

The Filipino Language as Academic And Cultural Medium: its Emergence as Intellectual Practice

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ABSTRAK

Di kawasan Asia Tenggara, negeri Filipina seolah-olahnya memberi kesan sebagai sebuah negeri yang masih belum mempunyai bahasa kebangsaan-nya sendiri. Akan tetapi, pemakaian bahasa kebangsaan dalam bidang budaya dan akademik Filipina kini sudah menjadi sesuatu practice yang dilakukan oleh ahli akademik dan budayawan Filipina untuk mengatasi perpisahan ideologi dan kesetiaan intelektual yang sudah lama mengelirukan mereka sebagai kelas pertengahan dalam masyarakat Filipina. Ahli-ahli akademik dan budayawan Filipina diwariskan oleh tradisi intelektual yang dipelopori oleh kaum berpendidikan di zaman kolonial Sepanyol tetapi kemudian tradisi itu dipisahkan kepada dua aliran: reformis dan radikal. Sebab itu mereka kini meninjau ke arah pengalaman rakyat Filipina, iaitu rakyat jelata dan petani, supaya mendapat apa yang boleh digantikan untuk tradisi intelektual yang tersebut. Usaha pembentukan sesuatu tradisi intelektual yang lebih sesuai dengan keadaan masyarakat neo-kolonial Filipina telah berkembang dari pendapatan "serve the people" pada tahun-tahun 60-an ke pelaksanaan "learn from the people" pada zaman sekarang, iaitu melalui pengajian pelbagai bentuk dan penggunaan bahasa kebangsaan dalam bidang budaya selama 20 tahun yang rakyat Filipina perjuangkan menentang pemerintahan Marcos. Kini budaya berbahasa kebangsaan sudah berkuasa dalam bidang teater dan media serta sastera popular. Pada tahun 1988, Universiti Filipina (yang menerima lebih kurang 20,000 mahasiswa setiap tahun di 8 kampusnya) telah menguruskan cadangannya untuk menggantikan bahasa Inggeris dengan bahasa kebangsaan sebagai media pengajaran. Semua ikhtiar ini terlancah daripada dayausaha golongan akademik dan budayawan sendiri serta audience tulennya yang lebih besar diwakili oleh kaum petani dan pekerja di kilang. Apalagi, sambil diingatkan kesilapan kerajaan Filipina dalam persoalan bahasa, kegiatan budaya dan akademik yang berbahasa kebangsaan pada zaman sekarang sedang diarahkan dalam cara yang lebih demokratik serta melibatkan, termasuk semua kawasan di luar ibu negara yang masih mempunyai pelbagai bahasa daerahnya.

ABSTRACT

In the Southeast Asian region, the Philippines gives the impression that it has yet to possess a national language of its own. However, the use of Filipino, the national language, in current academic and cultural activities, has already become an acknowledged practice. Among today's academics and artists in the Philippines, expressing themselves in the national language is a deliberate attempt to overcome the ideological schisms and divided loyalties that have afflicted them as members of a well-entrenched middle-class. Inheritors of an intellectual tradition initiated by the native intelligentsia of the Spanish colonial period which later on was dichotomized into the reformist and radical streams, today's Filipino academics and cultural workers have turned to the experience of the masses, the peasants and workers, for alternatives to this dualistic intellectual tradition. The search for an alternative that answers the needs of neocolonial Philippine society developed from a belief in "serving the people" in the late 1960s to the current view that the nation's intelligentsia should instead be learning from the people themselves, especially through the various cultural forms and practices that emerged in the people's struggle against more than twenty years of Marcosian rule. Theater and popular literature have already become the stronghold of Filipino-language culture. In 1988, the University of the Philippines, the national university, began to replace English with Filipino as its medium of instruction. All these efforts have been made at the initiative of the academics, the artists and their real audience, the largest sector of Philippine society which is found in the country's farms and factories. Furthermore, bearing in mind the government's past mistakes, these efforts are directed at expanding the space occupied by the Filipino language as an academic and cultural medium in ways that are more democratic and participatory, especially for those in regions where various languages, including the Filipino language, are widely used.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent seminar on "Bahasa Melayu Sebagai Bahasa Pergaulan ASEAN" in Riau, there were quite a number of papers which painted a bleak picture of the Philippines. In the entire ASEAN region, the Philippines was the only country which did not need an English interpreter during ASEAN meetings and conferences. This fact, that Filipinos can easily speak the English language with foreigners and even among themselves,¹ gave the impression that the Philippines has yet to possess a national language of its own. Similarly, the continued reference to the country's national language as Tagalog and not Filipino,² and the

