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by Richard Critchfield
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THE CHANGING PEASANT
Part VI: The Tenant

"This has always been a peaceful place," the villagers said, as if the very words, repeated often enough, could protect them from the troubles outside. Sturdy, good-humored folk, with patient Malay faces and quick smiles, they radiated ineffable permanence. Living on the edge of subsistence, they seemed unchangeable.

The Philippine barrio of Tulungatung, with its nipa stilt houses adorned with bougainvillea and dangling pots of roses, probably has looked much the same since Muslim Malays migrated from Borneo in the thirteenth century, settled the coastal plains of the Philippine islands, and chased the aboriginal Aetes (or *Negritos* as the Spaniards called them), who had inhabited the archipelago for at least 50,000 years, into the mountains and jungles, where they still survive.

Ferdinand Magellan's three ships, the first to sail around the earth, brought the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. They settled the tip of Zamboanga peninsula on Mindanao and named it "land of the flowers." The Spaniards soon had baptized the lowland Malays and founded Zamboanga City as a seat of Castilian culture. But they failed to convert many Muslims, whom the Spaniards called *Moros* (Moors). The Moros retreated to strongholds on Mindanao, Brunei, and the islands of the Sulu Sea, where many became hereditary pirates. Organized under sultans or *datus*, the Moros began a conflict in 1571 that continues to this day; the word for "Christian" in the Tausug language of the Sulu islanders is still *bisaya*, "slave." In 1848 came American troops under such commanders as General "Black Jack" Pershing. They fought the Moros, then tried a policy of attraction and "isolation." After World War II, independent Philippine governments sought to "foster integration," "unify the country," and "protect minority cultures." But in 1972, many Moros still remained pirates, plundering fishing boats along Zamboanga's coast, stealing kerosene lamps and equipment, and dumping their victims, themselves mostly Muslim fishermen, into the Sulu Sea to be eaten by sharks. (Two years earlier, something of a shooting war had begun after small groups of Christian settlers from the overpopulated Visayan islands and Luzon joined with bandits to form anti-Muslim gangs. Both sides were then just small terrorist groups.)

Upon this enduring fabric, the fallout of modernity was inevitably settling: Japanese Isuzu buses plied the coastal road into Zamboanga City, blaring the Rolling Stones on their Sony cassette players. The latest C-4 and IR-22 American-bred, dwarf rice was planted in the paddies of Tulungatung and the neighboring coastal barrios. The young men, if they had the pesos for a bus trip into town on Saturday nights, were more than likely to sneak into a porno *bomba* film or smoke pot.

But to the outsider in Tulungatung village—even now—it is the timeless peculiarity that tells: the purple hush of the Philippine dusk as trade winds stir the coconut palms; the pounding, muscular rhythm as the young men thresh the rice harvest by "dancing" upon it with their bare feet; the hands of an old woman, brown and fragile as last year's leaves, raised in prayer in the barrio chapel, with its incense, candles, lace shawls, and fat, old, complacent Spanish priest.

With no more than 50 or 60 nipa huts along a dusty, coconut-shadowed road, Tulungatung is cut to the same pattern as most of the 30,000 Philippine barrios. There is a burnt little plaza with fly-specked food stalls and a billard hall, a tavern where you can get pleasurably groggy on *tuba*, sour coconut palm wine. A tin-roofed chapel houses the patron saint, and every morning in the vegetable gardens of the barrio primary school shy, eager children scurry among the rows with big green sprinkling cans.

In the larger, seacoast barrio of Ayala, a mile away, the rest of Tulungatung's community life is carried on: here are the central church, the rice mill, the Chinese general stores, the cockpit, and the cemetery, with its forest of whitewashed tombs and angels with lichen-covered wings.

The barrio pattern holds the hearts of the Philippine peasantry. They feel secure within its familiar boundaries, confident of a welcome or help in time of need. Almost everyone is related through birth or marriage.

There is no electricity and no paving; during the rains Tulungatung slips into mud; in dry weather the ground underfoot is as hard as stone. A river flows sluggishly between Chinese-owned coconut plantations to the sea. Half hidden by soaring coconut palms, Spanish acacia trees, bamboo thickets, and mango and banana groves, the

barrio by day is hot, sleepy, and dappled in vivid greens.

It rouses into noise by night: snickering cicadas, angrily croaking frogs, yelping pye-dogs, crying babies, crowing roosters. Small wonder (as crime worsened in late 1972) that coconut thieves and cattle rustlers, if they came by stealth after dark, were seldom apprehended.

Inland, the coconut plantations soon die away into marshland and there begins a steep ascent to the forested mountains where the logging camps are. Once the mountainsides were covered with mahogany forest but now there are signs of cultivation everywhere: stumps of trees and ashes from fires where ground has been cleared for corn, cassava, and coconuts, for when the loggers move out, the slash-and-burn cultivators, or *kainjinero*, move in. Toward the sea opens a broad, level expanse of riceland, divided into several hundred small holdings of 2 to 15 acres each. Almost all this land, in 1972 and now, is tilled by impoverished leaseholding tenants or sharecroppers from Tulungatung and three neighboring barrios. The rice fields are owned, like most of the rice-growing Philippine lowlands, by absentee landlords, middle-class shopkeepers, schoolteachers, policemen, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and merchants from the prosperous little middle-class towns.

Of all Asia's wet rice agriculture or *sawah* regions, this ownership pattern is unique to the Philippines, an anomaly with roots in the history of these islands as the only Asian country colonized first by the Spanish and then the Americans. It poses a unique obstacle to agricultural modernization, since the 30 percent of income needed for fertilizer, pesticides, simple machinery (to shorten turnaround time between harvest and sowing), and modern irrigation is siphoned from each harvest as rent to the townspeople.

Over 300 years of near-serfdom under the Spaniards and 42 years of popular education under the Americans, plus a roaring population growth rate, are to blame. The Americans put an English-language primary school—many with American teachers—into every village and created many new universities in the towns. The population grew at an annual rate of over 3 percent for most of the twentieth century (though the rate is now 2.7% and falling). What seems to have happened is that three or four generations of former near-serfs got educated, moved into town, joined commercial or professional occupations, and started collecting rent from the furiously multiplying poorer, less-educated folks left behind to till the fields. American-style schooling has left the Philippines with the best educated peasantry and small townsfolk in the Third World—but also with the greatest number of tenant cultivators, who with their families literally live in their fields.

Giving one the same sense of air and release one gets on the sea, the big open clearings of riceland are where the people are—far too many of them for wet rice agriculture to support unless it is drastically modernized. But it cannot be modernized unless the land belongs to the man who cultivates it: under tenancy there is never enough profit and cash for agricultural investment. This is the real story of Tulungatung and the other 30,000 barrios where 70 percent of the country's people—40 million in 1972, nearly 50 million now—still live. It also tells why, when Tulungatung's people say, "This has always been a peaceful place," they are really saying it no longer is.

