

Chapter VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Serving as a background to this study is a short description of the Empire Province of Cotabato before the advent of the resettlement program of the government to best appreciate the social processes involved in the community formation. The old Cotabato had a rich cultural heritage distinguished from much of the Philippines by a strong religious bond - Islam. The rich cultural heritage was established amidst favorable ecological characteristics of an extensive area of plains and a typhoon-free climate favorable to the development of agriculture; its riverine and coastal locale whose nurturing power brought forth settlements based on both agriculture and trade; and its people who fashioned a socio-cultural and economic structure strong enough to maintain its independence from Spanish intrusion.

Islam, being the first exogenous religion introduced to the Philippine archipelago, led to the formation of an advanced socio-cultural and economic structure in Cotabato, the sultanate system. This strong Islamic heritage accounts for Cotabato's resilience and strength in dealing with Spanish challenge. Under the leadership of the sultanates, the Cotabato world put up a spirited resistance against the Spaniards and was generally successful despite their eventual loss of power and resources by the mid-19th century.

Caught in the entangled web of Spanish-Moro conflict were the Christianized natives of Luzon and Visayas and the Muslims of southern Philippines. The most tangible result of the Spanish war of conquest and attempts at Christianization was the historical and cultural divide which isolated southern Philippines from the Westernizing influence of Spanish rule. Despite Mindanao's later administrative incorporation into the Philippine state system made possible by the subtler ways of the more clever Americans, such divide persists until today.

But where the Christians of northern and central Philippines and the Muslims of the south remained geographically separated from each other, such divide would simply be shrugged off as an aspect of ethnic differences. Moreover, the American imperialist drive to exploit its conquered territories led to the passage of land laws which opened up Mindanao both as a plantation and migration area. The former benefited mostly American corporations, the latter, the landless Filipinos from the northern and central parts of the Philippine archipelago. Thus, the resettlement program of the government brought together in one geographical zone the people who were traditionally divided from each other. The early American experiment of establishing agricultural colonies in Cotabato, although economically a failure, showed a promise that the two cultural groups, the Muslims and the Christians, could live together in peace. An important lesson is learned from the Cotabato experience: that much of historical divide was a product not of actual interaction but of Spanish propaganda.

Relatively unheard of were the various non-Muslim groups living in Cotabato who retained their distinctive ways of life in a system of alliances and trade with the lowland and coastal Magindanaos. Thus, the resettlement program of the government inaugurated by the Americans in 1913 and pursued vigorously by the Commonwealth government starting 1939 brought three

autonomous cultural groups together. Viewed on another level, such meeting is the encounter of two worlds - the Christian and the indigenous worlds.

The setting for a meeting of cultures was a narrow plain located between Sarangani Bay in the south and Lake Buluan in the north, the "fertile cogonal and marshy valley of Koronadal". Southern Koronadal, called Buayan, was the least inhabited area before settlement days with most of the original inhabitants (Muslims and Lumads) found more numerous in the middle and northern Koronadal. Due to its dry climate, Southern Koronadal was not a favored place for settlement. Moreover, viewed as an extension of the Maguindanao world, *Sugod-a-Buayan* (Sarangani Bay area), was an important place for a domales activity, "to camp and to picnic" where salt-making and fishing activities were done. During the NLSA days, Buayan's location at the headwaters of Sarangani Bay made it the natural exit and entry points for Koronadal - Allah Valleys figuring prominently in the decision to make Buayan the NLSA headquarter in Mindanao as well as the site of the first settlement area, Lagao.

Symptomatic of their understanding of the meaning of Christian arrival to their ancestral lands, the Muslims raised the issue of land rights when they met the survey party looking for a suitable site for the Commonwealth-sponsored resettlement program. When verbally assured of their rights to their lands, they accepted the Christian coming with Muslim leaders even providing protection to the settlers. The enticement of material benefits to be derived from the settlement program like school, infrastructure, hospital, roads, etc. helped in the early welcome accorded the newcomers. The Lumads, on the other hand, quietly retreated to distant places when they saw the Christian settlers occupying their vast hunting and fishing grounds.

With a framework of peaceful accommodation established at the time of initial contact, gradual acculturation took place. While the magnitude of cultural borrowings of the Christian material culture made by the indigenous inhabitants was tremendous, however, cultural borrowing was not confined to one group. The newcomers to Mindanao, the migrant-settlers, also learned techniques of survival in a pioneering condition such as the trapping of wild animals and birds, the tapping of water from the trees where no potable water was available, and the adoption of native crops found more suitable to the area's distinct ecological characteristics from the indigenous inhabitants. Thus, acculturation, being gradual and based on a perceived mutuality of interest, was smooth.

