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*Philippine Studies* vol. 51, no. 3 (2003): 405–434

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Changing “We-Feelings” in a Period of Revolutionary Mobilization

Rosanne Rutten

*Since villagers in the Philippine lowlands are involved in fluid, ego-centered networks of bilateral kinship, friendship, and clientage, how then do revolutionary activists try to create “units of belonging” along stable and clear-cut lines? After all, sharp distinctions between “we” and “they” are needed to maximize militancy against perceived adversaries, as well as forge cohesion, commitment, and solidarity within one’s own ranks. This article explores how activists of the CPP-NPA (Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army) have dealt with this potential dilemma; it focuses on hacienda workers and farmers in Negros Occidental who joined the movement. The question relates to wider issues of social identification and community formation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *identity, community, social movements, CPP-NPA, rural mobilization*

Unconditional loyalty to socialist or communist movements is “quite difficult to achieve” in the Philippines, F. Landa Jocano has noted, since the main loyalty of individuals is to the family and, to a lesser extent, to other primary groups and personal networks (Jocano 1985, 63). In the history of collective action in the Philippines, successive radical movements have succumbed to infighting based on personal, family, and regional loyalties organized around individual leaders. The Katipunan split into rival factions “based on regional and personal loyalties of the troops” (ibid.). The post-independence, communist-led, peasant movement *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (People’s Liberation Army) was under the leadership of two pairs of brothers from different provinces, whose eventual conflict resulted in factional cleavage in the

movement: "the boundaries of loyalties [were defined] along kinship ties and regional affiliation" (*ibid.*). In a similar vein, Wurfel states: "the overriding importance of interpersonal linkages hinders the emergence of any group loyalties on which cohesive political parties . . . might be based." Except for "the most westernized sectors of society . . . a particular organization usually survives only because a strong leader has a wide network of clients" (Wurfel 1988, 35).

Yet, the CPP-NPA (henceforth called NPA) appeared singularly successful in creating loyalty, cohesion, and commitment among its activist members on a basis other than personal clientage and kin solidarity—albeit temporarily.<sup>1</sup> Besides creating commitment to the movement as such, the party fostered, among activists from cities and thousands of villages, a commitment to a much wider category of people, most of whom the activists would never know personally: the category of the poor and oppressed nationwide, for whom they were willing to sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

Here, I explore one aspect of this process: how NPA cadres sought to develop, among village activists, "we-feelings" that transcended the level of personal networks and primary groups. Drawing on the experiences of peasants and hacienda workers in Negros Occidental, the paper suggests some qualifications to the notion that particularistic ties and identities still form the essence of Philippine political dynamics.<sup>3</sup>

### Thinking, Talking, and Making "Community"

"We-feelings" that transcend the level of face-to-face relations are created through social ties and cultural work. Some authors emphasize the cultural aspect: people define boundaries between "us" and "them" through discourse and boundary-marking rituals, usually in the context of contention. People can "think themselves into difference" (Cohen 1985, 117). One of the proponents of the linguistic turn, Stedman Jones (1983), argues that notions of class opposition and feelings of belonging to a certain social class are produced by discourse rather than workplace experience, by a "language of class" developed in a political struggle.<sup>4</sup>

Others argue that feelings of community are anchored on social interdependencies, on ties between people that provide sustenance, protection, and aid in times of need. People share a sense of belonging

and solidarity primarily with those who form their main survival unit (Elias 1974; de Swaan 1995); hence, the feeling of belonging to a family or neighborhood, within which ties of mutual aid may be most intense. The integration of individuals in wider configurations of interdependent people is accompanied by "widening circles of identification," which may include such broad categories as the nation (de Swaan 1995).

Both approaches are relevant. I concentrate here on the interplay between thinking and talking "community," and actual social relations and interactions that help create, support, or undermine specific community perceptions.<sup>5</sup> Among villagers and hacienda workers of Negros Occidental, the NPA discourse of a nationwide community of the oppressed, and a nationwide community of revolutionaries, could only take root when the envisaged solidarity and brotherhood were enacted in real life—in actual solidarity, mutual aid, or collective action. Social ties that underpinned these "we-feelings" were both preexisting and newly forged in the process of mobilization.

### **Transcending Particularistic Loyalties: The "Brotherhood" as a Model**

Images of political "units of belonging" are linked to models of political mobilization. Political clientage—fuelled by personal commitments toward family, friends, patrons, and clients—promotes "we-feelings" that are limited to primary groups and to networks of patrons and fellow dependants.

A counter-model of mobilization and a counter-image of a political community that has been effective at least since the Katipunan, and the religio-political movements that preceded it, is the model and image of the "brotherhood." The brotherhood symbolizes a community of equals. Individual members swear loyalty to the whole membership, following initiation rites that recast members as "siblings." This loyalty and commitment can be extended to branches of a brotherhood located elsewhere. Introduced by Spanish friars as an organizational form for clergy and devotees, the brotherhood (*cofradía*) was eventually turned into a local variant that became an organizational and ideological weapon against the friars and the Spanish establishment itself. By the

nineteenth century, Christian notions of redemption and French revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity were reworked and adopted within the organizational form of the brotherhood, as were "Masonic rituals among ilustrado nationalists [which] paralleled those for the baptism of catechumens" (Fegan 1983, 215; Ileto 1979).

Originally intended as a religious form of organization, the brotherhood became a powerful model for secular mobilization on a supra-local scale, following the establishment of the Katipunan. Possibly, no other viable model existed in the Philippine Christian lowlands besides the leader-follower complex (Fegan 1983, 215).

The idiom of the family, embedded in the concept of brotherhood/siblinghood, was crucial in projecting the image of a community of equals.<sup>6</sup> This image contrasted sharply with the dominant hierarchical image of the political and familial order—of patron-client ties as parent-child dependencies, of rulers as patriarchs. It was, in a sense, a counter-image within an encompassing idiom of family relations.<sup>7</sup>

By the early twentieth century, the organizational form of the trade union had developed in the Philippines as a "union brotherhood," a brotherhood "on a wider basis than the *gremio* local mutual-aid society" (Fegan 1983, 215). With the introduction of anarchist and Marxist ideas about class solidarity and universal brotherhood of the oppressed, the scope of a class-based community of "siblings" was widened further.<sup>8</sup> The subsequent establishment of formal unions and social-movement organizations came with a risk: when these developed into hierarchical bureaucratic organizations, the idiom of family and brotherhood no longer matched the organizational form. Much ideological work and social engineering was then required to maintain, among its members and supporters, a semblance of a community of equals.