institutionalization of Tagalog instead of Filipino in the language departments of foreign universities, present a confusing picture of the language situation in the country. But this is a picture painted by outsiders of a national language situation so intricate and complex that not even all the inhabitants, the Filipinos themselves, can fully comprehend.

The outsider would fail to see the small but important changes that are happening in the academic and cultural fields because these have not attracted international media attention. The University of the Philippines, in particular, has been in the process of replacing the English language with Filipino as the medium for all academic activities since 1988. Even before this shift was made, cultural activities within the campus especially theatre productions and the influential student publication, the *Philippine Collegian*, have been using Filipino for more than a decade. The adoption of this policy of using Filipino as an academic and cultural medium in the university was really a simple matter of formalizing and making official a decision made from below, i.e. a decision made at the own initiative of the various academic departments and student organizations in the university which in turn were responding to the actual cultural practices of the people themselves.

This paper attempts to provide the insider's view of the role and function of the Filipino language in cultural and intellectual activities, especially those within the academe. My discussion focuses on the use of the Filipino language as an emergent practice among academics and artists in their attempt to resolve the ideological schisms and divided intellectual loyalties that have afflicted them as a middle-class group. Of course, as a practice, the Filipino language cannot be separated from the country's historical and political situations; neither can it be considered on purely linguistic and/or bureaucratic terms. But this demands a comprehensive discussion which may be best reserved for another occasion. For this seminar, my discussion will deal only with the catalysts, highlights and dominant concepts connected with the use of the Filipino language among intellectuals and cultural activists.

I have divided my discussion into three parts. The first part, "Dualistic Intellectual Tradition," concerns the two models of practice that have formed the Filipino intellectual tradition. Each model carries different linguistic and social ideologies, forcing generations of Filipino intellectuals to choose rather than combine one, with the other. The second part, "The Search for Alternatives," focuses on the attempts to evaluate, modify and synthesize this dualistic tradition in the face of major socio-political upheavals in the country. And the third and final part of my discussion, "Current Concerns and Directions," briefly describes how the Filipino language as a medium for intellectual activity is being harnessed in dismantling the structures of Marcosian culture.

Three important details. But before I proceed to the first part of my discussion, there are a few historical details about the national language which I have to point out. First, the concept of a national language was introduced in 1898 when the Filipinos who were then fighting for independence from Spanish colonial rule drafted a constitution and chose Tagalog as the language of the new and independent republic called *Filipinas*.

Second, it has taken fifty years for the country's political leaders to officially accept that there exists, in reality and in practice, a national language called Filipino. Since it became a distinct political entity, the Philippines has had three ratified Constitutions, in 1935, 1974³ and 1987. Before the present 1987 Constitution, the two previous constitutions dealt with the question of the national language in this way: that there shall be efforts towards the *development* of a national language. In 1987, exactly 89 years after the concept of a national language was first introduced by the anti-colonial Filipinos, the constitutional provision declared the national language to be already in existence, and it is called "Filipino."

Third, it took twenty years before the national language acquired a name. In 1937, the president of what was then the Philippine Commonwealth declared Tagalog to be the basis of the national language but he forgot to tell the public with what name the national language was to be called. Only in 1959, twenty-two years after that declaration, did it occur to one government official, the Secretary of the Department of Education, to issue a memorandum informing all schoolteachers that the name of the national language was "Pilipino."⁴ But the twenty-two years during which the national language remained anonymous (except for the fact that it was based on Tagalog) had already created widespread dissatisfaction among the people which continues to be felt in certain sectors even to this day.⁵

There are other facts about the national language situation in the Philippines but I have singled out these three details because they reveal the indecisiveness of government efforts. These details also emphasize that today's situation, i.e. Filipino as the lingua franca, has developed in spite of this indecisiveness, proving that much of the development of the national language in the Philippines has been dependent upon the initiatives of the ordinary people at the same time that it has become a distinct socio-cultural practice among the academic and cultural groups.

DUALISTIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

But intellectual activity in the Philippines has been informed by a tradition that has also proven to be problematic especially as far as language was concerned.

Every Filipino student is told that the first group of native intellectuals emerged out of the new Filipino middle class during the 19th century [Agoncillo 1990]. Their presence was felt when they began publishing their views about Spanish colonial rule. This later changed from being a campaign for reforms to a campaign for independence towards the end of the 19th century.

There are two leading figures of these campaigns that have captured the imagination of the succeeding generations. These are Jose Rizal, the famous novelist and the country's national hero, and Andres Bonifacio, who is virtually unknown to foreigners but highly revered by the Filipinos for having initiated the revolution against Spain, probably the first revolution for independence in Southeast Asia.

Jose Rizal. He was born in 1861 and belonged to a wealthy family which leased large tracts of land owned by the Dominican Catholic priests. Rizal acquired a classic European liberal education in Manila's Catholic universities. In 1882, he left for Europe where he became part of a group of Filipino "illustrados" (the highly-educated members of the middle-class) engaged in what has come to be called as "The Propaganda Movement", which was really a campaign for convincing the Spanish parliament to institute reforms in the Philippines. While in Europe, Rizal wrote and published two novels, *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). These two novels, which were written in Spanish, made Rizal unpopular with the colonial authorities in the Philippines but inspired other middle-class Filipinos in the country. Rizal firmly believed in reforms and was not in favor of separating the Philippines from Spain. Until his execution by the Spanish authorities in 1896, Rizal consistently refused to be part of the secret organization which was working for the independence of the Philippines. This organization was the Katipunan and its leader was Bonifacio.

Andres Bonifacio. He belonged to the same generation as Rizal and was also part of the middle class. Bonifacio was born in 1863 but unlike Rizal's land-based economic background, he belonged to a family of entrepreneurs or small businessmen, whose earnings came from making and selling native fans and brooms. He could more correctly be called "lower middle class." Bonifacio never had a university education but learned to read Spanish on his own. He was also a member of a theatre group based in Tondo, a suburb in Manila where he was born. Bonifacio was able to get hold of Rizal's novels (which were banned in the Philippines) and was inspired by them. When he formed the Katipunan, he asked Rizal to be its leader and remained persistent about it until Rizal was executed. Unlike Rizal, Bonifacio did not write novels nor was he engaged in discovering the foundations of Spanish and Filipino cultures.

But he wrote manifestos, political essays and nationalistic poems in Tagalog which were distributed (and translated into various local languages) among the ordinary Filipinos who were then waging a war against Spain. During the revolution, Bonifacio established an alliance with the upper middle-class Filipinos whose large lands had been confiscated by the priests. It was an uneasy alliance, however, which resulted in a struggle for leadership and Bonifacio's death in 1897. Like Rizal, Bonifacio was also executed, not by the Spaniards but by his upper middle class allies.

Models for intellectual activity. In Philippine cultural life, these two men have become models or paradigms against which intellectual activities are pursued and nationalistic commitment is measured. Their understanding and articulation of the Filipino people's problems fall within the liberal humanist thinking of their generation. And yet succeeding generations of Filipinos have been told that these two historical figures represent opposing rather than complementary models of practice. This interpretation could be traced to the publication in 1959 of *Revolt of the Masses*, a pioneering historical work on the Philippine revolution against Spain by Prof. Teodoro Agoncillo. In his well-documented book, Prof. Agoncillo tried to explain why it had to be Bonifacio and not Rizal who could energize the masses into taking action against colonial oppression. Prof. Agoncillo explained it in this manner:

It was perhaps to his [Bonifacio] advantage that he did not have the culture of Rizal whose many-faceted mind generated doubt and fear as to the ability of the people to stand on their own feet... As it was, his [Bonifacio] intellectual shortcomings and weaknesses became his strength (Agoncillo 1959:285).

