

# Fort Isabela II: The Making of Basilan Colonial History 1845-1898

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## ABSTRACT

Studies about fortress' impact on a specific area, particularly in Muslim dominated Sulu Archipelago, are extremely rare despite the several papers on the Spanish fortifications in the Philippines. Following the examination of historical sources, this study departs from ambiguous and sometimes even disputed, commonly held notions about Spanish forts, i.e. (1) usually connotes to *war*; and (2) a channel of *negative effect*. Archival documents and secondary sources were obtained – illustrating a clear picture of Fort Isabella II's roles in developing a small village in Basilan known to the locals as *Pasangan*. An examination of these sources yields the following: (1) Spain's motivations in fortifying the island, (2) reasons behind the existence of a Sulu raiders' base in Basilan, (3) the intention of the French Mission in Basilan, and (4) the conditions and nature of the indigenous Yakans. More so, circumstances precipitated the island's complex conditions shrouding the inhabitants' existence into obscurity, and impeding growth, which triggered several affected villagers to ally with foreign powers or more powerful chieftains, or to migrate to the latter's domain. Thus, contrary to what has often been presumed, the problematic situations had, in fact, led to shared efforts between the inhabitants (Christian settlers, Samals, Tausugs, Iranuns, Badjaos and Yakans) and the Spanish Fort Isabella II leading to the development of *Pasangan*, presently called Isabela City. The paper concludes that the building of Fort Isabella II laid down the foundation of the development of Basilan. Lastly, this paper strongly argues that growth and peace anchored on the introduction of genuine governance and order, had *positive effects* in Fort Isabella's case, such as public health, education, and respect for one's faith, security, and economic opportunity.

**Keywords:** *Sulu Archipelago, Pasangan, Sulu raiders, Fort Isabella II.*

## BASILAN AND FORT ISABELLA II

**B**asilan history is represented and usually discussed as part of the rich history of the Sulu Sultanate. As a result, Basilan's development is viewed as a product of the Sultanate's workings, undermining the role of other factors such as colonial interference and indigenous reactions in the process. James Warren, in his classic book *The Sulu Zone (1768- 1898): The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (1981), examined and traced the development of what he called "Sulu Zone" in the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup>. In his proposition, maritime trading, raiding, and slaving activities of the Sulu Sultanate, were the main factors in the transformation of this zone, highlighting its external relationship with Asian and European traders. Warren believes that some Yakan *datus*<sup>2</sup> recognized the sovereign of the Sultan of Sulu until the beginning of the Spanish intrusions<sup>3</sup>. Still, the Sultanate's control over the Yakan was mostly ritual. The Sultanate did not have a meaningful authority in Basilan's interior (Warren, page 99). Spain's incursion in Basilan occurred when the colonizer built a fort at the tip of the island. This study presents this history.

The *Fuerza de Reina Isabella de la Segunda* or Fort Isabella II occupied a picturesque position overlooking the Isabela Channel. It was the lone military outpost on the hilly portion of a coastal village known to the locals as *Pasangan*. From 1845 up to 1898, the fort was the symbol of Spanish colonial power in Basilan. Its remote location earned the fort a reputation as the farthest Spanish military outpost in the colony until Jolo's fortification in 1878, when the colonizer constructed the *Fuerza de Alfonso XII* and the *Fuerza Asturias*.<sup>4</sup>

The island's situation was generally complex, especially in the mid-1700s until the mid-late 1800s, as the Sulu Sultanate, the French, and the Spaniards, each with different agenda, competed for control of the island, affecting the Yakans in the process. But above all, it was perhaps the 'internal' divisiveness

<sup>1</sup> The Sulus referred in this study points to those who are connected to the Sulu Sultanate, whose capital in Jolo is ruled by a Tausug sultan. Under this political ladder are the Tausug *datus*. Moreover, the raiding and slaving activities of the sultanate are generally carried out by the Sama Balanguingui and Iranuns.

<sup>2</sup> *Yakan datu* mentioned in this paper refers to indigent chieftain or ruler of a village in Basilan. *Yakans* are the indigenous people of Basilan.

<sup>3</sup>In page 99 of his book *The Sulu Zone 1768- 1898* James Warren quoted the work of Christie Emerson, an Anthropologist, who wrote the book "*The Moros of the Sulu and Mindanao*"

<sup>4</sup> Fr Rene B Javellana, *Fortress of Empire Spanish Colonial Fortifications of the Philippines, 1565-1898* Makati City: (Bookmark, Inc., 1997.)

among the Yakans that made the situation more complicated. Government, authority, and law and order were non-existence on the island at the time. The above-given situation seemed to have warranted a more organized entity grounded on law and order, public health, social, and economic development. In the eyes of some distressed and receptive Yakans, the fort could provide security and economic opportunities. Fort Isabella II's establishment laid down a foundation for the development of the Pasangan area, presently Isabela City.

Spain's decision to fortify Basilan<sup>5</sup> reflected its decisive move critical to its expansion effort. It displayed the colonizer's boldness in engaging the most potent military forces south of the colony, the Sulu Sultanate. A careful examination shows the following: Fort Isabella II was the first Spanish military fortification in the Sulu Archipelago<sup>6</sup>; secondly, the fort's location was a 'marching' distance only from the Sulu raiders<sup>7</sup> camp located west of the island; and, lastly, Fort Isabella II was situated just around one hundred thirty-five (135) miles from Jolo, the Sultanate's stronghold. It was the only Spanish military garrison positioned between Jolo and Spain's second most important military outpost in the Philippine Islands, the *Fort Pilar* in Zamboanga<sup>8</sup>.

However, pieces of information about the fort are scarce for a more in-depth understanding about the island's conditions, about its inhabitants, and the impact of Fort Isabella on Basilan. Thus, this paper attempts to find out Fort Isabella's impact on the village of Pasangan and its vicinity, covering the period from 1845 to 1898. Furthermore, utilizing qualitative method with primary and secondary sources, the study specifically answers the following questions:

1. What factors led Spain to fortify Pasangan area in Basilan? And why?
2. What were the island's general conditions between 1750s and 1880s?
3. How did the building of Fort Isabella II lay down the foundation of the development of Basilan?

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<sup>5</sup> The old name of Basilan is *Taguima*.

<sup>6</sup>The Sulu Sultanate known for their fierce resistance to the Spanish intrusions in the south had a strong military, political, and economic influence in the entire Sulu Archipelago. Basilan Island, geographically a part of the Sulu Archipelago, was vassalage of the Sultanate.

<sup>7</sup> Sources did not indicate the name of the camp. The only data point to its location, that is *Maloza* (present-day Maluso Municipality), a coastal village situated around 25 kilometers from Fort Isabella II.

<sup>8</sup> *Fuerza de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza*, in the southernmost coast of Zamboanga is a Spanish fortress facing the Basilan Strait, built in 1635, abandoned in 1663 and rebuilt in 1719.

## The Building of Fort Isabella II and the French Mission

Pasangan's importance as a 'strategic area' came to light when then Spanish Governor-General Francisco de Paula Alcala de la Torre (June 1843-July 1844) sent troops to occupy the place in 1843. According to Fernandez and Jerez's book *Manual del Viajero en Filipinas* published in 1875, the troops "...occupied the island of Basilan, after a fierce encounter, taking from the pirates that nest or spoils of their loot"<sup>9</sup>. It appears that the area surrounding Pasangan<sup>10</sup> or its vicinity was well defended by Sulu raiders<sup>11</sup>. Aside from the Sulus, seafaring people from the Malay peninsula called the *Lutaos* or Samals<sup>12</sup> seemed to have settled in the area long before the Spanish occupation of 1843. According to Fr de La Costa's book, entitled *Jesuits in the Philippines*, Fr Francisco Lado, a Jesuit priest who was tasked to evangelize the inhabitants following the signing of the second Lopez Treaty<sup>13</sup> with Rajah Bungsu of Jolo on April 14, 1646<sup>14</sup>, encountered Lutaos in coastal areas of Basilan. Fr de La Costa wrote on Fr Lado's mission "*succeeded in winning the friendship of the Lutaos of the coastal settlements*"<sup>15</sup>. The Jesuits' venture in Basilan was short-lived, as all garrisons in the archipelago were recalled to Manila, following the order of Governor-General Sabiniano Manrique de Lara

<sup>9</sup> Ramon Fernandez and Don Federico Jerez. *Manual del Viajero en Filipinas* 2nd Ed. (Tipografico de Santo Tomas. 1875),59. Jerez did not identify the place where the encounter took place. The Sulus were known to have controlled almost all coastal areas of Basilan.

