# Maladeg Peace Zone: An Ethnography of a 

## Refugee Village in the Philippines

by<br>Marvi Sagun Lacar, B.A.

## THESIS

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## MASTER OF ARTS

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## by

## Marvi S. Lacar

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## APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:


To the people of Maladeg, with the hope that your pursuit for peace and progress would reach beyond the borders of your village.

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#### Abstract

\title{ Maladeg Peace Zone: An Ethnography of a }

\section*{Refugee Village in the Philippines}

By

Marvi Sagun Lacar, MA The University of Texas at Austin, 2002 SUPERVISOR: Robert Jensen

This thesis explores a zone of peace, the village of Maladeg, in Lanao del Sur, Philippines. Outside the borders of Maladeg, Muslim rebels continue to fight for a Moro republic, in spite of armed opposition from the government bent on retaining sovereignty over the southern islands. Violence and government corruption has made the region virtually inaccessible and underdeveloped even though it is considered among the richest in natural resources. Furthermore, conflict tradition among Muslims themselves called rido, or clan wars have also plagued the region, thus perpetuating the cause for rebellion and secession.

The project includes interviews that offer insight into the reasons the residents of Maladeg chose to declare their village a zone of peace and why their efforts have been relatively successful, despite the political and cultural history of violence in the land. The photography is a visual illustration of the people's way of life during both times of peace and violence.


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## INTRODUCTION

As early as the 1380 s, Arab traders established settlements in the island of Sulu, in the southern Philippines. ${ }^{1}$ By 1450 an Arab trader born in Mecca named Syed Abu Bakr, established his sultanate further into Zamboanga, Palawan and present-day Sabah. Under Syed Abu Bakr came the propagation of Islam and the introduction of political institutions that ran along Islamic lines. The Islamization of the tribal groups in the southern Philippines such as the Maguindanaos in the Cotabato provinces, Maranaos in the Lanao provinces and Joloanos in Zamboanga and the Sulu archipelago, became the underlying cause of resistance against Spanish conquistadors who arrived in the islands in $1565 .^{2}$

Historical records show that during the pre-Hispanic period, the Muslim sultanates in the southern islands-Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago-were independent from one another even though economic exchanges took place among them. The arrival of the Spaniards, whose mission was to propagate Catholicism and establish a different social system and form of government, disturbed the established social and political structure of the land. The Spanish colonizers were successful throughout most of the Philippine islands except in Muslim Mindanao where the Moros ${ }^{3}$ fiercely resisted foreign conquest for 333 years. ${ }^{4}$

[^0]As a strategy of counterattack, the Spaniards mobilized the converted natives or indios from the conquered regions against the Moros, which consequently created bitter enmity between the once peaceful groups and later proved detrimental for the Moros and the state of Muslim-Christian relations in the Philippines. Although the Spaniards never conquered the Moros, the territory they ceded to the United States after the Spanish-American war included the southern islands which the Moros rightfully claimed as their ancestral homeland.

When the Americans took over the Philippine islands in 1898, they recognized that they could not afford to stir trouble with the Moros of Mindanao. The Bates Treaty of 1899 , for example, gave autonomy to the Moros of Mindanao on the condition that they recognize the "paramount sovereignty" of the United States. ${ }^{5}$ This strategy won the support of the Moros who refused to collaborate with ChristianFilipino revolutionaries in fighting against the Americans. However, since integration was an American colonial policy, changes were later made that by-passed the local native "councils," established by each of the diverse, geographically dispersed, and autonomous sultanates. Subsequently, the Americans imposed taxes on the natives and replaced the traditional government system of the land. ${ }^{6}$

The Commonwealth Government of 1935 continued the American policy of political and economic integration aimed at including the Moro land into a future independent state. When the United States granted independence to the Philippines in

[^1]1946, the southern islands were included. In the 1950s, Muslim preachers from the Middle East and Southeast Asia came to the Mindanao and Sulu to contribute to the strengthening of Islam. Concomitantly, some Islamic institutions and universities in the Middle East awarded scholarships to young Moros to study abroad. An increasing number of Muslim villagers came in contact with the Islamic world through their pilgrimage to Mecca and participation in other functions, conferences and seminars sponsored by foreign Islamic institutions. However, the rise of religious pride and awareness led to the deterioration of the state of Muslim-Christian relations. ${ }^{7}$

Moro resentment against the Philippine government intensified after the government encouraged migration to the southern islands in order to solve the problem of over population in Luzon. Due to the influx of Christian settlers to Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, the Moros faced stiff competition for agricultural and marine resources. Some turned to illegal means, such as smuggling and banditry, to support themselves. Chaos persisted in the area.

Another cause of turmoil and violence in Muslim Mindanao are the clan wars that are inherent in the social structures of the Moro sultanates, which were historically characterized by a kinship system. This system forged "polarized loyalties and interests along bloodlines" and resulted in clan "rivalries and dissension. ${ }^{.8}$ Clan wars among Muslim tribes in the Philippines can start from petty theft to murder and last for many generations. A non-fatal offense can result in death against the ridu-ai or enemy unless blood money or any other form of compensation is offered to the aggrieved party for its loss of maratabat, or family honor. As the

[^2]government tried to suppress crime and rebellion in the area, reports of military abuse against innocent civilians became very common. ${ }^{9}$

Tensions between Muslims and the Christian-majority government escalated during the period of Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos' regime. Muslim youth and student activists organized and demanded better treatment of Muslims. Many of these student leaders were educated in Islamic institutions abroad and some became leaders of Moro liberation fronts. ${ }^{10}$ In 1969, young, secular educated Moros who wanted to dissociate their party from the traditional aristocratic elite of previous separatist movements established the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). With financial and military assistance provided by Islamic nations like Libya and Sabah, the MNLF was able to convert sporadic clashes between the Marcos government and the Moros to a "conventional war." ${ }^{11}$ This attracted the attention of the international Islamic community and pressured the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) into signing the Tripoli Agreement.

Signed in Tripoli, Libya on December 23, 1976, the Tripoli Agreement was a pact between representatives of the MNLF and the GRP, with the participation of the Quadripartite Ministerial Commission, the members of the Islamic Conference and the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Its goal was to attain a peaceful political solution to the problems of the Moros of Mindanao by granting autonomy to thirteen Muslim provinces of southern Philippines, henceforth referred to as the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

[^3]The Tripoli Agreement was not "self-executory." Further negotiations for implementation were attempted by subsequent administrations but failed and led to numerous impasse and clashes between the MNLF and the GRP. After a referendum in the Southern Philippines during Corazon Aquino's administration (1986-1992), four provinces voted for autonomy, thus forming the ARMM.

On September 2, 1996, under the Fidel Ramos' administration (1992-1998), the final agreement on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement was signed. Part of the agreement was the integration of the MNLF soldiers into the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. ${ }^{12}$ Another part was the election of Nur Misuari as governor of the ARMM and his appointment as chairman of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD).

In April 2001 of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's administration, the MNLF Council of 15, dissatisfied with Misuari's leadership as governor of the ARMM, stripped him of the position as chairman of the SPCPD and demanded for the election of a new ARMM governor. In November of 2001 Misuari was charged with masterminding several bombings in Jolo, Sulu to stall the ARMM elections. Though his popularity among former MNLF rebels has plummeted, Misuari still retains some loyal combatants.

Despite the years of violence that has plagued Mindanao, residents of Maladeg, a predominantly Muslim village in the province of Lanao del Sur, has recently established a Zone of Peace where clan wars and rebel movement are not

[^4]tolerated and where Christianity and Islam are equally propagated. The subsequent text and photographs convey their stories.

## METHODOLOGY

The impetus for this project was my familiarity with Lanao and my conversations with Rudy Rodil, a historian and professor at Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, a state university in Iligan City, Lanao del Norte. I grew up in this city where Maranao-Muslims and Bisaya-Christians ${ }^{13}$ coexist but generally, in segregated sections. The population of Iligan City as well as the province of Lanao del Norte is predominantly Christian. While it appears that members of both ethnic groups still harbor prejudices against each other, there is increasing tolerance of each other's group as manifested in the rise of integrated neighborhoods, mixed marriages and Muslim owned businesses. There is also an increase in the number of Muslims occupying elective, appointive, and civil service positions in government offices and in the public schools and universities.

During my conversations with Professor Rodil, I learned about a small village in Lanao del Sur-a predominantly Muslim province - where MaranaoMuslims and Bisaya-Christians coexist in relative amicability. Maladeg, is called a Zone of Peace, where clan wars, which are prevalent in the Maranao-Muslim sociopolitical culture, are not tolerated, and where rebel activities are not allowed. This research paper is a descriptive account of the daily life in this zone of peace. It also

[^5]describes the brief history of the Zone's development as recalled by the village leader and residents; as well as the residents' dreams and visions of the future.

Data for this research was obtained using ethnographic procedures such as observation, participation in some daily activities of the residents of the community, unstructured interviews, and informal conversations with people who told stories of personal background and experiences. I lived with the village leader, Bob Anton, and his family on intermittent periods equivalent to one month. This allowed me the opportunity to be relatively immersed in the way of life in the community, gain the residents' trust and confidence, and be able to observe them in their daily activities.

The photographs were taken during interviews, informal visits with the residents, and observation of some selected activities through casual tours around the area.


Figure 1. Map of Mindanao, Philippines


Figure 2: Map of Lanao, The Research Area

## DARANGAN

"I had the opportunity to talk to a spirit," said Bob Anton, capturing the attention of all the guests at the dinner table. ${ }^{14}$ "Yes, yes!" he said, pointing at my cousin as he prolonged the second yes to emphasize the veracity of his account. Under the thick, mock-tortoise, plastic frame glasses that covered a third of his face, his eyes intensely traveled from one seat to the next, scrutinizing his listeners to make sure they were captivated.
"At my house, in Maladeg," he continued, recounting the events partly in English and partly in Cebuano. ${ }^{15}$ "Do you know the epic Darangan?" he asked, turning to my cousin. She shook her head and started to mouth a no when he interrupted her. "It is a Maranao ${ }^{16}$ epic from the pre-Islamic period. I spoke with the brother of the hero in that story," he said without batting an eyelid, as though recounting a perfectly common incident.
"I was talking to Isang. You know, $\operatorname{ISANG}$," he asserted, convinced I remembered all the countless people to whom he introduced me during my first visit to his village. "That teacher, short one." He leveled his hand about four feet above the floor. "Shorter than you even," he laughed, nodding his head my way as the rest of his listeners chuckled.
"Yes, I was talking to Isang when all of a sudden her voice changed," he said, lowering the tone of his voice. "LIKE THIS."

[^6]"WATA!" ${ }^{17}$ he shouted, shoulders raised and chin lowered in mock stateliness and superiority. "Do you know who I am? I was startled! I've known Isang for years and there she was all of a sudden asking me if I knew her. Then I looked at my niece, Bebot, who was lying on the couch about that far," he said, pointing at the television set approximately 15 feet away. "But she acted like she didn't notice anything!"
"I am Daranda, the brother of Bantugan," Bob recounted, with a deep and penetrating voice.

Bantugan, I vaguely recalled, was an epic hero whose exploits I picked up only in bits and pieces in elementary school and folk musicals. I did not remember anything else about the protagonist besides his name.
"... We talked about a lot of things," Bob continued, pulling me away from my reverie. "We talked about the history of Maladeg, about my forefathers, and his forefathers... Did you know that the town was not originally called Maladeg? It was actually called Bandara Inged, a place of progress," he exclaimed, paused, reclined in his seat and observed his audience as if to give them enough time to fathom the surreal.

His narrative style is histrionic. He constantly shifted in his seat as though holding back information a minute longer would cause him to explode. The sixty-one-year-old spoke with tremendous charisma and retained a childlike verve that was intensely engaging. The guests could do nothing but hang on to his every word.
"Then the spirit said," his eyes smiling as he leaned toward me. With a whisper loud enough for everyone at the table to hear, "I have a secret to tell you, but

[^7]don't tell Isang. But there I was, looking at Isang," he exclaimed, and continued to rattle on and on, narrating with the enthusiasm and disbelief of someone recounting his wildest adventures for the first time.
"Nobody will touch you, because we are here to protect you. WEEeee," he enunciated, mouthing the word in exaggeration. "I asked him, we?"
"Yes, there are many of us here looking out for you. Look there under that tree, and over there, and at that waiting shed," Bob said, pointing at me, then at the thermos, and at my cousin sitting across from him. "So I look toward the waiting shed and I got goose bumps," he said, running his hands across his forearms. "There was nobody there! My brother Al , who was sitting right next to Isang, did not understand a word we were saying. All he could hear was $b z z z ~ b z z z ~ b z z z$," he said, with a theatrical shiver.

At the dinner table, his listeners shifted around in their seats. Their expressions were a mix of discomfort and curiosity. I suppose some were convinced that the story was true, or not true, or suspecting it was not true but still taking mental notes...in case it was true.
"Then the spirit saw my wife come down the stairs, and Isang asked, Kaila ba na si Da sa ako? ${ }^{18}$ I thought how strange? Why would Isang ask if my wife knows her? They've known each other for years! When Da offered her marang (a type of tropical fruit), Isang said, But we don't eat! Our kind don't eat." Bob put out his hand pretending to return the offer. He nudged me lightly with his open palm, reenacting the refusal of Da's gesture of hospitality. "So I told her, Just take it. In case

[^8]you meet someone down the road who is hungry, you give it to him. Take it, so that your Manang ${ }^{19}$ Da won't be slighted.
"When Da left, Isang said, Buotan na siya. She is a good woman and you should take care of her... And you know what Isang said when she left?" His eyes getting bigger as he leaned toward me. With cryptic smile to complete his animated delivery, he whispered, "Mo adto na mi. Mo adto na mi. Mo adto na mi. ${ }^{20}$ She said that three times! And she said we!
"So the next day I asked around among old folks if Bantugan had a brother. I found out that he did! According to the legend, Daranda was the fiercest among his brothers. He was so tough that when he got angry, people had to chisel his back in order to release the energy within; if not, he would have self-destructed.
"But I could not forget what he told me," he said, pausing to note his listeners' response. Satisfied that they were all transfixed, he continued with the statement that he believed foreshadowed the fate of his village. "You are a good person, wata. We saved this place because of you. If it weren't for you, this place would be destroyed."

[^9]
## MALADEG

Bandara Inged prospered. Her friends and enemies now know her as Maladeg, a small village nestled in the heart of Muslim-Christian conflict and Maranao clan wars. This coastal barangay ${ }^{21}$ in the province of the Lanao del Sur, masks her turbulent past with the serenity of her natural surroundings. To the east are verdant forests and to the west, a ceiling of poetic hues over the Moro Gulf. Maladeg's scenery is vibrant. Her history is vivid; and her people, an idiosyncratic amalgamation of violence and virtue.

Nevertheless, I will not credit her existence to the benevolent guardianship of ancestral spirits. Her story of survival is neither romantic nor tragic, but it merits telling because of conscientious efforts made by her residents--her loyal guardians and staunch defenders. The people of Maladeg are worthy of acknowledgment, even though at times their pursuits fall short of actualization. Maladeg's conservators, despite their dignified intentions, sometimes succumb to the advocates of status quo. Sometimes the utopian dream her protectors offer-a facile solution to a complex problem-becomes too contradictory to customs.

There are days when Maladeg is no different from other barangays, in every municipality, of every province in the Philippines. Some of the very same people who reap from her soil, rob her of her very essence. She is at times mired by the corruption and apathy of her own residents. Worse, some of her guardians defect in hopeless resignation. Understandably so, she poses challenges that can disillusion

[^10]even the most steadfast idealist. She sometimes becomes a microcosm of the corrupt national structure she claims to oppose.

As I noted earlier however, hers is not a tragic story. Maladeg's residents understand and accept their weaknesses. They operate under their own laws. They are persistent, like an inquisitive child incessantly searching for answers. Why? Why? Why? Why did it not work for Maladeg? How can we make it work for us? How can we succeed where others failed miserably? The small coastal village is on the path of constant self-discovery and evolution.


#### Abstract

Resident fishermen are subject to the fickle waters of the Moro Gulf. At times of abundance, their excess merchandise is sold at the marketplace in Malabang, the closest city, forty-five minutes and thirty-five pesos ${ }^{22}$ away by pump-boat. Agriculture is just as unpredictable, especially that year when copra was not as lucrative, fluctuating at more or less than four pesos a kilo.

Trading is less risky. Passing by the marketplace is like walking through a long line of small 7-11 convenience stores. A number of small nipa huts ${ }^{23}$ with display windows that cover half of its façade carry a rich variety for the shopping enthusiast. From fish to flip-flops, consumers are likely to find the bare necessities and many miscellaneous items hanging from the windows of these sari-sari ${ }^{24}$ stores. It is not surprising that the prices are significantly higher in Maladeg than in


[^11]Malabang. Considering the price one pays for the commute across the bay to the nearest commercial retailer, a liter of coke that costs ten pesos more is a bargain. Still, that bottle of coke does not necessarily come cold.

If pump boat operators decide not to traverse the high seas for the day, Maladeg experiences an ice deficit. Refrigerators are impractical since electricity only runs from six to nine in the evening. Some homes have their power run longer, although that means more money spent on fuel for the generators. A few, like the Anton's, can afford to light almost every room in the house. Most of the residents use only one, ten-watt bulb at fifty pesos a bulb per month, which suffices just as well because some houses only have one or two rooms.

It is also highly unlikely for one to find most prescription drugs in the village. Maladeg has no pharmacy, no hospital, one elementary school, an annex high school, no area-wide piping for potable water, one government funded outdoor latrine, eight hundred and seventy six houses-less than ten percent of which have indoor plumbing. As some residents put it, more people in Maladeg are "at one with nature;" thus was coined the term splash toilet instead of the ever-prosaic... beach.

The village is now home to more than 3,000 Maranaos, Bisayas, and Lumads. ${ }^{25}$ In Maladeg, as well as in other parts of the province, tribal and religious lines are blurred. The terms Maranao and Muslim are interchangeable, just as Bisaya and Christian are understood to be synonymous. Ninety percent of the population in Maladeg is Maranao.

[^12]Though Maladeg is comprised of a heterogeneous mix of cultures and faith, there is general amicability between the resident Muslims and Christians. Members of two faiths that have developed mutual enmity and distrust since the Spanish conquest, ${ }^{26}$ now live peacefully together. Cultural differences, while not always celebrated, are now tolerated.

The rationale behind their peaceful co-existence was not necessarily founded on the romantic notion of solidarity and nationalism. Muslims and Christians do not serenade each other with hymns of brotherhood and patriotism. Their homes are segregated on opposite sides of Bob Anton's house. This way, Bob reasons, devout Muslims would not be subjected to the smell and rowdiness associated with hog raising, smoking and drinking-practices common within many "Christian" households. However, in a community where different cultural and religious sectors are constantly exposed to each other, ideas are bound to cross cultural lines.
"One time, we had an occasion when the film, Jesus of Nazareth, was shown," Bob said, "and many Muslims...insisted in seeing the movie. They said they appreciated it. They sympathized with Jesus, like they were touched by His life. The movie house was packed. I could not even go inside. One couldn't walk in. It was jam packed with Muslims because here they are free. Nobody forces anything upon anybody," He talked proudly of this harmonious relationship among the residents of his village. Though I was uncertain who "anybody" was, if "nobody" had any exceptions and if "anything" was absolute.

[^13]It was a fact that some Muslims disapproved of what they deemed to be part of the Christian culture. Christians themselves were not free from bias. Bob, who was born of a Muslim mother and a Catholic father, shows no inhibitions when revealing his predilections.
"Ask the girls if they have the freedom to marry who they want, who would they want to marry? We want to marry Christians. Why? Because they are free to love. Love is not forced upon them. For Muslims, [love] is not free. They will pay for you. They rip the hell out of you," he exclaimed as his fist flailed wildly in the air. "I reprimanded my aunt one time when I found out that my cousin was bequeathed to marry someone whom she didn't like. The girl escaped to Iligan. When they consulted me, I said, You are people but you are acting like white slave owners. It would have been better if you made her a prostitute, at least you'll make money off her everyday! They were speechless. Why are you forcing this girl to get married? She hasn't even started her menstruation, yet you're making her enter into matrimony!"
"Culture," Da blurted out, throwing her shoulders back in resignation.
"Baaaahhh!" Bob cried out, in disagreement. "There are two kinds of culture; the good one and the bad one. Why do you choose, just because of culture or custom? If it is hurtful, why do you follow custom? There are a lot of wrongs within one's culture. It's wrong to defecate in the river, but that's our culture! Why don't you just go shit in the river then," he exclaimed, on the verge of losing his patience. After a brief moment of tense silence, both studied each other's faces and just as quickly as the mood turned grim did they burst into fits of laughter. Shouts filled the air, each
one trying to outdo each other in relating worse experiences along the fetid waters of the Malabang river.
"I asked the guy, How much would you spend to be able to make us concrete stairs?" Da said, her voice towering over everybody else's. Since she usually did the shopping and errands across the bay, she had by far, the most colorful tales of the obstacle course from the wharf of Malabang River to the pump boat. "I'm willing to contribute ... We from Maladeg are willing to give little bit every week. The guy said, no, no, I don't need money. I will work on that. The next time around, there were steps...made of garbage!"

Bob's vocal and unrestrained criticisms of Maranao culture and customs do not make him less popular among the Maranao-Muslim majority of Maladeg. In the contrary, his honesty proves to be his most valued virtue. Thus, it was not surprising that in the predominantly Muslim barangay, Bob Anton, a man of Christian faith, was given the esteemed Maranao title for a leader deemed as Mother and Father, the nurturer and protector. Bob is Maladeg's Ina-Ama. "I am not Cristiano ${ }^{27}$," he would often announce proudly, "I am Moros-tiano! ${ }^{28,}$

This Moros-tiano can be every bit as idiosyncratic as the people he oversees. He is the town's spokesperson for Muslim-Christian brotherhood, but has also sat in silence through acrimonious speeches against Maranao Muslims. He has attacked and defended both the Muslim and the Christian sides of his family. The man who has taken the lives of many Maranaos in the name of justice and vengeance, has

[^14]opened his land in the name of his Christian God, to the families of the very same enemies he fought.
"When [Muslims] were experiencing difficulties on account of the operations against the rebels," he said, "they were affected indirectly and directly. Your heart would still melt at the sight of that. It's because we're Christians," he added with conviction. "The kind of teaching we learn is different. [The Bible] teaches us to measure our love by giving to the point of loving your enemy. That's hard to do! But you know, God demands something extraordinary. God does not appreciate ordinary things. If you do extraordinary things, that's when He starts noticing you. And he backs you up. He backs up the idea of showing our love and affection to our former enemies [sic]."

