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INTRODUCTION

A central theme in the history of the Davao Gulf region is the development of a cash crop economy in abaca (Manila hemp). Abaca became an important cordage fiber by the mid-nineteenth century, and was in demand as a strategic war material by powerful countries. Until the 1920s the Bikol region in southern Luzon had enjoyed dominance as the main abaca-producing center, but the Bikol abaca planters could not maintain a level of production adequate for the demand of a modern world economy. On the other hand, the abaca industry in Davao, which was started by Spanish and American planters shortly after the American occupation, progressed steadily in Japanese hands during and after World War I, and finally replaced the Bikol abaca industry as the leading abaca-producing center in the Philippines.

Before the Americans came in 1899, Davao was a backward region where about 40,000 tribal people were living as semi-nomadic slash-and-burn agriculturists. The central concern of this article is the process of social and economic expansion on a colonial frontier and its impact on tribal people and their lands.

AMERICAN COLONIAL POLICY

With the establishment of the Moro Province in 1903, nearly five thousand Americans stationed in the province had the oppor-

This article was prepared for the Fifth National Conference, Asian Studies Association of Australia, Adelaide, May 1984. Unless otherwise indicated, all the data on which this article is based are found in my Ph.D. dissertation, "Tribes, Settlers and Administrators on a Frontier: Economic Development and Social Change in Davao, Southeastern Mindanao, the Philippines, 1899-1941" (Murdoch University, Western Australia, 1984).

tunity to see at first hand the uncultivated fertile land of Mindanao and Sulu.¹ The governors of the Moro Province between 1903 and 1913—Leonard Wood, Tasker Bliss and John Pershing—encouraged their soldiers to settle and farm in the province. At that time, abaca was the principal export of the Philippines to the United States and many Americans became involved in the abaca industry. By 1911 the number of American plantations had grown to forty-two.² They employed Bagobos, Mandayas, Mansacas, Tagacaolos, Bilaans, Muslims, Visayans, Kapampangans and Japanese. Most plantation labourers were tribal peoples living near plantations, but the planters also tried to import labour.³ Initially, the Davao planters lacked the skill and patience to deal with the tribal people, but the planters learned gradually how to communicate with them, and to train them to be abaca farmers with the support of the local colonial administrators.

The American colonial administrators tried to change traditional tribal customs and beliefs through the establishment of a political system in accord with American ideas and ideals. The first step was taken with the passage of the "Tribal Wards Act" in 1904. By this act the district governor was empowered to appoint as his representative in each tribal ward a headman. A principal aim of the organization of tribal wards was to collect taxes—a symbol of subjugation and the imposition of authority. The act prescribed that registration or capital or head taxes were to be paid by the inhabitants of the tribal wards. Fishing, the use of public markets, dogs, firearms, establishing and maintaining ferries, slaughter-houses and cockpits were also to be taxed on top of the head tax: "an annual personal tax of ten pesos upon each able-bodied male resident of the tribal ward between the ages of eighteen and fifty years."⁴ Those who would not work were tried before magistrates and sentenced to labour on public works. The introduction of taxes among tribal societies in Mindanao created

1. Wayne Wray Thompson, "Governors of Moro Province: Wood, Bliss, and Pershing in the Southern Philippines, 1903-1913," Ph.D. thesis (University of California, San Diego, 1975), p. 100.

2. The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province, 1911, p. 7.

3. Kamohara Hiroji, *Dabao Hojin Kaitaku-shi (History of Japanese Development of Davao)* (Davao: Nippi Shinbun-sha, 1938), pp. 41-50.

4. *Public Laws Passed by the Legislative Council of the Moro Province During the Period from September 4, 1903, to September 19, 1907, Comprising Acts Nos. 1 to 200, . . .*, published by authority of Legislative Council (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1909), pp. 111-12.

the need for money, which in turn forced an “uncivilized” people to seek employment.

