Breaking Free through Oppositional Peasant Politics in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

KMP is a peasant movement which draws its strength from local struggles. One example began in 1995 in Batangas when a property company seized land for a tourist development, with government backing. Local peasants blocked the development with human barricades. They formed an organization and allied to the national KMP. They were subject to bribery, intimidation, and selective murder. They responded by taking their case to the people at the local, national, and international level through demonstrations and networking. As a result, they were able to retain control of the land. The strength of the movement comes internally from the experience of struggle, and externally from its linkage with broader radical movements.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, two developments can explain the negligible attention given to peasant politics and movements. First, the remarkable popularization of the concept of civil society from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s overwhelmingly put the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) at the forefront of society’s dealings with the state. This phenomenon overlooked a major political-historical force in the course of societal reproduction and transformation—social movements. Moreover, peasant politics and movements have rarely been a topic of civil society literature.

Second, “social movement theory has predominantly analysed social movement organizations from a reform perspective, emphasising movement participants’ demands to be recognized by, and incorporated into, the dominant culture” (Fitzgerald and Rodgers, 2000: 573–92). In the 1990s, the question of rural political mobilization has likewise slipped down the agenda within peasant studies. Scholars have shifted
their focus towards "new social movements" emphasising urban politics and investigating organizations such as human rights, environmental, gender, and ethnic movements. And as the "everyday forms of resistance" paradigm (Scott, 1985) dominates the field of peasant or rural studies (Fletcher, 2001: 37–66), the tendency to lose sight of the frequency and force of open peasant movements or collective action is becoming a dominant practice (Starn, 1992: 92).

Peasant politics encompasses issues of class, gender, ethnicity, human rights, environment, and rural political participation. These issues continue to represent a variety of important and interrelated concerns not only in the Southeast Asian region but elsewhere as well.

In general, peasant politics includes the political behaviour of peasants, their political culture and identity, political economy, agrarian reform and rural development, mobilization, organization, ideology, history, nationalism, agency, social structure, collective struggle (armed and unarmed), and resistance, protection of the rural base, and other issues that concern the rural society and population.

The Southeast Asian milieu offers a rich terrain for exploring the dynamics of oppositional peasant politics and movements. In the Philippines, the axis of mainstream peasant politics seems to be the issue of agrarian reform and rural development focused on the implementation of the 1987 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). At the same time, peasant politics is also concerned with structural change within which the implementation of the revolutionary agrarian reform programme of the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People’s Army (CPP-NPA) is one of the key steps towards a socialist society.

One interesting typology categorizes peasant struggle in the Philippines into three political poles. As Franco (1999: 1–4) puts it:

The outright opposition (far left) is represented by KMP (Maoist-inspired, CPP-influenced) that perceives CARP as inherently limited and implementation is impossible... The second pole, uncritical collaboration (center-right) is exampled by Agrarian Reform Now! (which is of a pro-Ramos social democratic orientation). It relies on formal-legal means to move lands and lays exclusive emphasis on the state for implementation. And the third pole, critical engagement (left-of-center radical reform pole), is represented by Partnership for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development Services. It does not only rely on formal-legal means to move lands but more importantly on organized social pressure from above and below to drive land
reform.\(^3\)

In contrast, I use a realist view of civil society and differentiate peasant societies into those that cooperate with the projects of the state and those that challenge these projects (Jimenez, 2002: 12–14, 85–90):

*Members* pertain to those working within the rules of the game set by the state and collaborate towards the achievement of reforms. They believe that the policies and programs of the state can work toward the benefit of the people or their constituents. Empirically, they are likewise the more endowed organizations that "possess the political and economic resources necessary to influence institutionalized political decision making and who therefore can work to realize their interests through standard political channels" (Smith, 1991). They generally eschew the use of armed struggle to achieve their goals.

On the other hand, *challengers* refer to those organizations that contest the exercise of power by the state and dominant groups in society. They act on unaccepted and neglected social issues and primarily work outside of the conventional decision-making process. They have the capacity to initiate and sustain extra-parliamentary political and collective action in their struggle to oppose the state and powerful groups in society and implement their version of social reform and change. In the course of its political dealings with powerful social forces, the political contestation may evolve into the radical perspective of challenging the *status quo*, tilt the balance of power and consequently work to establish a new order. These groups are oftentimes the less endowed ones and those who have become exploited and oppressed by other social forces.

This paper aims to achieve four goals. First, it calls for a renewed attention on peasant politics and movements. Second, it demonstrates and conceptualizes how a challenger peasant movement can contribute to the strengthening of civil society. Third, it underscores the significant role of ideology in the struggle of social movements. Fourth, it stresses the importance of local struggle as the basis of national and international actions of social movements. This third objective has two corollaries: it shows the important role of national organizations and international linkages in providing a broader and higher venue for local struggles; and it shows how national state policies are effectively contested at the local level not primarily through lobbying and formal-legal means or patronage politics.

**THE POLITICS OF KMP**

The KMP (Peasant Movement of the Philippines) clearly stands in
opposition to the Philippine government and its programmes. Its oppositional politics, carried out together with a host of other militant organizations, are a real challenge to the state.\textsuperscript{4}

The political pedigree of KMP has so far been shaped by four historical junctures in the history of peasant movements in the Philippines: (a) the era of the PKP (referred to as the old Communist Party of the Philippines), HUKBALAHAP/HMB (People’s Army Against the Japanese/People’s Army for Liberation), and PKM (National Unity of Peasants) in the 1940s and 1950s; (b) the founding of the CPP and NPA in the late 1960s; (c) the establishment of the AMGL (Central Luzon Peasant Alliance) and its provincial chapters in the early 1980s; and (d) splits in the 1990s within the CPP and NPA that reverberated throughout the peasant movement, NGOs, and people’s organizations. Established on 24 July 1985, this peasant movement is said to have an effective leadership over a total of 800,000 rural people comprising roughly 9 per cent of the Philippine agricultural labour force with six regional and fifty-five provincial chapters (as of the Fourth KMP National Congress in 1993).

