

Samal Island and Its People: Narratives of Power in the Landscapes of a New City

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In the frontier zone of Southeastern Mindanao, the general sociological observation that social reality stands “in immediate relation to the distribution of power” proves to be a much more complex and dynamic state of being. This paper outlines several recurrent conversations about a particular island location in Southern Philippines. The sizeable island of Samal in the Davao Gulf is at its closest point only 15 minutes away from Davao City. It became the “Island Garden City of Samal” in 1998, but before that surprisingly few people in Davao City were even aware that there was an island called “Samal” nearby. Traveling around the island and conducting fieldwork in 1996-1997 I encountered many kinds of people and several recurrent conversations about Samal as a place. These local discourses tell of interregional migration and movement, and reflect active local engagement with the processes of “Bisayanization” and integration within the national mainstream, globalization, capitalism, and modernization in the Davao region. The paper situates each of the different kinds of claims on the landscape within the existing ethnographic, demographic, and historical picture for the region, and ends up describing a setting that is actually many different kinds of reality at the same time. Six narratives of the landscape are discussed: Samal Island as valuable real estate; as mythic place of “giants” and “ancestral domain”; as out-of-the-way and risky, where a visitor should watch out for “poisoning”; as recently settled frontier; as a promised and prophesied land; and, finally, as a landscape also inhabited by unseen beings that are “not like us,” widely feared to be exacting *taxes* in human life as large scale government and multinational-led infrastructural development proceeded in 1997. The paper examines each of these in turn, as they describe and address larger issues of identity, land and power.

This paper concerns the prominent island of Samal situated in the Davao Gulf in Southern Mindanao to show how, in relation to historical processes, Samal’s landscape is still being shaped and

fashioned. From conversations among the people there one derives a sense of overlapping kinds of place. The island is shared with many “others.” They include different kinds of migrants or “Bisaya” (people from the Visayas) and different kinds of “natives,” both of whom have moved around a lot. Some other relevant figures on Samal are absent landowners, and most recently, big-time investors in real estate as well as temporary holidaymakers and tourists. All these points of view render Samal into several kinds of place—or kinds of *reality*—at the same time, where one might appreciate an assortment of disparate “orders” of time and space both competing and overlapping. To ask “Whose place is Samal Island?” is also to ask “What kind of a place is Samal Island?”—as well as to ask these questions in the *plural*.

Historically the Davao Region is a frontier area that has become dominated by migrants from Luzon and, especially, the Visayas, since the turn of the 20th century. Perhaps peculiar to frontiers is the coexistence of different kinds of people, of different kinds of newcomers and different kinds of “natives,” each with different points of view. Several prevalent narratives concerning place and people that have to do with different kinds of “being first” or of constituting community and laying claim to landscape are outlined in this paper. Examining these narrative themes also bears out Giddens’ observation that “‘what passes for social reality’ stands in immediate relation to the distribution of power, not only on the most mundane levels of everyday interaction, but also on the level of global cultures and ideologies, whose influence indeed may be felt in every corner of everyday social life itself” (1993: 112). The narratives of location in Samal are very much “in conversation” with larger narratives; and one way to become familiar with the locale is by seeing its relation to places and events outside it.

The paper integrates historical, geographic, and ethnographic information on Samal with these local perceptions of place as I try to situate them within the sketchy ethnographic literature of the Davao region and volatile history of Mindanao, as well as portray shifts from one to the other storyline in relation to larger processes.¹

The significance of the study could best be appreciated in

terms of dialogic approaches in the social sciences wherein local voices and contexts are seen as coherently engaging other dominant voices—or how diverse conversations “on the ground” are engaged with larger discourses “in the air.”²² In this particular context, overlapping narratives reflect diverse claims to the landscape in Samal and perceptions of larger processes in the region.—

There is great dynamism in the Davao Gulf region. The complexity of the situation in Samal is in all likelihood a microcosm of similar processes at work in other parts of the region where the population incorporates not only “Bisaya,” *natibos* or “natives,” and *mestizos* or the offspring of intermarriage between the two, but also different kinds of natives and different kinds of settlers, and a multiplicity of denominations of Christianity, and people appropriating and shifting between categories. As political historians would also note, the Southern Mindanao region is an area that has been redefined and reoriented several times—as center, as periphery, and as “a frontier”—by a succession of different powerful political centers (e.g., the Magindanao *datus*, Spain, America, Manila), and by the processes of state formation and its shifting approaches toward the natives, settlers, and Muslims in the South (see Abinales, 1997). On Samal Island, the frontier experience allows for divergent identities to be actively delineated and improvised, as well as a sort of “popular consensus” on culture to emerge that is more broadly shared between people in the region as a whole. Meanwhile, occasions for recognizing the continuity of previous orders of time and space are still met with and evince a conscious sense of “transition.”

The first narrative that I will cite about Samal Island concerns its most recent and seemingly improbable transformation from a rural into an urban place. Another narrative serves to impress caution to be careful about eating locally served food “that may contain ‘poison,’” on people traveling to this *out-of-the-way place*. I next consider the label “Isamal”—invented by H. Otley Beyer and wielded by present-day “natives”—in relation to the other ethnicities in the Davao Gulf. Delineation of who are the “indigenous people” may be contrasted with consistently recurrent ways by which settlers

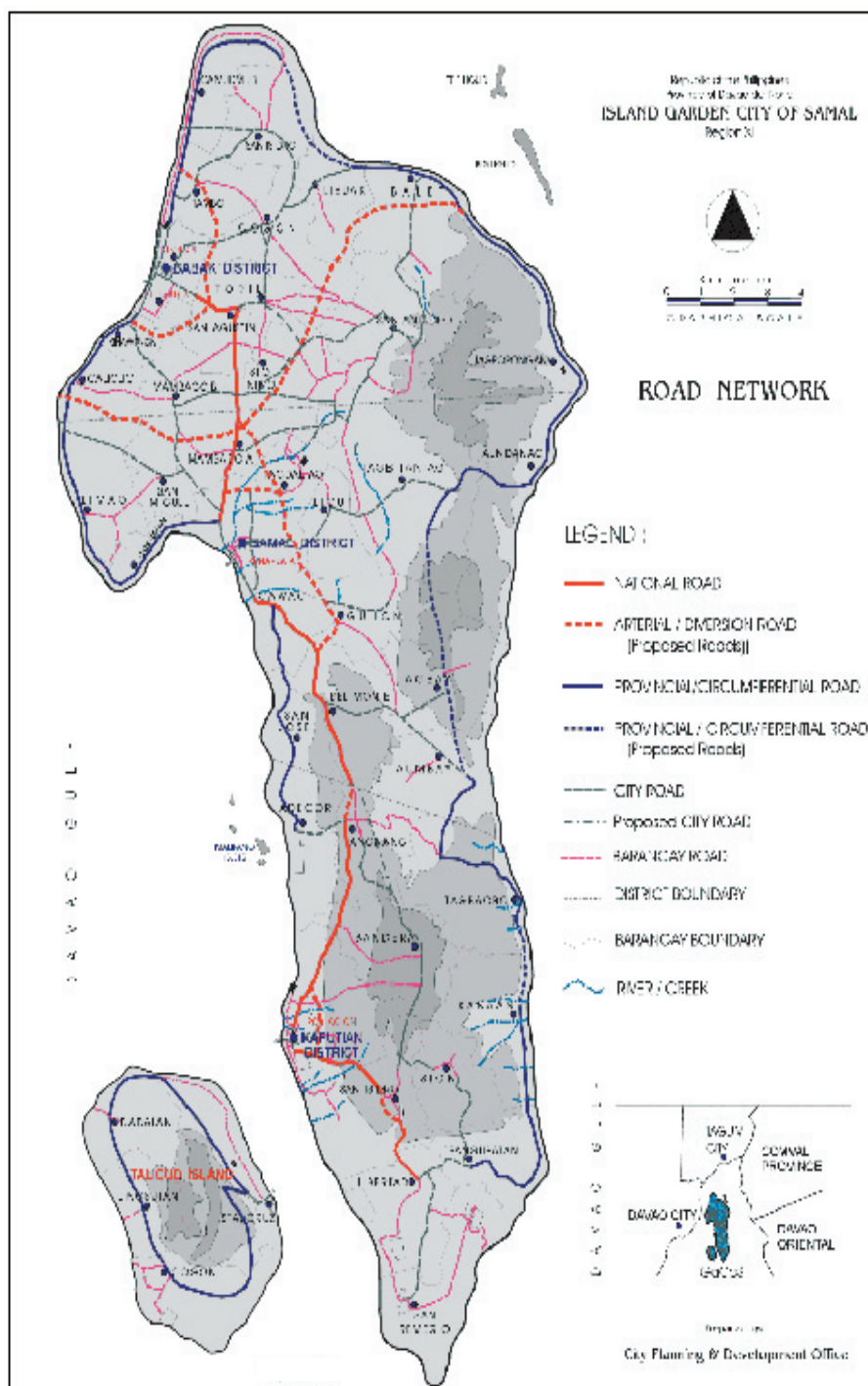
stress their own role in transforming the landscape. The significant diversity in religion on the island is also of note, wherein Samal has been perceived as a “chosen land” by some spiritual groups. And the last narrative that I cite has to do with the recognition of another kind of “first comers” claim, that of “the unseen” or the “not like us” (*dili ingon nato*) in the landscape.