The next step was taken in 1905, when tribal ward courts were established. An avowed purpose of these courts was to eradicate aspects of customary law of the non-Christian tribes. The Report of the Philippine Commission of 1907 explained the aims of the tribal courts:

So far as the pagan is concerned, the matter is comparatively simple. He has only to get rid of certain vague, ill-defined notions out of which his practices grow in order to accept our system in its entirety. With him it is only a question of civilization.⁵

The legal status of the non-Christian tribes was linked to a wider philosophical and moral policy of the United States towards non-Christian tribal people everywhere, particularly American Indians. With the establishment of the tribal ward courts, the organizational structure for the administration of the non-Christian tribes was complete. But there were problems from the start.

TRIBAL RESISTANCE

On the night of 6 June 1906, the first district governor of Davao, Edward Bolton, was murdered by Mungalayon, the deputy headman of the Tagacaolo tribal ward, when the Governor visited certain tribal people without military escort, for the purpose of reconciling their differences. Military reports, newspaper and magazine articles mentioned a variety of reasons for the murder of Governor Bolton. The causes were classified into three categories: the establishment of the Tagacaolo tribal ward, a “fanatical” religious movement, and maltreatment of tribal people at the hands of the planters.

Governor Bolton had interfered in internal tribal matters since the establishment of the Davao district. In February 1906, he established the Tagacaolo tribal ward with a planter, Max McCullough as headman. The Tagacaolo tribal ward was composed of the Tagacaolos, Kulamans, Bilaans and Kalagans. The Governor and local planters attempted to use the tribal ward system to draw the hill people down to the plantations on the coast. The ma-

5. *Reports of the Philippine Commission* (henceforth RPC) 1907, Part I, p. 393.

chinery of the tribal ward was seen as a handy device for recruiting and organizing a plantation labour force. McCullough spent several weeks prior to the meeting of 22 February travelling around the Tagacaolo villages to prepare the way for the organization of the tribal ward. As a result of the formation of the ward, traditional tribal social organization was swept aside and replaced with a single headman—a European planter. This radical restructuring aroused the jealousy and animosity of leading tribal people. They simply could not accept a single leader, let alone a European, to represent the various ethnic groupings in the ward. It was at this time that Mungalayon was said to have first declared his intention to kill McCullough.⁶

Fanatical movements have been reported the world over in tribal regions, when “uncivilized” people come in contact with “civilized” Europeans for the first time. Davao was no exception. One of the primary causes for the death of Governor Bolton was the activity of certain fanatical leaders. The ultimate object of the preaching of the leaders of the movement was to kill or expel all the Americans and Spaniards, and enslave the Christian Filipinos and certain other tribal groups, and then form an independent kingdom under a Muslim sultan.⁷

There were two prophets among the Davao tribesmen. One of them, Simbanan, was a healer, who for two years prior to the death of Bolton, had distributed charms against sickness and bad luck among the tribal people of the Tagacaolo tribal ward.⁸ The other was Sumalugpon, a Muslim from Sumlug, who claimed to have discovered a new god called *labi*, and created a ritual dance to go along with his new faith. These two prophets preached to the people that “they must bring them, the holy men, lots of rice and build them a fine house, otherwise there would be a famine.”⁹ Mungalayon was also involved in this movement. The news of a meeting of Muslims and many tribes—Manobos, Bilaans, Taga-

6. *RPC*, 1906, Part 2, pp. 298-99; *The Mindanao Herald*, 16 June 1906, p. 2; Thompson (1975), pp. 143-44.

7. *The Mindanao Herald*, 7 July 1906, p. 1; *Bliss Papers* 44, “Letter to General Wood from Bliss,” 25 July 1906, p. 4.

8. *RPC*, 1906, Part 2, p. 299; *The U.S. National Archives and Records Service Preliminary Inventory of the Records of U.S. Army Overseas Operations and Commands 1898-1942* (henceforth, *USNA RG 395*), 2108-4045U, “Letter to Bliss from Scott,” 16 June 1906, p. 3.