<sup>10</sup> Pasangan (a Samal or Lutaos word) is the old name of the place where the Fort Isabela II was built and where the town of Isabela was founded. The Yakans call this place *Pasangen*.

<sup>11</sup> The Sulu 'raiders' mentioned in this paper refers to Sulus (Iranun, Balangunui, and Tausugs) who participated and or were engaged in raiding activities, such as slave-raiding, and pillaging of coastal settlements in the colony or in neighboring countries.

<sup>12</sup> The Yakans, the native inhabitants of the island traditionally occupied the interior. "*The later inhabitants, the Samals who also called themselves Lutaos—people of the sea—belonged to the latest wave of Malay migration to wash the shores of the Sulu archipelago. They were fishermen, and spent most of their lives in their boats, drifting from island to island, although they would occasionally establish villages wherever the inhabitants did not*

*object too strenuously.*" Horacio de La Costa's *Jesuits in the Philippines*. (Harvard University Press. 1961), 322

<sup>13</sup> Rajah Bungsu was designated in this treaty as Sultan. The treaty according to Fr de la Costa was "*substantially the same as that negotiated with Kudrat. It too was a treaty of perpetual friendship and an offensive and defensive alliance*" One of the conditions specified in the treaty was that "*Jesuit missionaries could preach Christianity freely anywhere in the sultan's dominions.*" Fr de La Costa's *Jesuits in the Philippines*. 444

<sup>14</sup> Attempt to evangelize the island may have taken place years earlier when on March 25, 1637 Governor-General Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera asked Jesuit priests Fr Francisco Angel, SJ and Fr Gregorio Belin, SJ to establish a mission there. But, few years thereafter the mission "*had to be withdrawn because of the threatening attitude of the Lutaos*". No specific year given, but record shows the plan to withdraw the mission took place before 1644. Fr de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*. 386, 395, 444.

<sup>15</sup> Fr. de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, 386, 395, 444.

(July 25, 1653–September 8, 1663), as a measure to defend the capital from the threat of Chinese military leader Koxinga (born 1624–died June 1662). The entire Zamboanga garrison, together with the Jesuit missionaries, sailed away on April 1663<sup>16</sup>.

Pasangan's topography is generally uneven and undulating. The surface leading to the military garrison from the coast was an uphill, which gave an impression depicting the island's ruggedness. A few kilometers inland from the coast was a dense jungle.

Except for the blueprint of a fort, titled *Fuerza Pagsanhan*<sup>17</sup>, Pasangan began to appear in Spanish documents following its 1843 occupation. The earliest available document is the 1848 *Nota* of Governor-General Narciso Claveria y Zaldua (July 16, 1844– December 26, 1849). It also occurs that before the year 1843, Pasangan was not among the important villages in Basilan. Based on JH Moore's *Notices of the Indian Archipelago*, published in 1837, Basilan possessed two important settlements—*Maloza* (present-day Maluso Municipality) and *Gubarwang* (Guibawan, present-day Lamitan City). Notably, Moore did not mention Pasangan in his book.

In 1836<sup>18</sup>, Spanish Governor-General of the Philippine Islands Pedro Antonio Salazar (Sept. 1835- Aug. 1837) entered a peace treaty with the Sulu Sultanate. It was an uneasy truce, and shortly after that, hostilities resumed. The Sulus pillaged coastal areas of the archipelago. In a bold move that his predecessors may have perceived as a high-risk enterprise, Governor-General Don Francisco de Paula Alcalá in 1843<sup>19</sup> decided that a provisional fort be built in the northern part of Basilan<sup>20</sup> to address the following:

### **Asserting the crown's sovereignty over the island**

To provide a counterbalance against the Sulu encampment nearby and address the long-standing menace of Sulus raiding activities

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<sup>16</sup> Fr. de la Costa, *The Jesuits*, 451

<sup>17</sup> It seems, based on the Spanish record, the plan was created between 1750 and 1830.

<sup>18</sup> Manuel E Buzeta. *Geografico, Estadistico, Historico de las Islas Filipinas*. Vol 2. (Madrid: Imprenta de D. Jose de dela Peña, 1850), 122.

<sup>19</sup> Ferdinand Philippe Alencon. *Lucon et Mindanao. 1870*. (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1870), 59.

<sup>20</sup> Historia de Piratea Jose Montero y Vidal June 1888. (Madrid: Imprenta y Fundicion De Manuel Tello, 1888) 377.



Coincidentally, this took place the same year when Queen Isabella II<sup>21</sup> of Spain regained her crown following years of internal power struggle, through the help of the military. Governor-General Alcala's incursion occurred around the same year when western powers were competing for, and asserting their, influence in the Asia Pacific region: the British already had territorial possessions of Singapore and Hong Kong, while the Portuguese controlled Macao. During the same period, the French<sup>22</sup> already had their eyes on Basilan. Several islands in the South China Sea were considered by the French, but they did not attract them due to either their proximity in the British, or the Dutch possessions. Basilan, on the other hand suited the French 'criteria for an ideal port or military base.'<sup>23</sup>

Around October-November 1844, two French gunboats *Victorieux* and *La Sabine*<sup>24</sup> under the command of Captain Guerin arrived in Basilan, which was later joined by the *Archimedes* and the 50- gun frigate *Erigone* on January 12, 1845, commanded by Admiral Cecille, with Ambassador Lagrene on board. Captain Guerin, early on, formally announced the annexation of Basilan in the name of France. The *La Sabine* anchored off Pasangan,<sup>25</sup> specifically at the Strait of Malamawi, now called Isabela Channel<sup>26</sup> in full view of the Spanish military personnel manning the detachment in Pasangan, thus marking the start of the known "Basilan Blockade". The single Spanish gunboat "*Esperanza*" sent from Zamboanga was no match against the French squadron retreated to Zamboanga. However, due to diplomatic pressures<sup>27</sup> and disagreement with the Sultan of Sulu,<sup>28</sup> the French abandoned its plan to occupy the island and

<sup>21</sup> Born October 10, 1830. Reigned from 1833 to 1868, Isabella II became queen at age three, after her father's death.

<sup>22</sup>The French Mission was headed by Ambassador Lagrene in the company of six naval vessels: two fifty-gun frigates commanded by Admiral Cecille and Captain Charner; three corvettes, and one steamer, with Captain Rigault de Genouilly in command of the smallest corvettes. John F. Cady. *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), 43-44.

<sup>23</sup> "*The base should possess a large and enclosed harbor to be easy to defend, and have a healthful climate with abundant supplies of stores and water at hand.*" John F Cady *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*. 58

<sup>24</sup> Three of *La Sabine* sailors were captured and one officer killed by the Sulus in Maluso, Basilan while on a reconnoiter mission sent by Captain Guerin.

<sup>25</sup> Fr Pablo Banque letter dated March 2, 1884 *The Basilan Mission. Jesuit Missionary letters from Mindanao* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), 304.

<sup>26</sup> *Apuntes para Hacer un Libro sobre Jolo*. Espina, Miguel. 276. The main fleet left Manila for Basilan on January 8, 1845. *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*. 58.

<sup>27</sup>The issue about Basilan between Paris and Madrid was resolved in favor of Spain. John F Cady *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*. 58.

<sup>28</sup> The French recognized the sultanate's 'ownership' of Basilan, negotiated with Sultan Pulalun, who attempted to sell the island for one hundred thousand Mexican dollars (M\$100,000) in February

departed for Macao, arriving there on July 14, 1845, after stopping over in Singapore, and Batavia in the Dutch East Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia).

The newly appointed Governor-General Alcala was reputed to be one of the ablest fiscal administrators for having been able to stabilize and strengthen the colony's financial and economic performance<sup>29</sup>. He also very likely wanted to cement his prestige and enhance his reputation by sending troops to Basilan, which later turned out to be one of his significant achievements<sup>30</sup>. The base in Pasangan, along with Fort Pilar in Zamboanga, as what Spain probably had been hoping for, would be an effective network of garrisons that would allow the Spaniards, to fight the most potent military in the south on almost equal terms, a few distant miles away from the Spanish capital based in Manila.

