

# The Power of Discourse: NGOs, Gender and National Democratic Politics

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In 1992, the leadership of the Philippine radical-left National Democratic movement triggered a split in the movement, by calling upon its members to “reaffirm the principles and rectify the errors.” Loyalists to the National Democratic leadership became known as Reaffirmists (RAs), while the secessionist, individuals and organizations were called Rejectionists (RJs). Almost ten years passed before the different groups could be seen working together again. This was during the so-called Oust-Erap campaigns.

Little is known of what happened within the National Democratic movement during these past years, and especially about the role of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and the women’s movement in the periods preceding and after the split. The split not only affected the underground movement, but also spilled over to the nongovernmental development organizations and the people’s organizations (POs). For over a year, fierce fights occurred within and among development NGOs to draw the boundaries between RAs and RJs, while factions competed over offices, bank accounts, donor agencies and people’s organizations. After the dust settled, the RA NGOs started a rectification campaign in order to bring their organizations back into line with the basic principles of the National Democratic movement. This paper discusses the rectification in a group of NGOs in the Cordillera, with a special focus in the second part of the paper on the women’s movement, where women grappled with tensions between their own feminist and National Democratic political positions. It elaborates how the rectification campaign of the Philippine National Democratic movement may partly be viewed as an effort of the leadership of the movement to bring development NGOs back under its reins. It also suggests that the call to go back to basics may partly be understood as a “patriarchal” reaction to expansions in the space that women were maneuvering in.

I use the case of the National Democratic movement to explore questions of dominant discourse. Discourses are more or less coherent sets of references that frame the way we understand and act upon the world around us. Development NGOs are normally hinged around an amalgam of different discourses that all provide rationales for the work, appear in writings and contain points of reference to guide the numerous decisions and actions taken in NGOs. The discursive repertoire of the NGOs discussed here include the national democratic key ideas, indigenous rights discourses and the language of participation and development, as well as a number of everyday discourses, such as the language of kinship and traditional village politics. Before the split, NGOs used these discourses simultaneously and strategically,

deriving from their multiplicity sufficient room for maneuver to deal with everyday affairs. The rectification drive can be understood as an effort to restore the dominant position of the National Democratic discourse in the practice of NGOs. The question addressed here is how and when a discourse can become powerful in becoming the dominant frame of reference.

### The First NGOs in the Cordillera

The Cordillera is a mountainous area in the north of Luzon comprising six provinces, and occupied by indigenous peoples. The region was never fully incorporated into the colonial history with Spain, and state intervention only became a major factor under the American administration during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Seen from the outside, Cordillera people's lives are still highly organized through traditional practices and techniques. From the inside, however, the area is culturally diverse (Raedt, 1987) and differentially integrated into the economic, social, political and cultural processes of the lowlands.

The plans of President Marcos in the 1970s to construct a series of hydroelectric dams along the Chico River spurred a protest movement comprised of a large number of village-based organizations. In the wake of this movement, the region became a stronghold of the revolutionary struggle of the National Democratic Front and its armed wing, the New People's Army. In the course of many years, the anti-dams movement in the Cordillera moved from "protest to proposal" (Fals Borda, 1992: 305). In 1984, the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) was founded, representing more than a hundred POs. The CPA spearheaded a movement for regional autonomy. After the restoration of democracy in the Philippines, the CPA successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a provision in the new Constitution granting the Cordillera the right to autonomy. Soon thereafter, the CPA found itself marginalized in the negotiations for the implementation of autonomy in the region. Traditional politicians watered down the notion of autonomy, and the radical movement was also hampered by infighting and breakaway groups. In 1987, when an Autonomy Act was subjected to a plebiscite in the region, the Act was turned down. The CPA was among the organizations that lobbied against the Act.

In the 1980s, a number of NGOs emerged in the Cordillera as offsprings of the political movement. Development work *avant-la-lettre* in the Cordillera had sporadically been organized throughout the 20th century. Churches normally organized voluntary associations to assist the clergy, and some of these engaged in projects to raise living conditions in the villages. Government agencies initiated (mainly women's) associations to promote their programs, starting with the Rural Improvement Clubs of the Department of Agriculture in the 1930s (Miralao, 1993:

21; see also Po and Montiel, 1980). Finally, cadres of the New People's Army (NPA) during the 1970s facilitated small-scale projects as part of their organizing work, such as the construction of pig pens, and health education. As one former NPA explained to me, they did this because "when you came to these villages, the need for such work was very clear." This desire to improve life in the remote areas coincided with the ideological approach of the NPA that, following Mao, wanted to embed armed struggle through organizing activities in the villages.

In 1979, the first NGO was formed as part of the National Democratic movement in the region. After this, NGOs were set up one after the other, and in 1986, ten of them formed the Consortium of Development NGOs in the Cordillera.<sup>1</sup> There were three reasons why activists of the National Democratic movement resorted to the formation of NGOs in the region. First, the struggles against the Chico River dams and other resource-extracting projects had led to an interest in alternative development, based on small-scale, local, people, and environmentally friendly projects. Second, setting up NGOs was a way to straighten out some of the institutional tensions in the social movement, where churches and the National Democratic organizations partly coincided but competed to some extent with each other. The first NGOs in the region were set up by activists working in a church community development program, and were intertwined from the start with the organizational structures of the National Democratic movement. A final impetus to form NGOs came from outside, when it became clear in the early 1980s that international donor agencies tended to favor NGOs over POs.

The formation of the NGO Consortium in 1986 was a response to new development opportunities in the region, following the installation of President Aquino. Under her government, the Cordillera became a popular site for large international development programs. One of these was the European-sponsored Central Cordillera Agricultural Programme (CECAP). The story of CECAP deserves some attention since it shows how development projects can become a tool in political conflict. In a struggle parallel to the negotiations for regional autonomy, CECAP became one of the arenas where contestations over which organizations to include in the ordering of the region's development were decided.

### CECAP: Political Struggles Over a Development Program

In May 1986, barely three months after the installation of President Aquino, two representatives of the European Union visited the Cordillera to explore possibilities for an EU-assisted development program. They proposed to facilitate a wide array of small-scale projects for infrastructure, agricultural production and marketing in the communities of the Central Cordillera.<sup>2</sup> The Department of

Agriculture (DA) was selected to be the Philippine counterpart. From the start, it was clear that one of the objectives of the program was to curb the communist-inspired resistance movement in the region (Severino, 1994: 1). The first EU Mission report thus stated that “the development of the Cordillera is considered as the most important way to progressively limit and restrain the area of the insurgency” (cited in CRC, 1989: 10). Despite reservations prompted by this political agenda, the Cordillera activists were initially interested in cooperating with the EU, because the Mission report recommended that 10% of the project had to be channelled through NGOs. This was an opportunity for the Cordillera People’s Alliance, consisting of some 100 people’s organizations and a number of NGOs, to expand its socio-economic activities. The CPA decided to form a consortium of development NGOs, with the explicit aim of entering into a relationship with the proposed CECAP project. The institutional set-up was such that the NGOs were affiliated with the CPA and provided services to assist the local people’s organizations affiliated to CPA in organizing, educating, and launching projects.

The Consortium, with the assistance of a Manila-based consultancy firm, drafted a proposal that was endorsed by the CPA. The format and presentation of the Consortium’s proposal clearly showed that the associated NGOs were in for serious and competent development work. It consisted of 49 pages, plus 37 pages of annexes. One of the annexes contained a list of 134 proposals for micro-projects that had been put forward by local organizations affiliated with the CPA. An additional 16 maps, flowcharts and graphic representations of relations and procedures further enhanced the professional style of the envisaged program. One part of the proposal criticized the EU approach, which, according to the Consortium, failed to “situate the obvious problems in the magnitude of their implications and historical origins, and place these in the light of the development of the autonomous region” (CDP, 1987: 9). The remainder of the proposal described in great detail how the NGOs could contribute to CECAP, and centered around the key concepts of: participation, social justice, self-reliance, environmental conservation and utilization of local structures and institutions. Concepts such as project parameters, efficiency, risk variable analysis, project-identification, technology transfer and management training were abundantly interspersed throughout the document.