To scrutinize his motives, be they truly altruistic or a calculated effort to secure a comfortable seat in the afterlife, may only end up devaluing the end results of his efforts and contributions as the ina-ama. Ultimately, Bob Anton has done more for this abandoned barangay than any administration had in recent history. He has served as intermediary to countless families involved in rido, ${ }^{29}$ or clan wars. In an area where the government has left the resolution of such familial conflicts to the parties involved, Bob's efforts have served as respite from years of conflict and violence.

[^15]"I say, even if we're just camineros, ${ }^{30 "}$ he announced with a thundering voice and clenched fist, as though delivering a speech to a room full of voters, "we have done something that not even the president could do. We were able to fight ourselves-we loved our enemies. That makes us the best damn camineros in the nation!"

Although Bob has also been vocal in criticizing some aspects of the Maranao culture, his decisions concerning Maranao and Muslim political affairs are known to be egalitarian. He has penalized Christians who have offended the Muslim faith. He has even sided against his own kinsfolk. Thus, in a socio-political system where kinship is valued over justice, ${ }^{31}$ Bob has introduced hope to the many who have lost faith in the system.

So far, he has garnered the support of both Muslim and Christian residents of Maladeg. He is not suspicious of the Maranao-Muslim culture; in return, people of the tribe and faith have extended him their trust and loyalty. He understands the part of himself that was his mother's world, though not always does he accept it. He believes that his bi-cultural parentage allows him the right to criticize and defend both groups. "Listen to me," he would often say, shaking his fingers at me as he always does when he tries to prove a point, "I am half-Muslim. I know how Muslims are."

[^16]Bob has an uncanny ability to win the respect of his previous enemies, though not always through means of tact or political correctness. He does this by challenging people's jaded expectations of the status quo. It was Bob Anton, a Christian leader, who allowed a rido to be fought in the center of the town during Christmas of 1998-a decision made in defiance of the covenant of the Zone of Peace.
"If I had a choice between two evils, I choose the lesser of two evils [sic]," he explained. "I couldn't have prevented it. [The enemies] were going to cause trouble in the town no matter what. So might as well let them fight. Let them fight in the Muslim area but remove all the civilians. In the end, they went home happy. I did not embarrass them. They did not embarrass me."
"We had such a lively Christmas," he added, recounting the fighting that took place near the marketplace. "I mean, we had all the BOOMS. rrrrrrRAKATAKATAK, BOOM! rrrrrRRAKATAKATAK, BOOM! Lovely!" he giggled. "We had it all: grenade launcher, M16... What more do you want? It would have been more expensive if we bought fireworks!
"They fought for five days and four nights, nonstop. When the fighting ended, there were no casualties," he exclaimed, still in disbelief of the outcome of events that occurred more than two years ago. "Just dead cats, dogs, a few chickens maybe. I tell you, it is the mystery of Maladeg!"

The mystery of Maladeg, however, is not its impenetrability from its enemies. It is the glimmer of hope spawned by its people, whose culture has long been associated with violence, whose faith is tainted with bloodshed, and whose
bangsa ${ }^{32}$ was consolidated under a sovereign rule-The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

Moro armed resistance against foreign rule in Mindanao dates back as early as the Spanish colonization of the Philippines in the 1500 s, persisted through the American regime, and continues to plague the socioeconomic and political environment of the Philippines at present. However, as stories are often multifaceted, Bob Anton tenaciously holds on to his own version and memories.
"During the early ' 50 s there was already a good relationship between the Muslims and the Christians," he said. "All over Lanao, in fact. When we were children we rode the Muslim horses [sic]." "We borrowed [the horses] during Sundays. We went as far as ten to fifteen kilometers away from the town, using the Muslim horses [sic]. We went to [Muslim] communities, they gave us food there as a welcome, until some religious fanatics started giving them the wrong idea that it is the duty and obligation of the Muslims to eradicate Christianity."
"[These leaders] said that the Christians are trying to grab our religion, they are trying to displace our Islam. So because of ignorance and majority of the Muslims also cannot [sic] see that the government was serious in acting upon their predicaments, they resorted to joining [rebel] groups and taking advantage of the opportunity of holding guns."
"You know, a soldier's life... is a very tempting life among the Muslims... especially during times of was poverty and exploitation, some people just wanted to

[^17]hold a gun and exploit anytime. I really attribute this to the fundamentalists, the Muslim leaders who had the chance to go abroad and get the wrong training and wrong impressions about the relationship between Christians and Muslims... that the Muslim is under obligation to rule Christians or anybody. This was the concept that they learned from some fanatic leaders who came from abroad and started teaching that the Christians are mortal enemies of Islam."

However, pointing a finger at the "perpetrator" of the Muslim-Christian conflict in Mindanao, oversimplifies the history of suspicion and distrust of a group that has resisted centuries of foreign domination and national integration. Ironically nonetheless, the people of Maladeg offer a seemingly facile solution to a complex problem. The residents of Maladeg have opted to lay down their weapons in the name of respect. Thus, as Bob explained, it was this simple virtue that saved Maladeg. However, it was a decision made not necessarily for the purpose of becoming one nation under a sovereign rule, but for the mere yearning for normalcy and relative tranquility. On April 8, 1998, approximately ten years after the oral agreement, fortyone council of elders with diverse political ideologies signed an official document declaring Maladeg a Zone of Peace. ${ }^{33}$

[^18]
## THE PEACE ZONE

Ustadz ${ }^{34}$ Gulam Guindo, Sultan Cabugatan of Liangan, is wary about recounting his experiences during the years of martial law. ${ }^{35}$ His story is straightforward and stripped of color and details. "We were farmers up in the hills. The soldiers and rebels fought and we evacuated to Maladeg," he said, pausing at the end of every sentence, allowing Bob to translate from Maranao to English. "The Antons are our family. So the Antons said, We will gather the civilians in one place. Then we will declare this place as a Zone of Peace. We will remove evil ways here.

Those who wish to join us in our community, we will accept them."
Reticence, however, does not conceal the years of fighting and toil from the face of the old man. His slumped and weary gait is reminiscent of a difficult journey from the mountains to the flatlands. His faded trousers, rolled up a quarter of the way below his knees, revealed his soiled toenails. His cracked soles, were plainly visible through his worn out slippers. The wrinkles on his face were accentuated by even the slightest expression. Though he did not seem hesitant to talk to me, he kept finding something else to entertain himself. Something else, besides meeting my eye-he fidgeted with his fingers, he looked past me, he looked down at his feet, he wriggled

[^19]his toes, he fidgeted with his fingers. He was not too keen on expounding on his past, but as the subject turned to his vision of his adoptive hometown, he quickly turned erect.
"I know that there are rebels here and my opinion about their stay is that it is for the advantage of the people in Maladeg. As long as they are in Maladeg, the other invading rebels will not hurt us, because they might hurt their own brothers inside the village. So in short, the presence of these people is a deterrence for any probable destruction of Maladeg... The understanding is that regardless of which side you are on, this is not the place to fight."

Thus, for many years, rebels and soldiers have mingled peacefully in the area. But as national politics turned personal and civil unrest ruled the streets of Manila, the old man, who was also one of the original signatories of the Covenant of Peace Zone, was getting anxious about the waves of consequences that could possibly hit the barangay. ${ }^{36}$ "If [Gloria Macapagal Arroyo] will follow through the good side of her intentions and follow it seriously, maybe she will succeed. But if she will not, with all this number of people around her that do not like her, it could be possible that she is worse than Erap."

[^20]Yet, his demeanor conveyed a grim outlook on political reform. Ustadz Guindo believes that the national government still harbors unscrupulous and corrupt politicians. "The one in the highest position has a bigger amount to steal," he asserted. "The higher the position, the worse the corruption."

When asked if he had encountered corruption among the local politicians, the Ustadz was quick to respond, "Plenty. I'll give you an example... When Governor Mutilan was mayor, he did not have anything. Then he became a governor and surprisingly he was able to have huge buildings in Cagayan, in Marawi, in Iligan. And he was able to buy plantations, like the one in Pekong."
"For your information the plantation in Pekong was bought by Mutilan for 37M pesos" Bob said interpreting the Ustadz. He was speaking more rapidly and becoming more emotional about the subject. "And I'm surprised how he was able to acquire all these things with a very limited governor salary. How did he get all these things? He must have been very quick at money making., ${ }^{37}$
"Have you seen in your lifetime, a government official who actually is in office to serve the people?" I asked the Ustadz.
"None," he responded quickly without giving the question much thought.
"That toilet there is a donation of Mutilan," Bob interrupted again, unable to contain himself. "That's the most that he was able to put up here."

[^21]"That's it," mouthed the Ustadz calmly and quickly moved his gaze from me toward the dilapidated structure fifty yards away.

I studied him for a brief moment, trying to understand why this man, who seemed shamelessly abandoned by the very political entity that was supposed to protect him, appeared neither defeated nor downtrodden. It appears that inurement plays a significant role in one's ability to cope. Realities can be relative. Ustadz Guindo survived the perils of martial law; now he lives a tranquil life by the shores of Maladeg. Like many in the village, he is not provided the basic necessities expected of the government, yet he is mindful of the fact that he has been spared from the gross human rights abuses of the past. He understands that the titles of $U s t a d z$ and Sultan have little import to Malacañang, yet despite these harsh and humbling realities, he opted out of combat to obtain what is inalienable and rightfully his-to live peacefully-an effort that proved futile in his past.

Aripudin Caya Sultan had a different experience. Unlike Ustadz Guindo, he wanted to reveal his past and his side of the story. He found himself in Maladeg after running away from the family of the man he murdered. His story however, neither ends nor begins there. Arip's victim took his father hostage for P80,000. Now the family of his father's captor is seeking remuneration in form of blood money or blood.
"The man demanded ransom money," Arip said, explaining the beginning of his family's rido. "He was the chief of security of the logging company in Nunungan. What I know of this man was that he had a syndicate operating in that company."

His father, who owned land that he allowed for use by the logging company, never received his share of the profits. Desperate, Arip's father took matters into his own hands. "Although my father was what you would call no read, no write, he still caught the chief of security stealing items that were property of the company. So my father assembled a team. They broke into the company premises and killed maybe three people. They recovered some weapons but after five months, my father surrendered to the authorities... Finally, he was given a clean slate by the government."
"When the chief of security held my father hostage, I asked a number of $D^{2} t u^{38}$ if there was any reason for the kidnapping. They couldn't give me a reason. I told them, if the authorities won't settle the problem, I myself will seek justice for my father... You know, here in Mindanao, once you say a 'Muslim rido,' our government seems to lack the budget and the time to settle it. ${ }^{39}$ Muslims are different because they really don't seem to obey the law. That's the difficult part... I waited a month for justice to be served, but they still didn't deliver. For that reason, we killed him."

We, included Arip, his second cousin, and a close friend. The three ambushed their target just as he pocketed a box of cigarettes and turned on the ignition of his car. He knew his actions would lead to an explosive series of ambush killings or at the very least, put a price on his head. "I knew that his family was notorious for being

[^22]war freaks. Even if you just say something that might insult them, they can kill you," he explained, not feeling tormented by the realization that he is a Maranao who disagrees with a culture that he, nevertheless, feels resigned to follow. "They can kill you over words that hurt them. They would even kill their relative, how much more if you kill one of theirs- one who they rely on and trust. I am here in Maladeg because this is the only place where I am safe,"

However, he knows he is not welcomed by many of the town's residents, save his relatives and a few friends. Even the few merciful ones ask him not to prolong his stay for fear of being caught in the crossfire. So the twenty-six-year-old moves from house to house, sleeping when most are awake, and vigilant when the rest are in peaceful slumber. In the darkness, he passes the time by contemplating about the drastic changes in his life, clearing his mind only at dawn's first call of worship.

Arip was a college student preparing to receive his degree in engineering. "Automotive Engineering Technology," he added, "I wanted to go abroad." Now his journey reached a screeching halt. "You know, rido is a culture-I wouldn't say of Muslims because Muslims believe in God-but maybe of Maranaos. Many seem to like entering in rido. But if it weren't forced upon me," he paused and sat in brief silence while contemplating his concluding statement, "I know that with rido, I have no future."

He looked straight at me, not with the remorse of a man who took the life of another, but with the defeated stare of a fugitive who did not blame anyone else but himself. He did not blame the national government for its misappropriated budgeting
plans, or the local government for unethically abandoning its citizenry. He blamed himself. He regretted not pursuing any other way of finding justice for his father.

Wrapped to the waist in his malong, ${ }^{40}$ he sat in the dark corner of a relative's house. His shoulders slumped as he cautiously inched away from the mid-morning light that seeped through the open window. His outline, caught between the shadows and the glimmering rays that escaped through random crevices of the walls, was far from the symbolic embodiment of poetic justice.

Towards the end of 1998, Bob was faced with the decision of keeping the peace in Maladeg without resolving the rido against Arip and his family, or allowing violence inside the Zone of Peace in hopes of pacifying the enemy. Arip's ridu-ai ${ }^{4 l}$ would not retreat, and Arip would not leave Maladeg. Bob had to reach a compromise.

The enemies were allowed to enter Maladeg with their weapons, but since they were fighting a Maranao rido, it was decided that they would only attack and fire within the Maranao side of town. In December 1998, at the marketplace, seventeen of Arip's relatives fought against one hundred and three men. ${ }^{42}$ There were no human casualties and property damage was minimal.

Arip feels indebted to the townspeople for what he considers to be tolerance rather than fear, but he also knows that his time in Maladeg is running out. "I could only give thanks to the people here because they have tried to understand. If there

[^23]were any other way, I would not choose to stay here. I know I am violating their Zone of Peace covenant."


Many of the residents of Maladeg have stories similar to that of Arip and Ustadz Guindo. They were victims caught in the crossfire during Marcos' martial law. Others ran away from clan wars. Almost all, fled from the old way of life. "Maladeg is what you would call pahulayan, a resting place," said a former Zone Commander of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) who sought refuge in Maladeg during the height of guerilla warfare. Though he has not personally abandoned his desire for self-determination, he has since detached himself from the armed resistance and its concomitant party ideology. Nowadays, the former rebel busies himself tending to his small sari-sari at the marketplace. Ironically, he is not always able to elude danger even in his "resting place." The rido fought last December of 1998 rained bullets over many stalls and houses near the marketplace. Among those hit was his sari-sari store.
"What we did was to conduct a shuttle diplomacy for both sides of the warring factions," Bob said, relating how the Zone of Peace was formed. He is chairman of the Zone and was instrumental in heading the talks that started ten years earlier. "We made a covenant of peace or a conduct of engagement. We are tough but can't we control ourselves? Let's be gentlemen. Even though we're warriors, let's be gentlemen warriors. For example, let's not kill the women and children of our enemies. Let's not shoot at their houses, in case they have visitors who may get hit
and may get involved in the fighting. Let's not prevent the workers from making their livelihood. Let's not prevent the haulers carrying their products from the mountain community to the urban area where they can sell their merchandise. We will not kill people in the Zone of Peace." He raised an eyebrow, smiled wryly then winked at me. He had just proposed a set of rules that did not leave much room for leniency.
"With the absence of respect, there is no peace," Bob stated curtly. "If Muslims and Christians don't respect each other, they cannot be close to each other. Try hurting a Christian here and Muslims will retaliate against you. You cannot easily hurt a Muslim here either, the Christian minority will retaliate against you. They will bring you to court. Otherwise they will inflict harm on you," he said, repeating the clichéd attestations of many gentlemen warriors.
"This does not necessarily mean that we are one hundred percent peaceful here, but at least it will be inculcated in the minds of others... that even though the kind of people here are belligerent, in this particular place they can restrain themselves."

During the height of guerilla warfare, Bob Anton went to radio stations to broadcast information on areas of assistance available for civilian refugees caught in the crossfire. Among these refugee camps was his property in Maladeg. He relied mostly on word of mouth, but as individuals turned into families, greater amounts of aid were needed. The Antons, could no longer financially support the growing number of refugees in their area. It was time for the government to step in.
"Well, they're not vagabonds," he added, describing the government officials in-charge of supervising aid to Maladeg. "They're not criminals. They are officials, gentlemen, they understand that crime only happens in the isolated areas. The government also knew that those people were not fighting the government, they were civilians. But when we reacted to the needs of the civilians, it was not only the civilians who were able to take advantage, but also the rebels who turned civilian. I recognized them, but I didn't say anything to the soldiers, in case the soldiers might retaliate against them... Who wasn't an enemy of the government during those days anyway? But when they didn't want to fight anymore... Why should we make life harder for them? You don't need too much formality to mend relationships between enemies. A lot of what we see is too much publicity concerning rebel surrender, except that in reality, a lot of those who "surrendered" were tricycle drivers, noncombatants, non-rebels. ${ }^{43}$ But those people I knew, although there were no formalities, deep within their hearts I could presume that they were sincere. They wanted to start a new life. Later on when I felt that the soldiers weren't as indignant, I introduced the rebels one by one. The soldiers accepted the rebels. In fact, some were exculpated from their cases because of my interventions."

When the supplies came, Bob noticed that the refugees still built barracks instead of houses, peep holes instead of windows, camps instead of residences. Yet he kept his distance and allowed the healing take its natural course. "When I built my house [the residents] said, That's a beautiful pattern! So they imitated it. Others have

[^24]made bigger windows. So little by little, as the saying goes, Rome was not made in one day. Our place here was made out of many years of gradual development and changes. People are learning."

Gradually, the families in Maladeg put their guard down. Newer houses were built farther apart from each other. Since there were no longer constant threats of ambush, the idea of "security in numbers" has become a distant defense strategy. However, many of the barricades remained standing. Bob believes that the structures need not be torn down since they serve as a reminder of the powerful lessons of past that should not be forgotten.
"They are keeping that to remind their next generation that once upon a time, life here was extremely hard," he said, looking at the little ones who were now busy studying my cameras. It was a hot afternoon when he decided to take me on a tour around both the Muslim and Christian areas. The barricades that he was referring to were those rice sacks filled with rocks and soil, piled around the outside walls of almost every house. Some were as high as three feet. These days, the barricades serve as a play area where the children hide and climb up and down.
"In fact, I have a plan to build a housing project. But I am not going to dismantle the [formation] here," he said, pointing a large rock by the entrance gate of his house. I will keep that as a reminder to the next generation... Later on, my plan is to start a community that has a semblance of peace of mind, with no barricades, with a bath and toilet, with a marketplace... Where there is distance between houses, where they have gardens... Then you can make that comparison between the new [community] and the old one. So, I won't demolish the old structures. I'll keep that
there to remind the next generation, maybe decades from now, that once upon a time this was the life in Maladeg."

## AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Present day Maladeg however, is not free from the destructive hand of rido, already embedded in the politics and culture of the Mindanao Moros. As one Maranao explained to me, "to the Maranaos, shame, imprisonment, and death are one and the same."

In a culture where honor is of equal value to life itself, taking vengeance against one's ridu-ai means defending a dignified life. Rido can result from petty theft, like stealing coconuts, to gruesome murder. It can last through generations, with hatred planted in the hearts of posterity without any recollection of the roots of enmity.

In these communities, the rule of thumb is an eye for an eye-or at least it used to be that way before the Zone was established. Now, traditional leaders settle disputes in court. Blood money is exchanged for offenses committed. Thirty thousand pesos for the loss of blood. Sixty for the loss of a life. If for some reason, warring families cannot settle their differences in court, they must fight outside the Zone. These traditional laws are more widely accepted and applied in Maladeg. ${ }^{44}$

The local judicial system is considerably different from that of the rest of the country. As part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, traditional leaders are able to implement customary laws without frequent intervention from

[^25]government officials. ${ }^{45}$ However, many residents are resentful of the government's hands-off policy in the area.
"It's another form of eradication," Bob said, criticizing the government's
lack of participation and intervention in resolving rido among the Maranaos.
"Tolerating to eradicate... Here, I offer a kind of first aid justice."
The kind of first aid justice traditional leaders like Bob offer, used to take the
form of an oral resolution, sealed with a handshake. Nowadays, agreements are
written in contract form like the following, signed by Manuel "Bob" Anton:

## Domogcao (Alando) Clan and Bantuas Clan

On February 27, 1998, three young Muslim boys and their friend identified as Samad Domogcao, 18; Risa Domogcao, 16; Su-od Domogcao, 15, all brothers, and their friend Acmad visited the Christian community in Maladeg, Sultan Gumander, and at about 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, took intoxicating liquor, Tanduay and Tuba ${ }^{46}$ at the residence of Rufo Sollatorio, a Christian whose sideline was selling liquor secretly to Muslims.

At about 3:00 p.m., said group went to the market site (Muslim community), met the faithful (Muslims) going out of the mosque, chanced upon one Samrona Bantuas and without any provocation manhandled the latter causing serious physical injury to the point that Samrona Bantuas lost two of his front teeth. His body was badly hurt, he urinated blood when his kidney was hit by a $2 \times 2$ lumber.