For Prof. Agoncillo, Rizal had the qualities which Bonifacio did not, i.e. culture, intellect, and the ability to view a problem from all sides by having a "many-faceted mind." These qualities however caused Rizal's indecisiveness and lack of faith in the the Filipino masses. In contrast, Bonifacio, being less intelligent and having a "one-sided outlook", found it easier to take action and free the Filipino masses from Spanish colonial oppression.

It is interesting to note that Prof. Agoncillo glossed over what could be the most obvious difference between Rizal and Bonifacio: language. Rizal wrote most of his influential works in Spanish whereas Bonifacio wrote only in Tagalog. The choice of language reveals the target audience that each man was writing for. Since Spanish was the language of a small group of privileged Filipinos, Rizal's audience was not only limited but also less likely to create a more dramatic impact upon Philippine society of the kind that Bonifacio's masses were able to do when it was urged on

to revolution after having read and understood Bonifacio's political writings.

Be that as it may, Prof. Agoncillo's interpretations i.e. of Rizal as the indecisive intellectual and of Bonifacio as the unintelligent radical, has been transformed into a fundamental assumption underlying any discussion about the Filipino intellectual and his/her activities. Analyses and selection of strategies for cultural development came to be based on this dichotomy. In simple terms, the Filipino intellectual tradition is understood in this way: The Rizal model represents a sophisticated culture, extraordinary intelligence, facility in the colonial (Spanish or English) language and immersion in Western intellectual traditions, all of which result in intellectual activity which is reformist, indecisive and highly skeptical of the Filipino masses' abilities. On the other hand, the Bonifacio model represents unsophisticated or crude culture, limited intelligence and relative ignorance of colonial/Western language and intellectual traditions, all of which result in a revolutionary, energetic but narrow-minded understanding of the Filipino masses' abilities.

THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES

Radicalization and intellectual guilt. The dichotomy of this intellectual tradition increasingly became a problem in the 60s and early 70s, when radical ideas and student activism demanded a reinterpretation of Filipino intellectual and cultural life in more nationalistic terms. Issues on poverty, corruption, and American control of the nation's economy and culture revealed how privileged and elitist intellectual activity could be. And the Filipino intellectual could not avoid feeling guilty for getting paid for thinking while the rest of the nation was illiterate and hungry. This sense of guilt motivated the search for an alternative intellectual tradition and resulted in the publication of a number of influential works by Filipino scholars during this period. Reinterpretation of intellectual practice was either made from a moderate/neutral stance such as that found in Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People* [1960] and *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Traditional Tradition and Literature* [1967] or from a more radical stance that did not hide its nationalistic bias, exemplified in such works as the historian Renato Constantino's *The Filipinos and Other Essays* [1966] and Jose Ma. Sison's *The Struggle for National Democracy* [1967].

The Rizal model of intellectual practice was clearly dominant among the moderate intellectuals. Its representatives viewed Filipino culture as an object of academic scrutiny. The function of the intellectual was to record, preserve and, at certain times, pass judgment on its specific forms and practices. But when judgment was given, it was negative and

pessimistic because colonial culture was seen to have been so effectively integrated into local practices that it was better to accept the bitter reality that Filipino culture is a hybrid culture that was more Western than Asian.

On the other hand, the radical stance exemplified the Bonifacio model and viewed Filipino culture as a problem that needed to be solved rather than an object for scrutiny and judgment. Renato Constantino is credited for having included the intellectual as part of the problem, which he discussed in his article "The Miseducation of the Filipino." Jose Ma. Sison, who was a lecturer at the English Department of the University of the Philippines and later went on to form the *Kabataang Makabayan* (Nationalist Youth) and Communist Party of the Philippines, declared that there was a need for a cultural revolution. Sison, however, already recognized the dichotomy of Filipino intellectual tradition and tried to resolve it by stressing the need for the continuation of Rizal's efforts through what he called as a "Second Propaganda Movement."

