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Land Resettlement Policies in Colonial and PostColonial Philippines: Key to Current Insurgencies and Climate Disasters in its Southern Mindanao Island

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Abstract

American colonial policies aimed at increasing crop production, among others focused on opening up frontiers in Mindanao, southern Philippines. The settlement of its virgin lands through homesteading was considered the most contentious as it depleted government resources resulting to its abortion after almost seven years of implementation. However, the native Filipino leadership from Quezon up to Magsaysay regime considered that this form of resettlement not only answered the problems of economic development but also the peasant and labor unrests of the North and Central Philippines. Hence, the benefits, from the government's point of view, would eventually outweigh the costs of resettlement. Current insurgencies in the South such as that of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New People's Army are attributed to the land laws started by the American colonizers such as that of Homesteading. It was averred by Moro scholars that resettlement had displaced the Mindanaoans such that land conflicts had become inevitable. It is also a common notion that the government solution to the problems of the landless farmers of the North and Central Philippines had created a bigger problem in the South. The depletion of the frontier lands became not only a political disaster creating insurgencies but also ecological/environmental crises. Using archival and oral history, this paper seeks to answer the following: To what extent has the Philippine government's adoption of colonial land policies such as homesteading, including its current land reform program (which are its answers to problems of landlessness) were exploited by big vested interests? Does resettlement hold the key to native-settler land disputes? Is homesteading by landless farmer effectively answer underdevelopment? What were the implications of these to political and ecological climate of the South?

Introduction

The second biggest island in the Philippines, Mindanao, has for the past three years been in the radar of national dailies : First- because of the stalled peace process between the government and the MILF(Moro Islamic Liberation Front) due to the Mamasapano Incident. It was a botched operation that succeeded in the capture and assassination of Marwan, and international terrorist but at the cost the lives of 44 Special Action Forces of the Philippine National Police last January 25 at Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Apart from this are current intermittent New People's Army, another insurgent force, attacks on government forces in the eastern portion of the Island; and , Second the vulnerability of the island to typhoons- the most serious of which were the typhoon Sendong/Washi of December 17, 2011 and typhoon Pablo/Bopha of December 3,2012 that devastated lives and properties of the inhabitants of Northern and Southeastern Mindanao. For the Mindanaoans these events were not only economically damaging but also socially and psychologically damaging as well. Mindanao has been stereotyped as the country's sore thumb where problems of peace and order are chronic and at the same time the place where the poorest of poor in the country are found.

Taking history as the take off point this paper argues that homesteading, as core land distribution policy with its attendant resettlement projects introduced by the Americans during the early 20th century holds the key towards understanding the current state of Mindanao, Philippines. This will be done by: First, by tracing the role of land policies in encouraging the migration of landless peasants of the North and Central Philippines; Second, the impact of these resettlement projects on the native-government dynamics that had produced insurgencies; and, Third, the implications of these to ecological disasters in Mindanao in particular and the country in general. In my conclusion, I will attempt to offer insights on the native-settler land disputes as well as the political and ecological climate of Southern Philippines.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Land Policies that made an Impact on Mindanao's Economic Development

A. RESETTLEMENT AND COLONIZATION

Spanish '*reduccion*' and American 'agricultural colonization projects' were similarly aimed to transform the natives into willing and able subjects working towards their particular colonial goals and purposes. Spanish ecclesiastical objective of converting the native to become devout Catholics transferred the natives into planned settlements '*bajo la campana*' or under the bells for their close watch. American homestead farms or agricultural colonies were designed like military camps under close watch by their soldiers.

In Mindanao, the Spanish Jesuits 'Tamontaka Experiment' resonated in the 'American agricultural colonies project' where the goals of economic productivity was made in the service of creating a nation of willing and able subjects/citizens.¹ For instance at Tamontaka, Cotabato Jesuit missionaries developed a farm settlement where former Tiruray slaves whom they manumitted from their Moro masters were given religious instructions and training for agricultural livelihood as well as carpentry and masonry for the men ; and for the women, housekeeping, embroidery and other cottage industries. Women and men lived in separate dormitories and were expected to later marry and have families of their own. They eventually established their own dwellings and formed clusters of communities. These communities resembled the laid-out plans in a *reduccion*. Thus a kind of a model

¹¹ Faina Abaya-Ulindang "Slaves and Migrants in Mindanao During the Early 19th to late 20th Centuries: A Comparative Social History" MSU GRADUATE FORUM. Vol.5 nos 1&2 (2007) pp.187-205

town was what the Tamontaka experiment was expected to yield. Support for this project was taken through the *Obras Pias* and contributions from pious citizens in Manila.

As can be gleaned from the Reports of Jesuit missionaries in the Jesuit Letters,² their plans were carried out and were initially successful. *Moro* datus became curious and were amazed at the changes made among their former slaves, now skilful craftsmen. They would even ask them to help in building their *torogans*, or in doing some masonry. This pleased the missionaries because in coming to their missions the *moros* also became curious of their religious practices and asked questions. Eventually some of the *moro* chiefs became friends with the missionaries until one *datu* named Ali, who had been suspicious of the missionaries took offense of an act done by the Jesuits who built their church on a location which was supposedly a burial ground for Ali's ancestors. It caused a military intervention on the part of the Spanish government where Ali and his men were defeated. But the damage was already done. The dormitories were reduced into ashes, their barns looted and their livestock and fowls perished. The Mission was unable to restore itself after this debacle.

This Tamontaka experiment (1873-97) initiated by the Jesuit missionaries in Mindanao which aimed nonetheless for proselytization suggests a method for nation-building towards a self-sufficient, homogenous citizenry similar to the 'ideal citizen' concept of the Americans in their agricultural colony project in Northern Cotabato. Before the end of Spanish Rule actually Governor Blanco, already had in mind the resettlement of Mindanao with people from Luzon and Visayas that was supposedly to follow after the Lanao pacification campaign. This idea could have been inspired by the Jesuit's Tamontaka experiment as Blanco's Lanao campaign was almost contemporaneous to the this Jesuit's resettlement project in Cotabato.

