

# **PIONEERING IN THE COTABATO FRONTIER: THE KORONADAL VALLEY PROJECT DURING THE PREWAR YEARS**

**Andrea V. Campado**

## **Abstract**

This study tells of the opening of the Cotabato frontier under the auspices of the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA) starting 1939, and the consequent formation of a community by both the newcomers and the original inhabitants of the Koronadal and Allah Valley (now the SOCKSARGEN area comprising South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City) during the period 1939 to 1942.

The methodology of this study is qualitative, that is, it is not guided by hypotheses but by issues and problems that the study seeks to answer. Data were obtained through varied research techniques. These include in-depth interviews of key informants; the collection and review of secondary and primary sources; and the collection of case studies as illustrative cases to establish a linkage between the stories of the individual and the wider community.

The major findings of the study include: one, that the general poverty in the country was a powerful "push" factor for migration; two, the social processes of accommodation, assimilation, and amalgamation were all involved in the formation of a "melting pot" community; and three, the success of the Koronadal Valley Project could largely be attributed to the good relationship developed between the migrant-settlers and the NLSA officials on one hand, and the original inhabitants, on the other.

**Keywords:** pioneering; Cotabato frontier; IP (Indigenous Peoples); Koronadal Valley Project; melting pot; migration; National Land Settlement Administration

**Abbreviation:** IP (Indigenous Peoples)

## Introduction

Communion between history and other social sciences brings to the fore a focus on culture as the most viable means of bringing about a better understanding of humanity and society. This paper holds the view that social reality emerges through the process of interaction and/or the minimal level of consensus within the group. Thus, the interaction between and among the original inhabitants of the place (the Magindanaos and the indigenous peoples) and the newcomers (the migrant-settlers and the NLSA officials), defines the kind of community built in the Koronadal Project area, particularly in Southern Koronadal, now General Santos City.

## Land Settlement in Mindanao

The opening of the Mindanao frontier to migrants and corporations at the turn of the 20th century was made possible by the American public land policy in the Philippines. The Public Land Act of 1903 introduced the homestead system and provided rules for the sale or lease of land titles to these lands.

Government-sponsored settlements in Mindanao did not start until 1913. During the early years of the American era, settlement in Mindanao was privately led and was disorganized. By 1911, General Pershing, governor of the Moro Province, called for an immediate importation of homesteaders from congested areas of the Philippines. The government forthwith paraded around Cebu a corn stalk, thirteen feet tall, propped up with a bamboo stick, to convince the Cebuanos of the fertility of soil in Cotabato. Fifty men responded to the call. They were given initial capital and farm lots on loan basis. The clinching argument was the promise of eventually owning homestead (Rodil, 1994: 37).

One major aim, although not officially stated in the objectives of the agricultural colonization scheme, was the assimilation of the Christian and Muslim sectors. Governor Carpenter, of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu, declared “the aim

[for the settlement] is the amalgamation of the Mohammedan and Christian native population into a homogeneous Filipino people.” Thus of the total 774 colonist families (or the total of 3,809 men, women, and children), 427 were Visayan families and 347 were Muslim families. In the period between 1913 to 1918, there were five colonies established in the central valley of Cotabato in what is now Pikit, North Cotabato; one in Glan, in what is now Sarangani Province; one in Lamitan, Basilan Island; and one in Momungan, Lanao del Norte (Pelzer, 1948: 129).

But why would people leave behind familiar home, friends, and family for an unknown destination?

### **In Search for a Better Tomorrow**

Pioneering in the frontier necessitates a certain spirit characterized by a strong determination to succeed. Jose Guerrero, also called Datu Kusay by the local people, a former mayor of Lambayong town in the province of Sultan Kudarat, illustrates this pioneering spirit:

Cotabato in the twenties was a wilderness. This was the unoccupied land. Others went to settle in the northern seaboard... Some went to Cotabato... I lived with the Muslims, ate with them, just so I will have a place to stay. (Roperos, 1963: 26)

Pioneering in Cotabato meant conquering the fear of the Moros. Datu Kusay succeeded because he not only conquered his fear of the Moros, he also lived with them. In sociological parlance, he was able to traverse the ethnic boundary and became “one of them.”

To Datu Kusay and countless others, migration to the frontier region of Cotabato necessitated a sense of adventurism, a *babala na* spirit, as well as a strong desire to work hard for a better tomorrow. This pioneering spirit meant not only conquering one’s fear of the Moros but also taming the jungle, overcoming loneliness, and surviving attacks of wild pigs, flood,

drought, and the ubiquitous malaria – experiences enough to discourage the hardest of souls. An early account tells of the pioneers' experiences:

From thickly wooded forests and dense *talabib* growths they carved out their homes and farms. The swarms of mosquitoes as aggressive in the daytime as they were at night and the rampaging wild pigs which attacked the crops from sunset to sunrise, gave more than one settler cause for despair. Many fell victims to the malarial scourge and to other diseases.

Those whose fields were planted to any kind of crops were plagued by the devastation of numerous wild pigs – robbing the farmers of numberless nights of sleep. What the pigs spared were finished off by foraging monkeys and white parrots or washed away by the river when it overflowed its banks.... (Initan, 1952: 268)

Settlers in Southern Koronadal (now General Santos City) talk of “lonely stretches of shorelines,” “a few roughly built huts,” “a handful of natives,” “noticeable Dadiangas trees,” “cogon lands,” “the vast emptiness of the surrounding reaching out to the very foot of the brooding hills and mist shrouded mountains.”

Settlers in Middle Koronadal (what is now the Polomolok and Tupi municipalities of South Cotabato) and Northern Koronadal (what is now Koronadal City and the other municipalities of South Cotabato) describe the area as *lasang* (forest) where *baboy ramo* or wild pig were found.

### **On the Road to Koronadal Valley**

The advent of the Commonwealth led to the sidelining of the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act, the act that provided for a well-planned and well-funded project. Commonwealth Act No. 18, passed on January 2, 1936, diverted the one million pesos allotted for the construction of roads and bridges and for public surveying in line with the implementation of Act 4197 (Pelzer, 1948).

