The Lumad Struggle for Social and Environmental Justice: Alternative Media in a Socio-Environmental Movement in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study examines the role of alternative media in the socio-environmental movement for justice for the Lumad, the indigenous peoples of the southern Philippines, and the fight to protect the environment in the Philippines from extractive companies and mono-crop plantations. Using thematic textual analysis and framing analysis, the study analysed selected news articles, press releases and advocacy articles from bulatlat.com and civil society group websites posted online from September to December 2015. Anchored on Downing’s theory of alternative media as social movement media and Fuchs’ theory of alternative media as critical media, the study reveals four categories of alternative media: (1) as giver of voice to the oppressed Lumad; (2) as social movement media used for social mobilisation; (3) as an alternative media outfit fulfilling a complementary role with the socio-environmental movement; and (4) as making social movements’ offline activism visible. It concluded that alternative media play a vital role in socio-environmental movements and the continuing challenge to mitigate the climate crisis.

Keywords

Alternative media, civil society, counter-hegemony, critical media, environmental justice, ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, neoliberalism, socio-environmental movement, social justice, social movement media

Introduction

The indigenous peoples in Mindanao, the southern part of the Philippines, are called Lumad, meaning ‘born of the earth’ or homegrown. Lumad is used to refer to 15 to 18 ethno-linguistic groups in Mindanao, and among those usually included as Lumad are the Subanen, B’laan, Mandaya, Higaonon, Banwaon, Talantig, Ubo, Manobo, T’boli, T’boli, Talaandig, Bagobo, Tagakaolo, Dibabawon, Manguangan and Mansaka (La Viña, 2015). More than 60 indigenous leaders in Mindanao have been killed extra-judicially by paramilitary and military groups since 2010 (Varona, 2015). The attacks, which almost always precede the entry of mining and the establishment of plantations, have displaced more than 40,000 Lumad, according to the human rights group Karapatan.

The Lumad killings are a consequence of the Philippines government’s co-optation of neoliberal economics, or neoliberal globalisation. With its principle of unfettered markets as the driving force of development, neoliberalism has resulted in extravagant consumption, massive pollution, exploitation and degradation of the environment. Following the logic and mandate of neoliberal economics, the past Philippines administrations opened up investment and trade implemented with particular stress to attract TNC investment – which is utilised precisely by transnational corporations to target natural resources extraction, driving large-scale exploitation to satisfy commodities markets and the expansion of industrial production in some countries such as China.

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Tujan (2008) notes that, aside from massive pollution and degradation of the environment, the other side of neoliberal economic globalisation is the marginalisation of the majority of the people who remain poor. In the words of Tujan (2008: ii):

Communities engaged in traditional forms of livelihood depending on natural resources extraction such as forestry, indigenous communities and coastal communities face systematic marginalization as a result of privatization of the commons and large-scale development projects and become workers in large-scale extractive industries.

Indigenous peoples are denied their historical role in natural methods of conservation of the environment. Worse, these same communities face the severe impact of environmental degradation as a result of over-exploitation, such as pollution of freshwater resources due to toxic mine tailings or destructive flash floods due to over-logging. Such impacts are made even more severe by climate change, with higher rainfall more easily weakening sub-soils in overlogged areas, resulting in mudslides.

As a consequence of neoliberal economics, the Lumad face frequent attacks, and their ancestral domains are encroached upon by outsiders because many of the island’s natural resources – especially minerals – are in Lumad territory. This is the case in different parts of the world, particularly in Latin American countries and South-East Asian countries like Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. On 1 September 2015, three Lumad leaders were brutally killed by paramilitary groups at the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Development (ALCADEV) in Surigao, Mindanao. The three Lumad leaders were Emerito Samarca, director of ALCADEV; Dionel Campos, leader of an indigenous peoples’ organization against large-scale mining; and Bello Sinzo, a tribal leader known as a ‘Datu’, which means chief, or head. The brutal killings of Campos and Sinzo were carried out in front of the students and teachers of ALCADEV, while Emerito Samarca was killed in his office by slitting his throat and hacking him to death.

The death of the three Lumad leaders sparked civil society movements and actions to stop Lumad killings, render justice to the slain Lumad leaders and demand that the government respect Lumad rights, especially their right to their ancestral lands. Disinformation from the military groups was spread by saying that what happened was a result of tribal war, but alternative media revealed truths and realities not normally shown in mainstream media. Foremost in the alternative writing on the Lumad killings was the online alternative media outfit bulatlat.com, which has ‘Journalism for the people’ as its slogan. Civil society groups and NGO networks were also active in posting their news articles, press releases and advocacy articles calling for justice for the Lumad and the protection of their rights to their ancestral lands and self-determination.

