CHAPTER II

PIONEERING IN THE COTABATO FRONTIER

To the great mass of people of Mindanao, no other event in its twentieth century history proved far ranging in its effect than the land settlement program of the government. Started by the Americans in 1913, the land settlement program opened the hitherto vast expanse of Mindanao to migration and large-scale transfer of people from the northern and central parts of the Philippine archipelago to the southern frontier of Mindanao and Sulu through the government-directed migration which would forever change the land and its people, the effects, both positive and negative, of which are keenly felt today.

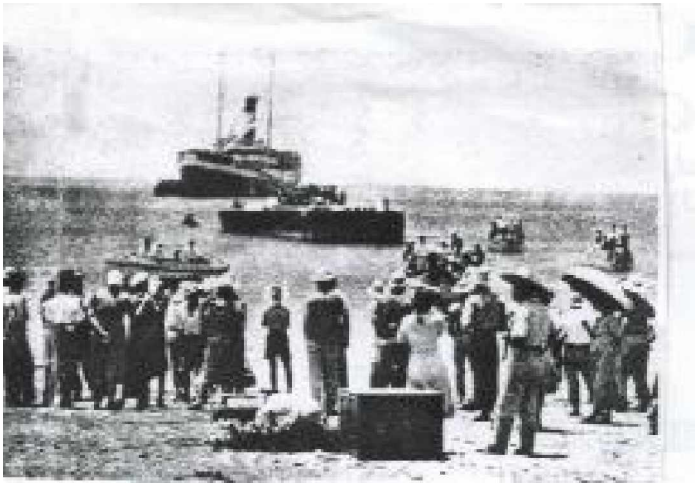

Fig. 4. Migrant-settlers arriving in the shores of Dadiangas, ca. 1939. Courtesy of NLSA, Pelzer, 1945.

Land Settlement to Mindanao

Pioneering in the frontier necessitates a certain spirit characterized by a strong determination to succeed. Nowhere was this proven than the story of a former mayor of Lambayong, a town in the province of Sultan Kudarat, who said:

> *"Cotabato in the twenties was a wilderness. This was the unoccupied land. Others went to settle in the northern seaboard. . . So I 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 Muslims. Datu Kusay succeeded because he not only conquered fear of the Muslims; he lived with the fearsome Muslims. In sociological parlance, he was able to traverse the ethnic boundary and became "one of them".

To Datu Kusay and countless others, the journey of hope to the wilderness was coupled with a sense of adventurism, the *"bahala na*" spirit, as well as the strong desire to work hard for a better tomorrow. This is popularly called the pioneering spirit. It was this spirit which also meant surviving the fear

of the Muslims, taming the jungle, overcoming loneliness, and finding solution to the depredations of the wild pigs, flood, drought, and the ubiquitous malaria. A 1952 account tells of a pre-1920 migrant-settler's experience:

> *"From thickly wooded forests and dense talahib 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)*

Malarial mosquitoes, monkeys, wild pigs, flood, drought, back-breaking job of clearing the jungle - experiences enough to discourage the hardest of souls. Thus, the pre-1920 colony administrators found themselves thinking of ways to enforce stringent measures to keep the colony from being de-colonized. "One such measure was the banning of the colonists from going to the market without a pass. Even then, they were closely watched" (Initan 1952: 268).

Government-sponsored settlement to Mindanao did not start until 1913. During the early years of the American era, the idea of settlement to Mindanao was privately led and disorganized. For instance, there was the proposal to settle the area with black Americans because these were thought more adaptable to the tropical climate than white Americans (Silva 1979: 35). Another proposal mentioned of lands in the Philippines to be organized into 200 colonies of 1,000 each or 100 colonies of 1,000 and 20 colonies of 5,000 each with the colonists provided $100 for transportation and $200 as loan in advance payable in ten years (Quezon Papers, Vol. II, Series VIII).

The American imperialist drive for the economic exploitation of Mindanao was seen from various proposals of liberalizing land laws and constant referrals of Mindanao plantation. By 1910, of the 97 major plantations of 100 hectares or more, 61 were owned by Americans, 19 by Europeans, 5 by Chinese and 12 by Filipinos (Christians and Moros) (Silva 1979).