There also occurred the issue of asserting Spain's 'national pride' given the competition and intention of several European powers. In 1844, the Governor of Zamboanga visited Basilan to establish relationships with the natives.<sup>31</sup> The village of Balactasan was the first to recognize Spanish authority<sup>32</sup>. Manuel Buzeta, author of the book *Geografico, Estadistico, Historico de las Islas Filipinas*, gave the credit to Governor-General Alcala for initiating the plan to put up a permanent fortification in Basilan, in which Governor-General Claveria carried out by ordering the construction of stone-walled fort on July 10, 1845.<sup>33</sup>

In May 1844, Spain took several strategic points in the Sibuguey coast, an area bordering the Zamboanga Peninsula. And it also obtained the promise of submission from some villages north of Basilan's island.<sup>34</sup> The cooperation of these villages, may have been Spain's key in setting up a permanent military fortification in Basilan.

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1845. But, dispute over the three French sailors held captive in Maluso for ransom money 'soured' the negotiation.

<sup>29</sup>Manuel E Buzeta. *Geografico, Estadistico, Historico de las Islas Filipinas. Vol 2*, 266.

<sup>30</sup> Manuel E Buzeta. *Geografico, Estadistico, Historico de las Islas Filipinas. Vol 2*, 266.

<sup>31</sup> Licinio Ruiz. *San Nicolas de Tolentino de las Islas Pilipinas* (Manila: UST, 1925), 241

<sup>32</sup> Licinio Ruiz. *San Nicolas de Tolentino de las Islas Pilipinas*, 241.

Balactasan, also spelled Balagtasan, was inhabited by *Yakans*. It is presently one of the Barangays of Lamitan City. (Population 2,359 2015 PSA census).

<sup>33</sup>Pablo Banque letter dated March 2, 1884. *The Basilan Mission. Jesuit Missionary letters from Mindanao* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), 304.

<sup>34</sup> Retana and Pastells's edition of *Historia de Mindanao*, (Madrid:1897), col xxx-xxxi

The earliest available blueprint, dated 1750 and 1830<sup>35</sup>, is the unfinished and indeterminate scale of the proposed fort presented in the cartographic material entitled "Isla de Malamawi" with a description "*Plano del Puerto de Pasanhan en la Isla de Basilán*," ( *The plan of Fort Pasangan in the island of Basilan*). This existing plan supports the strong indication that the Spaniards had been seriously considering the fortification in the mid-1700s during Archbishop Manuel Antonio Rojo del Río y Vieyra tenure as Governor-General of the Philippine Islands from July, 1761 to October, 1762 . One of his agendas in 1762 was to negotiate with Datu Bantilan to allow Spain to put up a fortress in Basilan <sup>36</sup>. Governor del Rio's term was short-lived, and it seems that the issue on fortifying Basilan was silent until Governor-General Alcalá's tenure. A span of almost a hundred years.

For economic, military, and political reasons, the Sulu Sultanate during Datu Bantilan<sup>37</sup> reign (1748 – 1764), strengthened its presence in the Sulu Archipelago by setting up a base in Maluso. The village then became a busy and principal port in Basilan due to the frequent Sulus raiding activities in the colony.

### The Yakans and Basilan's General Conditions

Bounded by the Sulu Sea to the west, Moro Gulf and Celebes Sea to the north-east and south-east respectively, Basilan is strategically located between the main island of Mindanao and Jolo. From the Sulus perspective, Basilan<sup>38</sup> was a doorway to the mainland, while the Spaniards viewed it as the gateway to Sulu Archipelago. The island, which was known to be endowed with natural resources, was reportedly home to first-class hardwood, to name a few, like *kamagong*, *molave*, and *narra*, and wild animals like boars and deer were plentiful. The island's magnificence is also found in Father Banque's letter dated in 1888:<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Isla de Malamawi. Cartasnáuticas. Material Cartográfico Manuscrito.1750 y 1830 Biblioteca Digital Hispanica

<sup>36</sup> *Rojo's Narrative*. The Philippine Islands 1493–1803, vol. 49, Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds.

(Cleveland, OH: The A.H. Clark Company, 1907), 186

<sup>37</sup>Datu Bantilan ruled as Sultan Muizz ud-Din of Sulu Sultanate. During his reign "*The condition of the [Philippine] Islands at the end of this year was probably the most deplorable in their history.*" Najeeb Salaby. *History of Sulu & Basilan* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1905), 183–185.

<sup>38</sup> Land area of Basilan was 68,320 hectares (1870s). Agustin De la Cavada and Mendez De Vigo, *Historia Geografica, Geologica y Estadistica de Filipinas*. vol 2. (Manila: In p. de Ramírez y Giraudier, 1876), 241.

<sup>39</sup> *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao*. The Basilan Mission, 303.



The sight of the lush and beautiful island gives a good impression. Rich greenery. A picturesque of panorama Basilan, with its multitude of islets around, appears like a labyrinth of gardens half-submerged in the waves, over which the smiling spring continually passed, leaving behind its rich gifts.

The Yakans are the indigenous people of Basilan, inhabiting mainly the interior of the island. Documents show that their participation was very limited or they played no ‘stand-alone’ role at the height of the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao wars against the Spaniards. Likewise, there were no records, thus far, to indicate that the Sulus main base in Maluso, and the Spanish garrison in Isabela encountered organized resistance or assault from the Yakans<sup>40</sup>.

Their form of livelihood was agriculture<sup>41</sup>. Years of confinement in the interior, had led Spanish Jesuit missionaries and military personnel, European writers, as well as other local inhabitants, to perceive the Yakans as generally fierce and feared people. English writer and Anthropologist, Arnold Henry S. Landor, who visited Basilan in 1903, commented, “*The Yacanes are people who keep much to themselves.*”<sup>42</sup>

The Sulus raiding activities aggravated the island’s already distressed situation<sup>43</sup>. Fr Pablo Cavalleria, SJ described the Sulu raiding activities in Basilan “... *whenever they can do so with impunity, they capture the Christians, or the Moros of the interior themselves or those of distant Samal rancherias, or those of other islands.*”<sup>44</sup> As a result, the Yakans generally avoided coastal areas and confined themselves in the interior turned to farming and hunting. As farmers and hunters, they were hardly “*capable of handling boats; they were not navigators*”,

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<sup>40</sup> Spaniards and Sulus, according documents “... *nevertheless, can by no means be induced to travel in the interior, such is their fear of the Yacanes.*” AH Landor. *Gems of the East* (Harper & Brothers Publishers New York - London. 1904), 250.

<sup>41</sup> In Fr Combes’ *Historia de las Islas de Mindanao* the Spaniards seemed to have called the indigenous people (Yakans) of Basilan *Sameacas* or “people of the uplands”. Francisco Combés, S.J. *Historia de las islas de Mindanao*. Madrid, 1667. In Blair and Robertson Volume XL, 1690–1691. Chapter 11. The Natives of the Southern Islands. Page 123 footnote 20, page 113n

<sup>42</sup> Arnold Henry S Landor. *Gems of the East* (Harper & Brothers Publishers New York - London. 1904), 249.

<sup>43</sup> “lawlessness, cattle-rustling, and inter-village warfare were common occurrence.” Reinardo Escobar. KALUN I. (unpublished). The same description by the late Virgilio C Pamaran, and Pedro C Pamaran

<sup>44</sup> *Letter from Fr P Cavalleria to Fr Sanchez, December 31, 1886.* In *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898.* Blair and Robertson. Vol. 43., 256.

relying heavily on coastal Samal for sea produce<sup>45</sup>. Hand-weaving was one of the skills that Yakan women possessed to make their colorful clothes. They had looms with which women hand-make fabrics for garments, turbans, and dresses, and sometimes sleeping mats.

Conflicts with fellow Yakans or with neighboring villages, and or exigencies from the Sulus, pushed the affected villagers to seek for a more secured place. Effecting the shifting in population <sup>46</sup>to areas near or within the Spanish control like Pasangan, or moved to Sengal (Guibawan)<sup>47</sup> or formed alliances with foreign powers or more powerful chieftains, such as the case of the chieftain of Balagtasan and ‘some villages north of Basilan's island’ mentioned in the preceding paragraph of this study.