Moreover, while aiming at agricultural self-sufficiency, the Americans believe in resettling farmers from Luzon and Visayas to assume their role as model citizens of the natives in the course of interacting with them. Conceived as part of the Filipinization policy of Governor General Harrison to make a '*Filipino* out of the *Moro*', the agricultural colonies were created at the end of the pacification campaign of Pershing. It is to be noted that Pershing's pacification campaigns were characterized by bloody massacres, such as the Bud Dajo incident, when it imposed its disarmament policy.

The agricultural colonies project in 1913 thus coincided with the creation of the Department of Mindanao and Sulu ending the military rule in Mindanao.³ At this juncture, it would be expedient to define Homesteading and Resettlement. Homesteading refers to the opening up of public lands for agricultural purposes to qualified citizens who will develop and make it productive. He will be required to remain in the area he applied for for a continuous five years and show proofs that he accomplished what was required of him. After this period of five years he could now apply for a Torrens title of the land. Historically, a citizen can for a maximum of 24 hectares during the American period, eventually this was reduced to twelve hectares then with the advent of the Philippine Republic it was reduced to five hectares. Resettlement, on the other hand would mean the transfer of abode from one to the other with the purpose of making his settlement to the new abode permanent. In this study, the use of the word "Settlers" would refer to those who resettled from North and Central Philippines to Mindanao who are largely Christians and had adopted the ways of the Spanish and American colonizers. The "Moros" would refer to the Muslim natives as they distinguish themselves from the native non-Muslims who are currently called the "Lumads" of Mindanao. In studying the peoples of Mindanao, it became convenient to use these three categories: Settlers, Moros and Lumads or the so-

² JESUIT MISSIONARY LETTERS FROM MINDANAO vol.1 Jose S. Arcilla, S.J. ed. Trans., Annotator. Q.C. University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies, National Historical Institute and UP Press, 2000

³ See for example Peter Gordon Gowing. MANDATE IN MOROLANDS: THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT OF MUSLIM FILIPINOS, 1899-1920 (Q.C. Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, 1977.

called Tri-People of Mindanao.

B. RESETTLEMENT AND NATION-BUILDING

A lesson in colonialism tells us that a centralized bureaucracy makes for a more efficient control of the subject nation. A stronger Filipino nation was inadvertently created by a weakening Spanish power that was challenged by American military subjugation. Through its first civil governor, William Howard Taft's legalistic economic policies, resettlement was enhanced, paving the way for a systematic inclusion of Mindanao's untapped resources into the newly colonized nation. The Treaty of Paris of 1898, ostensibly, gave the United States every right to occupy even Mindanao and Sulu's Muslim territories considered not yet fully pacified by the Spaniards. Though by 1913, these were militarily brought under American sovereignty, a civilian rule under John Carpenter, appointed by Governor Harrison, commenced. This was the Department of Mindanao and Sulu which effected the first agricultural colonies in Cotabato that resettled farmers from Luzon and Visayas to Cotabato in order to solve inadequate production of rice and corn. Corollary to this mission was for these farmers from the North to gradually '*Filipinize*' the natives in this far-flung Philippine territory. Thus, a culturally homogenized agricultural state would be an asset that would best serve American interest in consolidating its rule on Mindanao.

Six agricultural colonies were established in Northern Cotabato from 1913-1919. Although considerably successful for having increased the production of rice and corn and making headway in initiating a harmonized inter-ethnic relations in Cotabato, the succeeding Wood's administration considered these inconsequential compared with what it considered exorbitant government expenditures. The resettlement projects, however, were revived during Quezon's Commonwealth Regime following the same objectives instituted by the Americans. Furthermore, Quezon thought this to help ameliorate the tenants who were already restive in Luzon. Thus, the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA) was born on October 22, 1938 with the promulgation of the Commonwealth Act no.441.

Compared with the agricultural colonies of the Americans, this was a huge project funded by the National Development Corporation (NDC). Quezon borrowed from this corporation P200,000.00 to finance the settlement project. [NDC was created in 1937. "It was allowed to contract lease agreements with foreign and domestic investors for exploitation of public agricultural and mineral lands over and above the 1,024 hectares limit stipulated by the 1935 Constitution. B.F. Goodrich and Goodyear Tires pioneered in establishing 1000 ha. rubber plantation in 1919. It facilitated the development of large-scale plantations and the policy of encouraging small settlers in the "Land of Promise" which created contradictions in land-use policy in later years."⁴ He envisioned a Mindanao that would not only serve the government's need for increased revenue but also a well-integrated citizenry, peaceful and law-abiding. Through his Social Justice program, landless peasants from Luzon were given lands in famously fertile Allah and Koronadal Valleys of southern Cotabato.

Alongside the NLSA resettlement project was a comprehensive development plan of tapping the hydro-electric resources of Lanao's Maria Cristina Falls for industrial purposes. We know of this today as the National Power Corporation.

⁴ Hayami, Yujiro et al. TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE LAND REFORM PROGRAM PARADIGM (Q.C.: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1990) p.43

C. POST-COLONIAL LAND POLICIES-EDCOR MINDANAO SETTLEMENTS: A Case in Point

With the end of the Commonwealth Period and the inauguration of the independent Philippine Republic, resettlement as a panacea for social and economic ills, would, among others, engender complex socio-political and economic problems. One of which was the resettlement of the Huk rebel surrenderees from Luzon and Visayas to Mindanao. The Quirino Administrations' LASEDECO (Land Settlement Development Corporation), the successor of NLSA proved to be less effective compared with the military's Economic Development Corps or EDCOR. Although created under his administration, the EDCOR was a military outfit which was autonomously administered and funded by the Philippine Army. Ramon Magsaysay together with Edward Lansdale, conceived of an integrated approach to insurgency where weaning supporters of Communism could be successful should their attraction to it will cease. The primary attraction which was the communists 'land to the tillers' was transformed into 'land for the landless'; and Mindanao was pictured as that land of promise for the surrendered Huks. In time, this EDCOR idea proved to be successful.⁵ At this juncture, I am offering the story of EDCOR settlements as a typical case of homesteading and resettlement in Mindanao.