Accordingly, this was made possible by the American public land policy in the Philippines. In 1902, in continuity of the regalian doctrine adopted by the Spaniards vis-à-vis lands in the Philippines, the United States Congress gave the Philippine government power to administer the extensive public lands for the benefit of the Filipinos. This same congress limited to 16 hectares the amount that could be acquired by any individual. This was in response to the opposition demand in the United States to prevent the Philippines from becoming a plantation colony. In accordance with the power granted the Philippine Government, the Public Land Act was passed on October 7, 1903 which introduced the homestead system into the Philippines, provided rules for the sale or lease of public lands and the confirmation of land titles. In 1919, Act No. 2874 limited the exploitation and utilization of public lands to Filipinos and American citizens and citizens of other countries who gave reciprocal rights to Filipinos. The new law increased to 24 instead of 16 hectares that an individual

could obtain through homestead and 100 hectares instead of 16 through purchase, the latter later increased to 144 hectares (Pelzer 1948: 132).

These land laws were proven to have worked against the interest of the indigenous communities. For instance, Act No. 718 passed on April 4, 1903 voided "land grants from Moro sultans or datos or from chiefs of Non-Christian tribes made without governmental authority or consent" (Tan 1995: 5). Rodil (1994) claims that this provision continues to be in effect to this day thereby providing basis for the Muslim and Lumad perception of injustice from the very government which is supposed to take care of its inhabitants' interests. Act 2874 mentioned earlier while increasing the allowable land by homestead from 16 to 24 hectares also provided a discriminatory provision stating that non-Christians was allowed an area "which shall not exceed ten hectares". By November 7, 1936 under the all-Filipino Commonwealth Government through Commonwealth Act No. 41, the privilege granted to settlers of owning more than one homestead at 24 hectares each was withdrawn and reverted to only one not exceeding 16 hectares. Ironically, the non-Christians who were earlier allowed a maximum of ten hectares were now permitted only four hectares (Rodil 1994: 30).

It was never explained why such inequity was committed against the indigenous peoples. What is clear is that this had contributed to the general feeling among the native communities of an unfeeling and uncaring government, just as foreign as the Spanish and American-run government. Thus, at the start of American rule in the country, the inequity of land laws continued the divergent historical paths for the different groups of people in the Cotabato frontier region.

Drought in Sulu and Zamboanga and grasshoppers in Davao which reduced rice production in 1911 and 1912 gave General Pershing of the Moro Province the excuse to call for the immediate importation of homesteaders from congested areas of the Philippines. The American 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 the soil in Cotabato. Fifty men responded to the call. They were given an initial capital and farm tools on loan basis. The clinching argument was the promise of eventually owning homestead (Rodil 1994).

One major aim, although not officially placed in the objectives of the agricultural colonization scheme, was the amalgamation of the Christian and Muslim sector as elucidated by Governor Carpenter of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu who said that: "the aim is the amalgamation of the Mohammedan and Christian native population into a homogeneous Filipino people". Thus, of the total 774 colonist families (3,809 men, women, and children), 427 were Visayan families and 347 were Muslim families. In the period 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 the southern coast in what is now the Sarangani Province; one in Lamitan, Basilan Island; and one in Momungan, Lanao del Norte (Pelzer 1948: 129).

Interestingly, in its social goal of showing that Muslims and Christians can live side by side in harmony with each other, the government considered the experiment a success. Notwithstanding this perceived success, the government failed to establish the foundation for a future harmonious relationship among the various groups of people in Mindanao by equitable laws.

The land settlement program suffered a hiatus after 1917. Starting 1918 the Bureau of Labor was delegated to establish the Inter-Island Migration

Division. The functions of this division included the recruitment of home seekers and dispatch them to Mindanao or other thinly populated areas in the country. However, Pelzer (1948) cited the lack of road improvements and survey of public lands as a major deterrent to the success of the program. Land settlement remained small as a result. But the idea of land settlement became an established policy that the Commonwealth Government would pursue with great vigor two decades later inaugurating a massive transfer of population from the north and central part of the country to the southern part during the period immediately before and after the war.

But why would people leave behind familiar home, friends, and family to unknown region? To get part of the answer, one pre-war settler of Koronadal Valley was made to tell his story.

In Search For A Better Tomorrow

To the surviving settlers, the pre-war NLSA supported land settlement scheme was a journey of hope - hope for a better tomorrow. It was an envisioned future where they and their children would be able to live a better life than before. As their stories show, hope for a better life proved a powerful motivation because as one psychologist says: "With hope, man acts, moves, achieves."