KMP is a national democratic organization believing that “imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and feudalism are the triumvirate reasons for Philippine underdevelopment and subservience to foreign interests, especially the US. Under such political orientation, the movement envisions national freedom and democracy as the starting stage that will rid Philippine society of these social maladies.”\textsuperscript{5} Another principle that distinguishes the KMP from member peasant societies is the application of class analysis in society. It proposes that Philippine society is in a state of prolonged semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism—a diagnosis which other movements perceive as anachronistic. A third contentious issue that separates KMP from other peasant movements is its political standpoint on revolutionary armed struggle. It openly respects armed struggle as the primary and most effective means of achieving agrarian reform and societal transformation. Danilo Ramos perceives this as “an embodiment of a high commitment and strong principle in advancing the peasant struggle and societal transformation as a whole”.\textsuperscript{6} An undated KMP brochure summarizes its agenda as follows:

It advocates and struggles for a revolutionary agrarian reform program that will abolish all forms of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation and implement a free and equitable distribution of land and resources to the tillers. It espouses a rural development program complementing agrarian reform that encourages agricultural
cooperation among farmers and enhances local production and productivity. Agricultural productivity, however, is perceived to go hand in hand with sustainable agriculture and environmental protection. It likewise seeks to promote the rights and welfare of peasant women and eradicate all forms of discrimination against women, and the recognition and respect for the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples.

On a broader scale, the KMP stands for economic nationalism and freedom from foreign domination and control, particularly by the U.S. and Japan, and a nationalist industrialization program that counters imperialist globalization. It works for the establishment of a free, democratic, and independent nation that respects the people’s political and civil rights and pursues an independent foreign policy based on mutual interests. It strives for the realization of a comprehensive and progressive social policy that ensures the provision of basic social and public services for the people. In the cultural realm, it seeks to promote a nationalist, pro-people, and scientific culture.

The same brochure describes the KMP’s strategies and program of action as follows:

KMP carries out painstaking organizing and education work among the peasants as an important requisite in building a strong and mass-based organization. To fulfill its vision and mission, the movement employs various forms of struggle ranging from simple legal protests and lobby work to massive defiant actions such as nationwide strikes and land occupation. Alliance with other sectors of society especially with workers, students, and progressive sections of the middle class has been instrumental in generating popular opposition to government’s anti-people policies and programs.

The movement respects the option of armed revolution being waged by an increasing number of peasants who believe that this is the only means to redress grievances and achieve genuine people empowerment. KMP likewise struggles for tactical and temporary reforms that could bring economic relief for the people through programs and projects and contribute to actual socio-economic upliftment of the peasants. Livelihood, health, disaster relief, cooperative-building, and technology-development projects are some of the projects being undertaken.

KMP challenges the Philippine state and other dominant social forces through oppositional politics. This process of contesting dominant powers, however, does not exist in a social vacuum. The movement launches its oppositional peasant politics at different scales—the local,
national, and international levels. Political contestation is initiated and sustained through specific means and processes—political organization, advocacy and education, and mobilization. The political actions of KMP are orchestrated through extra-parliamentary, non-legal, and formal-legal arenas. The nucleus, however, of all political opposition launched by KMP on the national and international scales is anchored on the movement’s struggles at the local level. This paper focuses on KMP’s oppositional politics at the local level. The struggle of UMALPAS-KA (People’s Association Against Land Destruction, but literally translatable as “Break Free!”), a hacienda-wide organization, epitomises the struggle of KMP at the local level in contesting land conversion and challenging government and real estate developers.

LAND APPROPRIATION

Land conversion practically refers to the alteration of land use from agricultural to non-agricultural purposes such as residential, industrial, commercial, and other uses. But for the Philippine peasants, it specifically refers to “an irreversible process that can mean a permanent loss of the soil’s capacity for agricultural production” (Nantes, 1992, cited in PIAF, 1998: 9). And in the Philippines, where at least 43 per cent of the population (31.3 million) and 63 per cent of the poor (16.9 million) traditionally depend on the sector for their livelihood (NEDA, 1995: 3), misguided land conversion becomes virtually a crime.

Land conversion has become the instrument of the unscrupulous to legally grab lands and perpetrate brute harassment and coercion among the farmers, fisherfolk, and indigenous peoples, and make profits from destroying the ecological balance of the country. Today, peasants and peasant-based formations continue to build organizations and networks, advocate their concerns, and carry out collective action to fight the land conversion rush.

A very classic, concrete, and on-going case is the experience of Hacienda Looc farmers in Nasugbu, Batangas. The hacienda includes a lush stretch of coastline and agricultural land located southwest of Metro Manila and northwest of Batangas City covering a total land area of 8,651 hectares. It consists of four villages namely Calayo (929 ha), Papaya (1,205 ha), Looc (4,521 ha), Bulihan (1,393 ha), and a part of Cavite, Patungan (602 ha). Productive land (rice, coconut, mango farms, and other crops) covers more than 5,000 ha, while the mountainous parts comprise the remaining more than 3,000 ha.
Political tension in the hacienda intensified when peasants discovered that in January and June 1996, the Department of Agrarian Reform Regional Adjudication Board (Region IV) had issued three Partial Summary Judgements cancelling several certificate of landownership awards or land deeds. The Department of Agrarian Reform claimed the farmers had voluntarily returned the land and the Department’s village, municipal, and provincial offices testified that the lands were not suitable for agriculture and were declared as a tourism zone. The certificates covered around 3,432 hectares all located in Calayo and Papaya.

