



War of Extinction

by Arnold P Alamon, published by RMP-NMR Inc and the 'Healing the Hurt' Project partners, 233 pp, 5.85" x 8.3"

In the development aggression narrative, there are three categories of indigenous peoples: those who are contented with the exchange, the discontented and silent, and those who struggle for their rights to their ancestral lands. The book, *Wars of Extinction*, is about the third.

The book, composed of thirteen chapters, is a challenge to the people who remain silent amidst the struggle of the *Lumad* (indigenous people) for a better life. Let me present them here.

Chapter 1 presents the framework upon which the study is anchored. Structural discrimination, sometimes referred to as structural inequality or systemic discrimination, is a theory that posits that norms, rules and attitudes in societal institutions and structures hinder certain individuals and groups from enjoying the same rights and opportunities that the rest of the population do (Najcevska). It is rooted in the structures of society from the simplest unit of the family to the more complex governance systems where groups are disadvantaged by the formation of norms, discourses and policies that discriminate the weak and favor the dominant (genderequality.gov). It is borne of the interactions, actions and inaction of peoples; it is forged in institutional practices and in the discourse of 'the other' as against 'the us'; it is often unintentional although the consequences are very real (amazonaws.com)

Chapter 2 describes who the *Lumad* are as a group distinguished from the collective indigenous peoples of the Philippines. The *Lumad* in this book are the indigenous peoples of Mindanao who distinctly

referred to themselves as such by convention in 1986.

Chapter 3 narrates the creation of the *Lumad* basically informed from the accounts of BR Rodil's *Minoritization of the Indigenous Communities in Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago* (1994). Chapter 4 zeroes in on the sidelining of the Lumad in Bukidnon basically referring to the accounts of Madronio Lao's *The Economy of the Bukidnon Plateau during the American Period* (1987).

Chapters 5 and 6 depict the exploitation of the natural resources through logging and mining in the various landscapes in the archipelago. Because of these extractive activities, the so-called, Wars of Extinction, as Alamon depicts it in Chapter 7, were waged against the *Lumad* in the quest for capitalist expansion. These 'wars' leave gruesome stories of exploitation narrated in Chapter 8 with the story of the struggle of the Pulangion Manobo in Quezon, Bukidnon and on the Banwaon of San Luis in Agusan del Sur in Chapter 9.

The Banwaon struggle is a familiar story. My first assignment as a would-be anthropologist then, was to write an ethnographic account of the Banwaon people for the San Luis Lumad High School. I lived with them for four months amidst the tension between the military and the New People's Army in the area. There were stories of people hanged on trees as warning to others for their so-called betrayal. There was the account of two brothers in their teens, pinned on the ground with the nozzles of armalites in their heads as they were suspected that the sack of rice they were carrying is for the rebels.

Chapter 10 introduces the concept of accumulation by dispossession by a Marxist geographer, David Harvey, which he expanded from Marx' idea of primitive accumulation which is the exclusion of the laborer from the mode of production (Kulkami). The concept alludes to the neoliberal centralization of power by a few who dispossess the public particularly of their lands (Harvey, 2004) for capitalistic endeavors such as agricultural expansion and extractive activities. This chapter suggests the acquisition of the ancestral domains by loggers and miners to the detriment of the *Lumad* who end up dispossessed, poor and marginalized. This dispossession of the *Lumad* of their lands by multinational expansionist corporations is exacerbated by the what the author claims as the state-sponsored Wars of Extinction (Chapter 11),

where *Lumad* leaders and ‘countless others’ who struggled to fight for their rights to their lands fall lifeless to the ground they swear to protect.