Reverend Federico Domingo: "Insult Should Motivate One to Greater Heights"

"When I was still single, I was well criticized by my relatives because I was lazy, landless and the poorest in the clan," thus begun Reverend Federico's account of the circumstances surrounding the decision to migrate. To Reverend Federico's mind, poverty and landlessness were interrelated. Thus, Karl J. Pelzer of the John Hopkins University, found out that the proportion of landless farmers in the Philippines was "astonishingly high" for a tropical country (Pelzer 1994: 86). This was confirmed by the 1939 census that placed farmers who were owners of land as less than 50 per cent and more than one-third as tenants.

Thus, for centuries, "land for the landless" had been the peasants' cry, and the hunger for land was one of our 'nation's most pressing problems." The plight of tenants - poorly clothed, poorly fed, poorly housed, and constantly in debt - set the conditions leading to social eruption. Hayden's study (1942) gave an excellent insight into Philippine tenancy, viz:

> *"who as tenant farmers, renters, or virtually landless workers eke out a miserable living from the rich Philippine soil. These people constitute a depressed minority which has been largely left behind in the march of Philippine progress. Astonishingly ignorant, for the most part unable to use effectively any language save their local dialects, and economically helpless, it is they who are the most complete victims of the local cacique, the remorseless usurer and the exploiting political or religious charlatans" (Taruc 1967: 12).*

Sta. Ignacia of Reverend Federico's youth was a sleepy, third class farming municipality in Tarlac - a hilly, rolling place where rice was planted only once a year. It was this once a year cropping which appeared contributory to the poverty of the farmers. The absence of irrigation prevented the raising of secondary crops during the dry season.

Typical of a boy belonging to a tenant family, poverty prevented the boy Federico from aiming for a higher education beyond grade seven. The lack of employment opportunities had him and his peers with nothing to do except "*barkada, inom, patambay-tambay sa kanto".* (*barkada*, drinks, loafing around). They did not really worry as long as there were drinks and something to eat. There was not much to look forward to but they were simple teenagers with simple joys.

But this happy-go-lucky life did not last long. The young Federico got married. Then awakening came and with awakening was the growing fear of the future. He now had a wife to take care of and after a year also a son. "I was so poor I only had three pairs of clothes: *pang-kasal, pang-okasyon, at pang-trabaho."* ("I was so poor I only had three pairs of clothes: one for wedding, my Sunday best, and my working clothes") "If I cannot afford to have more clothes, how can I feed my wife and children?" the thought crossed his mind as he stayed awake looking at his sleeping wife.

Then one day his fellow Tarlaqueño from the neighboring Camiling, General Paulino Santos, came to campaign for people who wish to own land to go to Mindanao. He was enticed by the thought of owning a land - not only one but twelve hectares! It was a dream comes true! Of course, there were a lot of apprehensions, the fear for their safety being uppermost in his mind. General Santos tried to allay his *kababayans'* fears by telling them: "gaya rin sila [the Moros] sa atin na nag-alala baka kaming mga sundalo ay mamamatay-tao". ("they are also like us who also fear that we the soldiers are killers")

The decision to leave familiar homes, relatives, and friends was not an easy one. While he had talked it over with his wife, the imminent departure made him jittery and unsure of his decision. The thought of leaving Sta. Ignacia for the first time to go to an unknown destination caused a lot of them to reevaluate their earlier decision to go. "Umalis *kami na malungkot at kakaunti na kami na tumuloy. 4 pamilla na lang kaming tiga Sta. Ignacia."* (Sadly we departed because there were only four families who pushed through with the plan to join the settlement"). But, despite the pain of departure the family man Federico set aside his fears and misgivings and off he went to Manila to await the boat which would bring them to Koronadal valley.

Their travel to Mindanao was a great adventure. "*Parang nawalang longkot namin dahil puno ang barko at halos Ilocano kami. Ang sakay naming barko ay Basilan, malaki siya at halos dalawang linggo kami sa daan. Masaya kami, magprogram kami gabigabi, may kantahan, sayawan, dito kami naghistoryahan hanggang dumating kami sa Saranggani, Dadiangas."* (Our sadness was lifted up because the boat was filled up with people, mostly Ilocanos like myself. Our boat, Basilan, was big and we travelled for two weeks. We entertained ourselves during the journey by singing, dancing, story telling until we reached Sarangani, Dadiangas.")