In a general sense, the brotherhood, as a model of popular organization and image of a community of equals, has remained a powerful instrument for transcending particularistic loyalties. The mobilization strategies of the NPA may be viewed in this light.

## Two Localities

Hacienda Milagros (the names of both localities are pseudonyms) was formed in the 1920s as a "community in capitalism" in the lowland

sugarcane plantation region of Negros Occidental. It presently comprises about fifty families of workers and supervisory personnel. Thanks to union organization and NPA backing, these families have achieved minor improvements in their rather dismal labor and living conditions.

The village of San Juan, located in the southern uplands of Negros Occidental, evolved in the course of the twentieth century from a village of pioneer farmers to a village dominated by sugarcane haciendas and cattle ranches, and recently into a village of small farmers and landless workers. The latter change took place during the period of NPA control in the 1980s, when the village poor formally or informally occupied most of the village's haciendas and ranch lands.

Both places were considered as "consolidated NPA areas" in the mid-1980s. In 1990, the government military took control and the influence of the NPA waned. In my repeated visits to each place over several months in 1992 and 1995, I could draw on my earlier research and friendships that started in the late 1970s. Many of my old friends, ritual kin, and acquaintances had supported the NPA as local part-time activists or as mobile full-time cadres. By the early 1990s, most had become disengaged from the movement and most full-timers had returned home. In writing about the NPA, I use the past tense, even though the NPA, now split in several competing factions, and having lost much of its membership and support, is still active in parts of Negros Occidental and other areas in the country.<sup>9</sup>

### **Widening Units of Belonging, Redrawing Social Boundaries**

When NPA activists started to organize in San Juan and Hacienda Milagros in the late 1970s to early 1980s, they encountered women and men whose feelings of connectedness to other people already far transcended their network of face-to-face contacts. These collective identities concerned the nation, religious community, and class.

The NPA activists built on these wider "we-feelings," but tried to redefine the boundaries. They sought to change the boundaries of the nation to exclude the rich and powerful, expand the notion of class to include all the poor and laboring people, incorporate the progressive

Catholic community into the revolutionary fold, and “neutralize” the religious communities that resisted such inclusion.

### “We, Filipinos”: Reworking the Image of the Nation

The image of a cross-class national community, linked to a national identity, is primarily reproduced by the public schools, national media, and nationwide election campaigns, all of which reach deep into San Juan village and Hacienda Milagros. As the children attend the daily flag-raising ceremony, sing the national anthem on school grounds, perform Filipino folk dances at school festivities, and learn the national language and national history, they are taught to perceive themselves as members of a Filipino nation. The mass media reinforce this image. Although provincial radio stations appeal to regional identities by broadcasting provincial news and songs in Ilonggo, more and more villagers own a television set and are viewing national television channels with nationwide news and soap operas in the national language—important tools for national identification. This feeling of belonging is substantiated by the increasing geographic mobility of villagers throughout the country, seeking work in Manila or visiting relatives in Mindanao. During election time, moreover, political candidates evoke the image of a national benevolent state that distributes funds and “projects” among all citizens under its protective wings.

Since the NPA operated nationally and presented itself as a nationwide movement, it could profit from poor people’s familiarity with the concept of the nation. However, the state-sponsored concept of the “nation” is inclusive of all classes and closely linked to the United States in a beneficial bond. Hence, the NPA had to rework this image into one fit for revolutionary struggle. Influenced by nationalist and Marxist texts, José Maria Sison wrote a Marxist version of the history of the Philippine “people” that would inspire NPA seminars throughout the country (Guerrero 1979). These seminars were also given in peasant and worker homes in San Juan and Hacienda Milagros to (potential) supporters and members.

Philippine society as a pyramid of classes: that was the visual image presented by NPA activists in improvised seminar rooms in peasant and worker homes. It represented national society as molded into one huge

exploitative system, with "oppression" as the keyword. It stood in stark contrast to Philippine society represented by a "flat" geographic map of the country, which suggests a homogeneous population within its geographic boundaries, where people are positioned by region, not by class.<sup>10</sup> A united effort of the poor, who formed the broad base of the pyramid, could turn this pyramid upside down and produce a truly liberated society without oppressive structures.

The oppressed classes formed, together, the true Filipino nation. Excluded from this national unit of belonging were Filipino elites, exploiters of the nation. They were defined as outsiders (as was the United States). They were compradors, serving foreign interests, hence not truly Filipino. Sugar planters in Negros were depicted as land-grabbers of Spanish stock, without honest links to the soil, hence outsiders. The imagery used to convey this message included drawings of Uncle Sam sailing to the Philippines (represented by the national map) with one bagful of dollars and returning home with three. In skits and songs, the Philippine nation was portrayed as a beautiful young maiden in the clutches of oppressive forces, imagery that dates back to the independence movements against Spain and the United States, when Filipino playwrights used the figures of *Inangbayan* and *Malaya* (a young native woman) to symbolize Mother Country and the spirit of national independence (Riggs 1981, 126, 289). In popular skits by legal left-wing groups, she was freed from the tentacles of an octopus, each tentacle symbolizing an oppressive force, including landlords and imperialists.

In the retelling of national history, Andres Bonifacio was a potent symbol. The "proletarian" Bonifacio was the real national hero in the Philippine Revolution of 1896, not the *ilustrado* Rizal, since Bonifacio and his Katipunan had actually fought the Spanish for the sake of independence. As a former cadre from San Juan explained, "Rizal was striving for equal rights of Filipinos compared to Spanish citizens, he sought to make the Philippines a province of Spain. How, then, can you call him a national hero, a fighter for national liberty?"