During the time that the Consortium was drafting the proposal, the CPA made several attempts to arrange for a consultation with the team preparing CECAP from the European Community (EC) and the Department of Agriculture (DA). When the EC and the DA continuously cancelled appointments for consultation with the CPA, the Consortium finally submitted its counterpart proposal in February 1987, directly to the European Community. The EC never even replied. Sometime later, frustrated by the lack of willingness of the EC representatives to consult with the NGOs, the CPA abandoned its moderately positive attitude towards the program. A

public statement was made in which the project was characterized as being a “dole out” and “destructive to the interests of organized indigenous communities in the Cordillera and their goal for self-reliant development” (CRC, 1989: 85). CPA representatives wrote to the EC in Brussels to explain their reservations about the program and mobilized a number of their European-based contacts to add pressure on the EC. Although these lobbying efforts delayed the start of the program, it did not lead to any changes. When the project was approved in October 1987, with a budget of 18.5 million ECU for a duration of five years, there was no provision to include the CPA, the Consortium or any other NGO.<sup>3</sup>

When a journalist asked EC and DA representatives in 1994 why they had barred the participation of the CPA-related NGOs, they pointed to the political nature of the NGOs. The undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture said: “why should we deal with the brokers in Baguio, when we’ve already talked to the front-line groups?” This person referred to a meeting in September 1986, when the NPA had abducted an EC delegation and held them for six hours to discuss the CECAP project. The DA representative used this enforced meeting with the NPA as an excuse for not consulting the NGOs. The EC representatives, in turn, declared that the EC would rather work with “project-oriented,” than with “politically oriented” NGOs (Severino, 1994).

Apparently, the government and EC representatives viewed the CPA and the related NGOs as belonging to the underground National Democratic Front. From illegal, but widely accessible readings from the revolutionary movement, it was clear that this movement extended to legal activities. Although it seldom appeared openly in the discussions, many people believed that the CPA-related organizations formed a support mechanism for the underground movement, if not for their ideological resemblance to the NDF, or because of continuing military allusions and propaganda, then on account of the reputation of key actors in the organizations. In a relatively small region like the Cordillera, informed actors (who were one way or another engaged in regional affairs) normally thought they “knew” who belonged to the underground movement: through their past involvement, by deducting it from the people they were seen with, or simply from rumor. Apparently, no amount of effort, statement, or democratic practice of the CPA-related organizations could outweigh this alleged and tacit ‘knowledge’ among their opponents. The professionally-crafted proposal of the NGO Consortium did not convince the DA and the EC that they were dealing with real development organizations. It did not outweigh the reputation of the NGOs as political agents. If anything, the effect of the EC attitude was that the CPA-related groups, experiencing the lack of room for them in the newly created ‘democratic space,’ saw their ideological stances confirmed, and maintained or even strengthened their allegiance to the National Democratic

movement. By doing so, I believe the EC underestimated the genuine desire of the NGOs to work on socioeconomic development.

The CECAP debacle did not mean the end of the NGO Consortium. The NGOs continued their development work in diverse socioeconomic fields. They were able to access a variety of short- or medium-range funds with foreign donor agencies. What happened next is an ironic affirmation of the multifaceted nature of NGOs. The same organizations that were deemed too political by the government and the EC to be credible as development organizations became, in a few years time, as the next sections will elaborate, too “developmental” and “professional” for the taste of their political counterparts in the National Democratic movement.

### 1986-1992: The Expansion of Cordillera NGOs

In the period from 1986 to 1992, the work of the Consortium of NGOs proliferated and changed. Leaving the political organizing to the CPA, the NGOs increasingly concentrated on socio-economic work in a largely expanded area. International work, organizational alliances and co-operation with government agencies continued to change the nature of NGO work. The following account of one of the member organizations of the Consortium, the Cordillera Women’s NGO (CWNGO) is illustrative of these trends.

From 1984 onwards, there were instances of women organizing, especially in Baguio City, as part of the anti-dictatorship struggle. In 1987, CWNGO was formed, initially as a Baguio organization, and within a year, it expanded region-wide. The founding director of the CWNGO was born in the region and had been an activist since the 1970s. She was involved in the setting up of several NGOs in the region. CWNGO started with three staff members, who all worked part-time and who would later compose the members of the management of the organization. They also engaged in research activities. On the first year, CWNGO operated without funding, except for “loans” from other NGOs. In 1988 when a European funding agency decided to support CWNGO, the organization expanded rapidly.

CWNGO started with research workshops, contact building, organizing and educating women’s organizations. By directing efforts to existing church women’s organizations and women’s people’s organizations, within three years CWNGO developed a constituency of more than 100 local women’s organizations. All these organizations were given an education seminar and invited to join the women’s movement. In 1991, this culminated in the formation of a Cordillera-wide women’s federation. CWNGO had now expanded its staff to more than 20 and opened four additional offices in the provinces. Two years later, there were 35 staff members.

The main office in Baguio developed a number of separate “desks,” with projects as diverse as functional literacy, cooperatives, human rights, violence against women (with a separate crisis center), research and documentation, and a day-care center. The diversification of the NGO was accompanied by an increasing specialization of staff members.

CWNGO continued to receive its basic funding from the European funding agency, but several other projects were taken on with different funding agencies, including projects on women’s reproductive health, integrated pest management and women’s cooperatives. Increasingly, CWNGO sponsored local women’s projects. Along with the other NGOs in the region, CWNGO’s interest in socioeconomic work was boosted when a major earthquake hit the Cordillera in 1990. After the quake, money for relief and rehabilitation flooded into the region and the NGOs occupied themselves with repairing foot bridges, water systems and doing other service delivery work.

The NGOs also expanded into international work. The CPA in the 1980s already represented the Cordillera peoples in United Nations circles. This resulted in many contacts, and the CPA became a popular guest at international events. The international work reached a climax in 1993, which was the Year of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations, when more than 60 international trips were made by CPA affiliates. As an officer of the CPA, the director of CWNGO undertook a number of these trips and soon established a name for herself, receiving many personally-addressed invitations. The international dimension was further shaped through the large number of foreign visitors who continued to visit the region, for exposure to the villages. In 1993, CWNGO organized a conference for Asian indigenous women. It was attended by 143 participants. Through this international work, the NGOs started to focus more on issues of indigenous people’s rights. This became apparent from the education material that CWNGO, and other NGOs produced for the POs.

CWNGO’s work in the villages expanded further through alliance work and cooperation with government agencies. The organization was allied with a number of NGO networks, some of them with technical specializations, such as the environment and small-scale trade. These networks offered skills training to NGO staff-members, further contributing to their professionalization. The networks (as well as funding agencies) often initiated activities that relied on the contacts of NGO staff members in the villages. By obliging with these demands, CWNGO regional staff members increasingly set the agenda of the people’s organizations, instead of the other way around. The fast growth of NGO work, as well as changing political conditions in the region, led to increasing problems towards the early 1990s.

## Juggling with Development Discourses

Rapid expansion and diversification had many implications for the organization. While new and often inexperienced staff had to deal with large numbers of village-based activities, the CWNGO management was largely absorbed in report writing. International and alliance work often took them away from the office, leaving them little time to become personally involved in village-based work. Another implication was that the NGOs' work increasingly drew on a multiplicity of discourses. They continued to echo their own political language, but increasingly used notions derived from the international indigenous movement and development agencies.

Following how the language of development was incorporated by the organization illuminates some of the processes occurring during these years. During the time of CECAP, the adoption of "development-speak" had a clear strategic undertone. This continued when most funding agencies were no longer as interested in political NGO activities as they had been during the Marcos dictatorship, and only wanted to fund socioeconomic projects under the heading of poverty alleviation. NGOs felt obliged to couch their proposals in terms favored by donors. The NGOs also introduced a politically neutral development language in the villages. At the height of and in the aftermath of intense militarization in the region, NGOs were often branded as communist organizations. In order to avoid problems, NGO staff members started to censor their choice of words, carefully omitting words like imperialism and even human rights, since these phrases instilled fear among villagers, who would think they might be dealing with the NPA, which would then lead to military retribution.