Intellectual guilt and the need for an alternative intellectual practice led to the formation of PAKSA (*Panulat Para sa Kaunlaran ng Sambayanan* or Literature for the Advancement of the People) in 1971 [Lumbera 1982; San Juan 1984]. Rallying behind the slogan "Serve the People," PAKSA was a middle-class group that offered an alternative based on two fundamental concepts which continue to be influential until this day. First, that all cultural expressions invariably serve the interests of specific classes. Second, that Filipino intellectuals and artists must direct their activities at the largest and most exploited class in Philippine society: the peasants and laborers. In effect, the Filipino intellectual and artist, who come from the middle class, were to turn away from their usual audience comprising the elite and address those from the lower economic classes of society.

To serve the people meant that culture was to be popularized and elevated. Popularization did not mean vulgarization, however, but referred to the innovations in form and technique and the infusion of traditional cultural forms such as the *balagatasan* (poetic jousts) and *zarzuelas* with contemporary content. But in order for these intellectuals and artists to be understood, they had to express themselves not in English but in the language accessible to and understood by the people. And this was the national language, Filipino. PAKSA was able to publish *Sigwa* or Storm (1972), a collection of stories written in the Filipino language by young writers. One critic made the observation that

... in many of the stories in the collection, a middle-class intellectual serves as the central intelligence who arrives at an understanding of the need to side with the oppressed in a society struggling to free itself from foreign domination and exploitation by a native elite [Lumbera 1982:249].

Clearly, the PAKSA alternative also meant to address the cultural transformation of not only the peasants but also of the middle-class intellectuals themselves.

This organized expression of intellectual commitment at the start of the 70s was a sign that Filipino (not English nor Tagalog) was about to become the language of an intellectual and cultural practice that was nationalistic and committed to making culture less elitist and more democratic.⁶ Unfortunately, before this alternative could become the dominant tradition, martial law was declared and the Marcoses launched their campaign to sanitize and beautify not only the country but its culture as well.

Polarization and intellectual loyalty. The Marcos conjugal dictatorship effectively made use of nationalistic symbols to camouflage its violence and greed. Philippine culture proved to be a rich source of symbols for the regime which effectively turned Culture into a battle ground for possession between those who supported Marcos and its promotion of the “true, good and beautiful” in art and those who wanted to continue the alternative tradition initiated by PAKSA. The polarization of the Filipino intellectuals during this period manifested itself especially when the National Artist Awards were instituted by Imelda Marcos in 1974. The award for literature was given posthumously to Amado V. Hernandez (d. 1970), a writer who was himself symbolic of the kind of intellectual and artist in the PAKSA alternative tradition. Amado V. Hernandez had written critically acclaimed novels such as *Mga Ibong Mandaragit* (Birds of Prey, 1959) and whose collections of poetry, *Isang Dipang Langit* (An Armstretch of Sky, 1961) and *Bayang Malaya* (Free Nation, 1969), have been said to “contain the most beautiful and significant poetry written in the Philippines” [Agoncillo 1991: 555]. Hernandez’ poems were written while he was imprisoned for more than a decade because of his alleged subversive activities as a labor union leader. His selection as the first recipient of an award created by the Marcos dictatorship gave rise to a lengthy and impassioned debate among writers and intellectuals. Although the award was ultimately accepted by Amado Hernandez’s widow, it had already succeeded in disuniting the cultural and intellectual community and served to identify those who were to be considered persona non grata by the Marcos dictatorship. More significantly, it proved that the Filipino language (as it had been used by such a Tagalog writer as Hernandez) had become the site of an ideological struggle that the Marcos regime was determined to dominate. Cooptation of the alternative tradition and its symbols during the Marcos regime was especially intense when it concerned the national language. Slogans justifying the regime were expressed in Filipino, e.g. “*Bagong Lipunan*” (New Society), “*Isang Bansa, Isang Diwa*” (One Nation, One

Spirit) and school children were compelled to sing Filipino songs that were especially written to glorify the Marcos regime. A writers' organization was formed and given a Filipino name, *Kalipunan ng Mga Manunulat ng Pilipinas* (KUMPIL). Similarly, the newly-formed broadcast media association was called *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster sa Pilipinas* (KBP) while the Marcoses' daughter, Imee, formed and headed a national youth organization called *Kabataang Barangay* (the name, emblem and functions of which were meant to counteract the leftist *Kabataang Makabayan* which had gone underground).