Later investigations revealed that the Manila Southcoast Development Corporation (MSDC) had mysteriously acquired rights over the whole hacienda. The MSDC then forged a joint venture with the Fil-Estate Properties Inc. (FEPI) to develop the hacienda into a world-class tourism and leisure complex. The project, dubbed the Harbortown Golf and Country Club, was to include two marinas, four golf courses, a resort hotel, beach resorts, and residential and agropolitan subdivisions. It would eventually evict 10,000 families.

To make things worse, the peasants and the residents were victimized by what they refer to as a series of unscrupulous manoeuvres. First, coercion was primarily used to lure the peasants to give up their lands and possessions. Second, they were led to believe that it would be better to sell their land rather than let government take it away from them. Third, what is even more painful for them is that their very own village leader Max Limeta, whom they considered as their “father”, was the very first person to convince them to capitulate.

Fourth, not a single hearing or consultation with the peasants and communities of the hacienda was undertaken by government or the FEPI-MSDC to inform them of what was really happening. And fifth, members and sympathizers simply asked “why do they have to use military pressure and violence against our communities?” With these things at the back of their minds, the peasants and residents concluded that they would never be part of the “development” being undertaken.

**Naissance of a Challenge**

The peasants of Hacienda Looc could not “comprehend” the overwhelming flow of events. In their view, this was a land grabbing spree by real estate developers and businessmen in connivance with government. As early as 1993, Hacienda Looc, particularly Calayo and Looc, was swarming with real estate brokers, speculators, and land
buyers offering “large amounts of money” for land. Even before the cancellation of land deeds, FEPI had actually started dredging activities in the last quarter of 1995 without even bothering to secure an environmental compliance certificate.

The situation alarmed the peasants and made them reflect on what was happening. Earlier in the 1970s, the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) had attempted to take over their lands. The PTA invoked Marcos’ Presidential Decree No. 1520 of 28 November 1975 declaring the whole of Nasugbu as a tourism zone. After two years of dredging and drilling preparations for construction, the PTA was already claiming the land in 1979. The peasants, however, led by a certain Jose Bautista, spontaneously formed a barricade to block the PTA and nothing was heard from the agency afterwards.

Guillermo “Gemo” Bautista (45 years old), the son of Jose Bautista (now 81 years old), took over leadership of the peasantry of the hacienda in the struggle for land and livelihood. In the third quarter of 1995, Gemo and four other villagers decided to organize themselves. The initial stage was secret and the original plan was to launch an armed resistance against the land grabbing by FEPI-MSDC and government.

The militant instinct demonstrated by the organizers coheres with the history and peculiar characteristics of Calayo. In the 1940s, the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (People’s Army Against the Japanese) reached Nasugbu via Cavite and many Japanese soldiers were killed during armed encounters with the Huks. This was one of the reasons why the hacienda was one of the very few places that were not physically controlled by Japanese forces. The villagers are used to carrying arms, and the place has a reputation for the number of guns.

The 1950s witnessed the rise of the Mananalasap—armed elements who rob local villagers of their livestock, crops, and other possessions. In the 1960s, however, these bandits started to disappear one by one. The villagers observed that not a week or a month would pass when they would not hear a gunshot during supper time, signalling that another Mananalasap was dead. This experience explains the inborn activism and vigilance of the villagers to defend themselves against perceived enemies.

After careful deliberations and consultations with members and other peasant movements, the organizers opted to employ legal and extra-parliamentary means of struggle. Armed resistance, however, remained an alternative. Each of the organizers painstakingly and clandestinely recruited another three or four members and upon reaching a total of twenty, they decided to form the UMALPAS-KA (People’s Association Against Land
Destruction-Calayo) on 4 September 1995 and contest land conversion.

From Calayo village, the organization expanded and was able to cover the whole hacienda and some parts of Cavite. Today, UMALPAS-KA is estimated to have 40 per cent of the residents as members and another 35 per cent as sympathizers. UMALPAS-KA is now a hacienda-wide association of peasants and fisherfolk coming from the villages of Calayo, Bulihan, Papaya, Looc, an additional nearby village, Balaytigue, and Patungan of Cavite.

It operates under a simple structure where the leaders of each village chapter make up a Leaders’ Council that meets on a monthly basis. The leaders in turn take responsibility in disseminating information to their respective villages. During monthly meetings, the leaders collectively affirm their determination and plan their strategies and tactics to counter the plans of their political opponents. Regular consultations and tactical planning and assessments are held depending on the intensity of the day-to-day situation.

The organization chiefly relies on indigenous forms of communication to facilitate the flow of information throughout the hacienda and monitor the activities of enemies. Trusted couriers ensure that important messages between the chapter leaders are delivered safely and on time. Fish vendors and those who have to work in other villages serve as casual messengers and sources of information. This type of communication system becomes very handy when modern means of communicating with the national and provincial chapters fail, that is through an old Nokia cellular phone.

UMALPAS-KA also possesses simple “enterprise tools” (Smith, 1991) to facilitate its day-to-day activities. A ball pen, few pieces of paper, and a mobile meeting place are enough to formulate plans of action. It was only in August 2000 that the movement formally set up its office in Calayo to serve as the official meeting place and a reception area for visitors. Committees administer planned and emergency activities. A committee is comprised of several members or leaders who oversee the preparations, and they in turn appoint those who are free and willing to perform the task on hand. This explains an aspect of the political-organizational dynamics of UMALPAS-KA. The leaders and members not only rely on their formal organizational ties but equally on kinship or familial ties to organize actions and manage day-to-day affairs.