EDCOR SETTLEMENTS IN MINDANAO

The Setting of the EDCOR settlements : Kapatagan, Lanao and Buldon, Cotabato

As the name aptly describes it (for the locals), the Kapatagan Valley is flat at the center, sloping softly towards the south and east across the hilly Mt. Iniaon. Barrio Buriasan, where the EDCOR farm was situated, was a vast vacant public land of 1,690 hectares which was later expanded to 3,400 hectares in 1954. Seven hundred hectares of this land were allotted to registered owners and the rest to registered settlers. It was opened through Proclamation no.375 and became a settlement for 484 settler-families, which included sixty-four former Huks (who remained from the original one hundred rebel families in 1951), twenty-seven retired soldiers and nine civilian.⁶ Other sources however state another set of figures- Alvin Scaff during his field work in Kapatagan (September 1953), mentioned that there were one hundred settlers but did not specify how many of these were Huks. Shalom recorded that "when the project was completed, fewer than 1,000 families had been resettled... and only 246 of these were ex-Huks."⁷ "Huks", incidentally, are the Communists insurgents who fought the newly established Philippine Republic of July 4, 1946. Huks is shortened for Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan (People's Liberation Army). They were the army of the Communist Party of the Philippines, forerunner to its contemporary counterpart- The New People's Army or NPA.

The land was partially cleared and developed by the Army and civilian volunteers in early 1951.

⁵ See for example Jose V. Abueva, *RAMON MAGSAYSAY: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971)

⁶ Manila Times, January 19, 1954. Cf. DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY OF THE PHILIPPINES. *HUMAN SETTLEMENT PHILIPPINE FRONTIER SETTLEMENT MODELS: INVENTORY AND SUMMARY PROFILES*. Prepared by the Frontier and Rural Settlement Research Team of the Rural Transformation Project. n.d. On p.506- that there were 139 families as original settlers. There were a total of 352 residential lots of 600 square meters each, 140 farm lots of six hectares each by 1954, total area developed was 799,495 hectares

⁷ Manila Times, January 19, 1954. Cf. DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY OF THE PHILIPPINES. *HUMAN SETTLEMENT PHILIPPINE FRONTIER SETTLEMENT MODELS: INVENTORY AND SUMMARY PROFILES*. Prepared by the Frontier and Rural Settlement Research Team of the Rural Transformation Project. n.d. On p.506- that there were 139 families as original settlers. There were a total of 352 residential lots of 600 square meters each, 140 farm lots of six hectares each by 1954, total area developed was 799,495 hectares

Later, houses were built and roads were graded. A schoolhouse, administration building, dispensary and medical service facilities were added to the settlement.⁸ By the time the settlement became a municipality, the total area developed was 799.4965 hectares. Named Sapad municipality later, it comprised the barangays of Pili, Baning, Karibang, Patebon, Karkum, Taraka and Dansalan.⁹

The settlement procedure for EDCOR farms in Kapatagan, Buldon and later, Alamada followed almost the same pattern:

The townsites were designated to function as modern agglomerated communities - in that house lots were laid side by side in clustered village pattern. For instance, at (Kapatagan) the site was originally situated into 126 farm lots from the townsite, which had orderly rows of thatched cottages and numerous Army and community facilities. The dispersed settler-houses (were) well-constructed on wooden pilings, on palm leaf sides and thatched roofs. Homelots (were) supposedly to have place for vegetables, flowers, fruits, shade trees, toilet, garbage pit, poultry project and pig sty. Electricity was also provided including a radio center for outside communication.¹⁰

Buldon is a hilly area with an elevation of 1,500 feet above sea level. Located along the boundary of Cotabato and Lanao provinces where Simuay River cuts through, the Buldon (also called EDCOR) farm is situated on the rolling foothills at the base of the sharp-peaked mountains. The climate is not as hot and humid as in Kapatagan and the area is conducive to upland crops. Alamada EDCOR has been carved out of Libungan municipality, 18 miles north of Midsayap town proper. It has an undulating terrain surrounded by hills and mountains. At the same time of settlement kaingin trees abound. This was the third EDCOR settlement to be opened in Mindanao and it received its first batch of settlers in 1956.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE EDCOR HOMESTEADS

By hindsight and within the purview of the Spanish *reduccion* and American agricultural colonies, resettlement had always been considered as integral to the consolidation of colonial power. Proceeding from a military conquest, the population is made to serve the colonizers' vested interests with a combination of ameliorative, one of which is resettlement, and militarists, programs. This pattern continued even after the supposed national liberation of the conquered nation. This time it is called 'internal colonialism', i.e. domestic elites' vested interests, at the expense of the majority, continue to dominate national economic policies.

The newly established post-war Philippine Republic answer to a nation fragmented by Communist insurgency was, among others, resettlement through the EDCOR in Mindanao.

Administratively, EDCOR was under the direct supervision of the Civilian Affairs of the Armed Forces of the Philippines which was in charge of the Huk surrenderees. It was formally established on December 15, 1950. Funding was provided for through the Army Appropriations Act of 1951 intended for rebel rehabilitation. By February 22, 1951, the first EDCOR project at Kapatagan in Lanao was established. Edward Lansdale, who was with the group, recounted:

⁸ Alvin H. Scaff. THE PHILIPPINE ANSWER TO COMMUNISM.(California: Stanford University Press, 1955)p.108

⁹ From "Lanao Resettlement Project no.2.n.d.,n.p.photocopy from Sapad Municipality Department of Agricultural Reforms(DAR) Records

¹⁰ Maynard Winston Dow, "Counter-insurgency and Nation-building: A Comparative Study of Post World War II Anti-Guerilla Settlement in Malaya, The Philippines and South Vietnam".Thesis. Ph.D Geography . Syracuse University.January 1965. P.121

Magsaysay, Mirasol, a detachment of troops, surveyors and I went to Mindanao and looked over the area. It was lush, virgin jungle several kilometres inland from the sea, reached by an abominable muddy track of a road. A few small farms lay along this road, with rich-looking soil and reportedly abundant crops...A corps of engineers who executed the settlement lay-out plan of Magsaysay and Mirasol were with us.¹¹

The Political Situation in Mindanao(1955-60) and the EDCOR Homestead Settlements

In time, the evident economic prosperity of the EDCOR settlements was shown in the increase of agricultural production, in the diversity of settler population as well as in the peace and order prevailing in the homestead areas. The security provided by military presence in the farm settlement ostensibly assured the settlers that they would go on living their farm life undisturbed.