The four drunken boys were arrested by the community guards and brought to my (Bob Anton's) office. The committee members were called and an investigation was conducted. No less than the parents of said boys witnessed against their sons [sic]. It was found out that these boys have violated the rules/regulations of the community with

[^26]respect to abuses on account of intoxication. The decision of the committee was, as follows:

1. The culprits were fined, as follows:
a. They will have to pay 2,000 [pesos] for getting drunk and causing disturbance on a Muslim holy day (Friday)
b. They will have to pay another 2,000 [pesos] for creating havoc inside the Zone of Peace.
c. 30,000 to be paid to the person Samrona Bantuas representing the equivalent to _loss of his life and dignity and for causing his blood to untimely flow out of his body.
2. For failure to pay the penalty imposed by the committee, the culprits will have to be confined in the community jail until such time that the committee will deem it right for them to be released.
3. For the Christian vendor, Rufo Sollatorio, he is penalized to pay 5,000 cash or in kind for selling intoxicating liquor to the Muslim boys on a holy day, Friday.
4. All culprits have the option to pay their penalties, otherwise they will be vanished from Maladeg, never to return to this place again.
"It takes the patience of a dog trainer to deal with this people," he told me bluntly, as he was concentrating on his harvest of bird's nest that he was meticulously cleaning. "You know, I read a survey somewhere that the Maranaos are 400 years behind civilization. Do you know that when you ask a Maranao his name, he won't tell you? He tells the person next to him to tell you his name," he explained, his eyes never leaving the tweezers that he was using to pick dirt off his product.
"You as a leader must understand that. If you don't, you'll lose your patience. I mean that's a very simple question... asking someone's name $\ldots$ and they can't answer! If you were military and armed, you'll probably end up knocking the guy on the head with your gun!
"That's the problem with these people from Manila... These people in the government are used to timetables. They expect you to accomplish so and so by this
time. You're not dealing with garbage! You're dealing with people-crazy people for that matter-that's why they're in trouble.
"You heard what the commander said earlier," he said, referring to his guest at breakfast, Cmdr. Moracaya Macaalin, a former MNLF rebel now integrated into the AFP. "The solution is simple, establish the Shari' $a h^{47}$ as part of the law of the land. Why should I let these politicians dictate me? They don't know how it is in this place. I'm not scared of them. Why should I be scared of anybody?"

Thus, in Maladeg where he is considered the Ina-Ama, Bob applies the customary laws when intervening between two warring parties. As a peace negotiator however, he faces the challenge of appeasing both parties involved in the conflict. In order not to lose his credibility as a leader, he avoids lofty provisos. For example, once, when payment for a stolen cow meant giving another cow of equal value to the aggrieved party, Bob took from his own livestock when the offender was unable to pay on time. "They would pay me little by little, but you know how that goes," he shrugged. "They promised to pay off all their debts, but that would be a promise written in the wind," he added lightly with a smile. He remained content at the thought that Maladeg and its neighbors were one less rido away from peace. ${ }^{48}$
$\qquad$
"I believe that if I can put up a good model," Bob said. "It would automatically grow without me. This thing will grow naturally...because [the

[^27]residents] will see a certain kind of uniqueness in it. So, it would naturally be inculcated in them."
"What I am working out now is a society, small in size but something worth talking about, something worth seeing, something worth experiencing. If we can have this kind of society, it will serve as a catalyst for other societies or social groups to follow, because it will invade them. ${ }^{, 49}$

The Zone of Peace, which used to be a one square kilometer refugee area, now spans 7 x15 square kilometers. The Anton family owns most of the land in Maladeg, thus to seek refuge in the town virtually means to ask for Bob Anton's permission to occupy a parcel of his land. He is generous yet firm. "Tell them they can stay, on the condition that they don't bring any trouble makers with them," he instructed the liaison, barangay counselor Luting Limano. "Not even if they are related!"

At the dinner table, Da was busy setting a dish of fried fish and rice. "If they bring in any hoodlums who are going to wreak havoc, I will go back to my old self. And no dynamite fishing either," he added as he reached across the table for his share. "They don't understand that they're only going to end up starving themselves. Then I end up feeding them," he exclaimed, looking at Da as if to seek her agreement. Da, however, decided against any reaction that she felt would fan the flames. Her silence made Bob even more assertive. Feeling inclined to defend himself and clarify the fine line between selfishness and practicality, he threw his

[^28]hands in the air and blurted out a sharp retort, "What? You think you can endure watching them starve?"

Bob takes his role as Maladeg's Ina-Ama very seriously. He has become the people's nurturer and disciplinarian, and a constant flow of people seeking his advice, heeding his counsel, needing his support, are all part of a day's work."Anybody can come to my house at anytime," he said. "Morning, noon, night, they can seek my help even when I am having sexual relations with my wife."

It only took me a few minutes inside the Anton home, to realize that Bob was not exaggerating. Individuals, families, men, women, children, Muslims, Christians, VIPs, derelicts-people from all walks of life continually arrived at his doorstep. True to his word, Bob welcomed each one with admirable generosity and patience. Looking at him during those moments as Ina-Ama, it was apparent that Bob Anton was truly in his element. It was hard for me to imagine his violent past.

## MALA WATA

"What do you see when you look into the eyes of a man who has killed someone?" asked my cousin who was reading my interview transcripts.
"In this case," I explained, "it is just like looking into the eyes of a man who has not seen death."

He looks like such a simple man. His cement and hardwood house, though the biggest in Maladeg, is nonetheless, plain and austere. His lifestyle is neither lavish nor pretentious. The torn shirt, faded shorts and worn-out slippers are never paraded as a fashion statement or a declaration of his rugged virility. He is a man oblivious to the connection between appearance and self-expression. His method of conveying his beliefs is readily obvious. He talks. He talks a lot.
"These men surrounded me with guns," Bob recounted during one lazy afternoon when the rest of the town took their siesta from the hot summer sun. Bob, his friend, Narding and I were sharing noteworthy experiences underneath the shade of Bob's cottage by the beach. If I were a fly on the wall, I would choose that cottage by the beach as my local hangout. Countless politicians have stopped by that cottage when they needed validation from an influential leader. Candidates have narrated and orated, pledged and renounced, they have begged and bribed, to which Bob had bluntly responded, "If you can buy me, what makes you think your opponents can't?"

Many family disputes have been settled at the cottage beside the Anton house. Bob's affinity for what he refers to as his "office" stems from the fair exchange of colorful tales and notable experiences that have occurred beneath its shelter.
"They were threatening me," he said recounting another one of his near fatal encounters with MNLF commanders who accused him of masterminding the death of some of their men and additionally, tried to collect revolutionary tax. ${ }^{[50}$ Furious, Bob held out a grenade in his left hand and threatened to "blow everybody to pieces," including himself.
"How could they scare me with war?" he said with growl. "I eat war for breakfast, lunch and dinner. You think I'm scared of you? Try me and I will take you to kingdom come," he exclaimed, his lips quivering as he recounted the events, seeming as furious now as he was when the confrontation occurred. "Warrior blood runs within me, Español, Moro, Intsik, Cristiano!"51

Narding, who was sitting at the opposite side of the hut was laughing, amused by Bob's daring. It is true that Bob's lifestyle makes for interesting stories. Even the most mundane subjects often lead to a worthwhile tale.
"Have you ever tried durian?" he asked, trying to convince me to taste his most prized produce. I crinkled my nose at the thought of eating durian. I could never comprehend how people grew so addicted to something that reeks of rotten garbage. "Oh, it smells like hell, but it tastes like heaven," he urged.

I could not even stand the smell of durian long enough to try a bite. However, I did not want to offend my host, so I tried to be less absolute. "Well, I would try it if only I could find a way to get the smell out," I said, thinking I had found a way out. Surely, he would agree that durian can leave a lasting stench.

[^29]"Oh no, all you have to do is wash your hands with water that you let run through the pulp of the fruit," he argued, grinning at my look of defeat. "See the antidote, is usually from the thing itself that causes the problem."
"Yeah, once I had an allergic reaction to chili pepper, " I recounted. "I was red all over. So my father had someone mash chili pepper leaves and cover my entire body with its paste. Then I was green all over.
"Like the incredible hulk," Bob laughed.
"Yup," I agreed nodding. "It cured me though."
"Yes, there is always an antidote. If a snake bites you, you administer antivenom. If a rabid dog bites you..."
"You bite it back," interrupted Narding.
Bob disregarded the joke and turned to me with a contemplative stare. "A rabid dog bit me once," he said as he segued into another one of his surreal escapades. "I grabbed it by the snout and ripped its jaws apart," he said while showing me the scar on his left hand.
"What happened to the dog?" I asked.
"It died."
For a while, we sat in comfortable silence, staring at the colorful sky. The disturbance on the surface of the water grabbed his attention, and he quickly sat erect to examine what was happening a hundred yards in front of him. "Sharks won't bite if you don't startle them," he said as he sat back, content that it was only a school of fish passing by. "This is the life of a frontiersman," he said, pausing to examine the vast body of water, "there is no turning back."

I wondered if at one point he was ever scared of at least one thing. I thought of our first meeting. Bob was salivating over a piece of cake. Surely he wouldn't dare, I thought in disbelief; the entire slab was covered with black ants. Then he scooped up a piece and feigned a mischievous laugh. "HA, HA," he said playfully, like a child pretending to be a pirate ready to ambush. "They think I won't eat them," he announced in true thespian exaggeration, and a second later, swallowed a big slice of pineapple upside down cake.

His playfulness is a comical contrast to his intimidating physique. "Ay, akong bisita! ${ }^{52 "}$ I caught him cheerfully talking to a lizard one time, after dinner. "Go ahead, eat," he coaxed the frightened reptile that hid behind a plate of white rice, "nobody's going to scold you."

Swimming with sharks, killing a rabid dog with bare hands, threatening guerilla rebels, eating black ants, talking to animals-these are all intricately woven into Bob's daily life that he speaks of these incidents with no intention of boasting of his cunning. He even giggles at the thought that even MNLF commanders deem him with fearful respect.
"How can [the family Anton] be scared of anybody," the commanders once informed unsuspecting visitors at Sultan Gumander, "when they are practically the ones who kill everybody in the area!"
"I was so embarrassed," Bob laughed, showing a childlike playfulness as he stooped down to hide his face in his hands and knees. "These people from Manila

[^30]thought I am an angel, only to have the MNLF commanders of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur refer to me as the number one killer in Sultan Gumander."

Manuel "Bob" Anton, has many nicknames. The "number one killer in Sultan Gumander" goes by a different alias when among family member. He is often called Baby Boy, for he is the youngest of eight siblings. To the Maranaos who find his childish charisma comically unbefitting of a man with his size and temper, he is referred to as Mala Wata or Big Boy. Indeed, at almost six feet, 220 pounds, and with the resounding voice of a battalion commander, Mala Wata can be an intimidating figure.

He towers over most of the resident natives, as probably did his Spanish grandfather, Juan Anton de la Red, who left Spain to seek his fortune in Malabang. Bob attributes his sinewy frame to the physical expense of fighting and farm work. Yet despite the respect he commands, he still sees himself more of a frontiersman-a pioneer like his grandfather or his father Miguel, who kept the Anton legacy alive by becoming the first Presidente ${ }^{53}$ of Malabang. To a frontiersman, no terrain or body of water was too daunting. No area remained uncharted. No obstacles were to be regarded insurmountable.

Baby Boy grew up fast. His father left his mother when he was merely a boy, hence, seven brothers and a sister were left to care for a Maranao mother who drank her problems to oblivion. However, that was only the beginning of what would be

[^31]years of turmoil and violence to come. At a very young age, Bob and his brothers were thrown into the fires of clan wars.

Enemies wanted their family off the land that they considered home. When he turned twelve, his father was ambushed by ridu-ai. Baby Boy was then forced to cope with the consequent realities of death. Thus began his premature initiation into manhood.
"I think our father was killed so that they could get his land," he said. "He owned about 300 hectares there in Kalanugas. That land was given to the people there, but they still wanted his property here. We have very strong indications that he was killed because of that.
"We were still very young. Maybe [our enemies] thought that we would be scared or that we would flee, or that maybe we would not have the courage to stay. But they were wrong, they didn't realize that what they did was a provocation. It was also another kind of catalyst to make us resort to violence, because we needed justice and we didn't find justice. The Police, the mayor, they did not do anything. They knew who did it. They didn't do anything. So we hunted [our enemies]."
"With firearms?"
"Of course," he chuckled, "you can't fight them with your tongue. We hunted them down and eliminated them. A tooth for a tooth. It was not a war; it's just like liquidation. It was not a total war or family war because we are only seven brothers."

Disappointed with the government, Bob and his brothers took matters into their own hands. The seven brothers plotted vengeance against hundreds of men.
"Muslims, all of them," Bob continued. "It was not a head-on collision. We used tactics to take advantage of them and to pressure them, to eliminate them, bring them to justice. Some of them were brought to justice. But we exerted the efforts, not the authorities. [The authorities] knew [who our enemies were], they just let it pass. They were in cahoots," he said bluntly, certain of this conclusion.

His evolution from vigilante to village leader came at a time when he was winning against his enemies. The height of President Marcos' martial law sent many rebel and civilian Muslims fleeing from their homes, as government soldiers indiscriminately combated against the Moro liberation fronts in Mindanao. "That is the big difference when you know God," Bob explained. "The Bible tells us that one of the greatest tests of love, is to love your enemies. These people here are all relatives of [my] enemies, mortal enemies. They hunted us here, weeks, months, years...We also hunted them."

As I observed this massive figure in front of me talking about his warring days, I realized that maybe it was not so hard to picture him as a pugnacious child and as a young vigilante.
"Oh, they used to be crazy back in the days," said Da, who shook her head, with an expression not of disapproval but of resignation. She had learned to accept her husband's past as it was beyond her control. It was past nine o'clock and the lights had been out for quite some time. We were sitting on their second floor balcony, taking advantage of the clear night.
"Now, he has calmed down," she added. "Before, when he and his brothers would get together, they would drink. Then they would get into fistfights. At first it would be like that," she nodded her head towards the mango tree. Beneath the tree, Bob and his grandson, Mac-Mac were singing nostalgic ballads accompanied by a guitar, the moonlight and a powerful flashlight. "Just a good time," she continued. "But then the guns would start coming out!"
"Guns?" I asked, surprised at the extent to which the Anton brothers would go to prove their point.
"Oh yes, they would threaten each other with guns" she said, chuckling. I suppose, in hindsight, the tumultuous days of old can evolve into a comical tale. Outside, under the mango tree, Bob and Mac-Mac continued to bellow away in harmony-the older one, with his thundering voice, while the little one proudly entertained with his pre-pubescent warble.
"She loves all the things I love, including my insanity!" Bob confessed one afternoon at the cottage, as he watched his wife tend the garden. "I tell you, she was the only one who could control me. She said something that made me realize I was behind civilization, You've become an old man, yet you still haven't changed. Oh, I was so embarrassed!
"I tell you, I really believe that we're soul mates," he continued. "Why was it that the first time I saw her, I told her friend, Mao ra na ang babae nga makatumpag sa akong gi kamada nga copras!" His laughter faded when he noticed that I did not understand words no longer used by my generation. "Kamada," he repeated.
"Piled-she's the only woman who can topple the copra that I piled," he reiterated. "Come to find out, she was asking the same friend about me too. Where is your friend? You know, the one with big eyes."

But if their union was fated, their lives together did not mean utter bliss for Da . Her husband and his brother, Al , were a contentious pair in their youth. "We were partners," Bob exclaimed proudly. "When we got drunk, we would fire our guns! Ha! Even the police in Malabang ran! It's a good thing that you were able to put up with that, Da ," he said, turning to his wife who seemed neither amused nor bothered by her husband's delight.
"Well, everything has its season," she answered. "I just took it as a new life, a new experience..." she said, pausing to gauge her husband's reaction. "But it was still wrong," she finally added.
"Yes," said Bob nodding, "but during that time it was a necessity, because if we didn't prove our insanity, [our enemies] would not have feared us. The language they understand is insanity.

Once, when the sun had decided to hide momentarily behind the clouds, the couple decided to take me on a tour of their farm. What I thought would be a lazy walk around the area was in all actuality an exhausting hike up a mountain. Situated midway along the trail was Umbao's hut.
"My cousin, on my mother's side," said Bob introducing Umbao. He is also the Anton's caretaker. He tills and guards the land in exchange for a third of the harvest.

On the bamboo floor that was raised a couple of feet above ground was Umbao's youngest, a baby boy covered in clothes two sizes too small. He was fidgeting under the grasp of his sister who seemed to be no more than five years older than he was. Their backs faced the only walled side of the four-post hut. However, it was not the bareness of the structure that tugged my attention. It was the size of the hut that did not seem to match the number of individuals who inhabit it. About six by six feet in area, the shed was supposed to accommodate, Umbao, his wife, and their eight children.

Yet that morning, no one seemed as if they have awaken from a cramped night's sleep. Umbao, with one hand holding tightly his malong, used the other to give Bob a warm and welcoming tap on the shoulder. His brood was also in fairly good disposition. They were frolicking nearby and quickly dashed towards their aunt and uncle as soon as they saw the couple approaching.

Amen, they greeted their elders in an almost mechanical manner, as if they have performed this customary gesture a thousand times before. One-by-one each child pressed his/her forehead onto Bob and Da's knuckles. ${ }^{54}$ Amen.
"Pick some bayabas, ${ }^{55 "}$ " Da instructed in Maranao, as she caught the older girl's hand. Immediately, the little one released her grip and along with the rest of her barefooted siblings, sprinted away in search of fresh fruits for their visitors. None seemed unnerved by what could have been hiding beneath the tall grass.

I on the other hand, was a little more wary of the tropical rain forest and its inhabitant creatures. As I was trying to avoid giant spiders and breathlessly struggling

[^32]with all my equipment, my guides, who showed no signs of fatigue, were cheerfully telling stories of their encounters with aggressive reptiles.
"The little lady was right along this path," Bob said, teasing his wife as we proceeded downhill towards the house. "Right here, head up, swaying her hips from side to side, swinging her bolo ${ }^{56}$ like she had no care in the world. And I was telling her, You keep walking like that, you might step on a snake! Sure enough, after I said that, this mother snake came rushing towards her in full attack position!"

Da, who tried to defend herself, could not get a word out. "I-huh-HAD-huhthe bolo," she finally said, catching her breath in between fits of laughter.
"But instead of using it, she threw it towards me and ran away!"
"I said, You handle it! I don't want anything to do with it!"
Seeing my face turn from an amused red to pallid ocher, Bob expressed what was supposed to be kind but nevertheless futile words of reassurance. "She was just defending her young," he said. "Snakes are shy creatures. They normally run away. Unless of course they feel cornered, then they attack. Maybe we were coming too close to her eggs."
"What did you do?" I asked, nervously inspecting the grass beneath.
"Well it had its head up, like it wasn't going to back down. And I said, Hey you leave me no choice but to kill you or else you'll bite me."
"And?"
"And I cut its head off," he shrugged. "I had no choice."

[^33]Further downhill, Bob started humming. "Who gave me that mango tree?" he said playfully as he started an opening line of what seemed like a scripted dialogue between the two. After years of retelling their love story, the couple had perfected a playfully comical exchange. "MeeEEEeee," Da hollered in a singsong reply. Walking ahead of Bob, she absentmindedly swirled her walking stick as she swayed her way down the mountain.
"And why did you give that to me, my dear," said Bob, repeating the same tune that Da had just delivered.
"To remember me byyyy," she said, still continuing their jingle.
Bob, who was walking behind his wife, gave her an endearing laugh. The sophomoric crush that they have for each other has not faded through the monotony of daily routine and the adversities they faced. He had a volatile temper. She was not able to bear him children. She was a city gal. He was a country guy. Thus, when he decided to return to Maladeg to establish permanence, she gave him the seedling to remember her by. She stayed behind.
"But," Da added, "if it is something spiritual, you shouldn't fight it. The more you fight it, the stronger it gets the next time around." A few years later, she joined him with a vow of forever. "It came here before I did," she said looking at the thirty-five-foot tree along the south side entrance of her house. Though she never seemed to grow comfortable around the occasional gunfire, she has grown accustomed to the pace of the farm life where hours are as fluid as days.
"When I was single, I was like you, I had my job, I lived in the city," she said. "I wasn't comfortable in a place so laid back. But now, when people say there is
so much time and nothing to do, I think, no there is no time to do everything that $I$ want to do. Look at the farm! Look at the garden! See how big it is? No, there isn't enough time to do what I want to do."
"Soul mates!" Bob interrupted. "I truly believe that. I mean, look at Da," he said pointing at his wife. "People wondered... Yes! Yes, people wondered! Why Da, when I used to date beauty queens in my youth? Why did I end up marrying a woman with button nose?"

I eyed Da, at this remark. She seemed indifferent. I looked at Bob again and looked for that hint of arrogance. There may have been that, but what I noticed most was the aura of confidence that was formed throughout thirty years of unwavering devotion. There was something in his delivery and her reaction that made the whole scenario light and comfortable. Da did not take her husband's remark with any offense or insecurity.

The couple considered me as an inquisitive and wandering spirit, so they continued on with their advice on love and destiny. It was then that I understood that the couple held their union in quiet regard. They had the look of grateful surrender and warm acceptance of their fate; neither Bob nor Da questioned their feelings for each other.
"Eat," Bob announced, as we settled down for supper, "drink and be merry!"
"For tomorrow you diet," they said in unison as they chuckled mischievously, and bowed their heads in prayer.

## THE ROAD TO ZAMBOANGA

The late afternoon sun was flirtatiously touching the western horizon when a small group of Maranao men and women with hurried strides suddenly appeared in the foreground. A woman carrying a bulky load wrapped in malong, was heading a line of people walking along the shore, past the cottage by the beach. Just as instantly as the group appeared, they blended south into the horizon and were gone.
"Another dead child," Bob said as he, Zags and I watched the group proceed toward the burial site.
"There is no doctor to be contacted here," Zags said nonchalantly, as though he has seen this incident many times before. Zagusara "Zags" Dongdong, is Sultan Gumander's Municipal Planner and Development Coordinator. In the five-year plan that he drew up a few years back, he included the construction of a healthcare center in Maladeg. The plan was not implemented during the Estrada years and may have to pass through a different set of hands that manipulate the red and green lights in the present administration.

In the meantime, the sick and dying find other means of treatment and reprieve. Some seek Bob's knowledge in acupressure and acupuncture, while others still resort to folk medicine. Unfortunately there are those traditional healers whose diagnosis and treatment lead to fatal results; and Bob's way of teaching the residents a lesson were, at times, tragic.
"I tolerated the kids to die," he said, referring to two of his grandnephews who were taken to him already on the verge of death, "if only to make the parents wake up to the reality that they should not have gotten involved with the occult
because they were only being deceived. They were being deceived and cheated, while the [children's] condition worsened. It was only when the [children's] health was critical that [the parents] sent them to me... They asked for help but I couldn't do anything anymore. I told them, Earlier, I told you to go to the doctor, you did not see the doctor. You choose to give your money to that crazy guy there, so you might as well let him heal your child. Both children died."
"From that time, they advised others, If you don't take his word or advice earlier, then your children will die... From that time on, when somebody got sick, they went running to me. We do have ideas about herbal medicine and water therapy. We know acupressure, a little of acupuncture. We can help...if only for rheumatism, high blood pressure... in five minutes [a patient] can recover. We can even do it faster than a doctor, because the doctor will take hours before the patient can walk. We can make him walk in two to five minutes."