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When I first went to stay at Tulungatung in fall 1972, the Philippines was at the wrong end of almost every development list. Its then yearly population growth rate of 3.3 percent was one of the world's highest (Mexico, still at 3.7%, has probably the highest, and, as a Latin society deeply influenced by American culture, for many of the same reasons). The arrival of 1.3 million more Filipinos each year ranked the country tenth in the world for absolute annual increase. With only 8 million people at the end of World War II, the Philippines was projected to reach 65 million by 1985. In 1972, its GNP was less than $8 billion, joblessness stood at 15 percent of the labor force—25 percent for young men between 15 and 24; it also had one of the world's highest crime rates. The income gap between rich and poor was fast widening: between 1966 and 1972 the income of the richest 20 percent of Filipinos rose at a rate 12 to 16 times higher than that of the poorest 20 percent. Manila's new industries had such sophisticated technology that the average investment per worker was $2,645, compared to $626 in Korea and $756 in Taiwan, and dependency on big American-controlled multinational corporations had undercut local attempts at industrialization. Mounting foreign debt had caused a payments crisis. There were extremely low national savings for investment.

A density of 123 people per square kilometer, as against the Asian average of 86 and the world's 25, had created an intense need for more rice, more vegetables, more fish, more meat, and more lumber which lead to more dikes, more canals, more silted or eutrophying rivers, more mountainsides denuded by logging and slash-and-burn agriculture, and more coastal fishponds blocking drainage to the sea. This, in turn, left the islands' ecosystem with a sharply decreasing margin between minor losses and major disaster from typhoons, floods, and drought. Millions of peasants left their barrios for the cities, especially Manila; and squatters' settlements proliferated, breeding prostitution, crime, alcoholism, and disease. By any measure, the Philippines was in deep trouble.

Its dual social institutions, democracy based upon political parties and a free press adapted from the Americans side by side with an economically dominant landed oligarchy enjoying a feudalistic patronage system inherited from the Spaniards, had shown themselves unable to adjust to and cope with Philippine reality long before President Ferdinand E. Marcos decided to ride the tiger and declare martial law on September 21, 1972.

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When in 1966 Tonio Rohas, then 28, began farming 2.5 acres belonging to a schoolteacher in the next village, Ayala, he built himself a small nipa hut out in the fields. A stand of coconut palm gave some shade and beneath the soaring trees he planted cassava, eggplant, papaya, string beans, and other

green vegetables. These, together with three-fourths of the rice he grew and fish purchased from Muslim fishermen from the seashore, made up his diet. The Moro pirates rarely came ashore, but thievery among Tulungatung's own young men had grown apace with joblessness, drinking, and gambling. Tonio felt it more prudent to stay on the land.

Tonio hoped to build a better house to replace what was little more than a raised shack thatched with palm. He wanted to marry Maria Elena, a barrio schoolteacher in Tulungatung, but his hut was too makeshift. And 10 family members were already crowded into his father's house near the sea, many of them having to sleep on the floor. Tonio had no idea where the money would come from. Since he had started farming, he could not remember a time when he was not in debt. Together with his father, Catilino, a part-time kainjinero who sometimes helped him for a share of the rice, Tonio in 1972 owed 200 pesos on his last crop. It seemed to him he was moving—forever backward—on a treadmill of obligations. The peso was then about 7 to $1.

For Tonio, as for most of his neighbors, getting enough cash for food and clothing, cigarettes, wine, and pocket money was an all-absorbing, never-solved problem from one harvest to the next. After each rice harvest, a fourth had to be paid the schoolteacher-landowner. Another one-fifth share had to go to even poorer villagers who helped Tonio weed, cut, and thresh the rice, a system that helped perpetuate poverty but also insured that all Tulungatung's people were fed. Another fourth usually went to help feed Tonio's parents and six younger brothers and sisters at home.

Seed, if he had to buy it, cost about $16; planting, if you counted a laborer's wages, food, and tuba, another $20 or so; pesticides at least $20, and herbicides maybe $3. Fertilizer cost $30, and Tonio could no longer afford to buy enough. He had also, by 1972, abandoned the modern, but more expensive, practice of planting in straight rows.

Already Tonio was nostalgic for the days when, in the first few years out of high school, he had lived for only five things: girls, beaches, dancing, drinking, and baseball, however you shuffled the order, an alluring combination. To earn money he had knocked around—logging, shinnying up palm trees to pick coconuts, and loading trucks at a Chinese box factory. Then he joined the construction crew building Zamboanga City's first jet strip. Earning $2.25 a day by working overtime (some days up to 18 hours) he made more money than he had ever made in his life.

After the airfield was finished, he settled into farming. He had saved enough to invest in modern inputs, and when IR8 "miracle" rice was first introduced in Tulungatung in 1968, he harvested 6 tons from his 2.5 acres of rented paddy. But double-cropping, which was also introduced, meant Tulungatung's peasants could no longer burn off their fields and leave them fallow as they had done for centuries. Unchecked, the local insect population grew to plague proportions.

By 1972, Tulungatung's rice fields were infested by more army worms, green leaf hoppers, and stem borers than ever before. So much of each crop was damaged, Tonio was lucky to harvest two or three tons. The government agricultural radio news warned that a new rice disease, *tungro*, was moving into the Zamboanga peninsula from Luzon, where it had ravaged crops since 1969. Everyone was urged to grow a crop of legumes instead of rice to break the insects' life cycle. Some did; but other neighbors said this was nonsense and blamed the government for releasing a widely planted variety, IR22, which had proved highly susceptible to insects. Tonio wanted to try IR24, supposedly a new resistant strain, but the seed was not yet available.

Old Catalino complained, "The rice crop was doubled but now we grow deeper and deeper in debt buying chemicals to fight the insects. And what good does it do? We try to follow all the modern methods, but the insects become worse. It's no good. Physically, mentally, the farmers are being tortured. The government should give us free or subsidized insecticides and show us when to apply them."* (This is exactly what later happened.)

By 1972, agriculture in Tulungatung had actually gone backward. The insects, the unwillingness of absentee landlords to invest, and the rising costs of pesticides and fertilizer had made it impossible to use all the new high rice technology. Some of Tulungatung's men spoke of giving up the new ways altogether.

Tonio postponed his marriage, hoping things would look up. Already, with its bamboo beams aslant and nipa palm frayed and rotting, his hut looked as if it might fall apart at any moment. The interior was dark and cramped, little more than a sleeping platform; its wooden planks creaked and groaned, and the few patched garments hanging from nails brushed your head. A small improvised veranda outside, with a hearth, an earthen floor, bare table and bench, while crude and mean, was where he did his cooking and eating. Yet this hut provided a cool shade during the long midday siesta; and in the late afternoons, when a day's field labor was over and one of the neighboring farmers stopped by with a jug of tuba, it did not seem such a bad place to be.