The land issue, however, became the prominent bone of contention between the EDCOR and the Moros. There were reports of Moros contesting recognized public land at the EDCOR farms.¹² For instance, upon investigation, the Philippine Constabulary learned that a certain Umpa who was suspected to be the “landgrabber” was actually an employee of the Lanao Provincial government. He (Umpa) reported that when EDCOR was established in Kapatagan, land for his men behind the EDCOR area was assured; but when his men developed their parcels of land, they were forced to evacuate because EDCOR settlers came to occupy their attached farmlands. The same report alleged that the Maranaos (the natives of Lanao) harassed the settlers. Apparently, it was the military presence that averted open violence in this area.

Land Conflicts Related to EDCOR and NARRA

When Ramon Magsaysay was the elected president, his image as the “man of the masses” and his ‘land to the landless’ program gained prominence with the EDCOR and the NARRA (National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Authority).

At the outset of his administration, Magsaysay directed Secretary Balao of the EDCOR to advise the settlers to obtain a P750.00 per hectare loan for coffee plantation from the Rehabilitation Finance Corporation. The purpose of this loan program, according to Magsaysay was to “enhance the settlers’ capability to contribute to production of cash crops and improve the financial condition of the planters.”¹³ As gathered from this author’s interview, the settlers in Buldon benefitted from this program, specially at the time when rat infestation and forest fires plagued the place in the late sixties.

NARRA Mindanao projects on the other hand, just like EDCOR has to reckon with land problems. It was reported that settlers were shipped without assurance of the lands in the settlement where they were assigned.¹⁴ Beloso, the NARRA manager was ordered to correct the situation.

A more serious problem encountered was the land dispute between settlers and natives in the area. A land conflict between the *moro* claimants and the NARRA settlers almost developed into a bloody encounter. In August 1956, a certain Datu Sangke insisted on a claim consisting of 650 hectares located at Kauran, Datu Piang where a NARRA reservation was located. According to Datu Sangke, Kauran was one of the few remaining places where they, as natives, could settle. Most of the Koronadal and Allah Valley had been occupied by Christians.¹⁵ Two hundred and sixty-four Muslim families and one hundred and three Christian families fought over the controversial land. According to

¹¹ Edward Lansdale, IN THE MIDST OF WARS: AN AMERICAN MISSION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972) p.53

¹² Daily Mirror April 5, 1956

¹³ OFFICIAL GAZETTE vol 51 no.6 (June 1955) p.cc1

¹⁴ OFFICIAL GAZETTE vol.52 no.5 (May 7, 1956) p.ccvii

¹⁵ OFFICIAL GAZETTE vol. 52 no.6 (June 9, 1956) p.dxviii

the Christian settlers, they occupied the land in 1952 with the permission of another Muslim claimant.

The land conflict was settled through a division of farm lots, in which greater portion was allotted to Datu Sangke's men. An agreement called the 'Pledge of Brotherhood' was signed between the Muslim and Christian groups. This temporarily forestalled the conflict.

At Wao, (a town of Lanao del Sur) NARRA reports of anomalies committed by Busran Kalaw reached Malacanang in June 1898. Kalaw, according to these reports, cheated the settlers of their supplies, sold their rice supplies at exorbitant prices, and censored their letters and radiograms to government authorities. The settlers: Gregorio Abasta, Anita Reyes, Mariano Reyes, Amado Reyes and Arturo Angeles, presented to the President invoices showing they were given only a few gantas of rice a week, out of their weekly rations of fifteen gantas each.¹⁶

In Maramag (Bukidnon) NARRA, on the other hand, Jose Crisol (who conducted investigation there) reported that there were "administrative operational deficiencies" in the settlement and recommended the improvement of the road from Maramag to Wao. Moreover, it was also noted that some settlers from Wao wanted to transfer to Maramag.¹⁷ OFFICIAL GAZETTE vol. 52 no.6 (June 9,1956) p.dxiviii

At Davao, a NARRA project was abolished when it was found out that this government agency was actually the landgrabber.

Meantime, on the national level in 1957, a tragedy struck. President Magsaysay met a sudden death. He died in a plane crash on March 17,1957 together with Secretary of Education Gregorio Hernandez, former Senator Tomas Cabili, Gen. Benito Ebuena (Chief of the Philippine Air Force),Congressmen Pedro Lopez,Manuel Zosa, and William Chiongbian, Jean Paredes, a lawyer, and other passengers totalling twenty-seven persons, excluding the crew. Only one person survived the disaster. Accordingly, the plane Mount Pinatubo, hit the side of Mount Manunggal due to 'metal fatigue breakage'.¹⁸

Such tragedy brought a sense of insecurity among the Kapatagan EDCOR settlers. Since the termination of their subsidy coincided with the demise of the president, they thought that the succeeding Garcia administration was not sympathetic to their plight. It was apparent due to their unpaid loans they faced imminent foreclosure of their mortgaged land. They sought an audience with President Garcia, but to no avail. It was a policy of his administration to impose austerity and fiscal discipline. Thus, for the Kapatagan EDCOR settlers it seemed that the death of Magsaysay likewise ended the EDCOR project.

Following Magsaysay's death, the settlers in EDCOR Kapatagan, recalled seven significant developments: Moro conflicts, selling of land and animals, settlers returning to their original places, end of EDCOR's days of glory, [A film was made of Kapatagan EDCOR, the "Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay" which starred popular actress and actor, Nida Blanca and Luis Gonzales. showing how miraculously the people and the place was transformed through the EDCOR project. From a brief written by Mr. Peredo, a former EDCOR settler, for this author's research, he mentioned of the decrease in agricultural production, local government's takeover and the building of more houses. Further major changes were: 1)Most of Kapatagan settlers' support stopped; 2)Vigorous campaign to collectsettlers' debts to the government; 3)EDCOR's turnover to Land Authority in 1957; and 4) Its eventual phase-out and incorporation into the newly formed Sapad municipality in 1969.