For serious cases, patients still had to be taken to Cotabato ${ }^{57}$ or Malabang. But the road are virtually impassable. The national highway that ran through Maladeg, was not only stopped short by a fallen bridge but was also a fertile ground to a tree that has been growing unperturbed, in the middle of the road for years.
"Yes [the engineers] had photographs," said Bob as he explained to me why there was no government action regarding the rebuilding of the bridge and the national highway since the Marcos administration. "But those photographs were not photographs of the actual area. They were taken from another place where the roads

[^34]were concrete... These contractor-engineers made reports of accomplishing their contracts $95 \%, 100 \%$. There were a series of contractors, there were many of them."

With pictures in hand, Bob discredited the contractors reports when he testified in front of the Commission on Audit and to Robert Aventajado, during his chance meeting with the Presidential Adviser on Flagship Projects for Mindanao.

Bob's meeting with Aventajado sealed the fate of the officials who falsified the reports on the infrastructure projects in Maladeg. Subsequently, a team of investigators were sent from Manila. "They came to Maladeg without me knowing. They were all incognito and they had one rebel commander who escorted them. When they arrived at the market sight they tried to hire a tricycle to bring them all the way to the undeveloped areas."

But the roads were impenetrable by even a small tricycle. What the investigators saw prompted them to return to Manila and file a case against the contractors and engineers at the Office of the Ombudsman. However, with the repeated allegations of corruption against the Ombudsman, Bob was not hopeful that justice would be served accordingly.
"The contractors, are they Maranao or Christian or both?" I asked.
"Maranaos," he shrugged, "for money's sake, they forget [sic] their constituents." It was a complaint that resounded through various presidential administrations regardless of tribe and religion. That was a moment of paradigm shift. The ideological rift between Muslims and Christians, which has been long used as a platform by secessionists, may not be as relevant now as it was when the native Moros defended their independence from the Spaniards. The battle was no longer
about the natives vs. the conquistadores, not even Islam vs. Christianity. It had evolved into a merciless game of power and greed between the unscrupulous elite and the disenfranchised masses. Muslims and Christians alike have equal chances of being deprived of government services.
"[The contractors] took advantage," Bob continued. "The engineers who inspected said $o k$, they covered their eyes with money. When the investigators from Manila arrived, the engineers who were supposed to inspect with the contractors, were attempting to misguide those investigators from Manila.
"They told [the investigators], Lets just look at this part. So they stopped at the cemented portion. It was a good thing that my brother, Al, was there. He said, No, there's still more damaged road up ahead. This part isn't the problem."

The investigators followed Al Anton and saw that at about 150 meters away, lay the unpaved national highway leading to Zamboanga-the part contractors and engineers failed to record on film.

The road to Zamboanga was rendered impassable almost ten years ago when the approach to the Liangan Bridge collapsed into the Liangan river. Politics prevented the last contractor from completing the project.

Shirasak Abdullah ${ }^{58}$ and his partner had accrued a significant amount of debt from the local residents, whom they hired for security and labor as the construction proceeded south to Maladeg. Unable to pay their "back accounts," and fearing the reactions of the disgruntled workers, Abdullah and his partner sought help from the

[^35]mayor. Their reason for suspending the road construction was "Peace and Order," the phrase constantly used by the locals to describe the violent climate of Lanao del Sur.

Alindadir "Dagar" Balindong, mayor of Sultan Gumander, subsequently agreed for the contract to be turned over to Al Anton and his son Miguel, who was an experienced contractor. Besides being Dagar's relatives, the Antons won the support of the mayor because of their reputation and influence. The Antons were respected and feared. They were not only able to deter trouble from coming their way, but they were also able to convince skilled laborers to commit to the long overdue project.

The men were on their way to work on the fallen bridge for the first time in more than ten years. Sixty-seven-year-old Abelardo "Narding" Turla was driving the crew and their equipment to the site. Narding, Geronimo "Gerry" Abellanosa, the project engineer, and William Paglinawan were among those who agreed to take on a task attempted by many but never executed to its completion in the last twenty years.

Near the construction site were remnants that hinted of a residential area in the past. Now, cement barricades that crumbled at tremors caused by vehicles passing by, remained visible. Fallen trees in the middle of the road forced the men to park about thirty meters away and haul the equipment to the construction site.

In the middle of the southern approach to the bridge was a young tree, which served as a much sought-after shelter from the scorching sun. From under the tree, I could see how the strong river currents washed away the soil supporting the northern approach to the bridge. Unfortunately, the men's first task was to rob me of my shade.
"[The contractors] are scared of the 'peace and order' situation here," said Narding as we watched two men work on the tree with a chain saw.
"Exactly who are they scared of?" I asked.
Apparently it was a question that tickled William, who then patted Narding on the back. "You tell her, chief," he said as he walked away laughing. He decided to play it safe because in an area where armed militia, vigilante groups, and mercenaries roam freely, reticence is a virtue.
"There are many types of people that come here," Narding explained. "Those who aren't from here, and those who are from here. Those who are from here don't cause any trouble. Those who come from other places, like the mountains there, come here and ask..."
"Ask or extort?" I asked to clarify.
"Extort," Narding chuckled. He was amused by my efforts to avoid euphemisms. "Ask, extort, they're all the same. If there is a contract, there will always be people asking for money. Here in Lanao del Sur, you have to give something. Even if they don't ask for money, you really should give as compensation to the people who will help you."
"So that you won't get harassed?"
"Yes, so you won't get harassed."
"So why aren't you guys getting harassed?" I asked.
"Because we're brave," William said in friendly banter. He was still somewhat cautious around me but he had inched closer and closer as the conversation continued.
"We ran out of fear," added Narding, who was just as amused by the exchange that took place.
"Yeah we ran out of fear, so the only thing that's left is courage," said William who was expanding his chest and flexing his muscles. He was taking advantage of the tree's shadow during its last few moments while mindlessly nibbling on grass that he picked from under his foot. Even at ten o'clock in the morning, the sun was already unbearable. Everything around us but the river-the air, the leaves, the arid soil-stood still as if to conserve all the energy needed to survive under the searing heat. William, Gerry, Narding and I were miserably waiting for the men across the river to throw us the other end of the level, which in this case, was a stone tied to a transparent hose filled with water. As Narding put it, who needs a surveyor's transit when water is more reliable?

Gerry was now sketching the architectural plan of the bridge in my notebook. It was to be a wooden bridge, made of coconut lumber and reinforced with steel. "Like what 'Nong ${ }^{59}$ Narding said, if it weren't for Mr. Anton, we wouldn't come here," he said.

Looking at his notes, and the collapsed structure in front of us, it was hard to comprehend how more than fifty men could finish the P 2.3 million project in less than three months. Nevertheless, it had to be completed for the use of candidates and voters during May 14, 2001 National Elections. ${ }^{60}$

[^36]"You know, among us Bisaya, we say, we only look for a job, we don't mind if there's money or not," said Narding. He, like many of the workers drew a distinction between themselves and Maranao workers. "If we're offered money, that's good, just as long as we have a job!"

One of the idiosyncrasies that I observed in Maladeg was that even Bisayas who devoted their lives improving the welfare of the majority in the area, can be heard uttering prejudgments about their Maranao neighbors. Prejudice was still undeniably present in the village, and both Maranao and Bisaya remained cautious of each other. This does not mean, however, that violence continues to arise because of people's biases.

The Antons maintain that prejudice did not play any part in their decision to hire an all-Bisaya crew. Skilled construction workers had to be imported from Lanao del Norte because the men in Maladeg were either farmers or civilian soldiers. Only one man, though not on the payroll, is Maranao.

Bobong served as the site's security guard. He was often seen intoxicated, staggering around the site while entertaining the workers with his antics. He spoke to me partly in English, partly in Filipino, and mostly with an incomprehensible mumble. He was inquisitive, always wanting to know if I was comfortable, if I stayed cool under the shade, if I was thirsty, if I had a boyfriend...

While at times, I felt that his heartfelt concern bordered on drunken imposition, the men did not mind his eccentricity. Given a few bottles of Coke, bread and biscuits, a half an hour of shade, and a few minutes with Bobong, the men were

[^37]sufficiently fueled for the next task. Besides the fact that they did like him, they also knew that he served a vital role in their safety. As Miguel later explained, "he had a name," and in these parts, a contractor without the support of an influential family, could be inviting more than just monetary losses.
"It's not easy to get around in this area," William continued. He was becoming more at ease with my company, and offered his shadow as a temporary shelter. "If you don't have a name in these parts, you won't last long. Even a Maranao has a hard time finishing a contract here," he said.

William was the Anton family's taxi driver of choice at the times when they were in Iligan. When he found out that there was manual labor available for the willing and able, he stepped up to the challenge. "The first time I came here, I was really frightened," he said. "You're actually better off," he told me. "You get to ride a pump boat. By land, you have guns pointed at you. Every time you pass, they aim."

They - the local residents-aim because beyond the Zone of Peace is rido country where strangers are seen with as much suspicion as the enemies. Nevertheless, the men trust Narding to escort them around the area unharmed. Though he is Bisaya, he has lived in Lanao del Sur for a significant length of time and has become a trusted friend of many Maranao families. I traveled with him a few times before and observed that with a nod, a wave, a handshake and a box of cigarettes for the armed vigilantes, we were able to move ahead with a friendly parting. Nonetheless, he agrees that even the feared and respected should still proceed with caution.

[^38]BSDU, then as a Battalion Commander of the CHDF and later a CAFGU. ${ }^{61}$ "I had to arm myself," he reasoned. "If you do not support the MNLF, you will be kidnapped."

To this day he does not agree with the rebels' political ideology. "I am mestizo, ${ }^{62 "}$ he said fervently, "but when I was growing up, [Muslims and Christians] lived together. There was no conflict. [The Muslims] demanded secession when these people started going to Mecca!"

Like Bob, he maintains, from observation and experience, that the conflict in Mindanao is an issue born not during the colonial period but during the recent resurgence of Islam. Though unlike his gregarious younger brother, he is laconic by nature and is more comfortable being the silent observer.
"My brother and I have two different policies," Al said. "I believe that if you follow the law and do not go against the government, then we are friends. Bob will pacify but he will also fight. Fighting is my last resort. So if you follow the law, I will help you."

Due to his efforts as a mediator and guardian, Al won the respect of the people in the Maladeg and the neighboring area. He has arbitrated in countless clan

[^39]wars, served as intermediary between the rebels and the civilians, and even bargained with the rebels for the government.
"[The Maranaos] respect me because I was able to help them. Utang
kabubut-on-debt of gratitude. ${ }^{63}$ We saved many lives." Although saving many lives, the Anton brothers have also taken away a significant number. While Al is aware that some people's deference result purely from fear, he still believes in the tenacity of some friendships. "But there are also those who respect us with sincerity," he added, "because they are afraid that they might hurt our feelings."

[^40]
## LET THE STRONG SURVIVE

It is that feeling of betrayal that often shatters the most tenacious partnerships, powers vengeance and even drives others to forfeit loyalty. This rift can occur between lovers, good friends, or even a man and his country.
"My followers and I have seen many soldiers die, only to have Abubakar returned!" Al Anton said furiously, slamming his fist hard enough to shift everything on the table. "I think I have to join the MILF ${ }^{64}$," he snapped. He had just heard the evening news on the radio and this one, he felt, was of grave betrayal. As he walked in ranting about an incompetent and treacherous government, the smell of rum followed in his path. Though he seemed fully coherent and in control, the alcohol suppressed his inhibitions. Tonight was his night to speak.

Camp Abubakar ${ }^{65}$ was the main headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest of 45 declared MILF camps, and the last to be captured by the military during President Estrada's all-out offensive in $2000 .{ }^{66}$ On Wednesday, March 28, 2001, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo announced the details of the government's peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. As part of

[^41]her administration's move toward community development, Camp Abubakar as all other MILF camps captured by the AFP were to be considered Muslim communities, not MILF camps. There was yet to be no military pullout, but a promise was made to cease all military operations in exchange for an end to the armed offensive against the government. ${ }^{67}$

Since families of MILF members still lived in the area, Macapagal-Arroyo considered the decision as a crucial step toward development of Muslim areas, integration of rebel soldiers and subsequently, peace in Mindanao. ${ }^{68}$ The Anton's who fought alongside the past four administrations against the liberation fronts, however, felt only betrayal.
"What's the use of supporting the government that makes you a sacrificial lamb," Bob said with less emotion than Al. We were just finishing dinner when his older brother walked in with Narding. Though Bob seemed less agitated than his brother, he looked downtrodden, like a man who had to face an unexpected defeat. "They will not hesitate to sacrifice your interest."

As witness to a series of failed negotiations since the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the brothers could only foresee history repeating itself under the present administration. Their fears are compounded by the knowledge that many of the civilian residents around the rebel camp are their family members or sympathizers of

[^42]the MILF. They believed Arroyo's decision to be a dangerous tactical move for the Philippine government, especially when peace negotiations are still underway. They felt that the decision was a band-aid approach to the decades-long insurrection, and was done without regard for the deaths of military and civilian soldiers.
"The government should stick to what is written in the book," said Al. "The Constitution."
"The Constitution is the guiding principle of this country," Bob nodded in agreement. "Without the Constitution it will be a misguided government."
"Anybody who goes against the law is an enemy of the government, an enemy of the Filipino people."
"No concessions?" I asked.
"No concessions," they replied in unison.
"And that will teach people a lesson," Bob said fervently, his voice rising as the conversation pushed ahead. "Traffic violators are arrested, but murderers-organized killers are not being apprehended. Instead they are given importance!"
"We are not in favor of the turning over of Abubakar, because there was a war between the government and the MILF," said Al irately, the veins in hands becoming more visible as he clenched his fist. "[The government was] able to overrun the enemy and occupy Abubakar. What is concession given by the government to return Abubakar because of peace talks? [sic] We are against it! We will not just sympathize with any leader that has this kind of mentality. We have a constitution, let us follow the constitution. What is written shall be done accordingly
if you follow the law. But if you seek for amnesty, you are granted, even if you killed how many soldiers. [sic] We're against that!" ${ }^{69}$
"Civilians, not only soldiers," Bob corrected. "[They killed] not only soldiers, but including civilians, innocent ones. Now who's going to answer for the lives of the civilians who died? And the property of the helpless civilians that got burned or got destroyed, who's going to answer for all of this?"
"If you ask me," interrupted Al , "I would say, you better give this Mindanao to the MILF so that there won't be anymore trouble...because that's what they're after, according to them. Let Visayas be given to the Christians, the NPA ${ }^{70}$ up to Negros; and Luzon, give it to the dirty politicians. We can live. We will go abroad because I think, maybe, we can find [a] better life abroad. There will be no peace," Al said sullenly.
"If that system works, it would have worked during the time of Marcos," Bob agreed.
"A hundred years ago," Al smirked.
"Marcos has been the only leader I know, in this country, who had given the greatest concessions to the rebels who returned to the force of the law, but what happened? There were more rebels. I was a witness during the rehabilitation of the so-called rebels. They were given equipment for fishing. The government buys [tools and equipment] from this store, [the store] brings them to the government office.

[^43]From the government office they give them to the so-called recipients. The recipients bring them home. After one or two days they sell them back to that store and the store sells them again to the government. It's like a round robin you know? It's a circle... it keeps going around the same, and what happens? How much money was lost? Had it solved the problem of insurgency? No. It worsened, because the people [were] made to understand that if you are foolish, if you are hard to discipline, you can make money. If you are a killer, you are a hero, you are a big man, you are a good guy, so they give you plenty of money or concessions. [Rebels] turn over rotten Garands or shotguns."
"Unserviceable firearms," added Al.
"Unserviceable firearms," Bob affirmed. He was pacing energetically in front of me, furious, explosive, as though waiting to be provoked. "While [the rebels] retain the good ones and throw to the government the rotten ones. That's business, that's not..." he stopped. He was shaking. Talking seemed useless and he had to calm himself before rage overcame him. "My God..." he uttered softly, partly in grievance and partly in prayer.

The brothers were expecting the worst. That evening's news compounded with the recent order for the disarmament of the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units during the election season was the cause of their distress. ${ }^{71}$ Now the safety of Maladeg's civilian militia unit was left in the hands of the marines.

[^44]"That's what I was telling you," said Bob, "that these people in Manila are not going to hesitate to use us as sacrificial lambs. They are going to sacrifice the interests of the poor who are in the midst of all this dangerous situation."

The disarmament of the CAFGU was a precautionary measure by the military against forced campaigning by armed civilians. Lanao del Sur, which is among the election hotspots or areas of red alert, ${ }^{72}$ took extra steps to prevent the residents from falling victim to bribery or coercion by local politicians. Since there have been allegations of human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings by civilian militia units, a decision was made to confiscate weapons issued to the CAFGU three months prior and subsequent to election day. ${ }^{73}$
"I don't believe that," Bob said, disagreeing with the government's rationale behind the CAFGU disarmament. "We had several elections and we were never disbanded. In fact, we were used to augment the military and the police and seeing to it that there will be peace [sic]."
"But I will convince our people not to join the CAFGU anymore," Al added. "Live a private civilian life. Whatever problems our government will encounter, that is their problem. We will not... we were acquiring enemies in defending our constitution, our government, our armed forces..."

[^45]"BSDU, CHDF," Bob enumerated. "Before we were called BSDU, Barrio Self-Defense Units, then we became CHDF, Civilian Home Defense Forces, now we are the CAFGU ..."
"From there we will become Abu Sayyaf (ASG) ${ }^{74}$ or MILF," interrupted Al, the chuckle in voice silenced by the lump in his throat. The air had turned from tense to grim. The dim orange light overhead cast hard shadows that accentuated the wrinkles on their faces. Al and Bob, all of a sudden, looked old and weary, as though the years of fighting and toil finally crept in and stayed till their bodies surrendered. Narding, who was usually one to break tense situations, sat quietly in the corner. Beside him was Da, slumped silently in her seat with a tear in her eye. She too, did not dare comfort her husband. Not the possibility of a successful peace talks would bring optimism back into that room.
"Let the strong survive," Bob said, breaking the silence. He looked at his older brother who was broken and exhausted. "It hurts him so much because we were the only ones-our Muslim and Christian group-who fought side by side with the government, and now they won't address us. It's like we were thrown into a pack of wolves. Back in the days, it was like they were on the verge of tears, pleading, now they leave us naked for the predators. Its painful to think about it "

Al looked up at his brother, comforted by the thought that he was not alone in his frustrations but still neither hopeful nor energized. "The influential groups here

[^46]in Mindanao are the MILF," he said, "the Abu Sayyaf, and the dirty politicians who are linked with these people. So why should I go against them, right? If you cannot beat them, join them."
"I scratch your back, you scratch mine," agreed Bob, with hollow laugh. "Then we will have no enemies."

Just then, Al reached into his back pocket and asked me to put away my cameras. Delicately, he unfolded what was tucked away neatly in his wallet-confidential government papers confirming the release of kidnapped victims as a result of his intervention. The pieces of paper, darkened and crisp from years of preservation, were his prized possessions like plaques of high achievement. Even though only he, his pant pocket, and a select few were privy to the information written on those documents, Al was beaming with pride as he showed them to me. "Don't memorize the names," he snapped, quickly turning over the pages as fast as he displayed them. He folded the pieces of paper neatly back into place.
"A good Muslim is a dead Muslim," he said with fervent resentment.
After all the years of fighting against Moro rebels, intervening in rido and negotiating with kidnappers, Al finally let his emotions get the best of him. "Believe me, my mother [was] Muslim, believe me when I say, don't trust them... We follow one flag and that is the Philippine flag. We are nationalistic. Anybody who is an enemy of that flag is our enemy. I am anti-Muslim."

Though I was not sure if it was purely the alcohol talking, Al was certain, at least at that very moment, that the government he served loyally had abandoned him.

This time, he was renouncing his loyalties. "I [will become] a rebel... Cardinal Sin is a hypocrite! ${ }^{75}$ I do good and that's all that matters."
"How many people did he bring to the force of the law?" Bob interrupted.
"Five hundred rebels. The loose firearms we surrendered? More than three hundred firearms. And what did we get?"
"Not a pinch," answered Al. "Nothing. Not even to say thank you."
"I had one hundred seventy five rebels surrender. And I ended up losing out because I spent for those commanders..."
"Kidnappings-the son of Puno, ${ }^{76}$ " Al interrupted. "The [one] from Cotabato..."
"Doktora Aguirre ${ }^{77}$, yes we were the ones who [rescued] her... The family member of the government official from Cotabato, the one whom we found in the barracks..."
"Gun runners, smugglers, drug pushers...we helped a lot of people. But I think we will have to stop this kind of monkey business. I'm going to close my eyes, my ears...
"And I," said Bob, "will cover myself with the thickest blanket."
Security around the Liangan bridge became the brothers' primary concern.
With the absence of the CAFGU, the marines were on double duty. The bridge

[^47]however, was beyond the soldiers' feasible range of jurisdiction. Their priorities were Maladeg and the neighboring populated areas. Staff Sergeant Pasco and his men could not risk concentrating their forces in an area that was too remote and sparsely inhabited.

This time however, the Liangan bridge was a bustling construction site where men labored by day and slept by night. Al felt that their services deserved some reciprocity-at the very least, security.
"Brother Narding and I are only doing this as a gesture of service," Al said. "There is no money involved. I haven't even paid for the lumber yet."
"All my coconut trees have been cut down," said Bob.
"Mine are all gone," added his brother glumly.
"[The workers] will be paid by him," Bob nodded in Al's direction, "and he is not even sure whether he gets paid. ${ }^{78}$ Just like the previous 16 kilometers that we worked on that was a farm to market road...he was not paid."
"Not even one centavo."
"Son of a... Its hard to be leader my child," Bob shrugged.
"You know, I do not expect very much from this," Al said, attempting to lift their spirits. "What I expect is the blessing from The One above...that's all. We are Christians. We are hard [sic] believers because our parents, our great grandparents were also like us...I mean we are like them. We inherited this from them. Our parents and grandparents died serving the public."