I usually stayed in Tonio's fields until almost dark before bicycling home. As a flat, late sun slid into the Sulu Sea and hordes of shrill-voiced little boys ran about the fields with slingshots chasing away the rice-eating *maya* birds, glasses were filled and refilled with tuba. Most often the talk was of farming. How to get credit was a never-ending problem. Tonio would observe that a tenant, lacking a land title, could not borrow from the government's Rural Land Bank. "And even if you have title to your land," he said, "it takes a week or more. If you want to borrow 500 pesos, you must slip those bastards 50."

Nunilo, a fat, easy-going neighbor, who was our most constant companion, readily agreed. "If you don't

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*Tulungatung's people are bilingual and speak both Spanish and English; Zamboanga peninsula is only one of two areas in the Philippines where Spanish (rather than the Tagalog language of Malay origin) is spoken. Almost all Filipinos, however humble, speak English, because until recently it was the language of instruction, even in village primary schools. When someone is quoted in this *Report*, he is speaking English.

know somebody in the office, you get left at the door," he said. Lazy and sociable, Nunilo was forever coming over to gossip and tell jokes until his tiny, work-worn father, Pedro, would come angrily in search of him.

"So if you don't have land or other capital," Nunilo went on, "you get nothing after the harvest. All your profits will just go to the Spanish priest or Chinese merchant, those usurers." Tonio said a few of Tulungatung's best farmers had established credit at the Chinese rice mill in Ayala; they could borrow pesos at planting time at 20 percent interest. Everyone else, including himself, had to turn to Father Perez, the old Spanish priest, who gave 15 pesos during sowing in return for 30 pesos worth of rice after the harvest.

Cherito, Tonio's other closest neighbor, would argue that the best thing would be to form a cooperative. At 33, gloomy, handsome, and heavy-drinking, Cherito was something of a romantic figure. He was comparatively well-off, cultivating 9 rented acres and owning 22 acres of coconut trees and a herd of 50 cattle. But he had tragically fallen in love with his own first cousin, whom he could not marry (had he been Muslim, it would have been acceptable).

"Father Perez once formed a cooperative, but it is closed now because of the foolishness of the farmers," Cherito told us one evening. "Very few joined. We started with 25 registered. But so many of the men were *pilio*, mischievous. One gave the priest a certificate of ownership for his cow as collateral. But after the harvest the priest got that piece of paper and found the cow was already dead for a year."

Tonio and Nunilo laughed, relishing the idea of somebody putting one over on the wily Father Perez. "So our cooperative went down because of such foolishness," Cherito said. "Everybody was only borrowing and borrowing. They don't pay anything back."

Nunilo often talked of becoming a kainjinero like Tonio's father, brothers, and uncles. All farmed patches of corn and cassava in the mountains. Nunilo said the rich Chinese who owned most of this once-forested land would permit almost anyone to clear and work it. In return they had to plant and guard coconut trees for the Chinese. Tonio argued that you could raise corn, cassava, or dry rice only for a single crop, and new clearings had to be made every two or three years because heavy rains washed away the topsoil. Everybody knew slash-and-burn agriculture, together with the heavy logging going on, was wasteful, Cherito said. The precious mahogany forests were vanishing and the kainjineros would eventually ruin the land. "Who can worry about the distant future when they have an empty belly?" asked Nunilo.

As darkness fell, crowds of men and women would return from the fields, moving along the path by Tonio's hut, some carrying bundles of fodder on their heads, others riding big black *carabaos*, water buffalo. Some sang American pop songs as they went and waved at Tonio, evidently in a good mood now that the day's work was done and they were going to supper and rest. As the afterlight disappeared, the mosquitoes swarmed out of the wet paddy,

Cherito and Tulungatung village.

Old Catalino

Nunilo

Tonio

zooming in on us like pirates' knives. Tonio would light a fire of coconut husks, filling the hut with smoke to drive them away.

Sometimes, as the tuba jug was emptied into glass after glass and the frogs and the cicadas began their nightly chorus, the talk turned to cock fighting and how much money Tonio, Nunilo, and Cherito had won or lost at bets.Tunungatung's men thronged to the pit by the sea in Ayala each Sunday in their one hope of making enough to pay back their debts. By mid-afternoon hundreds of men would be crowded into the bleachers around the roofed cockpit; the roar was deafening as everyone shouted his bet. The bookies, or *kristos* as they were called, kept yelling "*Sombrero, sombrero*!" to back a favorite if its owner wore a straw hat. But you had to watch them closely as with quick, sudden gestures of their outstretched hands and fingers they would place their true wagers with gamblers across the pit. A dead hush always began a fight as two roosters were released to shuffle and peck at each other. Suddenly, like prisoners released from a lifetime's bondage to earth, like the birds they were, the cocks shot into the air in a fury of gleaming spurs, scattered feathers, and swirling dust. Then, blood spurting out, one would drop to the earth, shuddering in death spasm. Pitiless, the other would jump astride it, pecking away while all the *aficionados*—Tonio, Nunilo, and Cherito as lustfully as any of them—shouted, "*Esce, esce*! It is, it is! The cockfight was a mysterious, *macho* ritual—women were never present—and revealed dark springs of life I always found a bit unsettling in the usually easygoing Filipino peasants.

Tonio told us how he had once owned an imported *Texas* rooster. It won eight times in Ayala. He had trained, fondled, and watched over it day and night for months, treating it with the utmost tenderness. "I bet everything on it, borrowed from Catalino and my uncles, even sold my shirt to raise a peso," he told us. "When it won, it was glorious." But he brought it to the Ayala cockpit one Sunday afternoon and saw it die. When the cock got its throat cut, he accepted disaster philosophically. Now he talked only of the victories, how much money he had made, and how the fighting cock had brought him much honor. "It was brave and not afraid to die," he said with admiration.

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Tulungatung's people had an abiding faith in God. Tonio said the Lord's Prayer each morning when he awoke. Most barrio families knelt together after the evening meal to pray for relief against the plagues of insects and for a good harvest. Yet few villagers went to Sunday morning mass, and the older men like Catalino often complained about the rising prices charged by Father Perez. "The shepherd doesn't attend his flock," Catalino said. "Priests are supposed to save souls, not make business."