To the migrant Federico, the journey of hope prepared them for whatever lie ahead in the settlement area. Coupled with the understanding of the hard life awaiting anybody who dreamed of a better tomorrow was the willingness to work hard for that envisioned future.

On The Road to Koronadal Valley

The underlying theme in the story of Reverend Domingo was the general poverty and landlessness in the countryside. President Manuel L. Quezon took cognizance of this social problem in a statement in a press on January 22, 1937:

"If we are prepared to defend our country, we are free from foreign molestation; if we are just to our people, we will be free from internal rebellions" (Messages of the President, Vol. 5, Part I: 427-430). This statement is part of the social justice theme the president kept on hammering as a solution to sporadic outbursts of agrarian problem in Luzon.

During the first session of the National Assembly, President Quezon touched the national security concern as one of the justifications for the planned Mindanao migration enunciated within the general theme of development to Mindanao:

> *"The time has come when we should systematically proceed with and bring about colonization and economic development of Mindanao. A vast territory with its untapped natural resources is a temptation to interferring nations that are looking for an outlet for their excess population . . . If we resolved to conserve Mindanao for ourselves and our posterity, we must bend all efforts to occupy and develop it.*

The first three decades of the twentieth century witnessed three national security concerns, namely: the Japanese scare in Mindanao; the known Muslim distrust of Christian Filipino rule; and the persistent agrarian problem of the country rearing its ugly head in the Sakdal uprising of 1935. A short explanation of each concerns is attempted.

The Japanese scare was due to their perceived economic strength in Davao. In a study made by Quiason (1958), the Japanese were reported to hold 25,086 hectares of agricultural lands in Davao during the thirties, acquired either by lease or purchase in addition to another 22,000 hectares tilled by Japanese contractors leased from the Philippine government and private sector. In fact, as of 1937, the Japanese "ranked second in the whole province as evidenced by the impressive amount they invested in agriculture, commerce, and industry amounting to P375, 000.00 or 59% of the domestic taxes collected for the entire province" (Quiason 1958:221). Hayden (1933) went to the extent of calling Davao of the thirties as "primarily a Japanese achievement."

The Public Land Act of 1903, which permitted the sale or lease of public land, made the Japanese entrance in Davao possible. This allowed not only the Americans but also other nationalities as well in acquiring agricultural holdings in the country. The burst of nationalist concern was, however, primarily directed against the Japanese. An example was an article aptly titled: "Probable Steps That May Be Used by the Japanese". The steps mentioned were: "1) Japanese fishing vessels take a look; 2) Agriculturists follow the fishermen; 3) Then came the Japanese traders; 4) Japanese make friends with local leaders; 5) Stirring up trouble is the next move; 6) Moros break out in open revolt; 7) Battleships are rushed from Japan; and 8) A Moro Sultan becomes a Japanese puppet" (Stagg, *Philippine Free Press,* August 19, 1939: 2-3).

While appearing ridiculous, the hysteria on Japanese menace was understandable considering the Japanese adventurism in China and Manchuria during the same period. Nonetheless, despite suspicion on Japanese violation of Philippine laws, the Commonwealth government was not able to do anything against them.

Then there was the perceived distrust by Filipino Muslims of the Christian-controlled Filipino government. Public pronouncements made by

Muslim leaders were increasingly heard by the second decade of the twentieth century. For instance, in a conflict between Governor-General Wood and the Filipino leaders led by Quezon, the Muslims made a demonstration in Zamboanga on December 30, 1923 in support of the beleaguered American. A placard sign said: "Luzon and Visayas for the Filipinos; Mindanao, Sulu, for the Muslims. Long Live General Wood!" (Mayo 1925: 315) Their use of the term Filipinos when referring to Christians and Muslims when referring to themselves is very revealing indeed.