The organization gained support from other movements. The leaders realised that they needed external help to boost their campaign against powerful enemies. Gemo Bautista spearheaded the search. Through one
of his cousins, they were able to contact a university that had been actively involved in social action since the 1980s. From here they were put in contact with SENTRA (Center for Genuine Agrarian Reform), an NGO that provides legal and para-legal services to peasants.

In turn, SENTRA coordinated with the Public Interest Law Center (PILC), an established law firm, and PILC became the legal counsel for UMALPAS-KA. PILC also discussed the matter with the KMP. Consequently, the movement received organizational support from KMP and later became one of its local chapters. Finally, the KMP national office coordinated with its provincial and regional chapters in Southern Luzon endorsing UMALPAS-KA to SAMBAT (Batangas Peasant Movement) and KASAMA-TK (Association of Peasant Movements in Southern Luzon). The reinforcements provided by the larger support organizations helped the fledgling challenger become stronger.12

Provincial, regional, and national mobilizations are planned at their respective levels. Like other local organizations, UMALPAS-KA accommodates these broader plans in its own programme of action, but the decision to participate is taken locally and depends on local circumstances. Peasant leaders from the local, provincial, and regional chapters are consulted in the KMP national office for tactical briefings and last minute instructions on national events.

TRAINING AND ADVOCACY

The life-and-struggle of UMALPAS-KA is not simply “to expose and oppose” as many mainstream activists bemoan of radical social movements.13 Engaging in concrete consciousness-raising activities constitutes an important building block of the organization for political action. In coordination with its network of peasants and other social forces, the leaders and members of the movement undergo popular and formal education and training. The leaders and members have taken several educational courses on Philippine society and its revolutionary tradition.

They begin with basic courses for peasants, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, women, urban poor, and youth. These courses are taught and discussed by full-time peasant organizers and activists from the provincial and regional offices of SAMBAT and KASAMA-TK. At the intermediate level, they undergo a higher level of educational training by taking activist courses and studying revolutionary agrarian reform. These political courses are coupled with various training programs to develop
the skills of the movement’s leaders and members, such as mass campaigning and planning administration, instructors’ training, propaganda/speakers’ training, para-legal training on agrarian cases and human rights, research and documentation, and the art of negotiation.

These activities are carried out to augment the movement’s politics. The leaders and members collectively thresh out the learnings they have absorbed and translate them into political advocacy and action where the day-to-day battle of building influence and gaining support is fought. They won the support of other communities through painstaking and brain-drying discussions with barrio folks. They rallied support most effectively by demonstrating to other residents and villagers the disastrous impact of land conversion and by disclosing the real intent of government and real estate developers. They have brought their problems to public attention and created a dialogue among themselves and between peasant and non-peasant forces. They have likewise been exposed to the complexities of social and class analysis that have become a very useful tool in explaining their grievances and mustering local support.

Advocating a peasant discourse was the backbone of all consciousness-raising activities of UMALPAS-KA. One basic propaganda, for example, opens by asserting that “Hacienda Looc, just like the Philippines, is rich in resources but the (Filipino) people are poor”. This fundamental statement is followed by a class analysis of Philippine society, emphasising the core contradiction between the ruling and the ruled classes, between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited. The peasants obviously belong to the ruled classes and comprise the majority of the population while the landlords and/or capitalists comprise the ruling class. This discourse epitomizes a basic propaganda line of the national democrats and the CPP-NPA. Movement members and leaders accept this discourse because it reflects the reality of Southern and Central Luzon’s landlord-dominated society.14

The affirmation of collective identity and calls for collective political action are emphasized through various cultural media like songs, poems, and skits. Singing with the guitar and composing songs have become part of the daily life-and-struggle of the peasants. The song “Tano” (name of a peasant), for example, depicts how a peasant lost his land through usury and the tyranny of a haciendero (landlord). It shows how the peasant reacted to the situation by joining a peasant movement and ultimately the armed revolutionary movement.

In the office of UMALPAS-KA, the lyrics of the song “Buhay at
Bukid” (Life and Farmland) is posted on the wall to constantly remind leaders and members of the exploitation that peasants experience. The song states that someday the land and the farmers will be liberated with the workers as their partners, and that the people, not only the few, will reap the benefits from the land.

Another peasant song always played in gatherings and meetings is “Dapat Bawiin” (Reclaim!). It reasserts the principle that land is for the poor tillers and not for the rich and “we” have to reclaim it. Lastly, the song “Kamagong” was adapted and renamed “Hacienda Looc” by the culturati of the movement to depict how government and real estate developers tried to grab their lands, and destroy their livelihood and the environment, and more importantly how the people of the hacienda fight to win back their land and life.

During mobilization and confrontation, the leaders and members never fail to chant slogans promoting their peasant identity and their unity as a class, and hence as a social force in society. Slogans with stirring rhymes state “the peasantry as a class is now fighting for liberation” and “the peasantry is a liberating social force”. Gemo Bautista claims, “the peasant discourse, however, is always linked to the struggle of other social forces like the workers, indigenous peoples, urban poor, women, students, professionals, health and cultural workers, scientists, and even government employees”.