Nonetheless, despite all the troubles and volatile conditions, Fr. Pablo Pastelles described the Yakans as “*the most peaceful among the Moros [tribes] of Mindanao.*”<sup>48</sup>

### **Fort Isabella II and the early colonizers’ condition**

The fort stood on a little hill at the mouth of Isabela Channel, on the banks of a wide river, the Aguada. It was suitably located near the mooring place of the town. According to Governor Francisco Vasquez Perez de Vargas of Isabela de Basilan, in his journal dated 1893, the construction was under the direction of a military engineer, designed with warehouses, barracks, and rooms for military officers, artillery emplacements, and garrison for troops. The fort’s structure consisted of four (4) bulwarks or ramparts protruding outwards on four different angles, with a pit or ditch about twelve (12) feet deep by about twelve (12) feet wide throughout its perimeter, with a drawbridge. The four buildings located inside the fort are: building for guards and dungeons at the west side of the fort; to the south, the infantry detachment and presidio; north,

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<sup>45</sup> Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, page 99

<sup>46</sup> *Memorias de Basilan* 1888 Governor Cabezas, and 1893 Governor Romero

<sup>47</sup> Main base of Pedro J Cuevas, a native of Cavite. “*Pedro had been deported to Zamboanga by the colonial government for anti-Spanish activities which took place during the Cavite Uprising of 1872...*” In Pablo Pastells, *Mission to Mindanao 1859-1900*, Peter Schreurs, trans (Cebu City: University of San Carlos, 1994), 425.

Pedro escaped from San Ramon, landed in Basilan, consolidated the ‘divided’ Yakans, embraced *Islam*, and journeyed on to become Datu Kalun, leader of Basilan's Yakans.

<sup>48</sup> Letter of Fr Pablo Pastelles to Fr Provincial Juan Capell, SJ dated April 20, 1887. In *The Philippine Islands*, Vol 3 (Ohio: The Arthur H Clark Company, 1906), 287.

for artillery units; and the one on the east for the house of the military chief of the fort.<sup>49</sup> It had undergone several improvements since.<sup>50</sup>

The condition of the troops and personnel must have been harsh in the early years for reason of unfamiliarity with the place's topography. Also, for the most part, they had to deal with inhabitants who viewed them as invaders, with the fact that Sulus frequented nearby coast.<sup>51</sup> The early personnel appeared to content confinement inside the fort, or within the area of the naval station for safety and security.

Likely, such condition persisted until the early 1860s. In his book, entitled *Jesuit Missionary letters from Mindanao*, Fr Arcilla, SJ provides a glimpse about the conditions of the settlers and military personnel in Isabela, who appears to be struggling from harassment and threats from some hostile Yakans and Sulus, “*Depending only on the military budget, the Isabelinos lived on supplies shipped in from outside.*” Fr Arcilla cited Fr Jose Fernandez Cuevas’<sup>52</sup>

“Cultivating crops or raising livestock was out of the question, for a very practical reason,” “The Moros close by ‘lost their heart and their mind’ whenever they saw a healthy cow or the lush greenery of crops, and suffered such a strong temptation that they risked death for a single cow or carabao.”

The act committed by some group of Yakans may be viewed as an indication of resistance against the presence of the Spaniards and settlers, whom they viewed as intruders.

Another threat was from the Sulus known for frequenting nearby coastal areas for possible raiding victims. Fr Arcilla quoting Fr Cuevas’ article, “*The moros in the neighboring village of Pagsangahan busied themselves, not in backbreaking*

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<sup>49</sup> In the late 1870s an estimated 400 Sulus laid siege on Isabela where the fort happened to be undermanned. Datu Kalun positioned his Christian and Yakan fighters between the town and the Sulus, effecting the Sulus withdrawal. Governor Rafael Cabezas *Memorias de Basilan*, 1888; and AH Landor *Gems of the East*, 254.

<sup>50</sup> Fort's descriptions are mainly based on Governors Cabeza's, Vargas, and Romero's *Memorias 1888, 1893 and 1894* respectively. The rest are based from *Elihu Root Collection, Basilan and Zamboanga Appendix*, page 91.

<sup>51</sup> Escobar commented that “*some Sulus were living among the peaceful Samals...*” in *KALUN I, 1960s*

<sup>52</sup> In Fr Arcilla, *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao, Introduction xx*, cited Fr Jose Cuevas SJ article “*Relacion de u Viaje Exploracion a Mindanao*”. Fr Cuevas was the first superior of the Escuela Municipal in 1859.

*work on the fields, but on raids, enslaving even their co-religionist as far as Makassar and the adjacent islands”*

Though Governor-General Alcala initiated the plan, Fort Isabella II was Governor-General Claveria’s creation—constructed and completed under his watch. A reformer<sup>53</sup>, the fort became an extension of his leadership and management style. The Spaniards’ way of life and the institution that defined it—colonizers—was inseparably linked with the endeavor of the Catholic religious order in carrying out evangelizing an occupied territory. However, it seems that Governor-General Claveria, based on the accounts of Balbino Saavedra<sup>54</sup> would not forcibly fulfill the desire of religious order upon the inhabitants. In pursuit of peace and harmony, Governor-General Claveria advocated respect and equality among its inhabitants. His wisdom and civility became known when he ordered the practice of Islamic religion be tolerated in the town. Muslims were not forced to convert to Catholicism. Balbino Saavedra wrote , “*Governor Claveria dispuse se tolerase en Basilan el ejercicio de la religion mohametana y no obligacen a los moros para que abrazasen la catolica.*”. Governor-General Claveria believed that this policy would prevent Muslims from abandoning their homes<sup>55</sup>. His approach in handling the situation won Christians and Muslims' trust, and formed the foundation of Isabela town's settlements.

The stone-walled fort was completed in 1848. The same year Governor-General Claveria carried out the Balanguigui island campaign<sup>56</sup> in February 1848 notable for his employment of steam-powered navy ships for the first time in the south. This campaign displaced many inhabitants with some re-settled to Cagayan, Zamboanga, and Basilan. Besides, the Balanguigui campaign was Governor-General Claveria’s plan to assert and display Spain’s claim, amidst the growing competition among western countries, for territorial possessions in Asia.

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<sup>53</sup> During his term in the country, he tried to give the Islands a government as good as that of modern Spain. *wikipedia*

<sup>54</sup> Author of manuscript *Breve Historia de Basilan*, Saavedra was a school supervisor of Basilan School District during the American period. He was appointed as Zamboanga City councilor on January 24, 1946, at the time when Basilan was part of the chartered City of Zamboanga (1936–1948).

<sup>55</sup> Balbino Saavedra, *Breve Historia de Basilan*, (Basilan: 1962), 35. Note: Obtaining a primary source, ie, edict of Claveria, remains elusive to this date. However, Mr Saavedra accounts seems to offer the paramount source for this. His manuscript, aside from several books, were based on oral accounts of several inhabitants of Basilan and Zamboanga.

<sup>56</sup> A successful military expedition led by Governor-General Claveria directed against the island of Balangungui located between Basilan and Jolo in the Sulu Archipelago effectively “paused” the Samal Banguigui slave-raiding activities for years.

In September 1848, a decree was passed, which suggests giving benefits to veteran troops manning *Fort Vergara*<sup>57</sup> equal to those assigned in the garrison of Fort Isabella II. <sup>58</sup>“*It has been determined that the Infantry Detachment which maintains the Fort of Vergara of this Province will also provide the compensation and benefits of those who belong to the Fort of Pasanhan in the Island of Basilan.*”

Three months before Gov-Gen Claveria’s term ended, Fort Isabella had tasted its first ‘serious baptism of fire’ when around 3,000 Sulus assaulted the fort on September 29 1849<sup>59</sup>. This may have been in retaliation against Gov-Gen Claveria’s incursion into the Sulus camp at Maluso, four months earlier on May 31, 1849, and the 1848 Balanguingui Island campaign. To prevent the fort from being overrun, Governor of Zamboanga, Colonel Figueroa, sent a company of infantry to reinforce the beleaguered troops. Its timely arrival saved the fort with the attackers suffering a large number of casualties <sup>60</sup>. Gov-Gen Claveria’s term ended on December 26, 1849.