[^48]Yet Bob's rage was uninhibited by the memory of his parents, whose legacy of service transcended religious and tribal lines. "Sixteen kilometers of farm to market road, supposed to be a contract but he was not paid because the money went to the wrong hands. It was released to the wrong hands!"
"Any investigations?" I asked.
"[The government] can't even investigate Misuari ${ }^{79}$ !" Al was incensed. My inquiry apparently unearthed a deep indignation that went further than the 16 kilometers of farm to market road. "Where is the money for the Autonomous Region? We cannot even see the shadow of Misuari. What did the national Government do? Did they strip him of his powers? When Misuari was a member of the MNLF..." he paused, and turned to Narding. "Do you remember when we assisted him during the hard days? Protected him?" Then he looked at me intently, waving his fingers at me while he spoke. "Brother Narding and I were the ones who drove their Volvo here and..."
"Those people didn't remember you, my brother," interrupted Bob who was now fueled by Al's resentment. "All that money...they didn't even remember you..."

Narding, unprovoked or perhaps indifferent, remained silently in his corner, though he did manage to eke out a meek smile when he met my eye.
"Very dirty," Al muttered with a sigh. All of sudden he seemed drained and contemplative. "That's why I'm thinking, with my grandchildren, as soon as they graduate, I will send them to the States or send them to Spain or anywhere but not in the Philippines."

[^49]"Me, I'm very disgusted. So anyway, I'll just take care of my small world."
The conversation was coming to a close. If their spirits refused to be undefeated, their bodies surrendered for the evening. As I was putting away my chair, the screeching noise of the wood scraping the concrete muffled Da's parting words.
"Did you hear your mother's comment?" Bob, tapping me on the shoulder, asked. "She said you better go back to America."

I looked up at the woman who was smiling at me with neither sadness nor distress in her eyes. She was hopeful, it seemed. Perhaps because I was young, I was educated, I led a comfortable life, and most of all, I had a United States visa. She offered a succinct and poignant advice, like what most mothers often do in times of letting go. And she was fueled with optimism and the faith that I was not going to be shackled to the realities of her world. Da knew, along with everybody else, that I was well equipped for escape. Yet she did not resent me for this. I, however, was vacillating between my obligations to myself and to my homeland. Or whether both were an inseparable truth and that my survival ultimately depended on an internal reconciliation.

I was then left to wonder whether the promise of Maladeg would forever remain within the realm of its $7 \times 15$ square kilometer area. If indeed, outside the boundaries of the barangay, anybody is willing to effect change beyond what is comfortably doable, or if there are only a few who remain unperturbed by what was truly overwhelming. Is it idealism or is it sheer desperation that drive the few and the proud?

## THE FEW, THE PROUD

Staff Sergeant Pasco did not have much to say except that the orders, which came from "higher headquarters," were to disarm the CAFGU for "inventory purposes." His role as Staff Sergeant of the $34^{\text {th }}$ Marine Company, he explained, was to comply and secure the safety of his twenty men and the residents of Maladeg, even with the diminished manpower.

He is a quiet thirty-nine-year-old whose story about his entry into the marines has a similar ring to those of his men-that the decision to enlist is essentially for survival rather than service. "To be honest, I am only a high school graduate," he said, as he drove away flies with a shirt in his hand. He had noticed me several times before, always waved at me whenever I passed by the camp on top of a hill, east of the Anton home.

That day, I decided to climb the steep steps up the camp where the sergeant and an armed marine welcomed me at the entrance. He led me to the hut where some men were playing cards. Hurriedly, they cleared the tables for us, smiling at me and nodding eagerly as though I was their first visitor in an unbearably long time.
"Let the ma'am sit," said one soldier.
"Ma'am," they all said in unison, each gesturing for me to take their place inside the hut.
"Marvi," I said, amused by their enthusiasm. It wasn't that they were eager to see $m e$, I understood. They were eager to be around a palpable connection to the world outside Maladeg. Perhaps I reminded them of home, not for any particular trait
or physicality but for the mere fact that I was a civilian connection-one who had nothing to do with the military, or the rebels, or the clan wars, or anything pertaining to the conflict in Lanao del Sur.
"Give the ma'am something to drink," ordered Sgt. Pasco. "Or would you like coffee? Milo?" He asked turning to me, but before I could reply, he signaled the private behind him to buy "the ma'am" a bottle of Coke from the sari-sari store.
"Marv..." I was about to stress but decided against the effort. It was not hard to feel at ease around the men, as entering the military camp was just like visiting any Filipino home. Food and drinks were immediately offered, and I, the guest, was welcomed with superfluous hospitality.
"In 1982, I tried applying for jobs," the sergeant continued as the men scampered away and relocated around the outdoor kitchen, some to prepare the snacks while others continued their card game. "But times were hard and there were no job openings. The marines happened to be recruiting at that time, so for me, that was the fastest road to employment."

His salary of P7,402 a month is sufficient to support a wife and four children, he explained. "My family and I are used to a frugal life," he said. "We're not accustomed to having an abundance of food. You can say, we're in the middle of the economic stratum, we're neither poor, nor rich. We have enough to support a family, like we can put our children to school. That's our life," he said pausing to drink his coffee and wave the flies away from my hot cup of Milo. "For me, its a stable life."

However, his twenty years in the corps did not arm him with expansive knowledge and understanding of his adversaries and their cause. He is a soldier. His
obligation is to fight and defend; therefore, neither theory nor ideology matters in the battlefield.
"I guess I can't really answer that," he said, in response to my question regarding the MNLF and MILF struggle for autonomy and independence. "Especially because I'm at the low end of the military hierarchy, I just have a superficial knowledge of the reason behind their struggle. The people in higher positions would best understand those things-like what the rebels are fighting for. All we really do, is follow orders from higher headquarters."
"Even if you don't understand the reason behind those orders?" I asked.
"Well, when you hear the term 'rebels'...it has a bad connotation, right?" He looked at me for affirmation. "First of all, you just hear things like someone had a farm animal stolen, or someone's house was intentionally burned down, or someone was robbed... Then the news reaches higher headquarters. Now, if the people from the top confirm that what was rumored was in fact true, I'm given instructions to follow up on a resolution if my men and I are the closest to the site. So if we go to the said site and we're attacked, what kind of fools would we be if we didn't defend ourselves and retaliate? But with regard to the rebels' cause, I really can't answer that," he said shaking his head.
"And their charges of government oppression and marginalization of Muslim tribes in the Philippines?"
"I really can't say anything about that either. When you listen to the radio or read, it's as if those charges are true. But I don't really..." he paused. Sgt. Pasco was at a loss for words. His vague response was not for reasons of secrecy or distrust, but
of honest unfamiliarity with the history behind the conflict that he was ordered to control.
"If you ask me, I really don't know the whole story and the reason why..." he paused again and shrugged. If he was embarrassed by his limited knowledge of the issues and risks surrounding his life and those of his men, Staff Sergeant Pasco tried to maintain absolute inexpressiveness. "That's what I was saying, I have a superficial understanding of the issues, even though I am a soldier."

My next visit up the hill was spent with the sergeant and his men as they prepared supper. They had invited me for dinner, and I came in on time to see the men chase, kill, dress and cook the chicken. It is a self-sufficient camp, where most of the livestock are either bought from or donated by the farmers who live downhill as a gesture of appreciation for the men's steadfast vigilance. The men try not to exhaust their resources. Many of the animals are bred to guarantee continuous supply, while others, like the pig for example, are fattened for the fiesta in May.

Like many professional and business organizations in the Philippines, the $34^{\text {th }}$ Marine Company was also characterized with an air of informality. Though many argue that this particular Filipino trait often drives politicians to succumb to personal favors, plagues businesses with unprofessional employees, and runs the country into economic ruin, informality can still leave one feeling welcomed and embraced.
"Oh, the Miss wasn't here last week," exclaimed Sgt. Cequiña. "We caught a snake last week and had it for dinner," he teased, throwing me smile and a wink.
"See, I bet you haven't had adobong sawa, ${ }^{80 "}$ he giggled, tickled by the coming punch line that he was trying to mouth in between laughter. "Tastes like chicken! Ha! Ha!"

Staff Sgt. Salvador Cequiña was the house comedian, whose lines were often followed with an explosion of rambunctious laughter from the rest of the crew. He had a perpetual smile on his face that likened him to Batman's Joker, though he was actually funny and undoubtedly charming. He had also baptized me with the less affected title of "The Miss." I could live with that name, but I could not quite stomach the idea of eating a snake, and my apparent nausea only energized the sergeant to continue with his banter.

They were a lively bunch, always joking and teasing as they chopped and diced. "Have you ever tried the native chicken, Miss Marvi?" Sgt. Cequiña said. "That's the small kind. You know what they say about small things?" his grin widening, sensing that I knew where the joke was leading.
"Like what my male friends say," I said, pointing at the red chili pepper that he was working on. It was the small kind, about half an inch long, but potently hot. "Filipino men are like chili..."
"Ahhhhaaaa!" he roared, shaking his fingers at me like I was a child being reprimanded for misbehaving. "And you're small too, little miss. Would you say you are... JUICY?!!!" The burst of laughter from the men behind him evolved into a contagious roar, that lasted till some had to break away from the circle to catch their

[^50]breath. Sgt. Pasco was smiling quietly in the corner. He welcomed Sgt. Cequiña's jokes, because any type of entertainment often evokes high spirits.
"They need laughter, you know," Sgt. Pasco told me later that afternoon. "It helps the mind, keeps one from thinking too much about the loneliness."

Yet the men had to survive more than just seclusion and homesickness. Just a year ago, some of the men were involved in a full-scale offensive against the Moro National Liberation Front. Unlike their present assignment where, according to Sgt. Pasco, "everyday is like a Sunday," last year's mission tested the men's breaking point. For this reason, many of the marines disagreed with the decision to classify Camp Abubakar as a civilian settlement.
"You know, we don't agree with that decision," said the marine who was now dressing the chicken. "The hardships that we endured in the battlefield, seeing our colleagues sacrifice their lives, they all seemed to have no value to President Arroyo. That time we had to sleep from six in the evening till morning drenched in the rain, only to hear the guy next to us shivering, his teeth gnashing from the extreme cold...That time we could not eat till the evening for fear that the enemies might spot us... Once, someone died while picking a coconut from the tree. He was killed by a sniper's bullet. That's how he died-climbing a coconut tree. That's why we don't agree with the news about that Camp Abubakar... because it seems like the sacrifices involved were all in vain."
"There were times when we couldn't bathe for an entire week" interjected another soldier. The other men had gathered around the two marines who were preparing dinner, and many were eager to pour their angst. "If we see water that
dirty," he said, pointing at the muddy pond where the water buffaloes wallowed under the midday heat, "we would jump in, to rid our bodies of the itchiness caused by the extreme heat. We did not have spare clothes because our load was too heavy. Imagine, we had to carry 15 days of provisions on our backs. For example, if one day's serving is one canteen cup, that means we had to carry fifteen canteen cups, then bullets, and artillery. It was grueling what we went through to capture Camp Abubakar, then the government disregards all of that."
"So were you in favor of Estrada's all-out-war?" I asked.
"Of course," he responded without hesitation. "Many were complaining-Muslims and Christians alike-of flagrant extortion in the area. That's why I was in favor of Estrada's decision...to prevent the breakup of our nation."

Nonetheless, of those who shared their experiences with me, only a few professed to have had the welfare of the nation in mind upon entering the marine corps. "To be among The Few, The Proud," answered one soldier. For many, however, joining the corps meant escaping the uncertainty of the civilian world. Some even added a few years to their age in a hurried attempt to escape dire economic situations.
"I am here to earn money," said one twenty-eight-year-old who has been serving for five years. "You can also say that service would be part of my reasons, but first and foremost, I am here to hold a stable job. You can't really use to serve the country as a reason because you can always chose any profession to serve the country. You can even enter politics. Really, it is so that I can have a steady income."

## CAFGU

A steady income, especially for the farmers and contract workers in Maladeg, is at times unattainable, thus, many able bodied men opt to join the CAFGU. A steady input of sixty pesos a day is better than weeks of worrying about the next job contract, the storm that may obliterate this month's harvest, and supporting the family. Yet sixty pesos a day, according to Bob Anton, does not justly compensate the men, who usually take lead in prophylactic patrols because of their familiarity with the landscape.
"Eighteen thousand pesos, and you have a very risky job!" Bob exclaimed. "Why? Because of an 1,800 peso monthly allowance you won't die? Are the soldiers the only ones who are vulnerable? If there is an operation, you cannot say that you'll only serve two days and go home for the rest of the days. When there is trouble, you will stick it out with them until you finish the operation. So what happens? Is that commensurate? What is P1,800 if you leave your family for ten to fifteen days. Can your family live on P1,800 for a whole month? Then take into account the money subtracted, P100 if you are absent or P50 if you are late... ${ }^{81,}$

Understandably so, the men of the CAFGU have their long list of grievances. However, duty calls, the wife and the children await and the men, like Sgt. Cequiña, can only seek comfort in entertainment.

[^51]"Tonight, Chikoy is going to play for us," said Bob, as he noticed me staring at the guitar lying on the floor. Dinner was unusually quick as everybody hustled to prepare for the evening's impromptu recital. Chikoy, they kept reminding me, was visiting and everyone at the house was excited to hear his latest repertoire.

As Bob, Da and their visitors each carried a chair from the house to the foot of the mango tree, Mac-Mac was flipping through the songbook, eagerly awaiting his solo number.

Constancio "Chikoy" Rosas was a member CAFGU or as the residents of Maladeg would say, kap-goo. Popular for rhythmically transforming his field exploits into a repertoire of acoustic folk, Chikoy has been entertaining friends and colleagues with his musical tales since he joined the force in 1988. Garbed in military fatigue and a green bandana wrapped around his head, he looked more like a soldier ready for reconnaissance rather than the evening's comic relief.

As he tuned his instrument, he pointed at my recorder and asked, "Is this ready?" At my nod, he strummed the first note.

Kapait ning nasudlan kung trabaho.
Ang katunga civilian, katunga sundalo.
Isip nga nasakop na sa gobyerno.
Nag serbisyo, intawon isip mga CAFGU.
Ug unya order sa mga sundalo, Nga adunay pormisyon kada Lunes kuno.
Ang command very simple lang kaayo:
Kanan balikat, syasat agap, ug saludo.
Kung ipatrol ng mga CAFGU,
Sa bukid ipang distino, Ang dughan ko daw mobuto, Sa kakutas hangak kaayo.
Maayo lag way inkwentro,

> Kay layo ra sa peligro. Kay pastilan kung simbako, Dimalason, ma 'menteryo.
> Sa adlaw mo abut na ang allowance, Among misis medyo dali ra namong dulgan.
> Kung wala, mga bana mug-ot mug-otan, Kung mudulog me, i-tungang kamanghuran.
> Kung ipatrol ng mga CAFGU, Sa bukid ipang distino, Ang dughan ko daw mobuto, Sa kakutas hangak kaayo. Maayo lag way inkwentro, Kay layo ra sa peligro. Kay pastilan kung simbako, Dimalason ma 'menteryo.
> Gusto na gyud unta ko nga mo undang, Wala na lang kay ang allowance gi pang-increasan.
> Sa army, kami tawon ang kinaubsan, Nakafatigue, kumbat intawon armas garand, Apan o.k. lang kay M14 ang uban.
> How bitter is this job I am in 82 I am half civilian and half militiaman. As a member of the CAFGU, I am a civil servant by classification But I get my orders from a military platoon That orders us to a military drill formation Every Monday morning and afternoon. The drill commands are simple but absolute: Left shoulder, inspection arms and salute.
> When CAFGUs are sent on patrol mission The torturous mountains are our destination As my lungs explode while fulfilling our mission
> In a battle of fatigue and exhaustion.
> Lucky if there are no encounters From danger we take shelter Because God forbid violence await our mission The cemetery for the unlucky is a sure destination.

[^52]When our financial allowance finally comes Sleeping with the wife is spiced with a lot of welcome But when none comes our way as sometimes happens The wife pouts and puts the youngest one between

> When CAFGUs are sent on patrol mission The torturous mountains are our destination As my lungs explode fulfilling our mission

> In a battle of fatigue and exhaustion.
> Lucky if there are no encounters From danger we take shelter Because God forbid violence await our mission The cemetery for the unlucky is the sure destination.

> I have long wanted to end being a civilian soldier man
> But eventually decided to stay on when the military increased our allowance.

> In the military spectrum, CAFGUs are at the bottom stratum We wear combat fatigues for uniforms

> But carry antique Garands
> As our only weapons of protection.
> If it is any consolation, Other civilian soldier men Have M14s for their weapons.

"Wow!" exclaimed the audience in rhythmic applause.
"Ma'am, ma'am, you know it took him only a day to compose that," yelled someone from behind.
"Did you get all of that?" Bob asked, "Do it again! Just make sure you take out the part about the wife..."
"That's your research right there," Da said, clapping her hands fervently.
"Do it again, do it again," another requested.
"No, do the one of the fish. He has this song about fi-..."
"No, no," interrupted Chikoy, finally quieting the overly enthusiastic group.
The singer was receptive to the demands of his audience, but after the second
repetition, he decided that it was the perfect time and place for the debut of his new song. "This song," he narrated, "is only a fictive creation from the mind of the writer.

Any resemblances of places and events are purely coincidental."
Kalisod, kagubot natong mga Pilipino. Unsaon na wa'y klaro, nagka lain-laing tribu:

Muslim ug Cebuhano,
Tausug, may Hilongo,
Igorot, Yakan, Badjao,
Kalinga ug may Ifugao.
Ang gubot sa Mindanao, nagsugod didto's Lanao.
Ang kontra sa gobyerno, mga rebelding demonyo,
NPA, Abu Sayyaf, MILF, maoy nagplano
Kay sa gawas suportado sa high power nga equipo.
Ang mga warrior nila, nanglawom na ang mata,
Kay sa pusil nag dala-dala, Minus ug kaon wa'y sustansya.

Sa Marines may bonus pa,
Libre ang medicina.
Sa rebelde, wa pay cuarta,
Hinuon libre 'g malaria
Ang gubot sa Mindanao, nagsugod didto's Lanao. Ang kontra sa gobyerno, mga rebelding demonyo.

NPA, Abu Sayyaf, MILF, maoy nagplano
Kay sa gawas suportado sa high power nga equipo.
Ug unya ang gobyerno, nang recruit ug mga CAFGU.
Daghan ang intresado, kursonadang me-boluntaryo.
Pang recon nga estilo, ang gitudlo sa sundalo,
Kay aron lagi kuno, mga rebelde mapuo.
Padayun ang enkwentro,
Harass dinhi, ambush didto,
Sa crisis apektado, inosenteng Pilipino
Ma peaceful ba kaha?
Huhungihung sa mga tao.
Kung unsa ma'y resulta,
Ang Diyos ray nahibalo.
Mo surrender na lang unta ang rebelde sa mga sundalo?

A Filipino is a confused and ambiguous designation ${ }^{83}$ For there are too many tribes and religions:

Muslims and Cebuano, Tausog, Ilongo, Igorot, Yakan, Badjao, Kalinga, and Ifugao.

The trouble in Mindanao
Began in Lanao
The enemy of the government Were the devil rebels called NPA, Abu Sayyaf, and MILF. They plotted the rebellion Aided by foreign nations Who provided high-powered weapons And other equipment of mass destruction. ${ }^{84}$

The rebel warriors had sunken eyes Manifestation of their malnutrition For they prefer carrying high powered weapons Even if they eat food lacking nutrition.

The marines have bonuses with their fee
And supplied with medicines for free The rebels on the other hand have little money

But they get malaria abundantly
The trouble in Mindanao
Began in Lanao
The enemy of the government
Were the devil rebels called NPA, Abu Sayyaf, and MILF.

They plotted the rebellion
Aided by foreign nations
Who provided high-powered weapons
And other equipment of mass destruction.
And so the government recruited CAFGUs In droves, they came to volunteer their services

Reconnaissance they were taught

[^53]To pulverize the rebels in the onslaught.
As the armed encounters progress Here and there are harassments, And in the crossfire are caught, Innocent Filipinos.
Will peace ever come?
Were the muted questions
Of Filipinos in hush wonder, Whatever the outcome Only God can decipher.
Most could only wish in a whimper That to the soldiers, the rebels will finally surrender.
"Yehey!" Mac-Mac yelled in a hoarse voice. It was way past his bedtime but he was not going to miss his turn for the microphone. His admiration for Chikoy was matched with his excitement to finally sing. He was finally comfortable and situated, he cleared his throat, let go of his inhibitions and warbled,

I beeleeb da cheeldren ar ar pyootchoor
Teach dem well an let dem lead da way Show dim all da byootee dey possess insiiiiiide Give dem a sense o' pride, to make it easier...

Raised to embrace a bi-cultural society, Mac-Mac has become an embodiment of his grandparent's vision. His father, Bob's son by another woman, is Christian, and his mother is a Maranao-Muslim. Though Bob is adamantly against the boy becoming too close to his Maranao cousins who are "sons of outlaws," as he put it, he is generous in allowing the boy to explore beyond his father's world.
"His first and second cousins are MN and MI rebels, who grew up around guns and fighting; that's why we have to train him to be a good boy," Bob explained. On weekdays, Mac-Mac lives with his mother where he attends third grade at a

Filipino-American supervised school in Matling, Malabang. He returns to Maladeg on weekends, often times accompanying Da to the chapel on Sundays.

The couple intently watched the eight-year-old as he crooned, both radiating with superfluous pride most grandparents reserve for only their grandchildren.

And if by chans dat special place
Dat...hav...dreaming of
Hmmm...to a lonely place
Find your strength in laaaaaaaaaaab...
Before Mac-Mac could catch his breath, he was immediately smothered under the tight embrace of his adoptive grandmother, who rocked him in her arms. "A little more practice," Bob said, pulling his grandson towards him, "and you will be on your way!"