While road building was ongoing, fresh proposals were received, the most important of which were the Silayan Plan and the Howe Plan. The Silayan Plan called for an elaborate preparation which included prior survey and subdivision of land before settlement was to take place; proper preparation of the settlement site; and proper screening of applicants. Frederic Howe, on the other hand, envisioned an organized settlement, “as organized as an army,” with an administrative building surrounded by a school, health center, road, and family farms.

After receipt of various proposals on land settlement, President Quezon appointed a special three-man committee to organize the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA). Finding the bill organizing the NLSA subjected to intense debate in the National Assembly, President Quezon hastened the implementation of the land settlement program. The official reason given for the rush to start the program even before the passage of a law was the need to start planting before the onset of summer months. Thus, a working capital of 200,000 pesos was borrowed from the National Development Corporation. General Paulino Santos was relieved as Chief of Staff of the Army of the Philippines and subsequently appointed manager of the NLSA (Messages of the President, Vol. 5, Part I:427-430). To speed up the recruitment process, the first batches of settlers were recruited mostly from Manila. By February 22, the S/S Basilan was in the North Harbor awaiting departure for Koronadal.

Commonwealth Act No. 441, passed into law on June 3, 1939, had as its objectives the following:

1. To facilitate the acquisition, settlement and cultivation of land whether acquired from the government or from private parties;
2. To afford opportunity to own farm to tenant farmers and small farmers from congested areas, and to trainees who had completed the prescribed military training;

3. To encourage migration to sparsely populated regions, and facilitate the amalgamation of the people in different sections of the Philippines; and
4. to develop new money crops, which may suffer from the loss of preferences which they enjoyed in the American market.

### **The Koronadal Valley Settlement**

The beautiful and vast expanse of Koronadal with its varying topography and vegetation was home to the original inhabitants of the area – Magindanao, B'laan, T'boli, Tiruray, Sangil, and other indigenous groups. The land and its resources provided for the development of a rich cultural heritage among the indigenous peoples of Cotabato unhampered by Western influence until the turn of the 20th century.

The coming of the Christian settlers brought into contact two different worlds – on the one hand, the Westernized Filipinos, and on the other, the Muslims (in this case, mostly Magindanaos) and the indigenous groups (B'laan, T'boli, Sangil, Manobo, etc.). The more advanced legal and technological knowledge of the Christian settlers, coupled with government support in the form of farm implements, food, medicines, hospital, technical advice and the like, placed the newcomers at an advantage in this encounter of different cultures. A brief description of the original inhabitants of the area is necessary to understand the distinct community that evolved in Koronadal Valley.

### **The Original Inhabitants of the Valley**

To the Muslim groups, Southern Koronadal was an extension of the Maguindanao world. As the ancient name of Sarangani Bay (Sugod Boyan or Sugod Buayan) suggests, Koronadal was “the place toured or visited by the Sultan of Buayan.” The movement of some members of the Magindanao sultanate to the area reinforced the image of the southern

part of Cotabato as an extension of the Magindanao world. Ileto (1971) mentions the use of Sarangani Bay as the entry and exit point for smuggled arms and slaves after the 1861 establishment of a Spanish garrison at the mouth of Pulangi in Cotabato town.

As an extension of the Magindanao world, Sugod Boyan or Sugod Buayan was a place for the Magindanao to undertake the *domales* (meaning “to camp and to picnic”), during which time supplementary activities like salt-making and fishing were done during the long months between the planting and harvesting of crops. Thus, makeshift huts were built along the coast that were occupied during the *domales* season. Others stayed with their kins in the area. Once finished with their camping and picknicking in Sugod Buayan, they returned to their permanent homes where their farms were usually located.

“We had [a] good relationship then. The Muslim-Christian difference of today did not exist before. In fact, Sarip Zainal Abedin was the protector of the settlers,” explained one settler. Even in the coastal settlement of Kiamba, in the southern coast of Cotabato, Muslims gave the Christian migrants advise on how to deal with other Muslims so as to avoid conflict. “It was a relationship based on trust.” These observations confirm the earlier study made by Lugum Uka (1952) and Nobutaka Suzuki (1992) that the early success of the Christian settlements in Cotabato could be attributed to the cooperation and protection accorded the settlers by the powerful datu. Among these datu were Datu Piang in North Cotabato, Datu Kamsa in Northern Koronadal and Allah Valley, and Datu Sarip Zainal Abedin in Southern Koronadal. Datu Sarip Zainal Abedin was the first mayor of Buayan (now General Santos City).

In a conference with the Muslim leaders and their followers, General Paulino Santos narrated in his diary that he talked to the natives in the Maranao dialect, a dialect that he learned during his stay in Lanao when he was assigned there as deputy governor of Lanao. In that conference, General Santos assured

those present that whatever rights they had acquired or may acquire within the settlement area would be respected by the NLSA administration. He enticed them with the benefits that the establishment of the settlement would bring – schools, health facilities, better roads and other infrastructure. General Santos even promised assistance in the acquisition of titles to their landholdings (Gen. Paulino Santos, in a report published in 1947).

Moreover, as noted by Pelzer (1948), the government failed to make definite arrangements for the native inhabitants of Southern Philippines when Mindanao was opened for settlement. But as of 1939, the Magindanao people did not realize the full implication of the coming of the settlers. One daughter of a Magindanao datu mentioned his father saying: “*kawawa naman sila*” in explaining the permission he gave to settlers to cut bamboos found in his territory to be used for house construction. Thus, both groups opted for a peaceful co-existence at the time of initial contact.

The rapid arrival of settlers beyond the expected number led to the opening of more settlement districts. Fear of being dispossessed of their ancestral lands impelled more indigenous groups to settle in the surrounding areas to prevent the further expansion of the settlements (Tito, personal interview, 1997). The economic opportunity provided by the presence of an increasing number of people brought about the secondary migration from other parts of Mindanao. Secondary migrants were lured to settle down in the immediate vicinity of Koronadal Valley.