More opposition to Christian rule reverberated throughout Mindanao and Sulu before 1935. In 1926, Datu Maulana of Jolo declared that American rule was "the only hope for equality and justice for the Muslims." In Lanao, Muslim leaders went to the extent of petitioning the American governor-general to allow them to remain under American rule "forever" because they have no faith in "christian Filipinos treating them with equal justice." The Dansalan Declaration forged by the leading datus, hajis, and kalis of Lanao protested against the inclusion of Mindanao and Sulu in the future Republic of the Philippines and expressing desire for a continuous guidance and protection of the American government. The unfortunate interpretation of Filipinization to mean government position being turned over to Filipinos (read Christian Filipinos) even in Lumad and Christian territories led to a feeling of insecurity on the side of the Muslims. Thus, as expressed by Sultan Alaoya Alonto of Lanao in a metaphor:

> *" The Moro people want to set their house in order but how can they when the very key to their own house is not in their possession and perhaps the Moros may be locked in their hands. Those of you who are accustomed to witness the native son of the province conducting the affairs of your own people will surely understand what it means to be governed by "Outsiders" and "Intruders" who do not have even command of the dialect of the people to be governed" (Thomas 1971: 269-279).*

Muslim restlessness a few decades before the establishment of the Commonwealth Government indicated the entrenchment of the cultural divide which divided the two groups of people. However, our earlier discussion appear to justifiy the Muslim and other indigenous inhabitants' feeling of neglect and alienation from the government. Through the centuries, they progressively moved on from being a recalcitrant enemy during the Spanish period to a special problem child during the American period and finally as an ignored second class Filipino during the Commonwealth period.

In an incisive study on the Muslims by Peter G. Gowing (1979), it was mentioned that President Quezon's third priority was the "welfare of the Moro inhabitants which he elaborated:

> *"We are giving our Mohammedan brothers the best government they ever had and we are showing them our devoted interest in their welfare and advancement. In truth they are giving us their full cooperation. Let us at the same reserve for them in their respective localities such land of the public domain as they may need for their well-being. Let us at the same time place in the unoccupied lands of that region*

> *industrious Filipinos from other provinces of the archipelago, so that they may live "together in perfect harmony and brotherhood" (Gowing 1979: 176).*

Gowing noted that the Muslims, despite these presidential pronouncements, were "hard put" in identifying specific evidences of the government concern for their welfare. Evidences were not available. On the contrary, while the placing of "industrious Filipinos from other provinces of the archipelago" was set in motion with the passage of Commonwealth Act No. 441, the reservation for the Muslims "in their respective localities such land of the public domain as they may need for their well-being" was apparently forgotten. The concern for national security and economic development had so preoccupied the Commonwealth officials that they had neither time nor inclination to think of the third priority. This was duly noted by Pelzer (1948) who commented that in the search for a settlement area by the reconnaissance survey team in November 1938, only verbal assurances were made by the leader of the team (General Paulino Santos) to the Muslim inhabitants promising respect of their rights to their lands. Such government neglect was not helpful at all in allaying the restiveness of the native inhabitants in Mindanao and Sulu.

Prior to the establishment of the Commonwealth government, the passage of Legislative Act No. 4197 (Quirino-Recto Colonization Act) indicated that the American government had not abandoned the opening up of Mindanao to Christian settlers and with it American corporations, as well. What is significant is the cognizance by Act 4197 of the shortcomings of the earlier settlement programs by providing for a well funded, well-planned, and well-selected sites and settlers.

Moreover, the advent of the Commonwealth led to the sidelining of the Quirino-Recto Colonization Act. Commonwealth Act No. 18, passed on January 2, 1936, says Pelzer (1948), diverted the one million pesos allotted for the implementation of Act 4197 for the construction of roads and bridges and public surveying. This greatly improved the road condition in Mindanao as expressed by Dr. Stanton Youngberg, a member of the Mindanao Exploration Commission who found Mindanao of May 1939:

> *"Then there were only disconnected strips of road in the different provinces, most of which started on the coast and ended somewhere in particular. Now, one can travel by automobile from Surigao at the north-eastern tip of the island through Agusan, Oriental Misamis, Lanao, Cotabato, and Davao, a distance of seven hundred kilometers" (Pelzer 1948: 132).*

While road building was ongoing, fresh proposals were received, the most important of which were the Silayan Plan and the Howe Plan. Hilarion S. Silayan was the director of the Bureau of Plant Industry while Frederic Howe was the economic adviser to the president. The Silayan Plan called for an elaborate preparation which included prior survey and subdivision of land before settlement was to take place; prior preparation of the settlement site by constructing houses and irrigation before the arrival of settlers; proper screening of applicants to see that only those who can withstand the rigors of pioneering life may be accepted; and provision of enough funds and support in the form of credit, technical advice, health services, and other things necessary for a community life. 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, well-placed road, family farms which the settlers will pay on a long term basis and which settlers can neither mortgage or sell within a specified period of time. As the two proposals show, the planned settlement scheme was unlike previous programs in terms of government support and preparation.