In between his grandfather's massive arms, was the out-of-breath performer who managed a peep out from under Bob's armpit to give his audience a wide and appreciative grin. He scratched his head in slight embarrassment as his adult audience continued to compliment him. He was everybody's baby, it seemed. The adults never tired of his antics, and he relished the attention.

When Bob and Da finished their rendition of "Lift up your Hands," one after the other, the talented and the brave took turns for the microphone. The musical extravaganza continued long after the electric generators shut down.

## ARMM PLEBICITE

August was a bad month to visit Maladeg. The southwest monsoon made the months of July through August unfavorable for travel. That week, typhoon Jolina stirred the Illana Bay with gale force winds that prompted even the most experienced seamen to dock their boats in trepidation. Nevertheless, my third visit could not be cancelled. Tuesday, August 14 was the day of the plebiscite. Muslims and Christians in fifteen provinces and fourteen cities would decide if they wanted to be part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). ${ }^{85}$
"My daughter!" Bob yelled out from the window as he hastened to meet me at the door. Fortunately, my guide found a pump boat operator who agreed to brave the waves. Though I was shaken, drenched and anxious about the events to occur the following day, Bob's eager welcome alleviated my angst. "We've been waiting for you!" He said with a booming voice, as I held his hand to my forehead.
"Amen Tito,," ${ }^{86}$ I greeted him. Reciprocating, he grabbed me by the shoulders, pulled me forward and smothered me with his embrace.
"I was wondering what took you so long! We thought you were in Basilan covering the Abu Sayyaf," he said, grinning widely. As he pulled back to examine

[^54]me, Da shuffled toward us to help me with my backpack. While she was putting away the pasalubong, ${ }^{87}$ I noticed a number of people at the dinner table.

As usual, the couple was entertaining guests. In the Anton home, many important matters have been discussed over coffee and kaon-kaon. ${ }^{88}$ This time, the topic of the conversation was the upcoming plebiscite.

Bob and Da stood by their NO vote. "But we didn't campaign for it," said Da as she was rearranging baskets of lanzones ${ }^{89}$ harvested that morning. "It would be complicated. We don't want enemies... You should take pictures of the fruit trees, Marvi."
"And don't forget to bring some rambutan ${ }^{90}$ home," Bob interrupted. "We've had very good harvest this year. Sweet. Very Sweet."

Excited to examine and taste the products of the season, I decided to pick some rambutan with Bob. While on our way back from shaving all the fruits off of one tree, a couple of men were already inside the house talking to Da. I figured that they were another set of guests discussing the topic of the day.

Later, I found out that the men were merchants from Cotabato testing their luck in Maladeg. They brought with them their line of beauty products such as bath soaps, shampoos and lotions. All were neatly arranged in a single file, on the floor.
"We're not going to put too much confidence on that," said the one on the right, referring to possible improvements resulting from a YES vote. "YES or NO,

[^55]we can't put our trust on the votes." His partner nodded in agreement. "This," he said, pointing at the merchandise beside his left foot, "is where we put our confidence."

Da bought the whitening lotion.
A few minutes later came Mac-Mac, who ran into the room bubbling with excitement. We have not seen each other in over three months, so it was understandable that the moment he saw me, he turned shy and hesitant. But, he was quick to abandon his inhibitions after Da handed him the chocolates I brought as pasalubong.
"Thank you!" he finally blurted out, pausing to examine me a second longer. His teeth and gums became increasingly visible the longer he stared at me. "You got it cut!" he said, his stare directed at my new haircut. "Guapa," ${ }^{19}$ he said, stroking my hair approvingly. But his attention was quickly diverted past my hairstyle and towards the old man sitting behind me. Mac-Mac turned to his grandfather and whispered, "Who's he?"
"Oh, we don't even know his name," Bob said, shrugging somewhat indifferently. The old man who walked in with the merchants was already eating lanzones at the dinner table. Apparently, this was nothing new to Bob.
"Ang tigulang," said Da. "We just call him old man. He comes here when he's hungry so we have to feed him." For over two years the old man has been a part of the couple's routine. The old man walks into the house, sits down, they hand him a plate, he eats, and they send him off with a blessing.

[^56]Though the old man was only an earshot away from all of us, he indifferently continued on with his task of peeling and eating lanzones as I continued to find out information about him. I learned that he had no family and as he got older and more feeble, he found less and less work to support himself. He had also lost most of his hearing.

Like most of the town's tired and needy, the old man sought shelter at the Anton home. Like most traditional leaders, they felt compelled to take him in. "He even asks for money," Bob chuckled, amused by the old mans unabashed nature. "We give him ten or twenty pesos. We give him enough."

Shortly after the old man finished his snack, he got up and drudgingly paced towards the front door. As he walked, his eyes continually switched focus from the floor to his cane, and raised his head only to throw a seed onto a pile for germination. Bob, who was already waiting at the doorway, handed the old man a bunch of lanzones for the road. The host patted his guest on the shoulder and sent him off with an upbeat goodbye. Slowly, the old man lifted his gaze high enough for his eyes to meet Bob's chin. With a slight and humble nod, ang tigulang bid his benefactor a gracious farewell.

I woke up the next morning to the sound of busy chatter outside my bedroom window. Sitting inside the cottage by the beach was a group of public school elementary teachers spiritedly conversing among themselves, despite the gloomy weather outside. As mandated by law, they were to oversee that day's referendum. However, as strong winds persisted and towering waves came crashing down a few
feet away from them, the prospects of an ARMM plebiscite, grew dimmer by the minute.

The ballot boxes were supposed to have arrived the night before and released at seven that morning. By 8:53 a.m. when I joined the group, there was still no sign of a pump boat approaching from the horizon. Many of the women were becoming restless. Some felt justified in leaving. Others, to pass the time, engaged in the long running debate among Muslims and Christians since the signing of the Tripoli Agreement: "Would you vote for the inclusion of your province or city in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao?"
"What we want is for the majority of the people to vote yes, so that there will be an expansion of ARMM from the present four provinces," said Thalia Gacus, ${ }^{92}$ a middle-aged elementary school teacher who was sitting in front of me.
"So that we can exercise the Shari 'ah Law," added the young woman beside me. Her name was Halinah Dacsla. She was in her mid-twenties and she, along with Michael Pagurac and Nafissa Dalupang worked for one of the highest seats in the municipal government. They came as poll watchers. Though they leaned towards the vote supported by their office, their presence was primarily to deter voting fraud.

The Shari 'ah, they all asserted, should be the prevailing code of conduct and system of governance in the predominantly Muslims provinces and cities of Mindanao. "For Muslims only," interjected Tabitha Badu, a teacher assigned to one of the voting precincts in Maladeg. "It does not mean that we should eliminate the national law."

[^57]"With the Shari'ah court... There would be no trouble... Because everybody is aware of the consequences..." thundered everybody at once, each one attempting to be the loudest voice recorded.
"If YOU commit murder, YOU face judgment," said Tabitha who finally took control of the microphone. "YOU are the one the courts will seek and YOU are the one to die... Not like how it is now, where if you commit murder, justice may mean killing your first cousin."

They argued that the Philippine Constitution often falls short of its promise of giving equal and expedient justice. Compounded with the fact that the justice system of Moro Mindanao runs along Islamic lines that, at times, contradict the national law, many believe that the full implementation of the Shari'ah to include criminal law would finally eliminate the culture of rido.

The debate continued in that fashion, with two to three people exerting their vocal cords at the same time-the national government's system of jurisprudence is too bureaucratic, too slow, too corrupt. They argued that it is a system that engenders bribery and corruption. It runs along a palakasan system that is based on power and influence that favors the pinakamalakas-the most influential-and abandons the nameless to the mercy of corrupt judges. The consensus was that Justice is indeed selectively blind-that she cannot see those who have nothing to offer her in remuneration.
"It's worse with Maranaos actually," alleged Michael, nodding his head with resolute conviction. "Let us say for example, you are of the Balindong family or Dimaporo, you're a force to be reckoned with. You become this wall that is very hard
to topple. That is the truth," he said emphatically. "Actually Maranaos are scared of rido. If you are a Maranao police who witnessed a crime, you can't arrest the perpetrator. Because you know what will happen. You will be trapped in a tangled web. Even if you won't get killed, your brother or your cousin may pay the price. So, you the police, you might as well not take action..."
"Pretend you didn't see anything," interrupted Tabitha. "Pretend you didn't hear anything."
"Especially if you're looking at antagonizing an influential family," Michael concluded. "The problem does not lie among the common people, it lies among the powerful because the common man-the unknowns-will always be intimidated by the powerful."

Like all the ladies in the cottage, Michael's loyalty was to his tribe. But the former MNLF Junior Officer turned government employee, was also outspoken about his frustrations with the fraternity of ideologues and combatants who won his trust, when he was but an impressionable twenty-something. He was now convinced that the lines defining the oppressor and the oppressed had less and less to do with the cry for self-determination... That ruthless greed blurred the once noble efforts for an egalitarian society... That the unscrupulous were from both sides of the opposing parties. "The money for SZOPAD ${ }^{93}$ never reached us here in Sultan Gumander," he continued. "It stopped at the people on top..."

[^58]"... at least I haven't seen any projects," asserted someone.
"...in the Madrasah? ${ }^{944,}$
"...in their pockets!"
"...implemented in their pockets!" they chuckled.
"My opinion about Misuari is that he should be discharged," said Michael with a forceful swing of his hand, obviously not taking the matter as lightly as the rest of the group. As a young man who witnessed military abuses against civilians during the martial law, he saw no other avenue for justice but in his group of guerilla warriors. To the new recruits whom he trained, he was Yasser Arafat. Nowadays he is simply, Michael. And Michael shows little affinity for his former superior. "After years of Misuari being the ARMM governor, I hardly saw any [project] implementation..."

The debate went on about whether or not Misuari was to blame for the corruption that plagued his office. "Oh it is still his problem," Michael stressed. "The money embezzled by his own officials is still his problem... We had a rule in the MNLF, that the family of an MNLF soldier be taken care of in the event of his death. But that's not what happened. Take the MNLF integration for example, there were men who were integrated in the Armed Forces but were never really members of the

MNLF. They knew someone, who knew someone influential, and that's how they

[^59]garnered that spot...palakasan system!" he snarled. "My only request is that all the members of the MNLF be awarded some kind of remuneration, even if it's just letting the uneducated sweep the floors of the ARMM office. Yes, why not? They're uneducated. But a majority was never given jobs. ${ }^{95 \%}$

Rain brought in a bountiful harvest for the farmers that month; however, it discouraged residents from making the wet and onerous commute to the precincts at the southern end of the village on the day of the referendum. The ballot boxes, accompanied by the police, finally arrived at around noon that day. At 1:00 p.m., an unusual lull still hovered over the damp and empty classrooms of Miguel Anton Elementary School.

I was watching Michael, Thalia and her son, Malik ${ }^{96}$ set up their assigned precinct. Above their table was a poster of the ousted President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, staring out the open window where Thalia hung the damp lists of registered voters to dry. My eyes wandered throughout the room, scanning all the posters hanging from the walls, the national anthem... the pledge of allegiance ...1) Speak English... 2) Observe silence... 3) Be thoughtful... and from the periphery, Nurhatra slowly approaching me.
"Well we have a problem," she said in a low voice, her lips at a close distance from my ear. "Nobody is here!"

[^60]"Why do you think that is?" I asked trying not to react to her unusual approach. Though I understood her concern, I could not help but feel that she had another agenda.
"The rain. The boxes came really late," she shrugged. Then she perked up as if a thought suddenly came to her, "What are you going to write on your report?" she asked, radiating a smile and raising one inquisitive eyebrow.
"That nobody was here," I answered straightforwardly, although I could not help but think that she had that question formulated beforehand.
"Oh don't do that," she said with a playful whine, grinning even wider this time. "Just say a lot of people came!"

Was it a warning, I thought to myself as she turned and walked away. She seemed almost facetious, yet it was in the way she leaned towards me, the way she touched my hand as she spoke, the way the side of her lips twisted downward in an attempt to beam a charming smile... All those caused visceral unease.
"They're filling out the ballots themselves!" exclaimed Malik, who came running from the adjacent classroom. Bewildered and out of breath, he stood by the doorway, his gaze moving from one person to the next, as if to seek our advice and beg for validation that, no, he wasn't hallucinating. "Nurhatra and her group...they're using their own thumb marks and signing the ballots!"

Immediately, Thalia and Michael turned to catch my reaction. Maybe they wished that I was not there to hear the newsbreak, but how were they to redeem the actions of those persons beyond their supervision?
"I could never do that," Thalia said to me, as though to reassure me that she was going to play no part in any election fraud. "Some say I'm too clean," she chuckled, opting out of the gamble instead.

Malik stood at the doorway for a brief second, maybe waiting for one of his fellow precinct supervisors to charge into the next room and declare a "failure of elections." However, it did not take long for him to decide that it would be rather unwise and dangerous to meddle in other people's affairs. So he surrendered back to his post to dry the next batch of papers.

It may have been the knowledge that I was only a student observer that bolstered their daring. Whatever their reasons, the election officials in the adjacent room felt no need to be discreet. When I entered, they continued to sign an entire list of names stamped with only one thumb mark, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, and the occasional No. Even the poll watchers, the assigned guardians against voting fraud, were committing almost every illicit activity known in Philippine elections.

Ballot Secrecy Folders remained unused and neatly piled in the corner of the room. Groups of voters were huddled over one ballot. One person voted for ten. Children voted. A Bisaya woman even played "around the world" as she called moving from one precinct to the next. Though she voted for the expansion of the ARMM during the previous plebiscite, she decided against it this time. "There are still no improvements," she said, "so I'm going to test the no vote." She voted three times at three different precincts.
"You're from Iligan, aren't you?" asked one of the teachers. "Good!" she exclaimed, at my nod. "You can vote here since you aren't able to vote in Iligan," she eagerly coaxed. "Really, you can do that!"

Dante, ${ }^{97}$ my guide, was waiting for me at the door. He was fidgeting and nervous. Standing rigidly in front of me, his face was purposely turned away from Malik, Allan, and Thalia, who were quietly sitting inside the empty room. "I must speak to you," he whispered, hardly moving his lips as he spoke. He led me away from the door and sat by the gutter away from the windows. "I overheard them talking when you left," he said, still whispering under his breath. He would not look at me and pretended to be engrossed in a piece of leaf he picked from under his shoe. Since he decided to stay behind while I observed the reported anomalies in the adjacent room, Dante was privy to what was deliberately hidden from me.

Dante recounted that when I left, a man wearing a PNP shirt walked in and ordered the poll officials to "start what [they were] supposed to do." However, they dissented, but not necessarily out of principle. Allan was afraid of "ruining his reputation," if caught; Thalia reasoned that with too many people watching, the ordered task was just too risky.
"What task were they supposed to do?" I asked my guide.
He shrugged.
"Was she referring to me?"
"Well she pointed at the seat where you were sitting."

[^61]I found out later that the man wearing the PNP shirt was actually not a policeman. He worked under the same government office as Allan and Nurhatra.


#### Abstract

Bob arrived at around two o'clock that afternoon, still there were only a few who attempted the hike toward the school. "What's important to them is the kaonkaon," Bob said, commenting on the low voter turnout as he voted for himself and Da who was unable make it. "If the mayor were here handing out kaon-kaon, you bet there would be chaos, ${ }^{98 "}$ he exclaimed. As he talked, he was absentmindedly waving the piece of paper in his hand that read:

Do you vote in favor of the amendments of Republic Act No. 6734, the organic act of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao as proposed under this Organic Act which includes, among other things, the expansion of the area of the autonomous region? ${ }^{99}$

Bob voted Yes. "In the hopes of setting a precedent," he explained, "a precedent that amendments can be made to break away from the old Misuari rules." However, I could not help but wonder if any of the current amendments of Republic Act No. 6374 were significantly progressive compared to the original. Furthermore, I was not hopeful that most of the voters were thoroughly guided through the verbiage of the 62-paged revised Act. ${ }^{100}$


[^62]
#### Abstract

On the day of my return trip to Iligan, the winds were still too strong for sea travel. Luting volunteered to take me to Malabang on his dirt bike. As we passed by the camp on top of the hill, I noticed that it was considerably devoid of its usual bustle. Only the CAFGU were left to patrol and secure Maladeg.

Five months prior, an estimated twenty armed men identified as members of the Abu Sayyaf Gang (ASG) raided an upscale resort in the island of Palawan.

Among the twenty hostages were an eight-year-old boy and three Americans. Weeks later, the Abu Sayyaf announced the beheading of American hostage, Guillermo Sobero. His head, the ASG claimed, was the group's gift to President Macapagal Arroyo on her birthday. Sobero's body has yet to be found. More hostages and casualties were soon to follow in their wake. ${ }^{101}$

In an attempt to quell the country's most notorious band of bandits, the $34^{\text {th }}$ Marine Company, Marine Battalion Landing Team Four was sent to reinforce their colleagues who were dispatched to areas on red alert.

My volunteer guide for the day, Luting Limano, is a thirty-two-year-old Maranao and former CAFGU. Though he now works as a barangay councilor, he grew up learning how to fight like many of the men in the area. At 14 , he entered the


[^63]civilian militia, fought against rebels, bandits and later, even had his fair share of rido. When I asked him how he reconciled fighting for the government and being friends with enemies of the state, he simply put it as a matter of due respect.
"I beseeched of them not to create trouble in their own village," he said. "Their home is, my home too. I protect it because I am assigned to cover this area. But if my jurisdiction were outside of Maladeg, then that may have been a different story."

The drizzle showed no signs of letting up. Very quickly, the gravel road turned slippery and dangerous, especially for two passengers on a dirt bike loaded with bags. With the imminent downpour ahead and our final destination still thirty minutes away, Luting ceased the conversation to focus on maintaining a good grip of the wheel, while balancing my hiking pack slung around his chest.

Then I spotted it, a monitor lizard. It was diligently scouring the wet bushes for supper. That was my first time seeing such an animal, and Luting decided that he was not going to be the one to extinguish my excitement. So he slowed down his bike as we watched the lizard rapidly flicking its tongue as it waddled mindlessly beside us. We were drenched, but in that brief moment, the forest that had become a burial ground to many-the site that had overwhelmingly engulfed me a few minutes prior-was transformed into a placid canopy of refuge for the unique and unprotected creature.

Luting tilted his head closer to my ear. Above the ceaseless clatter of wind, rain and motor, he spoke in a calm and comforting voice, "It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

## THE CHILDREN

During one of my visits, I had the opportunity to meet two girls who were among the many children who regularly come to the Anton home. They refer to Bob and Da as uncle and auntie, although they are not blood related. They help around the house and receive from the couple some monetary support. They looked at me with undue curiosity and bashfulness.

They were supposed to accompany me in my room, but at eight thirty that evening, there were still no signs of the two girls. Da suspected that they were at the movie house. On quiet nights, many of Maladeg's residents frequent the small establishment in the middle of the village where English and Tagalog movies were shown on a $26^{\prime \prime}$ television set connected to a VCD and VHS player. The children usually stood outside and watched through the cracks on the wall. This was an economical as well as a convenient location for them. When taking breaks during the boring scenes, they play tag or hide-and-go-seek or any of those universal children's games that did not require any equipment or toys. Da suspected that my thirteen-year-old companions, were among those seeking entertainment.

Da was right. The two were out watching a movie, so they arrived home after the electric generators shut down for the evening.
"So what did you learn in school today?" I asked them, attempting to befriend my new roommates. They, on the other hand, were not as keen on conversing with me and immediately scurried under the covers and giggled uncontrollably.
"Really, I don't bite."

More giggling.
"So you didn't learn anything in school today?"
"A little," said Inday, the talkative one, who slowly peeked out from under the blanket to watch me write notes in my journal.
"Yeah like gardening," followed the other.
They must have noticed the look of surprise in my face because they quickly rushed back under the blanket and started to giggle all over again. As the candlelight flickered into darkness and the children finally laughed themselves to exhaustion, I could not help but wonder whether the school is no exception to the stereotypes about public, elementary education in the Philippines, where teachers are said to be habitually late or absent and students spend a significant part of their school day beautifying school grounds. I resolved to find out for myself what the Miguel Anton Elementary School is all about.

At 8:30 the next morning, I found out that I had already missed the flag raising ceremony. I was, however, on time for the gardening and cleanup session, which was a daily task, assigned to all first thru sixth grade pupils. Since the school's budget did not allow for a hired janitor or gardener, the students were made responsible for the upkeep of the one-hectare lot donated by the Antons to the Department of Education Culture and Sports. That morning, I watched students in uniform respectfully obeying their teachers' orders.
"Do something," said Thalia, pointing at the boy who had just surrendered his broom to another student. She stood in the middle of a large group of children
who were picking up trash and pulling out weeds. "You have to say that to some of them sometimes," she said turning to me, "because they just stand there while others work."

The students worked at warp speed and at 8:59, they put away their brooms and rushed to their classrooms, stopping only for a second at the door to leave behind their shoes and slippers. Thalia's section 2A class comprised of 68 students. Because there were not enough desks to accommodate everyone present, two to three second graders shared one desk space. Still, a considerable number sat on the floor, a more desirable spot considering that the only light in the room was the sun's rays that crept through the wooden window panes and the crevices on the walls.

It was dark and rainy outside and the ones assigned to sit at the back rows, were now situated on the floor, in front of the chalkboard. They were copying their first lesson for the day. First period was English.

## A Little Tree's Wish

Oh me! Said the little tree My old leaves were beat after all Wish I could have them back.

The tree fairy was a good fairy
So she touched the little tree
She gave it back its long, thin
And small leaves
How happy the little tree was!
Now I know! The tree said
It is best to be happy with what one has
The birds were happy too
[They] sang and made their home
In the branches of the little tree
"Did you understand all of that?" Ma'am Thalia asked in Tagalog. She read A Little Tree 's Wish with the whole class and afterwards, translated each line in Tagalog and Maranao. Suddenly, two boys who were clutching chalkboard erasers, eagerly ran outside and pounded the implements together to release chalk dust into the air. It was not until then that I realized I had missed the transition to second period, Science.