Besides the Magindanao, the other original inhabitants of Southern Koronadal were the B’laan. The B’laan tribe is one of the eighteen non-Muslim minority ethnic groups inhabiting the island of Mindanao. Traditionally, they inhabit South Cotabato, the southeastern part of Davao del Sur, the areas around Buluan Lake, and Sarangani Island off the coast of Mindanao.



The B'laan reacted to the Christian presence by retreating to the mountains. Arcenas (1993) explained this withdrawal as a manifestation of their peaceful reaction to newcomers that could be traced to their value system of placing primacy on peace and harmony.

The B'laan viewed the coming of the settlers as threatening to their way of life because they did not understand what was happening. A B'laan native explains:

When the Christians arrived in the place it was peaceful, but we were afraid of them. Even the footprints or the cigarette butts that we saw instilled fear on us. We hid ourselves because we did not know the language of the Christians. (Datu Ugan Samling, personal interview, 1995)

Faced with the coming of the settlers and seeing their vast hunting ground occupied by the newcomers, they quietly withdrew and settled in the “distant mountains.” While one B'laan claimed they were told to leave, Datu Ugan Samling of Barrio Kalkam in Tupi, claimed that nobody told them to leave. They simply left because “*maraming* settlers” (there were many settlers). However, he did acknowledge that there was a rich Christian who once threatened to shoot him.

The natives of Koronadal Valley who felt culturally inferior lived in the outskirts of the settlement. Moreover, despite clearly defined boundaries with the settlers residing within the settlement area and the original inhabitant mostly found at the outskirts of the settlement, interaction was bound to occur. Virginia Buhisan (1980), who made a study of the T'boli of the valley, reports that they “served as milk mothers, field and house hands, and hunting companions to the early settlers so that these regarded them as indispensable.” Buhisan further relates that the natives learned to adopt some new skills such as fishing, wet land rice farming, and the use of more sophisticated household tools from their Christian neighbors. The settlers in turn benefited from the natives' knowledge in folk medicine, methods of root crop planting, the making of animal traps, and tapping natural springs for drinking water.

This “melting pot” image was reinforced by a provision in Commonwealth Act No. 441 which provided that applicants for settlement purposes shall be recruited “from all provinces in proportion to their respective population and in case a province shall not be able to fill the quota assigned, the unfilled portion of the quota may be covered from other provinces having greater number of applicants.” Clearly, this highly political provision emanated from the legislators themselves who demanded that their respective provinces share the benefit that may be derived from the land settlement law. This is seen by personal efforts made by some congressmen in facilitating the settlement of their constituents under the program. There is an account of how Governor Bernardo Torres of Leyte personally recruited 14 Leyteño families to migrate to Koronadal Valley on July 19, 1940 (Acapulco, 1995). Thus, Commonwealth Act No. 441 made possible the representation of various ethnic groups of the country in the Koronadal-Allah Valley settlement areas. It also inaugurated the second – the first during the period of the sultanates – and most extensive process of realizing the so-called “population complexity” of Cotabato.

Thus, Buayan in particular, and Cotabato in general, became a melting pot of the country in spirit and in reality. The list of home origin of Koronadal settlers as of 1941 shows a relative representation of settlers from 41 of the 50 provinces of the country. As expected, the greatest number of prewar settlers came from the Visayas region like Iloilo, Leyte, Cebu, and Capiz. Settlers from Luzon (Pampanga, Pangasinan, and Tarlac) represented less than one third of the total number of settlers. Even migrants who had already settled in various areas of Mindanao like Cotabato town, Davao, Misamis, and Zamboanga undertook secondary migration to Koronadal Valley due to the promise of land ownership and government assistance. Increasingly, more and more people came at their own expense and applied as settlers upon arrival in Koronadal. Most of the settlers who came later were relatives of the earlier settlers.

These different groups of people who were brought together in one geographical zone by the government's project had to define their relationship. They opted for peaceful coexistence and, with the favored option, learned how to live together in peace with people of different cultural orientations.

Moreover, the clear identification of the settlement area precluded real mixing of the original inhabitants and the newcomers. The newcomers established themselves within the settlement areas while the original inhabitants were found at the outskirts of the settlement. Perhaps, this exclusivity was necessary for security purposes so as to lessen chances of tension between the two divergent groups.

Besides getting an assurance of cooperation from the original inhabitants of the valley, the general manager ordered the installation of a transmitting and receiving radio station in order to establish a direct link with Manila. Messages were then sent to Secretary Rafael H. Alunan, chairman of the NLSA Board of Directors; to General Basilio J. Valdes, Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army; General Guillermo V. Francisco, Chief of Constabulary; and other officials who helped in the realization of the project.

On March 3, the first settlement site was established in Lagao, a short distance away from Dadiangas. Its proximity to Dadiangas, a quiet anchorage area, became the major consideration for the choice of Lagao as the first settlement area and as the nerve center of the Koronadal project with its selection as the administration center in Mindanao. Other considerations included its being the terminal point of the proposed national highway (Alunan Highway) between Sarangani Bay and Dulawan; its being a malaria-free area; and finally, its being the least inhabited area of Koronadal Valley (Pelzer, 1945: 150).

Lagao had a land area of 30,200 hectares of which 10,000 were for distribution to the settlers. However, the distribution of farm lots had to wait until the survey. The failure of the NLSA

to follow the recommendations made by the reconnaissance team for a thorough survey of the water supply available for irrigation and the water holding capacity of the light, sandy soil of Southern Koronadal led to the early difficulties of the settlers. The settlers' failure to undertake agricultural activities the soonest time possible also caused an additional and unnecessary burden to the NLSA since under the contract, NLSA was obligated to provide for the settlers' needs while they had no production yet.

It should be recalled that the reason given for the haste in the implementation of the program despite the absence of the law creating the NLSA was the need to start the planting of crops before the onset of the summer months. Indeed, planting was made on homesteads and in the administration farm but the crops turned yellowish and died. "If I had wings, I could have flown back to Aklan," one settler recalled his disappointment then. He had planned to back out from the program since he was not actually landless in Aklan. Moreover, he had not seen the kind of soil in Koronadal in any place in Panay and wondered whether they could grow crops in Koronadal. But despite his decision to abandon the settlement area, he was not able to do so because no ships came (Isaias Rogan, personal interview, 1994). Unknown to them, General Santos had asked the shipping lines to reroute their scheduled trips and to not dock at the Dadiangas port temporarily (Ramirez, 1994).

