests invited. He was introduced as "Ben Ruben," still very young but already well known, noted for his "mayamang pangungusap at . . . pihikang pagkukuro" (rich words and . . . unique opinions). His poems were seen as depicting the "real life," noting its tragedies and horrors.<sup>8</sup>

Rosauro Almario, a poet-critic, described him as a "poeta-revolucionario" (revolutionary poet) because he was a fiercely individualist poet who did not dissemble. Martin Martinez Martires, another colleague, noted that one of Ramos's striking characteristics was his ability to delve into the great issues of the time. Martires felt that Ramos's poems could be instrumental in eventually bringing about change. Julian Cruz Balmaseda, noted playwright and novelist, saw Ramos as a radical among the radicals in politics. He came to be recognized not only as a poet but also as an orator, critic, and journalist. Most of all, he was recognized as a person who stood by his convictions, as proven by his poems. According to Balmaseda, Ramos's poetic ability was matched by only a few, and such ability should be saluted.

Whenever Ramos criticized U.S. colonization of the Philippines through his poems, he used a pen name. It was customary to adopt more than one

7. Among the members of Aklatang Bayan were Hermenegildo Cruz, Rosauro Almario, Carlos Ronquillo, Inigo Ed. Regalado, Lope K. Santos, Faustino Aguilar, Patricio Mariano, Julian Cruz Balmaseda, Pedro Gatmaitan, Patricio Dionisio, Severino Reyes, Amado V. Hernandez, and Jose P. Laurel. The other four models were Santos, Regalado, Balmaseda, and Gatmaitan. See Virgilio S. Almario, *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1984), pp. 53 and 86.

8. "Parangal sa Hari ng mga Manunulat," *Renacimiento Filipino*, 7 April 1911, p. 23. For other comments see: R. Almario, *Tampal sa Tampal*, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 87; Martires, "Benigno 'Ruben' Ramos, alias 'Ben Ruben,' Ang 'Sakdalero,'" *Alitaptap*, 20 November 1930; and Balmaseda, comp. "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik" (n.p., typescript), Balmaseda Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Filipiniana Division, National Library, Manila. The last is an incomplete compilation of his published poems prior to 1930.

pseudonym in order to avoid detection by the authorities. Ramos hid behind the names "Ben Ruben," "Gat Lotus," "Batikuling," "Ramon Galvez Pantaleon," "Wistano Biroy," "Taliptip," "B. . .," "Robespierre," and "Nilad."<sup>9</sup>

Ramos married Liboria de Castro of Baliwag, Bulacan, in 1913. It is said that the beautiful seventeen-year-old maiden was won over by Ben Ruben's poems.<sup>10</sup>

Ramos's poems, essays, and other writings may account for his being a popular leader of the Sakdalista Movement in later years.<sup>11</sup> One of his first poems which earned him recognition was "¡Bulkan!" (Volcano!).<sup>12</sup> The poem, according to Balmaseda, is the first Tagalog poem to have twenty-four syllables per verse, divided into four groups with six syllables each. The volcano in the poem represents the oppressed, including the poor, hungry, and weak. Although the volcano seems silent at the moment, it will erupt some day when too much pressure is applied. When a volcano sends out smoke, it is a sign that it is ready to erupt, and the eruption is the punishment meted out by the heavens. When the eruption takes place, it will be an extremely strong one. The poem warns oppressors, especially the rich, to change their ways.

There are other poems which deal with the peasants and the poor. "Asyenda," for example, depicts the plight of the tenants.<sup>13</sup> The land, which has witnessed the lives of generations of peasants, sympathizes with them. The poem agrees with the tenant's cry, "Lupa ko'y ibalik" (Give back my land). It stresses that the tenants rightfully own the land. Furthermore, they are encouraged to fight for their right to the land: "Ang bawa't sigaw mo ay naging kulog, ang bawa't hibik mo ay naging unos" (Your every cry becomes thunder, your every sob becomes a storm).

9. The use of pseudonyms by prewar writers was noted by V. Almario, *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo*, p. 49. For Ramos' pen names, see Balmaseda, comp., "Mga Tula" (n.p.), Balmaseda Collection. This compilation is almost identical to "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik," except that the former consists of the poems cut out from the original publications and that Balmaseda has handwritten notations.