9. *The Manila Times*, 16 June 1906, p. 6.

caolos and Samals on Samal Island—in the middle of May reached the Governor's ears. He had heard about this new dance movement where money was collected and admission charged for the privilege of participation. Bolton, already familiar with similar movements among the American Indians, arrested some fifteen leaders and took them to Davao.¹⁰

The maltreatment of tribal people at the hands of planters is clear from a letter of Governor Bliss:

There is one thing which I would much like to have you carefully and quietly investigate. In your last dispatch you referred to harsh treatment of natives by planters as explaining in part a certain amount of the ill-feeling of the latter toward Americans. I have always thought this to be very possible. We all know what men will do on a remote frontier, where they are removed from the immediate operation of law and from observation and criticism, and whose only object is to make money as rapidly as possible. . . . I would like to know, if possible, the extent to which native laborers are held under contract, and whether attempts on their part to break such contract lead to threats or actual ill treatment from the planters. Do the planters pay money wages? Do they expect the natives to spend their money at plantation stores? Do they work for their chow and such supplies as the planters give them?¹¹

The more Bliss learned, the more suspicious he became of the planters. The burning question raging in the Davao district was the chronic shortage of labour. The district officials made every effort to get the hill people to come down from the mountains and settle along the coast. These officials used the power of their office for their own personal advantage and economic interest. Bliss believed that "This has been the cause of the charges and counter-charges that have been made in the Davao district for the last two years. It was the sole cause of poor Bolton's trouble."¹²

The traditional tribal leaders had lost their leadership role and power in the eyes of their society as a result of the direct intervention of the American colonial administration. They had been humiliated unduly. Mungalayon said that they had killed Bolton in order to become once again "brave men."¹³ The American

10. *USNA RG395*, 2108-4045DD, "Letter to Bliss from Secretary of the Moro Province," 2 July 1906, p. 1.

11. *Bliss Papers*, 44 "Letter to Scott from Bliss," 3 July 1906, p. 3.

12. *Wood Papers*, 40, "Letter to Wood from Bliss," 14 January 1907, pp. 2-3. The same letter is also in *Bliss Papers*, 59.

13. *USNA RG395*, 2108-4045, "O. Wood to the Governor of the Moro Province," 9 June 1906, p. 4.

colonial government had introduced a policy for tribal people aimed at destroying their traditional way of life. Part of this "civilizing" mission involved turning tribal people into wage labourers. American administrators knew that planters took advantage of their roles and that led to resistance in the form of revitalization movements and armed struggle.

The patterns of tribal resistances in this period was characterized by a desire to wipe out all foreigners in the Davao Gulf region. However, the tribal leaders of the resistance were unable to overcome divisions among previously hostile and separate groups to form a new force against the American troops and Philippine Constabulary. Another dimension of the tribal resistances in Davao in this period was its strong religious flavour. With the weakening of datu leadership, the status of traditional religious mediums increased. The religious ceremonies and newly created dances which the mediums conducted assumed increasing importance in these movements, in their efforts to mount resistance against the American colonial administration.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ABACA INDUSTRY

The abaca industry developed by the Americans in the Davao Gulf region made slow but steady progress with the support of American colonial administrators. The area under cultivation increased from 2,499 hectares in 1902 to 16,410 in 1910 and production rose from 308 tons to 8,592. The abaca industry coordinated by American and Europeans reached a peak in these years, and then declined because of a chronic shortage of labor and capital. The Japanese overcame these problems and replaced American and European planters.

During World War I, a number of Japanese plantation companies were founded, and by 1918 the Japanese became the leading abaca planters in the Davao Gulf region. The area under cultivation increased to 34,280 hectares in 1921, and then 75,070 in 1930.¹⁴ This expansion of land meant that the Japanese made incursions into tribal lands. There were a variety of methods used by the Japanese to gain possession of tribal lands. They were classified by the Department of Forestry as follows:

14. *USNA Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, 1898-1935*, 845-with 241, "Abaca & Maguey Production, Charts & Figures, 1910-1930 by Provinces."