The months of July and August were crucial ones. The morale of the settlers was at its lowest point. Some settlers were planning to back out. Increasingly, vocal criticisms against the program were getting louder. Some senators were even known to campaign for the abrogation of Commonwealth Act No. 441. Newspaper reports and radio programs broadcasted about the apathetic attitude of some members of the Board of Directors of the NLSA.

To stem the tide of rising criticism, the absence of agricultural activity caused by low rainfall in the area had to be solved. More immediate, however, was the necessity to lift the

sagging morale of the settlers. A meeting was convened where General Santos was reported to have told the settlers:

Be proud of yourself! We are here to stay for good. Let us be patient. We shall soon overcome all these obstacles. Yes, with our firm determination and with God's blessing. (Ramirez, 1993: 52)

General Santos also decided to tap Klaja River, found nine kilometers north of Lagao, for irrigation. The NLSA employees left their offices and joined the settlers in constructing the irrigation. The irrigation system, started on July 3, was finally finished on August 9 with a discharge of 130 liters per second (Ramirez, 1993: 52).

It was not only the leadership of the Koronadal project that was bent on making the settlement project survive the crisis. President Quezon himself came over for a visit on June 28, 1939. In a meeting with the settlers, President Quezon gave a morale-boosting speech:

*Kayong mga settlers na dinala ni Paulino Santos dito sa timog ng Cotabato, buwag kayong mawalan ng pag-asa. Tulungan ninyo si Heneral Santos sa kanyang pangarap na kayo ay magkaroon ng sariling lupa. Mahalin ninyo at darating ang araw maibibigay ko ang inyong titulo upang maging sarili ninyo. Ipagpatuloy ang naumpisaban! May awa ang Diyos. Tayong labat ay magtatagumpay sa ating mithiin.*

(You, the settlers brought by Paulino Santos to South Cotabato, do not lose hope. Help General Santos realize his dream for you to have a land of your own. Love it and the time will come when I will be able to give the title to your lands. Continue with what was started! With God's help, we will overcome.)

This presidential visit at the crucial juncture of the project underscored the president's personal concern for the success of the project, which he had started even without the authorization of a law. Its success or failure was as much a political issue as

far as the president was concerned. The president's show of support neutralized the alleged apathy of some members of the Board of Directors, some of whom reportedly called the Koronadal Valley as "*ang mga bayan ng alikabok*" (the land of dust). General Santos also made direct appeals to the President for to intervene and speed up the release of funds for the operation of the settlement.

Besides the lack of rain, there was also the delay in the distribution of farm lots. This caused an unnecessary financial burden to the NLSA since settlers had to be provided for everything, including food, while they had no production yet. Cash advances were charged to the settlers' accounts with married settlers entitled to Php1,000, while unmarried settlers could draw Php600. The financial report prepared by the NLSA comptrollers as of December 31, 1940 shows that the NLSA had an income of Php89,531.06 pesos from interest charges, electric light feed, charges for transportation and preparation of the settlers' farm lots, sales of seed and seedlings, and various other sources of income. Moreover, the report also shows that 45.83 percent of the budget went to the settlers in the form of cash advances.

In the meantime, an administration farm was established where settlers were hired as laborers receiving 50 centavos a day. The administration farms, particularly its seed and livestock farms, served as experiment and demonstration stations. These were established to determine the viability of producing alternative cash crops, a major objective of the settlement project. A promising start was made with a thousand-hectare rubber farm in Tupi established before the war. Plans were likewise in place for the mechanized cultivation of cotton in Lagao (Pelzer, 1948).

The main function of the seed farm was for the production of seedlings needed in large quantities by the settlers. The settlement was particularly successful with the livestock farm. The largest hog farm then in the Philippines was found near

Lagao. This hog farm started with 18 sows and two boars bought for PhP1,177. The objective of the livestock farm was to provide the settlers with a pair of good breeding pigs and later to produce pigs for the market. After two years of operation, the original 18 sows and two boars became 600 pigs of all sizes, excluding those that had been sold to the settlers (Pelzer, 1948: 151-153). Indeed, the foundation for a self-supporting and productive settlement area was in place when war broke out.

Lack of settlers was never a problem. On the contrary, their rapid arrival in the valley necessitated fasttracking of settlement areas. This placed a tremendous pressure on the budget needs of the project. For instance, while the budget allowed for the recruitment of only 600 for every settlement per year, the number who came was double the required number. The NLSA management in Koronadal tried its best to cope with the growing demands. Thus bunkhouses, as temporary lodging places of new arrivals who still had to build their houses, were constructed as quickly as possible. When there was an immediate need to expand due to the number of settlers in comparison to the land available for settlement, applicants sometimes had to open the roads themselves. Due to the enthusiastic response to the land settlement program, the NLSA Board of Directors decided to reduce the land allotted to any settler whose farm was located along the national highway.

By this time, the procedure for the acceptance of an applicant as a settler had been systematized. Ramirez (1993) explains the process:

Upon their arrival, they were examined by the medical staff led by Dr. Jorge Royeca and Dr. Sergio Morales. They were inoculated against cholera and dysentery. Thereafter, they were housed in plain long sheds of bunkhouses located in Lagao district (Barrio Balite). These bunkhouses were divided into small sections, each accommodating one family. A few days after they were assigned to one of the settlement districts to which trucks transported them.

In each settlement district, an officer in charge (overseer) explained in public meeting the duties of new settlers and assigned to each a homelot, usually 2,000 square meters in size. The first task of a new settler was to build a house for his family. Usually, the NLSA supplied the materials necessary for a simple house of bamboos and roofed with cogon grass or the leaves of nipa palm. The next step was the assignment of farm lots....