Whenever the bells tolled for a funeral and we heard them in the fields, Nunilo or Cherito would joke, "Another 80 pesos for Father Perez." There was much humor over the old priest's venality. There were jokes about Tulungatung's people as well. Nunilo told about a man who knelt before the statue of Jesus in the Ayala church and frantically begged for a better life. "Here was Jesus in agony and suffering on the cross and this foolish Pedro throws himself down and cries, "Oh Lord, give me money, give me clothes, give me food, give me everything!' Finally Jesus looks down and says, "If my feet weren't nailed, I'd kick you.' "

Catholicism did not hold a monopoly on belief in Tulungatung. Malay paganism survived in a popular superstition about dwarfs. Everyone said they lived in certain old trees, sometimes taking the shape of ghost-like spirits and sometimes that of dwarfs who tried to carry you away with them. Tonio was genuinely afraid of them. When he was 18, he said, three of them actually appeared before him one day in the woods outside his father's hut, a beautiful woman beside them. "She was incomparable," Tonio told me. "She looked like a saint, a virgin. She is more beautiful than anyone. The dwarfs told me, 'If you go with us, you shall have this woman.' "

Tulungatung's witch doctor, a crone who claimed to have cured Tonio with herbs and magic fires, told me that, if he had spoken to the dwarfs, he would have become invisible and vanished forever. Instead Tonio kept silent, became delirious with fever, and ran amok. It took his father and several men to subdue him, binding him with ropes. They carried him home and Tonio wept as if he were dying. "Before I didn't believe in dwarfs," Tonio would say. "But since it actually happened to me, it must be true."

Competing with such beliefs—and steadily winning—is American pop culture, the whole world of rock and pop music, Hollywood films, and comic books, that caricature of a society permanently arrested in adolescence. There is a reason for its growing victory: the elementary school, where 70 percent of Filipinos get a good bit of their early culture, where English is still the main language of instruction. An effort is under way to replace English with Tagalog, the Philippine national language, spoken on the main island of Luzon. A cluster of barracks-like wooden buildings, with flagpole, victory gardens, and library, Tulungatung's school in 1972 already offered everything from the New Math to remedial education for backward children. President Marcos, handsome as a film star on a color poster, beamed down from the wall above the blackboards on which the teachers had written, in loopy Palmer Method script: "It is nice to be important, but it is more important to be nice." Looking into the classrooms, you could find a home economics class learning to make papaya pickles, second-graders counting up to 80, sixth-graders trying to unravel the mysteries of "sets" and "equivalents," or boys and girls singing the lyrics from "The Sound of Music." ("Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes, snowflakes that cling to your nose and eyelashes....")

Tulungatung is united through its elected barrio captain and council, a Farmers' Association, the Roman Catholic church in Ayala, and the village chapel. But if there is one thing that holds everyone's loyalty, it is the village school and the promise of an opening into the outside world that it gives them. This Americanization at the grassroots and of children at a young age (and few of the barrio's children go beyond the sixth grade as the high school is in town) has created a

unique culture (and cultural problem) in the Philippines. No other country, not even Mexico, has one quite like it. Nowhere else, perhaps, has American pop had quite such an impact.

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Pop culture is an important key to understanding the Philippines—the peculiar pattern of absentee small landlords, the Filipinos' love-hate relationship with Americans, their imitator's complex of admiration and contempt, and even its politics. The primary school in Tulungatung is very much like a primary school in rural Kansas or Vermont, but the world Philippine children find themselves facing after leaving school is terribly different.

Historians may someday conclude that among America's most compelling contributions to the late twentieth century, along with science and technology, was pop. Rock music, Hollywood movies and television, comic strips and pop fiction. The Bee Gees, Clint Eastwood, Hawaii-Five-O, Erle Stanley Gardner (India's best-selling author of all time), Popeye, and the Flintstones follow you these days all the way from Khartoum to Katmandu. Mickey Mouse may be the most famous American who ever lived.

Only in villages of the strongholds of ancient civilizations—India, China, Egypt, Indonesia—does pop fade or retreat toward those pop bastions, the luxury tourist hotels. (A Hilton Hotel *is* pop.) And even Mrs. Mao had her clandestine Hollywood films, Indira Gandhi secretly plays Scrabble, and Anwar Sadat relaxes by watching a new Western almost every night.

Closer to home our neighbors manage to transmute pop into folk art, probably because, unlike the Philippines, they do not have American-style, English-language village schools. Hence, Mexico has its Mexicali Rose *and* its own distinct traditions, the West Indies their *calypso* and *reggae*. But in the Philippines pop has so overwhelmed the older Aete, Malay, and Spanish cultures, it may have more psychic impact than even in the United States.

Especially in Manila and the other Philippine cities, I heard pure synthetic she-loves-me-yeh-yeh-yeh pop and I heard it all the time, and even in Tulungatung you are seldom out of earshot of a transistor playing rock. On my most recent visit a teeny-bopper's plaintive, whiny, "You light up my life, you give me hope, to carry on..." pursued me everywhere. Add bottled beer and coke, Action Comics, and Kung Fu movies.

Few people have such a deep and true enjoyment of pop culture. Even the Aetes, aboriginals who look like Africans, are affected. The Aetes live a neolithic culture even today; they still run about nearly naked, hunt with spears and bows, and happily spurn modern ways. But let them gather for a tribal dance and, as drums start to beat, men in loin cloths pair up with barebreasted girls—then, with solemn, rapt faces, they all start doing the Charleston.

Filipino crime is bastard pop, as bloody and slam-bang as the Hollywood gangster mythology that inspires it. These days, as cheapie killers, psychotics, and con men take over American films from the Gary Coopers and John Waynes, it's no surprise Filipino hoodlums get dehumanized. Go to 90 percent of the films playing in Manila and you get smacked in the face with so many falling, drowning, burning, hacked up, shot up bodies, it seems like their plots' only glue is fresh atrocities.

Between January and July 1978 a gang of arsonists started at least some of 45 major fires in Manila alone, in which 70 people were burned alive and 154 more badly hurt. So many started in movie theaters the thugs must have been going back for inspiration on how to maim and kill. Manila's police boast crime is 8 percent lower than in pre-martial law 1971; Manila was then the world's crime capital.

Violence in television, movies, and horror comics and its impact on social behavior are much debated in the United States. But what about its impact on the rest of the world? Police sirens, screams, high explosives, and pistol, rifle and machine-gun fire are coming from everybody else's movie screens and TV sets, too. Mostly made-in-U.S.A. mayhem pop is fun, it's entertainment, but should we take it seriously? We had better, because millions of semiliterate poor people in the Third World do—especially in the Philippines where the innocents pour out of the barrio schools into a hard, often jobless world where all further education comes from comic books and action movies. Since traditional values have been vanquished in the Philippine barrios, there is little cultural strength to resist pop.

There seems to be some affinity between pop and the beachy, balmy tropics; it seems perfectly at home in Manila, a natural part of the crime, corruption, and tourism. It's always Saturday night and anybody can be 17 (half the Filipinos are, or younger). Middle-aged Americans love Manila; they can perpetually relive their teen-age years.