Consequently, the movement has imbibed the political language and slogans of the national democratic movement, socialists, and communists: “no to imperialist globalization and plunder, oust US-Estrada regime, and down with feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism”. For UMALPAS-KA members and the hacienda residents, however,

[I]t may be part of a whole ideology and there’s nothing wrong with it. We, as a movement, cannot just be docile but continually search for answers and explanations as to why is this thing happening to us. My son, Siting Derain declared, was a Philippine Army soldier and was killed in an ambush launched by the NPA. But that does not bother me. We are advancing a very legitimate struggle and in the final analysis, this ideology (Communist as they say) is a mere instrument to fight for our legitimate rights. After all, no one is more to be blamed but the government and greedy capitalists.17

**CONFRONTATION**

The road to organizational and political consolidation has not been
easy and without bloodshed as the resolve and commitment of UMALPAS-KA was immediately tested. In December 1995, FEPI and cohorts started bulldozing the 216-hectare entrance of Harbortown in the uplands of Calayo. In the second quarter of 1996, a second attempt to bulldoze was confronted by a spontaneous reaction from the movement. Instantaneously, twenty of its members rushed to the area and formed a human barricade.¹⁸

With rain pouring very hard, other members soon brought food, cooking utensils, shelter materials, and extra clothes. For three days and two nights, around fifty people camped out in the area to guard the mountain. With a little help from an acacia tree that unexplainably fell and blocked the path of the bulldozer, the operations were forced to stop. Consequently, all "development" activities of FEPI-MSDC ceased by the last quarter of the year.

This confrontation was just the beginning. After the successful human barricade, the movement and hacienda residents (especially from Calayo) started to experience both violent and non-violent harassment. Leaders were lured with money. Gemo was offered 1-3 million pesos directly by Mayor Apacible of Nasugbu. Today, the leader is being teased with a "name-your-price" bid. None, however, gave in to the economic coercion having learned from their experiences and others as well. Eventually, the iron fist was used to compel the farmers to vacate their lands.

The first salvo of harassment involved no fatalities. Leaders, members, and sympathizers were directly threatened with death, physically and verbally bullied around, and their houses stoned. A daily parade of armed men (village militia) and indiscriminate firing of guns put them under constant pressure. In 1946, FEPI allegedly created a parallel organization of peasants, SAMA-CA (Association of Peasants in Calayo or "Join!"), headed by the village captain. This pro-land conversion organization consisted of only around 150 members but was backed by an armed group of village militia and several migrant farmers and fisherfolk loyal to Limeta.¹⁹

Then harassment moved beyond intimidation. In December 1996, two SAMBAT peasant organizers were ambushed and killed by armed men believed to be MSDC security guards. Two months later, Francisco Marasigan and Maximo Carpinter (members of UMALPAS-KA) were gunned down by FEPI-MSDC security guards on the evening of 13 February 1997 in the village of Papaya. The guards were apprehended by the Nasugbu police but eventually released without trial. In November of
the same year, another active member was brutally murdered by the same security force. And more than a year later, two more members, Terry Sevilla and Roger Alla, were likewise executed by armed men on 4 March 1999. Coming from a fiesta celebration, they were intercepted by “men in uniform” on their way home to Calayo.

The daunting presence of these armed goons and mercenary security guards, however, is not the only imminent danger that the residents of the hacienda have to live with. Since the land conflict, their once peaceful place has become militarized by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Not a month passes in which the army or the police do not conduct reconnaissance operations in their villages. In May 1997, the hacienda was used as a training ground by a company of soldiers from the Regional Special Action Force. The villagers clearly recall that the place was never used as a military training ground in the past. And on 21 August 2000, at least sixty members of the Philippine Army conducted their usual reconnaissance in Hacienda Looc and concentrated their forces in the Calayo area for at least three days.

As a result of this violence, many of the peasants have ceased cultivation, and their economic status has deteriorated. Former middle peasants have become lower-middle or poor peasants, the lower-middle ones have become poor, and the poor even poorer.

The movement has survived five years of struggle mainly through credit. The members are in debt for tens of thousands of pesos. Yet they maintain that a lot more would be lost if they surrender their cause.\(^{20}\) Donations from researchers, sympathizers, and supporters are far from sufficient.

The whole ordeal has created a dialogue between members, non-members, and the pro-conversion members who support the FEPI-MSDC project. It created bitter antagonisms between families who were ranged on different sides or caught in between the conflict.

Yet the leaders Philip de Guzman and Gemo Bautista stress that “we are able to demonstrate in theory and practice that the state and its apparatuses are there to defend the interests of the landlords and capitalists and that the only way to hold on to our lands is through a protracted struggle based on unity and militant collective action”. As a result, several former members of the now-defunct SAMA-CA are already apologizing to the organization and more and more non-members are giving their sympathy and support to defend Hacienda Looc from government and real estate developers.
BEYOND LOCALITY

Violent harassment failed to shatter and silence the movement. The members and residents have seemingly become more politically aware, determined, and militant as they have proven in practice the real intent of government and real estate developers. Every time FEPI-MSDC and government agencies make a move, the movement files petitions and counter-appeals to expose the unscrupulous manoeuvres.

On 3 March 1999, for instance, UMALPAS-KA made use of the radio station (ABS-CBN 6:30 News Flash program) to expose the dredging activities in Maniba Creek, Balaytique and the adverse effects on the properties and crops of the residents. At the burial ceremony for two of the murdered members of the movement (Sevilla and Alla), they marched the streets of Calayo to expose and condemn such atrocities and tried to get the sympathy of the people. This was dubbed as the Calayo Death March.

On grounds that Nasugbu Mayor Raymund Apacible is as guilty as Max Limeta in the crimes committed against them, the movement took their protest to the municipality. In February 1997, hundreds of residents of Calayo marched to the town hall to condemn the harassment and the collaboration of local government agencies with FEPI-MSDC. On 25 March 2000, the movement members stormed into the municipal hall and the headquarters of Nasugbu Philippine National Police to protest the assassination of their comrades. And on 4 September 2000, the movement celebrated its fifth anniversary by engaging the municipal council in a 3-hour dialogue on their grievances. Leaders Nardo Sevilla and Poling Villanueva described this as a “reaffirmation that only death can make them give up and vacate their lands”.