“When and where is Samal island?”:

On market value and awareness of place

The initial query one usually has about a place is its location. In this case, this is an interesting detail from which to start. On a map of the Philippines, Samal Island is quite prominent. From Davao City it is clearly visible from the shore or pier (but administratively belongs to Davao del Norte). Samal formerly comprised three municipalities: the municipality of Babak in the north of the island, the municipality of Samal in the middle, and the municipality of Kaputian, including Talikud Island in the south. The total population was 76,995 in 1995 (NSO, 1995). The island has always been called Samal from at least Spanish times. (See map below.)

When I began fieldwork in mid-1996, it puzzled me that Samal Island *as an island* was little known. A real estate broker mentioned to me that Samal Island would be “about the size of Singapore.” Such a sizeable island, however, did not seem to be part of local geography among most of the residents of Davao City at that time, and when I said I was doing fieldwork there, I was often asked “where is Samal Island?” The term “Samal” more frequently aroused associations with the Sama-Bajau, i.e., the “sea nomads,” a completely different group whose home range is mainly in the Sulu archipelago and who are neither Christian nor Muslim. They wander up to the Davao Gulf in their houseboats and settle in rickety huts on stilts in the urban slum on the sandbar Isla Verde off Magsaysay Park in Davao City. They are often looked down upon as the lowest kind of beggars in the streets of Davao City. But these are of different



ethnicity entirely and speak a dissimilar language to the natives of the Davao Gulf.

Many people had heard about or been to Peñaplata (the capital of Samal municipality), or to Babak, but were not aware that these were part of the island of Samal. On the other hand, Pearl Farm, the name of an expensive and internationally publicized resort in the municipality of Samal, was familiar to everyone at once. In the end, I found it easier to use it to contextualize my field site to others inquiring about its location—I would say, “do you know Pearl Farm? Well, that’s part of Samal.” Thus it was clear that the smaller points rather than the larger land had more currency as places in people’s minds. From outside (i.e., from Davao City) “Samal Island” did not seem to have a popular actuality as a place separate from the mainland but was like a continuous part of it, even though one had to cross the sea to get there.

However, this reality soon changed.

In January 1998—just in time to open new posts for incumbent politicians who could not run for reelection in their current posts (elections were to be held in May that year)—the two islands of Samal and Talikud were made into a city. From out of its relative obscurity, “The Island Garden City of Samal” (or IGACOS)³ was declared by Congress to be a new “component city” of Davao Province. Apparently it was the first time that three separate municipalities were brought together and unified as a city. That the three “5th class”⁴ agricultural municipalities spanning the two islands of Samal and Talikud could be reconceptualized as an urban place stemmed from the radical appreciation in value of real estate in Samal.

The minimum price for beachfront property in 1996 was one million pesos per hectare, ranging up to five million pesos per hectare. This in turn was because of speculation following a massive plan for tourism development in Kaputian on the southern end of Samal Island. This estate development was brokered by the Philippine Department of Tourism and embarked on by the Malaysian multinational, Ekran Berhad; it was a “100 million peso national flagship project” involving several golf courses, a hotel,

disparate resorts, a casino, and a marina sprawled over 215 hectares of land. It was inaugurated on October 20, 1997 by Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos and partially opened in December 1997 (see e.g., *Mindanao Daily Mirror* 1997).⁵

Such developments in turn might be linked with the ascent of capitalist networks in Southeast Asia, with Mindanao positioning itself at the heart of one new kind of “development zone” for investment and trading. In 1996 there was a visible construction boom in Davao City; aggressive and internationally oriented business was taking over the streets, high-rise hotels and city buildings were sprouting up. Mindanao could be found billed on the Internet as “An Island Economy with a Global Outlook” (<http://www.mindanao.org>), where one gains the impression it is at the epicenter of a region of energetic capitalism. Davao City was to be “the gateway to the ‘East ASEAN Growth Area’ ” (EAGA, which comprises Brunei; Indonesia’s Irian Jaya, Maluku, Sulawesi and Kalimantan; Malaysia’s Sarawak, Sabah and Lauan; and the Philippines’ Mindanao and Palawan). As the website also notes, this is a complete change of image for war-torn Mindanao, which is usually newsworthy for images of diversity, conflict and violence.

The effects of these developments were quickly being felt throughout Samal Island. Electricity lines were being laid and roads were being built. Traveling to the east side of Samal Island by hired motorcycle in July 1996, I was following the freshly-made tracks of bulldozers that had cut the road finally linking barangay Balet through to Tagpopongan (“the last barangay of Babak”), and on to barangay Aundanao, which was a part of the municipality of Samal. The jeeps soon found their way through this unpaved road, so that the “remote barangays” of Babak on the east side that had previously been reached either by hiking from Balet or by boat, now had a regular link with Babak (and the quickest ferry connection to Davao City).

Everywhere I went it was assumed I was interested in buying land. Samal itself was *the* booming commodity of the time. Copra was declining; in many places coconut trees were being hewn down by chainsaw for coco-lumber. Land had already been sold to the

big shopping mall-owners of Davao City and there was speculation that one day “they will also set up malls” on the island. The buyers also included senators and prominent politicians in Manila, movie stars, and foreigners.

Red and yellow pennants would readily be encountered on beachfront land that marked a surveyor’s latest property demarcation. Photocopies of old titles and documents from the 1950s signed with thumbmarks were being pored over and kept in folders together with a new accumulation of legal papers notarized in many copies. Some families living in houses roofed with *nipa* palm leaves and who had never enjoyed the luxury of running water and electricity were making plans for what to do with a million pesos.

Risks in the locale: The widely perceived danger of “poisoning”

In November 1996, I joined a tour of the Ekran Berhad construction site given by the Department of Tourism staff. On the boat on the way there one of the Filipino engineers (working on the Samal Island Tourism Estate Project), on learning that I was doing fieldwork in Samal, advised that I should “be very careful about accepting food because it’s known that the people here are into poisoning” (*biluan*). Actually, in moving around Samal I had been given this caution many times before. Poisoning is a recurrent theme of local narrative. The *biluan* (poisoners) supposedly do it involuntarily. According to this lore, such people have a regular “quota”; they cannot help it, and they must do it to their own family if they cannot do it to others. People who are potentially *biluan* are not necessarily indigenous natives of Samal, as one of my hosts exclaimed. Many local Bisaya have picked it up too, according to her, and they can be worse, they poison each other, relatives, neighbors and visitors alike. The frequent warnings emphasized that even apparently friendly gestures like pats on the shoulder are to be viewed with suspicion.⁶ One “should not trust” (*ayaw magkompiansa*). This somewhat negative standing of Samal as a place is not quite as

notorious as other islands in the Philippines, such as the island of Siquijor, which figure widely in popular imagination as “sorcerer’s dens.”