But underneath all the Marcos regime's Filipino slogans and patriotic propaganda was an elite English-language culture. Performances at the Cultural Center of the Philippines were always those by foreign artists. Television programs and mass media publications were in English. Government-financed literary journals in glossy and attractive formats like *Jose* and *Archipelago* featured only those short stories and poems that were written in English. After Amado V. Hernandez, all the National Artist Awards in literature handed out by the Marcoses were given to writers in English. To put it simply, culture as promoted by the Marcoses was a predilection of the elite; it functioned as an indicator of a person's civilized and refined sensibilities tailored according to Graeco-Roman aesthetic prescriptions, i.e. "the true, the good and the beautiful" in art. The Filipino slogans only masked what were really the regime's un-nationalistic and anti-people orientation.

The alternative intellectual and cultural tradition, conducted in the Filipino language and associated as it was with freeing the masses from oppression, was relentlessly being marginalized by the Marcos dictatorship. But it was not totally eradicated. Some intellectuals and cultural activists turned to non-government organizations such as the Philippine Educational Theatre Association, the Foundation for Nationalist Studies, the Concerned Artists of the Philippines and the *Galian sa Arte at Tula*. Others opted for the more radical choice—they went to the hills and mountains and became cultural workers in the underground armed struggle against the Marcos dictatorship.

In the meantime, the University of the Philippines (UP), was able to continue to develop the alternative nationalist tradition albeit in less confrontational ways. However, its efforts were confined within itself because the Marcos regime has made sure that the university would become an ivory tower. The isolation of UP was effective for not only did the Marcos regime limit its subsidy and create its own well-financed think tank called the Development Academy of the Philippines, it also created more than a dozen state universities which dispersed learning and intellectual activities away from the center that was UP. However, the UP academics who were still convinced of the PAKSA alternative were able to make the best of this situation. Being ignored by the dictatorship

provided a certain amount of freedom, even though it was extremely limited and risky. The UP Philippine Studies graduate program pioneered in theses and dissertations that were written in Filipino. Other departments, such as Art Studies, Theatre Arts, History, Anthropology, Sociology, Social Work and Community Development, began to use the Filipino language in teaching and research activities. All these were done in a low-key manner and without much coordination because doing otherwise would be attracting the dictatorship's attention and consequent censorship or detention.

Ironically, the Marcos dictatorship can be held responsible for broadening the base of the Filipino language as a cultural medium for the English-educated middle-class. Before martial law was declared in 1972, the Filipino language was a symbol of one's intellectual loyalty to the lower classes and was thus identified with a particular group of radical middle-class intellectuals. But during the Marcos dictatorship, the Filipino language developed as a symbol antithetical to the elitist and oppressive Marcosian culture to such an extent that using the Filipino language as a medium of intellectual and cultural expression established not only one's sympathy with the peasants and laborers but more significantly one's antipathy to, or at least a certain distance from, the Marcos dictatorship. In other words, for the middle-class artist or intellectual who did not subscribe to the PAKSA ideology, using the Filipino language meant that one had not been completely swallowed up by the "true, good, and beautiful" aesthetics of Marcosian Culture and remained critical of the dictatorship.

Revitalization and "democratic space". When the Marcoses fled the country in February 1986, it brought in a certain amount of freedom for the articulation and practice of the alternative tradition (which had now come to be called "nationalist and progressive"). But since the displacement of the Marcoses from political power did not necessarily mean that the socio-cultural and economic structures of the dictatorship had also been dismantled, this freedom was described only as a "democratic space" whose breadth and width were contingent upon the uncertainties of rebuilding a nation. This post-Marcos nation was one whose treasury was empty, its international credit line cut off, its military overgrown and unruly and its new president, Corazon Aquino, declaring that "culture" was the last priority in her administration.