In the course of time, however, the strategic nature of the use of the language of international development faded. Before long, as funding came in and projects were implemented, development work gained reality in the everyday practices of the NGOs. NGO management and staff alike became increasingly absorbed in the implementation of projects and took pride in their results. One of the things that changed was that NGOs started to demand educational qualifications from their staff, and people with less than a college degree were either not hired or received a salary lower than that of their colleagues. This was demoralizing for former activists among the NGO staff who had often interrupted their college education to attend full-time to political work and, were now discredited.

Nonetheless, management remained highly aware of the priorities and history of development thinking. When one CWNGO manager was asked in 1993 what she meant by 'sustainable development,' she replied: "I really mean social revolution." When I subsequently asked her about her ideas on participation, she smiled and said: "With that, I also mean social revolution. Everything we do is for a social revolution." For this management actor, it was still clear that development was



synonymous with radical social change. However, it soon became obvious that for newer staff, many of whom had no history of political work and were assigned to specific tasks, the development discourse had become natural. These staff members had no idea or had forgotten what the underlying political meaning of the NGO was.

By the end of 1993, the management of CWNGO and the other NGOs of the Consortium had begun to recognize the effects of the fast pace of change in their organizations. They felt alarmed by the signals that the work had become too thinly spread. Some POs began to complain about expectations not being met. Many felt that the NGOs had begun to lose their distinct identity in the eyes of the villagers who increasingly viewed NGOs as project deliverers.

### Changing State-Region Relations

In the 1990s, NGOs found it increasingly difficult to position themselves in relation to the state, due to the changing nature of state-region relations. During the Marcos era, NGOs opposed a government that was demonstrably anti-people. After the transition to democracy, relations and identities had to be redefined.<sup>4</sup> Immediately after the transition during the term of Aquino, a short period followed in which the NGOs tested the ground for democracy. When it became clear that the CPA was marginalized in the regional autonomy talks, that the Consortium was excluded from CECAP, and that Aquino, moreover, had declared “total war” against the insurgency, leading to heavy militarization in the Cordillera, the NGOs resumed their opposition to the state. In the 1990s, militarization in the region subsided, and there was room for NGOs and POs to participate in the local government through the installation of Local Development Boards.<sup>5</sup> Although in most cases, the Consortium NGOs of the Cordillera, did not become involved in these Boards (in certain areas, Boards did not function; in others, they were excluded or chose to opt out for various reasons), they increasingly engaged in joint projects with government agencies. CWNGO, for instance, cooperated with the government over its reproductive health project and in setting up village day-care centers.

Such cooperation blurred the distinction between government and NGOs in the eyes of villagers, and even for a number of NGO staff members. The identity of NGOs relative to the state became all the more unclear as government agencies increasingly adopted NGO features and vocabulary: they entered into direct funding relations with international agencies and used the language of sustainable and participatory development. A pamphlet of peasant organizations produced at this time hints at the mounting frustration among National Democratic NGOs:

NGOese like ‘sustainable’, ‘people empowerment’ and other

developmental jargon culled from the so-called third sector (the PO-NGO community), have been liberally adopted as their own by governments after Marcos in their unceasing doublespeak to deceive and perpetuate neo-colonial rule. (KMP, 1994)

The ensuing perplexity became even more problematic when the government developed a number of policies for the region in 1994, beginning with a number of projects to register and acknowledge claims to ancestral lands. According to the NGOs, these projects were empty gestures because they did not grant property rights to the claimants. The government then announced a new hydroelectric project, the San Roque dam, which was to be much larger than what the Chico dam was ever going to be. Moreover, a new Mining Code allowed foreign companies to explore large tracts of land, with rights to open mining, the use of timber and water, and even to demand the relocation of people. This convinced the NGOs that the government was still treating the Cordillera as nothing but a region to extract resources from for the national economy, so they resumed their total opposition to the state. At this time, however, the NGOs found it difficult to explain their position to the people's organizations they worked with. It was not easy to explain to people what was wrong with policies that seemingly met the demands they had been making since the 1970s, especially when people could no longer see the difference between the government and the NGOs.

It was thus obvious that there were mounting problems resulting from the proliferation of NGOs, on the one hand, and political changes, on the other. When, at this same time, the leadership of the National Democratic movement summoned the organizations to reassess their work and "rectify their errors," many of the NGO managers were ready to do so.

### Rectify the Errors: Split in the Underground Movement

The underground National Democratic Front, spearheaded by the Communist Party of the Philippines went through a difficult time after the 1986 watershed events. Just before the so-called EDSA revolution, the NDF had grown into a major revolutionary force. It reportedly had a mass base of 10 million and a membership of 35,000 cadres at its disposal. It operated on 60 guerrilla fronts in 63 provinces of the Philippines. With the EDSA revolution, the NDF saw much of the gains of years of organizing being reaped by an elite government and its middle-class followers. Uneasiness in defining its role under the democratic government of Aquino, increased military harassment and mounting internal problems led, according to the movement's own assessment, to a reduction of its mass base by 1990 to 40% of its 1986 level. The organization had also been seriously damaged by purges within its own ranks following the unmasking of a number of military infiltrators into NDF

organizations. Suspicions that several so-called “deep penetration agents” had joined the ranks of the NDF organizations led to the killing, detention, torture or expulsion of hundreds of NDF people between 1985 and 1991, especially in Mindanao and Southern Luzon. Disagreement over military tactics and the leadership of the National Democratic movement finally led to a split in 1992. This split was triggered by a document, authored by Armando Liwanag, called “Reaffirm our Basic Principles and Rectify the Errors.” The document was intended to bring the movement back to its pre-1986 shape by ‘going back to the basics’ (Liwanag, 1992).

Armando Liwanag is commonly assumed to be a pseudonym of Jose Maria Sison,<sup>6</sup> founder of the CPP who modelled the movement by combining Marx’s class-based analysis with the Leninist call for a vanguard organization leading the proletarian masses, and Mao Zedong’s rural-based revolutionary tactics. Sison continued to lead the Party throughout several years of detention and, from 1986, as a political exile in the Netherlands. The “Reaffirm...” document is the outcome of, and at the same time the reason for, a split in the organization and leadership of the movement. For the most part, the document is concerned with the ideology, strategies and organization of the Party and the armed struggle. Some parts, however, explicitly focus on aboveground (legal) offices, including the NGOs. One paragraph in particular points out:

There has been a proliferation of legal offices and institutions in conjunction with the increase in staff organs and a continuous build up in them of dropouts or near dropouts from the Party and the mass movement. An increasing number of political prisoners have also been lured into these offices instead of returning to direct work among the masses and the countryside where they are badly needed. Party work and Party life in them are often buried in office routines and office work away from the masses and the mass movement and where petty bourgeoisie [*sic*] views, habits, loose discipline and craving for comfort are strong and often go unchallenged. (*ibid.*: 326)

It seems the Party leadership increasingly viewed NGOs as competition instead of instruments of the NDF. The Party had supported and even initiated the formation of many NGOs since the 1970s, but always had difficulty in defining the role of socioeconomic work. This work was considered instrumental to the creation of the revolutionary mass base. On the other hand, it was considered dangerous because it could become “reformist,” that is, bringing about change *within* the ruling system, without systematically supplanting it. With the proliferation of NGOs after 1986, this fear seemed to be coming true. In addition, it has been suggested that Party revenues from NGOs (directly or through revolutionary taxation) started to decline towards the end of the 1980s, because NGO management negotiated to retain larger sums of their funding to actually implement programs. Finally, NGOs began to

provide institutional space for outright opposition to the Party leadership, both by providing venues for discussion in the period leading up to the split, and by serving as a basis and platform for alternative “progressive” agenda in the period thereafter (Clarke, 1998: 113-8; CDP, 1991).

### Rectifying Cordillera NGOs

“Reaffirm...” called upon the movement to “go back to its basics.” It led to a split in the movement between those accepting the document (the Reaffirmists) and those rejecting it, (the Rejectionists). Neither friends nor foes of the movement had expected how much this cleavage would affect the National Democratic development NGOs. What evolved, however, was a conflict situation short of the battlefield. Splits in NGOs and coalitions in Metro Manila and several other regions of the country were accompanied by fierce struggles. A number of NGOs did not survive and many staff members withdrew from NGO work. The breakaway NGOs embarked on a number of different strategies and alignments. For the remaining National Democratic NGOs, the re-affirmation was the first step in a rectification process that was to last for several years. The NGO Consortium in the Cordillera belongs to this latter group.