I asked the engineer, “won’t this reputation make the tourists afraid to come here ?” This question did not seem to be relevant; “it’s safe for them,” he said, “because they’ll stay in the hotel.” In fact, from the Davao International Airport, which is in Sasa, the guests would be transported straight to the site, bypassing other parts of the island, as well as Davao City completely. The resort represented a space nearly in its own separate world, confirming a travel writer’s insight that an island resort “turns into an extension of a mainland, even if that is half the world away” (Hamilton-Paterson, 1992: 72).

Conversations in transit: On the giant natives of Samal

I had many conversations and encountered many of the narratives being related in this paper (such as the above exchange) while in transit. Transport facilities were in the process of rapid improvement, and hence there may have been enhanced opportunities for sharing news and stories among residents.

The quickest way to cross the sea to Samal Island from the mainland is from *Onse* or “Kilometer Eleven” in Sâsâ. The way to the wharf of Sâsâ is lined with shops and stalls and transforms into a busy marketplace of fish and vegetables, especially in the late afternoon. The busy motor highway next to it leads to Davao City in one direction (11 kilometers) and to Davao del Norte in the other (44 kilometers to Tagum, the capital of Davao del Norte). Another place to cross to Samal from the mainland is from Sta. Ana wharf in Davao City, where regular ferryboats leave at hourly intervals for Peñaplata (the capital of Samal), and where there are also (less frequent) ferryboats to Kaputian.

From Sâsâ, crossing to the town of Babak on Samal Island takes less than 10 minutes. The loaded ferryboats piled with people and produce leave the pier every 15 minutes. Once in Babak there are passenger jeepneys with specific routes to other parts of the island,

or alternatively there are motorcycles lined up for hire that can carry up to four passengers. The *poblacion* or center of Babak is relatively urbanized, with some paved roads and many stores and schools, including vocational colleges, and quite a few large residential houses and business establishments, including banks. Traveling to the other barangays by jeepney or on a motorcycle takes one to more and more rural contexts, however. Coconut trees dominate much of the landscape, though there are also fields for corn, peanuts, and fruit trees. Huts and houses are interspersed by those which have small extensions of *sari-sari* stores (variety stores), and one comes upon a basketball court at regular intervals, or half-courts, even if made only of compact earth or loose gravel. After about an hour's ride on a jeep one reaches the eastern side of Samal Island facing the provinces of Davao del Norte and Davao Oriental. There are said to be more natives on this side of Samal Island (the side away from Davao City) and one can hear Sinamal spoken there. From this point, crossing the sea to the town of Pantukan can take as little as 30 minutes on a motorized boat.

With regular transport jeepneys plying the new road it is now much easier to commute to Davao City. During fieldwork I went back and forth to Davao frequently and on the jeep fortuitously met many people and learned much about local concerns. Fellow passengers were bringing copra to their “warehouse,” delivering fresh fish to their *suki* buyers, commuting to the high school in Balet, consulting a Bisaya specialist healer in another barangay, and had “things to do” in Babak, in Davao City or other parts of Davao, sometimes with various reasons “to visit or work a while” (*dayo*) at particular places. The jeeps were filled with people when there were fiestas or “Foundation Day” (*Aram*) celebrations in different barangays. Pre-fiesta “nights,” a series of performances for the entertainment of the public, and regular basketball tournaments—building up to the championship game on the fiesta day or the *Aram*—were also a frequent reason for visiting other places. Young people especially were eager to be mobile, going places to look up people they knew or simply “to roam around together with no particular destination” (*laag*); and I did some of this too.

On the jeepney the latest goings on were often commented on, and news, rumors, and stories exchanged, to level off to some kind of consensual understanding of events. From my own point of view it felt like new things were happening all the time, and strange and unusual stories gradually became quite familiar. And in the same way that, for example, people might say that they would miss a person because they had “gotten used to her” (*naanad*), I felt that Samal was a special landscape composed of many strange and different kinds of people who have gotten used to each other. In spite of the plurality of “others” sharing the same landscape, there were no prominent ethnic or religious conflicts in Samal.

On the jeep also, I absorbed many fantastic narratives which always had an edge of truth. Eventually it seemed to me that actually the amazing, and even magical, could be plausible and that talking and joking and exaggerating was also a subtle process of invoking, testing and negotiating between “established facts” and frameworks of meaning that are necessarily plural. For example, the widespread but what initially sounded to me like quite an improbable prophecy—that “one day Samal Island will become a city”—eventually did come to pass.

One repeated story I was often told, for example, was that the original inhabitants of Samal Island were a “giant race” called the Dinagats (or “people of the sea”; *dagat* = sea). This myth of an “extinct indigenous people,” I later learned, was also being formally cited for “ancestral domain claims.”

On a jeep in mid-1997, by chance I met Datu Manuel Pug-on of Caliclic, Babak, who later became the Tribal Chieftain of the “Samal Island Council of Tribal Leaders,” an association accredited with the government Office of Southern Cultural Communities. At that time, given the talk about making Samal Island into a city, he had filed a claim to the entire islands of Samal and Talikud as “ancestral land” of the Samal (see Pug-on, 1997). He narrated:

Before, Samal Island had no name, it was just called “*Pu'*” [i.e., *pulo* = “island”]. But nobody could go to this island as it was populated by a huge people about seven feet tall, who were known

as *Dinagat* [from *dagat* = “sea”]. The giants were bad-mannered bullies. They would go across to the mainland to raid villages, abduct women, eat the food they found in the houses, and to add insult, defecate on the kitchen hearth before they left. The women were taken back to the island to become “sex slaves,” and they bore the giants’ children. Some of the offspring turned out to be of giant stature, but there were others who were not, so a kind of selection and discrimination ensued; large-sized offspring were absorbed into the elite group but the small-sized ones were not paid much attention, and lived with the women in a segregated place, perhaps Talikud Island.

Weary of the giants’ oppression and incensed at their offensive behavior, neighboring groups around Davao Gulf got together and plotted. They made a small raft and prepared food, including a local fried delicacy made of rice flour and honey called *amik*,⁷ which they wrapped in large anahaw palm leaves and gaily decorated with colorful tassels and flowers. But, they had put poison in it. Then they set the raft to sea like an offering and it drifted across to Samal Island. The Dinagats found the raft, feasted on the food, and died little by little from the poison. They were buried in the caves. The only ones on the island who didn’t die were the small people who hadn’t been allowed to partake of the feast. And that’s why most present-day Samal are small of stature even though descended from a race of giants. These people became known as the Samal [as distinct from the Dinagat], because they were the “leftovers,” or the *samal* [“dregs”].

The physical remains of the “giants”—their longer-than-normal bones—stored in cave-cemeteries on Ligid Island [a small island north of Samal], or at Libud, and other places in Samal are the proof for this story, but it was also said that many of the bones have already been taken or stolen. Meanwhile, with the Dinagat giants gone, Samal Island became a “melting pot” for people around the Davao Gulf.

Some European visitors to Samal 100 years ago reiterate aspects of this myth. Early reports on Samal’s burial caves include testimony by Montano (1886: 228-233, cited in Neri, 1979: 158), a French scientist who took away skeletons from a cave. In 1882, one

traveler wrote that he met *un gigantesco indio de raza Mandaya*,” a giant “Indian” of the Mandaya race, in Samal (Rajal, 1891: 145), and that the name of the island is a corruption of the word *sam-ang* which in Bisaya was said to mean “cave-cemetery,” and that the people refer to themselves as “Diynagas.”⁸

Montano described the Samal natives he met as *grands, solides, bien muscled*”; he distinguished them from the Bisayas and the Moros for their lack of typical “Malay” slenderness, for their prominent cheekbones, as well as for their abundant mustaches and beards of straight hair that “gave them the appearance of a cat” (1886: 229). Montano notes that there were also “half-blood *Ata*” with Negroid characteristics on Samal (1887: 346, cited in Garvan, 1929: 5). Solheim et al. (1979) of the National Museum did some preliminary excavating in the northern part of Samal Island and exhibited boat coffins from Samal in Manila.