10. "Ang Buhay ni Gng. Liboria de Castro."

11. Balmaseda's "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik" has 124 poems Teodoro Agoncillo in his *Tagalog Periodical Literature* (Manila: Institute of National Language, 1953) lists a total of 135 poems. Ramos's style was striking. "Katas Diwa" (Balmaseda, "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik") and "Kahabag-habag" (*Renacimiento Filipino*, 28 March 1911) are considered by his critics as extraordinary. For details, see V. Almario, *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo*, pp. 113-15. For a literary analysis of Ramos's poems, see Tolentino, "Ang Panulaan ni Benigno Ramos."

12. "¡Bulkan!," *Renacimiento Filipino*, 21 February 1911.

13. "Asyenda," *Pagkakaisa*. "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik" states that "Asyenda" was originally published in *Pagkakaisa*, but does not give the date of publication.

His sentiment for the peasants can also be seen in his *balagtas* entitled "Dalagang Bayan Laban sa Dalagang Bukid" (City Maiden Versus Country Maiden).<sup>14</sup> The judgment of Lakandiwa is that city maiden and country maiden should not fight each other since they are sisters, both being daughters of the beloved country. Besides, if one insults one's own sister, the foreigners will be more inclined to insult, too. Here, Ramos emphasizes the importance of unity among the Filipinos. The author's sympathy toward the rural folk is seen. When Dalagang Bayan ridicules Dalagang Bukid's rough hands, the latter replies that those hands became rough because they feed the people in the city and rural areas. Most of Ramos' poems are filled with sadness and anger against the social conditions of his time. For instance, in "Gunita sa Lumipas" (Remembering the Past), he bitterly recalls that because of his social background, a girl who was his close childhood friend no longer regarded him well after she studied in an exclusive college.<sup>15</sup> He then realizes that wealth puts up barriers between people.

In another poem, "Ang Sigaw ng Api" (The Cry of the Oppressed), Ramos emphasizes the strength of the downtrodden.<sup>16</sup> Maliit tells Malakas that

Lakas, tapang, bagsik ang iyong puhunan;  
samantalang ako'y walang taglay naman  
kundi ang pag-ibig sa Katotohanan  
sa Bayan kong api at sa Katarungan;

(Strength, bravery, aggressiveness are your capital;  
while I have nothing  
but the love for Truth,  
for the oppressed Country and Justice;)

Ramos attributes the sad plight of the poor and the desperate economic condition of the country to its being under foreign domination. In "Pilipinas" (Philippines),<sup>17</sup> the country grieves that "Kung kahapon ako'y inapi ng Dasal / ngayon ay lalo pang kaapi-apihan; namatay ang aking Magiting na Rizal / at patuloy pa rin ang kanyang kaaway. . . ." (If

14. "Dalagang Bayan . . .," *Aliuptap*, 5 June 1930.

15. "Gunita sa Lumipas," *Liwayway*, 1 September 1923.

16. "Ang Sigaw ng Api," *Sampagita*, 15 February 1927.

17. Balmaseda, "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik." It was originally published in *Pagkakaisa*, but the compilation gives no date.

yesterday I was oppressed by Prayer [the Spaniards] / now I am more oppressed / my brave Rizal has died / and still his enemies live on. . . ).

In order to change this economic and social inequality, Ramos advocated the independence of the Philippines from the U.S. To express this sentiment, he wrote a *balagtas* entitled “*Balagtas* ng Kalayaan” (Poetical Joust on Independence). Five characters appear in it:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Bathala ng Kasarinlan | God of Independence                        |
| Huwan de la Kruz      | Juan de la Cruz<br>(the ordinary Filipino) |
| Diwa ni Rizal         | Spirit of Rizal                            |
| Tio Sam               | Uncle Sam (U.S.)                           |
| Hukumang Pangdaigdig  | World Court                                |

The Spirit of Rizal comments that even George Washington would be against what Uncle Sam is doing to the Philippines. Rizal laments: Sa paanan ng dakilang Mutya nating Kasarinlan / ang buhay ko’y inihandog upang siya ay mabuhay, / at sa ngayong mabuhay (sic) na’y wala rin sa aking bayan.” (Before our noble Muse Independence / I offered my life so that she may live / and now she lives but she is not in my country.) He encourages the Filipinos to continue fighting for independence, and he would help from above. The court rules in favor of Juan. Uncle Sam says that he will follow the decision, but that Juan should wait until the right moment comes. Juan de la Cruz complains that it seems to be his fate to wait. But he warns that he had better not be deceived again.

