

Research Methodology: Documenting the Manobo Matigsalug Ancestral Domain Claim

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Abstract


In documenting indigenous ancestral domain claims, this paper stresses that research methodology, because of time constraints, is highly focused on three main items of culture: genealogy to be able to establish the historical time depth; extent of physical occupancy, stories of names of places and the list of tribal leaders as a tool to determine the horizontal expanse of the indigenous territory; and indigenous custom on land acquisition and use to determine the indigenous mode of land acquisition. Basic skills are not confined to research abilities; they include as well the researcher's inner and outer disposition.

Introduction

Commissioned by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace Process (OPAPP), I did an eight-day field work on May 4-11, 1994 as part of the documentation of the historical basis of the ancestral land claim of the Matigsalug of Kitaotao in Bukidnon, Marilog District in Davao City and Arakan Valley in Cotabato. The eight days included the day of entry (May 4) and the day of exit (May 11).

Paper work took 35 days. The transcription of the twelve (12) tapes and the translation from Matigsalug to Cebuano were done by my interpreter-guide-friend, Matigsalug Cosme Lambayon, from May 12 to 20; translation from Cebuano to English, which I did, was completed by June 2. The writing process started on May 18 and the first draft was finished on May 24. The final report was completed on June 15, 1994.

The finished product includes: (1) the 51-generation genealogy of the important leaders of the Matigsalug; (2) the list of leaders throughout the Matigsalug land; (3) the stories behind the names and places in Matigsalug ancestral territory; and (4) the story of their rebellion in 1975. Custom law on land acquisition, disposition and use is incorporated in the last. In capsule form, let me elaborate on the significance of each of the four.

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Genealogy and Historical Time Depth

What is the significant connection between ancestral land claim and genealogy in our research? In the absence of a documented history, we can establish an estimated historical time depth by which we can estimate how long the Matigsalugs have lived in their claimed territory. How far back must we go to prove that they have lived there since time immemorial? Or that the territory has been handed down to them by their great ancestors?

We have in this study a genealogy whose continuity is traced through 51 generations. Given the universally accepted average of 30 years per generation, our 51 generations easily give us a time depth of 1,530 years. This is more than sufficient proof with which to establish the Matigsalug ancestral land claim.

Extent of Physical Occupancy

With the genealogy, we can determine the vertical time depth of their occupancy. By expanding the same genealogy horizontally, we can determine the physical breadth of their occupancy. Very early in the genealogy, we are told how the children of Apo Tahuranon resettled themselves in various places, and succeeding generations have continued to live there. There are no reported contrary claimants to these lands. Intermarriages with neighboring tribes also provide us with insights and lead us into how they handled inter-tribal relations. This also touches on the issue of land.

Finally, it must be stressed that genealogy should not be viewed apart from the stories on the names of places.

Stories of Names of Places

Stories about the names of places reveal four elements: (a) the language used is Matigsalug; (b) the content of the stories themselves are peculiarly Matigsalug; (c) the stories involving traditional community heroes, a historical time depth of occupancy, may be estimated and compared with names in the genealogy; and (d) the physical extent of occupancy itself may be indicated, or how far and wide the Matigsalug have occupied their claimed territory over several generations of open, continuous and uninterrupted occupancy.

List of Tribal Leaders

The extent of physical territory within which they moved about is reflected, too, in the presence of traditional leaders in various sitios and barangays. The list of traditional leaders in these places will enable us to pinpoint with greater accuracy where Matigsalug communities might be in existence. Kitaotao, Bukidnon is where the main concentration of Matigsalug population is to be found. Secondary habitat are in Arakan, Cotabato; in Marilog District, Davao City; and in Paquibato District, Davao City.