Schadenberg (1885) wrote (in German) about how he had photographed and collected bones from cave burials in Samal. He described the manners and customs of the Samals in comparison with the Bagobo: they had similar clothing and weapons as Bagobo but no tattooing or earrings or filed teeth; unlike the Bagobo who use abaka, the Samal grew and used cotton for their clothes; they were polygamous and they “bought women with dishes” (“like the Bagobo”); they lived in small groups of four to 10 families led by a chieftain distinguished for his “open mind and bravery”; they didn’t kill snakes; they fished, and trapped turtles whose shell was used in exchange; they practiced slavery; and, unlike other natives in the region, some of the men had imposing beards.

The myth of the giant Dinagats had also surfaced in more recent times; a University of Mindanao professor who explored a cave in Samal speculated in the *Sunday Times Magazine* that the bones he found belonged to people with bigger dimensions than normal (Ranido, 1968). This claim was subsequently rebutted in the same magazine by professors of anthropology and of history at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, as lacking in scientific rigor (Bailen et al., 1968).

Situating the Samal ethnicity in Mindanao ethnography

Differentiating ethnic identities seems to be both important as well as complicated in any ethnography of Mindanao, and especially the Davao region (Quizon, 1998; Yengoyan, 1988). This is so if only because there are so many ethnic groups in both the literature and in local usage; a bewildering number of “tribes” and their “synonyms,” subsets or taxonomies have been enumerated in the Davao region (e.g., Cole, 1913; Garvan, 1929; Yengoyan, 1975; 1988; Quizon, 1998). Present day ethnic group distinctions in the Davao region, as Quizon (1998) notes, are not necessarily coincident with linguistic differences, and historical process has played a great part in the development of complexity⁹ and in the active opposition of ethnicities, as well as in loss of identity to “Bisayanization.” Yengoyan (1975) stresses that tribal lines can be quite fluid due to intermarriage and movement.

The phenomena of migration and circulation of people within the region are extremely important processes to this day, although the character or rhythm, and the reasons for movement have changed completely over time. For example, headhunting is no longer practiced; and nomadic swidden cultivation as a means of subsistence was displaced first by abaka production then by coconut farming for money, etc. When I began a census in Tagpopongan and systematically visited people in their houses, quite a few respondents would go out of their way to inform me that they were “pure Samal.” But then, inquiring into who were their parents and their places of birth would reveal that there had been a parent who was “Mandaya,” or there might be “Bagobo” in the genealogy; often as not, a parent was “Bisaya,” “Mansaka” or “Moro,” or that they were not even born in Samal but in Pantukan across the sea.

The impression of the oldest people that I spoke with about the generation of their parents is that “in those days people kept wandering around” (“*Sa una, ang tao sige lang lakaw/tigsuruy*”). They also did this “to show off to women.” Men, especially, when they were single, or if widowed, were restless. In several stories, the first wife died in childbirth. A widower would leave his children behind with other relatives in order to wander, in the course of which he

might meet a new wife.¹⁰ Thus many had half-siblings living in other parts of Samal or across the sea on the mainland.

“After you get married, you still go around, but accompanied by your wife.” “You go and live with people you know and work there, clear land, plant rice.” Afterwards, if they “feel like it” (*ug ganahan na pud*), they go somewhere else. But as the old people observed, they themselves did not have the same inclination to wander so widely as their fathers had done. Some were also of the opinion that in those days people had to keep moving because of *fear*: if you stayed always in one place then others “might come and kill you.” Fear is also a frontier theme among the settlers, discussed in the succeeding section below.)

In the census of 1916, for want of a better label H. Otley Beyer had labeled natives of Samal Island “Isamal,” stating that this was in order to distinguish them from the “Samal” of Sulu. That census counted a population of 973 “pagan Isamal,” and others who were no longer pagan (i.e., who were Christian or Muslim) were included with the other groups (Beyer, 1917: 48). A few years earlier, Fay Cooper Cole (1913), working for the Field Museum of Chicago, had done a survey of “the wild tribes of Davao district” in which he made no attempt to report on the inhabitants of Samal Island because in his opinion they were already “Christianized or Mohammedanized.” This partly accounts for the lack of presence in ethnographic literature of a “Samal” or “Isamal” group:¹¹ the people were not considered “wild” or pristine enough to be of interest when the ethnological agenda was set, they were seen to have assimilated too fast into the mainstream culture.

The group “Isamal,” however, is still officially recognized by the Philippines national government and appears in the National Museum’s “Peoples of the Philippines” map. At the time of my research it was quite possible to get a certificate to authenticate the status of “Isamal,” which was useful for scholarships and other kinds of benefits reserved for members of “cultural communities” from the OSCC (Office for Southern Cultural Communities).¹²

That the ethnic label “Samal” or “Isamal” became an established category may be credited mostly perhaps to the colonial bureaucracy

having been so concerned to establish the non-Christian people in space, and to pin down names. “Before, everybody in Samal had the same surname, everybody was ‘Samal,’ ” runs another local narrative. This appears to have been colonial administrative policy; until 1929 or 1930, other natives living around Mindanao carried identifying ethnic labels for surnames—like “Bagobo” (Manuel, 1973: 14), “Mandaya,” “Mansaka” or “Moro”—in their residence or tax certificates. In the cemetery at Tagpopongan one can find the marked grave of Ombata Mandaya, whose husband had come from the mainland and was “Mandaya.” The Christianized natives were later told to give themselves new surnames, again for bureaucratic convenience, “so that everybody wouldn’t have the same surname.” Thus some children were given the surnames of their godparents when they were baptized. Others adopted prominent names from Davao City, such as “Palma Gil” (a wealthy family in Davao) and “Uyanguren” (the name of the Spanish [Basque] *conquistador*, Jose Uyanguren, who had won the administrative concession to pacify, Christianize and hold exclusive rights to commerce in the area and who founded the Spanish settlement in what is now the city of Davao in 1847); both names can be found as main street names in Davao City. “That’s why many natives have names that are ‘classy.’ ” Others were given their father’s first name. For example, “Dionisio” became registered as a surname, and the respective children of brothers Dawang Samal and Banggat Samal became the Dawangs and the Banggats of Tagpopongan.

On Samal Island, in everyday talk, the other, more commonly used term for the “Samal” is *kanlaw*, which has derogatory connotations and when used still elicits mockery and discomfort. From Spanish time to the early American period, the censuses had been concerned to enumerate the inhabitants of the Philippines as split into a dichotomy of the “civilized” and the “wild.”¹³ This old discourse continues to affect the undertone of the label *kanlaw* today, although at the time of my fieldwork Datu Pug-on proposed to use this name and thus turn it into a dignified label. The word *kanlaw* or *kallaw* is said to have been a term of address to a friend or peer that was regularly heard when one native greeted another native.

Moreover the term *kanlaw* can also be read as a formal working label: the National Statistics Office includes the category “Isamal Kanlaw” in its survey of mother tongues: it is spoken by 0.12% of Region 11 population (NSO, 1995: 95).

Spoken “Sinamal” or “Kinanlaw” (as locals would also refer to it) is closely related to many of the languages around the Davao Gulf. The speakers of these mutually intelligible languages are more popularly known and represented in ethnographic literature today as “Mandaya,” “Mansaka,” “Tagakaolo,” “Kalagan” or “Davao Muslim” (but there are also non-muslim Kalagan). The groups of “Bagobo” and “B’laan” (who are found in the southwest part of the Davao region, and more in the interior than the coast) speak distinctly different languages by contrast. The language referred to as “Davaweño” or “Dinabaw” spoken among some sectors in Davao City and by the “Davao Muslims” is also intelligible with Sinamal.¹⁴ Speakers of this broad “Davao” language group include both Christians and Muslims and they are distributed all along the coast of the Davao Gulf and up along the East side of Mindanao, even to the northern part of Mindanao in Surigao, as well as inland up the main rivers that empty into the Davao Gulf. At the same time within Samal Island itself there are recognized variations in spoken Sinamal; for example, dialectal differences between the Sinamal spoken in Tagpopongan and in the neighboring barangay of Aundanao, where “d” sounds become “r.” And in Limao, Babak, a small community of Muslims also speaking “Sinamal” consider themselves to be natives or “indigenous” to Samal, but class themselves as “Kalagan.” The dominant language spoken on Samal today, however, and indeed the lingua franca for most of Mindanao, is “Bisaya,” i.e., Cebuano.