In order to carry on the task of acquiring independence, Ramos in the poem “*Alaala*” (Remembrance) says that the people could derive inspiration from the examples of the heroes of the Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

There is a poem dedicated to Jose Rizal, whom Ramos calls the Christ of the Philippines. Entitled “*Bayani!*” (Hero!), it describes characters who appear in Rizal’s two novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, and assures them that they would no longer be oppressed. Ramos ends the poem on a hopeful note, that independence will be the Philippines’s tomorrow.<sup>19</sup>

Ramos also portrays the society by making use of biblical allusions. In “*Bagong Hudyo*” (Jew of Today), he likens contemporary society to

18. “*Alaala*,” *Renacimiento Filipino*, 7 September 1911.

19. “*!Bayani!*,” *Renacimiento Filipino*, 28 December 1911.

the time of Jesus's death, when there were evil Jews who caused the death of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Christ represents the sectors of society which suffer injustice and inequality.

He expresses his religious conviction in "Ang Diyos Ko" (My God).<sup>21</sup> His God is not inside the temple but in the middle of the farm with the grieving ones. God is in the company of the lowly laborer, and in the spirit of those who strive to awaken the nation and change its destiny. "Ang Diyos ko'y wala sa gitna ng aliw / at di nakikita sa gitna ng ningning, / doon sa may lungkot, doon sa may lagim, / doon sa may habag—doon mo hanapin!" (My God is not in the midst of pleasure / and is not seen in the midst of glory, / where there is sadness, where there is sorrow, / where there is mercy—you will find Him there!)

We can easily detect Ramos's deep feelings for the small, oppressed, and poor in his short story of a Mexican *tulisan* (bandit), *Pancho Villa, Maikling Kasaysayan ng Bantog at Kilabot na Taong Ito sa Mehiko* (Pancho Villa, A Short History of this Famous and Dreaded Man in Mexico).<sup>22</sup> This is about a hacienda laborer who lives a peaceful life despite the poverty and corruption he sees in his environment, until his own family is affected. Then he turns into a Robin Hood type of criminal. Ramos' sympathy is obviously with Pancho Villa, and he implies that the desperate conditions found in Mexico also exist in the Philippines.

Ramos criticized the social and cultural temper of the twentieth century in a serialized story entitled "Talsik ng Siglo XX."<sup>23</sup> In this story, Sela decides to take revenge on her philandering husband Teong by having an affair of her own. Teong's girl is Nardy, who entices men for their money. Ramos made a point of the inequality of the sexes. If the male can do wrong, so can the female! Concern for the feelings of others was likened to "pananamit na lampas na sa uso" (clothing which is no longer in fashion). Ramos attributes this sorry situation to the materialism of the times:

Anopa't sa lahat, ang siglo XX ay dapat mapatangi. Sa kanyang kasaysayan ang salapi ay siyang puri, siyang buhay, siyang Dios, siyang lahat . . . Kung walang salapi ay wala.

20. "Bagong Hudyo," *Sampagita*, 6 April 1926.

21. "Mga Diwang Naghihimagsik" says that it originally appeared in *Pagkakaisa*, but gives no date.

22. (Manila: Imprenta y Libreria, 1916).

23. This was published regularly in the *Renacimiento Filipino* from 14 February to 21 May 1912. The Filipiniana Section of the University of the Philippines, Diliman Main Library has a copy in typescript.



(The twentieth century is certainly unique. In its history, money is the honor, life, God, everything . . . If you have no money you have nothing.)