The establishment of the settlement areas in their midst introduced new ways, new people, new economic system and new values. But more than any other factor, it was the peaceful process of accommodation and interaction between the original inhabitants and the newcomers which facilitated the successful land settlement program. The initial framework of contact held out even during the Japanese occupation especially since all inhabitants of the valley were similarly treated by the Japanese. What is significant in the Muslim-Christian-Lumad relationship during the war was the warning given by guerilla leader Salipada Pendatun to lawless elements coming from among the native population that they would answer to him for any wrongdoing done to the Christian settlers who evacuated to interior areas with the Japanese coming. However, the imperatives of personal survival led to the ebb of community spirit within the settlement area with the NLSA losing its moral ascendancy to lead the people. The death of Sarip Abedin and General Paulino Santos, the two leaders of pre-war Buayan, led to an anguished search for ways to survive the occupation sans the guiding hands of their leaders .

The post-war period brought a change in the pattern of relationship between the three autonomous groups. Migrants came no longer in trickles but already as onrushing tide tilting the demographic balance in favor of the newcomers. The creation of a cultural majority made the Christian way as the prevailing norm. The Muslims and the Lumads had varying reactions to these developments. The Muslims reacted by moving nearer to settlement areas and laying claim to the previous *domales* area. Thus, the raising of the level of ethnic consciousness among the Muslims led to the race for laying claim and / or buying lands outside Lagao district in competition with Christians who started acquiring lands outside the settlement districts. The movement of the two cultural groups converging in areas outside the settlement districts brought them closer to the B'laans who found they could withdraw no further. Thus, the convergence of the three cultural groups producing a real melting pot community in the southern part of Koronadal after the war.

Excluding the modern times, the following "turning points" in the history of General Santos City are identified as: (1) the incipient period characterized by the meeting of the three autonomous cultural groups occasioned by the land settlement project of the Commonwealth government; (2) the Japanese occupation which delivered a blow to the emerging community; (3) the liberation period which provided the libertarian condition for migrant settlers to grow both individually and as a community; and (4) the period of the 60s which provided the infrastructure for growth anchored on economic development.

1. The Incipient Period and the Emerging Community

The various settlement areas (Lagao, Marbel, Tupi and Polomolok) became the Christian enclave in the area peopled by the indigenous inhabitants. The incipient period shows the newcomers to the valley and the original inhabitants of Buayan defining their relationship with each other characterized by a "conscious effort" to accommodate each other. Moreover, the process of peaceful accommodation and gradual acculturation happened while the three autonomous but interacting cultural communities were physically segregated from each other by the boundaries which separated the settlement districts from the larger community. In these settlement districts the migrants lived their own lives, preoccupied with their own affairs, while the original inhabitants preferred to stay in their own neighborhoods leading their own lives.

The newcomers to the valley, assured of security brought about by the peaceful process of accommodation, fashioned their own community following closely the guidelines set by the NLSA management. These guidelines show a settlement area that was closely controlled by General Paulino Santos, dubbed the father of the community. Moreover, the practice of regular consultation and discussion on issues affecting the settlement districts neutralized the "semi-militaristic" way of the leader of the settlement district. With settlers coming from different parts of the country, it was in these meetings that ethnic differences were threshed out showing the "conscious efforts" of attaining community solidarity.

In this environment of security, the settlement areas were able to develop well-defined political structures. Each of the four settlement districts earlier mentioned had one town which served as the administrative and economic center around which the barrios were located. Each district was under an

overseer and a staff of assistants appointed by the general manager. But it was in the barrio level that the democratic practice of consultation took place including the choice of barrio lieutenants and assistant barrio lieutenants, contributing to the establishment of a strong foundation for civic consciousness, self-reliance and a strong government-private sector involvement.

No such parallel development happened in the communities of the Lumads and the Muslims. Both groups preserved the traditional manner of political organization with traditional leaders (the *datu*) continuing their dominance in Buayan affairs. Moreover, it was in the economic field that constant interaction took place among the different cultural groups besides personal relationships which some were able to develop. Thus, the market place became an enduring sites of interaction.