Bisayanization and the Samal identity

One could in fact speak of everybody having become “Bisaya” by now. This was observed many times in Tagpopongan and Aundanao by contrasting native ways of doing things, with informants saying that “today is Bisaya already” (“*Bisaya na karon*”). The term “Bisaya” therefore does not represent a particular

group that develops and maintains control of resources for itself. Moreover, the Bisaya themselves usually thought of themselves as “Filipino” rather than “Bisaya”.¹⁵

In Tagpopongan there is much intermarriage and no class relationship between “pure Samal” and “pure Bisaya”; equally they may own land or not, and now as result of intermarriage the population is fairly mixed. Two *puroks* (subsections of a Barangay) are dominated by Samal speakers, one is dominated by Bisaya, but many of the “Bisaya” are second-generation, born in Samal. And most are mestizo mixes or offspring of parents who come from different places—the Visayas (Cebu, Bohol, Iloilo, Antique, Samar), Samal Island (Aumbay, Tigpan, San Antonio, Libuak), and other parts of Mindanao (e.g., Davao Oriental, Surigao, Zamboanga). Moreover, many of the older generation had moved from place to place in Mindanao before ending up in the barangay. By contrast, Sinamal speakers dominate in the barangay of Aundanao, although the population includes many Bisaya, while the neighboring barangay of Balet is populated by Bisaya and Samal and has a community of Muslim Tausug.

In Davao, and perhaps in Mindanao in general, a local model for the general trend of social change is in terms of kinds of identity that become more appropriate to wear or shed. “Bisayanization” is a term that has occasionally been used to refer to this process wherein the natives take up the identity of the “Bisaya” (Yengoyan, 1966). Becoming Bisaya was synonymous with integration into the nation. Ethnographers saw the process of assimilation as inevitable given that political and commercial power was in Bisaya hands, and national laws uphold homesteaders, large-scale plantation enterprises, logging claims and mining concessions in many parts of Mindanao (e.g., Yengoyan, 1975; 1988; Manuel, 1979). During the Spanish period, the colonial administration tried to “Visayanize” Mindanao using the previously successful conversion experience in the Visayas as a model (Payne, 1985: 40), which also involved new political arrangements, in trying to get the people to settle in the lowlands. To Christianize in Mindanao meant to obliterate a separate ethnic identity (Garvan, 1929: 250).¹⁶

But Yengoyan also uses the term “Bisayanization” to refer to a process of Mandaya natives shifting their identities to “Bisaya” by *actively seeking* baptism. This he suggests was not motivated by interest in spiritual transformation but should be thought of in terms of locally established models of hierarchies of identity (Yengoyan, 1988), which is an issue that could perhaps be problematized more. Yengoyan’s insight implies that one local way of keeping up with change as well as responding to change is in terms of managing identity—learning to shed one that is becoming obsolete and to adopt new ones, or knowing the appropriate times and contexts to perform, assert, invoke, disclaim, recognize, and adapt or even reinvent particular identities (e.g., Mangahas, 1998). The self that is actively created results from the appreciation of relative “power” between parties that interact.¹⁷

In such a mixed population as Tagpopongan, another aspect to the process of “Bisayanization” is being *both* Bisaya and Samal, and sometimes shifting back and forth from being Bisaya to being Samal.¹⁸ The contemporary era provides occasions that also give glamour to being “native.” Thus, the “already Bisaya” and the second-generation Bisaya residents who were born in Samal consider themselves to be “also Samal” and the “mestizo Bisaya”/“mestizo Samal” a mix of both. Even “pure Bisaya” also participate in “tribal dance” presentations and join associations and activities for indigenous people or “IPs.”¹⁹

However, there were some occasions when it seemed essential to abide by or observe Samal identity. In death, for example, family of the deceased confronted the obligation to observe some details in a Samal fashion. Especially when the person who had died was quite old and therefore had lived for more of his life as a native, they had to consider whether they could simply do it “normal” Bisaya way (which also involves less outlay of resources) or not. A need for careful or proper transition out of the hold of a Samal order surfaced. Thus it depends greatly on the age and status of the deceased how the funeral and the death anniversary is carried out. Older generations in Aundanao and Tagpopongan still straddle both worlds. They would not have to do it anymore, they said, as

soon as all the “old people” have died; then they could do all things Bisaya ay only.

In the places that I did fieldwork, they noted that all the *balyan* or Samal religious practitioners (spirit mediums/healers) had died already. At the death of an 80-year-old Samal in Aundanao, whose family lineage was known to be *balyan*, an old man was fetched to do some necessary Samal things in order to safely pass on the potent “heirlooms” (*pusaka*) that the deceased had left behind to one of the children. He narrated:

I am mestizo Bisaya. I was born here in Samal, but I don't know what was the year of my birth. My mother was a tribal here. My father came from Iloilo in 1905, here to Davao... The old ways here, I reached them, like the system that I did a while ago [preparation of an offering of rice and betel chewing ingredients]... The ways of the old, if we don't do it well, it's difficult. Same thing with being Bisaya. For our being Bisaya, if we don't do it well, it's hard.

The Samal death anniversary (*taw*) involves much work to produce the rice-based sweet *amik* for giving away. Although *amik* is also widespread as a delicacy among other groups in Mindanao (Bajau and Tausug make it as a snack, the Mansaka were said to prepare it during weddings), the Samal make *amik* only on the occasion of death anniversaries. All those who had come to pay respect and give help to the deceased's family (based on a list kept) would be invited to a feast exactly a year after the death and each person would be formally presented with *amik* wrapped in decorated *anahaw* palm leaf bundles.

This reciprocity in remembrance of death is one of the few genuine expressions of a still extant Samal identity today among families on the eastern side of Samal Island. The preparation of the huge quantities of *amik* required for the death anniversary involves much labor and family resources that have to be pooled, planned, and mobilized throughout the whole year in advance. Over several months, sacks of rice are pounded and sifted into fine flour, then follow several weeks of nonstop cooking. The work of fashioning and decorating several hundred *anahaw* bundles with colored paper

a feast is held wherein the Samal “elders” (*matikadong*) are accorded special places to sit and the bundles of *amik* are given away. Turning the myth narrated by Datu Pug-on upside-down, this seems to re-enact the fatal offerings that had once been made to the “indigenous giants” who were the ancestors of the “Samal,” but this time in honor of the dead, and to be consumed safely among relatives, friends and allies.

The emotional transformation of the frontier

Barangay Tagpopongan is a relatively large barangay of more than 200 households spread out over a long coastline and divided into seven smaller sections called Puroks. Another core institution in the barangay is the (public) elementary school. The barangay organization and the school go together as essential components of a barangay, the foundation of both of which were achieved out of the struggle by both Bisaya and native to settle the place. This, the creation of human habitation out of wilderness is still a part of recent memory. As they frequently recalled, “there were no people here before,” and then people came and settled and the population grew.

Barangay officials speaking during “*Araw ng Balet*,” the foundation day of Barangay Balet, stressed that, as pioneer settlers who have struggled and transformed the landscape, they “are ‘native’ (*lumad*) too”:

....We are happy in our hearts today. Why? Because we are all here to celebrate the “birthday” of our barangay that we have together worked for, loved, helped to manage, each of us with all our heart, no matter how lonely was this place...

In the beginning, the road was only a path two-hand-breadths wide... We were scared to come all the way here because first we would have to pass the cemetery, and then there were the monkeys, and there were so many wild pigs here before. And now, my brothers and sisters, we have a good road to Balet, no one can doubt that we have improved Balet through our work and the responsibility shown by our barangay captain and other elected officials here...

