

Women Discourse in the Philippine Revolutionary Movement

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Abstract---For many years that the Philippines has been colonized, there has been many stories of struggles. From ethnic groups who struggled and fought against Christianity brought by the Spaniards, Filipinos who revolted against these foreign colonizers, and the continuing parliamentary and armed struggle against foreign and local domination over the majority of the Filipino people. This paper attempts to look at the history women discourse in the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its national democratic revolution.

Keywords---Communist Party of the Philippines, National Democratic Front of the Philippines, revolution, sexual struggle, women's movement

I. INTRODUCTION

THE history of the Philippines can be described as a long history of struggle to form a national identity, and to achieve genuine liberation from exploitation, injustice, and poverty. Historians have time and again pointed out: the Philippines is a resource-rich country but majority of Filipinos remain poor. Discussions on Amado Guerrero's Short Course on Philippine Society and Revolution (Maikling Kurso sa Lipunan at Rebolusyong Pilipino/MKLRP) which former, current, and future activists took up/take up/will take up, typically use such analysis as a springboard.

On the 26th of December 1968, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was established under the leadership of Amado Guerrero or Jose Maria Sison. Such reestablishment was grounded on the integration of the universal theory of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism (MLM) with the concrete situation and concrete practice of the Philippine revolution (Sison, Krisis 83). The CPP has described Philippine society as semifeudal and semicolonial.

Meanwhile, the New People's Army (NPA) was established on the 29th of March 1969, on the anniversary of the establishment of the older guerrilla group People's Army Against the Japanese (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon/Hukbalahap).

On 1971, the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the National Democratic Front, the CPP's political arm, was created in Metro Manila and it started its own underground activities hence (Sison, Rebolusyong 85). From 1970 to 1972, new mass organizations such as the Katipunan ng mga Samahang Manggagawa/KASAMA (Union of Labor Organizations) and Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Manggagawa ng Pilipinas/PAKMAP (National Movement of Workers in the Philippines) among workers, Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan/MAKIBAKA (Independent Movement of New Women) among women, Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan/SDK (Democratic Association of Students) and Katipunan ng Kabataang Demokratiko/KKD (Union of Democratic Youth) among the youth, Kapisanan ng mga Gurong Makabayan/KAGUMA (Association of Patriotic Teachers) among teachers, Christians for National Liberation (CNL), League of Editors for a Democratic Society (LEADS), Panulat para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan/PAKSA (Pen for the People's Progress), and the Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista-Arkitecto/NPA (United Progressive Artists-Architects) thrived (Sison, Rebolusyong 45).

On the 24 of April 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF), aimed at uniting the mass organizations that were banned in 1972 under one clandestine umbrella group, was established (Sison, Rebolusyong 85).

Primarily, the NDF aims to promote the unity and cooperation of all patriotic and progressive classes, sectors and forces in society, so that they can effectively struggle for national freedom and democracy, and for them to help bring down the abusive and exploitative ruling class. It promotes the revolutionary class line of the united front. (NDFP 20)

II. WOMEN AND THE PARTY

According to Ka1 Salud, who became a member of a mass organization in 1968 and a Party cadre from 1971, women have been represented when the Kabataang Makabayan/KM (Patriotic Youth). The said organization had a women's committee that organizes young female students, workers, professionals, and those who belong to other sectors. Other mass organizations have their women's committees too. Issues on the role and importance of women in the national-democratic struggle

¹ "Ka" is a shortened formed of "kasama" which means "comrade."

were incorporated in Amado Guerrero's *Lipunang at Rebolusyong Pilipino/LRP* (Philippine Society and Revolution), one of the most basic works that Filipino activists study. Women are classified as among the special social groups.

"Women comprise 50% of the Philippine population and they belong to various social classes. Hence, majority of Filipino women belong to the oppressed and exploited classes. But aside from class oppression, they also experience men's oppression. Male revolutionaries should all the more endeavor to pave the way for the broadest participation of women in the democratic people's revolution. They should delude themselves into believing that men's participation in the revolutionary movement is enough. Truly, such attitude is feudal, and the old influence of family and the Church on women will only strengthen if they will be excluded from the revolutionary movement. Women can take up general and special revolutionary responsibilities. This is an effective means of liberating women from the clutches of feudal conservatism and from the decadent bourgeois stereotype of women as objects for mere entertainment." (Guerrero 146)

It is clear from Guerrero's analysis that women belong to the exploited and oppressed classes in a semifeudal, semicolonial social system because women are in various sectors of our society such as workers and peasants. But Guerrero emphasizes that aside from being women-workers and women-peasants who are exploited as part of their respective social classes, they experience extra oppression and exploitation at the hands of men. On the other hand, women need to wean themselves away from the feudal view that the revolution is for men only. Women are duty-bound to become active in engaging and being in solidarity with the people's revolutionary struggle.