The Philippines contains a thriving and vibrant civil society, which McCoy (2009: 515) describes as ‘the most elaborate citizens’ network anywhere in the developing world’. This civil society contains NGOs involved in a variety of different types of activism, such as advocacy on behalf of agrarian reform, environmental protection, indigenous peoples’ rights, labour organising and the plight of the urban poor. Many of these NGOs generate stiff resistance to neoliberal policies, which constitutes a significant barrier to their implementation. The opposition of social movements to mining, for example, includes protests, litigation, administrative proceedings and the implementation of mining moratoriums by local governments.

**Literature, theory and research questions**

There is a very close relationship between alternative media and civil society’s political actions constituting a social movement for the Lumad struggle, which this study set out to examine. For Downing (2011), radical media or alternative media are the media of social movements: non-
mainstream and counterhegemonic, offering counter-information and aimed at social change. Since activists and those involved in social movements are excluded and marginalised from the mainstream press, they historically have created their own media or relied on alternative media for a non-hegemonic perspective. As Twitter and Facebook – arguably forms of online alternative media – have both played critical roles in recent revolutions and protests, understanding what forms of media activists use and trust is crucial for understanding what role alternative media play in activism (Harlow, 2013). Rodríguez (2011) builds on Downing’s definition of radical or alternative media as media of social movements to proffer the concept of ‘citizens’ media’ which implies that citizens are actively contributing to the mediascape so that the communication process itself becomes empowering. Regardless of the term used, what they have in common is ‘the desire to foster substantially different structures and processes of communication that make possible egalitarian, interactive, and emancipatory discourse’ (Attwood, 1986: 19).

Online alternative media enable activists and other marginalised groups systematically ignored by the mainstream media to reach new and dispersed audiences not restricted by the limits of time, space, distance or even ideology, even reaching audiences with differing opinions and beliefs who otherwise might only read mainstream media (Harlow, 2013). The internet has been utilised by social movement players for networking, as it has enabled a low-cost message transmission ‘where alternative communication projects located in different parts of the globe can link and enhance their knowledge exchanging experiences of struggle in their specific contexts, enabling concrete action’ (Colectivo ConoSur, 2004: 91). Furthermore, ‘literature shows that online tools facilitate and amplify offline activism; other studies have demonstrated that online activism translates into offline activism, and vice versa’ (Harlow, 2013: 32). This study focuses on both online and offline activism of civil society groups in the Philippines for the cause of justice for the Lumad and environmental protection in the Philippines.

Empirical studies show the vital role of alternative media in social movements in shaping ‘a media agenda allied to social movements and alternative communication networks to position themes and perspectives different from mainstream media’ (ALAI, 2012, para. 1). The main issues presented by alternative media in Latin America’s grassroots production include the promotion and defence of human rights (especially of indigenous people, women, children, workers and social activists), defence of territories (resistance against agribusiness, extractive and mining industries, transgenic corporations), and promotion of grassroots experiences (achievements in gender equality, education, climate justice and food sovereignty, among others). In Latin American grassroots integration, alternative media work with grassroots sectors as they participate and cover events, mobilisations or marches, strengthening confidence among the people they represent, transcending the traditional conception of media as an information transmitter. Alternative media actually help to organise and mediate experiences of struggle that can strengthen social movements’ capacities. Parra (2015: 3695) notes the following in her article on alternative media and Latin American grassroots integration:

Mediation between social movements and society sometimes consists in enabling media to spread the social movement’s voice on their struggles and realities. The past notion of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ is now seen as serving social movements, not only to distribute information, but also to make visible and articulate demands, territories, subjectivities, identities, and alternative lifestyles.

In other resource-rich countries like India, socio-environmental movements against extractive industries have also been formed. An example is Odisha, which has become an important site of resistance movements against large extractive projects. Issues of ecology and environment were part of the framework of resistance, along with social justice for the dispossessed peasantry, sharecroppers and forest-dependent groups of people. Environmental pollution and destruction
of landscapes have increased to the extent where a novel synthesis between social justice and environmental care is the rallying cry of the resistance movements against the predations of globalised capitalism.

In the absence of positive coverage in mainstream, corporate media, activists started using the internet as a medium to circulate information on the ground. Videos of police and corporate repression, and write-ups online, have helped to get messages out to the wider world. These efforts have ensured that the alternative viewpoints of the resistance movements are being presented and articulated in the public space. The dogged resistance to global capital and a neoliberal state, combined with the ability to synthesise social justice with ecological concerns, makes the movements in Odisha significant for global struggles against extractive capital.