In 1959, serious management problems beset the Gallego EDCOR in Buldon. Army Chief of Staff Alejo Santos ordered a military investigation of the Gallego Farms regarding the reported abuses

¹⁶ OFFICIAL GAZETTE no. 52 no.12 (September 30,1956)p.ccciv-vii

¹⁷ OFFICIAL GAZETTE vol. 52 no.6 (June 9,1956) p.dxiviii

¹⁸ Carlos Quirino .MAGSAYSAY OF THE PHILIPPINES (Manila: Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Society,1964) p.232

of military personnel against settlers in the form of usurious credit, charging settlers for use of military vehicles at exorbitant rates, confiscation of work animals, farm lots and other property of the settlers who failed to pay borrowed money, and sale of drugs and medicines which were originally issued free to the settlers.¹⁹

Furthermore, Senator Genaro Magsaysay, who visited Libungan (Genio EDCOR farm or Alamada) in late 1962, confirmed landgrabbing cases there. Allotted lots for settlers were said to have been withdrawn and finally, fell into the hands of moneyed people and certain government officials. These landgrabbing cases were denied by the then Acting Bureau of Lands Director.²⁰ Apparently, the latter was implicated in the anomaly. Related to this report was the charge of illegal logging at the EDCOR farm in Buldon.

A case was filed in 1963 against a lumber company on an EDCOR reservation of 134,041 hectares in Buldon, Cotabato. The company had been logging in Buldon since 1958, in an area reserved by Ramon Magsaysay under Proclamation No.6(March 2,1954). The permission was given through an official who was unauthorized to act on behalf of EDCOR, according to Defense Secretary Macario Peralta. Forestry Director Bernal said that through a series of amendments, the company increased its logging areas from 49,000 hectares to 107,400 hectares in a matter of two months, and not without the official consent of the Defense Secretary.²¹

Natives Anxiety Over the Presence of the EDCOR settlements in their area

A concrete instance of a Maguindanaoan's complaint over the loss of what they believe to be their land to the EDCOR project was reflected in the following:

*We are poor...The government brought in ex-rebel from the other end of the country, people who are alien to us, settled them down on our land, gave them everything they need to farm, and (laid) out towns for them. We ask(ed) for the same consideration. We (were) told we do not quality...We do not know how to compete with these people...Soon we shall be landless people on our ownhome country.*²²

Quoted by Melvin Mednick from a Maguindanaoan informant in "Development Programs and the Moslems" p. 38 cited in Maynard Dow,op cit. p.127

In such a situation, according to Melvin Mednick, an anthropologist who studied the Muslims in Mindanao, "the effect of the EDCOR project was...a good example of a situation in which a solution of the problems (in Luzon) turn(ed) into the breeding ground for another." *ibid.* p.128²³In an effort to prevent such occurrence, the government allowed a segment on the settlement reserved for the Maguindanaoans. By April 4,1956 the government authorized 227 Moro families to occupy and settle lands at Genio EDCOR project which, according to Ciriaco Mirasol, EDCOR chief, "accomplished two things: 1)it filled the project up t To capacity and 2)obviated possible Muslim charges that the government provid(ed) more privileges to Christians than (the) native(s) of the area."²⁴

Nonetheless, after the surrender of rebels Tawan-tawan and Kamlon in 1951 and 1954, respectively, there was relative calm all over Mindanao and Sulu.

¹⁹ MANILA TIMES November 5,1959

²⁰ DAILY MIRROR December 22,1962

²¹ MANILA TIMES, October 30,1963

²²Quoted by Melvin Mednick from a Maguindanaoan informant in "Development Programs and the Moslems" p. 38 cited in Maynard Dow,op cit. p.127

²³ *ibid.* p.128

²⁴ *ibid.*

THE CREATION OF THE SEMP MINDANAO HOMESTEADS

In 1959, the government created another resettlement program Socio-Economic Military Program (SEMP)²⁵ modelled ostensibly from the EDCOR design.

SEMP was intended to “help retired enlisted men and ex-trainees to acquire their own land which they (would) work as homestead until they (could) have a title to it”. The program was under the supervision of the Philippine Army which acquired public land not reserved for NARRA nor the EDCOR. Under the same program, the Army helped the settlers by opening roads, particularly for transporting the settlers’ machinery and equipment, cleaning the forest, planning the community, sending tools and advancing supplies.²⁶

Evidently, the creation of SEMP as an exclusive military resettlement project formalized the alienation of the former insurgents-the Huks, from the rest of the settlers. The government considered the ‘Huk menace’ as solved and as a precautionary measure, they had to be isolated from the Maguindanaoans who were also potential rebels. The land issue remained a sensitive matter, specially for the latter. In fact, in Alamada EDCOR which was the biggest settlement of 673 settlers, only seven were former Huks while 97 were militarymen .

Moreover, it would be this SEMP-EDCOR in the Alamada settlement (also called Barrira-Genio), in comparison with the other EDCOR settlements, which would be the last to be turned over to civilian administration under the Ministry of Agrarian Reform in 1972.²⁷ Cayetano Paderanga, Jr. “A Review of Land Settlements in the Philippines” MINDANAO STUDIES REPORT no.2 (UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies) p.18²⁸ This fact suggests that EDCOR Alamada retained its military nature for almost two decades. When the author visited the area in 1994, she was impressed that much of its military settlement lay-out remained. According to Maynard Dow, an American military officer,

(T)he EDCOR ha(d) made significant strides...When it was apparent that there were insufficient ex-Huks and other settlers for filling the original quota, the government took definite steps to include indigenous moro. Moro settler heads of families were incorporated into the EDCOR (Alamada) in 1956.²⁹

THE IMPACT OF RESETTLEMENT PROJECT ON MINDANAO, Philippines

A. INTERNAL COLONIZATION AND THE CONSEQUENT INSURGENCIES

The history of the migrant-settlers and their struggles for a better life underwent a period of debacle, or a period of helplessness in the face of peace and order problems in Mindanao. While symptoms of the impending native resistance to further attempts at internal colonization of the government of the Republic, these brewing sentiments conflagrated into secessionists movements spearheaded by the Moro National Liberation Front, later by its breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front, then the

²⁵ Dow op.cit. p.110

²⁶ *ibid.* p.113

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cayetano Paderanga, Jr. “A Review of Land Settlements in the Philippines” MINDANAO STUDIES REPORT no.2 (UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies) p.18

²⁹ Dow op cit p.138

terrorists Abu Sayyaf during the Martial Period up to the present. Compounding these problems would be the presence of the New Peoples' Army of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

By 1961, nearly thirty percent of the population of Mindanao have migrated there during the past twelve years according to a report cited by Kit Collier³⁰.