The first “natives” helping here were the M family, the Y family, the K family, the Z family. They were the founders of the school. Some of us, me and N, we had no children of school age when the school was built, but we joined the Parent-Teachers Association anyway ... We just wanted to help to make the school, and it got bigger with God’s pity, he heard perhaps my praying...

Even if I only reached Grade 2 I have a right to be here because I helped so that our school would be built. And we fought so that it would not be made in a different place, we took responsibility and acted so that it would be built here. How was I able to do my part ? Because I desired that our barrio would be happy.

The idioms of transformation in the frontier experience represent an emotional investment in the landscape. They constantly reiterated how lonely wilderness was replaced by people and infused with “life,” with people. A place that was “lonely” (*mingan*) was made “lively” (*vivo*). “Before, there were no people.” “It was all forest.” “It was terribly lonely.” “There was only the cry of the kalaw bird to break the stillness.”

In Samal I appreciated greatly the Visayan love of “life.” Travel to neighboring places was undertaken because “it will be *vivo* there.” Aside from going to Catholic fiestas, some people even went to join Muslim Ramadan in barangay Libuak (“Muslim fiesta”). The commemoration of the *Araw* or “Day” when the barangay was founded is the other usual lively occasion. Davao City which celebrates its own foundation day as a chartered city in 1939 or *Araw ng Davao* with a big street parade and various entertainments is perhaps the “liveliest” of such occasions to go to. Municipalities and barangays also commemorated the Days when they were founded.

The foundation day celebrations typically involve a local parade, ideally with “majorettes” dressed in tall boots and short skirts, and followed by a bugle band. On the barangay’s Day, usually the whole barangay represents itself in a parade around the streets of the barangay, as completely as possible: this includes “natives” in indigenous costume, the various barangay organizations like the

Civilian Volunteer Organization (for peace and order), the Bantay Dagat (sea wardens), the Barangay Health Workers wearing their violet vests, the purok leaders and members, the teachers in their uniforms, the boy scouts and girl scouts, the different sectors (fishers, farmers, store owners) sometimes carrying the emblems of their livelihood (e.g., fishing paraphernalia for fishers), different church groups, and all the voluntary organizations from youth clubs to the Senior Citizens Association. After that they assemble at the basketball court, and a programme is held. Everybody has a part: each purok, each formal organization, local leaders and officials are called upon to give a speech or a performance, which can be a dance number either “modern,” “tribal” or “muslim,” a song or poem. The masters of ceremonies are usually the elementary school principal and teachers. Then in the afternoon there would be basketball games and additional entertainment.

The travails of migration

Migration rates to the Davao region in the middle part of the 20th century are reflected in the rise in population of Samal Island (NSO 1990:1):

1918:	1,956
1939:	7,473
1948:	20,334
1960:	36,161
1970:	50,839
1980:	62,423

These numbers include the populations of Babak and Kaputian. Babak was created into a separate municipality from Samal in 1953, Kaputian in 1966).²⁰ For many of the migrants, their present-day security is the culmination of the travails, movements, and twists of fate that eventually landed them in Samal. Two “typical” migrants’ lives in Tagpopongan illustrate this:

Guillermo said that his older siblings were all born in Hawaii (USA). His parents, originally from Bacolod in the Visayas, had migrated there to work on the sugarcane plantations. But

Guillermo was born in Manila during what was intended to be a brief interlude visit of “5 years only” to the Philippines by his parents in order to fetch his oldest brother, a child by his father’s first wife. During this period, Guillermo was born in Tondo, Manila, in 1928. Then suddenly the plan for the whole family to go back to Hawaii was aborted; the oldest son burnt everybody’s papers when it was found out he could not come to America too. So the family stayed in Manila. In 1942, Guillermo was in 3rd year high school but he never got to finish it, he was drafted for the war and became a soldier. He was in the Death March from Manila to Bataan, which he deserted, and after two months of being on the run, traveling by banca he reached Davao.

Guillermo met and married his wife in 1953. She was 16 at the time. Her story is another one of continuous movement and migration. She was born in Antique on Panay Island in the Visayas. The family moved to Cotabato in Southern Mindanao in 1947, following an uncle on her father’s side who had gone to Mindanao ahead of them and who had found a living by planting sugarcane and rice. But after one year they got scared of the Muslims who were holding them up and taking the rice they had planted. They moved to Tuganay, Davao, where another uncle, this time on her mother’s side, was living. They were working by planting rice, then they moved on to Nabunturan, Campostela in Davao del Norte, where her father worked his own land and was a shareholder at the same time. But they had to leave because of terrible floods. The family went back to Davao City where her father worked as a stevedore carrying copra at the Sta. Ana pier. That was when she met Guillermo. After marrying they went back to Tuganay with her parents and acquired forestland which they cleared to plant rice and coconut trees. They stayed there 14 years. But again there were great floods. Their house, which was on high stilts, was reached by the water, their animals died, and they could not find drinking water. It was too difficult, so they decided to sell the land, and went back to Davao where they stayed five years with in-laws in Tibungco watching over someone else’s land. Then the land was sold so they had to move once more. Guillermo decided to go to Samal where he had a good friend he had made while in the army, a native Samal. The

family claimed forest land, felled trees, and planted coconuts and mango trees. At first they lived up in the hills, for 24 years, then they moved their house down to the shoreline; then, because of a misunderstanding with some of their neighbors, they moved to another purok of the same barangay.

Simkins and Wernstedt (1971) remark in their study of the settlement of the Digos-Padada valley in southern Davao that pull factors were stronger than push ones. Migrants, however, were not particularly keen to push into frontier land, they wanted to settle close to people, and there was a relatively slow rise in homestead patents. There is another aspect of inhabiting lonely landscapes that may explain this: the potential for violence in a frontier. Aside from companionship, there is safety in numbers. Historians of Mindanao have also described Mindanao as part of a “zone,” such as Warren’s (1995) “Sulu Zone,” a zone of piracy, raiding, and trading that reached up to the Visayas and to the seas further south of Mindanao, especially during the early colonial period. Captives of the Maguindanao pirates were often subsistence fishers or traders on exposed coasts; before the turn of the century, in Mindanao the term “Bisaya” was synonymous with “slave.”

The recollections of settlers on the east side of Samal Island stress the many dangers that were to be feared. “Houses were temporary.” “There were criminals who might come and kill you without saying anything.” “The children would not be allowed to go down from the house late in the afternoon because we were afraid of the Bajau, or Tausug, they were not ‘pure Bajau’, they might kidnap them.” “In 1930 there was a school in Balet, but it was burned by a moro juramentado, a dayo, when a local girl refused him.” “Before, if you were fierce, and had a big body, the people would be afraid.”

The east coast of Samal Island has been subject to *tulisan* or “bandit” attacks, some of them even in recent years. On hindsight, I accumulated quite a list of violent incidents that occurred in Tagpopongan or in Aundanao in the recent past: these include incidents of *tulisan* in 1993 and 1995, some of which resulted in loss of life. The vulnerability of fishers was also apparent; fishers

going to sea at night said they had experienced being held up for their lights (with intent to use them in the gold mines), or for their catch. During my stay we heard a boat land in the night; my young companion peeked out of the window, commenting fiercely that she was ready to run out the back door and up into the hills. We heard the sound of wood being loaded on the boat, it must be another kind of wood, not coco-lumber, they concluded, otherwise it wouldn't be loaded at night. "As soon as we hear a pumpboat at night, we go down and are ready to flee" sounds like a comment that might have been taken from out of the slaving and raiding period.