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The political rise of President Ferdinand Marcos reflected pop fantasy; he was the Philippines' Audie Murphy, its Bataan hero, its most decorated soldier of World War II. Like the hero of an action movie made 30 years ago, Marcos embodied the strength and will to fight and win; he was the natural champion of all the Tonios who got their ideas of what makes a leader from the Saturday night movie in Zamboanga. Some of this follow-me-men aura still survived when he imposed martial law in 1972 on I-am-the-one-lone-leader-in-a-country-crawling-with-Commies grounds. Enough Filipinos, their minds prepared by the barrio schools and conditioned by old movies (or current TV), bought it.

Marcos, the private man, was too smart, too well read, too Catholic, and too much the introspective loner to be a pop stereotype. Yet some of his public speeches (and he *knew* his audience) had such a cartoon stridency you might have seen words above his head in comic strip balloons. (Maybe all strong men get to sounding like Dick Tracy.)

But it is Imelda Marcos who succeeded triumphantly as a Pop Superstar. Even her admirers did not dispute that she was after international stardom, success made manifest as a jet-setting Celebrity. An intimate of such as Jihan Sadat, Christina Ford, Van Cliburn, and, at one time, Mrs. Mao, jetting to Togo and Persepolis, to Libya to bargain over the Muslim rebels with Qadhafi,

their chief arms supplier, to London to be photographed with the prime minister, to Washington to pass on a Kosygin we-will-bury-you threat ("Nobody wants to be on the losing side," she said with the chic shade of hip cynicism.) There was also a Walt Disney image, gained when she had the government-run TV networks refer to her, and often, as "Mrs. Imelda Romualdez Marcos, First Lady, Governor of Metro Manila, and Minister of Human Settlements." She comes off not like the fantasy princess she evidently intends but more like the wicked queen in *Snow White* ("Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?") Since she fended off a bolo-slashing maniac in 1974 with karate, she has acquired a Kung Fu image. And a Queen of Hearts; stay out of her way.

The ordinary Filipino was impressed and contemptuous at the same time. Even Imelda's reputation for commercial acuteness enhanced her Superstar stature. The money and power gained are admired in a way her critics' poor-and-honest-but-drab liberalism is not, especially since their criticism often got them whisked from the scene.

Then there was Lady Bountiful, though Imelda's corrupted-by-pop notion of helping the poor left thousands stranded too far from anywhere to get a job, their old squatter homes demolished. She built 1,000 model middle-class dwellings in Tondo, Manila's worst slum (promptly all occupied by middle-class government servants) but Tondo has 30,000 families still living in shacks (3,800 of them without possessions after one of those mysterious fires in April 1978). To create a truly impressive new complex of cultural and convention centers, theaters, exhibition halls, and a fancy hotel, she had a mountain of earth dredged from the bottom of Manila Bay to expand the seafront. Some of the (unspecified) cost came in donations from the less-than-eager rich (as Imelda put it in a now-famous remark to an American newsman, "I see their income tax returns.") All this in a city that had already spent $350-$500 million in government funds on luxury hotels but only $13.3 million on public housing. Mrs. Marcos had her dream of what Manila should be, but it was already a smudged dream, degraded by the basic phoniness of pop values.

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Since 1970, the Marcos government has officially endorsed smaller families. By 1978 the yearly growth rate had fallen from 3.3 percent to 2.7 percent. (In Indonesia, also Malay-populated, it fell in the same period from 3% to 1.7% and is still falling fast.) The largest of some 45 family planning organizations promotes only the rhythm method, recommended by the Roman Catholic Church but of proven ineffectiveness in traditional peasant societies. A change of policy by Pope John Paul II would make a tremendous difference. But, as in every Latin (and Middle East Muslim) society, a real obstacle is also the cult of *machismo*; it is manly to have many more children than just one or two.

Family planning arrived in Tulungatung in 1969 in the form of two lady "motivators" from Ayala, Mrs. Bernardo and her assistant, Gloria. When I first met them in 1972, the two were a familiar sight in Tulungatung, two yellow parasols bobbing across the rice fields. They were financed by a private, Oklahoma City organization called "World Neighbors" and came twice a week to dispense free contraceptives, lecture the peasants and their wives on the reproductive system, and advise on baby care and gardening (and gossip, they were always brimming with news). Then only a third of Tulungatung's women were acceptors and these—the schoolteachers and wives of government workers or the most prosperous farmers—were the easy third. Mrs. Bernardo said she had discovered a dual society in Tulungatung and Ayala: a small, modernizing, usually landowning group whose living standards were rising and birthrates falling and a large, impoverished mass of tenants and sharecroppers who were experiencing no improvements in living standards and no fertility decline.

Gloria, the assistant, complained that the barrio women were hiding from them. She said many were afraid their health would be affected or they said, "It's against God." Many feared their husbands. Tulungatung's men identified many children as proof of their sexual powers and *machismo* or said they were God's blessing. No one voiced concern that Tulungatung's population could double in 20 years.

"We need patience in this work, Gloria," Mrs. Bernardo, a fat, motherly woman with seven children of her own, would say habitually. When Tonio protested he was still single, she told him that was the best time to plan a two-child family. "Or 11 or 15," he replied.

One morning as we winnowed rice, Mrs. Bernardo and Gloria came by, yellow parasols high, to voice indignation about the Ayala priest. "I met Father Perez today," Mrs. Bernardo said. "He calls, 'Hey, Mrs. Bernardo, where are you going?' I say I am going out to motivate. He says the Pope is against contraceptives, only the rhythm method. I tell him, 'Father, supposing the lady is irregular? Some are 28 days, some 30 days. There are so many failures in rhythm.' All he does is quote me the Bible, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'"

"Maybe Father Perez is like that because the number of baptisms will go down," Tonio joked. "So many people are getting stabbed these days. If it becomes peaceful, the church bell would never toll." Tonio said he heard family planning pills made women fat.

Mrs. Bernardo snorted. "So much false gossip going around. That even if you have an IUD you can get pregnant."

Tonio laughed. "Some sperms are very tricky. Maybe they can jump over the IUD." Mrs. Bernardo was a veteran at such banter. Though Gloria looked embarrassed, Mrs. Bernardo unrolled a condom and held it up to Tonio. "When erect already, that is the best time to put on this stocking. If you want to make it slippery use oil. The Muslims in Recodo use pomade but it doesn't work very well. Best is Brilliantine."

Tonio changed the subject, telling the two women about a murder in the next barrio. Mrs. Bernardo firmly brought the conversation back to family planning: "They're very fond of stabbing in Maasin barrio. Sometimes they stab their best friend, sometimes their worst friend. They drink and forget. Maasin is all condom too." She paused to let

everyone ponder the significance. "All condom. Mr. Mulorino, Mr. Enriquez, Mr. Araneta. In Recondo it's IUD and pills. In Tulungatung, mostly rhythm. In Ayala, pills, condoms, and Emco vagina foam."