In a broader sense, NPA cadres sought to counter the state-sponsored popular identification with Rizal and the *ilustrado* class as the representatives of Philippine nationalism and the Filipino people at large (cross-class). Instead, they promoted the view that Bonifacio and the



lower classes/the poor were the true representatives of the Filipino nation. Moreover, they rejected the view that the Philippine Revolution formed a crucial stage in the unfolding of an independent, multi-class nation-state. Instead, they embraced the image of the Philippine Revolution as one stage in the irrevocable "march forward" of the oppressed classes toward total liberation (Ileto 1986, 6). This version entails a "call to action for participation, through organization and struggle, in this historical process."<sup>11</sup> Such a reinterpretation of history is a standard part of social-movement narratives, as it gives meaning to the movement's struggle, incites participation, and boosts morale. The narratives that fit old struggles in a new meaningful frame of a history of oppression and liberation, says Tilly, "ordinarily entail teleologies tying [these age-old struggles] irrevocably to here and now: the present moment, in their construction, culminates a long, long directional process" (1993-94, 9). NPA cadres legitimized the current armed revolutionary struggle of the NPA as the last phase in this historically "necessary" trajectory, as the "resumption of the unfinished Philippine Revolution" (Sison and Werning 1989, 11).

In the words of a former NPA organizer in the Negros lowlands: "the NPA shows the people the continuity of oppression and resistance in national history, so that they [the poor] won't see the NPA as something that just cropped up, but as an army in the tradition of the Katipunan." The image of an irrepressible wave of successive liberation struggles, of which the NPA represented the last and final phase, was certainly convincing for some people in Hacienda Milagros. In their perception, the good fight of the Katipunan was resumed, in the twentieth century, by the Huk movement, then by the *Kabataang Makabayan* (the left-wing student movement whose leader would later form the CPP-NPA), and finally by the CPP-NPA.

Other workers in Hacienda Milagros initially resisted the NPA's re-writing of history. Older people, in particular, granted more weight to the state version of Philippine history than to the version propagated by a handful of young people who, in the early stages of their proselytizing work, commanded little authority as yet, and who included some of the older hacienda workers' own young kin or neighbors. A female

worker recounted, "Some didn't believe that Andres Bonifacio was a hero, because they had learned in school that Dr. José Rizal was the hero, the revolutionary." Moreover, where the NPA depicted the Katipunan as a phase in an ongoing struggle that would ultimately lead to victory, some workers instead regarded the Katipunan episode as one of defeat. According to a Milagros worker, "In the seminar we were taught: Rizal is not a hero because he did not fight the Spanish, whereas Bonifacio did. I thought, that may be true, but they [the Katipunan] did not win."

### "We, Farmers/Workers"

Apparently, the state unwittingly helped foster a consciousness of class among small farmers and hacienda workers in Negros, a consciousness connected to a shared identity that already existed at the local level. Influential factors were state legislation—the granting of rights to national categories of farmers and workers—and state rhetoric.

Since American colonial times, but in particular under President Magsaysay in the 1950s, the "land to the landless" ideology had gained respectability among state institutions. The massive homestead programs carried out since the early 1900s in areas such as the southern uplands of Negros Occidental suggested that the state acknowledged the right of small farmers to own the land they tilled, although primarily in the case of settlers and with little actual state protection of settler property. Hence, small farmers had a strategic advantage to feel part of a national category of farmers in order to claim the rights connected to it. This identification also boosted morale. In the 1950s, farmer-settlers of San Juan successfully challenged the claims of a lowland planter to a tract of land that the settlers had designated as the site of their future village center. Peasant organizations, in particular the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), appealed to the legislated rights of this national category of settlers, as they began to mobilize settlers in the southern uplands in the 1950s whose lands were threatened by encroaching ranchers and planters.

In a similar vein, the populist rhetoric of President Marcos in the early days of Martial Law (starting in 1972) helped strengthen the no-

tion of a national working class. By raising workers' minimum wages shortly after the declaration of Martial Law, and by having this broadcast over the radio throughout the country, reaching millions of workers' homes in urban slums and plantations, it became worth belonging to the state-acknowledged category of "workers." As with farmer-settlers, workers had a strategic advantage to claim membership of this class. In Negros, the relevant legislated category became the cane worker (*mamumugon sa kampo*, hacienda worker).

Labor unions in Negros Occidental helped turn this national category, or at least a provincial section of it, into a "unit of belonging" and a lived reality. Since the 1970s, unions had been particularly active in mobilizing hacienda workers province-wide by appealing to national labor laws and pushing for their enforcement. Using rally and demonstration as forms of collective action, the left-wing National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) brought workers from scattered haciendas together in rallies in Bacolod City as members of the same large class of hacienda workers, standing shoulder to shoulder at the Bacolod Plaza. Workers of Hacienda Milagros were among the regular rallyists.<sup>12</sup>

NPA cadres could build on this notion of class. However, since the NPA tried to forge a cross-class alliance among the poor to gain sufficient strength to capture state power, it stressed the shared experiences of oppression among farmers, workers, and other poor classes. It propagated the image of a nationwide multi-class community of the poor and oppressed, the *pumuluho* (the people, the poor), or, in NPA language, the *masa*. Progressive Catholic clergy and left-wing labor unions also evoked this image as a broad left-wing multisectoral movement against the Marcos regime was formed in the 1970s-1980s. Progressive clergy in both research localities, and organizers of the left-wing union of sugar workers in Hacienda Milagros, helped draw farmers and workers into this wider community by mobilizing their participation in province-wide rallies, including those for Labor Day, Human Rights Day, and International Women's Day, as well as for several *Welgang Bayan* (People's Strikes). These rallies were significant as public displays of united, solidary groups, and they could be viewed, in a sense, as celebrations of the wider community of the poor. Workers of Hacienda Milagros remembered the first times they participated in

such rallies as exhilarating events, in which they bodily experienced a sense of belonging to a vast mass of assertive fellow poor.