At the national level, UMALPAS-KA, in coordination with KMP, SAMBAT, and KASAMA-TK, has also conducted many pickets, demonstrations, camp-outs, and vigils in the offices of the Department of Agriculture (DAR) and the Supreme Court. In April 1997, the movement spearheaded a 3-day demonstration dubbed the DAR Camp-out. On 15 April, participating peasants burned copies of CARP books, land deeds, and Supreme Court and DAR decisions to condemn their pro-landlord and pro-developer stance. And on 16 April, the activity culminated in an action where peasant leaders and members locked the gates of DAR with an extraordinarily big padlock and fenced the gates with big bamboo shanks.

On 6 March 1997, protesters trooped through the streets of Ortigas,
the central business district of Mandaluyong, and held a demonstration in front of the FEPI office, waving placards bearing the statements “Fil-Estate – Landgraber, Murderer!!!” and “Hey, There’s Blood On Your Stocks!” Over 14–17 April 1998, the movement joined with local\textsuperscript{21} and national\textsuperscript{22} organizations to launch the “Oppressed Batangas Folks Manila Camp-Out” in front of DAR to highlight DAR’s six years of nakedly pro-landlord decisions under the Ramos administration and Garilao bureaucracy. The 800-strong delegation condemned the massive cancellations of land deeds, land grabbing and scams, and human rights violations in Hacienda Looc, Hacienda Roxas, Patugo, Lian, Rosario, and San Juan.

In coordination with KMP, SENTRA, and PILC, the movement launched a national press conference on 17 August 2000. People from the broadcast and print media in Manila witnessed how the UMALPAS-KA is committed to the struggle. They published several articles in the newspapers and broadcast the grievances and experiences of the movement over radio.

One of the latest engagements of the movement in national protest actions was during the 2000 October Peasant Campaign. Together with other peasant organizations in Southern Luzon, UMALPAS-KA participated in the October 16 nationwide signature campaign against agro-chemical transnational corporations. On 28 October, the movement took part in the celebration of the Peasant Week by marching into Mendiola.\textsuperscript{23} And on 28–30 November, the members took part in the People’s Caravan 2000\textsuperscript{24} that culminated with a demonstration and vigil in Mendiola.

The movement also presented its case at the international level. In 1998, Xavier Renard of Terres de Hommes (a French NGO) in coordination with KMP visited the Hacienda Looc peasants. After several days of living with them, he decided his organization would adopt this struggle for land reform as a major international campaign. Upon his return to France, a group of French NGOs and POs met to forge common actions and initiatives for Philippine concerns and the meeting led to the formation of the “Philippines Collective”\textsuperscript{25} On 17 April, this grouping delivered a letter to the Philippine ambassador in Paris “questioning” the government’s economic policies that have caused more hardships and misery to the peasants. The letter also expressed the support pledged by the French support organizations to the cause and demands advanced by the Hacienda Looc peasants.\textsuperscript{26}
In the first week of August 2000, Filipino Americans living in the US went to Calayo. They represented the League of Filipino Students, Los Angeles chapter, New Patriotic Alliance (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan) International, and GABRIELA International. Having learned of the movement’s experiences, they launched a series of educational and fund raising campaigns in December 2000 to gather support for the movement in the US.

In the same month, the hacienda was chosen as one of the sites of study for the International Fact Finding Mission conducted by international organizations such as La Via Campesina and Food First International to assess the state of agrarian reform in the Philippines and other parts of the world. The occasion was a big eye opener. Members of the movement were simply overwhelmed by the fact that they are not alone in their struggle. Non-members were dumb-founded to witness the kind of support the organization is getting.

At the opening of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development on 5 December 2000, UMALPAS-KA constituted 25 per cent of the 500-strong delegation that staged a demonstration in Tagaytay City to confront DAR Secretary Horacio Morales with their agrarian problems. The delegation was not permitted to enter the premises of the conference site and by the order of Morales, the security guards moved to disperse their formation. Negotiations ensued and three delegates intervened to avoid violent confrontation. The UNORKA (National Coordination of Local Autonomous Rural People’s Organizations), however, was permitted to enter the premises because of its “pro-CARP” stand.

On 5 July 2000, the Office of the President affirmed the rights of FEPI-MSDC to develop the land. As a result, UMALPAS-KA and its network conceded that they may never win the battle within the formal-legal institutions of the state. They concluded that the use of extra-parliamentary and non-legal means should be intensified. This was clarified by a concluding remark at the movement’s fifth anniversary:

This is the land where our forefathers have lived through countless generations. Without any help from government, we have managed to develop and sustain our economic activities and live a happy peaceful life. This land is ours, our life. We are here because of the land and the land is here to be made productive and provide our necessities—not to fulfill the whims and caprices of the rich, landlords, real estate developers, and government. To take it away from us is synonymous to extinguishing the very basis of our
existence. Hence, we rather die fighting and get buried in our lands and let future generations realize that their land has been purified and nurtured by valiant human blood and not with poisonous fertilizers used for fairways and greens.\textsuperscript{29}

**CONCLUSION**

Peasant politics thrives in Philippine society. Movements may naturally grow old and perish (Ahrne, 1998: 91) but KMP has thus far withstood the test of time and disproved the peasant adage of 1980s—that there are two ways of killing an organization, with repression or with money (Edelmann, 1999: 188). The experiences of UMALPAS-KA and other peasant movements in Southeast Asia (Assembly of Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast, Assembly of the Poor, and the Federation of Northern Thai Farmers in Thailand) are testimony that peasant politics in Southeast Asian societies will continue to play a significant role in this age of globalization.