Tonio was unimpressed. As soon as Mrs. Bernardo left, he said, "If you really want to practice family planning, you'd better cut off your organ."

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Most villagers the world over ask only three things of their governments: a small but perceptible rise in living standards, protection from lawlessness, and the delivery of essential services without too much intervening corruption and inefficiency. In September 1972, when President Marcos imposed martial law in the Philippines, his government was failing Tulungatung's people on all three counts: agriculture was slipping backward; crime was rising, as was the danger of being engulfed in the Christian-Muslim terrorist land war; and public venality had never been worse. That summer city engineers building a new irrigation system above the village had openly pocketed a fifth of the workers' payroll. When the insect plague hit, the government provided neither pesticides nor technical help. A promised small yearly development grant never reached the village.

Reaction to Marcos's promises to use martial law to build a "New Society" varied. Nobody liked the idea of press censorship or rule by decree. Nunilo scoffed at Marcos's claim that the Philippines were threatened by Communist insurgency. Cherito feared the local police would abuse their new authority. But most hoped it meant the government might govern better. As old Catalino said, "Maybe Marcos just wants to be a dictator. Maybe he wants to do good things. How can I know? I'll just watch and wait."

When Marcos spoke on the radio explaining his new reform program we gathered at Tonio's hut to listen, but transmission was so poor we could hear little through the crackle of static but a few catch phrases: "...land to the tiller...equal justice for all...dignity for the working man." "It's because they're all clapping," Tonio joked about the static. "Imelda is clapping beside Marcos."

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Two years later, on a hot September 1974 afternoon in Manila, I settled back on the white cushions of the presidential limousine as Marcos leaned forward to tell the driver to go slowly so we could talk. It had been a long morning of ribbon-cutting and ceremonial appearances, including a military review at Fort Bonifacio and a sensitive speech to generals with a Muslim insurgency on their hands. It was already evident Marcos had made a fatal mistake in his decision to bring the Philippine Army and Air Force to Mindanao when he declared martial law. The military had perceived itself to be an occupation force and had acted like it. Armed insurrection followed: property was destroyed, the Sulu Island's largest town of Jolo razed by fire, and there were thousands of casualties. Armies of refugees gathered in camps. Fierce fighting had revealed how deep the conflict's roots really went; the Mindanao and Sulu military commander, Rear Admiral R.M. Espaldon, had told me a few days earlier the conflict was "a cultural minority phenomenon." He blamed Mindanao's Christians for showing "palpable discrimination and prejudice toward Muslims" and the Muslims for responding with "ill feelings, resentment, and even hostility."

That afternoon, as the city of Manila moved past, white in the afternoon glare of the equatorial sun, Marcos discussed Muslim history in the southern Philippines and the problem of making the Muslims feel like Filipinos while keeping their own cultural identity. The route we followed was almost deserted, lined only with policemen, who stood every few dozen yards, their backs to the street. Only a few, pathetic groups of people stood along the curb, waiting to glimpse their president. Some children waved and Marcos waved back, murmuring, almost apologetically, "Now this I enjoy."

Soon we entered the gates of Malacanang Palace, the home of the Philippine presidents on the Pasig River. "Come in and have a bowl of soup," Marcos said. Aides hurried ahead through the darkened halls and palatial reception rooms to his study, flicking light switches and turning on air conditioners. A secretary reminded him of a waiting British trade delegation and other pressing appointments.

Marcos waved it all aside and in a modest sitting room behind his study, over soup and sandwiches, talked leisurely for more than an hour. He was seriously concerned, he said, about his bad image abroad, saying, "It affects our credit, markets, investment, and sources of raw material, including oil. I'm afraid the original reaction to the term, martial law, was to connote oppression, authoritarianism, and, at worst, dictatorship. This has not yet been dissipated."

He said he himself was pleased how things were going: "I'm pleasantly surprised we've moved so fast. We had a 10 percent growth in GNP last year, more than anyone expected. Land reform has succeeded with 800,000 acres or one-fourth of our total target now distributed. New foreign and domestic investment has come in. Agriculture has been revitalized."

His analysis, as he explained it to me, was that until he imposed martial law, the legacy of 42 years of American rule following three centuries of Spanish colonialism had left the Philippines with an increasingly unworkable system. The American democratic institutions, the party system and free press, were superimposed upon an essentially feudal society, with a landed rich dispensing patronage to a largely landless peasantry and defending its interests with private armies. As the Philippines modernized, this ruling class was able to concentrate most economic and political power in its hands.

Land reform would be the center of his corrective strategy, Marcos said. He hastened to add he would not try to destroy the rich oligarchy or seize its property because this would weaken the country's political base. Instead he would "regulate" the oligarchy's wealth and "reorient its managerial energies" into planned development.

Several times Marcos made reference to development theory and the writings of Gunnar Myrdal, Barbara Ward, and others, whose work he

appeared to have studied carefully. I found him a much more complex and well-read person than I had expected; he seemed genuinely to feel he had been chosen by destiny to reshape and modernize Philippine society. "There was a complete disenchantment with the political orientation of our old society," he said, as a waiter came to clear the table. "In my eight years as President of the Philippines, whatever has been accomplished has been the work of technocrats, not politicians." Few Filipinos would dispute this.

The interview over, we shook hands and I thanked him for inviting me to spend much of the day with him and glimpse how a president lived. He noted I ate only one sandwich; I had been too busy taking notes. "Here, take some with you," he insisted. And so I departed, moving through the grandeur of the great Malacanang reception hall, all pomp, red carpets and chandeliers, to the astonishment of servants, security men, and the British trade delegation, munching a ham and cheese on rye.

* * * * *

The questions facing Tonio in his nipa hut and Marcos in his palace today are just about the same: where, if Tulungatung and the Philippines are going to progress, will they get the money to invest in new scientific farming if a fourth of every harvest continues to go to absentee owners?

Tonio, at 34, cultivated the same 2.5 acres he started with, which put him close to the statistically average Filipino peasant. Typically, a farm in the Philippines has seven rainfed acres, but with at least one million tenants (half working in sugar and coconut plantations), plus an uncounted number of shifting kainjineros like Tonio's father, Catalino, land per family is much lower.

The average farm raises two crops (rice and corn), has a carabao for heavy work, and provides a yearly income of $400 (75% of the national average). Like Tonio, such a family usually lives in a remote barrio like Tulungatung, several miles from a paved road and without easy access to markets, electricity (all but 15%), or most public services. It is the Latin American pattern: extremely backward villages and glittery modern cities.

The Asian Development Bank estimates that of 5 million rural families (30 million of the Philippines's 46 million people), only 900,000, or about one-fifth, have enough capital to fully adopt the new scientific rice technology. If you count the preagricultural Aetes, you get a rural underclass that probably goes as high as 3 million families.