Custom on Land Acquisition and Use; View on Land

Our respondents said that concepts like "my land" or "my kaingin" did not exist in the

old days. Their ancestors cleared lands in groups. There were no boundaries then. They felt free to move within their accustomed territory. People from Panganan would do their clearing in Sinuda; those from Arakan would clear lands in Sinuda. There were no restrictions. Land was held as common for the use of all. They did not own lands then. They believed that it was land that owned the people. God created land for the people. The truth is, when they die they are buried in the land. This was why their ancestors believed that land owned the people. The boundaries came later when people from other tribes would trespass occupied lands.

But what was the physical extent of their moving about from one kaingin to another? In their own words: "From Kalagangan, Panganan, Digongan, Kiulum, Patag, Marahan, Dalurong, Kitubo, White Kulaman, Sagundanon, Cabalantian and Campo Uno on the Davao side, etc. That is how far we go. But only within."

Why not outside, we ask? "Because outside does not belong to us. There are other natives there, Manobo communities. We stay within our group, within our territory." And this was how they defined their territory: "within" was theirs and "outside" belonged to other people.

This was the main document in the application of the Manobo Matigsalug for a Certification of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) filed with the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR). The size of the territory applied for in mid-1994 was 64,691.22 hectares; they received their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim for 77,000 hectares in the summer of 1995.

Sharing Abilities for Peace Research

I have been asked by friends to put into writing the methodology I employed in documenting the ancestral domain claim of the Matigsalugs as a contribution to peace research. At the time of this writing I have already employed a more refined version of the same methodology to put together the ancestral domain claim of the two neighboring communities (called Bong Banwus) of the Bla-ans of Danlag and Pula Bato in Tampakan, South Cotabato.

The intention, I was told, is to help equip researchers who may wish to undertake ancestral domain research on their own. It is called peace research because there is this basic assumption that the ancestral domain issue is an important item in the peace agenda in the Philippines. I cannot agree more.

What seems to have attracted peace advocates is the fact that the field work or data gathering phase took only eight (8) days in the case of the Matigsalugs, the days of entry and exit included, and eleven (11) days for the two adjacent Bong Banwus of the Bla-ans, also including the days of entry and exit. They argue that there must be something in the methodology that is worth sharing with others. I agree. But before I proceed with that I must explain how I view ancestral domain research.

Inner Disposition and Basic Skills in Ancestral Domain Research

I see it, first and foremost, as an expression of the researcher's totality as a person which may, for the sake of convenience, be theoretically distinguished into his inner dispo-

sition to undertake the research and his skills to execute the actual work of data gathering, data processing and composing the finished product.

The inner disposition includes his inner drive or commitment to do the work and his ability to delight in it despite the physical and psychological pressures. His accumulated experience, which may or may not be directly related to the research work at hand but because of which he has developed empathy for the indigenous peoples, must also be part of this. Such an experience could be exposure to indigenous culture, their socio-economic situation and related concerns.

The skills refer specifically to his ability do a number of important activities with relative ease, namely, (a) to set the general and specific directions of the research, (b) to organize the actual work plan from the preparatory phase to the finished product, (c) to visualize the end product as the research progresses, (d) to be flexible in the interview proper and make on-the-spot adjustments as the situation requires, (e) to systematically process and analyze the data gathered, (f) to compose the write up in pleasantly readable form, and (g) to undertake the work from beginning to end without break in momentum.

Methodology Is a Social Transaction

Methodology in ancestral domain research is, to my mind, not only something which one can objectify and then use as a mechanical guide in undertaking a successful research. I see it also as an event, an expression of harmonious interplay between the researcher and his respondents, the result of which is the written product, the documentation of the traditional basis of the ancestral domain claim.

The method of data gathering may seem procedural to certain people but actually it is not. It is a unique form of social interaction, a human transaction between the researcher and the respondent/s for the common end of documenting the ancestral domain claim of the interviewee.

For the researcher himself, the work is a social situation within which he has to demonstrate his trustworthiness as outsider to the community and his commitment to their cause. While he cannot project himself as a detached stranger, he has to show that he is a class apart from those who have taken advantage of them in the past such as the loggers, the land grabbers, and so on.