Ruano, Pacheco and Suazo (2013) analysed the use of digital media for a socio-environmental movement in Mayan marginalised communities in Guatemala. They learned several lessons from this analysis. The organisers of the movement recognised the value of ICTs to improve membership, increase collective efficacy and strengthen networks of support. Thus the use of digital media (mobile phones, computers with internet) was strong and highly effective in the mobilisation inside the movement, but weak and curbed in its effects on policies and political decision-making processes outside the movement, as structural exclusion, ineffective political dialogue and blatant persecution against indigenous leaders hindered the movement’s potential to effectively influence elites’ decision-making, resulting in increasing conflict and violence. Despite these setbacks, the movement has achieved some intermediate goals, such as influencing the media agenda, changing corporate policies and some public policy modifications. For the Mayan communities, digital media served as social and environmental movement media, resisting and challenging the neoliberal policies of the state-corporation nexus.

Alternative media, whether using traditional or digital media, can be defined as ‘essentially counter-hegemonic, that is challenging established, hierarchical, systems of politics, economics, and culture’ (Watson and Hill, 2003: 172). The central characteristic of alternative media is their alternative political vision: ‘By radical media, I refer to media, generally small-scale and in many different forms that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives’ (Downing, 2001: v). The alternative media’s alternative vision refers to the resistance to the dominating and marginalising consequences of economic or neoliberal globalisation, calling to mind alternative globalisation movements such as that shown at the World Social Forum, with its slogan ‘Another world is possible’.

Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) distinguish some approaches that define alternative media in different ways. Of these, the approaches that are relevant to this study are: (1) alternative media as alternative to mainstream media (large-scale, state-owned or commercial, hierarchical, dominant discourses vs small-scale, independent, non-hierarchical, non-dominant discourses); (2) approaches to looking at alternative media using the notion of counter-hegemonic media that are part of civil society and form a third voice between state media and commercial media; and (3) approaches that speak of rhizomatic media that are relational because they link different protest groups and movements, connect the local and the global, and establish different types of relationships with the market and/or the state.

Fuchs (2010) posits that alternative media, being counter-hegemonic in nature, are critical media. This means that, in contrast to mainstream, commercial media, they are characterised by critical form and content. Critical media contain oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives, which reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism and so on; such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. In critical media content, there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the voices of the excluded, the oppressed, the
dominated, the enslaved, the estranged and the exploited, and that argues for the advancements of a cooperative society. Such content shows ‘suppressed possibilities of existence, antagonisms of reality, potentials for change’ (Fuchs, 2010). Critical media give voices to the voiceless and media power to the powerless, and transcend the filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies or cultural monopolies in public information and communication.

As alternative media strive to give voice to the voiceless, oppressed and marginalised, this study specifically sought to find out whether the Lumad possess a critical consciousness of the root causes of their oppression; if they do, its goal was to find out what their response or attitude might be towards their oppressed condition. The study seeks to know whether and how the Lumad resist the capitalist encroachment and militarisation in their lands. In Paulo Freire’s (1970) conscientisation of the oppressed, the oppressed need to understand why they are oppressed. Conscientisation – which means the ways in which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action – involves examining and acting on the root causes of oppression as experienced in the here and now (Freire, 1970). Thus the study sought to find out how the Lumad act on the root causes of their oppression.

The main research question, therefore, was:

What roles do alternative media play in the socio-environmental movement for Lumad and the environment in the Philippines and how do they fulfil these roles?

This led to a number of subsidiary research questions:

• In what ways do alternative news about the Lumad function as critical, counter-hegemonic media that give voice to the voiceless while seeking social justice and social change? How do alternative news site bulatlat.com and NGO networks frame their news, press releases and articles on the Lumad in the Philippines?

• How do social movement actors or activists use online media for social mobilisation and publicity for their campaigns and activities?

• In what ways does bulatlat.com work with civil society groups and activists in the social movement for justice for the Lumad and environmental protection in the Philippines?

• What is bulatlat.com’s role with regard to the offline activism of civil society groups in advancing the cause of the Lumad and of environmental conservation and protection in the Philippines?

Methods

This study employs a purely qualitative approach using the deductive inquiry method. Following Fuchs’ (2010) theorising of alternative media as critical media that may be approached in different ways, and Downing’s (2011) theoretical statement that alternative media are the media of social movements and can also mean ‘citizens’ media’, the researcher set out to download all the relevant news on the Lumad and mining from the alternative media site bulatlat.com, press releases from the most relevant civil society groups or NGO networks posted on their websites, and a few advocacy articles most related to the struggle of the Lumad from the time of the killing of three Lumad leaders in Mindanao on 1 September 2015 to December 2015.