In a short article written in 1922, Ramos warns of the politics the U.S. introduced to the Philippines. He notes that while Spain used religion to make the people forget their problems, the U.S. utilized politics.<sup>24</sup> He also addressed the Filipino women, hoping that they would never become pro-foreigners but would remain genuine Filipinos in character and thought.<sup>25</sup> In another article entitled "Ang Tunay na Kalaban," Ramos laments that Filipino businesses are being taken over by foreigners. He asks

Hindi kaya ikagalak ng ating sarili kung maturang ang buong Escolta ay ari ng mga Pilipino, ang Rosario ay hindi sa intsik kundi sa kababayan din natin, ang Ave [nida] Rizal ay hindi sa mga hapon kundi sa mga kabalat din natin?<sup>26</sup>

(Would it not gladden us to see the whole stretch of Escolta owned by Filipinos, Rosario is not for the Chinese but for our countrymen, Ave[nida] Rizal is not for the Japanese but for our own race?)

However, the foreigners are not the real enemies, but the Filipinos themselves. Ramos says that Filipinos are not being forced to buy from the foreigners; therefore, the Filipinos should correct this wrong attitude. He even suggests that they should go back to the use of gas lamps, *kalesa*, *karitela* (native modes of transportation), and locally woven cloth, rather than make fools of themselves by spending money that would never come back to Filipinos.

In August 1926, the weekly *Sampagita* magazine announced a balag-tasan entitled "Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas." The three periods were assigned to the leading poets of the time, to Iñigo Ed. Regalado, Benigno Ramos, and Julián Cruz Balmaseda respectively. Each would defend his assigned period by turns, one period per issue. They were to be judged by the readers' votes. The balag-tasan ended in December of the same

24. "Ang Laruang Bigay sa Atin ng Amerika," *Sakdal*, 18 October 1930. This was declared to be a reprint of what Ramos had written in 1922.

25. Ben Ruben, "Ang Kalinisan ng Ating Mga Babae," *ibid.* This was declared to be a reprint of what Ramos had written in 1924.

26. *Ibid.* It is allegedly a reprint of what Ramos had written in 1927.

year.<sup>27</sup> Balmaseda's "Bukas" won the contest, according to the board of judges, who said that the future is something to look forward to, and that it would bring progress. Ramos, the second placer, explained that "Ngayon" is blessed with material wealth, but controlled by the whites. He urged the people to act at once in order to save the country from a bleak future at the hands of imperialists. One can see that Benigno Ramos already showed a rebellious spirit ("diwang maghihimagsik") and a strong patriotism even during his early days.

Besides being a fiery poet, Ramos was also known as an elegant, graceful Tagalog orator, as attested to by his participation in balagtasan events.<sup>28</sup> His oratory caught the attention of then Senate President Quezon. Subsequently, Ramos would accompany Quezon on the latter's Nacionalista Party rallies and act as interpreter. Later, he was hired as the director of the Senate Clipping Division, with an annual salary of ₱1,500.<sup>29</sup>

#### FOUNDING OF THE SAKDAL MOVEMENT

In one of the earliest issues of *Sakdal*, Ramos urged the poets to use their pens for the betterment of the society: "Kailangang kita sa gitna ng digma / at sa pagtatanghal ng bayaning diwa, / hayo't ibangon mo ang lahat ng dukha! / hayo't ibagsak mo ang mga masiba!"<sup>30</sup> This was his declaration to the world that poets should be instruments of change as demanded by the signs of the time. In another poem, he reiterated that he was against the autonomy promised by the U.S. for this was a form of slavery.<sup>31</sup>

27. "Balagtasan: Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas," *Sampaguita*, 24 August to 21 December 1926, (typescript), Filipiniana Section, University of the Philippines Main Library, Quezon City.

28. One such event was held at the Olympic Stadium on 16 December 1925. The argument centered around who was fit to raise children, the father or the mother. Gatmaitan spoke in behalf of the mother while Ramos took up the cudgels for the father. Ramos was described as "temperamental, impulsive and fiery." He dominated the hearts of his listeners with his forceful phrases. On the other hand, Gatmaitan made them shed tears. Although Ramos lost, it was the most hotly contested literary battle ever recorded in the annals of vernacular literature, according to the *Tribune*, 18 December 1925.

29. Grant K. Goodman, "Japan and Philippine Radicalism: The Case of Benigno Ramos," in *Four Aspects of Philippine-Japan Relations, 1930-1940* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Southeast Asia Program, 1967), p. 135.

30. The poem "Panulat," *Sakdal*, 30 August 1930.

31. "Tutol Ako!" *Sakdal*, 2 January 1932.