Touching Base, Understanding Indigenous Consciousness

The research is a meeting of two cultures, that of the researcher and that of the people being studied. During the short period of his stay among them, the researcher must enter into the consciousness of the indigenous people, situate his research therein, and gather his data within that setting. He is best able to do this if he already has within himself a certain degree of sympathy for the indigenous peoples as a whole. Being so, his own consciousness is already appropriately and generally attuned within the range of his subject. All he has to do is fine tune it a little bit more for greater accuracy. His task is not only obtaining the external data, it is also absorbing the flow of the stories told by the respondents and reflecting the same, to the nearest extent possible, in his written output. The product shall constitute the objective data about the indigenous community.

Learning the Indigenous Language

It may be objected, and rightly so, that to understand the people's consciousness, the researcher has to have command of their language. This is the ideal under normal circumstances. But a whirlwind field work of two weeks or less allows no time to learn a new language! Employing a good interpreter is simpler.

Drawing from Background Knowledge on Indigenous Culture

But even with the help of a good interpreter, one must have had earlier some background on indigenous cultures in Mindanao. The people's consciousness is not only intelligible through spoken language. Language has many meanings. The verbal form is only one of them. If one were sufficiently exposed to the ways and world view of the indigenous peoples of Mindanao, other than those he is currently researching on, he has already touched the consciousness of his subject.

With the assistance of a good interpreter, there is no need for him to learn the language during a two-week period of field work, that is, if the specific goal is merely to document the basis of the ancestral domain claim of an indigenous community. It must also be pointed out that over the last 90 years of the 20th century, bridges have been established among Mindanao languages. If one speaks Cebuano Bisaya, with sprinklings of Ilonggo and Manobo, he can move about in practically any Lumad community and be able to communicate with them. Among the Matigsalug respondents, more than 90 percent of them spoke excellent Cebuano Bisaya.

My Own Background and Realizations

I have the advantage of having grown up with the Tedurays, an indigenous community in the province of Maguindanao. I spoke their language, and sang their songs. At the same time I had playmates and classmates in the elementary school who were Maguindanao, Tagalog, Ilonggo, and Ilocano. This multi-cultural exposure has served me well. I have also been exposed later to other groups in Mindanao through direct contact and other studies, and, as part of an accumulated familiarity with the peoples of the region, I have long realized that they all have a common thread of consciousness running through their respective cultures. I would like to believe that this particular item can actually form part of the inner disposition of an ancestral domain researcher.

Positive Disposition of the Researcher

Talking about research methodology is not a simple case of just methods regardless of the person employing the methodology. We wish to emphasize again the fundamental importance of the inner disposition of the researcher in any research methodology.

With a positive disposition or the natural liking of the researcher for his work, he is able to determine his general objectives, weave his specific objectives within the general objectives, and visualize an interconnected work plan. The ability to write is an integral part of this inner disposition. All these factors will guide him during the interview proper, during

the data processing and the writing stage, and sustain him until the work is deemed completed.

Travel Light

To work fast, one has to travel light. This is an important physical consideration. In the field, I always wear light pants, a T-shirt, a light cotton bush jacket, a hat and light socks and rubber shoes. I have a camera bag which contains two tape recorders, films and notebooks. I have two backpacks: the bigger one for two sets of clothing (I wear the third set), wrapped in plastic as safeguard against the rain, and the smaller one containing the batteries and a day's supply of rice for two, canned fish, iodized salt and candies. Part of the pre-field work deliberation is determining where rice, canned goods, salt and sugar can be bought. This means one must make do with the minimum of clothing. The bulk of the physical weight comes from vital equipment like tape recorders and blank tapes, alcohol and cotton for cleaning the tape head, camera and films, batteries, notebooks and ball pens.

Other details like being able to adjust to the spartan food and accommodations cheerfully is also part of the inner disposition.