**Civil society and oppositional peasant politics**

At the base of UMALPAS-KA’s oppositional peasant politics were three fundamental concepts: pedagogy, socialization, and organization. First, participants gained education both in the course of struggle, and from the deliberately pedagogical approach of the established radical movement organizations. As Chandhoke (1995: 34) puts it, “civil society possesses a pedagogic character since it educates the individual in the values of collective action”. The pedagogic character of civil society thus rests on the capacity to construct or develop a particular kind of consciousness. Second, civil society is also “the sphere where the individual learns sociability, the value of group action, social solidarity, and the dependence of his welfare on others” (Pelczynski in Keane, 1988: 364). Socialization is a route to political mobilization. Through sociability and social action, actors develop a certain degree of collective self-confidence. Third, organization harnesses individual interests into a broader collective will and transforms individual initiatives into collective action. To challenge powerful structures and processes naturally necessitates a significant degree of unity. A challenger movement like UMALPAS-KA builds a strong civil society by educating, socializing and organizing.
Local struggles as the nucleus of opposition

Struggles at the local level are the "microfoundations that transform individual agents into a collective actor that can engage in social activism" (Buechler, 2000: 149). This level is likewise the site where oppositional movements directly encounter and contest the exercise of power by the state and dominant forces. Local peasant struggles are a critical representation of bigger agrarian and social processes.

Local peasant struggles are the basis of KMP's oppositional politics. These struggles, however, may always be perceived as insignificant and parochial, and easily dismissed as isolated cases of rural unrest if their cause and nature are not projected and elevated at the national level. This is where the role of national organizations comes in. KMP with its affiliate national organizations transformed the local struggle of UMALPAS-KA into national opposition, a broader and higher level of contestation. National opposition also demonstrates how local opposition is reciprocated by national actions and vice versa. At the local level KMP is able to confront its political opponents face-to-face through UMALPAS-KA, while at the national level the movement confronts the source of policies that engender local conflicts. By participating at the national level, local peasant movements are able to compare their experiences and learn from each other.

The oppositional politics of KMP is not confined within the local and national socio-historical structures. Beyond these, a larger and still broader formation exists. Under globalization, nations, countries, and societies begin to realise the interconnections of their concerns and problems. KMP's international linkages add an international dimension to the local and national peasant struggles of the movement. Local contestation is linked to global processes and structures, and vice versa. Projecting a local peasant struggle to the international level and contesting the dominance of international structures becomes a way to advance local and national peasant interests.

At the local level, the failure of real estate developers and government to evict the residents of Hacienda Looc and convert it into a tourist spot concretely manifested how national policies could be resisted. Through direct action UMALPAS-KA challenged and defied the Philippine state and big business and all their apparatuses—FEPI-MSDC, the military and police, the national, regional, and local agencies of DAR, the Supreme Court, and the Office of the President.
Ideology

It is very tempting to dismiss the role of ideologies in analyzing present day movements. "Ideology has become an orphan in social movement theory" (Buechler, 2000: 200). Yet some of the most thriving movements in the present day are intensely ideological. The struggle of UMALPAS-KA demonstrated how the development of an insurgent consciousness and the belief in a programme for national liberation helped its leaders and members persevere and retain control of their lands.

KMP thrives through class politics. The movement addresses peasant concerns and grievances, directly and indirectly, through class-based organizing, mobilization, and pedagogy. Ideology remains important not only in the emergence and development of contemporary social movements and civil society but in their analysis as well. Ideology has not vanished in Philippine politics and society, and in others as well.

Notes

1 This paper draws on my dissertation “KMP (Peasant Movement of the Philippines): Strengthening Civil Society through Oppositional Peasant Politics”. Sections of this paper have also been presented in two international conferences, see Jimenez (2001; 2002).

2 Starn (1992: 91) states that “peasant mobilisation has received little attention in the literature on new social movements” and notes the “greater visibility of urban politics” in the work of Touraine, Gilroy, Laclau and Mouffe. Buechler (2000: 45–51) considers Castells, Touraine, Habermas, and Melucci as the four major theorists of this paradigm.

3 Ananias Loza of PAKISAMA (a member organization of Agrarian Reform Now!) wrote to Franco that AR-Now! is not pro-CARP, not anti-Morales, and not anti-ERAP, but acknowledges the serious limitations of CARP and has always maintained a “critical engagement” position vis-à-vis government. See Political Brief, December 1999, Letters: 21–3.

4 Hewison (1997: 10) critically observes that “constestation is not always a challenge to the state especially where an expanded political space is considered a legitimate part of political activity”.

5 Interviews with KMP leaders, Rafael Mariano and Danilo Ramos, 17 August 2000.

6 Interview with Danilo Ramos (KMP President), 28-30 November 2000.

7 For the background see OPP (2000); PILC (2000); KMP’s website, http://www.geocities.com/kmp_ph/strug/looc/looc.html; and UMALPAS-KA etc.
Based on 1999 population of 72.7 million. In 1999, the poor population comprised about 36.8 per cent of the total population or 26.8 out of 72.7 million (1999 Philippine Statistical Yearbook, NCSB: 2–25).


The DAR presented hundreds of signatures as evidence. These signatures were collected in a meeting of residents from the four villages called by then Mayor Rosario Apacible (mother of incumbent Mayor Raymund Apacible) in July 1995. The residents did not know their signatures would later be used as an evidence that they have waived their land rights. In front of the Lipa City DAR officials, the mayor told the people not to sell their land deeds during the meeting. Ironically, payments for the sale of land deeds were transacted in the Mayor’s house. Instalment payments ranged from P5 to P30 thousand (see the PILC Petition to the Court of Appeals, 4 September 2000: 50).

