
In the span of the last two years that the Lumad people have been in evacuation, they have survived a punitive and fascist response to the health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to: increased surveillance, increased killings, strict curfews and laws around gathering in groups, and a public health crisis. Furthermore, because of the pandemic, the Lumad schools, such as the UCCP Haran Bakwit School in Davao City, lost their main source of income: visits from individual donors and international humanitarian organizations. Because of their status as refugees and their condition of impoverishment, the Lumad were and are entitled to financial support from the government; however, the daughter of the president happens to be the mayor in Davao City, and she denied them financial support. The idea was to starve the Lumad people out in the cities so that they would be forced to return to their ancestral homeland of Mindanao, where their struggle would be removed from international attention. Fortunately, the Lumad were able to connect with local permaculture projects and learned through them how to create urban farms, providing them with subsistence such as vegetables, fruit, and meat, which have sustained them up until now.

Since the pandemic, there has been increased violence towards the Lumad communities both by the government and by individual actors. The Anti-Terror Act, passed in 2020, allows police to arrest anyone suspected of “terrorism” without a warrant. This law has been used to target Lumad schools, claiming that teaching and learning culturally relevant material is somehow terrorism. Furthermore, earlier this year, UP Dillaman, a school in Manila which offered sanctuary to the Lumad students on their campus, abruptly ended their sanctuary agreement, exposing them to the violence of state and non-state actors. UP Dillaman was raided by police on February 15th, resulting in the brutalization of students and teachers alike, the arrest of everyone over 18, and the illegal detention of minors.

The main goal of my project was to support Lumad women and girls in sharing their lived experiences, feelings, hopes, dreams, and fears through the medium of poetry. I find that poetry is a medium that is more raw, authentic and vulnerable, and intended that through the practice and sharing of poetry, Lumad women and girls would be able to listen deeply to each other and heal in community the wounds of having their voices silenced and their lived realities denied. In addition, I intended that some of the students and teachers at the school in Davao would be able to learn about media production, so that these poems and anything else that the Lumad women would like to share can start to be accessible online, to a national and international audience, in order to raise awareness about the atrocities that are being committed by the Filipino government in the name of justice.

Though I wasn’t able to visit the Lumad school that I was supporting through the Projects for Peace grant, I was able to hire a local media team to translate and teach the students through a curriculum that I created this summer at an art residency with Moments Co-op in Oakland, CA. Through this residency, I was also able to write a collaborative poetry zine with 3 other Filipino poets based around the theme of solidarity between diasporic Latino and Filipino communities in the USA. Both of these materials were invaluable to the creation of the poetry workshops. The media creation/technology skills workshops were not created by me, but by the aforementioned media group, simply because I do not have a deep knowledge of the equipment used.

Among the people who participated in the workshops included members of the Talaingod Manobo, Tinanananon Manobo, Mandaya, Matisalog Manobo, Blaan, Tboli, Obo Manobo, Bagobo Manobo, Dibab awon Manobo, and Mansaka tribes. These people, though being from different ethnolinguistic groups, were able to write and share poetry together, as well as practice speaking and writing in Tagalog, Bisaya, English, Manobo, among others.

All students rotated between poetry and digital tech classes and were able to familiarize themselves with both the soft skills of writing and the hard skills of media production. The poetry writing sessions went superbly, and many students expressed their desire to keep writing poetry both collectively and individually. The students especially enjoyed reading the zine that I had written, and copies were

made for a great majority of the students to have their own. The media technology sessions also were fruitful, but unfortunately the students did not have enough time to produce their own video by the end of the workshop. However, there is a plan moving forward to produce videos of the poems they created.

Through the rollout of these workshop series, I was able to equip Lumad women and girls with material support such as video cameras, microphones, recorders, USBs, and computers. One staff member who was hired to support the media tech workshops recalled that because of this project, they were able to receive a COVID test, which they had never gotten before because it can cost over $200 US dollars for a single prognosis.

In terms of long-term support, I am proud to say that I was able to support the deepening of relationship between the Lumad schools and an existing local media partner, who can continue to sustain media competency and literary programs in a way that I would never have been able to if I had taught the workshops myself. Because of this collaboration, the Lumad have built their own mobile media lab, which will allow them to create media for this and future projects as they move around. This is especially important as many of the Lumad in evacuation have chosen to return to their ancestral lands after a long six year absence, despite the risks. The ability to continue to share their stories from a distance will help support their efforts to have their stories and calls for peace be heard internationally.

Though the Lumad face many struggles in the days ahead, their community and their collective strength is what allows them to overcome, time and time again. Something that I learned throughout the course of this project is that peace does not necessarily require someone else to be peaceful or non-violent to you. Rather, peace is something that is cultivated internally through right relationship with the land and with the communities that you are a part of. And if someone comes to you with violence, you can still maintain your own peace through the practice of self-respect and integrity with your own actions and responses.

A message from the Lumad eldership:

“Contrary to many western societies, collectivity is central to our culture and values. From our defense of land, to our artistry, to our form of consultation and decision-making in even the most adverse of conditions, we value the input and needs of the collective over individual opinions and desires. We believe that true healing happens at a collective level, including the defense and restoration of our ancestral lands, shared cultural practice and united and concerted efforts to develop our culture.

We are troubled by misconceptions of our people as being backwards, fighting only to preserve the past in an idyllic and utopian manner. Our culture is inherently progressive -- we have always adapted to our changing circumstances, whether they are political, environmental, economic or cultural. We conduct consultations to assess our practices to ensure that they are serving their intended purpose in our communities, and work to develop and refine our artistry as our culture shifts. This is why we are able to challenge the harmful buy-a (multiple wives system), and why we are able to retain our identity despite being displaced from our ancestral land, the source of our culture.

Displacement and militarization have sought to dispossess us of the ability to develop our cultures, to move forward in the face of oppression, to come together, and to strengthen generations of our people to fight for our right to land, livelihood and self-determination with emotional, physical and spiritual strength and resilience. Despite that we were not able to meet René in person, their project and the generosity of Projects for Peace were important and invaluable acts of solidarity to support us against the ethnocide being waged against us. We were able to create a new collective space for our youth where they learned new digital and artistic skills and processed many of their shared experiences. In the poetry writing workshops, our youth were able to discuss issues including COVID-19, displacement, SOGIE, gender based violence and militarization.” (translated )