

Unveiling the Past: Delving into the Local History of Mati City, Davao Oriental, Philippines

Ardin Odoy*

Email: ardin.odoy@msumain.edu.ph

Abstract

This study delves into the local history of Mati, tracing its evolution from a humble municipality to a thriving city in Davao Oriental. A significant aspect of this investigation lies in its implications for the national government. A focal point of the investigation is the historical background of Mati during various colonial eras, notably under Spanish, American, and Japanese rule. The Spanish presence in Mati dates back to the 16th century when St. Francis Xavier visited the region, specifically the barangay known as *Kabuaya* or *Cabuaya*. However, immediate settlement attempts were hampered by the threat posed by the Moros. It was only after the defeat of Moro ruler Datu Bago by Spanish conquistador Don Jose Oyanguren during the 17th century that Mati officially became a regular town or pueblo, marking the end of the Moro influence in the Davao territory. The American colonial era significantly influenced Mati's political and economic landscape. In 1903, under Organic Act No. 21, Mati was established as a regular municipality, bringing with it a new governmental system. The Americans, exercising control over politics and the economy, altered landownership, reducing native landowners to tenants. During World War II, Mati, like much of the Philippines, fell under Japanese occupation. Interestingly, despite their presence, there are no recorded reports of Japanese atrocities in Mati. Post-war, the Japanese influence dwindled. After enduring the successive waves of colonization, Mati achieved city status in 2007, a process marked by challenges. Its journey to cityhood was fraught with setbacks, losing and regaining city status multiple times. In 2011, the Supreme Court's ruling solidified Mati's cityhood, bringing forth new governance opportunities and challenges. The local populace anticipates improved services and employment prospects under the city's administration. Further, this study employs a meticulous descriptive historical methodology, utilizing primary sources and key informant interviews. It integrates both external and internal analysis of available data.

Key Words: Cityhood; Colonization; *Mandayan*; *Moros*.

Received: 10/10/2023

Accepted: 11/20/2023

Published: 11/29/2023

* Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

Writing local history in the Philippines presents a daunting challenge for historians due to the scarcity and difficulty in obtaining written sources. Additionally, traditional Philippine historiography often exaggerates the role of urban centers and national elites, leading to a neglect of local developments that don't align with national patterns. This historical imbalance arises from overlooking the significance of local history as the foundation for national history. Local histories offer vital insights into the complexities of the past, shedding light on the overall development of Philippine history [1].

Local history not only forms the backbone and identity of the people in a specific area but also serves as a vital but often overlooked aspect of a community's heritage. Despite this, contemporary society tends to disregard the importance of studying or researching their own history, with only a handful of individuals showing genuine interest in exploring their local heritage. The researcher stands among the few passionate individuals determined to document the history of their hometown. While the scope may not match broader historical studies, the collected data can provide valuable insights and historical context not only for the local residents but also for anyone interested in understanding the region.

The focal point of this study is Mati City, Davao Oriental, a locale often unfamiliar to many in the country, let alone its history. Unlike more prominent cities like Davao City, Mati remains relatively obscure. Despite the existence of some books discussing the area, they offer only brief glimpses into its history. Consequently, the researcher endeavors to conduct a preliminary study on Mati's history, aiming to fill the void in comprehensive historical accounts. The primary objectives of this study are threefold: first, to explore the origins of Mati and its early settlers; second, to investigate the establishment of Spanish, American, and Japanese settlements in the area; and lastly, to trace the evolution of Mati from a municipality to a city. Through this research, the goal is to provide an in-depth understanding of Mati's historical journey for those genuinely interested in its past, thus enriching the broader tapestry of Philippine history.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive-historical research design to chronicle the evolution of Mati City. The study extensively relies on primary sources, meticulously examining available records and documents within Mati City, focusing on its physical environment and historical background. To ensure a reliable analysis, the researcher extensively utilized resources from various institutions, including the Davao City Public Library, Ateneo de Davao University, University of Mindanao, Davao Oriental State College of Science and Technology, and Mindanao State University. Additionally, archival research was conducted at the Subangan Museum in Davao Oriental. The study used authentic materials such as books, journals, newspapers, manuscripts, and other relevant documents. In conjunction with written sources, oral history was also integrated into the research. Interviews with elderly and local residents of Mati were conducted, strategically selecting statements that align with the information derived from written sources. This meticulous approach, combining both primary sources and oral history, allowed for a thorough and nuanced exploration of Mati from a municipality into a city.