Reverend Domingo who was then assigned to Marbel district gives a more vivid account:

*Dito kami natulog sa Dadiyangas at kinabukasan may malakas na ugong at ito pala ang pangdating ng marami at malalaking trak na nagbakot sa amin. Halos isang araw ang pagdala sa amin at sa awa ng Panginoon ay dito kami sa Marbel . . . Hinakot kami at dinala kami doon sa tabi ng San Felipe. Dito po ay may mababang bankhouse na may mga kuarto na may numero at nagbonotan kaming labat dahil kami ay naging 86 head pamilya kaming nalagay dito sa tinatawag nila barrio ono. Ang mga kasama namin sa barko napunta sila sa mga ibang barrio sa 5, 2, 3, 8 ito dito sila nadistino. . . Dito naman kami umiyak dahil sa ang palibot namin ay cogonal, talabiban, kakahoyan at ang dami ngang baboy damo at usa lalo itong (wild carabaos). Ang naririnig namin ay huni ng unggoy, ibon at mga kulintang ng Muslim.*

*Ang bubay namin bilang settler ay laging may schedule ng aming pagkuba o pagbali namin sa aming pangangailangan. Kada barrio dala mo ang carabao at karosa at labat na kailanganin sa isang simana isulat sa isang papel na maliit. At kada simana may miting.*

(Upon arrival, we slept in Dadiangas. By the next day the noise signaled the arrival of the trucks that would bring us to our destination. This took about one day. With the grace of God, we were brought to Marbel where we were



brought near San Felipe. There was a long bunkhouse divided into small sections intended to each family. There were 86 heads of families who participated in the lottery to determine who will be sent to Barrio 1. We were distributed to the different barrios: 5, 2, 3, 8. . . We felt anxiety looking at the surroundings with its cogonal, talahiban, kakahoyan and the wild pigs, deer, and wild carabaos. We heard the sound of the squeeking monkeys, the birds, and the kulintang of the Muslims.

Our life as settlers was routinary. There was a schedule for everything including the distribution of ration. Once a week, we wrote down on a small sheet of paper our weekly needs, then brought our carabao and cart where we placed our supplies. We also had a meeting once a week.)

When the national highway reached Marbel by the end of 1939, the general manager directed Lt. Jesus Larrabaster to open the Marbel district on January 10, 1940. With a general rainfall classification of “more or less evenly distributed throughout the year,” Marbel district was the most attractive settlement site especially for the Ilonggo's preference for a *basakan* (rice field). By July, the Tupi settlement was established. Polomolok would be established much later due to the lack of potable water aside from it being a malarial area. Of the four settlement districts, Marbel had the fastest growth of population (unpublished NLSA record, as quoted from Pelzer).

Each of the settlement districts had one town that served as the administrative and economic center, and around which the barrios were located. Each district was placed under an overseer and a staff of assistants. The office of the overseer, the store, hospital, church, school, warehouse, tool and machinery sheds, and other buildings were found in the town. Each barrio was under the charge of a barrio lieutenant and an assistant barrio lieutenant, both of whom were chosen by the settlers from among themselves. The town of this period inevitably became

the nucleus of the postwar municipalities, with the exception of Lagao whose prewar preeminence was overshadowed by nearby Dadiangas.

While the overseer was chosen by the manager, the barrio lieutenant and the assistant barrio lieutenant were chosen by the people themselves in a meeting called for the purpose. This democratic practice together with the weekly meetings helped in the creation of a “feeling of community.” It was in the weekly meetings that problems were threshed out, especially in matters of relationships among settlers. For instance, Reverend Domingo tells of the “rambol” by the Ilonggo and Ilocano youngsters. This was immediately followed by a conference of the battling youths with their parents. The conference usually ended with an admonition by the barrio lieutenant or the overseer, and a reminder for the need to build smooth interactions among one another as well as with other people outside the district.

The conscious effort of building a community of people in harmony with each other was shown by the activities promoted by the management. Thus, a regular *baile* (community public dance) was a favored activity among the settlers. The bachelors engaged in their favorite *barana* (serenade). Birthdays, wakes for the dead, weddings, and even the *pasiyam* (the nine days of prayer for the dead) which followed the burial, were also well-attended. In the early months of the settlement, a bowling alley was built for the recreation of the settlers in the Lagao district. Sometimes, the different groups coming from various settlement areas competing with each other played ballgames like softball.

Cultural differences caused conflict. But the imperatives of solidarity was emphasized time and again where the ugly specter of ethnic differences threatened to rise up as seen in the account of Reverend Domingo on the gang wars of the Ilocano and Ilonggo youngsters in Marbel. Eventually, adjustments were made. But while the predominant culture became the

norm, acculturation was a two-way process. For instance, the cultural experience of the Christian settlers in Kiamba did not prepare them for the wild pigs, deer, monkeys, and birds. To save their plants they learned from the indigenous inhabitants the art of trapping wild animals. They also learned a lot from observation of the ways of life of the indigenous inhabitants. Thus, Virginia Buhisan (1980) reports:

Christian neighbors are welcome to T'boli celebrations like weddings and wakes for the dead, and they attend as friends and to observe how the T'boli carry out these ceremonies. Sometimes they are invited as "honored guests.

While there are no accounts that similar relationship occurred between the B'laans and the Christian settlers of Koronadal, the imperatives of community solidarity appeared to have tempered whatever biases the more modern Christian settlers had against the original inhabitants. Symptomatic of the settlers' cultural baggage, in this case that of an Ilocano migrant, regarding other ethnic groups is contained in the following observation:

*Dito rin bumalik ang longkot dahil panay Hilongo ang salita ng dinatnan namin. Araw ng palengke noon araw ng Sabado dito ako nakakita ng mga Bilaan at Moro sa palengke. Ang mga Bilaan ay parang babai sila mahaba ang bobok nila at maliliit sila. Ang Moslem din ay ang pag-tingin ko sa kanila ay kriminal dahil bindi nila mabitawan ang tabas nila at ang bangkaw, kaya't takot na takot ako sa kanila dahil ang mga baro nila ay abaca fiber. Tabimik akong nanonood lalo naman ang mga Hilongo kong magsalita parang ibon.*

(Loneliness returned upon hearing the strange Ilonggo language of the people when we arrived. It was on a market day when I first saw the B'laan and the Moro. The B'laans were like women because they had long hair. On the other hand, I was afraid pf the Muslims due to the bolos and

spears always at their side. Their dresses were made of abaca fiber. I silently observed them especially the Ilonggos who talked like birds.)