Computer Indispensable for Speed

Facility with the computer should be counted as part of the research methodology nowadays. The computer plays a very important role in the data processing phase for convenience, speed, efficiency. Cosme did his transcription and translation from Matigsalug to Cebuano manually; I did my translation from Cebuano to English direct on the computer. By the time I was done with the translation, I had also encoded my data, which took time, and had more or less constructed in my mind the broad organization of the story. There is no overemphasizing the convenience and the time saved through the computer.

Group Interview

In all interviews from Kilahod to Marahan, the respondents were gathered together. I explained to them that the purpose of our visit was to document the traditional basis of their ancestral domain claim so that they could file their CADC application, and, more specifically, the need for us to record four important interconnected aspects of their culture, namely; (a) the genealogy of the acknowledged leaders within the tribe, (b) the names of places in Kilahod and the stories behind each, (c) the list of tribal leaders within the claimed territory, and (d) the customary law on acquisition, disposition and use of land.

Having them gathered in one house from beginning to the end of the interview session covering all four major sub-topics saves plenty of time. Because it is their own domain or homeland that is at stake, they usually stay on far into the night without complaint. Note that they normally go to sleep as soon as night falls.

I call it group interview because I transact with them as a group. They knew who among them were experts or knowledgeable on a particular subject and these readily volunteered. They were generally well mannered, never interrupting unless an obvious error was made by the one talking and required correction. Errors in data were spontaneously and openly

corrected in a manner that did not violate good conduct in their culture. This is the advantage of group interview, the accuracy or inaccuracy of data is settled immediately. Occasionally, a long discussion would ensue, like in genealogy where some difficulty was encountered in determining one's mother or father. They do not stop until the matter is clarified.

Let the Tape Recorder Document

For speed, the interviews should involve very little note taking. It is mostly recording through the tape recorder so that the respondents can talk with minimal interruption. Having two tape recorders rolling simultaneously may sound like unnecessary luxury but for those who have experienced mechanical failure, like this researcher, even with brand new recorders, no risk must be taken. Invisible tape dust from brand new tapes can wreak havoc on the recording process. Bear in mind that a ten-day field work leaves little or no room for a return trip for cross-checking data.

Business Transaction; No Show of Wealth

Since we came into the place with all sorts of sophisticated, and obviously expensive gadgets (camera and tape recorders), we made sure that there should be no more show of wealth. Cosme and I agreed that he alone should undertake all transactions involving money, food and supplies with our host household. This was meant to insure that transactions with the local people should be as smooth and as discrete as possible. The interpreter knew the nuances of the culture, I did not. Where we knew beforehand that a barangay did not sell food supplies, we brought enough food supplies to last for the duration of our stay. The word "enough" includes the household members and the respondents. Where we knew that the place had these items on sale, we usually bought them locally, through the household. As a rule, we always traveled light. I gave Cosme the necessary cash — we deliberately brought plenty of small bills, not the crisp new ones, and he indeed conducted his transactions with remarkable discretion.

As an act of goodwill, we made sure that people who were photographed were later sent copies of their photographs.