3. Review of Related Literatures

While conducting the study, a notable absence of literature solely dedicated to the historical narrative of Mati was observed. However, several works did offer brief insights about the region, proving to be invaluable resources for this study. Specifically, three texts played a significant role:

"*Kasaysayan* (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture and Arts" authored by Rev. Fr. Rolando F. Sayman stood out as a crucial guiding reference. This book not only delved into the cultural and artistic aspects of Davao Oriental but also meticulously detailed the province's history, providing concise accounts of its municipalities, including Mati [2]. By offering a comprehensive perspective, the text illuminated not only historical events but also the rich heritage and lives of the people of Davao Oriental, with Mati being an integral part of this intricate tapestry.

Another pivotal work was "Caraga Antigua 1521-1910" penned by Peter Schreurs in 2000. This text was referenced due to its focused exploration of the Caraga territory, which encompassed Davao Oriental. Schreurs meticulously documented the regions constituting Caraga, tracing its history from initial discovery until the mid-nineteenth century [3]. The term 'Caraga' extended far beyond the coastal village within Davao Oriental, encompassing a vast area from the southern Pacific coast through Surigao and Butuan, up to Gingoog in Misamis Oriental. The book extensively discussed the processes of Hispanization and Christianization in Agusan, Surigao, and East Davao, which now constitute present-day Davao Oriental.

Lastly, "Davao History" by Corcino in 1998 proved to be a pertinent text for this study. This book provided a comprehensive historical account of the broader Davao Region, incorporating the history of Mati. It meticulously detailed the arrival and colonization efforts of the Spaniards, Americans, and the Japanese in Davao, intricately weaving Mati's history into the broader regional context [4]. Particularly notable was its exploration of the American occupation period, shedding light on the pathways through which the Americans reached Mati during their presence in the Philippine Islands. These works collectively provided invaluable insights, enabling a nuanced understanding of Mati's historical evolution within the broader context of Davao Oriental.

4. Mati City: A Brief Historical Background of Davao Oriental's Gem

4.1. Etymology of the Municipality of Mati

According to a government document about the socio-economic profile of Mati available in the repository of the city in 2013, it is mentioned that during the pre-colonial period most of the natives settled in the place near or beside the coastal or riverine area because these were the places that had a good source of food and means of transportation [5]. Like other places the early settlers of Mati lived near a body of water which was a creek. The natives called that creek "*Ma-ati*" or "*Ka-ati*" from the Mandayan word which means "dry" or "dries quickly." This characteristic of said creek which surprised the Spanish conquistadores when they were told by the natives that it dries quickly even after a heavy rain. The creek was situated at the heart of the present Mati between the Provincial Capitol of Davao Oriental and the City Hall Building of Mati today. "*Mati*" later became associated

with the whole town, not merely the creek that is still part of the natural feature of the downtown.

4.2. Early Settlers of Mati

Historical documents available from the city's local repository reveal the profound cultural richness of Mati City. The indigenous Mandaya community, spanning the eastern coastline of Mindanao from cape San Agustin, Sigaboy to Surigao, has a strong presence in the region. The Mandaya population is notably concentrated along the east coast belt encompassing Boston, Cateel, Baganga, Caraga, Manay, Tarragona, Lupon, and Mati [6]. Much of the territory now constituting Davao Oriental, including parts of Surigao, is inhabited by the Mandaya people. This extensive Mandaya presence explains the linguistic connection between the Surigaonon people of Surigao and the native language spoken in Davao Oriental, particularly along the east coast where the Mandaya community resides. Additionally, another early group that settled in the area is the Kaagan community, Islamized natives of Davao who share a similar dialect with the Mandaya people. The differences between the two dialects are minor, with the Kaagan dialect incorporating some Arabic, Malay, Mranaw, Maguindanawn, and Tausog terms, setting it apart from the Mandaya language.

4.2.1. The Mandayas of Mati

As quoted from the *Subangan* Museum of Davao Oriental Province, the etymological meaning of Mandaya comes from the two words "*man*" (prefix) and "*daya*" (root word). *Man* or *mang* is a Mandaya possessive prefix, which means "of" or "from." *Daya*, on the other hand, literally means "upstream" or "upland" [7]. Hence, Mandaya describes the people who are living in the high regions, such as a plateau, valley or mountain.