In this study, the small-scale, independent media being studied comprises Bulatlat.com, while the social movement media are the press releases and advocacy articles posted in the websites of civil society groups such as Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment, Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance to Stop Mining) and 350.org. The researcher focused on the online alternative media outfit Bulatlat.com because of its promise to
expose the truth, *(bulatlat* is a Filipino word meaning to dig into and to expose); its slogan ‘Journalism for the people’; and its very well-written news, feature and opinion articles. It also kept articles on the plight of the Lumad and the mining issue in the Philippines up to date.

These downloaded articles were then further selected and categorised into themes using theoretical concepts on alternative media from John Downing (2011), Christian Fuchs (2010) and related literature. Four themes or categories were identified: (1) alternative media (both the alternative news from the online alternative media outfit and civil society groups’ postings in their websites) as critical media that give voice to the voiceless and produce counter-hegemonic content; (2) alternative media as social movement media for social mobilisation; (3) alternative media outfits as the partner of social movement in three more functions (as monitor, articulator and network-builder); and (4) alternative media outfits as making social movements’ offline activism visible.

A framing analysis of the alternative news from bulatlat.com and the press releases and advocacy articles was done for alternative media role categories 1 and 2, together with a textual analysis of each article for their critical and counter-hegemonic content. The researcher employed thematic textual analysis for the articles under alternative media role categories 3 and 4. The data discussion and summary focuses on the roles of alternative media to the social movement and the struggle of the Lumad and civil society organisations for both social justice and the mitigation of the climate crisis through environmental protection.

**Alternative media as giver of voice to the exploited**

As critical media that contain counter-information and counter-hegemony (Fuchs, 2010), alternative news and advocacy articles from Bulatlat.com and NGO networks’ websites give voice to the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged and the exploited. A framing analysis of news that gave voice to the Lumad revealed both the human rights and the climate crisis frames, and the interconnection between the two. This connection manifests in the direct quotes from the Lumad and activists supporting the Lumad.

Several human rights of the Lumad have been violated, as shown by the framing analysis of the alternative news about the Lumad, depicting their sentiments and voices regarding the extra-judicial killings, the militarisation of their communities, the disruption of their livelihood as farmers and their evacuation from their homes due to the militarisation and killing of their leaders. These rights include the right to life, liberty and security; freedom from arbitrary arrest; freedom from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence; the right to own property (their ancestral lands); the right to desirable work; the right to an adequate standard of living (as they were forced to leave their homes); and the Lumad children’s right to education.

In ‘#StopLumadKillings: An appeal from a Lumad daughter’ (23 October 2015), posted on Kalikasan.net, Michelle Campos, daughter of slain leader Dionel Campos, writes the following words that show her critical consciousness of the cause of the climate crisis, which is also the cause of fear and violence in her community:

> But in my community, large-scale mining interests are sowing fear and violence. Not only are the fossil fuel and extractive corporations driving the climate crisis, leaving us extremely vulnerable to typhoons such as Washi in 2011 and Bopha in 2012 that killed thousands of people – they are taking our land and killing our people, too. (Campos 2015)

In ‘Voice of a Lumad widow: Our land, our blood’, published by Bulatlat.com (30 September 2015), Jocelyn Campos, widow of Dionel Campos and mother of Michelle, speaks of her community’s desire for the education of their children to prepare them for a better life and their stand to protect the environment; however, she points out that the legitimate right of the children to be educated is violated by attacks on their schools by the military and paramilitary,
notably the killing of Emerito Samarca, executive director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural Development. She states:

All we want is for our children to know how to read, write and have a better life ahead of them. The Lumad took a stand to protect the environment and give our children education but they don’t want us to do that. The government and the capitalists want us to remain uneducated, primitive and weak.

Jocelyn Campos also points to the Lumad defence of their lands from the entry of large-scale mining and other capitalists:

We know that businessmen and capitalists have a huge interest in our lands. They want to pursue mining and logging but we, the Lumad don’t want mining operations in our areas. We know the bad things that it will bring. Andap Valley is rich, they want us to vacate the complex and make way for the entry of large scale mining.

Datu Dulphing Ogang earlier spoke of the corporate encroachment of Lumad lands in ‘Indigenous peoples call: “Carry on the struggle”’ (Bulatlat.com, 9 August 2015). In an interview with Dee Ayroso, Datu Ogang describes the modern slavery brought by corporate encroachment on Lumad lands:

Corporate encroachment has turned many indigenous peoples into modern slaves in their own lands working as plantation and mine workers. Those who resist became targets of ‘brutal attacks’ under the counterinsurgency program Oplan Bayanihan. Soldiers have restricted farm work to one and-a-half hours, and falsely accused villagers of being New People’s Army (NPA) guerrillas, curtailing their economic, social, and civil rights (right to desirable work; right to life, liberty, and personal security; and right to adequate living standard).