In the Cordillera, NGO managements decided to go along with the call to ‘rectify’ their errors. Certain individuals decided to resign from office, but on the whole, NGOs stayed loyal to the National Democratic movement. For a time, the debate demoralized many NGO actors who saw their movement set back by years, and were confronted with the ‘betrayal’ of many National Democratic leaders who had long been friends and respected leaders. Nevertheless, the regional movement, including the NGOs of the Consortium, started to work seriously on the rectification campaign by the end of 1993.

The rectification campaign was to last for several years. With admirable stamina and thoroughness, round after round of evaluations were held, using the “Reaffirm...” document as a term of reference. Experiences from the start of the movement in the 1970s were meticulously summed up and analyzed, submitted for discussion and feedback to the different organizations. Once the assessment was completed, policies were reformulated and the work was reorganized. The new directions had to be disseminated through education sessions, and coordination procedures between organizations and education materials for the POs were all redrafted. For some time, the rectification was so time-consuming that NGO work in the region virtually stopped, except for routine follow-up of ongoing commitments to POs and funding agencies. By the end of 1995, however, it was felt that the movement was sufficiently back in shape to respond pro-actively to developments in the region and to implement

new programs. Painful as the evaluations were at times (punctuated by criticisms and self-criticisms), many revived their enthusiasm and motivation in the process. By early 1996, many NGO actors, especially from management echelons, felt that the rectification process had succeeded in fine tuning their policies and practices, and in strengthening their organizations.

Evaluation of NGOs during the rectification campaign led to the identification of several “errors” of a reformist nature. The term “NGOism” captures the critique. The “malady of NGOism” as it was called, is defined by the National Democratic peasant movement as “a state of being engrossed in unholistic developmentalism leading to bureaucratic tendencies in dealing with the people that the NGOs have sworn to serve” (KMP, 1994: 13). In a statement about reformism in the Philippine NGO community, the peasant movement charges that

NGOs afflicted with this malady have a concept of development segregated from the people’s movement, focused on welfare, productivity and sustainability concerns and unmindful of challenging the base structures responsible for the people’s emiserization [sic]. Victims of NGOism also magnify the NGO position in social transformation. (*Ibid.*)

The pamphlet identifies seven major symptoms of the malady of NGOism: loyalty to the funding agency rather than to the people’s movement; socioeconomic work without the need for class struggle and changes in the social structure; bureaucratism; corruption of the NGO service orientation; professionalism; adoption of corporate practices and standards; and competition or “turfig” (*Ibid.*: 14-17).

All in all, it was concluded that in the period from 1987 to 1992, certain basic principles had been lost. To rectify this, a large number of measures were taken that profoundly affected the organizational structures, practices and discursive repertoires of the NGOs. Thorough political education was to ensure that NGO staff members (re)mastered the proper language of the movement. To avoid confusion, the oppositional stance to government policies was no longer to be watered down by simultaneously cooperating with government line agencies, which was going to be limited to a minimum. Another important measure consisted of the devolution of NGOs. In order to break down the top-heavy structures of NGOs, with too many specialist staff members in the office as compared to organizers in the field, as many staff members as possible were re-deployed from the Baguio offices to the provinces. Office-based management became much more selective in taking on alliance work and international assignments. Traveling abroad was to be restricted. In order to better integrate and coordinate local work, NGOs pooled their staff in area-based teams, largely setting aside their separate specializations. The teams primarily focused on the (re)building of POs in the villages.

Thus, the NGOs of the Consortium reaffirmed their affiliation with the National Democratic ideas. They wanted to achieve ideological coherence and to systematically design structures and practices in line with this ideology, and wished to become organizations with an unmistakable and clear identity. The question remains posed as to why NGO actors wanted to make these changes. After all, the measures had vast implications for their relative autonomy as well as for the individual room for maneuvering of NGO managers. Moreover, some explanation are needed to understand why NGO people, who had been exposed to and had come to believe in a multitude of ideas, resorted again to an ideology that reduced the problems of society to the three themes of “feudalism,” “imperialism,” and “bureaucrat capitalism,” defined as central in the 1960s. Why would actors operating in a globalized world convert to such a reductionist scheme?<sup>7</sup>

## Responses

A number of factors appear to have been relevant for those NGO managers who, wholly or half-heartedly, reshaped NGO work in the region.<sup>8</sup> One source of consent or inspiration was found in the legacy of the National Democratic movement before 1986. A large number of NGO managers had grown up as activists in the 1970s and 1980s and were excited at the prospect of reviving those years. “Finally,” exclaimed one of them after a meeting, “we will step away from socioeconomic work. I really missed the social activism.” Among some of the younger managers, this legacy acquired mythical proportions. They were ardent admirers of Jose Maria Sison and looked upon his writings, if not as the gospel, at least with a lot of goodwill.

Secondly, the critique embodied in the “Reaffirm...” document found clear resonance in the disappointment among leaders with the meager and dispersed NGO performance in the region, both concerning their socioeconomic work and their political aspirations. There had indeed been a lot of problems. The straightforward analysis of these problems provided in the document gave a clear indication of the strategies that would remedy them. Although they looked back at a period of errors, they now had their work clearly cut out for the period to follow. Related to this, I was often struck by the enormous sense of personal responsibility NGO leaders felt for past mistakes. I remember one provincial manager in particular. He was a professional man with a full-time job who coordinated NGO work in his spare time. He seemed dragged down by perpetual fatigue, and over a beer I asked how he was doing. He then presented me with an awesome list of tasks for the near future, to which he added an equally awesome list of problems and obstacles he foresaw. When I asked him where he found the motivation to move on with this herculean workload, he responded,

“There is the option to simply continue with my ordinary work especially since there is family pressure to do so. But I am still motivated. I feel responsible for many of the mistakes that were made. So I have a duty to take part in correcting them. We just have to start again.”

Finally, a strong impetus to believe in the rightness of the ‘back-to-basics’ ideology was provided by government policies. Despite economic growth, the majority of the Philippine population continued to live in abject poverty. In the Cordillera, military oppression and the violation of civil human rights had decreased in the last years, but these were replaced by economic policies that were possibly even more devastating. For the National Democratic activists, these developments contained ample evidence that, politically speaking, nothing had changed: the country was still ruled through imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

Before delving into the meaning of NGO actors’ responses to the rectification campaign for a better understanding of development discourse, let me first elaborate on gender and the role of women in the National Democratic movement.

### Stories of Gender in the National Democratic Movement

How did National Democratic women’s organization fare in the rectification? CWNGO belongs to a nationwide women’s movement called GABRIELA, which was formed in 1984. This coalition has always emphasized class and nationalist dimensions of women’s oppression, in the belief that “equality with men is meaningless if we can only be equal with them in poverty and oppression” (Dacanay, 1998:10). For this reason, the major issues addressed by GABRIELA are land reform, labor exploitation and human rights abuses, with special reference to the gender dimension. They also address body politics, such as the export of female labor, sex trafficking and prostitution. These are high in the agenda, and for a good reason, considering the enormous number of women affected and their often heartbreaking experiences. Gender relations in the household, on the other hand, receive far less attention, and are rarely considered a priority. Nonetheless, this section focuses on how domestic violence against women is addressed by the women’s movement, and on gender issues within the National Democratic organizations. This choice of topics should be seen as a methodological device. More than any other issue, the treatment of gender in the family and in the organizations reveals conflicting positions and power relations in the National Democratic movement.

The history of GABRIELA is locally specific, yet related to global developments in women’s or feminist movements. In 1984, Robin Morgan launched the slogan “Sisterhood Is Global.” Like many feminists in the 1970s, Morgan asserts that women share a common worldview as a result of a common condition. This idea

has been thoroughly discredited ever since, with women pointing to divisions based on class and race. It has also become common sense that there is no singular kind of women's movement. Just as gender has come to be seen as evolving at particular historical junctures and constantly subject to negotiation (see Lamphere, 1987; Moore, 1988), so feminist movements must be contextualized to be understood. As Mohanty (1991) argues, there are many feminist agenda and movements.