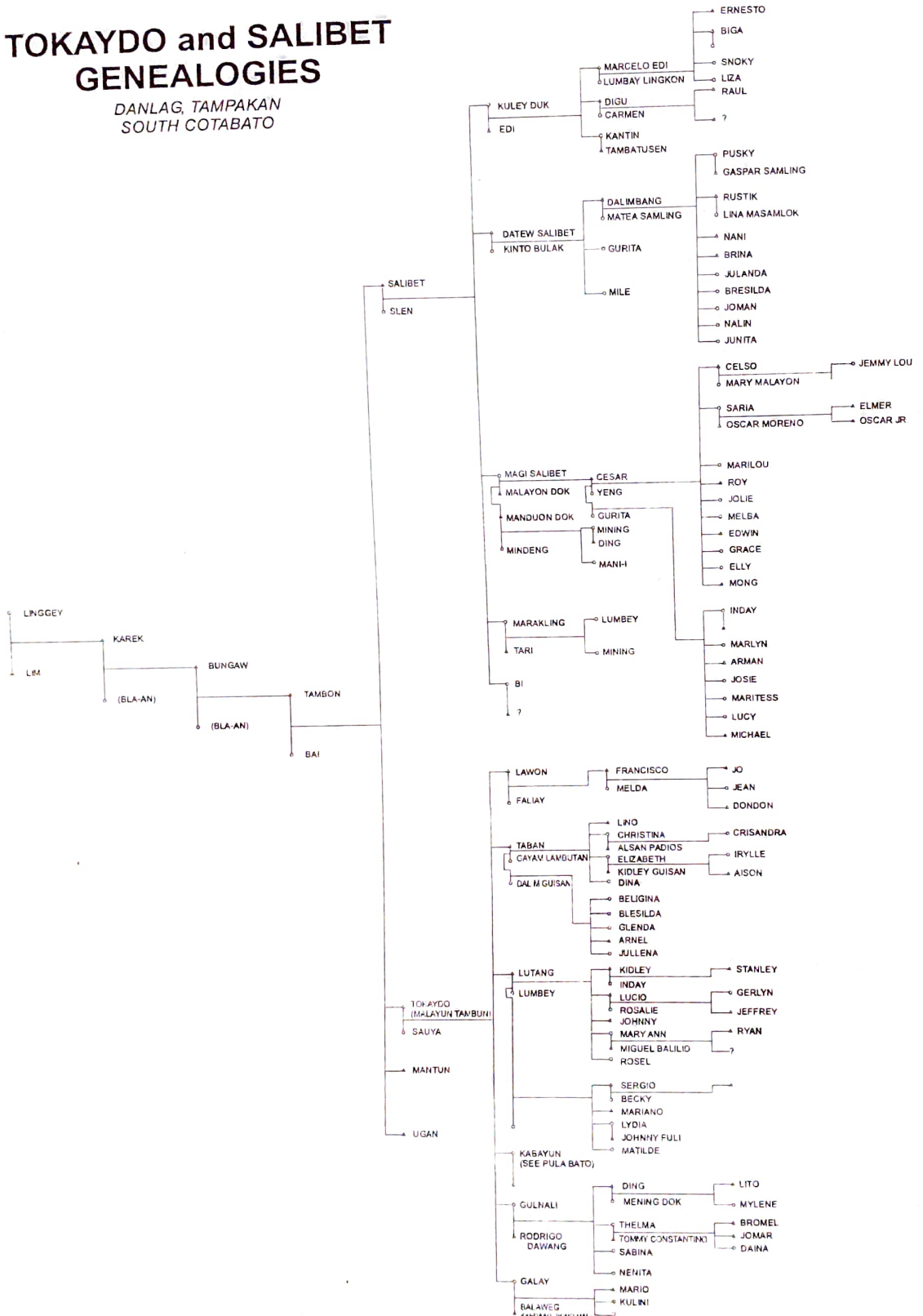
Continuity in the Pace

Continuity means that once the work is started, there should be no break in the momentum from start to finish — except to meet the call of nature (sleep, eat, etc.). Momentum is getting started, setting a pace, creating a rhythm. Once broken, it is extremely difficult to revive. We maintained a pace which averaged sixteen hours a day.

It is a beautiful feeling when the work is done.