The Mindanao frontier, now was almost closed specially the vast tracts of land in the Central and Southern Mindanao area. Three decades later, during the nineteen nineties, as we would find below, the ecosystem was already showing signs of decay with the phenomenal flashfloods which were unknown in Mindanao before.

Thus, this period is largely characterised by problems of peace and order brought about by Marcos' long term Martial Rule. From a research conducted by the author among second generation migrants- intense peace and order problem was felt during this period.

Ferdinand Marcos' rationale for the declaration of Martial Law in September 21, 1972 was, among others, the secessionist movement i.e. Moro National Liberation Front(MNLF) in Mindanao. This armed group was able to draw international support, particularly from the Organization of Islamic Countries(OIC), from which both material and moral support were generously given. He, Marcos, eventually acceded to negotiate with them. Thus, the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on December 23,1976. Mindanaoans knew what Marcos and Cory did thereafter towards this demand for autonomy by the Muslims. Elaboration of this issue is however, not within the province of this paper.

Meantime, intensifying clashes were known between the partisan armed groups. In the Lanao area, the clashes between the Barracudas, the alleged private army of the Dimaporos and the Ilagas, a vigilante group formed by a some Ilonggo settlers in Cotabato became much more intense during the Martial Law, along with the rebels Moro Islamic Liberation Front(MILF),and New People's Army (NPA) versus the Philippine Army.

At this instance, refugees from both Christian and Muslims fled to the cities escaping the armed confrontation of both. Concerned women's groups responded to this crisis by organizing themselves and became active in providing food, shelter and clothing in Iligan City, being one of the many cities affected by these conflicts.

Meantime, for the settlers-migrants of Mindanao the political maneuverings of the administration were at best, attempts at prolonging the period of truce with the rebels. The Martial Law period initiated a period of strife, a longing for a period of a stable peace and order condition accompanied with uniform and judicious economic development. This condition is quite prolonged which, for some, even still remained to the present.

Marcos continued the policy of resettling rebels who surrendered to the government. A micro case in point is the Brgy Dalipuga, Iligan City. A sitio in Dalipuga is known as "landless" because the residents in the area are former NPA rebels who surrendered to the government and were given residential lots.

From the point of view of the settlers interviewed as well as unpublished sources used for this paper, what used to be the government Moro policy under Ferdinand Marcos was ostensibly, continued by Cory Aquino and her successor Fidel Ramos. The latter sought to negotiate a truce with the MILF and peace reigned temporarily in Mindanao. However, all these came to naught with the advent of Erap Estrada administration.

Ironically, the most intense fear experienced by the migrants particularly those in Lanao del Norte was during the post-Martial period-the administration of Estrada when he declared an all-out-war on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. On March 18, 2000 President Joseph Estrada declared

³⁰ "The Theoretical Problems of Insurgency in Mindanao: Why Theory? Why Mindanao?" in MINDANAO: LAND OF UNFULFILLED PROMISE. op cit. p.204, citing National Economic Council Regional Survey: Mindanao Area Series (1961) pp.2-3

“Crush the MILF at all cost”. This was clearly a land related conflict involving the migrants and native. We will find out more about this below. Meantime, the reason for this policy declaration was the following:

The MILF violated the truce agreement 277 times which included the 1) kidnapping of a foreign priest named Father Luciano Benedetti; 2) occupying and setting on fire of the municipal hall of Talayan in Maguindanao; 3) the bombing of the ship M/V Lady of Mediatrix of Ozamis City and 4) the take over of the Narciso Ramos highway in Maguindanao Province connecting it with Lanao del Sur.³¹ The MILF, on the other hand, accused of the government of the same violation of truce agreement by mobilizing its troops against the MILF elements. The Kauswagan , Lanao del Norte Incident was apparently the one that ignited this, as it spilled over the nearby towns of Linamon, Matungao, Pantao-Ragat and Balo-i. Immediately after this incident was the declaration of all-out-war by Estrada. Most of these towns were inhabited by Christians who were the majority, except that of Balo-i where the the Maranao Muslims were the majority. It was said that in Balo-i there were sizable MILF mujahideens as well as MILF sympathizers coming from Butig, Batangan, Matungao, PantaoRagat and Sagiaran in Lanao del Sur.³²

Apparently, the MILF-GRP battles in Balo-i was a spill-over of the Kauswagan and towns near it incident. On April 25, MILF forces massed in Balo-i to defend what they consider their territory. Thus, the settlers who were minorities here had to evacuate to other areas. Even the Maranao civilians like Magadapa, 57 years old, a farmer and livestock owner at Brgy. Sandor needed to evacuate in order to avoid being caught in the crossfire. According to him:

When the war broke out here in Baloi, almost the whole of Baloi had evacuated and that everyone went to their relatives in other areas. My family and I went to Pantao Ragat in Lanao del Norte area. Our coconut plantation, as well as those of my neighbours, were all left behind. Of course, no sane person would still harvest his coconuts while war was going on in the surrounding areas. The war was long, for it lasted a month. Actually, it was some of our MILF friends that informed us to evacuate the area since they suspect a huge war was looming. We feared to be included in the war so everyone of us evacuated but left behind their sheep, carabao and other domesticated livestock. We only carried anything that our hands could carry. In the course of the war, some of the men made quick visits to inspect their houses in the daytime but many simply waited for any news to come about the conditions of their left belongings and properties. Also we learned that most of those MILF men that went here in Baloi came from Lanao del Sur areas while some came from areas of Lanao del Norte. When those MILF men gained position in many Barangays of Baloi they scattered out, divided their troops and some of them even dug holes in every house's sides. They were numerous for we estimated them to be 1000 in all. Their route was very long- they hiked all the way from Pat-