The continuing developmental process of Pasangan occurred when the Spaniards decided to construct buildings along the coastline, to house naval and marine personnel, warehouses, and several other structures. Wharves were constructed to accommodate coal-fired sea vessels, contributed to carrying large cargo volumes, thus enhancing trade and commerce and stimulating economic activities.

The earliest available material describes the naval station's features in the book *Historia Geografica, Geologica y Estadistica de Filipinas. Vol 2*, written by Agustin De Vigo, Mendez, was published in 1876. He noted that the naval station was composed of several buildings, “*The command house is made of wood and nipa. The Marine Corps barracks, the storage rooms, kitchens, and workshops roof were made of nipa, and their walls were made of* ‘*tabique Pampango.*’” Tabique pampago was a thin wall made of interlaced pieces of wood and bamboo and given a coating of lime mixed with sand<sup>61</sup>. As a naval station, Reverend Fr Jose

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<sup>57</sup> No available sources on hand, as of this writing, pointing the fort’s location. ‘*Fort Vergara*’ in the 1848 *Nota* was very likely the military camp in *Nueva Vergara* (present-day Davao City) occupied by Spanish conquistador Don Jose Oyanguren in 1848 as directed by Gov-Gen Claveria.

<sup>58</sup> Reference “*Nota Setiembre*” dated 1848. The fort then was still called *Fort Pagsanhan* (Pasangan).

<sup>59</sup> Miguel A Espina, *Apuntes para Hacer Un Librosobre Jolo*. (Manila: Imprenta Y Litografia De Perez, 1888), 206.

<sup>60</sup> Miguel A Espina, *Apuntes para Hacer Un Librosobre Jolo*, 206.

<sup>61</sup> Regalado Trota José, *Simbahan: Church Art in Colonial Philippines 1565-1898*. 1991. <https://www.google.com>



Algue, S. J. Director of the Philippine Weather Bureau of the Manila Observatory wrote in 1903, it contained the following: the fort itself, infirmary, military barracks, repairing yard with workshops for machinery, and a slipway for hauling out small vessels<sup>62</sup>.

Governor Francisco Vasquez Perez de Vargas offered detailed description of the naval station's offices and buildings. According to Governor Vasquez,

the station was located in the west of the town of Isabela. It occupied a floor area of 700 square meters (100 meters x 70meters), almost rectangular. It contained living quarters for sailors or crew. The station had a warehouse division and offices. There was a wooden building containing boilers, zinc-coated tools workshops for repairs on machinery, blacksmithing, foundry, and servicing vessels. The three sides of the station extended facing towards the sea.

Across the Isabela Channel, in Malamawi Island the Spaniards built a military depot<sup>63</sup>. In the swampy area of the island stood a four-storage room with a nipa roof. Coals for the coal-powered ships were stored here—presently, this area is one of the barangays in Malamawi named *Carbon* (coal in Spanish) -- The same place was a storage room for powder keg with walls made of Pampango tabique partition and its roofing made of certain type of metal. A guardhouse stood nearby.

The sleepy coastal area was transformed into a vibrant (by 1800s standard) village bustling with activities as ships were busy ferrying men and materials to and from Zamboanga or Manila. The building of Fort Isabella II facilitated the making of the town of Isabela.

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<sup>62</sup> *Cyclones of the Far East* (Manila. Bureau of Public Printing, 1904), 264. The military organizational structure of the naval station dates back to 1861 upon the creation of the 6<sup>th</sup> District where Army officers in command of the fort were subordinate to the head of the naval station. During that period (1861-1898) the chief of naval station was also the politico-governor of the 6th district (Basilan).

<sup>63</sup> Forbes-Lindsay. *The Philippines under Spanish and American Rules*. (Philadelphia: The JC Winston Company. 1906). In *The United States and its Territories, 1870-1925: The Age of Imperialism*, 506

## The Making of the Town of Isabela

The village of Isabela was officially created in 1851<sup>64</sup>. Ten years later in 1861, Mindanao was divided into six administrative district: the Basilan-Sulu as the 6<sup>th</sup> District with Isabela as its capital. By year 1862, the authorities appeared to have increase its control of nearby areas by creating new communities, namely: Paniguyan, Pagsanhan, Guibanang, Malamáwi, and Isabela (probably town center)<sup>65</sup>.

At the right banks of Aguada River, just across the fort, was a village called Tabuc<sup>66</sup>. According to Saavedra, Salip Akbala resided with his family in Tabuc. A native of Jolo, he was friendly to the Spanish government. He was a Muslim leader respected by the authorities. Governor-General Claveria rewarded him with a monthly pension of 30 pesos, and the government built a house for him and his family<sup>67</sup>.

In the early 1890's, Isabela's Governor Vasquez de Vergara planned to build a bridge connecting the main town to the Tabuc settlement. The construction was carried out by his successor Don Romero in 1894. According to Jesuit Father Pablo Cavalleria's letter dated December 16, 1894, the bridge was made of solid materials, and it was elegant<sup>68</sup>. Governor Romero also built a street, stretching from the other end of the bridge, towards the Tabuc village. "*Actually, now more than before there [Tabuk] is more communication with the Moros there and vice-versa.*" Father Pablo Cavalleria wrote <sup>69</sup>.

Saavedra mentioned another prominent leader, Salip Abdullah, who owned a large tract of land from the seaside that stretched all the way to Kabonbata, an area around four kilometers away from the fort. It is not known certainly, if

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<sup>64</sup> Agustin de la Cavada and Mendez De Vigo. *Historia Geografica, Geologicay Estadistica de Filipinas*. (Manila: de

Ramírez y Giraudier, 1876), 241.

<sup>65</sup> Cavada and Mendez, *Historia*, 264.

<sup>66</sup> Sources did not specify ethnographic background of the inhabitants residing in Tabuc. But it is highly possible that Tabuc was populated mainly by Tausugs, and Samal. Tabuc also spelled Tabuk, is presently one of the barangays in Isabela City. Its population as determined by the 2015 Census was 6,696. <https://www.philatlas.com/mindanao/r09/basilan/isabela-city/tabuk.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Balbino Saavedra, *Breve Historia de Basilan y isla adjacentes*. (Basilan: 1962), 35.

<sup>68</sup> Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao. The Basilan Mission. (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2000.), 364.

<sup>69</sup> Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao. The Basilan Mission, 364.

Salip Abdullah settled there before or after the Spanish occupation.<sup>70</sup> He was married to a daughter of a prominent family and resided in Tabuc.

Meantime, across the Isabela channel in Malamawi Island, a village where former Christian captives and escapees from the Sulus 'slave market'<sup>71</sup>, was formed. This village is called Panigayan. Aside from former slaves, it appears that there were also prominent Muslims displaced from Balanguingui settled in Panigayan<sup>72</sup>. Among the first to settle and lived in Panigayan, were Maharaja Magasa, the Mandarin Panglima Lajiludin, Panglima Agasi, and Salibansanan Malabon. They came with their family and relatives. In the ensuing years, some of them and their descendants held elected positions in the community, one of them was Maharajah Julkarnain Dalkis, a grandson of Mandarin Panglima Lajiludin. He was elected community councilor of the barangay.<sup>73</sup>

In 1894, Governor Romero built a new house for a respected individual and his family residing in Panigayan, whose shelter, which was a public building, was converted to a school.<sup>74</sup>

It also seems that not all rescued slaves<sup>75</sup> settled in Panigayan village. Some were settled near the fort. And in later years, some of them migrated to other parts of the colony, or there is a possibility that they went back to their hometown, as observed by Fr Pablo Cavalleria, SJ in his letter to Fr Francisco Sanchez dated December 31, 1886.<sup>76</sup>

Saavedra also emphasized that a few years later, permanent structures were constructed at the site of the trading center or market by the banks of the town's Aguada river. The authorities also built a dike for small cargo ships. At the early phase of the naval station's construction, technical personnel from the Spanish Navy headquarters in Cavite, and their families, were brought in. Some settled

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<sup>70</sup> Salip Abdulla's son Salip Abubakar, a respected chief of the village Ugbong (Ugbong is now part of Al Barka Municipality), was a close friend of Pedro Cuevas Datu Kalun.