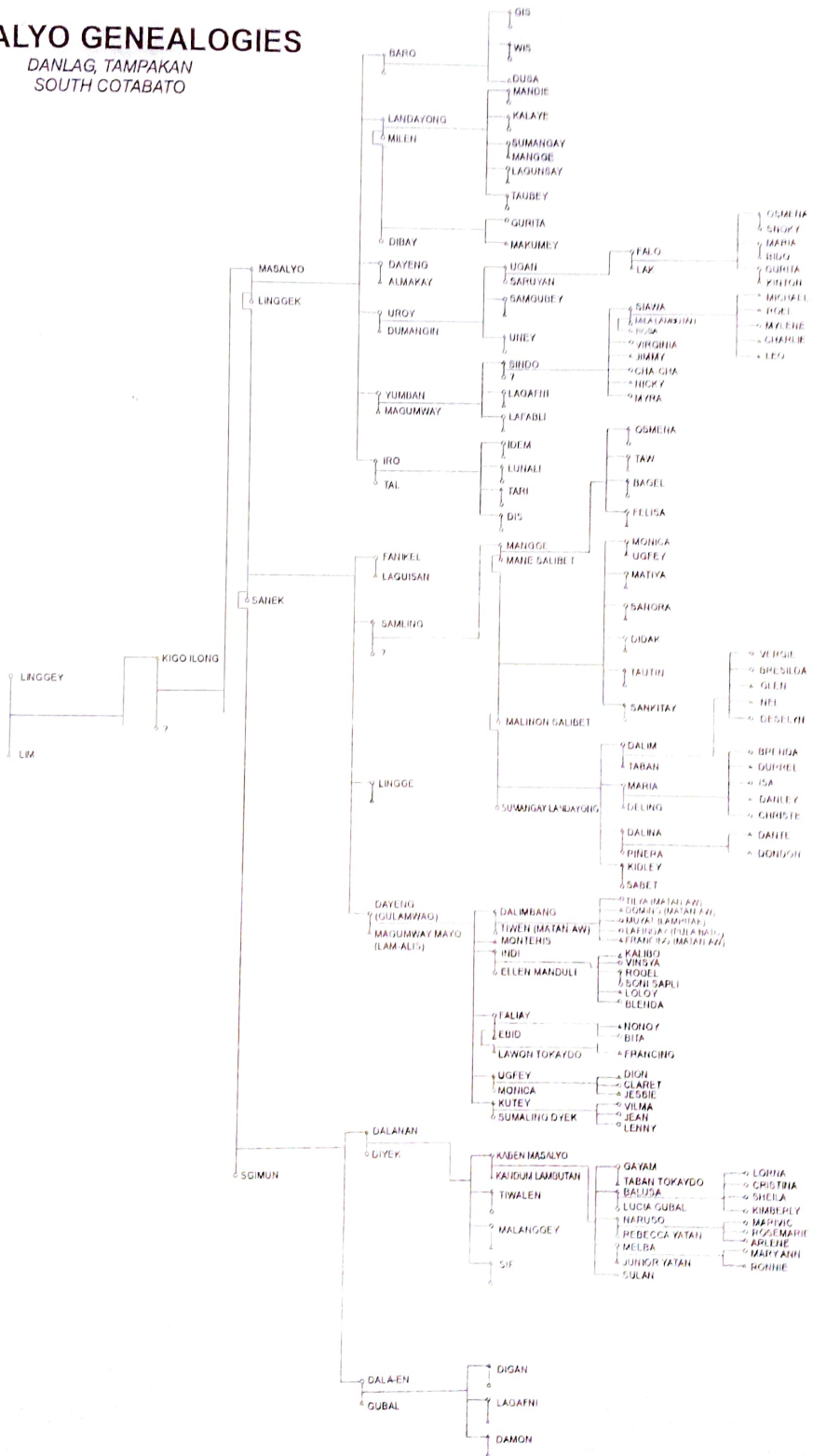
TOKAYDO and SALIBET GENEALOGIES

DANLAG, TAMPAKAN
SOUTH COTABATO



MASALYO GENEALOGIES

DANLAG, TAMPAKAN
SOUTH COTABATO





Manaobo Matigsalug Supreme Tribal Chieftain Lorenzo Gawilan at left; Datu Jose Diaon, tribal chieftain of Sinuda, Kitaotao, Bukidnon, at right.



This marks the gravesite of Apo Gawilan, great grandfather of Supreme Tribal Chieftain Lorenzo Gawilan



Doming sings Matigsalug songs accompanied by his kuglung



Launa and Antonio Tandingan, Husband and wife singing team at Sinuda



Tribal leaders at Marahan, Davao City



Datu Salud Liatan of Agila, Cabalantian, Arakan and son