### "We, Catholics/Sabadistas/Baptists"

The small church congregations in both localities created in the minds of their active members an image of a national and transnational religious unit of belonging. San Juan village contained a Catholic, a Baptist, and a Seventh-Day Adventist (*Sabadista*) chapel at the time the NPA began to mobilize there, and the Baptist congregation had a resident pastor. Each church comprised some fifteen to thirty active members from among the small farmers, hacienda workers, and hacienda supervisory personnel in the village, although more people attended the weekly services regularly. In Hacienda Milagros, only the Catholic Church had a presence of some importance, with a core of active church members among workers and supervisory personnel. In the absence of a chapel in the hacienda, churchgoers would attend the church in town. Daily prayer meetings and weekly Bible study meetings were held in hacienda homes or at the hacienda plaza in the late 1960s-1970s under the influence of Catholic revival movements that gained many adherents in the area. All these local religious gatherings, organizations, and related networks of mutual aid created small solidary communities. Each helped visualize the wider community of believers that religious leaders and texts sought to evoke.<sup>13</sup>

The Seventh-Day Adventists had perhaps the most active policy of involving villagers in a "virtual" worldwide community of believers. In San Juan, the daylong service on Saturdays included a public reading of the missionary leaflet *Misyon, Reaching the World with the Gospel Mission*, probably originated in the United States but translated into Ilonggo. From the pulpit in the weather-beaten chapel perched on a small hill overlooking the vast upland plateau, believers listened to narratives about fellow *Sabadistas* on distant continents who, despite many odds, had been able to build a new church and help victims of an earthquake, or, in China, had bravely continued to worship despite losing control over their church buildings. Each issue dealt with another continent and contained a crude map of the region, with dots marking

the places where fellow worshippers were active. The link between the believers in San Juan and those in other far-flung places was made real and tangible as each worshipper, however poor, donated a few pesos to help support the project, somewhere on the globe, that was highlighted during the service. The use of kinship terms (“brothers and sisters”) to refer to distant and unknown fellow believers heightened the sense of connectedness.

The progressive branch of the Roman Catholic Church—adherents of Vatican II and liberation theology—introduced another type of wider community and of the worshippers’ place in it. In their view, the main social boundary was the chasm between the oppressing rich and the oppressed poor, and they felt compelled to take sides. Progressive priests were assigned to the areas of San Juan and Hacienda Milagros in the late 1960s-1970s. They were part of a nationwide progressive Catholic revival movement, the Basic Christian Communities-Community Organizing movement (BCC-CO), which helped set up among villagers and urban dwellers community organizations for religious worship and emancipatory action.

Through these local Basic Christian Communities (*Kristianong Katilingan*; BCCs), progressive clergy and lay leaders conjured up (by means of sermons, seminars, and discussions at BCC gatherings) the image of a nationwide category of poor and oppressed, and fostered identification with it as the most relevant unit of belonging for the poor farmers and hacienda workers. Power to improve their condition, the clergy argued, would stem from solidarity within this unit, from collective action by its members. Following Marxist analysis, they redefined the workers and farmers from “the poor” into “the oppressed,” and sought to change their self-image from poor people who were dependent on the assistance of individual patrons and who might suffer under an individual planter, into people whose misery was caused by class oppression. Moreover, among active church members, the BCC-CO movement helped redefine the notion of “service to God” into “service to the people.” It fostered among a number of people of San Juan and Milagros a willingness to sacrifice in behalf of a community much wider than that of kin, friends, and village-mates.<sup>14</sup>

On the one hand, NPA cadres who entered San Juan and Hacienda Milagros found like-minded individuals among these progressive Catholics. These women and men already tended to link local problems to wider oppressive structures, local struggles to nationwide contention, and local commitments to nationwide units of belonging. In making the decision to support armed struggle, they were supported by clergy members and lay leaders who condoned revolutionary struggle as a last resort for the poor and powerless (in particular, under conditions of martial law), and who included the NPA within the broad emancipatory movement they envisaged.

On the other hand, NPA mobilizers clashed with religious activists who belonged to churches that defined communism and revolutionary struggle as sinful and excluded revolutionary supporters from their large brotherhood of believers. Such “we-they” distinctions between God-fearing and law-abiding believers and godless revolutionaries were largely drawn by Baptist and Seventh-Day Adventist churches, and by the conservative branch of the Roman Catholic Church.

The village of San Juan became a symbolic battleground of competing communities. This was a battle for legitimacy, for the adherence of villagers to their respective organizations and doctrines, to the “right path” that they espoused. The pastors of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the Baptist Church of San Juan condemned communism and rejected the NPA on the grounds that it renounced God, undermined the government, and condoned violence. The most committed Baptists, Adventists, and part of the Catholics who were active in their own BCCs tried to remain outside the NPA organizations that were gradually created in the village.

Chapel, text, religious gathering, and collective ritual—symbolizing the local religious communities—marked them off from the community of the NPA and linked them to supra-local organizations and communities of believers. For the NPA activists and supporters in the village, the three small wooden chapels perched on different hilltops in the village, filled with worshippers on Saturdays or Sundays, became a symbol of the “others.” The NPA members and supporters converged for their own gatherings (seminars or committee meetings), in their own physi-

cal space (houses of activists), centered on their own texts and doctrines, linked to their own supra-local community of believers.

### **Changing Identities: "Serving the People" as a New Mission in Life**

Consider the following remarks by former NPA activists from San Juan and Hacienda Milagros, mostly women and men of poor-farmer or poor-worker background, who had left their homes to become full-time mobile cadres deployed throughout the island:

"I entered the movement [NPA] out of my own free will. I really wanted to serve the people."

"I felt that whatever might happen, it was all right as long as I could help my equals, the *masa*. I trusted them, I depended on them."

"I have forsaken the interests at home for the interests of the poor."

"The struggle, serving the people, was number one for me. My family was secondary."

"I feel an attachment to the *pumuluyo* (the people, the poor), that's where my heart is."

These women and men identified with a national, or at least a regional, category of "the people," "the poor," which extended far beyond their personal networks. As they included these people in their circle of compassion, they felt compelled to take action on their behalf. True, they themselves and their families would also profit from eventual successes as they belonged to the category of the poor as well. However, socialized to their activist role, that concern was relegated to the background. Their adage was "serving the poor" in good and bad times. They worked as organizers, guerrilla fighters, medical personnel, radiomen, and the like, in areas in Negros distant from their own village or hacienda, among farmers and workers who initially were strangers.