³¹ Cf. “Speech of former President Estrada on the GRP-Moro Conflict UP-HDN forum on the GRP-Moro Conflict Sept 18,2008 UP School of Economics Auditorium. [http://hdn.org.ph/speech of former president Estrada on the GRP-Moro conflict](http://hdn.org.ph/speech%20of%20former%20president%20Estrada%20on%20the%20GRP-Moro%20conflict). March 15,2012 in Saro et al. p.23

³² Norayneh B. Saro et al. “2000 “All-Out-War” : The Balo-i Experience AB History Thesis. MSU-IIT March 2012. Pp.20-21. Interview of Adap Pasunob

pangkat of Sagiran (Lanao del Sur) to Bobong, Mamaanun, Olango, Lumbak, Bsagad, Momongan then to Pacalundo and then some of them passed through Matampay Bulao, Pantaon, Batangan, and Bangko, while some of them positioned themselves in Matungao. There were also those who came from Pantao Ragat, Lanao del Norte. Anyway, when these men dug the trenches beside some houses, they must be very visible from the sky causing the air force to drop bombs on the houses.³³

From an MILF fighter, Ustad Ibir, 50 years old who studied in China on Islamic Studies and a *mujahidin* for twenty years: “The inclusion of Baloi in the 2000 all-out-war was a military tactic of diverting the attention of some of the AFP disabling them not to fight in full force against our Maguindanao Camp Abubakar.”³⁴ Obviously, the Lanao provinces were mere collateral damage of the MILF-GRP conflict based on Maguindanao. Damage from this war which ended one month after the declaration of Estrada’s all out war was incalculable, specially on the part of civilians both Maranao and Christians.

The Kauswagan Incident

It was said that the term *Kauswagan* means “progress or prosperity” and was derived from the term “*dalicanan*” meaning “to bend” which was the root word for “*Kaidalicanan*” or the place of early settlers. The Maranaos were considered the natives of the area and were followed by Christian migrants from Visayas during the pre-war era.³⁵

Prior to the Kauswagan Incident that ignited Estrada’s “All-Out-War” in 2000, a Tacub (a barangay of Kauswagan) massacre involving the murder of thirty-nine dead and fifty-four wounded Maranao Muslim on November 28, 1971, in an election related violence had implicated twenty-one army men including three officers. The latter were court-marshalled and thereafter relieved from their duties. This was at the height of the war between the *Barracuda-Illaga* during the Marcos era. As was popularly known in Central Mindanao at that time, the *Barracudas* were supposed fighters for the Muslims while the *Ilagas* were the supposed defenders of the Christian settlers.

Kauswagan would again be prominent as the staging ground for another conflict. This time the issue would be about land dispute between a Christian and a Maranao. A certain Maximiano Oliverio claimed he owns a twenty four hectare land in Brgy. Inudaran- a land which he had to abandon for several years due to peace and order situation. A Maranao, by the name of Paudak Somocor, claim he has a title that gives him the right over five hectares, an area within Oliverio’s claim of twenty-four hectares. The question was that Paudak could not harvest his crop for almost twenty years, since Martial Law, because he feared for his safety. From January

until September of 1999, nineteen, mostly Christians were killed because of this land disputes.³⁶ The construction of an MILF camp in Inudaran while there was this ongoing land dispute, alarmed the people. It was called Camp John Mack and was know as the base of Moro Islamic Liberation Front of 303rd Brigade under Adullah Macapaar (a.k.a) “Commander Bravo”. When a letter complaint by some municipal officials and some residents reached President Estrada an agreement was finalized on March 10, 2000 stating that the camp would move one hundred meters away from their existing location. Apparently, such an agreement was interpreted by the MILF as a legitimate recognition of their right over the area because despite the military’s demand that they move out, they remained in

³³ Saro et al *ibid.* pp.32-33

³⁴ Translated from Maranao *ibid.* p.38

³⁵ Louie T. Geronimo and Carmelo V. Pacdol. “An Account on the Armed Conflict in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte.” AB History Thesis. MSU IIT. March 2002. p. 20

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the area and refused to relocate.

B. LAND RESETTLEMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO ECOLOGICAL DISASTERS IN MINDANAO

According to Kit Collier in describing the early post-Martial law era and referring to the presence of the Communists New People's Army in Mindanao:

The militarization, lawlessness and land-grabbing which are such an important part of the Mindanao story provide us with more of a clue about the nature of society and revolution on the island. Rather than seeking to restore traditional institutions, it seems possible that revolutionaries in frontier societies are attempting to create structures of their own to fill an institutional vacuum.[Italics mine].³⁷

In the instance where we saw the migrants exposed to hostile situations created inadvertently by their presence as landowners, their response was reflexive rather than well-thought out. Apparently, the government was deemed by the natives as the one that supports and protects the migrants and that these outsiders who were resettled to their areas benefitted and prospered at their (the natives) expense and developed a love-hate relationship with the latter. The realities that the migrants had to face was stupendous. Hard-working they maybe, and pioneering has considerably allowed them the ownership of lands never before they dreamed of owning; yet, living with chronic hostilities between the army forces and the rebels was something they have yet to live with.

In Central Mindanao, where the frontier have long been closed the trend of settlement was typically two-folds: urbanization and significant increase of upland agriculture. Costello avers:

The heavy immigration which Mindanao experienced during the 1950s and 1960's was in large part rural-to-rural movement. Now that the frontier has closed, a good part of the region's population growth must be absorbed by its cities.³⁸

The growth of Iligan, General Santos and Cagayan de Oro cities in Central Mindanao (which is the focus of this study) may compare favourably with the growth trend in Southern Davao, particularly Davao city and Western Mindanao, particularly Zamboanga City, Pagadian City and Dipolog City. "The larger cities of Mindanao were (even) growing much more rapidly than most other cities of the Philippines of comparable size between 1960 and 1970."³⁹

However, the growing scarcity of lowlands now fully occupied by settler/migrants has inevitably increased upland migration. We have seen that the IPs such as B'laans, Tirurays, even Manobos wary of the coming of the migrants during the 1930's up to 1960's preferred to retreat to the interior in order to avoid having had anything to do with the latter. Although there were stories of harmonious relationship between them and the migrants, they have marked the upland as their domicile. Nonetheless, the primitive upland agriculture practiced by the IPs and more so, through plantation