It is asserted that feminist movements, like other social movements, have a constructed and emerging character. However, at the same time, we have to acknowledge that particular frozen images of women's movements continue to play a role in discussions and practices of women engaged in collective action. One such image depicts feminism as a product of "decadent" Western capitalism, and therefore of no relevance to (poor) women in the Third World. Notwithstanding the work of people like Jayawardena (1986), showing that many early feminist struggles arose in the Third World, the *image* of feminism as a Western concept has deterred many Southern women's movements from adopting the word (Johnson-Odim, 1991: 315; Basu, 1995: 6-9). Time and time again, dividing lines have been drawn during international conferences where women from the South emphasize that women's oppression should be understood in a framework wider than that of simple gender only, to include class, nationality and race. These dividing lines have a certain justification in differing women's practices, but are just as much related to habits of pigeonholing "others" in fixed positions (Wieringa, 1995: 1-23). It is difficult to talk about women's movements without feeding into stereotyped notions of feminism or anti-feminism.

The Philippine women's "movement" consists of a large number of organizations divided according to their position regarding women's oppression, running along two axes: cultural and political.<sup>10</sup> The cultural axis originates from debates on the issue of complementarity of gender in Southeast Asia, which stipulates that gender roles in this part of the world are not so much ranked hierarchically and accorded differential status, but are organized in a complementary way.<sup>11</sup> Positions range from stating that women in the Philippines are not oppressed, pointing to the relatively high status of women compared to other cultures, to claiming that women *are* nonetheless oppressed. The latter is arrived at by referring to the cultural ruptures caused by the colonial period introducing inequality, or by referring to evidence that the nature of Southeast Asian complementarity is such that "the prerogatives and prestige of men typically exceed those of women" (Ong and Peletz, 1995: 7). Those organizations stressing complementarity denounce those speaking of women's oppression as "anti-male," with the charge of being "Western-biased" always around the corner. This position has been more pronounced in organizations of indigenous women, who are thought to have retained more remnants of precolonial, complementary culture.



The political axis refers to debates regarding the positioning of gender *vis-à-vis* other sources of women's oppression. It ranges from locating women's oppression solely in their gender to viewing women's oppression as stemming exclusively from class and national factors.<sup>12</sup> Organizations move along this axis trying to define their own position, while at the same time being boxed into the extremities of the axis by other women's organizations, mixed organizations and the media. The first women's organization that explicitly tried to combine a gender approach with a political outlook was *Makibaka*. It sprang from the student movement that raged in the Philippines in the late 1960s.

*Makibaka* was formed in 1970. Its first public activity was the picketing of a major beauty contest, echoing a similar picket held earlier that year in London. Immediately, *Makibaka* was scorned in the press as a bunch of "anti-male," "bra-burning" Western feminists propagating "free sex," and practically denounced by comrades in the student movement. However, the manifesto that accompanied the picket made it clear that *Makibaka* translated its feminist standpoints for the local context by placing the event in the political context of the Philippines:

Women have a far more important role in our society than participation in such inane activities as beauty contests. *Makibaka* believes that in these crucial times women of the Philippines should participate in the struggle for change towards a just and equitable society.

It further said that women should be emancipated from "feudal restraints which prevent their full participation in the struggle for National Democracy" (Taguiwalo, 1994). Debates between *Makibaka* members and their student comrades were soon cut short by the imposition of Martial Law in 1972, when all such organizations were banned. *Makibaka* lived on as the underground women's organization, and one of the member organizations of the National Democratic Front. Lorena Barros, who founded the organization, became an NPA guerrilla fighter. She became one of the heroes-cum-martyrs of the revolution when she was killed by government troops in 1976.

In the early 1980s, new women's organizations began to emerge from the National Democratic dominated anti-dictatorship struggle.<sup>13</sup> In 1984, the nationwide coalition of women's organizations, GABRIELA,<sup>14</sup> was formed. The coalition was named after Gabriela Silang, a heroine of the Philippine resistance against Spanish colonizers. The backbone of the coalition was formed by large alliances of peasant women (*Amihan*), urban poor women (*Samakana*) and women workers (KMK). From the start, GABRIELA took a firm political position as part of the National Democratic movement. After the restoration of democracy in 1986, this led to internal clashes, and two organizations (*Pilipina* and *Kalayaan*) left GABRIELA because they advocated for a separate women's movement outside of the overall organizational

framework of the National Democrats (Santiago, 1995: 121). For its part GABRIELA declared it was happy to continue without these middle-class-oriented organizations. In 1992, the coalition consisted of 80 organizations, with a total membership of 40,000 women

The treatment of gender issues within GABRIELA as part of the National Democratic movement continues to be problematic, however. The National Democratic women's organizations started in the early 1980s with the aim of involving more women in the anti-dictatorship struggle, with the bonus that women were effective in attracting funding. Long-time GABRIELA leaders remember the international women's conference in Nairobi in 1985 as a turning point in this instrumental approach towards a more feminist perspective. One of them said in 1994, "When the GABRIELA delegation came back from Nairobi, the talk was all about Global Sisterhood and women's oppression." For several years, GABRIELA sought to continue dialogue with international women's organizations, in part through the organization of a number of WISAPs or "Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines." At the same time, the coalition maintained a critical distinction from Western feminism by strongly emphasizing that feminism should be embedded in nationalist and class issues.

### Violence Against Women

Ideologically, GABRIELA women increasingly identified with socialist-feminism. They defined their coalition as "distinct from but integral" to the National Democratic movement. The organization's effort to strike a balance between the socialist and the feminist becomes apparent when we consider how it organized International Women's Day over the years. Every International Women's Day on March 8 is punctuated by campaign with themes derived from ongoing political struggles, to which GABRIELA adds a gender dimension. In 1987, the organization followed the political slogan "Peace, based on Justice" with a focus on human rights abuses against women. Some years later when "Ousting the US Bases" formed the political agenda, GABRIELA substantiated this call by airing the plight of women prostitutes around the American military bases. In 1993, however, GABRIELA broke away from this tradition and chose a theme with a clear gender connotation: "Violence Against Women." The country was shaken at that time by a series of highly publicized rape killings and GABRIELA was involved in lobbying for an anti-rape bill. Moreover, through research and education activities GABRIELA leaders came to realize that many women in the Philippines experienced domestic violence, with estimates as high as 60% of all women. As one GABRIELA leader told me,

“Our ‘Violence Against Women’ campaign started with education with the women. When we told them about the military abuse of women, they responded that they had no experience. Their problem was with their own husbands who beat them.”

In the brochure that GABRIELA disseminated for the campaign, only one or two sentences are devoted to men as perpetrators of violence. The remainder of the text blames violence against women entirely on the Philippine government. The state is held responsible because it maintains anti-women policies such as “the indiscriminate selling of Filipino migrant workers,” through “its own officials and agencies violating women’s rights” and by its “lack of interest in pursuing cases of violence against women.” The brochure concludes that the government must be held accountable for the prevalence of violence against women (GABRIELA, 1993). Despite GABRIELA’s careful political setting of the issue (to the extent of inviting criticism from other feminist organizations), the campaign was criticized by a number of National Democratic organizations. One organization reacted by saying the issue was too personal and asked why GABRIELA did not choose instead the more poignant issues, such as difficulties with the provision of electricity that result in frequent “brownouts.” The youth sector complained that the brochure designated men first as responsible and the state only second.

From the start, the need for a separate women’s movement was regularly questioned by people from the “mixed” National Democratic organizations. This put the women of GABRIELA always on the defensive (Angeles, 1989: 213-6). The National Democratic leadership endorsed the women’s movement, but in practice it seemed that raising gender issues was allowed only as long as it added to anti-government protest. The tolerance for gender issues stopped short when men were implicated as agents of women oppression. This was even more so when this concerned men *within* the movement. This became clear from responses to an interview given by a leader of the peasant women of *Amihan* in 1992. She mentioned that several men, *even those who were organized*, prevented their wives from participating in *Amihan* activities, or harassed women organizers (Balmaceda-Gutierrez, 1992: 34). In response to the interview, the regional branch of the farmer’s organization of KMP, which is the “mixed” counterpart of *Amihan*, wanted nothing more to do with *Amihan*. As one *Amihan* officer said,

“We could not understand why they were so furious, because it is common knowledge that wife battering happens. But they said it is baseless.”