Prices ranged from P 80,000 to P100,000 per hectare and for two years many plots were bought by government officials from the village up to the regional level, including the village head and the Mayor. Details cannot be determined. What made them suspicious was the mode of payment. Villagers were given cash advances in instalments. The first payment for example was 10 per cent of the offered value and amounted to P10,000. As a cash advance, this automatically became a loan to the peasants with interest compounded monthly. The second payment was not so straightforward. The peasants were ridiculed and even slapped in their faces. Hence, almost none of them was really paid the right price for their land (Interviews with Calayo and Looc residents and those who transacted with the Mayor, August 2000).

UMALPAS-KA, however, was likewise affected by the latest split within the revolutionary movement. In 1997, the Jose Magdangal faction known as Kilusang para sa Pambansang Demokrasya (KPD, Movement for National Democracy) declared its independence from the CPP-NPA. Unknown to them and to the KMP, peasant organizers and leaders Frank Pascual and Ed Mora of the national office belong to this faction. In December 1998, UMALPAS-KA started to notice major changes in planning and conducting mobilization activities. organizers Ana and Abel (faction members) later succeeded in convincing four members of the Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Kabataan sa Calayo (Association of United Youth in Calayo), the youth arm of the movement. On the other hand, Gemo Bautista, the first one to notice that there was something going on, talked to the leaders and was able to win back the youth members who eventually changed the name of their organization (Interviews with Calayo youth activists, August 2000).

As Tarrow (1998: 3) said, “social movements do not solely contend... they build organisations, elaborate on ideologies, socialize and mobilize constituencies, and members engage in self-development and the construction of collective identities”.
Landholdings in Southern Luzon are concentrated in the hands of fifty-three landlords/corporations who control at least 276,410 hectares (see KASAMA-TK Manifesto, “Landlords in Southern Luzon”: 1–2). In Central Luzon (Bulacan, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija), land is concentrated in the hands of thirty-nine landlords/corporations who control at least 70,876 hectares (see AMGL – Central Luzon Peasant Alliance) “Manifesto on Landlessness”, 1998).

This song was created in 1988 by the Gintong Silahis Cultural Band, an armed cultural group in Southern Luzon. It recounts the experiences of Kamagong villagers in the 1960s when they reclaimed their land from a despotic landlord named Platon through armed means (Personal communications with former members, 1989).

National democratic forces believe that the Estrada administration is just another lackey of the US government. This formulation has been consistently used since the Marcos regime without qualification. Others would say that it is already archaic.

This was the determined reaction of three peasant women in Calayo when they heard about the July 2000 decision of the Office of the President. This opinion is similar with the perception of Atty. Dominique Misa saying that “it should not be allowed to muddle the true purpose of their campaign. Ideology is just a means, a tool to get whatever they want to achieve” (CyberDyaro September 1999).

The barricade was the initiative of UMALPAS-KA and only later (on the second day) did KMP (national office) and SAMBAT (provincial office) come to know of the situation.

This private army has at least fifteen high-powered rifles (M-16, M-14, baby armalite, shotguns, M-1 Carbine, M-1 Garand, Springfield, and Uzi) and around eight to ten short firearms (caliber .22, .38, .45, and 9 mm). Conrado Sevilla knows their fire power because he was likewise victimized by their atrocities. On 9 June 1999, these goons (as the people have learned to call them) entered his house by force and threatened to shoot and kill him together with his daughter Nenet. The para-military group is further supported by the 134-strong FEPI-MSDC security unit in the hacienda. The people simply ask one question: Where do they get their firearms?

Rutten (2000: 215–52) refers to this practice as high-cost activism.

DAMBA, the Association of Farm Workers in Batangas; HABAGAT, the Foundation of Batangeño Fisherfolks (Batangeño means people from the province of Batangas); and KMMLT, the Small Fisherfolks Movement in Lake Taal.

SAMBAT, KASAMA-TK, and KMP.

Mendiola refers to the historical place where activists march and demonstrate their disappointment and resentment with government. It is the place where Malacañang, the office of the President, is located.

The campaign, “Caravan 2000: land and food without poisons” was an international and national mass mobilization, education, and direct action to demonstrate how poor countries stand against (imperialist) globalization. In
particular, it was a protest against the domination and control of TNCs over their lives and the disastrous effects of pesticides, agricultural genetic engineering, land conversion, food insecurity, and environmental destruction. Similar activities were held in India, Bangladesh, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia.


26 See also Philippine Peasant Update, June 1998: 5, "French partners pledge support for Looc peasants". KMP Research Desk: Quezon City.

27 National Alliance of Women's Organizations in the Philippines.

28 La Via Campesina (LVC) is an international movement of small and middle peasants, agricultural workers, rural women and indigenous people in more than sixty-three countries in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe. The main aim of LVC is to develop the solidarity and unity in diversity between rural organizations in order to promote economic relations based on equality and justice, the defense of their lands, food sovereignty, and a sustainable agriculture based on small and middle producers, http://ns.rds.org.hn/via/what-is.htm; http://ns.rds.org.hn/via/theme-agrarian.htm. Foodfirst Informations and Actions Network (FIAN) is an international human rights organization working for the right to feed oneself and with members in more than fifty countries. FIAN aims to contribute in the implementation of International Bill of Human Rights. It works in particular for the right to feed oneself of persons and groups threatened by hunger and malnutrition (http://www.fian.org/).

29 General consensus of the UMALPAS-KA Leaders' Council held in the first week of September, firmly supported by its members during the celebration of the movement's fifth anniversary.

30 As Buechler (2000: 200) aptly puts it, "the social movement theory of the 'end of ideology' is premature, and it limits our ability to conceptualise the larger role of ideas in social activism".

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