Eventually, however, this settler in question learned that the fearsome Moros could also be friends. He learned their language and recalled with pride the advantage he had over other settlers because he knew how to talk the Magindanao language.

Some of the processes involved in the interaction between and among the different ethnic groups in the Koronadal Valley migration experience may be explained as follows:

During the settlement days, the social process of accommodation was the framework for interaction established from the time of initial contact. Aided by the congruence of the newcomers' intention of building for themselves a better future and the original inhabitants' desire to continue their peaceful existence, coupled with the enticement of benefits which could be derived from the presence of infrastructure and economic opportunities brought by the settlement, such peaceful accommodation established the framework of contact between the newcomers and the original inhabitants. As the "conscious efforts of men to develop such working arrangements among themselves as will suspend conflict and make their relations tolerable," accommodation was a favored option. During this period when the three autonomous groups were segregated from each other by settlement boundaries, it was in the area of economic exchange, in the market places where they met on common footing, that frequent interaction took place.

The establishment of local governmental units opened the previous settlement areas to more people. Despite differences, people in interaction with one another cannot long remain oblivious of each other. Cases of intermarriages or amalgamation were and are taking place. Who gets to follow what religion as a result of amalgamation depends on the individuals involved in the process. More importantly, amalgamation as a social process

is also the fastest way in bringing about adoption of cultural traits in a social process popularly known as acculturation, the process of modifying one's culture as a result of cultural borrowings.

Acculturation is the natural result of "societies of different cultures in a fairly close and long-continued contact with each other." Acculturation does not imply the loss of an older culture but merely the acquisition of some new traits from another culture. The dominant position, due to numerical superiority, assumed by the newcomers after the war gave the new traits favorable status. This was coupled with the comforts derived from the adoption of the Christians' material culture. Although there was an adherence to ancestral customs especially by the old folks, the manner of acquisition of new cultural traits was not forced but based on a perception of pragmatic need making this social process a natural result of the long and continued contact with each other.

Acculturation also implies mutual borrowing. Thus, Reverend Domingo learned the Magindanao language to enable him to communicate with the Magindanao passing by his residence on their way to the market place. The Glan and Kiamba migrant-settlers, on the other hand, learned survival techniques in trapping deers, birds, boars, snakes, and other wild animals; the technique of getting water from a branch of a tree; and other such indigenous techniques. Likewise, the newcomers' adoption of indigenous materials more suited to the area indicated mutual borrowing and adaptation to the new environment.

On the other hand, the material culture brought by the settlers appeared beneficial and therefore appealing to the indigenous inhabitants. Such material culture as household utensils, additional agricultural crops, and the use of soap, canned goods, and Christian manner of dressing were the most common form of cultural borrowings.

## **Institutions Formed in the New Community**

### **1. Political Institution**

By 1941, four settlement districts were established: Lagao, Tupi, Marbel, and Polomolok. These settlement districts, while found within the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Buayan, were administered separately by the NLSA.

This reality led to the conclusion that there were two political entities existing within the Southern Koronadal Valley: first, the settlement area managed by officials of the NLSA, and second, the Municipal District of Buayan then under the Municipal District of Glan of the Empire Province of Cotabato. The former had jurisdiction over the settlers, the latter, over the original inhabitants of the valley.

Moreover, there was the all-out support to the Koronadal project by the government as seen from the funds given to the NLSA (Php20 million). Hence, the NLSA as a government corporation was able to establish and provide irrigation systems, hospitals, schools, mechanized equipment, and supplies within the settlement areas. On the other hand, its absence in the areas outside the settlement highlighted the government neglect of other areas. For instance, the Municipal District of Buayan had to house itself in the private residence of Sarip Zainal Abedin in the Muksin-Abedin compound until 1949.

The fast development of Buayan led to the separation of the Municipal District of Buayan from its mother unit, the Municipal District of Glan in 1940. But while theoretically Lagao was within the jurisdiction of the Municipal District of Buayan under its first appointed mayor, Mayor Sarip Zainal Abedin, in practice no substantial change in the political arrangement between the NLSA and the municipal district was effected. The informants said that the view of the government was that both Sarip Abedin and General Santos would cooperate with each other for the good of the community. That the two leaders did establish an enduring relationship based on trust was shown

by Sarip Abedin's unconditional support of General Santos' decision to deal with the Japanese peacefully so as not to jeopardize the settlers' safety.

## **2. Economic Institution**

Economic interaction provided the more frequent contact between the newcomers and the original inhabitants of the valley. As more settlers came, the settlers felt the need to establish a *tabo* or market day. The *tabo* became the meeting place of different occupants of the valley. The B'laans used to come to barter their native ginger, rootcrops, and other produce in exchange for the settlers' clothes, canned goods, and later for money. The two major market places were Lagao, NLSA's administration center and settlement area, and Dadiangas, the anchorage area of ships. Dadiangas with the Japanese businessman Kuruda was a major trading area in Koronadal Valley. The policy disallowing the Chinese in the settlement area assured that business in the area remained in the hands of Filipinos within the settlement area. Dadiangas where Kuruda was based was found outside the settlement area.

Another economic interaction resulted from the settlers' needs for manpower in house construction and in the farm. Twelve hectares of land was difficult for a settler to till. He needed extra hands that were filled in by the natives, mostly the B'laan. The B'laan services were also needed in cutting wood for house construction. The B'laan workers proved loyal when treated with kindness.

Likewise, the establishment of *tabo* by the settlement areas brought the market places closer to the indigenous inhabitants. Before 1939, Datu Ugan Samling of Tupa tells of the almost one day travel to Lutayan in the present Dulawan to barter their produce in exchange for the things they needed. The distance and the lack of public transportation did not even allow them

to go back to Tupi the same day because of the danger of travel during nighttime. Hence, they had to pass the night in Lutayan and start their journey back to their place the following day.