And yet, despite these limitations, the "democratic space" was fully utilized and proved to be instrumental in letting the public know that Filipino had already developed from being a language of the less educated to being a medium through which the intricacies of such academic fields such as philosophy and the social sciences, and even physics and chemistry, could be expressed. Since the ownership of the

mass media had been taken away from the Marcos cronies, the principle of free enterprise in the mass media could now play itself out and the mad scramble for getting the largest audience resulted in the production of news programs and television shows in Filipino. Especially significant were two highly-intelligent programs: "People's Forum," a talk show on socio-political issues hosted by a sociology professor from UP, and "Six O'clock News," a show that proved that Filipino can also be an effective medium for such an elevated cultural form as political satire. In addition, the publication of a daily newspaper in the Filipino language called *Diyaryo Filipino* showed that the publishers' attitude had changed from one that regarded the Filipino language as a medium suitable only for tabloids that dished out sensationalized news items for its lower-class readers to a recognition that there already existed a more sophisticated and critical readership for serious journalism that uses the Filipino language as its medium.

The "democratic space" also allowed for the consolidation of the intellectual community which could now renew the debates and exchanges regarding the alternative intellectual tradition and the pro-people culture that it was meant to develop. Some articles by intellectuals who were imprisoned by the Marcos dictatorship were published in the mass media while a number of the regular opinion columns in the daily newspapers were being written by those academics declared to be "left-leaning" and banned from publication during the Marcos years. The lively intellectual exchange was also to be found in the universities where lectures and discussion were held with the intention of sharing various experience culled from conducting intellectual and cultural activities under a dictatorial regime.

Beyond the recriminations, accusations and judgements tossed back and forth between those who worked with and against the dictatorship, an effort was clearly being made to assess the damage done by Marcosian culture and to consolidate the different specific practices that were employed in pursuit of a genuinely nationalist and pro-people Filipino culture. This effort would take years to be completed but initial discussions already pointed to the fact that, despite the centralized control of cultural production during the Marcos dictatorship, the Filipino language was the language used in organizing and consolidating the various anti-Marcos groups in the different parts of the country. But the more important discovery was that, through these activities, most of which were conducted underground, the Filipino language came to be accepted and used by the non-Tagalog farmer or worker in describing his own oppression, either during political discussions or through cultural forms such as poetry and prose. These discoveries have in a certain way directed the concerns of present-day intellectual and cultural activities.

CURRENT CONCERNS AND DIRECTIONS

The Marcos dictatorship successfully propagated its own kind of culture because it centralized all cultural and literary activities not only in terms of the outlets for artistic production, e.g. constructing edifices like the Folk Arts Theater and Manila Film Center, but more significantly in controlling artistic expression itself through a combination of censorship and patronage. Thus, in an attempt to dismantle the basic structure of Marcosian culture, decentralization of all cultural activities is presently being made. The Cultural Center of the Philippines has been renamed *Sentro ng Kultura ng Pilipinas* and its orientation overhauled to become a *coordinating* center for all cultural activities in the country, giving special attention to those that were being conducted in Filipino. A Presidential Commission on Culture and the Arts (now renamed National Commission for Culture and the Arts) was formed whose members were nominated by various cultural organizations in order to democratize the formation of cultural policies which Imelda Marcos had previously appropriated unto herself.

But in more specific terms, decentralization meant going to the people and learning from their experiences. The aftermath of a dictatorial regime had shown that the slogan of the intellectual in the 1970s to "serve the people" had to be expanded to include learning from them. For despite the risks of detention and summary executions by the Marcos army, a significant number of the masses, especially those in the factories and farming villages, actively participated in the formation of their own culture (i.e a culture that serves their interest and not the elite's) in ways that were different from what the intellectual in the 1970s had expected. Various collections of the poems, songs and stories written by farmers and factory workers who had joined the armed struggle against the dictatorship were printed in book form and made accessible to the general public in the immediate post-Marcos years. These collections were multi-lingual editions containing works written in the various regional languages but with accompanying translations in the Filipino language. What the middle-class intellectuals of PAKSA had articulated in the 1970s was already, "out there". In response, intellectual activity, in the form of researches and studies, has taken on a new focus: the production of a *nationalist* culture through alternative or non-traditional means, e.g. the short plays written and performed by factory workers at the picket line, the vocabulary and semantic structures introduced into the Filipino language by the anti-Marcos groups in different parts of the country, or the practice of translation (from English to Filipino or from a regional language to Filipino) among the New People's Army.⁷