1. By means of the Public Land and Corporation Acts.
2. Subleasing lands previously leased by individuals or American and Philippine corporations.
3. Leasing lands claimed as private property and paying the owner a certain percent of the product, or other agreements.
4. Inducing a native to apply for or occupy a certain tract of land. The Japanese will pay the entry fee (homestead, purchase, lease, or land tax) besides the 10 percent to the applicant of ₱100 per hectare, as soon as the land begins to produce.
5. Joining in marriage with a non-Christian woman, especially of the family of a datu, thus gaining a more intimate relation with the tribe and the relatives of the women and in this way succeeding in handling the lands of non-Christians.
6. Inducing the non-Christians and other natives who are owners of lands to buy on credit in the Japanese stores which are scattered throughout the plantations, and when these are unable to pay such credits in money, they are required to pay with their lands.
7. Buying the rights of a leasee (sic) and paying him for all the improvements, who then requests the cancellation of his application and the buyer submits a new one.
8. Organizing several corporations which are financed and maintained by a single capitalist. Among the best informed persons in Davao, it is a well-known fact that most, if not all of the Japanese corporations, are capitalized by Ohta & Co., Furukawa & Co., Fujitagumi & Co., and Nampy & Co., and others, and that an investigation of said corporations would result in the cancellation of a great number of them in view of the fact that they are not complying with the requirements of the Corporation Law.¹⁵

The early Japanese had opportunity to establish harmonious social relations with tribal people and they proceeded to befriend the Bagobo. The Bagobo regarded the Japanese with such high esteem that several Japanese became datos. However, the first abaca boom during World War I completely changed the situation. A number of mainland Japanese with capital began to push into the middle and upland regions, i.e., tribal lands. The tribal people

15. *USNA Records of the Military Intelligence Division War Department General Staff, 1917-41* 2065-261-4, "Report of Rafael Medina," 19 August 1919, pp. 1-2.

lost their land and traditional way of life, and murdered Japanese settlers. In the most aggressive period of Japanese land expansion between 1918 and 1921, it is estimated that no fewer than 100 Japanese settlers were killed.¹⁶

In traditional Bagobo society with its hierarchical structure and warrior class, killing was officially sanctioned. A man who killed another person was revered and called *magani*; he was permitted to wear a blood-red kerchief, a blood-red shirt, blood-red trousers, and either a blood-red suit or a black hemp suit according to the number of individuals he had killed. The fact that these attacks were frequently from ambush, or that whole families were slain while asleep in their houses, did not detract from the honour of being a *magani*. There were various motives to kill within the traditional cultural context of Bagobo society. Young men had to demonstrate their courage and bravery by killing non-Bagobo living in their territory. And that time the Bagobo rightly believed the Japanese were disenfranchising them from their land.

The legitimate territorial domain of the Bagobo could be vast, far greater in expanse than the Americans or Japanese thought possible. Both refused to recognize the vastness of Bagobo land-holdings, and their temporarily abandoned kaingins were deemed to be public land. The Japanese settlers occupied the "public land" in accordance with their lawyers' advice, and ignored the improvements the Bagobo had made, such as planting *lanson*, coconut, betel nut, *durian* and other fruit trees which continued to thrive during their temporary absence. In the first abaca boom many Bagobos died as a result of successive small-pox epidemics in 1917-18, and an outbreak of influenza in 1918 in the Guianga District.¹⁷ To escape from the contagion, they temporarily abandoned their lands, which, much to their dismay, were "legally" occupied by new settlers during their absence. During this difficult period, some aggressive settlers boldly drove ignorant Bagobos off land that they were actually occupying and cultivating. All of these actions finally incurred the wrath of the Bagobo.