In political leadership, there was the sharing of power in Buayan between General Paulino Santos and Sarip Zainal Abedin, with the former in-charge of the settlers in the settlement districts and the latter, the original inhabitants in areas outside the settlement areas. The good relationship between the original inhabitants and the newcomers to the valley could be traced to the relationship of these two leaders. Moreover, the presence of infrastructure like roads, irrigation, bridges, and buildings in the settlement areas, and their lack or absence in outlying communities show the apparent neglect on the part of the government in looking after the well-being of far-flung areas of the country, particularly those areas peopled by indigenous inhabitants.

2. The Emerging Community in Disarray

The Japanese coming to Koronadal Valley caused massive evacuation by the people, settlers and native inhabitants alike, from Buayan into the interior places. The strongest disruption occurred in Buayan due to its proximity to Sarangani Bay.

To the settlers, especially the new arrivals who had no produce yet and were still relying on government support, the most significant effect of Japanese occupation was the termination of government support. The initial community spirit was not yet strong enough to withstand the pressure of fear, insecurity and hunger. Thus, the conscious effort of building a community suffered a setback with community spirit taking a back seat in favor of personal survival. It should be recalled that the crack in community solidarity dates back to the Japanese occupation. This manifested after the liberation, formalized in a formal complaint by some settlers who organized themselves into the United Settlers Movement. It was one of the early charges of corruption directed against a government agency during this period.

Compared with other regions of the country, Buayan lived more or less a peaceful and normal life during the Japanese period. This condition was attributed to at least two factors: one, the decision of the leadership to "play ball" with the Japanese in order to protect the gains of the community and its people; and second, the hospitality of the area attributed to the presence of plenty of food within the settlement area, the "play ball" attitude exhibited by the NLSA officials, and the lack of an aggressive guerilla organization in the southern part of Cotabato. This stands in sharp contrast to North Cotabato's fighting stance against the Japanese under the leadership of the intrepid guerilla leaders Salipada K. Pendatun and Datu Udtog Matalam.

The Japanese occupation was remembered due to the departure from the scene of its important personalities which include General Paulino Santos, Sarip Abedin and the Japanese Kuroda. Japanese occupation finally ended on August 11, 1945 with the surrender of 1,700 Japanese trapped at Klaja- Konel, their last stronghold in the valley.

3. Liberation From Dependency

An important development after the war was the abolition of the NLSA with its absorption into the LASEDECO in 1950. Four years later, the LASEDECO itself was also abolished. The establishment of regular political units in hereto settlement areas set the conditions which liberated the settlers from any legal constraints emanating from the contract which they signed when they became settlers. At the same time, this libertarian condition forced the settlers to be self-reliant at the earliest possible time.

4. The Foundation For A “Booming Economy”

The inability of the NLSA to lead in post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction caused the inhabitants of Buayan district to turn to the Municipal district of Buayan for leadership. The settlers' participation in the political life of Buayan introduced the “politics of number” into play with the demographically dominant newcomers taking over the political leadership of the Municipal District of Buayan. The Christian sector's linkage with the national government may have led to local participation in national party politics. In fact, the first post-war appointed mayor was the campaign manager of President Roxas in Koronadal Valley. Thus, at this point in time Buayan ceased to be an extension of the Maguindanao world.

The new socio-political order was manifested by the change of the ancient name Buayan to General Santos in 1954 and the separation of the province of South Cotabato from the Empire Province of Cotabato.

The 60s was a turning point in the history of Buayan due to several reasons. Firstly, the foundation for a booming economy was put in place with Buayan, renamed General Santos, enjoying comparative advantage owing to its inherent potential for development. Its strategic location and accessibility made it the natural converging point for people and goods coming from its rich hinterland composed of the provinces of South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and Davao del Sur. Secondly, the diversity of its economic activities caused by its vast pasture land and rich marine and agricultural resources. Finally, the “boom town” spirit of its people strengthened across time by the peaceful process of accommodation and interaction among and between the occupants of the southern Koronadal Valley.

The undeniable economic progress of General Santos City is seen in its dynamic growth from a fourth class city in 1965 to a first class city 10 years later. Twelve years after, propelled by the “phenomenal growth of its fishing industry,” the city posted an income of forty six million pesos.

B. Conclusion: Trends and Prospects

The most significant development of the post-EDSA period is the creation of a growth area in southern Mindanao known as the SOCSARGEN, an acronym for South Cotabato, Sarangani and General Santos City. The birth of

SOCSARGEN as a growth area is a post-EDSA phenomenon which, together with the CALABARZON, Panay, Samar and the Iligan-Cagayan de Oro Growth Corridor, became the government's projects under the Philippine Aid Plan (PAP). The tremendous potential of the SOCSARGEN growth corridor is shown by its being first or second in the production of at least eight commodities which include corn, cotton, rice, pineapple, livestock, fisheries, coconuts and copra.

