



***Manobo Dreams in Arakan: A People's Struggle to keep their Homeland* by Karl M Gaspar, CSsR. Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City. c 2011 239 pages, 15.2x23 cm.**

The various groups of indigenous people in the Philippines seem to go through the same struggle year after year. Aspects of their ethnic cultures begin to disintegrate as migrants come in increasing numbers and dominate in their ancestral lands. Belief systems of ethnic groups slowly crumble as missionaries of different religions proselyte in their area. Traditions, customs and peculiar ethnic practices fall apart as the larger Philippine society sets its norms and standards and dictate how ethnic groups should think, behave and act. Worst of all, homelands of indigenous people are getting smaller and in many cases, they are forced to leave their own lands to give way to the migrants from both the Luzon and Visayas areas. Why is this the perennial plight of the indigenous people in our country?

Manobo Dreams in Arakan, by Karl M Gaspar, provides an in-depth presentation of the Manobo, one of the indigenous groups in Mindanao, and their struggle to preserve the identity along with the challenges in keeping their homeland. Gaspar, having spent considerable time with the Manobo in the Arakan Valley, gained first-hand accounts of the challenges that beset this people. The Manobo's struggles, like most indigenous groups, date back to the beginning of the colonization of the Philippines. The colonizers tried to alter the beliefs of the natives in Arakan, including their concept and structure of society. As a result of the process, the colonizers created the so-called "cultural minority" which referred to those people they have displaced from the area. Moreover, the colonizers, by virtue of the Regalian Doctrine, claimed ownership and sovereignty over all the lands they conquered.

Consequently, the Manobo, gradually became estranged from the evolving majority of the Filipino society. Stereotyping and labelling came about as a cultural segregation in the society and in the country in general. What has happened to the Manobo in the Arakan Valley just got worse at present as they lost control over most of their homeland to the entry of ranchers, loggers, and landless settlers who use different approaches, ranging from gentle persuasion to the application of armed forces towards the Manobo. And as a reaction to the incursion of the lowlanders to their homeland, the Manobo have also responded in various ways. Some of them have accommodated

the outsiders to prevent disputes from erupting while some others waged the *pangayaw* (tribal warfare) to repel the lowlanders from invading their homeland.

Gaspar, who grew up in Davao del Sur, gives the readers an intimate picture of the Manobos' world. His book enlightens readers of the Manobos' way of life, their traditions, practices and their customary laws. They have their own viewpoint of the world and have their own concept of what a society should be. Their traditional customary laws that were handed down from their ancestors had strengthened their ties as a people and these laws served as the basis of setting the norms and rules of their society. Such customary laws, cultures and traditions of the Manobo were threatened by the incursion of the lowlanders.

The book begins during the time when migrants and the lowlanders started to intrude into the realm of the Manobos in the Arakan Valley. This intrusion directly caused the transformation of the Manobo in almost all aspects: social, political, and economic. Gaspar explains that the "inland colonization" of the Manobos can be best understood in the broader picture of what the country went through during the colonization process. He also adds that the rationale of the colonization is not due to the internal developments within the Manobo culture and society, but due to the external influences brought about by the history of the colonization of the country. This new system that the colonizers had introduced to the Philippines, changed the political, economic and social foundations of the Manobo and the rest of the inhabitants in the islands. The political framework that was established by the colonizers began after their policy of resettlement which they referred to as *reduccion*, was worked out both by their officials and the friars. They then sought the collaboration of the locals, who were mostly members of the upper class, to be recruited to function as local magistrates.

Although the Manobo in the Arakan Valley were not directly affected by the system introduced by the colonizers, their descendants eventually were placed under this new system. As the process of colonization expanded, the number of communities affected also increased. Policies that reinforced the state's control over the public domain resulted to the transformation of the real estate concept into an industry, a money-making scheme at the expense of the Manobo lands. During the American period, a number of acts were passed. This included the practice that all unregistered land would become a part of the public domain that only the state was authorized to classify and exploit. Also, Mindanao was open to migrants as being the "Land of Promise", fuelling waves of migrants to find a secure a land. Mindanao, too attracted many businessmen with its promising prospects for money-making enterprises.

The book highlights the American regime that brought about dramatic changes to the indigenous groups in Mindanao. The government became aggressive to extend its control to the southern part of the country. The influx of migrants continued to increase especially after the Second World War as agencies, (such as LASEDECO and NARRA), were created to spearhead the resettlement issues. This chapter provides stories depicting how the Manobo responded to the invasion of the lowlanders which

greatly disturbed the peace in the area as the natives were being displaced from their own place. The natives of Arakan Valley resorted to their practice of the *pangayaw* in defending their ancestral domain. Shortly after the first EDSA revolution, civic organizations were created in support of the fight of the Manobo. These included the SEC-registered church agency called the Tribal Filipino Program for Community Development, Inc (TFPCDI), the indigenous people's organization in Arakan called the Manobo Lumadnong Panaghiusa (MALUPA) and the Davao – based NGO which is composed of artists, cultural workers and others called the Kaliwat Theatre Collective (KTC). With the support of other organizations and the media, the indigenous group now have a venue to ventilate their concerns and problems.

This book fully captures the travails of the Manobo in the Arakan Valley, in their utmost dream to preserve their identity and their homeland. This is one dream worthy of respect: to make Mindanao a peaceful place where the Lumads, Muslims and Christians can live together in harmony and peace for generations to come.

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