The Japanese and Americans believed that the sole immediate

16. Furukawa Yoshizo, *Dabao Kaitaku-ki (History of Development of Davao)* (Tokyo, 1956), p. 370.

17. *Beyer Collection*, 21/6, 61, "The Bagobo-Japanese Land Troubles in Davao Province (Part II)," by Orie S. Walkup (1919), p. 3.

problem facing the Bagobo was loss of their land holdings, but a far more serious problem from the standpoint of the Bagobo was the alienation of their hunting and gathering grounds as well as temporarily abandoned kaingins. In 1919 approximately twenty Japanese woodcutters were killed by Bagobos in the forests of Davao.¹⁸ The Japanese settlers ruthlessly cut down large numbers of valuable trees upon which the Bagobo were dependent for their livelihood. The Bagobo believed that "public land" and the forests adjoining their cultivated fields belonged to them by right of inheritance and tenure, and that no one had the right to remove the trees without their consent. With deforestation their hunting game gradually disappeared from the forests and rivers. An ecological disaster was in the offing. Many streams dried up and the rest were befouled by the debris cast into them to make way for more abaca. The charred felled trees were dumped into the streams wherever possible to make more room for planting. Orie Walkup, a public lands inspector, reported the gravity of this situation in 1919.

The wild hogs have practically disappeared altho there is still enough fallen fruit from the lanzon trees in season to sustain considerable numbers, and deer are almost now unheard of. The disappearance of the large forest and the intrusion of man has driven these animals away. It has also caused the streams to dry up or shrink to such size that they no longer contain the fish they used to furnish. The Bagobo now seldom eats flesh, fish, or fowl, except what he buys in tins, salmon, sardines, etc., from the Chino or Jap stores who fleece him unmercifully.¹⁹

Moreover, these trees, which the Japanese cut down, were inhabited by spirits in the Bagobo world view. Such acts frightened the Bagobo. Coincidentally the small-pox epidemics and influenza spread among the Bagobo at this time. As a result of their "misfortunes," the Bagobo lashed out and began killing Japanese in retribution. Captured Bagobo were found guilty of murder in the law courts, despite having sought retribution in accordance with traditional custom.

18. *Manila Daily Bulletin*, 26 December 1919, p. 1.

19. Beyer Collection, 21/6, 61, Walkup (1919), pp. 10-11.

SOCIAL CHANGE OF BAGOBO SOCIETY

Before the Europeans came to Davao, the Bagobo had an almost self-sufficient economy. But Chinese and Muslim traders did bring in some trade-ware in exchange for a variety of items. Their economy operated on the principles of barter and reciprocity, and the Bagobo were ignorant of the real cash value of their goods and a monetary system of exchange. Traditional trade and exchange among the Bagobo fulfilled an important social as well as economic function in their lives. However, the advent of the American pioneers heralded a revolutionary change in the economic practice and life of the Bagobo. The American abaca and coconut planters quickly established trading stations on their plantations, and began to barter western trade stuffs for Bagobo abaca, coconuts and handicraft items, and at prices set by them at the storefront. The colonial government encouraged this process by inducing the Bagobo to settle on the plantations, or at least clear their land, plant abaca, and build a permanent house in the center of the cultivated patch. Officials wanted the Bagobo to be like small farmers so as to give support to the newly established towns.²⁰ This colonial policy was successful by 1907:

Already some 4,000 of them (the natives in the Guianga tribal ward) are living on American plantations. Here they not only work for a daily wage, but are planting hemp on their own account, and thus taking the first steps toward becoming a class of peasant proprietors. Twelve hundred of these men have families and now own a total of 89,000 hills of hemp.²¹

The Bagobo earned wages as plantation labourers or small planters, and then often spent their pay at the local store on an American plantation. The common currency of the traditional economy of the Bagobo was not acceptable in these shops. Cash currency from wages or the lure of abaca itself provided the means of compelling them to stay longer on the plantations to transplant the abaca without extra expense to the planters. These Bagobo who were temporarily separated from their traditional way of life by money and wage work introduced the value of cash and a cash economy to the Bagobo in the midland and upland regions. Chinese and

20. *Beyer Collection*, 21/4, 38, No. 13, "Letter from O. Wood," (1903), p. 20.