Experiencing such oppressive condition, Datu Guibang Apoga, another Manobo leader, makes a stand to carry on the struggle against the oppressors of the Lumad because they had no choice but fight them: ‘We refuse to give up the struggle, and they try to kill us; we give up, and they will still kill us. So, it’s better to carry on the struggle.’

**Alternative media as the media for social mobilisation**

Aside from studying an alternative media outfit as an alternative to the mainstream media, giving voice to the voiceless, this study approaches alternative media as social movement media used for the purpose of social mobilisation by civil society groups and networks. It includes the use of social media by the social movement actors and the official websites of civil society groups where press releases, news articles and advocacy articles are posted. As such, it is counter-hegemonic and rhizomatic in nature, since websites link to other like-minded civil society groups or NGO networks. The framing analysis of these online postings showed either a placing of emphasis on the human rights of the Lumad or a dual emphasis given to the human rights and environmental protection frames, which are seen to be intertwined in certain posts.

In ‘Network launched to resist plantation expansion in peasant, Lumad and Moro areas’, a press release of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (28 October 2015), the undeniable link between militarisation – which causes human rights violations – and environmental pollution and degradation – which are driven by and exacerbate climate change – is evident, thus manifesting the interlocking of the human rights and environmental degradation, leading to climate crisis frames. The news writer expressed the fact that the expansion of plantations in Mindanao poses ‘serious threats to the environment and health of the people living within and working in the plantations’, with the use of pesticides and other chemicals, ‘which have proven to have caused skin and respiratory diseases to workers in oil palm, banana and even pineapple plantations’. The green groups and the Lumad denounced the state, military and other security forces for being ‘responsible for violating the rights of the people through continued harassment,
vilification and even killings to protect the interests of these corporate plantations’. They opposed the plantation expansion with empirical arguments that the alteration of the natural landscape (i.e. flattening of mountains) and denudation of natural forests to plant agri-plantation crops also had negative impact on soil erosion, biodiversity and sources of water, again showing that environmental degradation drives up climate change and is connected to human rights violation of poor communities.

To persuade people and to mobilise them to fight for Lumad land rights, self-determination and the mitigation of climate change. Zeph Repollo, writing for 350.org in ‘People over profits: #StopLumadKillings’ (15 October 2015), asserts that we will never win the climate fight without the indigenous peoples. She writes:

The Indigenous People’s right to land and self- determination is parallel to the preservation of our ecological frontiers that are helping mitigate the impacts of climate change. They are fighting for their ancestral domains – our survival. They are fighting for their lives – our existence. What they will lose, we will lose. What they nurture, we all benefit.

Repollo (2015) writes that the struggle of the Lumad in the Philippines is similar to the different indigenous communities’ struggles in different parts of the world. Corporate interests inflict injustices and violence on communities defending their land and heritage; at the same time, they inflict devastation on the environment, feeding into the global climate crisis. Repollo draws a clear connection between the indigenous peoples’ fight for their ancestral domains and the fight against the effects of climate change. The fight against large-scale mining, fossil fuels and vast plantation corporations is a fight to save the last ecological frontiers that may help to mitigate climate change. Repollo’s words proffer the counter-hegemonic ideology that what the indigenous peoples protect and nurture will benefit humanity. Thus neoliberalism, or the economic system of an unfettered market, must be resisted, opposed and transformed into a more sustainable global economic system.

The socio-environmental movement used social media for social mobilisation in its Twitter campaign #StopLumadKillings, which gained massive local and international support from different civic organisations. In these tweets and re-tweets, the human rights of the Lumad were emphasised as NGO networks called to stop Lumad killings and uphold the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and to self-determination. Just some of those who tweeted and re-tweeted were Action Net Philippines, a Network of German NGOs working together for human rights in the Philippines; Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defender Network (IPHRD Network), a network serving as a platform for solidarity of coordination among indigenous peoples; Balitang New York (News from New York), the voice of the Filipino community in New York; International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines; Save Our Schools Network (SOS Network), a network of child-focused NGOs, church-based groups and other stakeholders advocating for children’s right to education; and Land is Life, a global movement on the frontlines of safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples to protect lands, cultures and biodiversity for all of humanity.