The extremely high degree of tenancy and absentee ownership might not matter so much if: (1) the Philippines could modernize in spite of it, and (2) the country did not have an incipient Maoist-inspired peasant rebellion on its hands, complicated by the seemingly unsolvable, culturally rooted Muslim insurgency in the south.

The main, northern island of Luzon has been especially plagued by chronic peasant insurrections since World War II: a Maoist New Peoples Army now has an estimated armed strength of between 3,000 and 30,000 men (the American Embassy in Manila uses the lower figure while the Philippine government, and I think correctly, uses the higher; Marcos's Army, 30,000 in 1972, has tripled since then). These days the Maoists have a new gospel to preach and it is formidable: having done in China's landed gentry in 1950-1952 (and perhaps millions died), Mao decreed: "Put overall emphasis on agricultural production." Enough Western farm scientists, both wheat and rice experts, have now been to China to confirm that Mao did just that; creating what these experts almost unanimously praise as the best technical system to modernize peasant agriculture ever seen. The consensus among those visiting plant breeders, pathologists, entomologists, soil men, and agronomists is that, when it comes to scientific know-how and getting it applied by peasants, as well as irrigation, multiple cropping, pest control and waste recycling, China is way ahead of every developing country (including Taiwan, so it's not just being Chinese). Its one weakness is pure research, and China is taking steps to remedy that in a field where India, among Asian countries, is still in the lead.

In contrast, in the Philippines, because most of each crop gets eaten or goes to pay rent to absentee owners in the towns, there is no cash to invest in new methods. China is even starting to make better use than the Philippines of the American-created International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) at Los Baños, just an hour's drive from Manila, where all the world comes these days to learn the latest techniques.

Marcos himself has analyzed the Philippine problem as well as anybody. In a 1971 book he wrote that a peasant revolution could be averted only if the government staged its own pre-emptive "constitutional, peaceful and legal" counterrevolution, first through "drastic" redistribution of land and wealth. He had repeated this theme to me in the 1974 soup-and-sandwiches interview and in another talk I had had with him soon after martial law in 1972. Indeed, he made the threat of Maoist insurgency and the need for land reform to stop it the main justification for imposing martial law in 1972. The danger, as he saw it, was from the New Peoples Army on the left and the landed, super-rich, mostly Spanish-descended oligarchy of 400 or so families on the right. A group of Harvard-MIT-educated "technocrats" and Annapolis and West Point-trained military officers of the center supported him (and, according to some of them in recent conversations, had already in 1964-65 begun to see need for someone to rule by decree long enough to create a workable system of government, even before Marcos was elected president for the first time). When Marcos went ahead, most Filipinos and Washington acquiesced.

What ails the Philippines today is not, as his critics charged, that Marcos became a real dictator, but that he did not. He failed to assume enough power to do the things that had to be done. He didn't go far enough and fast enough when he had the chance. His land reform program, announced immediately after he imposed martial law in 1972, aimed merely to provide family-sized farms (7.5 acres if irrigated, 12.5 if dry) to 715,000 tenants on all rice-corn land *above* 17.5 acres. Since farms smaller than that make up half the land sown in rice and corn and have 60 percent of the tenants, and 90 percent of the land-

lords, Marcos did not even begin to tackle the basic problem of absentee landlordism. Nor did his reform touch sugar and coconut plantations, the army of landless laborers, or marginal upland cultivators.

In the years since, even this limited reform has bogged down. Marcos can be justly proud of breaking up the old haciendas (though he gave many of the dispossessed owners holdings almost as big from government-owned lands in Mindanao). And he redistributed about half the farms over 17.5 acres. But only 3,000 owners were compensated and only 46,200 former tenants actually bought what turned out to be an average of 5 acres each (unirrigated, a bit too small to support a family).

How much can Marcos be blamed? He was no all-powerful Mao Tsetung or a Chiang Kai-shek on a beleaguered Taiwan, or even a General MacArthur in an occupied Japan. He felt (probably rightly) that he had to carry his family, closest supporters (including some of the super-rich), the military-technocrat alliance, and at least some of the small landowning middle class (who make up much of the mid-ranks of his government and Army) along with him. He needed something of a political consensus. Even Washington made it clear from the start it did not want to get deeply involved in land reform in the Philippines, a decision we may come to regret. (Dr. Roy Prosterman, a University of Washington land reform expert, who wanted the United States to help finance a program with a zero retention rate that would have solved the absentee problem, came to be *persona non grata* in Manila. If Washington had put up $100-$200 million to reimburse the smalltown landowners, it could have been a different story.)

It just may be that in a country of such extreme inequality and such widespread small-landlord power neither Marcos nor anybody else could hope to win enough of a consensus to redistribute land and wealth equitably and undo the effects of 400 years of Spanish and American colonialism. It also may be that the kind of land redistribution needed to apply scientific methods (instead of 25% of each crop going to some nonfarmer) may be impossible without a Maoist-type peasant organization.

Could Philippine agriculture be modernized without redistribution? I put the question to some senior IRRI scientists. Their reply:

Unless absentee landlordism is eliminated in the Philippines, farmers won't be able to afford enough fertilizer, pesticides, or small machinery. Conceivably, if Marcos could move in with enough irrigation, fertilizer, credit, machinery, and high-yield technology, the farmers might prosper enough to buy their land if the townspeople found it profitable to sell it. Gradually, it might solve itself. But it will be very, very difficult.

This is exactly what Marcos tried to do. He hoped to irrigate 250,000 more acres each year for 10 years; only 12 percent of 2.5 million acres of potentially irrigable land of 21.2

Threshing in Tulungatung

million acres was irrigated; it automatically doubled production. He also tried to spread new technology with subsidized inputs and collateral-free loans after 1974 in a program called *Masagana* (abundance); this doubled rice and maize yields in the third of the country where it was tried, but only 21 percent of the loans were repaid by August 1978, leaving $80-$90 million still due. Borrowers had dropped from 855,000 in 1974-75 to fewer than 200,000 in 1978 (if you can't pay back a crop loan, you don't get another one).

Never mind, Agriculture Minister Arturo Tanco told me in an interview, once peasants profit from the new technology, they'll find some way to keep using it. (This has happened in Indonesia, where, on Java and Bali farms are much smaller, but richer, with higher yields, and there is no absentee landlord problem.) Fertilizer application did reach 800,000 tons by 1978, but it is still only one-fourth of what it should be.

Watch at Zamboanga

What Marcos did was arrest a vicious circle from 20 years of rural neglect that had left the poorest peasants getting poorer, having more children, ever pushing into more marginal hillsides (at 200,000 acres per year), and facing Manila with a falling food surplus and fewer agricultural exports. This downward spiral has been at least temporarily stopped; the Philippines is again self-sufficient in rice and even exports a little.

