

Book Review

CENTERING MINDANAO'S MARGINS

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The lumad's struggle in the face of globalization by Karl M. Gaspar C.S.s.R.; Davao City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, Inc., 2000.

In Mindanao's tri-people reality, two voices are privileged: the Christian settlers' and the Muslims'. Another voice, which is the last and the least heard, belongs to the *lumad* a.k.a. indigenous peoples (IP), tribal Filipinos, *katutubo*, even ethnic minorities. Gaspar's latest book, however, attempts to center Mindanao's margins in three essays.

The first essay, which is the title essay, is ambitious, but Gaspar carries it off well. Quite comprehensive in scope, it traces the changes in tribal economies from precolonial to postcolonial eras. The essay shows the faces of development aggression in logging and agribusiness plantations, mining and energy infra projects. Not content with bold strokes, Gaspar provides eight case studies of IP economies that have either adapted or failed after foreign intervention. See how the Sagada Igorot fared compared to the Mangyan, Agta/Mamanua, Tiruray, Bukidnon, T'boli, Manobo and B'laan.

"The disenfranchisement of the IPs" is the second essay. It examines the distances and connections between the unwritten tribal law on land and the national "legal" law.

National laws and indigenous laws exist simultaneously, but obviously independently of each other. At various junctures, their antagonistic relation has erupted into a struggle for dominance. Being based on very different historical origins and evolving from different modes of production, they contradict each other. Where they interact, the contradiction in terms of opposing principles and theories is evident (p. 122).

Then Gaspar shows us why the IPs do not have a ground to stand on. Although all lands are theirs, they're virtually landless by virtue of the American titling system and the State "ownership" of all public lands. He gives us an underside view of the opening up of Mindanao:

The American colonial government likewise issued Public Land Acts of 1913, 1919, and 1925. By virtue of these laws, Mindanao and all other fertile lands that the State considered unoccupied, unreserved, or otherwise unappropriated public lands became available to homesteaders and corporations—despite the fact that the IPs were in these lands (p. 115).

The third essay focuses on "The changing patterns of datu leadership." The case studies are of the Manobos of Arakan Valley, Cotabato, and the Subanens of Lakewood, Zamboanga del Sur. These are the communities with whom Gaspar lived and worked for eight years. Although Gaspar's writing is spiked with indignation at the political violence, it is still full of optimism and hope. He points up a challenge to the *lumad* in their struggle for their ancestral domain: revive the old leadership of the *datu* or acknowledge the strength of new unroyal leaders.

The essays are rich in substance. They are more authoritative, not because of the volumes of references Gaspar consulted, but because of his actual experience with the *lumad*. Bro. Karl Gaspar is currently coordinator of the Redemptorist Itinerant Mission Team based in Mindanao. He also writes as Melchor M. Morante. He has around 30 plays (unpublished but performed all over Davao) and two novels in Cebuano, *Basin ugma puhon, Junjun* (1994) and *Tuburan sa handurawan* (1995). His other publications are: *How*

long? Prison reflections of Karl Gaspar (1985); *Pumipiglas: Teyolohiya ng bayan* (1986); *You are not forgotten: Symbols during martial law* (1988); and *A people's option: To struggle for creation* (1990). Gaspar just earned his Ph.D. in Philippine Studies from the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

The book is 200-pages strong with photographs and maps on almost every spread. Gaspar quotes quite liberally from seminal works and is not stingy with tables comparing and contrasting tribal laws, attitudes towards land and ownership thereof. Three big and beautiful Anoy Catague paintings serve as essay dividers and give the book an apt ethnic flavor.

Prose in some places is a bit involved. A more careful proofreading could have done away with a number of printing errors. The photographs, though well-chosen, could have been better reproduced. These flaws, however, do not diminish the significance of Gaspar's work.

It is as the publisher says: "... an essential source material for students, academicians, historians and for all those who wish to improve their knowledge and understanding of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines." Both Gaspar and AFRIM merit commendation for this publication. It is an important and deeply disturbing book.