³⁷ Kit Collier, "The Theoretical problems of insurgency in Mindanao: why theory? Why Mindanao" MINDANAO: LAND OF UNFULFILLED PROMISE. Ed by Mark Turner, R.J.May and Lulu Respall Turner. New Day Publishers Quezon City. 1992 pp.197-212 *passim*

³⁸ MICHAEL COSTELLO "THE DEMOGRAPHY OF MINDANAO" MINDANAO:LAND OF UNFULFILLED PROMISE *ibid.* p.31

³⁹ *Ibid.* citing Ulack p.43

corporate farming, land conversion by subdivision developers, widening pasture lands had drastic effect on the environment. According to Costello,

Upland populations have generally been growing at a more rapid pace than found for the region as a whole, a finding which implies that most of the migrants to rural areas in Mindanao are currently selecting these types of destination...The inexorable increase in the levels of population density in (the table below) indicates that the demographic pressure upon Mindanao's fragile upland ecosystem has increased dramatically over the past two generations.⁴⁰

Population Growth in Mindanao's Upland Areas, 1948-1980⁴¹

Population Size	Density	Intercensal growth rate	
		Upland Mindanao	Total Mindanao
1948	1,043,980	21.63	-----
1960	1,864,598	38.63	5.0
1970	3,128,990	64.83	5.3
1980	4,400,883	91.19	3.5

Magdalena⁴², in his study on the effect of increasing population on Mindanao's ecosystem found out that- while migration may have helped in Mindanao's economic development yet this was at the expense of the environment, among which are forest degradation and environmental pollution; not to mention the displacement of the Lumads and the Moros, that as we have seen above is the cause of the insurgencies. He said:

A new ecological pattern seems to have evolved based on rapid population movements, the most notable being segregation, where the lowlanders have inhabited the town and cities or cultivated choice lands, while the Lumads and the Moros have taken refuge to the interior where life is harsher. In many instances, the change in the ecological balance resulted in conflict as communities compete for resources, particularly land, or claims for (r)ights over the utilization of such resources.⁴³

Furthermore, due to "the rapid growth of upland population...due to lack of livelihood opportunities in the lowlands, illegal logging and rampant *kaingin* agriculture destroy some 3,790 hectares yearly, or a total forest area of 1.02 million hectares of forest cover."⁴⁴ As a result, in 1994 from over 4 million hectares of forest twenty years ago, only 1 million hectare was left, which was "due largely to forest depletion-210,000 hectares annually between 1969 and 1990" *ibid.* pp.21-22 citing Journal of Philippine Statistics 1991⁴⁵ Doctor Magdalena even predicted:

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 36

⁴¹ Costello, *ibid.* p.36

⁴² Federico V. Magdalena, "Population Growth and the Changing Ecosystem on Mindanao" *Mindanao Journal* vol.xxiii nos 1-2 (July-December 1996) pp.14-31

⁴³ *ibid.* p.27

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp.21-22 citing Journal of Philippine Statistics 1991

Unless arrested soon, nature will take its own revenge. The tragedy in Ormoc, where thousands drowned in a flashflood a couple of years back; is not a far-fetched possibility in Mindanao. ⁴⁶

True enough, the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro were devastated by the Sendong tragedy last December 17, 2011 when thousands perished due to flashfloods inundating these heavily populated Christian dominated cities of Mindanao.

Costello, on the other hand, views the growth of cities in Mindanao as the positive development, with all its accompanying infrastructural and electrification support from the government, and projects a scenario that is totally decidedly positive though he admits that- there is an apparent uneven development in Mindanao. Rural areas were mere support to the growing cities-attracting its youth who are potential change agents in their places of origin. The violent clashes between the government forces and the rebels result in the growing number of refugees who had to leave their homes in order to avoid being caught in the crossfire. Furthermore, the diminishing resources afforded by the corporate plantation economy had spelled doom to ecological balance. Thus, the over-all impact of heavy migration into Mindanao while may have answered the need to address the developmental concerns of the nation economically, socially and politically, the trade off was an island with chronic armed clashes and ecological disasters. Of the latter, the largest victims would therefore be the Mindanaoan Christian migrants who have been the dominant population for several decades.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper argued that with a land policy that were born from colonial experiences that were directed towards the development of underdeveloped areas in the country land resettlement through homesteading became the favoured government policy. The case of EDCOR Mindanao which was modelled from the American experience of homesteading but with a definite aim at aborting the erosion of peasants support to the government. Apparently the former (peasants are inclined to support insurgents such as the Communists' "land for the landless" program. However, this paper showed that indeed, resettlement through homesteading, was effective. Although not much was presented on the current land reform program as another alternative to the problem of landlessness, it can be mentioned, by hindsight that although Land Reform which was defined in its classic form as land distribution towards real equity between the rich and the poor was attempted by President Diosdado Macapagal and his successors. However, more studies are needed to find out why even up to the present all these failed dismally. Resettlement through homesteading it seems from the point of view of its beneficiaries was far more effective. However, as also shown in this paper current insurgencies became the indirect result of these, specially in Mindanao where as the southern frontier became the haven for landless peasants from the north and central Philippines.

Moreover, land resettlements as suggested in this paper, although seemingly economically viable for an agricultural country such as the Philippines brought with it attendant complexities-foremost of which is the adverse reaction of the natives to the government that was responsible for the transfer of the huge number of migrants to what they call their "ancestral domain". Through time, the government made efforts to ameliorate the dismal condition of the peoples of Mindanao. However, vested interests as shown in this paper continue to further render peace efforts far more challenging than otherwise.

Another important point that this paper presented was the consequent environmental disasters

⁴⁶ Ibid.p.22

that unbridled development engendered . Ecological disasters became inevitable. Cyclones now became a common occurrence. These were unheard of in the past. While population pressure in Mindanao may have a lot to do with it, current debates center more on the unbridled development efforts by the government without regard for ecological balance.

Finally, more studies on land issues as they impign on climate and political disaster is highly recommended.

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