The discussions triggered by the “violence against women” campaign were soon overtaken by the debate between the Reaffirmists and Rejectionists. As a nationwide coalition, GABRIELA was heavily affected by this debate, and a number

of national GABRIELA leaders left the organization.<sup>15</sup> But the core of the coalition continued to work within the framework of the National Democrats. In the rectification campaign, GABRIELA went back to basics and reiterated its priority for class-based and anti-imperialist struggles. In particular, the evaluation concluded that the adoption of a socialist-feminist framework was an error, because it implied a kind of equal importance to both elements, instead of prioritizing the socialist. In 1995, GABRIELA again went to the international women's conference in Beijing. This time, they were not searching for new ideas, but had a clear mission to meet like-minded women and bring anti-imperialism back on the agenda of the international women's movement.<sup>16</sup> *Makibaka* was also in Beijing, distributing a pamphlet warning against the "gender trap" in which the Beijing Platform for Action was portrayed as an "Imperialist Scheme for Co-opting the World's Women," excluding the possibilities for empowerment of women through revolution (Makibaka, 1995: 40). The two organizations had some well attended activities and rallied the support of hundreds of women in a protest march during the talk of Hillary Clinton before the NGO forum.

### Rectifying Gender in the Cordillera

CWNGO was, from the start, a member of GABRIELA, and adopted a similar socialist-feminist view. However, to the trinity of national, class and gender oppression, CWNGO added a fourth dimension of ethnic oppression to characterize the condition of indigenous women. In the early years, CWNGO was outspoken in claiming that gender issues should be addressed within the National Democratic organizations. The initial feminist position of CWNGO was also apparent from what may be called one of the 'founding myths' of the organization. This was the oft-repeated story (with slight variations) of how the organization acquired its initial funding.

In 1987, a woman from a European funding agency came to attend a conference in Manila. She had written a letter to another NGO of the Consortium to say she wanted to talk to women in the Cordillera. Though we had been working for several years as CWNGO, we were never told about this letter. We only found out by sheer accident. And so we asked to meet her. But they said: "We will talk to her ourselves, because most of us are women after all." In the end they grudgingly arranged a short meeting just before she was leaving. Her plane left at 9, and we were meeting her at 7. And she was so happy to meet with us. She then asked us for a proposal. So, that is how it all began.

The story brings out an image of determined women who had, despite obstructions, successfully established their institution. CWNGO managers were

also fond of recalling how male companions in mixed organizations had not taken them seriously until CWNGO acquired its own financial base, proving, in their opinion, how important economic independence is for women.

The first time that CWNGO ran into problems because of its gender focus was, again, around the issue of domestic violence. In 1989, CWNGO conducted health research among women in a small-scale mining area. One of the findings of the research was that 50% of the women experienced wife-beating; among the husbands were several leaders of the miners' organizations. These men objected to the publication of the findings which according to them, CWNGO had damaged their reputation. In the first instance, CWNGO emerged more defiant from this experience, relating the protests of the miners during several public occasions to substantiate their idea that a separate women's movement was needed, apart from, but integral to the 'mixed' National Democratic organization. As we shall see, this interpretation of the event would later be changed.

CWNGO continued to work on issues of violence against women. Approached by women victims or their relatives, CWNGO set up a number of campaigns relating to cases of rape and sexual harassment. In writing about these cases, CWNGO emphasized that violence against women was either alien to indigenous culture, or met with strict community sanctions. Public campaigns were launched in cases where the perpetrator was either a lowlander, educated government official or a member of the military. After some time, CWNGO decided to open a Women's Crisis Center which attracted two staff members and several volunteers. The center provided counseling and legal advice and engaged in lobbying government agencies to get them to become more proactive regarding violence against women. Deliberately, CWNGO located the Crisis Center in a separate office in town. The reason given was that women needed to be able to go to there unobserved and in private. Prominent among the projected clientele were NGO staff members and wives of men in the NGOs and regional organizations. The Crisis Center thus contributed to acknowledging that violence against women also occurred within the NGOs and the National Democratic organizations.

Towards the end of 1993, there were increasing complaints about CWNGO's education seminars, in particular the two-day Basic Women's Orientation, which laid the groundwork for their nationalist-feminist position. According to CWNGO and other NGO staff members, this education program was considered divisive in the community. This led to considerations among CWNGO staff to redesign the training for women and men together. However, by this time, the damage had been done and the Basic Women's Orientation and CWNGO had acquired a reputation in the wider NGO network of being "divisive."

As mentioned earlier, when the rectification came, women's work in the region was largely deemed an error, and the socialist-feminist approach was abandoned as a "disorientation," because it implied that class and gender oppression were equally important. Instead, referring to Marx and Engels, it was stated that patriarchy was, in fact, a derivative of class formation. Women's work was also considered to be culturally inappropriate for the indigenous population. At the time of the rectification, another story gained mythical proportions. This was the story of how Manila-based feminists had come to the region to give a so-called "women's orientation" in the province.

When the session came to women's bodies, they suddenly removed their shirts, showing their breasts, saying: "Look how beautiful women's bodies are." And these women in the villages were just so embarrassed.

After careful evaluation, the CWNGO management reconsidered its opinion about the conflict with the miners' organizations. It was now considered wrong to have published the findings, because it had not helped women: "The men were so angry that the women had told us stories that instead of stopping, they hit them even more." Some months later, mixed NGOs complained to CWNGO about an interview it was about to publish in which an NGO staff member stated that her husband failed to help her with household chores even though they were both full-time activists. CWNGO, without much ado, withdrew the publication.

Hence, the rectification gave a strong message about gender issues, stipulating that attention to gender was still possible, even important, but should not be divisive. As long as women's organizations continued to address state or economic oppression of women, it was all right. But they should refrain from addressing gender relations within the household and especially gender relations within the organizations. This ideological shift had several ramifications for the organization of women. Thenceforth, villages were going to be organized with teams of mixed NGOs addressing men and women simultaneously; maintaining separate women's organizations was no longer a priority and sometimes actively discouraged. Women orientations were being revised, and when the regional women's federation was revived, a major policy point was for it not to be divisive. The Crisis Center was closed.

### Informal Gender Repertoires

So far, I have dealt with the ideological struggles regarding gender and how the more or less formal relations between women and mixed organizations influenced the struggles. However, there is another side to the story relating to more informal, cultural changes. It is the story of how NGO women started to break away from the

cultural prescriptions for middle-class women in the Philippines and how this was resented by men in the NGOs (and a number of women too), including the male leadership of the National Democratic movement. It is a more tentative story, constructed from reading certain trends, from pieces of conversation and observations. It is nevertheless an important story to tell.

From *Makibaka's* beginnings, members increasingly addressed a large range of gender issues through their everyday practices and discourses. Their practice over the years became replete with statements about women's roles and gender relations. In the first place, they focused attention on the implications of motherhood and other issues pertinent to women activists in the National Democratic movement. One of the major criticisms of the movement at the time of the debate in 1992 concerned its "instrumental view of people", a "tendency to evaluate their worth mainly on whether they advance or obstruct the Left's class-determined political objectives" (Bello, 1992: 6).<sup>17</sup> This problem was clearly felt by women comrades who had children. Some considered their pregnancy mainly as an interruption of their political work and left their children with relatives as soon as they could. Many, however, felt there was no sympathy for their problems or felt excluded by virtue of their motherhood. One woman I interviewed clearly remembered how hurt she felt when her husband was told, in her presence, that she could not be relied on for a position of political leadership because she had to take care of her children. The women of the underground *Makibaka* regularly raised the issue of the lack of attention or the trivialization of issues relating to childbirth and childcare (Siapno, 1995: 232).