In an effort to escape the cloud of chalk dust that was quickly being blown toward me, I stumbled into section 2B, which was a stark contrast from the previous. While the six children present continued on with their lesson on colors, Ms. Macapanton ${ }^{102}$ explained to me that the wet weather might have prevented the rest of her students from daring the 4-kilometer walk down the slippery slopes. Today would have been one of those "not worth it" mornings.

Nevertheless, six was better than zero-the number of sixth graders who went to school that day. I found out from Ms. Macapanton that the sixth grade teacher was working on her Graduate degree at the state university in Marawi. This meant ending her lectures at the elementary school by mid-week, to prepare for the five-hour commute north of Maladeg. She did not miss too many class sessions however, because in Maladeg and in other areas of the ARMM, classes begin on Sundays to allow Muslim children to attend the Madrasah on Fridays and Saturdays.

A few minutes away from the elementary school was the Sultan Gumander Annex National High School, where Dante and I proceeded next. There were no gates, just a clearing in the middle of a wooded area. I noted one building partitioned

[^64]into two classroom by a chalkboard, and two sheds where classes were also held. Closest to the road was the larger of the two sheds. It was four-post structure that sheltered a chalkboard filled with algebraic equations, a teacher and a handful of students. Right next to it was a tree, where a hollow piece of metal tank hung. Dante said it was a truck's engine brake, yet paired with a small piece of grill bar it served as a school bell. Or maybe not, because despite the silence at 11 o'clock, students milled out of their classrooms and onto the dirt road back to their homes.

I returned at around noon to give myself a few minutes with some teachers before classes were to resume at one o'clock. When I approached a group of teachers working on their lesson plans, the math instructor who I recognized from earlier that morning enthusiastically welcomed me.

His name is Joseph Anton, 29, Bob Anton's nephew and one of the ten volunteer teachers at the high school. Joseph, I found out, was one of those late bloomers who wandered through his late teens and early twenties without a sense of urgency for finding a profession. Although he once considered Electronics Service as a vocational course, an accident prompted him to think twice about his possible future.
"I got electrocuted," he exclaimed, letting out a infectious guffaw. "I was talking, and I completely forgot that I was doing something. So then it happened-I got electrocuted! I thought to myself, I might end up burning down our house because of my stupidity!" Thus, he dropped out of school; fooled around until fooling around became incongruous to his age and to a certain degree, embarrassing.

After hearing on the local news names of former classmates who have received their professional licenses, he finally decided to enter the world of the certified and the marketable. Thus, he went to Cebu to obtain his Bachelor's degree in Education.

Last year, Joseph returned to Maladeg with a desire to first teach in his village before venturing on to places beyond its boarders. He believes that Maladeg is a place where the students' potentials can be unleashed, given a little bit of commitment and concern.
"It is ideal here because it is far away from most distractions, such as drugs and alcohol," he said. "But it is unfortunate that students are not given the proper attention. We lack teachers, and the ones who are here, seldom report for work... The teachers just don't seem so concerned about the children. You know, if they're not relatives... its not like how it is with us Bisaya, who don't chose favorites. We teach all the students. I don't know, I think Maranaos have a different culture. They are indifferent, just as long as the children come to school. Among Christians, it is not like that," he said, convinced that the weaknesses of the school could be attributed to a culture of indolence ingrained among the majority of the community.

By 1:30 p.m. the teachers coaxed the student into the classrooms. At around two o'clock, the head teacher arrived and started her lessons. It should be noted, however, that the prevalence of truant teachers, poor facilities and lack of instructional resources are not unique to Maranao schools. These are typical concerns regarding public schools in many remote and rural areas of the Philippines. Even
schools in poor, urban communities are plagued with the same problems. ${ }^{103}$ The children of Maladeg have many of the same problems faced by their counterparts in other areas of the Philippines.

In a country that is constitutionally secular but where religion pervades politics and tradition, some children have more than just their education to worry about. This, I learned best from two Maranao boys whom I met during one of my daily afternoon strolls. They were walking toward me; hand-in-hand and flirtatiously fidgeting with their kumbong ${ }^{104}$ as they gracefully bounced and switched left, right...stop, fix headdress...left, right, left...
"Faggots!" taunted one of the Maranao women who passed by them. They turned and looked at her, examined her from head to foot, and with an exaggerated and effeminate about-face, proceeded toward me.
"What is your name Ate? ${ }^{105 "}$ asked the prettier one, his voice teetering between a soft baritone and a painful screech. "Where are you going?"
"Just walking around," I said.
With that reply, they smiled at each other, nodded and eagerly accompanied me along my path. The pretty eleven-year-old wearing orange nail polish introduced himself as Norhan. His best friend was fifteen-year-old, Saipoden. As we walked and talked, the two kept interrupting each other and often switched three or four times to

[^65]finish just one sentence. Together, they made such a chatty pair that I had hard time noting who said what.
"Our grandparents were born and raised here... We're not relatives of the Anton's... There are a lot of rido in this area... But they fight way up in the mountains... Now, there is calm because of the marines..." and on and on.
"How is it like to be Maranao and openly gay in a predominantly Muslim village?" I addressed the two boys. It was an imminent question that knew I had to eventually ask, and I was quickly inundated with a slew of answers that rolled in, one on top of the other.
"They say, why are you acting like homosexuals?"
"We say, this is what God willed for us!"
"Our parents are okay with it..."
"Because we are the ones who cook and clean and wash the dishes."
"Some of our neighbors even tell my father, you are lucky for having a son who can help around the house!"
"We say, there is only one God, and this is what God willed for us. No one can change who we are because this is how we have always been even as children."
"They say, when will you become real men? Such a pity how handsome you are!"
"We say, only time can answer that."
"Really, our hearts are the hearts of women."
"And Baby Boy gets mad..."
"He belittles us..."
"But others are fond of us..."
"Especially when we pray. They say we look really happy together, especially when we pray."
"Others talk about killing us..."
"But we just disregard those as idle talk."
"Everywhere we go, people know we're gay. Maybe its because we move like women."
"And at night we dress sexy!"
"Oh no, we're dead!" exclaimed the older one who quickly took off his headdress. With all the talking going on, Norhan and Saipoden did not notice that we were already in front of Bob Anton's house. Surprisingly, however, it was not as much of an expression of fear in their faces but that of deference instead. The switching became minimal and the effeminate mannerisms were, for the meantime, suppressed. They walked hurriedly past Bob's yard with an unnaturally poised and stiff gait. A few meters later, they were back in the rhythm of left, right, left, fix headdress...
"Mmmmmmwah!" said Saipoden kissing his palm and gently pressing on the picture of a man's face, above which was written: Jun Macarambon for Congressman $2^{\text {nd }}$ District. "I hope you win," he said with an overly emotional yearning. "I tell my parents, how can you be so ungrateful and not vote for him? The water that you drink, that's from Macarambon! Before, we had to climb up the mountains to fetch water. Now, we can do our laundry close by. That is all because of

Macarambon! Do you not know the meaning of utang na loob?" he said, swaying his arms and hips as he talked.

As darkness slowly took the stead of the afternoon sun, Norhan and Saipoden decided to head back to their respective homes. Saipoden's parents were returning home that day from Kapatagan, where they sold their harvest of copra. He invited me into their house, which was a tiny hut partitioned into two rooms. Facing the entrance door was the kitchen and dinning room in one and to the left and two steps up was the bedroom.

As Saipoden prepared dinner, a friend, Joel walked in the room. At eleven years of age, Joel seemed too short and undernourished for his four-foot frame. Nevertheless, he was energetic, agile and quick-quick to notice the kumbong that was laying on the chair beside him. While Joel pranced around the tiny room gracefully donning the headdress, the two chatted interminably, mostly talking about their experiences with homophobic and unwelcoming neighbors.
"Are we dogs that they wouldn't allow us into their hou-ahhhhhhhhhhh!" screamed the little one who just spotted Saipoden's parents approaching the house. Panic stricken, Joel quickly took off the kumbong, threw it at Saipoden, who in turn bolted into the bedroom, returned his mother's headdress, and rushed back to the front door, in time to greet his parents with a big sigh of relief.

I ended that day with more questions than answers about the future of Maladeg. I kept hearing Norhan's voice in my head, "They say we look really happy together, especially when we pray..." Maybe the solution is exactly what Norhan and Saipoden suggested-one that is easier said than done-a learning process of
tolerance, acceptance and respect. As I stood in front of the Anton home, I was uncertain that I would see the day when peace will reign over Muslim Mindanao. However, I was comforted by the thought that I witnessed a concerted effort in achieving that ultimate goal, in this tiny village, protected by visionaries and maybe even, benevolent spirits.

## CONCLUSION

The international community and a majority of Filipinos have thought of the peace and order problem in Mindanao and specifically in Lanao del Sur as conflict between the Muslim secessionists and the Philippine government. Clan wars among Muslim families, however, appear to be the primary cause of violence and displacement of Maranao-Muslims in the area.

The village of Maladeg avoided the same dire state of its neighbors due to the efforts of its residents and village leaders. The concept of tolerance and peaceful negotiation is constantly imbued by the village leaders upon those who reside within the boundaries of the zone of peace. Residents are also encouraged to be more proactive and resourceful, thus eliminating apathy, disgruntlement, and dependence on the government that oftentimes fails to hold true to its promise of implementing peace and development projects.

It takes a special kind of character to become a successful leader in an experimental refugee village like Maladeg. Bob Anton has the ability to reconcile his charisma and ill repute to elicit support and deference from his constituents. He is sensitive to the concerns of both Muslims and Christian residents, yet is never apologetic when making decisions that may favor one side over the other. He commands respect and loyalty from the residents to whom he feels a deep sense of obligation to protect and educate.

Maladeg has survived because the residents have made great strides to reject cultural practices that hinder their effort toward peace and development. Covert prejudices remain but generally do not interfere with interpersonal relations between
both ethnic groups. Their approach toward peace and progress is not founded on an abstract goal for achieving a utopian community. Instead, it is based on a homegrown and mutually agreed upon process of communication, negotiation and implementation, driven by perseverance and respect.

## MALADEG ZONE OF PEACE: A PHOTO STORY



THE REFUGEE VILLAGE
Maladeg is a small village nestled in the heart of Muslim-Christian conflict and Maranao-Muslim clan wars in the province of Lanao del Sur, Philippines. More than ten years after the unofficial declaration of the peace zone, the village has now become a home to more than 3,000 people from either Islamic, Christian or animist tribal groups. Though Maladeg is comprised of a heterogeneous mix of cultures and faith, there is a general amicability between the resident Muslims and Christians.


Sunset, Maladeg, Lanao del Sur
Residents leisurely stroll down the beach. Although Maladeg is among the most scenic places in the island, its beauty is marred by practices that pollute the waters such as laundering and defecating at the shoreline because of lack of indoor plumbing facilities.


Fisherman
A fisherman and his sons untangle fishing nets before going out to sea. Fishing and farming are the main livelihood of the residents of Maladeg.


## Farmer

A farm worker husks newly harvested coconuts in preparation for processing copra (dried coconut meat). Agriculture, specifically copra production, is one of the more common sources of income for many residents. In 2001 however, prices of copra fluctuated at more or less than four pesos a kilo (0.08USD), prompting many residents to seek other forms of livelihood.


Barely Making It
Saipoden Sultan (right) normally takes on the house chores while his parents work in the farm. Saipoden's father (left), just recently arrived exhausted from a daylong trip to Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, to sell their harvest of copra. Copra can be sold at $5.40 \mathrm{PHP} /$ kilo $(1 \mathrm{USD}=50 \mathrm{PHP})$ in Kapatagan compared to 3.50 PHP/kilo in Maladeg. The farmers however, do not realize the entire profit because transportation from Maladeg to Kapatagan can cost 30 cents/kilo of copra.


## Shackled

A pet bird, tied to a stick, falls on a bed of rice grains as it tried to escape. Many of the residents in Maladeg are subsistence farmers who harvest and mill their own rice. Excess is often sold at the marketplace.


Tobacco Vendor
A Maranao-Muslim vendor packages and sells chewing tobacco at the marketplace. Residents of Maladeg rely on small-scale business as a more stable source of income than farming or fishing.


Five o'clock Prayer
Maranao-Muslims congregate at five o'clock in the afternoon to pray inside the mosque. In Maladeg, Muslims and Christians peacefully practice their faith in close proximity to one another.


## Basketball Game

Muslim and Christian residents play a friendly game of basketball against one another. The basketball court was built with donations of the residents of the village.


## Billiards

Muslim and Christian men play billiards in the Christian side of the village. Since smoking, drinking and gambling are tolerated in the Christian area, Muslims and Christians gather around this side of the town to participate in activities prohibited and considered sinful vices in the other side.


## THE ISOLATION

## Birth

The baby was born a few hours earlier under the care of a traditional healer. Since there is no hospital in Maladeg, mother and child had to take the first boat trip at dawn to the closest city. The road leading to the hospital is not only surrounded by bandits and mercenaries but is also temporarily impassable due to a fallen bridge.


Death
A relative of the deceased washes the body (left, covered in sheets) in preparation for burial. With limited finances, the family decided against medical help. Furthermore, the sick would have had to endure a long and arduous boat ride to the closest hospital in the city across the Illana bay..


## Building a Bridge

More than ten years ago, the constant strong current of the river washed away the approach to the Liangan Bridge. Construction on the new bridge did not start until after the residents stopped pleading to the government. Instead, the village leaders gathered their own resources and built a coconut lumber bridge.


Building a Bridge
Construction workers use ropes to traverse the river as they rebuild a new approach to the Liangan Bridge.


## Coconut Lumber

Coconut lumber was used to build the approach to the Liangan Bridge. Coconut is an abundant resource in the area and also provides strong lumber that can withstand the elements.


## A New Liangan Bridge

Children dive off the newly constructed Liangan Bridge.


## Bringing a Promise of Change

Gubernatorial candidate Abu Baulo promises to bring aid to the poverty stricken village by constructing roads, hospitals, potable water piping system, etc. Baulo, a medical doctor by profession, lost to a more popular and seasoned politician.


## THE CONFLICT

## Bullet Holes

Bullet holes mark many of the houses around the marketplace of Maladeg. Bob Anton, the village leader, allowed a Maranao-Muslim clan war to be fought in the center of the town during Christmas of 1998. Although the decision was made in defiance of the Covenant Zone of Peace, the village elders felt that the fighting was a way to eliminate ambush killings outside the zone


Mother Mourning
Cabi Saripoda collapses in tears when she sees the belongings of her murdered son hanging on the wall. Her son was alleged to be a victim of a clan war. Clan wars can result from petty theft, like stealing coconuts, to murder. It can last through generations, with hatred planted in the hearts of posterity.


## Afternoon of Mourning

Relatives mourn the death of a clan war victim whose body is covered in white cloth. The family awaits relatives from other villages to pay their respects, before burying the victim on the same day of death, in accordance with Islamic burial rights. Vengeance, which is often instilled upon the young, perpetuates the cycle of violence.


## Burial Rites

Relatives transport the body of a clan war victim to a different house where male members of the family would cleanse the body in accordance with Islamic burial rites.


## THE CONSERVATORS

## Election Season

Philippine marines conduct constant patrols during election season. Lanao del Sur is considered an election hot spot by the military. Candidates and supporters often fall victim to violence and coercion by politicians and even soldiers and policemen bent on advancing their candidate and political platform.


ARMM Plebiscite
On August 14, 2001 residents of Maladeg voted on their inclusion to or exclusion from the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Due to torrential rain, a significant number of voters failed to arrive before the precincts closed. However, ballot boxes, such as the one shown above, were filled to the brim as a result of election fraud.


## Preparing for Patrol

Men of the Philippine Marines and the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) prepare to conduct a prophylactic patrol around Maladeg. To counter rebel activities and clan wars, a contingent of the Philippine Marines has been stationed in Maladeg.


On Patrol
Soldiers cover both the mountains and the beach surrounding Maladeg when conducting prophylactic patrols. Although the marines conduct constant patrols in the area, they have not completely prevented hijacking and ambushing of residents involved in clan wars.


Aka "Chikoy"
Constancio "Chikoy" Rosas sings songs lamenting the CAFGU men's subordinate position in the military hierarchy. CAFGU men are civilian volunteers who receive per diem allowance, not salary, for their services. Since they are residents of the village and are familiar with the area, they are often assigned to the front line. They are however, allotted only a few number of bullets when sent out on patrol with the marines.


Night Watch
CAFGU men on night watch inside the marine camp, sing songs lamenting their subordinate position in the military. Even though their stipend is low, many men continue volunteering their services because unemployment rate is high and their stipend is their primary income.


Bob and Da Anton
He is the feared and respected village leader, yet confesses of his deference to her, his wife of more than twenty years. He put down his guns and explored peaceful negotiations with enemies after she told him to "grow up," and leave the belligerent lifestyle.


## Bob and Da Anton

"The first time I saw her, I said to myself, that is the only woman who can topple all the copra that I piled."
-Bob Anton, 2002-


D' Peacemaker
Friends of Bob Anton help pull Bob's boat, D' Peacemaker, to shore. Bob Anton prides himself of mediating a significant number of family feuds within Maladeg and its vicinity, consequently decreasing the number of casualties of clan wars.


## THE FUTURE

## A Lesson on Colors

A sixth grader goes up to the chalkboard and finishes an exercise on spelling colors. The prevalence of truant teachers, poor facilities and lack of equipment are not unique to Maranao-Muslim schools. Public schools in many remote and rural areas of the Philippines are plagued with similar problems.


Fetching Water
A boy carries potable water to his house. Maladeg has no area-wide potable water piping system, and children are normally assigned the task of fetching water for cooking and drinking.


Gun Play
A boy plays with a toy gun at the marketplace.


At Play
Children play at the marketplace where many of the stores and houses were riddled with bullets fired during a clan war fought in December 1998.


## Boy and his Dog

The population of children in Maladeg is high because family planning is not widely practiced by the residents. Children are also seen as additional help with livelihood and domestic chores.


Children at Play


Returning to Maladeg
A boy climbs up a boat as it sails ashore in Maladeg.

## APPENDIX A: <br> Covenant of Peace and Development

## (Original document written in Maranao) <br> To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned leaders and current datus of our respective communities surrounding the area of responsibility of Barrio Maladeg on this day, Wednesday, $08^{\text {th }}$ of April, 1998, are gathered in the presence of our leader (Father-Mother) Bob Anton to put into writing the old, unwritten agreement that led to the creation of the Zone of Peace and Development in Maladeg. Said Agreement has been continued up to the present, and we have agreed to expand the area covered by the original Zone of Peace and Development to Barangay Turayas in the east; in the western side it will extend to as far as Barangay Uban-Uban in Baropit. In the north, it will extend as far as Kalumpang then to Barangay Mamaanen.
Herewith are the major rules and regulations inside the Zone of Peace and Development.

1. It is prohibited to gamble inside the Zone of Peace and Development.
2. Armed conflict and any form of criminality is prohibited inside the Zone of Peace.
3. The use of [illegal] drugs is also prohibited inside the Zone of Peace.
4. We will prohibit anything considered bad and we will inspire good deeds.
5. We guarantee the dissemination of these laws to our respective families and subjects inside the Zone of Peace and Development;
6. If there is anyone among our families and subjects inside the Zone of Peace who will be found violating the laws, we promise to do everything possible to bring said violators to justice. If we cannot do so because of our inability to enforce the law upon our clan, it now becomes the duty of all the undersigned Datus and leaders to help bring the culprits to justice at all cost.
7. For all non-original residents of the Zone of Peace and Development who want to migrate inside the Zone of Peace and Development, they have to secure permission from the Council of Elders who will approve said application on condition that the applicant will give a guarantee that they will observe our rules/regulations strictly, if they wish to be protected by the datus of the Zone of Peace and Development.
8. For outsiders of the Zone of Peace and Development having family feuds (rido) but do not wish to be part of their rido, they can avail of sanctuary inside the Zone of Peace and Development and will be allowed to seek shelter inside the Zone of Peace on condition that said applicant will promise to renounce war and to put an end to his support for his relatives/friends involved in rido. In return the datus will provide him protection and assistance from any troublemaker.

Hereto, we, the leaders who formed this covenant, affix our signatures without
coercion to manifest our sincerity.

## (Signatories)

1. Bob Anton

Ina-Ama o Pagilidan
2. Rasoman Guindo

Panondiongan sa Pagalungan
Commander Zone V, MNLF
3. Kilab Ramber

Sancupan sa Nunungan
4. Datu Eba Sarip

Representing Sultan sa Nunungan
5. Dilawin Caontongan

Rajamuda sa Pantar
6. Abdulmalik Toandatu

Alim (Islam)
7. Imam Caontongan Mupon, Al Haj
8. Ustadz Ibrahim Ampaso Representative of Ampaso family of Uyaan.
9. Abdul Ampuan, Al Haj.

Representing Ampuan Clan of Nunungan
10. Gasanara Patad, Al Haj.

Representing Patad Clan of Nunungan
11. Golam Guindo

Sultan Cabugatan sa Liangan
12. Ali Diarangkal

Representing Diarangkal Clan
Nunungan, Lanao del Norte
13. Ustadz Ismael Abdurasad

Representing the Datu Imam Clan
Mamaanen, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur
22. C/INSP Latiph H. Rasol PNP

GPN OFFR $1505^{\text {th }}$ PMG
Camp Jose Abad Santos, Malabang
23.Saliling Tagoranao Naseph

Bulucaon, Sultan Gumander
24. Datamani Ampuan Sultan

Bgy Captain, Brgy Balangas
Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur
25. Ustadz Caris Dipatuan Representing the Dipatuan Clan
26. Sultan Dimainding Labuan

Sultan sa Mamaanen, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur
27. Candidato Saripada

Representing Saripada Clan of Pualas, Lanao Sur
28. Abas Sarip, Al Haj

Representing Sarip Clan of Nunungan
29. Faisal Amin

Cmdr MILF, Sultan Gumander, Lanao Sur
30. Nasip Saliling, Al Haj
(Alim) Representing Bolocaon
Sultan Gumander
31. Macmod Caya, Al Haj

Representing Sultan sa Caya
32. Dico Limano

Sultan a Kabugatan sa P'nod
33. Takim Kabugatan

Sultan a Kabugatan sa Taraka
Representing Madaya Clan
34. Sultan Amir Balindong

Sultan sa Picong
14. Ustadz Adrali Yusop

Representing Polayagan Clan
Nunungan, Lanao del Norte
15. Yusop Limano

Sultan Adil of Kalalano-an
16. Sultan Alinadir Balindong

Sultan sa Tanaon
17. Abdullah Carnabal, Al Haj.