Aside from the Twitter campaign, civil society groups and networks posted their own press releases and advocacy articles to achieve their purpose of calling for justice for the Lumad and environmental protection. The Catholic religious group known as Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) posted on its website about the support given by the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, chaired by the Reverend Barry Naylor (2015), who delivered his keynote address for the Barug Katungod Mindanao Conference (Mindanao Stand for Human Rights) in Cagayan de Oro City on 11 September 2015. The human rights frame is clearly emphasised in Reverend Naylor’s keynote address, which called for Global Days of
Action for Mindanao from 22 November to 10 December 2015 to campaign against the intensified United States–Aquino regime’s attacks on the Filipino people.

Online activism was translated to offline activism as Rev. Naylor’s urgent summons was realised when representatives from the Lumad, RMP and Lumad supporters campaigned in Europe to gather support for the call to stop Lumad killings and uphold their rights. The contingent from the Philippines spoke to various groups and offices in Geneva, Rome, London, Brussels, Amsterdam and Krakow during the early leg of the #GlobalWeeksOfAction4Mindanao in Europe, which started on 22 November and ran to 10 December 2015. The main objectives of the Global Weeks of Action for Mindanao were to publicise and gain even wider international support for the struggles of the peoples of Mindanao against their systematic repression and exploitation by their own government – particularly the Save our Schools Campaign to call on the government and military to stop the attacks on Lumad schools. These global days of action gained widespread support from Europeans, Canadians and Americans, who wrote public letters to President Benigno Aquino and gave financial support to the Lumad and civil society groups supporting them.

This networked resistance to the neoliberal economic system is articulated in the press release posted by Alyansa Tigil Mina (2015) on its website on 28 November 2015. The press release entitled ‘Filipinos join the global climate march to demand climate justice’ released information about 15,000 advocates representing climate-impacted communities, religious groups, youth, labour unions, anti-coal and renewable energy campaigners, and other concerned citizens who took to the streets of Manila and other major cities in the Philippines to join the Global Climate March on the weekend before the UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris. The Filipino advocates marched to call for climate justice in behalf of vulnerable nations like the Philippines, and to demand a strong, fair and ambitious global climate agreement ahead of the international UN climate talks that started on 30 November.

The demands of the Filipino marchers included those concerning the Lumad of the Philippines – such as the demand to shift to renewable energy, as this would prevent coal mining on indigenous lands, protect people’s rights to food, water and the commons, guarantee the rights of all people and communities, and deliver justice and address the impacts of climate – including those particular to women and indigenous communities. The nation-wide march was intended for both the environmental and human rights of the Lumad and the larger community of people as weapons of liberation from neoliberal globalisation.

**Alternative media outfits as partners of the social movement for the Lumad and the environment**

Earlier, it was shown that bulatlat.com gave voice to the oppressed Lumad in its news articles. A thematic textual analysis of more alternative news from bulatlat.com reveals the other functions of this alternative news site in relation to the social movement in support of the Lumad and the environment: (1) monitoring of the programs of activities; (2) articulating the narratives and agenda; and (3) connecting groups and forging solidarity.

Bulatlat.com monitors and covers the activities of civil society groups in fighting for both social justice for the Lumad and environmental protection. An example of this is its news report ‘#StopLumadKillings: Groups protest “butcher mining companies” confab’, which reported on the protests of Lumad and green groups outside the annual gathering of the Chamber of Mines in the Philippines (CoMP) at the Solaire Casino and Resort in Paranaque City on 15 September, citing the protesters’ label for the gathering as ‘a conference of militarists and polluters’ (Ayroso, 2015b). According to the article, Clemente Bautista, national coordinator of the environmental NGO Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment, strongly demanded justice and
accountability from the large-scale miners for the human rights violations they had been perpetrating both against the people – especially the Lumad – and the environment:

We are resolute in demanding accountability and justice for the ongoing pollution, plunder and even genocide that these large-scale miners are perpetrating against the people and the environment. We demand immediate justice for our Lumad brothers and sisters and the pull-out of the butcher mining companies that militarized their communities.

Clemente made the strong link between human rights and the climate change issues when he identified the mining conference’s top sponsors as the leading sponsors of paramilitary groups that have sown terror across the mine-affected communities – especially in Mindanao. These sponsors, continued Clemente, also have extensive track records of pollution and plunder over the past recent years.