After receipt of various proposals on land settlement, President Quezon appointed a special three-man committee composed of the Secretaries of Interior (Rafael R. Alunan), Finance (Manuel Roxas), and Agriculture and Commerce (Benigno S. Aquino) to organize the National Land Settlement Administration. Finding the bill organizing the NLSA subjected to intense debate in the National Assembly and harassed by requests for a projected colony for Jewish refugees from Europe led to a hasty implementation of the land settlement program. The official reason given for the haste 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. Earlier, a reconnaissance mission was sent to search for possible sites, which recommended Koronadal Valley and the Compostela - Monkayo districts as resettlement sites. On February 11, 1939 President Quezon issued Proclamation Nos. 383 and 384 which provided for the reservation of the two recommended districts as resettlement sites.

Similar haste was observed in the appointment of General Paulino Santos as NLSA manager. Executive Order No. 179 dated December 31, 1938 relieved Major-General Paulino Santos as Chief of Staff of the Army of the Philippines (Messages of the President, vol. 5, Part I: 427-430). By January, he was appointed manager of the NLSA Koronadal project. Subsequently, the energetic General Santos went to work. The recruitment of personnel of the NLSA was immediately undertaken followed by the campaign for, interview and recruitment of prospective settlers. To speed up the recruitment process, the first batch of settlers was 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 most of the recommendations by the NEC Director Manuel Roxas, viz:

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.

To attain the aforementioned objectives the National Land Settlement Administration, a government corporation, was empowered to hold public agricultural land for 25 years with possible renewal for another period of the same length. It could further recommend to the President the reservation of public land for settlement projects. Such land was to be surveyed, cleared, prepared for cultivation, and assigned to settlers in parcels not exceeding 24 hectares. The corporation was also empowered to establish and operate

electric- light and water-supply plants, irrigation systems, and trading stores and to engage in variety of activities like manufacturing, milling, lumbering, and other enterprises considered necessary for the success of its undertaking (Standard Contract Between the Settler and NLSA).

Unfortunately, the haste stood in the way of the prior preparation of land, which was supposed to be "surveyed, cleared, prepared for cultivation, and assigned to settlers". While the first batch of settlers landed in Koronadal Valley in February 1939, the surveyors arrived in December, ten months later! This constituted the first major crisis of the settlement.

A Board of Directors composed of five persons appointed by the President with the consent of the National Assembly for a three-year term managed the NLSA. The first members of the Board of Directors were: Rafael R. Alunan, Secretary of Interior, chairman; Manuel Roxas, Secretary of Finance; Benigno S. Aquino, Secretary of Agriculture and Commerce; Jose Avelino, Secretary of Labor; and Ramon Roces, Manila publisher. The Board of Directors appointed Major General Paulino Santos, former Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army, as manager. General Santos' experiences in the development of agricultural penal colonies making penal colonies self-supporting and his innovative approaches of introducing vocational training and modern farming technique to young recruits appeared the major considerations in his choice. It was also bruited about that he was the personal choice of President Quezon having personal knowledge of him as the President's former aide-de-camp. The manager, in turn, appointed the technical, clerical, and other personnel whose salaries did not exceed 2,400 pesos a year. The central office was in Manila.

The capital of the NLSA amounting to 20 million pesos was to be taken from the coconut-oil excise tax fund in appropriations not exceeding 4 million pesos annually. The manager was required to submit an annual report and a balance sheet to the President and the National Assembly.

There was strict screening for settlers as shown by the account of a surviving first batch settler (Mr. Jesus Lautengco) who was rejected by Professor Raymundo, but whose persistence led him to see General Santos personally to convince the general that his being a student of a technical school should be considered. Among the requirements for a settler included Filipino or American citizenship, of legal age, preferably not over 40, married and with children. They, and their dependents, should be healthy and fit for a pioneering life; should have some agricultural experience; and should be of good character and reputation. Mr. Lautengco's disqualification was his lack of agricultural experience. However, President Quezon's verbal instruction to accept all persons presenting themselves as settler if they seemed to fulfill the qualifications worked in Mr. Lautengco's favor. Besides, there were the families from other provinces of Mindanao and from other islands who moved to the settlement districts at their own expense that made careful screening of settlers difficult.