Didi treated me to a softdrink in her sari-sari store and suddenly narrated her story to me:

Didi's Chinese father and Samal mother had initially settled "across the sea" (Pantukan, Davao del Norte), but then moved back to Samal. They set up a store in Aumbabak (part of Tagpopongan), then they moved to Tigpan (another place on the east side of Samal Island) where she was born; at that time it was still mainly a forested place. One day her mother went up to the water source to wash clothes, leaving Didi, who was still a baby at that time, at home with her father. Suddenly *tulisan*es came with guns! They shot her father. A neighbor picked up Didi and ran with her to her mother, that person was even hit by a bullet as he was fleeing. He told her mother not to go back down because the *tulisan* wanted to get her in order to find where their money was hidden.

Didi commented that the store she owns today has been held up (*tinulis*) twice already. The first time, in 1983, their store was burned. After this incident Didi's husband had let it be known that he would buy an armalite to kill the *tulisan* should they ever come again. In 1986 another *tulisan* came when Didi was the only one in the store, he was armed with a .45, but apparently what he wanted was the armalite that her husband had bragged about. This weapon was nonexistent, Didi told him, those were just words that had been said. She calmed him down and gave him P500, saying it was the only money she had at the moment and that it was meant for the school tuition of her children.

Religious landscapes of Samal

The reasons for the movement of people around the region and settling down in Samal were social, economic, and also political, as was the case, for example, for some of the Muslims in Samal; indeed, many of the Tausug in Balet moved there following the unrest in Jolo in the early 1970s. Still another factor for in-migration to Samal is religion. Christianity is fairly recent in this part of Samal; in fact, the oldest residents were not baptized. However, they made sure to baptize their children. Meanwhile, religious evangelical activity continues to be high (for example “crusades” were being carried out by 7th Day Adventists during the time of fieldwork).

Samal, moreover, is mystically special as an island—no less than four local religions and many of their followers are based there because Samal had been pointed out to them as “the chosen land”: the Moncadista, with its colony in Samal and headquarters in Babak (see Flores-Tolentino, 1982); in Kaputian, the Iglesia Patriotica, which is managed and led by all-women disciples; the “Remnants of God,” which is partly an offshoot of the Iglesia Patriotica; and most recently, in Peñaplata, Samal, a new settlement called “Auring Village,” comprised of followers of “Papa Auring,” was established in 1996, and is a breakaway faction of the Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association based on Dinagat Island in Surigao. (All of these churches have branches in other parts of the Philippines, and at least one, the Moncado, also has branches abroad.) For the members of the Iglesia Patriotica church, which I visited, Samal Island becoming a city was not a surprising new development but simply the fulfillment of a prophecy that had been made by their founder.

Still other parts of Samal are special for less established religious groups. A “native Samal” narrated this experience:

There is a tunnel passing beneath the sea from Sta. Cruz in Talikud Island to Sta. Cruz in Davao del Sur. I went through it one time, together with other members of the “ILAGA,” the “Ilonggo Landgrabbers’ Association.” It took 40 days. We had nothing to eat but we were told by our teacher to “eat what you see”; so

we ate soil and found that we could eat it. When we reached the other side we had become small, so small that we seemed to be small children and could ride the bus for free, nobody noticed, until we reached Davao City again, then somebody I know saw me sitting on the roof of the bus and recognized me, when he called my name I became man-sized again.

Denominations of Christian religious identities, however, could be shifting and were often situated in plural situations. One noticeable detail about Tagpopongan is how there are so many churches in it. There was a Catholic chapel in two puroks and another Catholic chapel was being built in 1997. Each chapel had its own patron saint and fiesta day and services conducted by lay workers or a visiting priest. There were also two Baptist churches, located practically side by side, and one Four Square church. The proportion of Catholics and Protestants in the barangay was roughly equal (34% and 36%), the Baptists slightly outnumbering the Catholics. Bisaya were nearly always Catholic, while the Samal were usually either Baptist or Catholic. There were also individuals who had shifted religion several times, as well as families whose members followed different religions. For example, in one household the Catholic parents had three children that were Catholic, one son who was a Baptist pastor, and two children who had been baptised Four Square. Aside from Catholic, Baptist and Four Square, there were also one or two Jehovah's Witnesses, Moncadista, 7th Day Adventists, Mormon, and a few who identified themselves as "backsliders" in the barangay. Thus even a single barangay like Tagpopongan is a composite community of several religious communities. And some people have changed their religion several times. There are moreover sizeable Tausug and Kalagan Muslim communities in other parts of Samal Island.

Sacrifice for development: "*The big hotel*"

The final narrative I would like to present concerns the existence of other supernatural forces in the perceived landscape.

Regardless of religion, this reality was palpable as the partial opening of the Department of Tourism/Ekran Berhad casino resort approached and the inauguration was scheduled. A rash of rumors spread: concerns and fears seemed to reveal the unspoken idea that the landscape is also shared with agents or forces that are invisible or “not like us” (*dili ingon nato*). From the point of view of locals, it would seem that there are old forces in the landscape who have a claim to it, belonging to an order that precedes modernity but that still interacts with it, and whose influence can still be felt or be seen to be reproduced, even by a foreign multinational. Any significant transformation of the landscape requires sacrifice of life. This was actually a popular Davao-wide perception.

In November 1997, stories spread of children disappearing, and even of some adults. They had been kidnapped, it was said, “to be paid as tax” (*ibuhis*), given the impending inauguration of “the big hotel” (*hotel nga daku*). Someone at the construction site had come upon a child in a sack, it was whispered. The cautions were even broadcast on AM radio. The elementary school teachers dismissed classes early and walked home with the children.

On the jeepney, people kept asking if I had also heard, and was it true that a boy or girl had been abducted? “Yes,” some said, they had heard, “in Cogon” (three barangays away), “yes, in San Antonio” (two barangays away), “yes, in Toril,” (Penaplata, the next municipality). My gregarious host started a discussion with the neighbors: “would you sell them your child if they offer you 100,000 pesos?” she provoked. “Oh no!” people exclaimed, “never!”

“Watch out for Indians” we were cautioned, half-seriously, as I with two teenage girls for companions went walking over the hill to the neighboring barangay. “If they catch you, you would be placed in a sack, and ‘the hotel’ will pay 200,000 pesos for each.”

The process of story generation is clearly a dynamic and an ongoing process of challenging and constructing reality where exaggeration is part of the fun and creative participation is open to all. In the space of a few minutes I could see the going price for the “sacrificial victim” skyrocketing and doubling before my eyes.

The apparent reaction to the new infrastructural development on the landscape of Samal is perhaps most significantly a question of scale, as seen in the prevailing term of allusion to the Ekran Berhad site, which was generally referred to as “the big hotel” (*hotel nga daku*). The general apprehension is: “who is going to be sacrificed for a ‘big’ profit-making hotel?” It may be appropriate to view the resurfacing of traditional spirits as “spirits of resistance” (Ong 1987); i.e., to see in the resurgence of the unseen beings an apparent form of popular “resistance” to experiences of powerlessness and capitalist exploitation, though this be an unfocused and very localized reaction (especially in relation to a project whose scope is global and not merely national). One could also read in the fantastic rumors being spread the power of parody available to the poor—those “who have nothing” (Cannell 1999). Poor people along the margins do have the power of speech and discourse to produce a fearsome and very real image of the economics and the politics of scale.

I would assert that this narrative also expresses a widespread cultural principle that people can never quite exclusively “own” the landscape but must share and negotiate for it with those that have been there “first.”

Conclusion

Many voices from a place now being shared by different kinds of people—natives, settlers, and other participants from outside—that give substance to different kinds of “reality” have been aired. To recap, they show Samal Island to be several distinct kinds of places at the same time: Samal is a “risky place” to visit. Samal is a nice white sand beach with the market value of a few million pesos. Samal’s “indigenous giants” were buried in the caves and their descendants continue to live on Samal Island. Samal was a wilderness that diverse settlers have cleared and carved out of a “lonely” state into something that people occupy, braving violence on the frontier and the vulnerability of living close to the coast. With the dominance of Bisaya language and culture, identities can

be appropriated and imitated, and it appears that they can often be held simultaneous with other identities, or mixed. Samal Island is a “chosen land” for some religious communities. Samal Island is now a city; The Island Garden City of Samal, considered good real estate investment, and to be “developed” as an urban place and as a holiday destination for tourists, potential bringers of foreign currency, all of which is fitted in with the “national interest.” Meanwhile, the conversations also achieve the idea that large-scale modernization and “development” may be accommodated in the landscape by the traditional unseen forces only by means of sacrificial offering.