Tutol ako sa bala nang [*sic*] nanalik sa tanikala

.....

Tutol ako sa balanang nanulsol sa taong bayan

.....

Tutol ako sa balanang nanguulol, nangdadaya sa bunganga'y pawang bayan, nguni't taksil sa paggawa:

Tutol ako sa dayuhang nanatay sa Kasarinlan. Tutol ako sa kabalat na walang kayang labanan . . . . .

Tutol ako sa kadimlan [*sic*], autonomia't kaalipnan [*sic*]!

(I am against anyone who approves of slavery

.....

I am against anyone who bribes the people

.....

I am against anyone who deceives, cheats, whose words are patriotic, but whose actions are traitorous

I am against my countrymen who do not know how to fight

.....

I am against darkness, autonomy and slavery!)

His admiration and respect for the fallen dead of the 1896 revolution had not changed. In another speech, he calls Filipino leaders and citizens cowards because they have no courage to rise up in arms against oppressors and foreign rulers as Andres Bonifacio had done. He ends the speech with a prayer to Bonifacio:<sup>32</sup>

Mabunying Ama ng kabayanihang-tagalog: unti-unting dumidilim ang aming kabuhasan; unti-unting nagbabalik kami sa panahong lumipas ng mga guardia civil, ng mga prayle at ng mga sakristan. Kailan ka magbabalik, mabunying ama namin? Buhayin mo sa aming puso ang tapang at ang pagmamahal sa aming kalayaan, sapagka't samantalang wala ito ay sari-saring kaapihan ang aming aabutin.

(Revered Father of Tagalog-heroism: little by little our livelihood prospects are becoming bleak; slowly we are going back to the past, with its *guardia civil*, its friars and its sacristans. When will you return, our revered father? Make alive in our hearts and bravery and the love for our freedom, because while this is absent we will experience all kinds of oppression.)

32. "Nagkasagutan ang Pangulo ng Pulo at ang Aming Direktor ukol kay J. Manahan," *Sakdal*, 5 December 1931.

His hatred toward the powerful and the greedy remained strong. He cited Rizal as an example of someone who could have used his influence and opportunities for self-gain, but instead chose to be on the side of the people.<sup>33</sup> He assures his followers and the oppressed that those who suffer are never wrong, because the pure beating of their hearts and cry of their souls is pleasing to the Creator.<sup>34</sup> Commenting on the sad fact that he could not afford to pay anyone to sell for him, Ramos wrote that “ang kurus na ito ay talagang kinakailangang ako lamang mag-isa ang pumasan (the cross must be carried by me alone).”<sup>35</sup> His view of himself as another Christ was echoed by his followers, as we shall see later.

Ramos talked on the social conditions prevailing in the country, the government officials' corruption, and the importance of national unity in the form of conversational poems which could be easily understood by the common *tao*. He used animals such as the shrimp, cat, hen, and eagle, in the tradition of the fable. “Pagibig na Sawing Palad (Sa Alamat ng Manok at Lawin)” [Unfortunate Love (Legend of the Hen and the Hawk)] is one such work. It tells about U.S. imperialism in the Philippines in the 1930s through the love story of Lawin (U.S. imperialism) and Manok (Filipinos). Another is “Legislatura ng mga Pusa” (Legislature of the Cats). The cats are Quezon, Osmeña, Roxas, and other politicians. Here, the political maneuvers under the U.S. colonial government are ridiculed.<sup>36</sup>

#### SAKDALISTA'S IMAGE OF RAMOS

How did his followers view Ramos? What kind of image did they have of him? Following is a typical comment on the drawing power of Ramos. For his listeners, he was able to give definite shape to their unexpressed words.<sup>37</sup> He was praised as

33. Ibid.

34. “Ang Ikinaalipin ng Ibang Bayan Ay ang Di Pagkaunawa sa Kalayaan; May Liham ang Patnugot ng Kilusang Sakdalista,” *Sakdal*, 26 May 1934.