The main obligations of the settler were: to plant and cultivate the land given to him, following the prescribed plants by the administration; to devote himself to this exclusively and not to engage in any other trade or occupation without the approval of the administration; not to transfer his land in any way, except by bequest, to any other person for the first ten years after receipt of the title to the land; to reimburse the administration within 20 years, at 4 per cent interest, for the transportation, building materials, food, and clothing that he might receive; to deposit all of his surplus products in administration warehouses for sale through the administration.

Thus, one can see that the agricultural colonization scheme also necessitated a tight control on the activities of the settlers, a throwback on the pre-1920 land settlement experiences in Cotabato. A former Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army appeared an ideal choice, especially one who had proven himself as a former Director of the Bureau of Prisons under whose term the penal colonies became self-sufficient. Besides, the word "security" would appear synonymous with the word "military". Those were the half-forgotten days when a military man evoked the feelings of safety and security among the people.

The prohibition to engage in any other trade and occupation and allowing the transfer of land in any way other than bequest were safeguards to prevent speculation in the settlement area believed detrimental to the settlers' interests.

The obligations of the NLSA to the settlers, on the other hand, included the following: to advance the cost of transporting the settler, his family, and his belongings; to assign to him a parcel of 12 hectares of agricultural land; to supply him, on a credit basis, with building materials, food until he should become self-sufficient, the use of machinery, planting material and fertilizer, livestock, and agricultural implements; to sell on his behalf the products deposited by him in the administration warehouses; and to give him full title to the land after all obligations should have been met. Furthermore, payments were to begin only after the third year and were not to exceed 30 per cent of the proceeds of the sales made through the administration.

The Journey of Hope to Koronadal Valley

To the settlers who joined the settlement project, their travel from Manila to Koronadal Valley was a journey of hope - hope for a better tomorrow. Taken from the diary of General Paulino Santos, the following account was relived many times every foundation day of the city in commemoration of the arrival of the first batch of Commonwealth-sponsored settlers.

By February 22, the S/S Basilan was in North Harbor awaiting departure for Koronadal. But as explained by Reverend Domingo: *"Mahirap talaga ang lumisan. Ang mga kamag-anak ay nagsi-iyakan. . . Totoong napakalayo ang Mindanaw.*" ("Departure was indeed difficult. Our relatives were sad. Mindanao was so far away"). Thus, while there were a lot of names on the list, there were less than the expected numbers during the day of the departure because "the others made excuses that they would follow later."

The first port of call was Cebu. It took them two days to reach Cebu in the morning of February 24. It is apparent from the accounts that migration to Mindanao had taken an unstoppable movement of its own with several hundred people from Antique, Bohol, and other parts of Visayas bound for Davao and Cotabato taking the boat in Cebu port.

By 11:00 a.m. of February 26, S/S Basilan anchored at the mouth of Cotabato River where a radiogram was sent to Governor Sobrecarey and Mayor Artiaga of Davao where a request for assistance was made for and in behalf of Miss Catherine Porter of the Institute of Pacific Relations who was scheduled to visit the Davao Penal colony. The poor Miss Porter was wrongly thought of as the General's paramour! Indeed, the predominantly male settlers had had a field day discussing about the General and his visitor.

In keeping with the significance attached to the coming of the first batch of settlers to Koronadal Valley, no less than the governor of the province of Cotabato welcomed the newcomers. The settlers who came to Buayan district earlier in the 20s led by Don Paco Natividad were also around to welcome them.

The newcomers saw "lonely stretches of shorelines . . . a few roughly built huts. . . cogon lands . . . the vast emptiness of the surrounding reaching out to the very foot of the brooding hills and mist shrouded mountains." Nonetheless, the sixty two settlers, five dependents, and fourteen NLSA employees who landed on Sarangani Bay on February 27, 1939 were too busy unloading equipment and supplies and storing them in the temporary warehouse furnished by several residents of Dadiangas. For the new arrivals, there was no time to contemplate on the loneliness and isolation of the surroundings.

Interestingly, the diary of General Santos failed to mention that on the first night many slept on the ground under an open sky while some of the officials and employees slept in the house of Mr. Gerodias and Don Paco. All that the general wrote in his diary was: "At night, everybody was properly sheltered and each one enjoyed a peaceful and sound sleep."

At 4:00 a.m. the following day the general to start the day's work awakened everybody. Life in the pioneering region had begun . . .

Fig. 5. A settler's house with Mt. Matutum at the background