The articulator function means that alternative media articulate counter-information not provided by mainstream media and also present an alternative vision of civil society groups calling for a sustainable development model. Bulatlat.com, for instance, posted an advocacy article entitled ‘A deluge of crises: the roots of our climate vulnerability’ (4 November 2015), by Leon Dulce, the campaign coordinator of Kalikasan Philippine Network for the Environment. In the article, Dulce writes about the various forms of development aggression, which he sees as the greatest drivers in the destruction in the Philippine environment. He cites the following inconvenient facts:

Around a million hectares of our lands are currently covered by large-scale mining applications, over 177,000 hectares in timber plantations masquerading as forest management agreements, and more than 1.2 million hectares under mono-crop plantations. Meanwhile, 38,000 hectares of foreshore areas are covered by reclamation projects, and around 70 percent of our fisheries is exploited and controlled by foreign companies.

With these alarming statistics cited by Dulce (2015a) to point to the various forms of development aggression that are the root causes of the Filipinos’ climate vulnerability, it is easy to understand why the green groups that are working in solidarity with the Lumad protest and resist further expansion of mono-crop plantations and the entry of destructive large-scale mining on Lumad lands, especially as these are watershed areas. It is easy to see that the Filipino communities’ food and water security will be threatened, since agricultural farms and clean sources of water will be jeopardised by the toxic tailings and pesticides from the plantations, as well as drought or flooding due to climate change.

The function of connecting with other groups and forging solidarity is fulfilled in alternative news coverage of social movement networks, serving to expand the linkages and networks among the social movement actors both within and outside the country. The alternative news site serves to strengthen the link and creates potential linkages with other groups with the coverage of forged links. One example is the coverage of the members of the International League for Peoples’ Struggle’s visit to Manila to express their solidarity with the Lumad and the other groups supporting them. In ‘Internationalists unite with Lumad for Apec protests’ (Ayroso, 2015d). Meza, an American who heads the organization Chelsea Unity Against War, is quoted as saying:

We express solidarity in the struggle against militarization in Mindanao, and against big mining corporations in the Philippines … that destroy the land and livelihood of people, to mine coal, gold, just for the profit of big corporations and the one percent wealthy of the world.

Meza points out that big mining corporations destroy the land and livelihood of people for profit, and the 1 per cent wealthy of the world – which includes the wealthy capitalists in the
Philippines. The Lumad struggle is thus shown to be resistance against neoliberal or corporate globalization, which results in massive inequality, environmental destruction and hardship for those who do not benefit from it, but instead are deprived of their land and livelihood – such as the Lumad.

Alternative media outfits’ role in making social movements’ offline activism visible

In covering social movements’ offline activism, bulatlat.com fulfills its four-fold function of being the mouthpiece, monitor, articulator and network-builder, serving and partnering with civil society groups and NGO networks to advance the cause of the oppressed Lumad and the endangered Philippine environment. Bulatlat.com serves as a social movement for the Lumad and the environment by monitoring, reporting and making visible offline activism; articulating the movement’s agenda, identities, aesthetics and narratives; and thus aligning online activism with offline activism. It covers cultural presentations such as songs, poems, a play re-enacting the atrocities of the state forces in Mindanao and testimonies by those who were at the scene of the killing of Lumad leaders or the massacre of family members. This section demonstrates that online alternative media amplify offline activism since publicising it leads to greater support from both the policy-makers and the masses of people.

These cultural presentations served as expressions of protest, cries for justice and expressions of solidarity with the oppressed Lumad and the devastated environment. In ‘Gathering for Lumad weaves peoples’ high resolve for solidarity, justice’ (22 September 2015), supporters from various groups registered their solidarity with the Lumad struggle for justice, self-determination and freedom through cultural presentations held at Mandell Hall, Trinity University in Quezon City on 18 September. Lumad from Davao, Bukidnon and Surigao del Sur who were victims of militarisation recounted their harrowing experiences of human rights violations. Telling of such a gathering, Mabalay (2015) writes:

Combined emotions of grief, rage, desire for justice, and solidarity to support and defend the Lumad were felt by those who participated in the cultural-solidarity gathering organized by civil society organizations such as Promotion of Church People’s Response (PCPR), Kasimbayan/ECD, Bayan, and Katribu. Aside from the prevailing sentiment of solidarity felt from the gathering, it also aimed to gather a minimum of P50,000 as support for the campaign of Lumad against militarization and provide for the primary needs of the refugees in evacuation centers.

The protest caravan known as Manilakbayan has affected the capital of the Philippines, Manila. In ‘#Manilakbayan2015: “We have affected the center”’ (22 November 2015), Ayroso (2015c) writes about the 700-strong protest caravan consisting of hundreds of Lumad and hundreds of their supporters who travelled 1000 kilometres through the Visayas, Bicol and Southern Tagalog all the way to Manila. They marched hundreds of kilometres, staged dozens of protests and had some skirmishes with police.