"The articulation of the women's perspective in social movements, particularly the Left, emerged from the actual engagements of key leaders and articulators with radical social movements such as the old Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), the social democratic and national democratic movements and the Communist Party of the Philippines." (Santos 114)

One of the primary women's organizations that participates in the national-democratic struggle is the *Malayang Kilusang Makabagong Kababaihan/MAKIBAKA* (Independent Movement of Modern Women).

"MAKIBAKA, in realizing the necessity of linking up the active participation of women in the national-democratic struggle, clarified the correct orientation of women's involvement. The unity and/or revival of women's councils and women's organizations within other national-democratic endeavors should be given particular emphasis and attention. The organization aims to establish other women's organizations in the countryside and in the cities. This is the first time in the history of women's organization that an ideological framework has been adopted to guide women as they struggle for their rights." (Corpuz 117).

Ka Esperanza recalls that in the time of the First Quarter Storm (FQS), there were many women activists. Women activists from various mass organizations decided to hold a summit. Women who participated in the summit resolved to

protest against beauty pageants. They held a picket in front of the Araneta Coliseum where the coronation night of the Binibining Pilipinas or Miss Philippines Beauty Contest to express their dissent on the commercialization of Filipino women. This protest action made headlines. The issue became popular in the mass media and various sectors issued commentaries.

From this point hence, women activists became more enlightened on their social responsibilities. Women have been already participating in the revolution for a long time. As early as the years of the Katipunan, women's contributions to the revolution have been mentioned.

Lorena Barros became the chairperson of MAKIBAKA. According to Dr. Judy Taguiwalo, an activist during the First Quarter Storm and currently a UP professor, she remembers Lorena was the first woman to speak in a rally then. When Lorena spoke before the rally she said, "Women are not only meant for beds, for kitchens, but they're also meant for the struggle!" Because of MAKIBAKA, women started having a venue to experience various means of actions. Women in other organizations with male members find it difficult to engage in full time activist work because they need to go home or they can't sleep in the offices because their parents won't allow them too if there are men around. But because members of the MAKIBAKA are all women, it was easier for them to engage in activist work on a full time basis. In other organizations where there are men, when the mimeographing machine breaks down, for example, male members are expected to repair it. In contrast, Taguiwalo added, in MAKIBAKA, women will do the repair. She further stated that female students then who were not allowed by their parents to join *Kabataang Makabayan* (Patriotic Youth) or other militant groups, were allowed to join MAKIBAKA because this is exclusive for women, and hence, parents find it easy to accept their daughters' participation in this organization.

MAKIBAKA was officially established as a national women's movement on the 12th of March 1972, as they launched their First National Congress. In this occasion, Jose Maria Sison gave a message:

"It is very important for the women's liberation movement to recognize the line of thinking that the authority in politics is the backbone of other systems of authorities. In bringing down such authority, we begin to bring down all other systems. Hence, political struggle, active participation in the national-democratic revolution is the key chain in the noble task of liberating women. Basically, the movement for the liberation of women is a struggle against the political authority of foreign imperialism, domestic feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, if Filipino women are to be liberated and if gender equality is to be achieved." (Sison, "Mensahe" 313)

Meanwhile, women behind MAKIBAKA ensured that their analysis of the women's situation is aligned with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. At this time, the women's movement is strong in Western countries. The second stream of feminism in the United States and Europe is on its peak. Thus, MAKIBAKA made it clear that:

“[W]omen, like men in a semifeudal and semicolonial society, suffer intense exploitation and oppression. They suffer from the oppression and imperialism and the joint dictatorship of the comprador bourgeoisie and landlord classes. Added to this, women suffer from the oppression of religion, the clan and family.” (NDFP 10)

As per the opinion of Ka Ligaya, a member of the CPP Women’s Bureau starting in the 1970s, the Party’s recognition of women has probably influenced too by the Parties in Vietnam and in China. In their Parties, even then, the importance and role of women in the era of launching a people’s war for national freedom against the aggression of US and other colonial powers has been recognized. The CPP swiftly reciprocated such actions of communist parties in other countries.

When Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law, MAKIBAKA and many of its members went underground. Its relationship with the Party was further strengthened. It is among the organizations that joined the National Democratic Front

In general, MAKIBAKA remains strongly connected to the national-democratic movement of the CPP and its allied organizations (Elumbre 249). When MAKIBAKA went underground, many women like Barros decided to participate in the armed struggle, the field of engagement that women broadened inside the movement.

Sex and Sexuality, and the Party

The Party recognizes that cadres do not only love their country, but also love their fellow humans. Even the CPP founder Jose Maria Sison met his wife Julie de Lima while working in a mass organization. Many comrades and activists develop romantic relationships because of their work in the movement. This is not unique to the reestablished Party. Even in the old Partido Komunista ng

According to Ka Esperanza, even during the height of activism in the 1960s to the 1970s, the influence of Church doctrines on activists and cadres of the CPP remains strong. During those times, premarital sex, class and sex love were still non-issues. Supposedly, two comrades’ love for each other is supreme. Many comrades had unplanned pregnancies which affected their work in the movement. Cases of infidelity were also reported. Moreover, the Party then had no clear political context for developing relationships. Some had purely sexual relations, devoid of any politics. Some had purely political relations, devoid of personal involvement. According to ORS, the issue of gender relations is an issue of class. This clarified the difference between bourgeois and proletarian perspectives in gender relations. Because of the semifeudal and semicolonial character of our society, one perspective holds that women are under the economic power of men. Women are considered weak because they typically don’t engage in production. As per the bourgeois perspective, gender relations are biased towards men. This reflects the capitalist exploitation of relations of production where women are treated as commodities and dehumanized under capitalism. Bourgeois gender relations is competitive, abusive, divisive and decadent.