This process of identification with wider categories of people included internalizing a new self-image, in particular, the identity of the

selfless *rebolusyonaryo*. It also involved actual integration into wider NPA networks that linked the activists, at the regional level, with other poor people, as well as with one another. As the preceding paragraphs suggest, villagers' activist experiences with the progressive Catholic Church and the left-wing labor union had "culturally prepared" them—to borrow Ileto's formulation (1979, 24)—for a far more encompassing activism. For instance, one of the first NPA activists in San Juan, a small farmer, recounted that the church seminars on the BCCs, which included a leadership seminar, made him feel responsible to "help the people" along non-particularistic lines. After all, "help your fellow men" was the dictum of the BCCs, he said. In both localities, BCC members and union activists were among the first to join the NPA.

A weakening of particularistic loyalties, especially to one's family, was a crucial part of this process of identification. Youths formed the majority among the women and men who became mobile full-timers, and their unmarried status and relatively limited familial responsibilities (at least compared with that of parents) made them the most "biographically available" for full-time activism (see McAdam 1986, 70). Their "dis-identification" vis-à-vis their own families was a sequential process. They started as part-time activists within their own village or hacienda: as youth organizers and members of the NPA's "cultural group" that staged revolutionary sketches and songs, intended to foster identification with the *pumuluyo* and the movement, and promote a genuine interest in its goals. Taking up these tasks, they became part of the network of local village-based activists and developed new loyalties toward this group, as well as new (non-particularistic) responsibilities toward the people in their own communities.

As they became full-timers and rose in the hierarchy, their responsibilities and connections covered an ever-widening circle of poor people. In contrast, affective bonds and feelings of responsibility toward their kin were discouraged, and contact with their family cut to a minimum. Longing to be with one's family members was ridiculed as "sentimentalism." "As a full-timer, it seems you're the property of the masses," an ex-full-timer said.

The role model of the full-timer as a person with selfless dedication to the interests of the people and the revolution was an important



ideological asset of the movement. This image was particularly attractive to idealistic youths whose ties with their parents were loosening. Those who went full-time were imbued with this new identity through seminars, criticism/self-criticism sessions, revolutionary songs, and daily interactions with comrades and villagers that validated this identity. Self-perceptions changed. For example, a former cadre from San Juan recalled that the NPA seminars promoted in him a powerful feeling of being "one of the ingredients" of societal change, and a total commitment to the movement. Another recalled a similar, morale-boosting feeling of being part of the *pwersa* (the united people as a force of change).

### **The Community of Revolutionaries: The Movement**

The identification with the *masa* would be developed and sustained within a new community that had been formed in the course of mobilization: the community of revolutionaries, the *hukbong* (the movement). "The movement" stands for the national entity made up of mobile full-timers, part-timers active within their own village or neighborhood, and allied people. Activists had a clear sense of a nationwide movement and were supported in this view by regular news of NPA actions throughout the country. In their perception, however, the most relevant unit of the movement was regional, covering Negros island. Given the tactical constraints posed by the Philippine archipelago, the NPA promoted regional units in which activists were highly mobile. Thus, the former full-timers from San Juan and Hacienda Milagros were deployed throughout the island (although primarily in their native western part, which is Ilonggo-speaking compared to the Cebuano-speaking eastern part). They were regularly transferred to new areas as they moved up in the hierarchy, and so they moved from one activist collective to another, at each station linking up with the collectives hierarchically above and below them.

Some parallels can be drawn with Anderson's notion of a "pilgrimage" of officials throughout an administrative territory, a protracted journey between places and social positions which can be viewed, following Victor Turner, as a "meaning-creating experience" (Anderson

1991, 53). Such a journey may create among officials in each place of assignment a shared experience and a sense of fellowship and connectedness which eventually may give rise to an encompassing sense of belonging among people spread out over a wide geographic area (ibid., 53–57). For instance, a small farmer from San Juan who became a full-time member of a Propaganda Organizing Team (POT) moved up in the hierarchy to become a political instructor at the section level and eventually at the district level. With each promotion, he covered a wider geographic area, interacted with more instructors and their local collectives, connected with more guerrilla squads moving around the area, with superiors visiting the area for party caucuses, and so on. Such visits, meetings, caucuses, and the like, held in the homes of *masa* or in small improvised camps, were moments of intensive sharing of experiences and of information about who was where and doing what in the region. This created a sense of interconnectedness with fellow activists in an ever-wider area, which turned the image of a nationwide movement into a lived reality.

Activists experienced the movement as a community of fellow activists. “We share a bloodline with the movement,” a former cadre said. This sense of community was the product of intensive cultural and social work. On the one hand, there was an overwhelming use of discourse—of language, behavior, ritual, and song—to create this effect. On the other hand, social ties of mutual aid and dependency underpinned the feeling of community. I will briefly consider each of these aspects.

Discourse marked a unique subculture of the movement and defined the boundaries between its members and outsiders. It was a subculture built around an ethos of sharing and sacrifice for the common good, against common adversaries. Through songs, criticism/self-criticism sessions, seminars, and other forms of what activists called “education,” the activists were constantly reminded of their shared mission in life, of their collective role in the “struggle.” The teachings on the “characteristics of a good revolutionary” supplied the touchstone that helped define who really qualified to be part of the community and who did not. A “good revolutionary” served as a model for the *masa* and the comrades, was always open to criticism and self-improve-

ment, and practiced "simple living" (adjusting to the lifestyle of the *masa*). Although few activists fully matched the ideal, many made a sincere effort to do so.