21. *RPC*, 1907, Part 1, p. 387.

Japanese merchants established stores further inland as Davao developed, and these reinforced the pattern of selling modern goods and rising prices. They introduced the Bagobo too, to credit and debt within the framework of an alien monetary system. In 1912 the government passed Act No. 2193:

an act prohibiting, in the territory inhabited by Moros or other non-Christian tribes the forcing, compelling or obliging of any labour or other employee to purchase merchandise, commodities or personal property under certain conditions.²²

However, this law was to remain a dead letter as the colonial administration wanted tribal people to become actively involved in a cash economy, both as a means of securing labour and trapping them in a capitalized economy, and as a means of forcing them to relocate and settle. It was easy for tribal people to get cash once the abaca boom got underway. According to Manuel, "by the 1920s the midland areas were being converted into abaca plantations and by the 1930s the uplanders were raising abaca for cash."²³ Many Bagobo gave up their seminomadic life to work their small abaca holdings. These Bagobo, as well as other people in Davao, benefited from economic activities of the Japanese, who controlled the abaca industry with the support of the colonial government. These people were appointed by the colonial government to leadership roles among the Bagobo as a consequence of their economic initiatives. Traditional leaders lost their power in the wake of the spread of the abaca industry inland.

With the introduction of modern bureaucratic and political structures, contradictory factors surfaced within the framework of Bagobo political life and its relationship to colonial rule and policy. The new political system developed a paramount datu whose role was to provide leadership for the unification of as many communities as possible. As the administrative districts grew, it became ever more difficult to maintain proper relations among the various tribal communities. Furthermore, certain clever community authorities acquired undue power at the expense of others who lost it, because of the unwieldy size of the new political administrative unit.

22. *Official Gazette*, 13 November 1912, p. 1929.

23. E. Arsenio Manuel, *Manuvu' Social Organization* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973), p. 220.

Once a *datu* accepted an appointment from the colonial government, he was instructed to keep the peace, report violations of the law and the commission of crimes, urge his people to pay their taxes, and encourage agricultural productivity and trade. As a result, these paramount *datu*s were constantly confronted with problems arising from a conflict between customary and statutory laws.

A government appointment results in a *datu* having a dual personality, function, and allegiance. He being already in the exercise of traditional authority has an added responsibility and must now be guided by two sets of laws—one with which he is very familiar and the other about which he knows next to nothing. Such a situation creates a puzzling and ambivalent position, both with the *datu* and the people, but more so with the folk authorities.²⁴

Of course they soon became aware of the real supremacy of the power lying behind statutory law and the lack of sanction for customary law.

Traditional Bagobo society was comprised of pioneering cultivators and warriors. It was rare to see a Bagobo unarmed. However, once the colonial government prohibited the carrying and use of arms, the dignity of the tribesmen as warriors was destroyed. Young men came to fear the police, the constabulary and other agents of the law, because of the horrible stories they had heard of the experiences of Bagobo offenders in municipal and provincial gaols.

The external forces transforming Bagobo life not only included colonial law and law enforcement agencies, but also private organizations and individuals. Japanese plantation companies and settlers, and other migrants cut deep into the fabric of traditional Bagobo society. Bagobo who happened to benefit indirectly from the presence of these newcomers also tended to become the recognized representatives of their communities in mediation with the plantations and migrant cultivators.

As a result of economic and social change in Davao, the tribal people were left to consider how to come to terms with the traumatic changes in their life and land that had been wrought over the previous four decades by Japanese cultivators, American administrators, and the rise and development of the abaca industry.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 375-76.