



State of Fear: Reportage on human rights in Mindanao during the Arroyo and Aquino regimes Davao Today. Davao Today Webworks & Multimedia Ventures Inc., Davao City., 2014, 329 pages

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As it is commonly known that media is controlled by those in power, this compilation braves to expose the stories of the voiceless Mindanao. *State of Fear* is a collection of Davao Today's reportage on the killings, abuses, maltreatment, and silencing of the civilians by the military under the reign of then president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the current Benigno Aquino Jr.

In a constant struggle to achieve peace, *State of Fear* questions the government's means in achieving the end. With fourteen chapters, it chronologically covers the period between 2006 up until 2013 and gathers true accounts of harassments of the Lumads, the farmers, NGOs, and even the National People's Army.

All these atrocities prompted the editors to come up with the present volume of articles. From the birth of Oplan Bantay Laya under the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, to the newly branded Oplan Bayanihan, these military strategies remain to function in the same manner: to continuously instill fear. But this state of fear has to stop, as mentioned by Germelina A. Lacote in the preface, by telling the world all the victims' stories.

This sentiment is aptly followed by Luis V. Teodoro of UP-Diliman who, in his foreword, recalls the recent inhumane irregularities of the distribution of basic necessities to the victims of Yolanda. This, he states, is just a scratch on the surface if one looks into the gross treatment of the military. The same military who has done little amidst the billions that have been allocated for its "modernization". With its change of name, under the Aquino

administration, Teodoro warns the reader that this “peace and development” program still operates with the same deceitful intent: to preserve the reign of the political dynasties.

With its first four chapters, *State of Fear* reveals the stories of political activists and workers who seek to protect the basic human-rights of Mindanao, as reported in “The Years of Living Dangerously”. Such as the experience of InPeace lawyer Beverly Selim-Musni who experienced first-hand threats from gunmen sent by the government to stop her cause. Musni, along with many other NGO workers, seeks to protect the peasants of Mindanao from being thrown out of their territories.

From massive dislocation, to limiting the purchase of rice to a kilo per day, “Villages in the Grip of Fear” recounts the pressures put on by the military during the height of its operations against the NPA. Limiting the innocent families’ access to basic commodities is the military’s technique to make the people “confess”. Thus obtaining the authority to execute the innocents.

The result of all this chaos is laid out in “Fleeing Terror”. This chapter reveals how the Lumads and Moros alike, would rather stay in public schools and municipal halls. Everyone seems to be conveniently tagged as rebels. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) has conveniently laid out that the villagers’ role: whether one is with the government, or with the NPA. Such is the crisis revealed in the fourth chapter, “Paquibato”, where people can no longer move freely without any identification card that bears a soldier’s signature.

Unfortunately the harassment does not only end with fear. For it also disturbs the lives of children, women, and martyrs. All of these accounts are revealed in the fifth to eight chapter, respectively titled “Childhood Interrupted”, “Heroes & Martyrs”, “Rebelyn Pitao” and “The Agony of Waiting.” These chapters seek to voice out the unheard deaths of the children, the women, and the professionals who dedicated their lives aiding Mindanao when the government refused to do so.

In the concluding chapters, *State of Fear* revisits the tumultuous times in Philippine history and looks into the grim situation of “Martial Law”. Of how, 37 years later, the age of despotism has not really died with the dictator. Such power in any regimes could have

destroyed any community. For one does not have to look far, for the carnage that transpired in Ampatuan, Maguindanao is still fresh in the mind of the people. “Blood in her Hands” discusses how the perpetrators were protected by the administration who, in the end, highly benefited from this reign of terror.

Yet the question remains: what now?

In these suffocating fears that take unnamed lives and sedate an entire nation, *State of Fear* awakens a community and stirs the government to take notice. Free from the political and economic chains that dominate the mainstream media, Davao Today’s *State of Fear* has successfully voiced the unheard. 🇵🇭