In this joint venture, they developed a behavior and language that set them apart from *burgis* (bourgeois) mainstream society, although building on Filipino cultural elements. Male activists became "disciplined" in the sense of renouncing the male vices of "chicks, drinks, and gambling," or at least they tried. Thus, they recast the image of the Filipino macho male into one of the "disciplined" male, an image that proved highly attractive to many women and girls among the *masa*. Young female activists renounced the behavior of girlish teenagers and sought to avoid a "sexy" appearance by creating a plain look: loose pants, shorts not higher than the knees, loose t-shirt, no makeup. Among themselves, activists began to use a vocabulary of Maoist and organizational terms, and so the daily conversations of farm- and hacienda-worker activists would come to include terms as *pyudal* (feudal) and *CSC* (criticism/self-criticism).

The term *personal enteres* (personal interests) was used in a negative sense: in activist discourse, it stood for the Filipino mainstream culture of "each for himself," family-centeredness, and personal favoritism. "Service to the people" stood for the opposite: each for the common good; a renouncement of the primacy of ties with family, friends, patrons, and other personalistic relationships, and the pursuit of a corporate society.

The ritual construction of this revolutionary community took place through numerous ceremonies held throughout the island. Foremost were the graduation ceremonies of NPA fighters and the yearly anniversary celebrations of the CPP and the NPA. Large numbers of activists deployed in the area, and trusted *masa*, would gather for the occasion. There, speeches, songs, and skits from the NPA repertoire evoked the image of a community formed in contention, of people uniting under the aegis of the movement to courageously fight their common enemies. The initiation rites, where activists became candidate CPP members and pledged lifelong allegiance to the movement, were smaller, more private affairs. So were NPA marriage ceremonies. The new party members took their oath of allegiance by placing their hands on top of those

of their comrades, the pile of hands resting on a text of Mao Zedong, each holding a firearm in the other hand. The communist flag, draped around their shoulders, united marriage partners. Both symbolized the connectedness of activists and their shared service to the movement and the *masa*.

The social ties that upheld this sense of community among activists were newly forged. All full-timers were part of a "collective," a group of some five to eight people who shared the same work, such as organizing, within a designated area. They came together for task assignments, assessments, and criticism/self-criticism sessions, as well as for informal gatherings. The collective became the activists' new peer group, and resembled the group of friends (*barkada*) that is so central to Philippine social life. Within their own collective, activists developed relations of mutual aid and of social and emotional succor. The movement leadership also encouraged this behavior.

Ties of interdependence were extended to the trusted *masa*, and to the movement at large. Full-timers depended on villagers for food, shelter, and moral support, reciprocated by assistance in household chores, for example. Each activist was, moreover, socially dependent on the movement. The organization provided full-timers with a small monthly allowance to cover costs of soap and the like, and, when the income from "revolutionary taxes" improved, it also provided allowances for full-timers' children (who were mostly left in the care of close relatives) and for widows of fallen comrades. At a more emotional level, activists depended for their sense of self-worth on the achievements of the movement and their own contributions to it, such as a successful mobilization of villagers for a rally in the city, or a successful collective action against a planter. In a sense, activists depended on the movement and its subgroups as a survival unit. They had little else to fall back on: they had left home, with just a knapsack containing some clothes and a blanket, and contact with their families had become largely sporadic.

What about particularism? It could be that all this discourse and performance of community was just a smokescreen that masked the "real" relations of clientelism and personal favoritism that possibly formed the social body of the movement. My own research, although

limited in scope, does not support such a view. There were surely instances of favoritism and personal loyalties between people of unequal status in the NPA hierarchy. Some examples are part-time activists who favored close relatives in the allocation of land reclaimed from planters, married couples who held key positions in party committees and were thus well positioned to secure privileges for themselves, and village NPA leaders who recruited support among their kin and friends and who expected the latter's support when they had trouble with their revolutionary superiors. However, many (former) activists I know did practice and express commitment to a generalized category of "oppressed people" rather than an individual leader, and did adopt the ethos of sharing and sacrifice for the common good. Social pressures to conform to this ethos and commitment were strong.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this wider commitment, and of the limited influence of personalistic leader-follower ties, was the manner in which full-time activists in Negros realigned after the movement split in 1992-1993. Conversations with people who were then in the movement, including its allied legal organizations, suggested that activists were expected to make their own decisions based on the extensive underground seminars and discussions about the conflict. Moreover, these activists did not follow a respected leader as a matter of course. Clustered realignments were rather the result of group pressure and group consensus than of quasi patron-client bonds. Like full-timers, part-time activists in Hacienda Milagros strongly resented having to take sides. They expressed a primary commitment to the movement as such, and not to specific persons in it. Without this commitment, taking sides would have been a rather simple exercise in "following the leader."

Several practices within the NPA helped counter particularistic loyalties: First, the regular transfer of individual full-timers to other areas of operation did not allow for the development of stable ties within their collectives and within other NPA networks of control. Second, social control by means of criticism/self-criticism sessions within one's collective was intense; overcoming this hurdle required a dominant influence within the collective, by means of a conjugal leadership, for example. Third, the movement's discourse fostered commitment to the "principles" of the movement, not to individual leaders. Following Maoist

strategy, this served to retain people's commitment in case leaders would be killed or jailed. As a side effect, at least, this strategy also weakened the notion that political commitment should always be linked to a person. These factors contributed to the development of the movement as a predominantly corporate political organization rather than a movement based on personal loyalties.

### **Disillusionment: Demise of the Revolutionary Community**

Several former activists from San Juan and Hacienda Milagros described their notion of an ideal community, of "communism" as they understood it, as follows:

"I perceived communism as a spiritual ideal—*komunal*, sharing, forming a true community. I read about it in Church texts of Vatican II, the theology of liberation—like Christ with his disciples, sharing."

"People sharing the same intentions and wishes."

"People helping each other, understanding each other, and relations between one another are close."

"No more owners, no more workers; all work according to their capability and receive according to their needs."

A key theme is "sharing" in the sense of mutual help, social and economic equality, personal closeness, and shared understandings. These activists believed the movement was striving to realize this ideal. Meanwhile, the movement tried to provide a glimpse of this ideal community in the villages and haciendas it controlled, and in the social sphere of the movement itself.