<sup>71</sup> The Sulu 'Slave market' mentioned in this article generally refers to the 'market system', or place, where captives are taken and sold or use as labors in the Sulu Zone. It was headquartered in Jolo

<sup>72</sup> Among the displaced from Balanguingui was the family of the maternal great-grand parent of this researcher.

<sup>73</sup> Balbino Saavedra. *Breve Historia de Basilan*. (Basilan: 1962), 37.

<sup>74</sup> Fr Pablo Cavalleria's letter dated December 10, 1894. *The Basilan Mission*. Page 362. (Note: Fr Cavalleria did not mention the name, but he did mention that individual as a 'leading Moro [Tausug or Samal] figure'.

<sup>75</sup> most of whom were already married to Muslims and had converted to Islam

<sup>76</sup> "The Moro race has already thinned for many are descendants of the Visayanans kidnapped long ago." Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao. The Basilan Mission, 309

and built houses in the town. Naturally, the construction activities and the growing population had increased the demand for consumable goods, which the locals supplied.

The surge of a Christian population was mainly due to the initiative of the governor of Isabela, who in coordination with the governor of Zamboanga, invited some families from Zamboanga to settle near Pasangan. This explains why Chavacano dialect is widely spoken in Isabela even to this date. They were promised free agricultural land and were assured of security. The island turned out to be promising and attracted many more Christian settlers from different parts of the archipelago. These settlers started to venture a little distant from the fort gradually, expanding the territory in search of agricultural land, and settling in a secured area, free from any attack by hostile Yakans or from the Sulus.

Furthermore, Saavedra stated, the Yakans that inhabited the interior dedicated themselves to the planting and cultivating of palay, corn, bananas, and edible tubers for their consumption. As the inhabitants of the Isabela increased, some Christians developed the areas near the town, gradually occupying towards inner areas, formerly owned by the Yakans, where they planted coconuts, seedlings, palay, corn, and vegetables. But they avoided going too far from the town, since some Yakans became increasingly hostile. For protection and security, the settlers developed a security scheme, by grouping themselves with other families. It was through this method that the nearby villages, barangays of Isabela, were founded over the years. The barangays of Santa Barbara, San Rafael, and San Roque were among the settlers' areas.

One of the first Christian settlements, Santa Barbara, a district on the island of Malamawi during Spanish times, covered three (3) sitios: Lucbuton, Lucaban, and Marang-Marang. In Lucbuton, settlers lived with their respective families, built houses, and cultivated it.

Another nearby area founded by Father Pedro Llausas S.J. and opened for settlement was the San Rafael district<sup>77</sup>. And within the San Rafael area, not very far from Fort Isabella II, a Christian settlement was created, called

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<sup>77</sup> Born in Gerona, Spain, joined the Society of Jesus on May 10, 1861, and came to the Philippines in 1865. He spent his life almost exclusively in the Mindanao mission. He died on September 19, 1888 in Zamboanga. *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao. The Zamboanga mission. Page 58*

Sumagdang, presently one of the barangays of Isabela City<sup>78</sup>. In 1879 descendants of some Yakans, who used to reside in the area sold parcel of lots in the San Rafael area to the heirs of the Christians living nearby.<sup>79</sup>

Not only did the island enticed the Spaniards, the French, and Sulus for military or economic reasons, but it also attracted prison escapees and military deserters as a haven. The island's geographic proximity from Zamboanga, where many political prisoners served their sentence at the San Ramon agricultural colony, had made Basilan an ideal destination to would be escapees. Navy and army deserters from nearby naval base in Zamboanga and Isabela had made the island their refuge too<sup>80</sup>. Among the known escapees from the San Ramon presidio, whose feats the Spanish authorities and Jesuit missionaries had documented are those of Pedro J Cuevas, and Domingo A Flores<sup>81</sup>. This group also formed the large number of the so-called "settlers". They considered the island as their second home. Over the years, they inter-married with native women, some converted to Islam and produced offspring that populated first the town of San Pedro de Gubawan and later, the town of Isabela and other parts of the island. Their descendants scattered throughout the island.

## Planning the Town

On June 14, 1858, the plan for the construction of the governor's residence at Isabela was approved, with floor and column to be made of wood.<sup>82</sup>

The schools for boys and girls were located near the church. The structure of the schools was simple, and like any other building at that time, it was made of wood and nipa with *Pampang* partitions. The schools were situated along the street, which the Spaniards called *Calle de Marina*<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> As of 2015 census the population of Sumagdang Barangay was 6,529. Source: *Philippine Statistics Authority*

<sup>79</sup> Balbino Saavedra. *Breve Historia de Basilan*. (Basilan: 1962)

<sup>80</sup> One of the deserters was a cousin of Pedro Cuevas, a "bugler of the local garrison". Fr Francisco Mallari, SJ. *The Exploits of a Christian Caviteño Datu*, based from the Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus XIV-9-D/1/1881.

<sup>81</sup> Cuevas and Flores respectively are the paternal great-grandfather and the maternal great-grandfather of this researcher. Flores served in the *ejercito* (army) during Gen. Malcampo's Jolo campaign of 1876. He deserted, captured and interned at the San Ramon, where he escaped and joined Pedro Cuevas' band in Basilan. Flores became one of Cuevas' (Datu Kalun) close lieutenants.

<sup>82</sup> Obras Publicas, 1857-1898, 90/625 Catalogo de Materiales Especiales de la Seccion de Documentos Españoles del Archivo Nacional de Filipinas

<sup>83</sup> *Calle de Marina* literally translated as Marine or Naval Street in English.



The Townhall and courthouse buildings were along the street called *Calle del Fuerte*, situated near the fort. On December 4, 1878, a plan for constructing the first courthouse at Isabela was finalized by the Inspector General of Public Works, Eulogio Dominguez<sup>84</sup>.

In 1890 the court building was repaired, and it was the only government building with a metal roofing. The engineering unit along the street near the Church consisted of the following: barracks for the head of the engineering, workshops, a blacksmith shop, a small house made of masonry, and a storeroom. The structures' wall and floor were made of either wood or bamboo and nipa roof. A concretized and lighted streets of Isabela town with a width of around 7 to 8 meters were, by 1800s standard, relatively beautiful for a small town in a remote island.

Mendez mentioned that the church's location was along the *Calle de Marina*. In addition to that, Governor Vasquez stated that the church was around 150 meters away from Fort Isabella II. The Church's structure was made of light materials, and thus, its general appearance according to Governor Vasquez was like a "*provisional Church building*". Its floor was made of wood with nipa roof. Its belltower was suspended on a makeshift structure attached to the Church building. Governor Vasquez also mentioned that the image of the venerated St. Elizabeth Queen of Portugal was located at the main altar. The Spanish Jesuit missionaries are said to have kept records of baptism and matrimony. So far, to this date, only very few of these archives are known to have remained intact. Among them are the following: a record on the baptism of a male child that took place on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1885. The baby boy, who was born to a Chinese father was christened Pedro Cuevas, in honor of his godfather (ninong or padrino) Pedro Javier Cuevas. While the other person who stood witness to the christening was the boy's godmother, Ms. Fausta Carrasco. The officiating priest was Pedro Llaussas, SJ. In addition to this, the marriage record of Don Ramoncito Larracochea and Doña Gregoria Cuevas<sup>85</sup> that took place on the 9th of July 1906 is also one of the rare documents. According to the document, Gregoria was nineteen years old while Ramoncito was twenty-two years of

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<sup>84</sup> Obras Publicas, 1857-1898, 90/843 Catalogo de Materiales Especiales de la Seccion de Documentos Españoles del Archivo Nacional de Filipinas

<sup>85</sup> Don Larracochea was the son of Isabela treasurer Don Ramon, while Gregoria was the daughter of Pedro Cuevas.

age.<sup>86</sup> (Father Pablo Caballeria SJ) with Fr. Isidero de la Torre SJ solemnized the marriage.

