OPERATION THUNDERBOLT: THE ETHNICIZATION OF MOUNTAIN DWELLERS OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL

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ABSTRACT

The Aquino government after EDSA-1 promised to restore democracy and issued a ceasefire with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), founded during Marcos regime. Many histories after Marcos' Martial Law era deal with the rise of civil society, the triumph of EDSA-1, and democratization. As a counter history to the positive history written about Cory Aquino's administration, histories regarding Aquino's counterinsurgency efforts that resulted in conflict, death and destruction in the rural areas are also widely available. However, few studies drawn from this deal with conflict as a platform and means of identity construction. Taking from Mary Kaldors's "Identity and War" which argues that identity is an outcome of the war, and Edward Said's concept of Othering, this research asserts the notion that war can be a means of formulating and highlighting political identities. In the case of Negros Island's mountain dwellers, the new identity that emerged after the war was their "IP identity"—their indigenousness. Taking further from Edward Said's concept of Othering, understood as the interpellation of ideas among people by external actors, this thesis argues that the counterinsurgency Operation Thunderbolt in 1989 intensified the sense of identity of the *Bukidnon* when they were incorporated into the mainstream lowlander refugees during their escape from hinterland conflict. This thesis contends that *Bukidnon*'s "IP identity" was highlighted, tested, and showcased during the war, eventually institutionalized by the state with the help of organizing tools like the church and the NGOs, and the military via a largely unconscious act of Othering. This study introduces the massive 1989 counterinsurgency campaign in the Province of Negros Occidental called Operation Thunderbolt. Operation Thunderbolt became an instrument that highlighted and constructed a sectarian identity of indigenous people, particularly the mountain dwellers of Negros Occidental.