The role of General Santos City in the growth corridor is primarily caused by its cosmopolitan people whose diverse ethnic origin and a tradition of peaceful co-existence with each other produced a tolerant and open outlook, an enterprising spirit expressed by the term "boom town," and a tradition of a strong government-private sector cooperation and collaboration. Besides its people, the following are the city's plus factors: its strategic location and accessibility as the gateway to the rich hinterland; the diversity of its economic activities caused by its vast pasture land; and its rich marine and agricultural resources. What may be considered a monumental development in the 90s for the SOCSARGEN is the advocacy of the East ASEAN Growth Area (EAGA) in conjunction with the government's strategy of promoting trade with other countries. Davao City and General Santos City are identified as participating growth areas in the dynamic BIMP-EAGA economic complementation projects. Culturally, the significance of the EAGA concept is the revival of the long history of historical linkage of Cotabato with its neighbors in island Southeast Asia.

Basic problems remain for the young city occasioned by rapid growth and urbanization. Nonetheless, the track record of the people of this area who were able to retain the basic framework of peaceful accommodation even during the turbulent years of the 70s makes one confident that they would be able to overcome these challenges of the modern era.

Based on the foregoing, the major findings of this study are the following:

1. The desire for a better life was a common motivating factor which led to the decision of the migrant settler to join the Commonwealth-sponsored settlement to Koronadal Valley. Hope for a better life was expressed in various ways, some of which were the following: "to own land"; "alleviation of one's condition"; "employment and business opportunities"; and "presence of relatives". Hope, therefore, was a strong motivating factor which caused the settlers of Koronadal-Allah Valleys to migrate to Mindanao.
2. The geographical characteristics of Southern Koronadal facilitated its leadership status among the various settlement areas of the Koronadal - Allah Valley project. Among these basic ecological characteristics are the following: strategic location, easy accessibility, naturally safe harbor, a typhoon - free climate, and the ready accessibility of the rich fishing grounds of Mindanao and Celebes Sea. These geographical characteristics provided the infrastructure favorable for its growth and development.
3. But more than the aforementioned geographical characteristics, the main architect in the formation of the community were its people whose interaction with one another, with the environment and with the outside world largely defined the community.

4. The community which emerged was a melting pot of different groups in the country. The “melting pot”, as the converging point not only of the different ethnic groupings but also of three distinct autonomous interacting cultural groups, brought about the development of an open and tolerant people. Likewise, the mutual adjustment and cooperation among and between the occupants of the valley helped in the development of a strong government - private sector collaboration which found expression in the term “boom town” Dadiangas.
5. In the cultural activities of the people, the “melting pot” concept manifested itself with no one culture predominating over other groups. This was seen from a mixed language - a Tagalog-Visayan-Hiligaynon hybrid language.
6. The social processes involved in the process of interaction in the area of study are accommodation, assimilation, and acculturation. What the eventual direction would be vis-a-vis the Lumads, whether towards assimilation or towards cultural pluralism, would depend upon the cultural majority who now determines the prevailing norms. Also, whether the disturbing signs of revivalism of the historical divide between the Muslims and the Christians would lead to eventual social disunity would again be determined by the people involved in the process of interaction. Much work has to be done by all groups to maintain the peaceful process of accommodation which they successfully established from the beginning of contact.

C. Areas For Future Research

It is clear that the attempt to forge a communion between history and culture by focusing on what people were able to build and create through shared definitions and meanings was made possible not by one methodological strategy alone. The inter-disciplinary approach in undertaking local historical studies is the paper's major contribution to research. The etically derived information of the researcher taken from primary and secondary sources complemented by the emic perspectives largely derived from interviews and personal accounts were found useful in this study. A hybrid research methodology, then, is recommended for a socio-historical study of this kind.

But as this study also deals with migration, albeit on a peripheral level, a more in - depth study is needed not only for Southern Koronadal but for the entire Koronadal-Allah Valleys as well. A wealth of materials awaits future researchers interested in both community and migration studies. The time to undertake research on the Commonwealth - sponsored settlement is **now** while many of the participants of the process of migration are still alive.

With the young city experiencing social problems brought about by too rapid urbanization, this specific research undertaking proposes that a more in-depth study on urbanization be conducted to be able to come up with a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the government's ecological policy and practices.

This could be General Santos City's contribution to urbanization issues.