Having narrated and described a history of struggle leading to the disenfranchisement and marginalization and dispossession of the *Lumad*, Chapter 12, entitled “The *Lumad* Future,” is depicted just as bleak. The author describes here the factions created within the *Lumad* communities, putting their collective identity in contestation by no other than their own kin, pitting them against each other, making them vulnerable and easy to subdue and eventually dispossess. Highlighted in this chapter is the role of the New People’s Army (NPA) who have embedded themselves in the heart of the *Lumad* struggle and resist the State, offering the *Lumad* a breathing-respite of political and economic freedom. In this chapter, the author sees a spark of the *Lumad* identity in the consciousness of the people through social media discourses, in dramatization walks to the urban centers, in write-ups and narratives of the history of the *Lumad* plight and struggle. A theoretical argument is stressed by the author here: to reclaim the *Lumad* identity is to regard it as a class position—a term that depicts a dynamic assertion and positioning characteristic of the Marxist class struggle that theoretically leads to a revolution of the labor class or the masses. This becomes evident in Chapter 13 as the author alludes to a decoupling of the *Lumad* from the hold of the global economic order, violently or otherwise.

Chapter 13 summarizes the various contestations about the *Lumad* identity and their cultural conceptions worthy of a separate discursive exercise as they deal much on the debates of scholars on various matters cramped in a few pages. I would like to focus however on the context of structural discrimination as framed in the first chapter.

As previously mentioned, structural discrimination is a by-product of actions, interactions and inactions of peoples. Historically, the colonizers and the oligarchs that reigned in the country marginalized the indigenous peoples labeling them as wild and savage as against the conquered and Christianized, the civilized ones (Rodil, 1994). That is direct action. This attitude continues to be passed on to the present times manifested by our contempt for the mendicant *Lumad* such as the Bajao and the Mamanwa whom we characterize as lazy without consideration of the fact that their lands and waters were taken from

them by our very own migrant ancestors; or when we refer to someone by using the Higaonon term 'gali' (friend) to mean "ignorant"; the same meaning attributed when someone is called suban-on, a derogation of the ethnicity Subanen. This is discrimination born from our interactions with the *Lumad* or with our fellow migrants. Finally, the discrimination born of our inaction, something the author aptly encapsulates:

Our continuing complacency and incapacity to understand the *Lumad* manifest our ignorance and collective scorn over our shared history as a people oppressed. The narratives of oppression and their contemporary plight as the dispossessed are glaring omissions in the dominant national consciousness. (Alamon, 2017; 210)

The book closes with a hopeful stance that as the alliances of indigenous peoples are formed, when the common denominator of their struggle becomes their rallying cry, when the conversations shift from their uniqueness to their commonalities, then the journey to self-determination takes shape (Alamon, 2017).

In the introductory paragraph of this review, I delineated three types of *Lumad* engagements in the context of development aggression. I emphasized that this book is about the third group: those that struggled for their ancestral lands. I have been to different indigenous communities particularly in Mindanao. The plight of the *Lumad* may be the same in essence but the experiences are different. There are indigenous communities too that are contented or perhaps just silent; or at least that is how it appears to me. The book must be understood in that context. It must not be construed as a reality true to all *Lumad* in Mindanao. This however does not mean that the realities presented here are the figment of the author's imagination. These events continue to happen today. A common denominator probably is that these confrontations occur in IP communities suspected to be infiltrated by the New People's Army (NPA).

The claim of State-sponsored Wars of Extinction may be too generalized. As presented earlier, these cases occur in some communities but not in others. Being state-sponsored may entail violence that

is systematically conducted but its absence in other communities contradicts the premise. The pattern of aggression, however, may be systematic: a naturally endowed *Lumad* community is suspected of coddling NPA rebels; the military enters to control the alleged lawlessness. Thus, fights ensue and when the government forces win, the mining and logging companies enter. This appears to be a pattern in these contested areas.

While I do not agree that there is a systematic war of extinction or that there is a concerted *Lumad* dispossession, one fact certainly remains which I myself attest: these stories are real. Perhaps not to all indigenous groups but surely to some. What is disconcerting is our collective silence which this book intends to shatter.

This book is brave and bold in its exposition. It will open not only eyes but hearts. It is hoped that those who read this will listen to that passionate call to action, to work together for the *Lumad* and with the *Lumad*.

R~Jay Rey G Alovera

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