Acting Mayor, Sultan Gumander, Lanao del Sur
18. Mauyag Ampuan

Ampuan sa Nunungan, Lanao Norte
19. Taradtingan A. Balindong MNLF Commander, Ponong, Sultan Gumander
20. Rombraan Lala

Sultan sa Mapialupa
21. Dimnatang Limano

Sangkupan, Munai
Lanao del Norte
35. Col. Luciano Campos

BATCOM, 28IB, 4ID, PA
36. Macasiding Polao

Datu sa Torayas, Sultan
Gumander, Lanao Sur
37. Datu Mangbisa Manalao

Barrio Captain, Ilian
Sultan Gumander, Lanao Sur
38. Salem Isra Ompa Alando

Sultan sa Mala-ig, Nunungan
Lanao Norte
39. Ameroddin Sarangani

President of Supreme Council for
Coordinating Islamic Affairs in the Philippines
40. Moh. Amir PD Pundogar

Representing the BAMUSPROF \& Filmusprof
41. Col. Alex Ambor PA

Representing BAMUS PROFs
Nasroden B. Nagamura
Board Member
42. Panondiongan Caya

Barrio Captain, Uban-Uban, Sultan Gumander, Lanao Sur Commander, $3^{\text {rd }}$ Mobile Army, MNLF

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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ See map on page 9.
    ${ }^{2}$ See Che Man, W. K., Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990) 21-22.
    ${ }^{3}$ A term used to describe the Muslim tribes of the southern Philippines. Many who belong to these tribes do not refer to themselves as Filipino Muslims since they do not pledge their allegiance to the Philippine government but to the Bangsa Moro Republic instead.

[^1]:    ${ }^{4}$ See Lacar, Luis Q., "Neglected Dimensions in the Development of Muslims in Mindanao and the Continuing Struggle of the Moro People for Self-determination." Journals Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, 9, No. 2, (1988): 297.
    ${ }^{5}$ Funtecha, Henry F., American Military Occupation of the Lake Lanao Region 1901-1913. (Marawi City: University Research Center, Mindanao State University, 1979) 9.
    ${ }^{6}$ Lacar, page 299.

[^2]:    ${ }^{7}$ Ibid, p. 57.
    ${ }^{8}$ Che Man, p. 31.

[^3]:    ${ }^{9}$ Che Man, p. 23.
    ${ }^{10}$ Ibid, pp. 74-77.
    ${ }^{11}$ Ibid, p. 80.

[^4]:    ${ }^{12}$ Rodil, B. R., Kalinaw Mindanaw: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Process, 1975-1996. (Davao City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2000) 41, 129.

[^5]:    ${ }^{13}$ Maranao is the tribal group of Lanao del Sur and Bisaya is the word used to describe all ethno-linguistic groups belonging to the Christian majority of the Visayas and Mindanao, and their dialects. Though not all Maranao are practicing Muslims and not all Bisaya are devout Christians, Maranao/Muslim and Bisaya/Christian are used by the general public as synonymous terms that distinguish these ethno-linguistic groups from each other. The reader must note that the terms Maranao/Muslim and Bisaya/Christians are used interchangeably in interviews throughout the report.

[^6]:    ${ }^{14}$ Conversations in the local dialect are translated in English.
    ${ }^{15}$ A language spoken in the island of Cebu and some other areas of the Visayas and Mindanao; also used interchangeably with Bisaya.
    ${ }^{16}$ An ethno-linguistic group of Philippine Muslims concentrated around the edges of Lake Lanao. The term also means "people of the lake."

[^7]:    ${ }^{17}$ Child

[^8]:    ${ }^{18}$ Does she know me?

[^9]:    ${ }^{19}$ Manang or sister is used as a title of respect for an older female.
    ${ }^{20} \mathrm{We}$ are leaving now.

[^10]:    ${ }^{21}$ The smallest political/territorial unit in the Philippines; also replaced the term barrio.

[^11]:    ${ }^{22}$ In 2001, the value of the Philippine peso fluctuated between 45 PHP to 55 PHP to 1USD. dollar. For the purposes of this paper, the peso to dollar conversion rate shall be understood as 50P TO 1USD.
    ${ }^{23}$ Small dwellings made of light materials and roof of nipa palm leaves
    ${ }^{24}$ Variety store

[^12]:    ${ }^{25}$ Indigenous, animist peoples of the Philippines.

[^13]:    ${ }^{26}$ Muslim-Christian relations vary from one region to the next. Animosity between the two groups is more intense in central Mindanao, Zamboanga del Sur and Basilan, where land had been partitioned in favor of the Christian settlers.

[^14]:    ${ }^{27}$ Christian
    ${ }^{28}$ A play of words for the term "Muslim-Christian."

[^15]:    ${ }^{29}$ Clan wars among Maranaos in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte can start from petty theft to murder and last for many generations. A non-fatal offense can result in death against the ridu-ai or enemy unless blood money or any other form of compensation is offered to the aggrieved party for his/her loss of maratabat, or family honor.

[^16]:    ${ }^{30}$ Farmers
    ${ }^{31}$ The Philippine system of allegiance is founded on consanguinity and affinal ties. It is expected that one owes loyalty to one's relatives (Dolan, 1993: 88). Such solidarity manifests itself in the "emergence of family corporations in industry or business, by family dynasties in politics, by paternalism in formal organizations and by nepotism among public officials" (Medina, 1991: 250).

[^17]:    ${ }^{32}$ Clan; often referred to as Bangsa Moro or Moro nation, a term that gained popularity during the emergence of Muslim separatist groups. Bangsa Moro includes the lands occupied by Muslim tribes of the MINSUPALA (Mindanao, Sulu, Palawan) region. .

[^18]:    ${ }^{33}$ See Appendix A: Covenant of Peace and Development

[^19]:    ${ }^{34}$ Religious teacher
    ${ }^{35}$ During his first term as president, Ferdinand Marcos launched numerous infrastructure projects. His second term, however, saw a decrease in economic growth and an increase in crime and violence. Filipinos were dissatisfied with the Marcos regime.
    The growing number of communist insurgents and Moro rebels led to the declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972. Marcos argued that martial law was a prelude to a "New Society" that would foster modernization. His attempt at eliminating traditional political and social practices such as government bureaucracy and the colonial ethic of utang na loob, or debt of gratitude, did not materialize (Dolan, 1993: 50-56). Instead, the new system exacerbated inefficiency and corruption. During the martial law regime, the president used police and military forces to silence the opposition, control the media, prohibit organized political activity, and imprison, torture and assassinate political enemies (Wurfel, 1988: 115).

[^20]:    ${ }^{36}$ In January of 2001, thousands of anti-Estrada protesters assembled around the EDSA Shrine, sight of the 1986 People Power Revolution that led to the collapse of the Marcos administration (1965-1986). "EDSA People Power II," as it was popularly called, demanded the resignation of President Joseph "Erap" Estrada. The protest lasted for four days and four nights, culminating in the inauguration of the then Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. On the same day of Arroyo's inauguration, Estrada left Malacañang Palace as president. He was later arrested on charges of plunder. On May 1, 2001, pro-Estrada supporters took to the streets in Mendiola in an attempt to enter Malacañang. The rioters, who demanded Estrada's return to power, caused damage to public and private property around the area. In response to the events that occurred during the four-day Mendiola rallies or "EDSA 3," President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared Manila in a State of Rebellion.

[^21]:    ${ }^{37}$ Though charges against the governor were not verified, it is not an uncommon practice for politicians to receive personal funds in exchange for political favors. Among the major areas of corruption in the country are "electoral fraud" and "legislative perks and privileges." In 1996, the office of the Ombudsman reported that the Philippine government lost P1.4M annually in the previous six years, as indicated by court cases for the loss of government funds and assets (Angeles, 1999: 5). In 2000, the World Bank reported that corruption cost the Philippine government $\$ 47$ million a year, amounting to $\$ 48$ billion over the 20 -year period to 1997 (Nugent, BBC News).

[^22]:    ${ }^{38}$ Traditional or communal leader of the Moro society whose measure of power is based on his number of followers. In return for tribute and labor, the datu provides protection to his followers, monetary aid, and advocacy in local disputes (Dolan, 1993: 82). The concept of a traditional leader has not drastically changed since the pre-Spanish period. Traditional leaders are still expected to provide their followers with political and financial support, a practice that, many argue, fosters bribery and extortion when applied in the present political system. ${ }^{39}$ Local authorities were also Maranao.

[^23]:    ${ }^{40}$ A long piece of cloth traditionally worn around the lower body by Moro men and women in the Philippines, akin to the Indian sari.
    ${ }^{41}$ Enemy
    ${ }^{42}$ The relatives who fought alongside Arip were relatives of his mother. They were initially not involved in the rido, but found themselves under attack after word got out that they were protecting Arip.

[^24]:    ${ }^{43}$ Many critics are against highly publicized surrender of arms by rebels because of reports claiming that some rebel soldiers or groups are known to use the money received from the government to buy newer and more advanced weapons.

[^25]:    ${ }^{44}$ The Shari'ah and "adat" (law composed of a mixture of customs, traditions, practices, usage and precepts based on the Qur'an) have been practiced by the Moros of southern Philippines since the introduction of Islam to the islands. The Datu or the Sultan and his council of elders are expected to be knowledgeable of these laws and to preside of over the traditional legal system. In the Philippines, Muslim laws are influenced by the traditions and culture of each tribe; thus, these customary laws vary from one Muslim community to the next (Sinsuat, 1977: 78-79).

[^26]:    ${ }^{45}$ As stated in the Tripoli Agreement of 1976 (see Chapter 7), "In the areas of autonomy, the Muslims shall have the right to set up their own Courts which implement the Islamic Shari'ah laws," on the condition that implementation of the Tripoli Agreement follows constitutional processes. As a result, the legal practice of Shari'ah in the Philippines is confined to personal, property and family relations, and does not include criminal law since the country already has a criminal code. Incorporating a second criminal code would be unconstitutional.
    ${ }^{46}$ Liquor made from fermented coconut juice.

[^27]:    ${ }^{47}$ A set of laws and codes on ideology and faith, behavior and manners, and practical daily matters prescribed for followers of Islam.
    ${ }^{48}$ Ninety percent of rido resolved by the council of elders occur outside Maladeg

[^28]:    ${ }^{49}$ Source: May 1998 interview notes by historian Rudy Rodil

[^29]:    ${ }^{50}$ Money collected by rebel groups from area residents used mainly to support their subsistence.
    ${ }^{51}$ Spanish, Moro, Chinese, Christian

[^30]:    ${ }^{52} \mathrm{Oh}$, my visitor!

[^31]:    ${ }^{53}$ Mayor; Miguel Anton was appointed the first Presidente of Malabang by the Commonwealth President Luis L. Quezon and presided for two years. He later ran thrice for mayor and won. He stayed in office for three terms or twelve years.

[^32]:    ${ }^{54}$ Gesture of respect towards elders
    ${ }^{55}$ Guavas

[^33]:    ${ }^{56}$ A bladed hand instrument about 20 inches long and used either as a farm tool or as a weapon.

[^34]:    ${ }^{57}$ A region south of Lanao del Sur; Cotabato is approximately 1 hour away by land from Malabang.

[^35]:    ${ }^{58}$ Name was changed in order to protect the security of parties involved.

[^36]:    ${ }^{59}$ Manong or brother, is used as a title of respect for an older male.
    ${ }^{60}$ The deadline was imposed so that voters from remote areas can have access to the voting sites and candidates and their delegation can campaign by land. It should be noted that a common complaint among voters during election is that infrastructure constructions do not

[^37]:    usually start until election season and end abruptly afterward, whether or not the projects are completed.

[^38]:    "The Antons would have been finished a long time ago if they weren't fearless," Narding said. "Their plantation would have been claimed by squatters if they didn't fight back. Because they are fearless, because they fought back, they still have all their land.
    "There," he continued, pointing at the vast expanse of land were the river disappeared into the forest, "that's more than 1,000 hectares. That's Rashid Lucman's-Maranao, congressman and spouse of the governor-but still squatters occupied more than 1,000 hectares of their property.

    It was predictable that when time came to designate tasks, Miguel Anton was in-charge of all matters pertaining to construction, while his father Alfonso "Al" Anton, headed security. Miguel is a successful and experienced contractor. Al had been an intermediary and a soldier since his early twenties.

    At twenty-one, Al ran for counselor of Malabang and won. He holds the title of Sultan Dalumangkub, a rank that calls for him to oversee seventeen other sultans and all their subjects. He is skilled in the art of negotiation, resolving countless rido through dialogue and diplomacy. Nonetheless, Al Anton knows how to fight. At sixty-five, his sturdy physique gives hint of an experienced soldier.

    In the sixties, when all his siblings left Maladeg in search of better opportunities, Al stayed behind to protect their 700-hectare land and the neighboring families. He fought against the rebels alongside the government as a member of the

[^39]:    ${ }^{61}$ Barrio Self-Defense Units, Civilian Home Defense Forces, Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units, respectively. These civilian paramilitary groups were initially established as part of the government counter-insurgency campaign. Locals of the barrios were recruited and trained by the Philippine military. The reputation of these paramilitary units came under attack after human rights groups reported of petty crimes and more serious attacks such as rape, torture, and extra-judicial killings. The United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, characterized these paramilitary groups as "nonprofessional units [having] inadequate training, poor supervision, and a propensity for violent behavior." (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor).
    ${ }^{62}$ Person of mixed ethnicity such as the Spanish-Filipino, Chinese-Filipino. In this case, the term is used loosely to mean a person of Maranao-Bisaya or Muslim-Christian roots.

[^40]:    ${ }^{63}$ In Tagalog known as utang na loob, or debt of gratitude that is formed upon the receipt of gifts or favors (e.g. saving one's life, providing for education, employment, etc.) This value of reciprocity is practiced in both social and political settings. It is argued to be one of the prime factors leading to corruption and bribery in the Philippine government, where political favors are generously granted as a form of payment for a previous favor received.

[^41]:    ${ }^{64}$ Moro Islamic Liberation Front, led by Salamat Hashim, operates with the goal of establishing an Islamic society regulated by the Shari'ah. Their strategy, like the MNLF, was to step up military activities in order to expedite government negotiations based on the Tripoli Agreement. The party differs from the MNLF in that its leadership is composed mainly of traditional aristocratic and religious elites (Che Man, 1990: 88).
    ${ }^{65}$ The camp allegedly serves as the link between the Central Committee based in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia and other camps and provincial committees in Mindanao.
    ${ }^{66}$ The 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement was rejected by the MILF who demanded a separate Bangsa Moro state. When subsequent negotiations with the MILF failed, the incumbent president, Joseph Estrada launched an all-out offensive against the rebel group, starting with Camp Omar on February 15, 2000 and proclaiming victory after the capture of Camp Abubakar on July 9 of the same year.

[^42]:    ${ }^{67}$ Pinaroc, Joel. "No military pullout from captured MILF stronghold, says Gloria," Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 28, 2001, (15 January 2002). [http://www.inq7.net/brk/2001/mar/28/pbreak13.htm](http://www.inq7.net/brk/2001/mar/28/pbreak13.htm)
    ${ }^{68}$ After recovering from an all-out offensive against the Estrada administration, the MILF is conducting peace negotiations with the Arroyo government. Spokespersons for the MILF deny allegations of joining forces with Misuari and continue to stand on their promise of peace talks with the present administration.

[^43]:    ${ }^{69}$ In the end, the government decided to maintain the Armed Forces in the areas, which were then considered civilian communities and not rebel camps.
    ${ }^{70}$ New People's Army. The NPA is the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), a Marxist-Leninist movement founded on December 1968. The party's cry for a proletarian revolution to overthrow the elite and exploiting classes garnered the support of many peasants and workers (Dolan: 1993, 281).

[^44]:    ${ }^{71}$ Civilian paramilitary groups have been known to work with local politicians to coerce votes from the residents. This does not necessarily mean that the CAFGU in Maladeg have committed such crimes. The Antons maintain that these reports are of isolated incidences and should not be taken as a bases for generalization.

[^45]:    ${ }^{72}$ Apart from vote buying, ballot-box stuffing and miscounts, a certain number of electionrelated violence are considered normal (Dolan, 1993: 222).
    ${ }^{73}$ Votes are tallied by hand and it takes weeks or months for the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to announce official election results. During this period, politicians and their supporters are known to use coercion and violence to steer election results.

[^46]:    ${ }^{74}$ The smallest and most radical Islamic separatist group in the Philippines. Some members are known to have ties with Osama Bin Laden and his supporters while training in Afghanistan. Because the ASG engages in bombings, extortion, and kidnappings to promote an Islamic state, the present administration considers it as the number one terrorist group in the nation and maintains a "no-negotiations" policy with the group.

[^47]:    ${ }^{75}$ Though the Philippines is a constitutionally secular country, Roman Catholicism, holds a high degree of influence among the majority. Around $85 \%$ of Filipinos are Catholic. Cardinal Jaime Sin, archbishop of the Philippines, is among the most influential leaders in Philippine politics. He was instrumental in Corazon Aquino's triumph over Marcos as well as Macapagal Arroyo's rise to the presidency.
    ${ }^{76}$ Names of kidnapping victims were changed to protect the parties involved.
    ${ }^{77}$ Not her real name

[^48]:    ${ }^{78}$ The Department of Public Works and Highways releases $15 \%$ of the allotted budget once $30 \%$ of the project is completed.

[^49]:    ${ }^{79}$ Nurullaji "Nur" Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF.

[^50]:    ${ }^{80}$ Diced snake meat cooked with in garlic, soy sauce, vinegar and other condiments.

[^51]:    ${ }^{81}$ There in no legal provision that supports monetary penalty for absences and truancy However, since the P60 per diem allowance for the CAFGU is usually given to their families and spent on other needs, many detachments officer and the CAFGU often reach an agreement wherein money is collected and spent for the men's provisions.

[^52]:    ${ }^{82}$ English translation provided for the reader, not part of the rendition.

[^53]:    ${ }^{83}$ English translation provided for the reader, not part of the rendition.
    ${ }^{84}$ The Moro liberation fronts received financial and military support from Islamic nations sympathetic to the plight of the Muslims in Mindanao. Col. Khaddafy of Libya, for example, was said to have spent over $£ 30 \mathrm{M}$ U.K. to fight against the government during the Marcos regime (Rodil, 1975: 26).

[^54]:    ${ }^{85}$ Recently passed, was a bill proposing for the expansion of the ARMM to 14 provinces and 15 cities. Residents were to decide the inclusion of these areas to the ARMM during the August 14, 2001 referendum. Current ARMM areas include five provinces and one city, namely, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan and Marawi City.
    ${ }^{86}$ Uncle; in this case, used as a title of respect rather than a title for a blood kin.

[^55]:    ${ }^{87}$ Gifts usually offered by a guest to his host as a form of gratitude, or brought by a family member returning from a trip.
    ${ }^{88}$ Snacks (colloquial).
    ${ }^{89}$ A type of tropical fruit.
    ${ }^{90}$ A type of tropical fruit.

[^56]:    ${ }^{91}$ Pretty

[^57]:    ${ }^{92}$ All the names of the officials in the 2001 ARMM Plebiscite were changed to protect the security of all persons involved.

[^58]:    ${ }^{93}$ Special Zone of Peace and Development. Peace negotiations between the GRP and the MNLF led to the proclamation of the SZOPAD, and area focused on "intensive peace and development efforts." Executive Order No. 371 state that "Investments shall be channeled to this area to spur economic activities and uplift the conditions of the people therein." SZOPAD consist of 15 provinces and 10 cities in Mindanao and Palawan. After the 1996 peace

[^59]:    agreement, over $\$ 8 \mathrm{M}$ US were donated by United Nations agencies to the SZOPAD. An additional $\$ 40 \mathrm{M}$ US was donated by other agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development and the European Union. In 1998, reports indicated that the government released only P2.8 billion of the 41.9 billion allocated for the SZOPAD (Timonera, Philippine Daily Inquirer). Charges that Misuari squandered government funds come from his former MNLF allies as well as adversaries.
    ${ }^{94}$ Islamic school.

[^60]:    ${ }^{95}$ Though those MNLF members interviewed claimed that a significant number of rebel soldiers were never given aid by the government, these charges were not officially verified. Official reports state that as of March 2000 of the Estrada Administration, 7,500 (91\%) MNLF soldiers were integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police.
    ${ }^{96}$ Not his real name.

[^61]:    ${ }^{97}$ Not his real name.

[^62]:    ${ }^{98}$ In the Philippines, candidates rely not on platform but primarily on personality and kinship to win an election. From local to national elections, candidates take various steps to win voter support through vote buying, bribery, and even coercion (Dolan, 1993: 224).
    ${ }^{99}$ The question was specifically for voters of the four ARMM provinces. Residents of the proposed 11 provinces and 14 cities of Mindanao and Palawan were to vote on their inclusion to or exclusion from the ARMM.
    ${ }^{100}$ Months prior to the plebiscite, the COMELEC had already projected a low voter turnout. Critics say that the reason for the sparse voters was due to the lackluster information drive by the COMELEC itself, poor publicity by government media agencies, the apparent prejudice

[^63]:    against the ARMM by the dominant Christian population, and the ARMM's poor performance at implementing promised projects for development (de la Cruz: 2001)
    ${ }^{101}$ In March 2002, the ASG still held two Americans and Filipino hostages in the island of Basilan. In January of 2002, the Arroyo administration opened its doors to the United States military in its attempt to quell the ASG insurgency in southern Philippines - a move highly criticized by Filipino militant groups warning that this was a step towards "another Vietnam. The Philippine and U.S. governments claim that U.S. participation, which is said to only involve training, is within the legal framework of the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty and the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (Philippine Daily Inquirer, January 14, 2002).

[^64]:    ${ }^{102}$ Not her real name

[^65]:    ${ }^{103}$ Studies have yet to be made whether these problems are disproportionately more common in Muslim areas.
    ${ }^{104}$ headdress
    ${ }^{105}$ Sister or title of respect for an older female.