### ***3. Religious Institution***

While the material needs of the settlers were taken care of by the NLSA, it was in the field of religion that various socio-cultural activities found expression. Due to the absence of records on the religious affiliation of the settlers, this paper relied heavily on the study made by Ramirez (1993) and Eric Casiño's work entitled *Mindanao Statecraft and Ecology* (2000) about the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Koronadal Valley.

According to Eric Casiño, the Jesuit mission work in Mindanao suffered a lull with the death of Fr. Jacinto Juanmarti in 1897. Between 1900 and 1936, overseeing Sulu, Cotabato, and Davao mission works were three ageing Jesuits working under the Diocese of Zamboanga. Bishop Luis del Rosario, S.J., then turned for help to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). As a result, seven Oblate pioneers were sent to the Philippines in 1939 to take over the missions in Cotabato and Sulu. These pioneers produced the first Bishop of Cotabato (Mongeau) and the first Bishop of Sulu (McSorley).

Prior to the coming of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), the Catholic mass in the settlement occurred during visits by visiting dignitaries who brought along a priest during such visits. Due to the absence of roads with only the constabulary launch and horseback riding as the available means of transportation, chapels were invariably located in coastal communities like Buayan and Glan. The construction of different chapels in the interior of Koronadal and Allah valley came as a natural response to the presence of Christian settlers who opened up the rich Koronadal and later the Allah Valley.

The establishment of the first church in Lagao showed a true community spirit. No less than General Santos himself gave the



order to the settlement engineers to prepare a church plan. Don Paco Natividad and other established residents volunteered materials for the church while the settlers volunteered their labor during their free time. This community enterprise made possible the construction of the first church in Lagao, which was “unlike most of the several chapels” since its foundation were concrete and the structure wood. Later, other settlement areas constructed their own chapels. Since the Oblate fathers were few in number, the service in the different chapels had to be scheduled in accordance with the availability of the priests.

How were patron saints chosen? Carlos Godmaling of Tampakan, South Cotabato gave this fascinating story:

In 1940, maybe in the month of November, the settlers were having their worship. During the meeting, the majority was Leyteño from Baybay, Leyte, the settlers were made to choose their patron saint. Some of us suggested Sto. Niño and La Purisima Concepcion. Votation was the basis. During the votation, La Purisima was chosen because Leyteños favored La Purisima. But Capizeños came and they said: “we want to join the votation”. So, the first votation was invalid and for the second time, Sto. Nino was chosen because Capizeño joined the votation. That’s why, La Purisima Concepcion was running second patron saint.

The practice of deciding important issues through discussion and voting explains in part the building of community spirit. Thus, fiestas held in honor of the patron saint that they themselves chose soon became the major activities of the settlement areas. The *Santacrusan*, *cenakulo*, and procession were attended by almost everybody. This provided the necessary respite from the hard and tedious life of a settler.

Barely a year after their arrival, Fr. Mercado, the current president of Notre Dame University in Cotabato City, relates that the Oblates opened their first school, the Notre Dame of Midsayap. Other parish schools followed in other areas. When

Notre Dame of Dulawan was opened, the community it served was about 90 percent Muslim and the school built the first mosque on campus for the Muslim students. A proliferation of Notre Dame schools continued to be built after 1946. The Notre Dame University (NDU) of Cotabato serves as the flagship school of the Oblates in Mindanao.

By 1941, the settlement areas came out promisingly productive and progressive. Irrigation systems (Silway irrigation was added to the earlier Klaja irrigation), roads and bridges, piggery and poultry projects, plantation of wide varieties of crops and vegetables, and efficient administration brought about the impressive economic progress of Koronadal Valley. Due to the generally peaceful interaction of the different ethnic groupings, a peaceful process of accommodation and acculturation took place. The land settlement project proved a success after the initial difficulties. On his first year of administration, General Santos reported to the Board of Directors of the NLSA in Manila:

We pass the first year of existence firm in the belief that we carried out to the best of our ability the objectives to which the NLSA was created. After one year of operation, we can say without hesitation that we have more than justified the expenditures incurred in the development of the Koronadal Valley Project.... We have peopled an otherwise empty valley. And built communities which are model of cleanliness, industry and peace. There is no question that they (the settlers) have found a better home than they left behind. We have proven to the skeptical people that the Filipino farmers can work in peaceful productivity in his community unhampered by vice which saps moral strength. Without doubt, this is the most practical application of the President's policy of social justice for it has given to the poor man who is willing to work a chance to earn a living through his own honest effort....

Hence, the Koronadal Valley Settlement that extended from Lagao to Marbel rose to a population of 11,016 by February 1941 due to the incessant arrival of new settlers and the families of old settlers who followed them in the settlement. The Municipal District of Buayan was a developing community in the south when the ugly specter of war appeared on the Philippine horizon. **B**

## **Bibliography**

### ***I. Primary Sources***

#### ***A. Interviews Conducted***

Aquino, Rafael, a long-time secretary of General Paulino Santos

Al-Habsi, Hassan Sarip, a relative of the first mayor of Buayan district

Arsenal, Juliet Engkong

Bulaong, Eusebio, one of the first batch of settlers

Corpuz, Carmen, a daughter of a migrant-settler who came in the early fifties

Diaz, Vic, a son of a settler who came in 1940

Domingo, Federico, a 1939 settler

Dulay, Eliseo, an NLSA employee

Gatdula, Manuel, son of the adopted daughter of Suikichi Kuruda

Gabales, Agustin, in an interview conducted by Annalita G. Jaralba

Jagna-an, Angela, one of the pioneering teachers of Dadiangas

Jandoc, Manuela, wife of the Japanese resident of Dadiangas

Hidalgo, Ella, daughter of an NLSA employee

Lagare, Cesar, brother of Ex-OIC Mayor Dominador Lagare

Lautengco, Jesus, a pioneering settler

Mamalumpong, Mamundas, a relative of Mayor Abedin

Natividad, Mamerto III, a member of the 116th Guerilla Regiment

Nacivalencia, Serafin, in an interview conducted by Delight C. Nantong

Non, Domingo, a local historian, in an informal interview.