Being the first church in Basilan, there were several inhabitants of Isabela and neighboring town of San Pedro de Gubawan that served at the Sta Isabel church. One of them was Gabino C. Pamaran, whose mother Florencia was a devout catholic,<sup>87</sup> a native of Bacoor Cavite settled in San Pedro de Gubawan with his parents and other relatives. He went to study in Isabela, where he also served as an altar boy at the Sta Isabela church.<sup>88</sup>

One of the practices (culture) accepted by the town's inhabitants—Muslims and Christians—was during feast day where religious function, procession, music, constant lighting, cockpit, races, and even native Moro dance were part of the annual program.<sup>89</sup>

On November 26, 1897, Father Pablo Cavalleria SJ started constructing a new church in the village of Tabuc, but the project was discontinued, as the Spanish-American war erupted in 1898, and the Spanish evacuated Basilan in 1899.

By 1870,<sup>90</sup> a beautiful and unique hospital located in the channel some 120 meters from the shore, facing the naval station, was already operational. As the Americans would later call it, the marine hospital had two (2) wards; each ward had a capacity of around 40 beds. It also had ten (10) other rooms.<sup>91</sup> The marine hospital sat on a sandbar piling made of sturdy materials elevated 6 to 8 feet above the sea.<sup>92</sup> It was well-maintained by the Spaniards, until around the 6-months gap between the Spanish evacuation in 1898 and American occupation in 1899. The hospital was neglected and vandalized of its materials by the

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<sup>86</sup> the couple tied knot in Islamic rites on July on July 6, 1904, ten days before Datu Kalun's death.

<sup>87</sup> Gabino Pamaran was the nephew, son-in-law, and successor of Pedro J Cuevas Datu Kalun.

<sup>88</sup> Source: the late Virgilio and Pedro C Pamaran. Gabino's sons

<sup>89</sup> According to *Governor Romero* the feast day took place every July 8, 9 and 10 of the year. The participation and the performance of the *Moro dance* was based on the observation of the governor of Isabela and Jesuit priests. The same was also practiced, until this present day, in San Pedro de Gubawan in yearly fiesta celebration.

<sup>90</sup> Agustin De la Cavada and Mendez De Vigo, *Historia Geografica, Geologica y Estadistica de Filipinas. vol 2.*

(Manila: In p. de Ramirez y Giraudier, 1876), 243.

<sup>91</sup> Treaty with Sultanate of Sulu, *Hon Elihu Root Collection.* (1901), 91.

<sup>92</sup> Annual Report of the Surgeon General. United States. Navy Department. Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Report on the United States Marine Post. Joseph Guthrie. Port Isabela Basilan Island 1901, 138.

locals.<sup>93</sup> The hospital was abandoned, and since 1919 it was used for a short period as a temporary infirmary for leprosy patients awaiting transfer to the leprosarium in Culion, Palawan.<sup>94</sup> By 1880, Isabela had two hospitals.<sup>95</sup>

In 1882 as part of Governor Don Joaquin Ibanez's project before his term ended, streets along the fort leading towards the plaza had been improved.

At the time, all buildings were located not very far from the fort or naval station, confined within an area of around 2 hectares.

The town of Isabela became a trading center and the seat of power of the Spanish government in Basilan. The naval station's presence stimulated economic activities, demographic changes as demand for goods and services grew. This marked the start of changes in the socio-economic development of the area. The town's accessibility by sea and the roadstead provided shelter to boats during bad weather had made the town a transshipment point for inter-island sea vessels.

In the census year ended January 1, 1878, the town registered a total population of seven hundred sixty (760), of which fifty-six percent (56%) or four hundred twenty-three (423) were female and forty-four percent (44%) or three hundred thirty-seven (337) male<sup>96</sup>. By 1886, Fr Pablo Cavalleria estimated the total population of the town to be around eight hundred (800).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Annual Report of the Surgeon General, 138.

<sup>94</sup> During the Japanese occupation, the hospital was completely destroyed by American bombs in 1945. Balbino Saavedra. *Breve Historia de Basilan. Research and Development section. National Historical Institute. Page 90*

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Laist. *Handbook of the Philippine Islands*. Translated from the *Compendio de Geografia*. (Manila: William Partier, 1899), 118.

<sup>96</sup> Source: *General Summary of Identification Cards (Cedulas)* obtained from December 1877 to January 1, 1878. In *Memorias de Basilan. Governor Cabezas. 1888*. The population counting was the *Poblacion de Hecho* method.

<sup>97</sup> Fr Cavalleria, in his December 31, 1886 letter, observed “*The indigenous race constitute the population of Isabela.*” In *Jesuit Missionary Letters from Mindanao*, 309. It is very likely, that *Yakans* constituted the number residing among the population of the town, as trading started to take shape. Fr Cavalleria also noted separate population counting of Panigayan at four hundred (400).

**Table 1: Population distribution of Isabela Town 1870s<sup>98</sup>**

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage to population
Spaniard (peninsulares*)	3		3	0.60
Mestizos	4	6	10	2
Indios**	174	171	345	66
Infieles***	61	51	112	21.4
Chinese	53		53	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: *Historia: Geografica, Geologia y Estadistica de Filipinas*

**Table 2: Literacy among adult male and female inhabitants of Isabela**

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage to population of 523
Able to read	43	36	79	
Able to read and write	39	6	45	
Speak Spanish	163	140	303	
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>81.64%</b>

Source: *Historia: Geografica, Geologia y Estadistica de Filipinas*

**Table 3: Literacy and skills of Children**

	Boys	Girls	Total	Percentage to population of 523
Able to read	28	24		
Able to read and write	13	13		
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>78</b>	
Speak Spanish	41	35		
Sewing skills		15		
<b>Total</b>			<b>78</b>	<b>14.91%</b>

Source: *Historia: Geografica, Geologia y Estadistica de Filipinas*

<sup>98</sup> \**Peninsulares*, or full-blooded Spaniards born in Europe      \*\* *Indio* the general term applied to Christianised natives who lived in the Spanish colonies.      \*\*\* *infieles* the indigenous communities or inhabitants

The town registered a (twenty-six percent) 26% increase in the number of children attending schools in (twenty) 20 years period, from seventy-eight (78) in the 1870s to ninety-eight (98) in 1890. The school building for girls was designed and built with a new 2-floor structure made of wood with a nipa roof. The school building had a floor dimension of 12 meters x 12 meters with a capacity for 50 or 60 school children. Classrooms occupied the top floor while the teachers' workroom on the ground floor.

It was also a fact that almost all the students were children of Christian settlers during the early years. Many Muslim parents prevented their children from attending school. The foremost reason was that schools were set up and ran by the Catholic Religious order of the Jesuits, who also happened to be the teachers on many occasions. There was also the issue of conversion or evangelization of the Muslims carried out by the Spanish Jesuit missionaries assigned on the island. Nevertheless, statistics painted an accurate picture of the effort by the Jesuits and the authorities, of educating the inhabitants regardless of their creed, race, or religion.

In 1894, the Jesuits negotiated with Isabela's Governor Romero for the conversion of a public building in Panigayan for the establishment of classrooms.

### **Development of Economy and Governance**

The growing population of the town certainly triggered an increase in the demand for goods and services. As the population grew, the Spanish authorities, with the help of the Jesuits missionaries, opened new land for settlers to live, and built houses. As stated in the preceding paragraphs, areas like San Rafael District was opened to Christian settlers. Lands were cleared and planted. Demand for lumbers grew, which no doubt the island was able to supply, given its endowment. As explained in the previous paragraph, some of the properties were acquired through purchase. But some lands stayed exposed as some Yakans had abandoned their land and moved towards the interior long ago. Since there was no clear delineation of the property plus the absence of legal papers or land titles, the settlers simply occupied the exposed land.

Clarity on land or territorial boundary was perhaps one of the several issues afflicting the island that probably date back to the colonial period or probably



even earlier, hence the inter-village.<sup>99</sup> The absence of clear land boundaries or partition may have been one of the root causes of this. Counting on the traditional method, they relied on trees or plants for determining the borderline. Problems occurred when the marked trees die or were deliberately or accidentally cut off; therefore, the claimants or the heirs contested or disputed the new boundary.

Given the situation, Spanish authorities in Isabela, by all indications, introduced private ownership implemented to settlers as well as to all inhabitants, first in the areas outlying the fort.<sup>100</sup>

The inhabitants gradually embraced this concept of land ownership grounded on legal norms—i.e., land boundary determined by geodetic land survey with certificate of land title as proof of ownership. Those residing in the interior, may have taken many years (some reaching towards the end of the Spanish period and even up to the American period) before they could finally accept the new concept that was different from their traditional practice.