35. Ramos, “Umagap Kayo sa Aming Despatso.”

36. See *Sakdal* issues for August and September in 1930.

37. “Sa Tama ng Ilaw; ang Aming Tagapamahala Sang-ayon kay G. Zosimo O. Maderal,” *Sakdal*, 6 December 1930. Maderal also described Ramos as “isang makatang . . . sa Katagalugan, na, ang mga pinagtuhugtuhog na sutlang hibla ng panaginip ay nagiging matibay na tulay ng ating lahi sa pagbabagunpalad at pagbabagunbuhay” (a poet in the Tagalog region, whose woven silk threads of dream becomes a strong bridge of our race in changing our destiny and in making a new life).

isang ibong puting-puti na sugo ng mga bayani mula sa karurukan ng langit upang maghatid ng kalatas ng pagpanibagong buhay sa isang bayang nakahandusay nang walang pagasa sa unang baytang pa lamang ng kanyang matarik na kalbaryo.

(a white bird that is a messenger of the heroes from the highest heavens in order to send a written message of new life to a country prostrated without hope even on the very first step of her steep Calvary.)

This same writer saw Ramos as a modern-day Rizal, the Mahatma Gandhi of the Philippines, and the Messiah for a new life in the society.

Still other examples of his appeal can be seen on the following occasions. In November 1930, he went to Luchan. He started speaking at around seven in the evening, and the people did not allow him to stop until it was way past midnight. His sweat-covered body and his hoarse voice were proof of his exertions, and yet the people kept asking for more. In April 1931, Ramos went to Lucena, and it is said that around four thousand people endured the midday sun just to listen to him.<sup>38</sup>

Ramos's followers contended that he had always been politically radical. He did not become so only when the Sakdal Movement started. Compared with other pro-labor people, Ramos was "tunay na makadukha ngayon at kailanman" (truly for the poor always). He dared to serve the country despite the dangers he might face, without expecting any favor, compensation, vote, position, etc., unlike others who were only after their own benefits.<sup>39</sup>

Some regarded him as an able editor campaigning for social change by exposing the social and political conditions of the country.<sup>40</sup> A member wrote to Ramos that he liked the *Sakdal* motto, "Walang Panginoon Kundi ang Bayan" (No Master but the People). He praised the fact that Ramos criticized the vulgar and dirty administration of the leaders and legislators.<sup>41</sup>

Sa mga gawain mong iyan, ay mapapanuto ikaw sa matuwid na landas ng katuwiran at tunay na walang bahid na itim ang iyong adhikain, sa ikadadakila at ikalulusog ng ating bayan at sa ikapagtatagumpay ng ating kagyat na pagsasarili.

38. See *ibid.*; and "Ang Aming Paglalakbay sa Tayabas ay Napuspos ng Tagumpay ng Simulaing Pang Bayan," *Sakdal*, 18 April 1931.

39. "Buzon ng Sakdal," *Sakdal*, 13 September 1930.

40. As expressed in several letters, like the ones which appeared in *Sakdal*, 15 November 1930.

41. "Ang Batangan, Batangas, Ay Laang Tumulong Kay Benigno Ramos," *Sakdal*, 29 November 1930.

(In the light of such activities, we realize that you are on the right path of reason and that you have pure intentions, for the greatness and welfare of our country and for the attainment of our immediate independence.)

Ramos was described as "the owner and editor of a newspaper which headlined the destruction of the selfish, unjust, revengeful, and oppressive political kingdom of the kings and princes in the Philippine government." He and the *Sakdal* are praised for fearlessly writing about what other newspapers hid: "Iyan, iyan ang diwang mapanghimagsik na pinakikilos ni Ben Ruben, ang Makata, ang Manunulat at ang Mananalumpati sa lahat ng talata ng Sakdal" (That is the revolutionary spirit that Ben Ruben, the Poet, the Writer and the Speaker, brings to life in the pages of the *Sakdal*).<sup>42</sup>

Ramos was clearly an incorruptible person in the eyes of Sakdalista members and sympathizers. He was likened to Ursus, the mythological bear whom nobody dared to oppose. He would rush forward to express the true feelings of the people while the country's leaders obeyed only the wishes of the colonizers.<sup>43</sup> The victory of the Sakdal Movement was, according to them, the victory of all, especially the *dukha* (needy) and the *maralita* (destitute). Benigno Ramos was merely the *buklod* (uniting factor) of the movement.<sup>44</sup>

bawat isa sa mga dukhang iyan ay dapat kumilos at ituring na siya'y si Benigno Ramos din na nakikitalad sa loob ng batas at ng katuwiran sa ikaliligtas ng ating bayan at ng ating kabuhayan at kalayaan.