Their calls were: ‘Stop Lumad killings, Save our schools, Pull out military from the communities, Disband paramilitary groups’. Manilakbayan caught the attention of, and drew overwhelming support from, schools, students, athletes, netizens, the Catholic Church and other church denominations, NGOs, showbusiness personalities, Aldub fans and even local government councils, although the national government ignored them. A chain reaction of protest and calls on the government was the outcome of the Manilakbayan, ramping up the struggle for social and environmental justice for the Lumad.

Aside from cultural performances, protest caravans, global days of action for the Lumad and public statements, civil society organisations in the Philippines have also been working at the grassroots level on various forms of protest against the encroachment and destructive effects of neoliberal capitalism. In an advocacy article entitled ‘A world to win: people’s actions on climate change’ (26 November 2015), Leon Dulce (2015b) describes the growing resistance of
peasant, fisher folk, indigenous people and other grassroots communities who are staging various forms of protest, from people’s barricades and picket actions to calibrated acts of sabotage and ultimately armed resistance, which successfully are delaying or ousting mining projects from the north to the south of the Philippines. In Batangas City, a participatory environmental investigative mission on the proposed JG Summit-owned coal power project was launched to ascertain the possible ecological and health impacts of the project. The Roman Catholic Church also set out on a million-signature campaign against coal power projects as a concrete response to Pope Francis’s encyclical, Laudato Si. Progressive NGOs have established community-based renewable energy systems and sustainable agriculture farms to deliver basic needs such as food security and rural electrification.

Data discussion, summary and conclusion
The framing analysis of alternative news by the alternative media outfit bulatlat.com and articles posted by civil society groups and NGO networks on their websites revealed two frames: the human rights frame and the climate crisis frame, which are intertwined in more of the articles analyzed. The protection of the human rights of the Lumad, as shown in this article, is intertwined with the protection of the environment – the ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples. Thus the struggle of the Lumad and people who fight for them is for social justice as well as environmental justice.

According to the US Department of Energy, environmental justice is

fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no population bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or from the execution of federal, state, and local laws; regulations; and policies. Meaningful involvement requires effective access to decision makers for all, and the ability in all communities to make informed decisions and take positive actions to produce environmental justice for themselves.

Hawkins (2010) discusses the connection between social justice and environmental justice, defining environmental justice as the right of current and future generations to a clean, healthy and safe environment. She cites Hancock’s (2003) definition of ‘environmental human rights’ as the human right to live in an environment free from toxic pollution and to exercise control over local natural resources. The poorest people, the marginalised communities and the ethnic minorities, pay the greatest cost for ecological damage, including loss of access to natural resources. It can never be emphasised enough that it is essential to secure environmental justice as a basic human right.

Alternative media’s role in this socio-environmental movement is shown to be vital in this study. Four categories of the role of alternative media have been identified in the study, all showing the need to present critical and counter-hegemonic content that opposes the values of the neoliberal economic system currently in place. The first category shows alternative media as giving a voice to the exploited, at the same time revealing the intertwined human rights and climate crisis frames. The second category shows alternative media as social movement media – the media produced by civil society groups and NGO networks through press releases, campaign posters and advocacy articles posted on their websites. The third category shows alternative media outfits as the partners of social movements fulfilling three other functions: as monitor, articulator and network-builder, publicising the social movement’s programs and activities, articulating their assessment of the consequences of the neoliberal policies of the state and their alternative development model, and strengthening and expanding networks.

Finally, the fourth category shows the role of alternative media outfits in making visible the offline activism of social movement actors, in the process fulfilling its fourfold function of giving
voice to the voiceless; monitoring the programs and activities of social movement actors; articulating the social movement's identities, aesthetics, narratives and agenda; and strengthening and potentially enlarging networks through its online platform and publicity for events by gaining more sympathy and support from people and groups, from the local to the global arenas.

This discussion shows that alternative media outfits can actually complement the social movement media, or the media produced by civil society groups who are part of the social movement. Alternative media outfits can monitor programs and activities, make visible and amplify what the social movement agents are doing, articulate their agenda, give voice to the voiceless and forge solidarities through their media power. At the same time, civil society groups’ online media presented on their own websites are rhizomatic in nature, as they link with other groups online and use the power of social media.

While the supporters and campaigners of the corporate mining industries and mono-crop plantations refuse to budge from their complacency, the increase in support that has created networks of groups and movements from the Western and Asian countries proves that the work of social movement and the role of alternative media have not been in vain. The challenge of confronting neoliberalism and mitigating climate crisis continues; hence, future research needs to focus on assessing the impact of specific social movements and of alternative media through other qualitative methods, such as key informant interviews and ethnographic and/or quantitative methods.

References