The frontier dynamics in this island corner of the Philippines (and perhaps this may be true for current frontier settings in other parts as well), reveals many and diverse local speaker-actors to be participants in processes of reality-construction. Building up narratives that do not merely reflect historical and global processes that are beyond their control but that are more actively forms of resistance and of assertion of claims to identity and place, they perform plural landscapes and create a highly contested setting.

Notes

1. This paper was presented at the 24th UGAT National Conference, “Rootwork and Network: Weaving Mindanao Anthropology,” 8-10 April 2002, Paradise Island Resort, Island Garden City of Samal, Davao. It has been revised from Chapter 2 of the author’s Ph.D. dissertation in Social Anthropology, entitled “Managing Luck and Negotiating Change—Ethnographies of Fishing and Sharing in the Philippines,” University of Cambridge, 2000.
2. In the spirit of attempts to write “history from below” incorporating the popular rhetoric (e.g., Iletto, 1979), or to work in Anthropology that casts the ethnography as a conversation involving the texts of social science, the folk models of rural people, and the context of fieldwork (e.g., Gudeman and Rivera, 1990).
3. *Igacos* also means “to embrace” in Cebuano.

4. The lowest classification for a city, based on its income.
5. The resort development was termed a “cooperative tourism” project. The land was to have been awarded to agrarian reform beneficiaries, but the Department of Tourism intervened to organize them into a cooperative and convinced them to lease the land to Ekran Berhad. A few communities had to be relocated. See Nicholson (1997) and publications by AFRIM (e.g., *Bantaaw* 1997) for discussions of the controversies surrounding this project.
6. The poison was said to be a substance in their fingernails that falls into your glass or food if they pass their hands over it. Alternatively *barang* may be used—which is a different kind of sorcery involving insects—or *usik*, i.e., lifeless matter. There were also cautions about *pekepek*, which is a Cebuano term (or *pikpik*) meaning “to pat, tap lightly on the body,” or “sorcery inflicted by tapping someone on the back,” which is counteracted by tapping back the person who sent it (Wolff, 1972: 758). Stories about sorcery are as much a part of Visayan culture as of Mindanao. Payne (1985) also makes note of the same kind of concern about “tapping sorcery” among the Bagobo.

There are other reasons for eating or drinking with caution: a “*lumay*” or love charm might have been slipped into the food and drink, causing you to feel irresistibly attracted to the person who put it there. *Lumay* love, however, is said to expire after one year. Knowledge about *lumay* is property of another religion and ethnic group: the Muslims, specifically in the communities of Tausug on Samal where it is said one can purchase a *lumay*.

7. Sometimes also pronounced “*amil*”. The batter is made out of rice flour mixed with sugar, water and oil. This is ladled into and dripped through a coconut shell with holes (like a sieve) so it falls through like fine noodles into hot oil. While frying, this is folded into various shapes using two specially made cooking implements.
8. Don Rajal was an infantry colonel and ex-governor of Nueva Ecija (Luzon, Philippines) who visited Samal in 1882.
9. The groups around the Davao Gulf were known for being “war-like,” with the Bagobo having developed the greatest political

- complexity in their *datu*-system by the time of the colonial period (Yengoyan, 1975; Quizon, 1998: 108). All the Davao groups were generally seen to share a dependence on shifting cultivation, and dispersed settlement patterns; they were distinguished from each other by art styles, clothing, and religious orientations rather than linguistic markers.
10. For example, one resident of Aundanao said: “*My father (a Bisaya) was in Benoling [Peñaplata, Samal] but his wife died. He went to Madaum (Davao del Norte). He went to Panacan (also on the mainland). He went to Aumbay (a place on Samal). He went to Aundanao. Then he saw a woman. That was my mother.*”
 11. Leaders of the current Samal Island tribal organization, PIGSAPU, reject the names “Samal” and “Isamal”; they want to correct this to “Isama” (personal communication, Albert Alejo, S.J.).
 12. This office has been converted to the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) since 1997.
 13. The initial colonial attempts to delineate the different “tribes” in the Davao district, aside from intending to map the different groups’ geographical distribution, had also sought to construct a hierarchy among them that reflected both already existing hierarchies of ethnicity (for example, one group regularly taking “slaves” from another group) as well as the “West’s” own standards of “race” and “potential for civilization,” as seen for example in relative “bravery,” “intelligence,” and “cleanliness” (e.g., Garvan, 1929).
 14. In ethnic divisions drawn by linguists “Davaweño” is sometimes used as the generic label. For example: Davaweño includes the following ten dialect areas: (1) Davaweño or all coastal Moros; (2) Mansaka, found in Lupon, Pantukan, and the Maragosan valleys; (3) Mandayan, spoken in most of Compostela and closely related to Mansaka; (4) Mangarangan, spoken in upper Caraga; (5) Cateelano, spoken in upper Cateel and Baganga; (6) Manurigao, spoken in southwest Baganga and southeast Compostela, and appearing to be identical with Mangarangan; (7) Manay Mandaya, spoken in Manay; (8) Saug Mandaya, spoken in upper Tagum,

- Panabo and Saug; (9) Samal (Isamal), spoken on Samal Island; and (10) Tagakaolo, spoken in areas west of Digos. (Yengoyan, 1988: 177, based on Svelmoe, Richert and Thomas, 1957: 1-11).
15. My Bisaya host, for example, would incorporate me, the outsider in the group, as fellow “Filipino” when contrasting with the Samal—“Us Filipinos” (*kitang mga Filipino*), as opposed to “them natives” (*silang mga natibos*), in which category she included her Samal husband who was more active in church than she.
 16. Then he ceases to be Manobo or Mandaya, in order to be a Christian; he relinquishes his pagan name and in the course of time can hardly be distinguished from the inhabitants of the ancient Christian towns (Garvan 1929: 250).
 17. This is a similar kind of argument to Cannell’s (1999) insight on “self-transformation” as a means to equalize different kinds of imbalanced relationships (of social class in Bicol).
 18. For example, there were some occasions such as legally uncontractable teenage marriage when they found it necessary to improvise and draw on Samal culture. Thus, despite the disparagement of native culture as “primitive” and laughable, and despite the dissipation of knowledge of many of the details of native ways of doing things, it continues to have some quiet currency for setting standards for behavior and to provide options and alternatives to “Bisaya” practice (Mangahas, 1998). I argued that these are not so much instances of “resistance” to the state so much as of actively exercising citizenship in nation, by utilizing the local governmental structures, within the space for improvisation and innovation afforded by being somewhat on the margins of the mainstream (see Mangahas, 1998).
 19. Samal leaders in the past had been organized and affiliated with other natives in the region via the “Mindanao Highlander’s Association.” It was said that, formerly, ritual procedures had been devised for “adopting” Bisaya as Samal, but it was said that too many Bisaya were getting themselves adopted as Samal.
 20. During the American period, Mindanao was consciously seen as a “frontier” in parallel with the experience of the American frontier. Under American army administration from 1903-1913 when it

was part of the “Moro Province” (see Thompson, 1975), they attempted to establish a plantation economy, and sought to attract Americans interested in being pioneers, envisioning a “white Mindanao.” There was difficulty recruiting labor from the natives; Japanese migrant workers, and later Japanese entrepreneurs, came over and it is apparently to their credit that Davao was built up from scratch into a boom town, one based mainly on abaka production (and coconuts, and ramie) for the world market. From the 1920s Davao City attracted migrants from other parts of the Philippines on an unprecedented scale, and by the 1930s the Christian migrants were already dominating the Muslim and indigenous population in Mindanao, especially in Davao (Gloria, 1987:36). After WWII, the region was promoted for continued settlement by the Philippine government as a “land of promise,” and also to relieve tensions over land in the Visayas. From the start, the majority of migrants came from the Visayas.

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