(each one of the poor should act and consider himself as another Benigno Ramos who also works within the law and reason for the salvation of our country and our livelihood and freedom.)

Some of his followers wrote poems to show their love and respect for Ramos. One such poem says: "alaala ito / sa kabayanihang / ipanalas [*sic*] / sa harap ng bayan" (in remembrance of the bravery shown by Ramos for the country). The writer was referring to Ramos's consistent call for the boycott of foreign goods, which the writer states is a concrete

42. Pedro F. Espiritu, "Lalong Makapagpapabigat sa Maysakit," *Sakdal*, 18 October 1934.

43. See "Hindi Maaaring Masilaw si Ramos sa Ano Mang Salapi o Biyaya," *Sakdal*, 18 February 1933; and "Mga Dapat Mabatid: Ganap sa Ursus," *Sakdal*, 22 April 1933.

44. "Masiglang Totoo ang Kilos ng mga Sakdalista," *Sakdal*, 6 January 1934.

manifestation of that bravery. Ramos was seen as the true representative of the people.<sup>45</sup>

According to a *Sakdal* article, all the writers and prolabor people of the time were reportedly bought by Quezon. For instance, Lope K. Santos became governor of Nueva Vizcaya, and later was a senator. Hermengildo Cruz, formerly prolabor, became a senator and later was in the Bureau of Labor. Faustino Aguilar became the director of Labor, and later was the Secretary of the Senate. Patricio Mariano was also brought into the Senate. Jacinto Manahan was likewise in the Senate payroll. Crisanto Evangelista was included in the Mission of 1922. But Ramos did not join this crowd.<sup>46</sup> Ramos was not an educated man in the sense that he had not even finished high school, but people did not worry about that. He was considered a man of the times, fruit of the people's aspirations, especially with regard to the issue of independence. This was why he could not bring himself to be like the propagandists of other newspapers.<sup>47</sup>

Ramos was respected, trustworthy, and incorruptible, and was a worthy representative of the people. The people ranked him among those who had fought and died for independence. He was likened to Bonifacio, Rizal, and even Jesus Christ. The following is one expression of his being likened to Bonifacio:<sup>48</sup>

noong una'y isang Bonifacio ang pinagkalooban ng Diyos ng kapangyarihan upang lumikha ng Katipunan, at hanguin ang Inang bayan sa labis na pagkaalipin. Hindi natin mananawaran kailanman na baka ang "Ben Ruben" ngayon ay maging isang Bonifacio kahapon.

(in the past a Bonifacio was granted by God the power to establish the Katipunan, and rescue the Mother country from excessive enslavement. Who knows if the "Ben Ruben" of today is the Bonifacio of yesterday.)

In an article about the harassment Ramos had to bear, Rizal and del Pilar are remembered as those who possessed conviction to go through

45. For the poem, see Erato, "Buntot-Page: Kay Ben Ruben," *Sakdal*, 28 November 1931. For the statement regarding his representing the people, see "Palabasin Din Itong America at Magpadala sa Lahat ng Bansa at Liga," *Sakdal*, 5 November 1932.

46. "Lahat ng May Paniit Ay Ikinabit, Lahat ng May Bunganga, May Mantika," *Sakdal*, 17 March 1932.

47. See "Sa Miting, Konstable; Sa Pahayagan, Paglailit; Iyan ang Ginagamit sa Amin ng mga Makatiyan," *Sakdal*, 14 January 1933; and "Salamin ng Dangal: Mga Tudla ni Parapit," *Sakdal*, 8 April 1933.