It must again be pointed out that with this new focus comes the recognition that the nation's lingua franca is the Filipino language, even

though language planners are still trying to pin down how and in what way this lingua franca has deviated from their Tagalog-based model. Their task have been made less difficult by the endless editions of penny novels written in Filipino for the adolescent market. Exemplifying various sub-genres such as the romance, gothic and detective novels, these affordable and readable material are being written by those who have ready made a name for themselves in "serious" literature. Given the vagaries of "serious" literature within a ravaged economy and a polarized society, the popularity of these penny novels in Filipino provide the writers with the access to 65 million readers, more than half of whom are below 21 years old. Similarly, the brisk sales have convinced the book publishing industry (which is a virtual monopoly by just one company) that novels in Filipino, albeit penny novels, are profitable enough to be published in book form rather than as serialized novels in magazines. The success of these Filipino-language penny novels is less of a marketing strategy than an unexpected discovery of an existing reading public numbering up to millions.

Learning from the people's experiences is also an admission that the isolation of the university and the intellectual was institutionalized during the Marcos regime. Given the more pressing economic and political problems that the Philippine government and society are confronted with, the breaking down of this ivory tower could only come from within. In the case of the University of the Philippines, the decision to adopt Filipino as the language in all subjects was not accompanied by any financial endowment from the government to ensure the success of this policy. Nevertheless, translations of technical terms used in the various academic fields have been done by committees formed among the faculties of the university, which receive no financial remuneration for their efforts. The *Diliman Review*, academic journal of the three colleges of Science, Arts and Letters and Social Sciences and Philosophy, has adopted a policy of preference for articles written in Filipino. Professorial lectures, convocations and award-giving ceremonies are being conducted in Filipino. The process is slow and tedious while critics of the university's language policy have declared it to be *ningas cogon* or a mere whim that the University will tire of soon enough.

Indeed, it is quite difficult to foresee the immediate success of the UP language policy while the centers of power in Philippine society, such as business and government, continue to use the English language. But as the previous discussion has tried to show, changes in this area of Philippine life have come from outside the centers of power. It is already a feat in itself that the Filipino language as a cultural medium tied to a non-elite and mass-oriented discourse has emerged and carved out its own space in what is in fact an elite domain—the academe. However, the current concern is not to elevate the Filipino language into the realm of

elitism and thus dislodge the English language from its privileged position. Rather, the concern is to expand the space already occupied by the Filipino language in cultural and intellectual discourse, a movement that is more democratic and participatory in a country that has known little of it.

NOTES

1. The Philippine education system pursues a bilingual policy in medium of instruction at all levels. Although recommendations to use Filipino as the sole language of instruction have been made and accepted, the economic and political costs of such a shift have prevented its implementation.
2. This is not a mere matter of politics. Linguistic differences have emerged between Tagalog and Filipino. In contrast with the Tagalog language which has only 20 letters in its alphabet, Filipino has 28 letters. The phonology system is also different for each of these languages. Cf. Ruby Gamboa-Alcantara (1991) "Na Naman!" *Diliman Review* Tomo 39 Blg 2, pp. 47-48.
3. The 1974 Constitution was ratified under martial-law conditions. Marcos issued a decree that required ratification to be done not by the ballot but merely by a show of hands.
4. In both the 1974 and 1987 Constitutions, the national language is spelt with an "F". Thus, "Filipino".
5. Much of the resistance comes from the fear that the Tagalog-speaking people, (a linguistic group found in some regions in Luzon island) will replace the English-speaking elite (made up of various linguistic groups from various regions of the country) in dominating and controlling the country's socio-cultural and economic affairs.
6. Although this did not lead to a wholesale rejection of the English language, this was the period when the limits of the Filipino language as an artistic medium were tested and the cultural forms in which it could attract the middle-class audience were discovered. It was in theatre that these efforts were a complete success. Plays written in English have lost their middle-class audience who have become, until today, avid followers of Filipino-language theatre. Playwriting in English has deteriorated into a mere writing workshop activity that has no hopes of being staged at all.
7. See Monico Atienza's *Kilusang Pambansa-Demokratiko sa Wika* [1992] Lunsod Quezon: Sentro ng Wikang Filipino, Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Sistem. Atienza's work is the only one of its kind which has documented and analyzed the linguistic and translation activities of the underground leftist movement.

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