One of the most significant projects undertaken by the Spaniards that generated economic and business opportunities and opened the island to the rest of the archipelago was the construction and expansion of the town's wharf. The introduction of steamboats and large sea vessels boosted the town's economic activities and trading with neighboring towns. Large volumes of crops, like coffee and cacao, mentioned above, were transported to Zamboanga, and some cattle were even shipped directly to Manila. Besides, it is also a fact that boats owned by coastal inhabitants frequented other villages, to ferry goods and/or passengers.

And in the ensuing years, motivated by economic activities and opportunities, some Yakans residing in the interior traveled to Isabela to sell their hand-made items like, baskets or sell their crops such as sweet potatoes, cassava, and

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<sup>99</sup> It appears that internal animosity dated back to the 1500s and probably even earlier. Capt. Diego de Artieda in 1573 observed, *“These people rob and enslave one another, although of the same island and even kindred. They are cruel among themselves. Relation of Western Islands.* Blair and Robertson. *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1898.* Vol. III, 1569–1576, 197.

<sup>100</sup> This may have been introduced in the Spanish possessions in the Americas *“The most significant Spanish innovation concerning property rights was the introduction of the concept of legal title to land, that is private ownership”* (Riedinger, 1995) In Alberto Vargas Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin–Madison

bananas. On the other hand, coastal Samal, Badjaos and Tausugs engaged in fishing also benefited from the growing economic activities of the town.<sup>101</sup>

With the regular schedule of the ships came the mail. The postal service had connected Isabela with the rest of the world. Mails reaching the town usually came by way of Zamboanga every three days via boats or navy ships.

The frequency of cargo and passenger ships that plied the Isabela-Zamboanga route in the 1870s was substantially enough to cater services to the town's population and cargo volume. The frequency of the trip from Isabela to Zamboanga averaged three (3) trips a month, while Isabela to Jolo averaged once a month or a total average outbound trip of four (4) a month. Meantime, inbound trips averaged three (3) trips per month with ships from Zamboanga and Jolo calling the Isabela port with forty-one (41) trips. Jolo bound trips are three (3) times more frequent than inbound, maybe because of the volume of crops, various goods or materials, and even perhaps the movement of civilians and military personnel bound for Jolo. For instance, in June 1881 pieces of lumber were shipped to Jolo for use in the construction of a church.<sup>102</sup>

**Table 8: Frequency of passenger / cargo vessel *from* Isabela to Zamboanga and Jolo**

	To Zamboanga	To Jolo	Total outbound trips
	34	15	49

Source: *Historia: Geografica, Geologia y Estadistica de Filipinas*

**Table 9: Frequency of passenger / cargo vessel *to* Isabela from Zamboanga and Jolo**

	From Zamboanga	From Jolo	Total inbound trips
	36	5	41

Source: *Historia: Geografica, Geologia y Estadistica de Filipinas*

<sup>101</sup> Balbino Saavedra, *Breve Historia de Basilan y Islas Adjacentes*, (City government of Basilan.1962), 70.

<sup>102</sup> Fr. Pujol, SJ letter dated June 22, 1881. *Jesuit Missionary letters from Mindanao. The Basilan-Zamboanga-Jolo Mission*, (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2000), 285.

## Conclusion

The study on Fort Isabella II provides a better ‘sense of realization’ about the island’s past, and provides understanding on the colonists’ relationship with the inhabitants covering the period from 1845 until the Spaniards’ departure in 1899.

Indicative of the study is that the collaborative efforts of the inhabitants and colonists played critical roles in developing the Pasangan area, taking into consideration several factors such as the culture and nature of the Yakans and the general conditions on the island.

The establishment of Fort Isabella II<sup>103</sup> was precipitous, and therefore subjugating the entire island, or challenging Sulus dominance may not be Spain’s primary object. In fact, records indicated that Spain carried no military expedition aiming at subjugating the native inhabitants of Basilan. Governor-General Alcala’s main intention in 1843 was to safeguard Spain’s colonial interest and boost its image amidst growing European expansionism in Asia. In 1845, when the stonewalled fort was constructed replacing the provisional fort, Spain occupied a tiny area at the tip of Basilan but declared the entire island a Spanish possession. By 1870, the colonizer’s sphere of control<sup>104</sup> contained in an area just about the size of two Ateneo de Zamboanga Main Campus<sup>105</sup>. Consequently, given the island’s complex conditions outlined in the above paragraphs, a turn of events occurred during which, the collaborative efforts of the inhabitants of the ‘enclave,’ with some allied chieftains, turned out to be beneficial in some respect.

## Recommendation

This paper generated concepts, thoughts, realizations, and defines the value and true meaning of *good governance* and *development* as instruments to progress and peace. For instance, the idea of peace introduced by Governor-General Claveria, such as respect for the minority's culture and identity, religious

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<sup>103</sup> American bombardment destroyed Fort Isabela II during the war for liberation in 1945. The site where it once stood now occupied by the Basilan Provincial Capitol building. No remains of the stoned-walled fort are visible to this date.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Sphere of control’ in this study refers to the area where the Spanish authority and influence heavily concentrated in the Isabela Town, which by Cavada’s estimate had a land area of 7.31 hectares. De la Cavada Agustin D. y De Vigo, Mendez. *Historia Geografica, Geologica y Estadistica de Filipinas*. (Manila: In p. de Ramirez y Giraudier .1876), 241.

<sup>105</sup> Ateneo de Zamboanga Main Campus land area is estimated to be around 4.3 hectares (*wikipedia*)

tolerance, and Isabela Governor Romero's approach, like building rapport with the Muslim population of the town may be worth emulating. The method of these two individuals, introduced more than a hundred years ago in Basilan, can be used as inspiration for *genuine* peace and development. Economic opportunity and business activities, public health, and education, security that had proven to be driving forces in developing the surrounding areas of Fort Isabella II, both Christians or Muslims, must likewise be promoted. In addition to promoting of *life-improvement*, plans and programs suggested and outlined in the significance of this study, some of the following areas in strengthening social and peace development are: Education, Peace advocacy, Youth involvement, Promote, recognize, respect for local culture and practices, Religious tolerance, and empowerment.

## Historical Timeline of Pasangan

<u>Year inclusive</u>	<u>Events</u>
1843- 1844	} Gov-Gen Alcala lands troops in Pasangan. A provisional fort is built.
1845	Gov-Gen Claveria orders the construction of stonewalled replacing the provisional fort. The Spaniards name it <i>Fuerza Pagsanhan</i> .
1848	Stone-walled fort is completed. <i>Fuerza Pagsanhan</i> appears in <i>Nota</i> of Gov-Gen Claveria dated September 2, 1848. It must have been some months or little after 1848 that the fort was finally named <i>Fuerza de Reina Isabella de la Segunda</i> in honor of the then reigning queen of Spain, Queen Isabella II.
1851	The village ( <i>reduccion</i> ) is named Isabela.
1861	Mindanao administrative district is created. Basilan-Sulu becomes 6 <sup>th</sup> District, with Isabela de Basilan as the capital.
1862	Five (5) communities are created. The Jesuits took over the Mission from the Recollects.
1900s	American period. Basilan is divided into three administrative districts. Isabela District along with Maluso and Lamitan becomes one of the three (3) political districts of Basilan.
1948	Basilan becomes a chartered city. Isabela retains its importance as the political, commercial, and economic center of the island.
1975	Isabela Municipality is created along with six (6) other municipalities of Basilan Province.
2001	Isabela attains cityhood status.



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### Oral accounts

Additional information on the general conditions of Basilan (in the early 1800s up to 1900's) were obtained from several residents of the island, among them are: Mr Virgilio Cuevas Pamaran (deceased), Mr. Pedro Cuevas Pamaran (deceased), Mr. Wifrido Cuevas Furigay, Princess Lily Cuevas Mangusan (deceased), and Mr. Rizalino Cabu Flores (deceased) all residents of Lamitan City, Basilan. The interview (conversation), mainly started in late 2010 and March-April 2011, and thereafter took place on several occasions in Basilan and Zamboanga.