48. Marcelo Teo, Roberto, "Huwag Isipin ang Pagkatakot Kundi ang Pagpapakasakit," *Sakdal*, 6 December 1930.

all the shame, insults, mockery, and oppression. This is because freedom appears in the midst of sorrow and tragedy, as in the case of these two heroes.<sup>49</sup> Ramos's followers assured him that he was not alone in his defense of true freedom. They appreciated his willingness to be "nailed to the Cross" just so that the noble Sakdal principles would triumph.<sup>50</sup> Jesus Christ during his time was called a fool, madman, and pauper. Rizal's novels were burned. And during Ramos's time, the Sakdal Movement was suppressed. The article which cited these comparisons is appropriately entitled "Walang Progreso o Pagkasulong" (No Progress or Advancement).<sup>51</sup>

All this was ecstatic praise for a man who certainly did not deserve the exaggerations, but it was a clear indication of the impact Ramos had on the people and of the important role he played in the Sakdal Movement.

### CONCLUSION

In November 1934, Ramos left the Philippines ostensibly to go to the U.S. to work for Philippine independence. However, he disembarked in Yokohama and stayed in Japan until 1938. While there, he advanced his cause among Japanese nationalists. One of them, Matsumoto Kumpei, took care of Ramos and his family. Matsumoto was a Diet member, through whom Ramos became acquainted with Toyama Mitsuru, a stalwart ultranationalist.<sup>52</sup>

Ramos returned to the Philippines in August 1938 after meeting with Commonwealth president Quezon, who was then visiting Japan. Upon his arrival, Ramos was arrested on charges of agitating for insurrection and sedition. His arrest was contrary to an agreement allegedly forged between him and Quezon. However, he was immediately released on bail which was collected from his supporters. He then established another political party, the Ganap, so that he could continue with his fight for independence. In May 1939 he was arrested again, this time for estafa and illegal solicitation of money. His sentence, given seven months later, was four to ten years of imprisonment.

49. "May Balitang Hahalayin si G.B. Ramos Upang Manglamig ang mga Sakdalista," *Sakdal*, 1 September 1934.

50. "Buzon ng Sakdal," *Sakdal*, 28 February 1931.

51. By S.F. Silos, *Sakdal*, 22 January 1932.

52. The most detailed account of Ramos's sojourn in Japan, his meeting with Quezon, and Ramos's activities until the war is in Goodman, "Japan and Philippine Radicalism."



Ramos was released from prison by the Japanese occupying forces in April 1942. At the end of that year, he started to serve as one of the officials for the Japanese-sponsored *Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas* (Kalibapi), a mass mobilization organization. At the end of 1944, he was one of the founding members of the *Makabayan Katipunan ng Pilipino* or *Kalipunang Makabayan ng mga Pilipino* (Makapili).<sup>53</sup>

Ramos retreated to the mountain areas of Northern Luzon along with the Japanese Army and some Cabinet members of the newly established Philippine "Republic," at the end of the Japanese Occupation. An eyewitness account declares that Ramos was on board a Japanese plane which crashed as it took off for Japan. His belongings were brought back to one of his sisters, but his remains have never been recovered.<sup>54</sup>

His relatives believed that he had died until several years ago when someone brought the news that he was still alive and living on Mount Bosoboso, Antipolo. Some members of the Ramos clan visited him, but his relatives were divided as to the authenticity of the man. Ramos's daughter, Leticia Ramos-Uyboco, is inclined to believe that he is her long-lost father.

I met this man who claims to be Benigno Ramos on two occasions, 22 September and 23 October 1983.<sup>55</sup> Even considering his old age, which would have been ninety-four in 1985, and the amnesia which the man said he suffered after the war, I am not convinced that he is the real Ramos. His facial features are different from those seen in Ramos's early pictures. He claims that he does not remember how to speak Spanish, nor does he recall the names of his Japanese hosts, even though he was in Japan for four years. He could not remember the Manila North High School incident, or other events in Ramos's life. He did not remember Jeremias Adia, who served him as secretary during the war. Mr. Adia shares my opinions regarding the authenticity of this so-called Ramos.

Whether or not Benigno Ramos is still alive, his spirit and thoughts continue to dwell among his surviving followers and among the members of organizations, which today perpetuate these ideas in various forms. They will remain with them until their desire for "True Independence" is no longer a dream.

53. His name appears off and on in connection with these two organizations in the *Tribune* issues of the war years.

54. Interview with Ramos-Uyboco.

55. The first trip was arranged through the assistance of Ramos' grandnephews. On the second trip, I was accompanied by two others: Professor Shizuo Suzuki of the Shizuoka University and Jeremias Adia, former Sakdalista.