Apparently, activist commitment depended on a regular reenactment of such an ideal, liberated community, both among full-timers in the movement and in NPA-controlled areas. The activists needed living proof that the movement was indeed what it claimed to be: a community of equals, vastly superior to *burgis* society, striving for the genuine liberation of the poor. Moreover, they needed an assurance that the sacrifices they were asked to make—the physical risks, the poverty, the neglect of their own families, the anxiety—were all positively useful to the struggle.

Stories of disillusionment among former activists in San Juan and Hacienda Milagros centered around two themes: (1) the feeling that sacrifices were not equally shared, and (2) the perception that leaders failed to act according to the principles and aims of the movement, and got away with it. The first suggested distinctions, inequality, and favoritism; the second implied that the individual sacrifices had been "useless." These critical narratives may be colored by the specific source and situation: they come from ex-full-timers who left the movement by choice or force of circumstance, and, at the time they were made, the movement's aura of righteousness and irrepressible power was fading under the impact of the movement's decline and leadership conflicts.

### 1. Distinctions: Inequalities in sacrifice

I have heard numerous tales of resentment among former full-time activists about superiors at the section or district level who enjoyed some luxuries, however minimal, which the rank and file had to forego, such as a good supply of cigarettes. Rumors about some district and provincial leaders who were able to rent a house in Bacolod City, send their children to good schools, and employ housemaids, were told with indignation as the former activists pointed out that the income from "revolutionary taxes" extracted from planters and others was not equally shared.

These former activists recounted that, when they were still in the movement, they felt that their superiors failed, at times, to consider their interests and acknowledge their sacrifices. Some resented, in particular, that the movement had ignored their medical needs. The movement's own mobile medical personnel could handle simple cases, but serious ailments required professional help. Some recounted bitterly that they were denied such help even though funds were available: "they chose to buy extra bullets instead," or "they did finance the purchase of an electric fan" for some movement leader who operated in the legal sphere, "aboveground." Former (mobile) full-timers were also painfully aware that the movement failed to help support their children, who were usually cared for by close kin. They considered the movement's monthly financial allowances "for the dependants" as too small (and eventually these were stopped altogether as the movement's "tax"

income declined). They said that the children of their superiors received higher allowances, which they resented, and they felt that their total devotion to the movement should be matched by adequate child support. This perceived gap between the professed ideal and the lived reality was described concisely by a former activist: he hinted that the activists themselves were excluded from the "people" whom the movement was expected to "serve."

## 2. Leaders deviating from the "principles" of the movement

"I was ashamed toward the *masa* about the promises that were broken." This statement by a former activist from Hacienda Milagros can stand as an example of the disillusionment felt by several activists from Milagros and San Juan about policies and actions of their superiors in the movement, which they felt were running counter to the interests of the poor.

It centered in particular on two major changes. The first concerns a decision by the regional movement leadership in 1987 that people in NPA-controlled areas should cut their ties with nongovernment organizations (NGOs) that were not sympathetic to the line of the movement. The background to the decision was the collapse of the ceasefire negotiations between the Aquino government and the NPA; the NPA opted for a more confrontational approach and an expansion of the armed struggle. The decision threatened to undermine the efforts of small farmers and workers involved in several government-supported land reform projects in San Juan and in the surroundings of Hacienda Milagros. In the perception of the activist cited above, the regional leadership sacrificed the immediate interests of the poor for those of the armed struggle. In San Juan, NPA efforts to thwart the government's land reform project were met with protest by the local secretary of the movement's party branch, all the more so as mobile NPAs began to confiscate the project's carabao without adequately compensating the duped farmers. Not all full-timers perceived these policies as a breach of movement principles, however; some supported them as a necessary step in the intensification of the struggle.

The nationwide split of the movement in 1992-1993 formed a second and major source of disillusionment among activists, and produced



doubt about the sincerity and commitment of the leadership. The split into the faction of CPP leader José Maria Sison (the “reaffirmists”) and the faction opposing Sison (the “rejectionists”) concerned matters of strategy and leadership. It materialized in Negros in 1993, when the Negros Regional Party Committee sided with the rejectionists, and all people connected to the movement, down to the village and hacienda level, were expected to take sides. The two factions staked out their own territories on the island, trying to avoid armed confrontation. The split was carried over to legal mass organizations, such as left-wing labor unions, resulting in a competition for membership. Overall, the split weakened the movement considerably.

For many activists and former activists I have talked with, the split signified that the community of the movement had collapsed, and that leaders were betraying the broad aims of the movement to further their own personal agenda. This made their own sacrifices in the movement seem useless, they said. Moreover, as all activists were expected to take sides, the conflict was carried down to the level of each collective, which ruptured the sense of sharing, unity, and mutual aid that had been so carefully cultivated. A former NPA fighter from Hacienda Milagros recalled that the members of his collective “began to distrust one another, and I feared I might be shot by one of my comrades”; this prompted his exit from the movement. In NPA-influenced villages and haciendas, the sense of community that local activists had sought to forge and maintain also disappeared as mobilizers from rivaling factions tried to convince residents to take their side. “They no longer greet me when we meet on the road,” said an activist about two former comrades from Hacienda Milagros who sided with a rival faction.

In short, actual practice began to diverge markedly from the discourse of revolutionary community. The social foundation of this community, developed so painstakingly, fell apart as the movement split and solidarities were redefined. For many of the former activists, these experiences contributed to their eventual decision to “lie low” or formally surrender (other conducive factors were the increasing presence of government military in their localities and the opportunity to avail themselves of government amnesty). Looking back, most of these

ex-fulltimers stressed that they had lost commitment to their leaders, and not to the movement as such, nor to its broad emancipatory aims. Several became active in the legal sphere, as union organizers or leaders of cooperatives. As they were involved less and less in the discourse and social networks of a national movement, however, their circle of identification appeared to narrow again.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

This article is inspired by an initial sense of wonderment. In a society where fluid personalistic ties and networks form a major basis for individual identification and commitment, thousands of young women and men left home to sacrifice for the welfare of a broad category of people, most of whom they would never come to know personally. Apparently, they developed a sense of belonging and commitment to two types of imagined communities: a nationwide community of the poor and oppressed, from which the rich and powerful were excluded, and a community of revolutionaries (the movement as such).