At the same time, National Democratic women in the NGOs were rapidly expanding their room for maneuvering, especially after 1986. A sign of those times is the growth of lesbian organizations within the National Democratic Women's Movement. While lesbianism in the mid-1980s was associated by many with Western women trying to "seduce" Filipinas during international events,<sup>18</sup> this was quickly overtaken by the emergence of explicit lesbians in the women's organizations, writing and organizing seminars on the issue as well as introducing it as a normal aspect of people relations and office life largely accepted or, at least openly, discussed.<sup>19</sup> Married women, on the other hand, increasingly explored ideas of women engaging in extra-marital affairs. It is common and quite accepted among Philippine men to have a *querida* (mistress). Now, women joked, it was their turn, and some of them actually put this into practice, either with a Filipino or with one of the many foreign visitors.

NGO women, fully absorbed in their work, spent practically all their time with their officemates, extending into occasional beer drinking sessions. Such sessions were full of jokes and teasing about gender relations and sexuality. Those women

who were neither married nor lesbian joked about their auto-erotic sexuality, referred to with that wonderful activist sense of humor as “armed struggle.” When I went to Beijing, one of my NGO friends in Baguio asked me to buy her a copy of Mao Zedong poems, as well as some pieces of silk underwear. When I told one of the GABRIELA leaders on our way to the airport about this funny combination of orders, she heartily laughed and exclaimed: “Now, that is the Filipino woman activist!” Not only did these women step away from the ideal picture of the “good soldier” of the National Democratic movement, in their songs, political statements and in their lifestyles, they had traveled very far from Maria Clara, the sweet, docile, obedient and self-sacrificing character in the famous novel *Noli me Tangere* of Rizal, which for a long time epitomized middle-class Filipino women.<sup>20</sup>

My interest in the significance of these everyday practices of women is twofold. In the first place, I am interested in knowing what role such changes played in the way the debate manifested itself and, in particular, how women’s organizations were dealt with in the rectification. When Liwanag condemned the “habits, loose discipline and craving for comfort in the offices” (see above), I wonder to what extent he was referring to the changing identities and roles of women. In a volume edited by Valentine Moghadam (1994), it was suggested that the upsurge of nationalist or fundamentalist ideologies (Hindu, Islamic and Christian alike), effecting restrictions on women, could partly be explained as a reaction against changing roles for women. Likewise, I suggest that Liwanag’s “back to basics” call, apart from being the reaction of a revolutionary losing ground, was also a patriarchal reaction against changing everyday gender relations.

This was never openly stated, but is based on impressions, informal comments, frowning faces and other small indications of male redress when confronted with signals or charges from these self-conscious women. This is not limited to the leadership of the movement; it also concerns men in local organizations opposing separate women groups, or resenting the influence GABRIELA had on women’s behavior. One example among numerous small events happened during a seminar in September 1993, when NGO workers had to identify a core gender problem in groups. One male group started their presentation by introducing their group as the Diego group. Named after Diego Silang (the husband of Gabriela Silang), the acronym stood for D’organization for the Immediate Elimination of all GABRIELA Organizations. The core problem the group presented was the “gender insensitivity of women.” When I asked one of them why he was so opposed to GABRIELA, he explained that a local GABRIELA organizer had advised the wife of a friend to abandon her husband. Further probing on my part revealed that the man was a repetitive wife-beater, but nonetheless this man thought GABRIELA had no right to meddle in family life.



In the second place, the temporary closure in discourses on female sexuality and women's oppression in the household and organizations during the rectification process appears much less definite if we take into account the everyday negotiations of gender. In informal practices and interactions, women continued to enact and defend their newly-acquired freedoms and lifestyles. Often, this materialized in the form of jokes. The nature of the jokes and the irony is double-faced. During the rectification campaign, jokes seemed, in the first place, to be a confirmation of the rectification, a ground where people could play out the new directions and show off their political correctness. However, it was also through jokes that negotiations continued over gender values in everyday life. Somebody commented about the jeans and short hair of my baby daughter: "She might become a lesbian." Somebody else replied: "Never mind her gender, as long as she has the correct class position." These and similar jokes point to the complexity and interrelation of discourses in everyday life. Even though discursive order appeared to be restored in the NGOs, women's issues could not equally be "boxed in" in everyday practices and confrontations.

### Theoretical Commentary

The timing and direction of the rectification campaign of the National Democratic movement, as described in this paper, are not so difficult to explain. The rectification campaign, with its call to go back to the basics, can easily be read as the defensive move of a threatened leadership. The movement lost much of its strength after 1986. It had difficulty defining its role in a democratic setting, there were internal contestations over power, and many people simply lost interest in the revolution. Given the changes that had taken place in the NGOs and the women's movement, respectively, it is also understandable why they were primary targets of the rectification. What remains a fascinating question, however, is why the rectification campaign was successful in enrolling a large part of the National Democratic movement membership. Examining the process by which the political rectification discourse became dominant among NGO actors sheds light on the interplay of discourse and power.

The question of how discourse becomes powerful is important (think of present-day resurgent nationalist, ethnic and fundamentalist ideologies), and defies a simple answer. What happened in the Cordillera was so complex that I became convinced that power could not be reduced to a single principle. Instead, I contend that the renewed National Democratic discourse became dominant in the Cordillera through a combination of coercion, conviction and seduction.

The fact that the rectification campaign was not accompanied by violence does not mean that there was no coercion involved. The “Reaffirm...” document was popularly thought to have evoked a “debate” in the National Democratic movement. In reality, this was not the case. The document put forward one “truth” that could be accepted or rejected but was not up for debate. By leaving no space between “correctness,” on the one hand, and “error,” on the other, a “take it or leave it” situation was created. One either consented or left. Although many organizations and individuals took the exit option, the pressure to stay was considerable in those areas where the leadership had taken sides with the Reaffirmists.<sup>21</sup> To understand this, one has to realize the nature of the actors’ commitment to the National Democratic movement. This movement was close to what Goffman calls a “total institution” (1961). Membership represented many things at the same time. One operated in closely-knit groups, where work, leisure and family life were concentrated with the same people. Entering this movement often implied a virtual break with one’s family and former friends, so comrades became colleagues, friends and relatives at the same time. The identification with the movement was reinforced by one’s being engaged in partially underground work, underlining the distance from the “rest of society.” One believed in the cause of the movement, and it was at the same time one’s life project, embodying aspirations and career prospects. While a good record could result in a higher position in the movement, it was hardly saleable in job hunts outside of it. In this situation, peer pressure and the prospect of having to leave the movement when opting out of the rectification provided a strong hold on people.

The rectification was also **convincing** to a large number of people. Subjects of ideology, ranging from capitalism to present-day fundamentalist movements, have often been associated with “false consciousness,” where people are thought to internalize certain interpretations that have no “objective” connection to their actual situation, needs and desires. However, as stipulated above, the arguments put forward by the “Reaffirm...” document were quite convincing. It was not difficult to find empirical evidence to corroborate the notion that, essentially, nothing had changed. NGO problems hinted at were not mere inventions of Liwanag, but resonated growing concerns of NGO management both within and outside of the movement (Constantino-David, 1998). Once accepted, the ideas of the rectification indeed became a powerful ideology with a high “ability to intervene in the consciousness of those it subjects, appropriating and reinflecting their experience” (Eagleton, 1991: 45). Increasingly, the interpretation of events and processes was filtered through this forceful prism. Sealed off from alternative readings and ideas that were *a priori* considered worthless when originating from somebody without the “right framework,” the rectification discourse became an ahistoric, “naturalized” representation of social reality. What started as a convincing analysis thus turned into a discourse that increasingly shaped the reality.

Finally, the rectification discourse was also **seductive**. Actors were seduced by the rectification in two ways. In the first place, the rectification did not just present a coherent picture of social reality and errors in earlier strategies, it also provided a clear solution by “going back to basics.” Emery Roe stated that in cases of high ambiguity and pressure to act, organizations tend to resort to broad explanatory narratives and standard approaches (Roe, 1991).<sup>22</sup> The “Reaffirm...” document was just such a narrative on which to base organizational policy. The rectification was also seductive in a more symbolic way. The process of identifying and rectifying errors resembled the road to redemption of Catholic sinners. People had committed errors, had wandered from the right path, which was analyzed and “confessed” to in a rectification, after which they could resume with a clean slate, as if they were absolved from their errors/sins.<sup>23</sup> The willingness of people to undergo criticisms and self-criticisms, accompanied by intense emotional outbursts and a drive to make up for past errors, indicates that they attached a high symbolic value to the rectification.<sup>24</sup>

The mechanisms that rendered the rectification discourse its power, *i.e.* coercion, conviction and seduction, worked in different combinations and with different weights through time for different people. Actors did not simply enact the rectification discourse. They responded differently to the various pressures, accorded different meanings to the discourse and valorized it in varied ways. While for some the discourse represented absolute truth, others used it merely as a reference point. What one person embraced with dedication left his or her comrade largely indifferent. Where some felt the coercive properties of the rectification, others were challenged by opportunities to gain leadership. Some merely subjected themselves to the rectification, others explored the room for maneuvering that it provided.