Olarte, Alberto, one of the early Christian migrants to Dadiangas

Panadero, Eufemia, one of the pioneer teachers of Dadiangas

Rogan, Isaias, one of the pioneering settlers

Royeca, Jorge, a pioneering doctor of the settlement

Tito, Janena, a member of the royalty

Villano, Jesus, a retired PACD official

***B. Documents Taken from the Philippine National Library and Other Government Publications.***

Annual Report of the Provincial Governor of Cotabato, 1946-47 and 1950, Historical Data File, Reel No. 24, MCF Section, Filipiniana, National Library Manila City.

Census of the Philippines, 1903, 1918, 1939, 1948, 1960, 1970, and 1990.

Commonwealth Act No. 441.

Confidential Biographical Report on Major-General Paulino Santos, U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch.

Messages of the President, Commonwealth Government of the Philippines, Vol. 5, Part I.

Philippine (Commonwealth). National Information Office. Achievements of the Quezon Administration. Manila: National Printing Office, 1939.

Philippine (Commonwealth). Office of the Military Adviser. Report on National Defense in the Philippines. Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1936.

Quezon Papers, Vol. II, Series VIII, Provincial and Municipal File, Mindanao and Sulu, 1915-1935, Rare Book Section, Filipiniana, Philippine National Library, Manila City.

Quezon Papers, Vol. III. Executive Order No. 254, February 20, 1940 Revising Executive Order No. 195 dated March 13, 1939 establishing the classification of ports.

Report of the Investigation of the Koronadal Muddle, Manila, dated August 24, 1946 by Atty. Tomas E. Testa, investigator, submitted to the Chief of the Executive Office, Malacañang, Manila.

***II. SECONDARY SOURCES***

***A. Theses and Dissertations***

Acapulco, J. P. 1995. *The History of Migration of Tampakán, South Cotabato (1940 - 1950)*. Undergraduate thesis, Mindanao State University, General Santos City.

Buhisan, V. L. 1980. *The Socialization of the T'bolis in Kiamba, South Cotabato*. Thesis (M.A.), Silliman University, Dumaguete City.

Cosep, H. B. 1996. *The History of Klinan 6 Settlement (1940 - 1950)*. Undergraduate thesis. Mindanao State University, General Santos City.

- Munda, M. E. S. 1972. *The Socio-Economic Changes in the Lives of the Original Settlers in Koronadal Valley and Their Implications for Social Welfare*. Thesis (M.A.), The Philippine Women's University, Manila City.
- Sobrejuanite, J. M. 1996. *A Study of Historical Settlement of Caloocan, Koronadal, South Cotabato, 1940-1964*. A paper in History 198 submitted to Prof. Deogracias G. Romero, Mindanao State University, General Santos City.
- Suzuki, N. 1992. *Migration, Adaptation, and Ethnic Relations: A Case of Ilongo Christian Filipino Migrants in South Cotabato, Mindanao*. Thesis (M.A.) Asian Center, University of the Philippines.
- Wabe, A. V. undated. *Ang Kasaysayan ng Pagkaka-alis ng mga Katutubo sa Poblasyon Tupi, Timog Cotabato, Taon 1939-1953*. A paper in History 198 submitted to Prof. Deogracias G. Romero, Mindanao State University, General Santos City.

#### **B. Books and Other Sources**

- Aguilar, J. N. 1894. *Mindanao, Sus Historia y Geografia*. Madrid: Imprenta delCuerpo Administrativo del Ejercito.
- Alencon, F. 1870. *Lucon et Mindanao*. Paris: Michael Levi Frerer Editeura. Translated from French into English by Armando Malay, Jr, faculty member of the Institute of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines.
- Cavada, A. dela. 1876. *Historia Geografica, Geologica, Estadista*. Manila: Imprenta del Ramirez y Giraudier.
- Estember, E. D. 1966. Tabunaway and Mamalu. *UNITAS*, Vol. 39, No. 5, December.
- Eyre, J. K. 1938. Japan and the Philippines. *Philippines Social Science Review*, Vol. X, No. 1, February.
- Howe, F. 1938. Philippine Homestead Plans. *National Research Council of the Philippines Bulletin No. 17*. Manila: Bureau of Printing.
- Huke, R. E. 1963. *Shadows on the Land*. Manila: Carmelo E. Bauermann, Inc.
- Hunt, C. L. 1954. *Cotabato, Melting Pot of the Philippines*. Manila: UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines.

- Kasilag, M. 1938. *Policy of the Commonwealth Government Towards the Non-Christians in Mindanao and Sulu*. Manila: Institute of Pacific Relations.
- Lichauco, L. 1956. Land Settlement in the Philippines. *Land Tenure*. Edited by K.K. Parsons, et. al. Madison: University of Wisconsin.
- Millan, S. F. 1952. *Cotabato 1952 Guidebook*. Cotabato: Goodwill Press.
- Munda, A. undated. *The Last Days of General Santos*. Cotabato: Notre Dame Press.
- Pelzer, K. J. 1948. *Pioneer Settlement in the Asiatic Tropics*. New York: American Geographical Society.
- Ramirez, Teodolo. (1993). *The Southerner*. Davao City: Midtown Printing Co.
- Ramirez, T. undated. *Who is Who Databank, Vol. II*.
- Rodil, B.R. 1994. *The Minoritization of the Indigenous Communities of Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago*. Davao City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, Inc.
- Saleeby, N. M. 1904. *Studies on Moro History, Law and Religion*. Manila: Department of Interior.
- Silva, R. D. 1979. *Two Hills of the Same Land: Truth Behind the Mindanao Problem*. Iligan City: Mindanao - Sulu Critical Studies and Research Group.
- Wernstedt, F. L. and Spencer, J. E. 1967. *The Philippine Island World: A Physical, Cultural and Regional Geography*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.