These new “we-feelings,” which reached far beyond personalized networks and local communities, were painstakingly cultivated by the CPP-NPA. Cadres spent considerable time on cultural work that linked—among villagers and other prospective members and supporters—established commitments to a wider community. Moreover, they created new social ties—between activists and villagers, and between activists from the level of the village up to the national level—which produced actual interdependencies that promoted a sense of connectedness. The cadres followed a model of popular mobilization that resembled that of the “brotherhood”: an organization presented as a community of equals, in which the affection and commitment inherent in familial bonds were (re)directed to a much wider category of people.

Since the NPA evoked the image of a better, post-victory society, one of a sharing and caring community writ large, the credibility of the NPA depended on the enactment, in real life, of such envisaged solidarities, on however small a scale. Such solidarities could be based on preexisting ones, but could also be newly constructed in the course of

mobilization. A weakening and breakdown of these actual solidarities (for reasons discussed above) widened the gap between image and reality, and contributed to the disillusionment of a sizeable number of NPA activists from San Juan and Hacienda Milagros.

The brief exploration of this process suggests a few additional points. First, among the villagers studied, collective identities that transcend local communities were already salient before the arrival of NPA cadres in their midst. These identities concern those of nation, class, and religious community. For decades, popular mobilizers other than the NPA (agents of the state, unions, peasant organizations, and religious leaders) have tried to include villagers into wider units of belonging. NPA cadres could build on these wider “we-feelings” and, at the same time, redefine the boundary between “we” and “they.”

Second, political units of belonging are linked to models of political mobilization. The “we-feelings” generally perceived as the essence of Philippine politics—loyalties focused on primary groups and on networks of patrons and fellow dependants—only persist because these are constantly reproduced and confirmed in political mobilizations along clientelist lines. Other forms of political mobilization—if viable—may produce other loyalties and collective identities, inspiring very different political commitments and actions. As the present case suggests, this does require a certain fit between the image of the envisaged community and the reality of social ties.

## Notes

1. By 1988, the NPA had counted some 24,000 full-time cadres nationwide and controlled or influenced about 20 percent of the country's villages and urban neighborhoods (Jones 1989, 8). The decline of the movement set in as the Aquino government launched a concerted counter-insurgency drive coupled with an amnesty program; as the restoration of electoral democracy won middle-class support for the government and strengthened the position of provincial elites; and as the movement split over issues of strategy and leadership. In the course of the 1990s, territorial control and influence dwindled, and the number of guerrilla fighters and other full-time activists dropped significantly. In recent years, however, the various factions are regaining influence and manpower. On the CPP-NPA see, for example, Abinales 1996, Chapman 1987, Jones 1989, Rocamora 1994, Rutten 1996, 2001, Thompson 1998, and Weekley 2001.

2. See Anderson 1991.

3. The research concerns the rise and decline of popular support for the revolutionary movement CPP-NPA from the perspective of people in two communities in Negros Occidental. Based on my earlier fieldwork among hacienda workers in 1977-1978, I revisited the province for extended periods in 1992, 1995, and 2000. I owe much of my understanding of developments in one of the two research localities, the upland village in southern Negros Occidental, to John Wiersma, who has done research in the village since the 1970s. From 1992 to 1995, the research was financed through a grant from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

4. For a critical discussion of the linguistic turn in social history and in the study of collective action, see Berlanstein 1991.

5. Tilly (1998, 217-23) makes a strong case for a relational analysis of political identities: a political identity is defined as "an actor's experience of a shared social relation"; its creation involves a "selective fortification of certain social ties and divisions at the expense of others," and its validation depends on interactions with other people. Political identities change "as political networks, opportunities, and strategies shift."

6. In the Philippine Revolution against Spain, for instance, the nation was imagined as a family of equals, children of the Motherland, siblings, and hence comrades-in-arms. Consider, for instance, how General Alvarez of the Philippine Revolutionary forces interrogated a suspected traitor in 1897: "Do you realize that you are a Filipino, . . . a son of the Philippines, our Motherland? . . . Do you realize that one who betrays one of his race, or a kinsman, a brother or a comrade, is a traitor to the honor of the native land?" (Alvarez 1992, 130).

7. Parallels can be drawn with eighteenth-century revolutionary France. Lynn Hunt (1992, xiv) argues that the French revolutionaries who aimed for a political order based on *fraternité* produced a "break in the family model of politics," as they tried to "imagine a polity unhinged from patriarchal authority," a polity in which their "political parents," the royal couple, were replaced "with a different kind of family, one in which the parents were effaced and the children, especially the brothers, acted autonomously."

8. A trailblazer in spreading these new ideas was journalist-publisher Isabelo de los Reyes, who had spent time as a political prisoner in Barcelona's Montjuich jail in the company of Spanish anarchists in 1897 (Scott 1992; Kerkvliet 1992).

9. An analysis of the rise and decline of support for the CPP-NPA in Hacienda Milagros is provided in Rutten (1996, 2000). On the CPP-NPA in Negros Occidental, see also Berlow 1996, Da-anoy Satake 2001, and Duño 1993.

10. Just as geographic borders may symbolize the distinction between a national "us" and a foreign "them," as Thongchai Winichakul discusses in *Siam mapped* (1994), so do the tiers of the "pyramid" symbolize the dividing lines between social classes within the nation.

11. Iletto (1986, 6) argues that both liberal and left-wing nationalist writings on Philippine history "proceed from the same construct of Fall-Darkness-Recovery, or Triumph" (respectively, conquest by Spain, the age of Spanish domination, and the period of the independence struggle leading ultimately to a liberated nation), "where there is a necessary development from a point in the past to the present and everything in between is either taken up in the march forward, or simply suppressed." See also May 1987.

12. On labor unions in Negros Occidental, see McCoy 1991.

13. For an overview of the history of the Catholic Church in Negros Occidental, see Sa-Onoy 1976.

14. See O'Brien 1987 for a personal account of the development of Basic Christian Communities in the uplands of Negros Occidental.

15. For a discussion of these recent changes, see Rutten 2001.

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