Is it enough? Maoist strength almost exactly reflects the concentration of tenants; in its main central Luzon staging area, just north of Manila, tenancy in some barrios runs 80-100 percent. And Marcos, by not carrying out the land redistribution—his main justification for martial law in the first place—has lost a lot of his old credibility (after all, he had had six years). Marcos accepted the military-technocrat alliance's ideas about redistributing wealth, reestablishing law and order, and rapid development through Western public and private investment (why not? it kept him in power), but it has never been clear whether he really believed in it or it was just stardust he threw in his own eyes so he wouldn't have to see what a dangerous tiger he'd trapped himself into riding. He still was running the show but with so many scandals, having, for example, to rig the Manila vote in an otherwise genuine election victory in April 1978 on behalf of a foolishly extravagant, wildly politically ambitious wife who is half-Top of the Hit Parade, half-Most Wanted on everybody's list. It must have made him uneasy to see how far he departed from the original script.

Then the pop culture lens through which the ordinary, poor Filipino sees things—and that is 70-80 percent of them—itself has changed. The myths of the Old West have been turned upside down; today's heroes don't believe in anything, just hip jokes and killing. Things may change but in much of pop culture it is still exploitative, hip, cynical sentiment that counts. This works against Marcos; on my last visit it was evident that a good many Filipinos were beginning to suspect that instead of Galahad (or at least Alan Ladd), they had got an antihero with Hollywood's current "Look out for Number One" ethics. [This can have tragic consequences for teen-agers; the foreign minister's grandson took part in the gang-rape of a paraplegic girl in 1975, the defense minister's son killed a fellow teen-ager in 1976 (his bodyguard took the rap), and in 1978 a nephew of Marcos shot and killed a university student and wounded his mother and father (two weeks later, when the nervous local police did nothing, Marcos ordered an official investigation.)]

In the mixed-up world of American pop corrupted life that is Manila, thinking Filipinos seem to find few moral and intellectual choices open to them. Many would have liked to continue to believe in Marcos, but felt unable to when he failed to deliver on so many promises. Some university students were starting to grasp that too serious acceptance of pop itself was partly to blame; it's a self put-down. A small but growing number of idealistic young people were turning toward a nonideological, antipop, anti-Imelda, anti-American Maoism. There is not much the old Chairman would recognize about it, but it led to a steady trickle of Manila university students and recent graduates off to the hills to join the National Peoples Army. And it can be no coincidence that a hit song among such youth, who spurn pop and rock in favor of native Malay folk songs, began, "I'm a Filipino with a language of my own and I'm tired of speaking like foreigners."

In one remote mountain village in Nueva Ecija province, I had joked to the peasants that the surrounding hills would be a good place for guerrillas when they told me, yes, the National Peoples Army was up there.

"Do they ever come down?" I asked, ready to run for the car.

Every week, for food, the villagers said. But there was nothing to fear; the NPA guerrillas were "nice" and "*educado*," most of them from the University of the Philippines. The villagers obviously preferred them to the local government soldiers and police.

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More important, what about the peasants like Tonio, still unaffected by the Maoist movement?

The Masagana program reached Tulungatung in mid-1974. For the first time, bankers came to the village to extend credit at 12 percent interest per crop season. Agricultural technicians, the first Tonio had seen for years, also came to see that the money borrowed went for land preparation, new seeds, insecticide, and fertilizer and that these were used correctly. Tonio took a loan of $172, invested in inputs and once more harvested a crop of six tons, the same amount he had harvested when he first took up farming in 1966. High commodity prices enabled him to sell rice to the Chinese miller in Ayala for $6.50 a 44-kilo sack, 50 percent more than in 1972. He was able to pay off this crop loan, hire a mechanical thresher for the first time, and buy three pigs. In early 1975 he and Maria Elena were married and Tonio began building a new nipa hut. Cattle and coconut theft in Tulungatung had ended.

By 1978 it had all come unstuck again. The price of rice was up to $7.50 a sack, but prices of fertilizer and pesticides rose even more. Tonio harvested only 3.5 tons his last crop. Like many of his neighbors, he had gone back to threshing with his feet. Though Maria Elena's teacher's salary helped, he has a wife and three small children to feed—a baby was born each year of their marriage. After eating and paying rent, the crop was gone.

In Tonio's words, "Almost everybody in Tulungatung has left Masagana. That's why we don't have a good harvest this year. Nobody has the money to buy fertilizer and insecticide. Most of us are not able to pay the bank what we owe and I'm one of them. What am I going to do?"

Most nights there was firing. Cherito said it was mostly government soldiers, getting drunk and firing at nothing. Refugees had been living in shantytowns along the sea in Ayala for five years, afraid to return to their villages. Christian "Ilagas" (short for "Iloilo Land Grabbing Association" after the island many of them came from) and Muslim "Barracudas" terrorize the countryside.

Old Catalino said, "The Muslims will never give up their firearms. Marcos can send soldiers, planes, even bomb their barrios. They won't give up." He was bitterly critical of both sides in the terrorist war. "When the Ilagas kill a Muslim they cut off an ear and bring it home to hang over their cooking pots so they can show how many Muslims they kill. They kill even women and children. The government must stop it."

"They never will," said Tonio, who found the Christian terrorists as heroic as Clint Eastwood. "It is the Muslims who began the trouble. The Christians are brave. They use only bolo knives while the Barracudas have Armalites and Garands." Catalino, who remembers the atrocities and deprivations of the Japanese occupation, when entire harvests were commandeered and women abducted, never to be seen again, told his son, "If those outlaws ever take Zamboanga City, Tonio, no matter which side it is, we must obey them."

The reckoning in Tulungatung comes at the end of the harvest when the rice, after long days of being pounded and crushed by bare feet or a carabao's hooves and winnowed from high bamboo platforms to catch the sea breeze, is measured out in baskets. For Tonio, after paying the rent, there would be just enough to feed his growing family; he would have to borrow once more from the Spanish priest or Chinese merchant—the old profitless cycle. "All that plowing, planting, weeding and harvesting," said Nunilo. "All gone with the wind."

Tonio's good spirits have deserted him. "Everything is getting worse again in the barrio. I don't know what you have to do to have a good life here. I don't know what to do." He glared up at the sky. "What is God doing up there?"

Nunilo worried about crime in Tulungatung. "These thieves," he said, "they're not afraid of martial law any more. Last week somebody entered my house and took my brother's pants. Right while he was sleeping. These goddamn stealers. I'd put them in the electric chair, before a firing squad. It's no good if a Filipino steals in his own barrio."

"They're hungry, that's why," said Tonio.

Old Catalino sighed heavily. "This used to always be a peaceful place. You could go anywhere, come home at any time of night and nobody would ever bother you. Not like this time now. People are afraid."