On the other hand, proletarian gender relations is dialectical, there is contradiction between the two genders

that lead to unity. It is liberative, progressive, and suits the objective conditions of society.

Love inside the Party is said to be free, free from economic considerations, religious judgment, and pressure from society to offer oneself to his/her beloved. This is because two activists or cadres who love each other should still offer themselves and their relationship to the struggle, to the revolution. For Ka Salud, marriage under the Party is important. Supposedly, this is the movement’s alternative to the backward, reactionary, and anti-women perspective in our society. Institutions are built to establish order in a society. The same applies to the Party. The marriage institution is meant to preserve the order in the Party. The CPP implements monogamy too, primarily to protect women, and to oppose the bourgeois perspective that somehow condones men’s infidelity. Generally, marriage under the Party is not viewed absolutely, that it is something that won’t change.

Marriage, as per the Marxist perspective, is another contradiction, a unity and struggle of the personal and the political interest of the two persons involved. As a contradiction, unity inside marriage is relative, hence, when the decision to part ways is mutual, divorce is permitted. Meanwhile, those involved in a relationship can be also separated when a party commits infidelity. If infidelity is proven, those involved in the relationship will be separated, and the unfaithful spouse will be dealt with disciplinary action (DA). There are instances when ending the original marriage and then remarrying are permitted, like when a cadre and his/her spouse fail to communicate in a span of five years. Based on the movement’s experience, there are husbands and wives who work in different areas which are typically far from each one. Hence, when communication is missing, either side can ask for a divorce.

On the second part of ORS, experiences of husbands and wives or those involved in relationships within the Party that should be studied by every activist and cadre were discussed. First among these is the desire of some husbands and wives to tilt their relationship to a merely personal level. There are instances when those involved in a relationship avoids conversing about politics when they are together, or when they avoid discussing their ideological and political differences. Some think that the Party is too interventionist when it comes to relationships. There are cadres who are too shy to share their problems on relationships to their unit or collective. But for Ka Esperanza, a cadre needs to share the status of his/her relationship (even prior to entering into one) to his unit. This is supposedly needed because the movement struggles, the Party wages a revolution. If a relationship fails, this might lead to one of those involved in the relationship to lie low, betray the movement, or even aid the enemy. The political and personal basis of the relation must always be ensured, including the issue of security.

The ORS also clarified that the issue with regard to cadres who believe in the concept of free love which wrongly assumes that they can love more than one person, persists. On the other hand, there are those who enter a relationship merely because of the political basis, with no

personal angle. There are cadres who say yes to those who court them merely because they find it difficult to say no to a comrade. In such instances, Party members are entreated to deal with the situation carefully.

Among husbands and wives who are members of the Party, there are problems that still need to be resolved. One of these is the perspective that one of them can engage in full-time work for the movement while the other one will work to support the family. The Party asserts the principle "simple living, arduous struggle" hence it must be emphasized that cadres who marry retain their primary responsibility which is to serve the people. The couple must put their trust on the masses and other comrades, and to their political actions, so as to live.

There are also cadres who would want their spouse to stop working for the movement for fear that something bad may happen to him/her. This is common among male cadres who encourage their spouses to just stay at home and stop participating in the movement's struggle. There are also couples who do not want to work separately. The Party tries its best to let couples engage in the work, or in the same area, but some circumstances demand otherwise. In these instances, couples are entreated to be open to such possibility. Another concern is the tendency of couples to side with each other at all times. Inside the movement, debates or contradictions are unavoidable, and in such situation, cadres are expected to be objective. But there are instances when a cadre sides with his/her spouse, not because he/she is convinced of his/her spouse's point, but rather, because he/she is his/her spouse.

While it is said that as early as 1974, the draft of the document "On the Relation of Sexes" (ORS) was finished, and it was only in 1977 that the document was distributed among organizations under the National Democratic Front (NDF), it took some more years for this document to be recognized as an official Party document. On April 1983, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines approved the document "On Relations Between the Sexes," an improved version of the ORS originally written in the 1970s, which became an important and solid guide of cadres and activists in developing relationships, and/or committing themselves to a married life.

For Ka Esperanza, politics and relationships in connection with the Party should always be of prime importance, and in the revolution's perspective, politics pertains to the relations of the cadres and activists to the masses, and their antagonism towards the enemies. Meanwhile, Ka Salud says that the ORS is very constructive. In her opinion, this shows that the Party is advanced in theory and practice. It is not antagonistic.

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