Indeed, the rectification process in the National Democratic movement in the Philippines was partly affected by, and in turn strongly effected developments in NGOs and the women’s movement. Due to its contracted nature, the rectification process magnifies certain processes of constructing and utilizing discourse in relation to power processes. The range of responses shows that even a powerful ideological discourse does not operate outside of people’s agency. Mediated by their agency and through their everyday practices, people evoke, empower, challenge and reshape discourses. At the same time, a discourse, once established, may be a forceful element in creating people’s realities.

## Notes

1. This paper only deals in detail with this group of National Democratic NGOs. There are many other kinds of NGOs in the Cordillera. A 1990 survey enumerates 60, most of which operate locally (Reyes-Boquiren *et al*, 1990). As in the wider Philippines, NGOs also differ in their political ideologies and affiliations. A small number of NGOs have a clear indigenous or environmentalist focus, many NGOs lean towards the government, and there are a number of NGOs set up by mining companies. For a comparative study on NGO interventions in open-pit mining communities, see Cariño, 1992; 1990.
2. This could amount to literally dozens of small projects in one village. For a village case study on CECAP, see Rovillos, 1996.
3. By the end of 1994, a total of 3,192 micro-projects were ongoing or completed and a program was approved for another five-year phase (CECAP, 1992-1994). CECAP remained highly visible throughout the Cordillera with calendars, posters and other paraphernalia continuously flooding offices, shops and billboards with slogans such as 'CECAP Providing Hope for the Long-term Future.' Some posters presented the communities 'before' and 'after' CECAP, and were not unlike adverts for cosmetics in women's weeklies. Seeing these, one could not escape the impression that the program's approach was more about CECAP-centered than people-centered development.
4. The problem of NGOs having to redefine their identity after transformations in the state, for example, from military rule to democracy, has been widely documented. Particularly for Latin America, see the volumes edited by Andrew Clayton 1996, and Michael Edwards and David Hulme, 1992. For Central America, see Biekart, 1999. Borgh, 1999; and Schlanger 1996 on Brazil. The Peruvian case is interesting, since NGOs face a double identity issue: in relation to the state and in relation to avoiding being associated with the Shining Path (Scurrah, 1996)
5. See Tigno, 1993; Zialcita *et al*, 1995; CODE-NGO and DILG, 1998; George, 1998.
6. For an authorized biography of Jose Maria Sison, see Sison and Werning, 1989; for an unauthorized account of Sison and the revolutionary movement, see Jones, 1989.
7. Although the NGOs joined the rectification, let me reiterate that not all of the NGO leaders appreciated the policies. Some opted out of the process, other individuals withdrew completely from NGO work. Several others, who were not fully convinced of the rectification, were nonetheless motivated to move along for several reasons. Some did not want to leave the movement for reasons of belonging, a sense of family, a loyalty that made one stay, despite one's reservations. Others took the rectification movement in stride, expecting that once the movement was consolidated, it would open up again to alternative ideas. The rectification campaign never came to a definite closure, as discussions continued about appropriate strategies and a proper balancing of alternative approaches.

8. The response of NGO staff members who were not part of management varied. The broad lines of the rectification were explained to them through education sessions. Some found the change of work meaningful, others merely followed the instructions of the management. There were also quite a few, however, who did not like the turn of events. They could not immediately resign for financial reasons, but silently looked around for other job opportunities. The number of staff decreased substantially. Particularly dissatisfied were those who had been involved in politics for several years, but at a low level, for example, through participation in study groups. They felt excluded from the discussions of the rectification movement.
9. Illustrative is the story of the new Governor of Benguet. In the 1995 elections this person had centered his campaign on the integrity of natural resources. His advocacy for self-determination of resources, as well as his family relations, - one of his brothers was the president of the CPA - led some NGOs and POs to make an exception to the general approach of staying away from elections, and they actively campaigned for him. However, soon after he resumed office, he changed position. Rumors had it that his gambling debts were so big that he was an easy prey to pressure from higher government officials. Whatever the truth, the fact was that he started to actively promote government projects, in particular the San Roque dam. The betrayal of his campaign promises was but another sign that, indeed, "nothing had changed" and that official, electoral politics would never lead to substantial social change.
10. An additional axis, ranging from practical gender interests to strategic interests (Molyneux, 1986; Moser, 1993) or feminine versus feminist interests (Stephen, 1997), which were subject to intense debate in Latin American women's movements, were never very prominent in the Philippines.
11. This complementarity is symbolized in the often-cited Philippine creation myth where *Babaye* (woman) is considered to have emerged from the nodes of a bamboo as a whole person, separate from, yet born together with, *Lalake* (man) (Santiago, 1995: 110).
12. For analytical clarity, these factors are presented as separate. Although they sometimes appear as such, Philippine women's organizations often take into account (explicitly or implicitly) the notion that these forms of difference are not additive, but that the experiences of race or class alter the experience of gender (see Moore, 1988). GABRIELA considered the articulation of forms of oppression by consistently raising the question of "how it is to be female and poor in a country dominated by foreign powers and interests" (Angeles, 1989: 65-70).
13. For a comparative account of women's movements springing from revolutionary or liberation movements in El Salvador, see Stephen, 1997.
14. GABRIELA stands for General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action.
15. Apart from ideological stances, it has been suggested that "personalities, political maneuvering and self-interest" were additional factors influencing women to take

one side or the other (Fumerton, 1995: 63).

16. The strong messages of Philippine women activists aimed in part to counter the positive impression given by the Philippine government of its advanced gender policies.
17. Quoted in Siapno, 1995: 232.
18. During my first visit to the Philippines in 1986, my hair was cut short. Several NGO women told me later during my stay that they had initially thought I was a lesbian and had been afraid I might 'approach' them.
19. Lesbian organizations (like the other women's organizations) are engaged in discussions about their political affiliations or non-affiliations. They are also very much engaged in defining the meaning of Philippine lesbianism. One of the issues under discussion is gender roles of lesbian partners. It is relatively common among Philippine lesbians to make a strong distinction between the 'butches' and the 'femmes' in a lesbian couple. Some organizations only accept the 'butches' as members, because they consider 'femmes' lesbians, to be ordinary women.
20. The class element here may be very significant. I am referring here to changes observed in women movement leaders. Although explicit talk about sexuality is considered shameful among middle-class women, it is, I believe, quite different among peasant women whose openness I have always found strikingly frank, including detailed comments about their husbands' performances in bed, quite contrary to the often cited demureness of Filipino women.
21. One reason why in the Cordillera the leadership did not divide over the debate was because the movement had already experienced it in 1986.
22. See also Hilhorst and van Leeuwen, 2000.
23. The comparison may not be taken literally when we take into account how Catholicism evolved in the Philippines. Philippine Catholicism has been characterized by a fascination for penance and the suffering of the passion, manifested among other things by the tradition of self-flagellation and even crucifixion practices during passion plays before Easter. As Nick Barker (1997) warned, this should not be interpreted as penitential exercise for committed sins, but as a "contractual sacrifice" where self-flagellation is done to acquire the grace of God and in exchange for protection of the family against mishaps and disease.
24. Returning home from the women's oppression seminar mentioned above, one CWNGO staff member, for example, burst into tears because, as she said "If I think back of all the erroneous things I have been teaching these women, how I poisoned their brains, my heart feels too heavy."
25. Wageningen University, Rural Development Sociology Group
26. The paper is based on a dissertation (Hilhorst, 2000) presently being prepared for publication by Zed Books.

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