The Mandaya comes from the Malay stock. They inhabit the slopes of mountain range the bordering the Pacific Ocean, from Mati to Bislig, and the area in upper Tagum and Hijo Rivers, as well as the upper Agusan River Valley. They were famed as a headhunting people, but their early contacts with the Spanish colonizers (since early 1600s) have made them the first indigenous group to embrace civilized life. Like most other natives, they are superstitious and polytheistic [8]. The people who are proud of their culture and heritage have gradually mixed with Visayan settlers over the many years. Brought over by the Spanish missionaries, these Visayan groups gradually intermarried with the locals [9].

4.2.2. The Calagan/Kaagan Moro Group

In an interview between Fr. Sayman and Imam Ruperto Manuel, it was revealed that "*Calagan/Kaagan*" referred to a Lumad group who embraced Islam, originating from Caraga, Davao Oriental, and extending westward to Davao del Sur, where many of them resided along the shoreline. The correct pronunciation, "*Kaagan*," stems from the native word "*Kaag*," signifying a "*babala*" or "warning" in Filipino, which translates to "warning" in English [10]. According to historical accounts, during the arrival of the Sarip (Sharif) from Malaysia in Caraga, they imparted warnings to the people about the presence of God, the impending Day of Judgment, the divine laws of Islam, and the concepts of paradise and hell. These warnings were delivered to the locals, eventually leading to the name "*Kaagan*" for the area. Over time, this term became associated with the people inhabiting the locale, particularly the Lumad who converted to Islam from Caraga to Davao del Sur.

Towards the late 15th century, the name was modified to "*Carragan or Carraga*," and the place where the Sarip resided was named "Santiago." Several other locations were named San Ignacio, Holy Cross, and Del Pilar, among others [11]. The Muslim "*Kaagan*" individuals from Tarragona to Carraga embraced Catholicism, while those remaining in the western region up to Davao del Sur continued to practice Islam due to interactions with Muslim missionaries from various provinces in Mindanao.

5. Mati Unveiled: Navigating the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era

5.1. Mati City in the Pre-colonial Era

As documented in Mati's socio-economic profile from 2013, the region of Davao Oriental, before the year 1521, was inhabited by indigenous people, often referred to as "*Lumads*," who shared similar worship practices, culture, customs, and traditions. These Lumads, including the *Mandaya*, *Mansaka*, *Mamanua*, *Manubo* or *Mang-suba*, *Mangguangan*, *Tagacaulo*, and others, resided along the Pacific Ocean shores, near rivers, and within the forest. Their primary mode of transportation was centered on river basins [12].

Due to the *Bagani* System, some of these indigenous communities constructed houses atop trees as a defensive measure against adversaries. Their societal structure was paternalistic, led by figures like *bagani*, *datu*, or *raja*, who governed the community. Their livelihood relied on rudimentary agricultural techniques, hunting, fishing, and occasional barter trading. Primitive farming practices involved "*kaingin*" (slash and burn) methods, exhibiting a nomadic lifestyle as they moved based on suitable soil for cultivation. According to Sayman, hunting, known as "*pangayam*," was a common activity among men, and the spoils of these hunts were generously shared within the community [13].

In terms of craftsmanship, Lumads were skilled weavers, creating their clothing from abaca fiber known as "*dagmay*." Weaving was considered a sacred ritual and was practiced by adept members of the tribe. Additionally, Lumads possessed unique musical instruments, dances, and ornaments. Their dances were symbolic, expressing different emotions such as joy, sadness, or anger. When recounting historical narratives, they incorporated chanting called "*dawot*" into their dances [14].

Religiously, Lumads adhered to the *Diwata* System, a matriarchal belief system that revered nature and humanity. Gifted women in the community were designated as "*Balyans*" or dancing priestesses, and "*Catalunans*" or singing priestesses. Their faith revolved around a tripod concept, encompassing God (referred to as "*Tagallang*," "*Magbabaya*," or "*Mansilatan*"), nature, and man. Significantly, they held the land in high regard, viewing it as sacred and eternal, emphasizing that humans were merely stewards. The land, they believed, was perpetual, outlasting individual lives.

Overall, the pre-colonial period in eastern Mindanao, including Davao Oriental, was characterized by solitude, spiritual reverence, and a simplistic way of life. The province was home to approximately five distinct indigenous groups, namely the Mandaya, Mansaka, Manobo, Tagacaulo, and Kaagan, each contributing to the rich tapestry of pre-colonial culture in the region [15].

6. Colonial Footprints: Mati under Foreign Colonial Rule

6.1. During the Spanish Era

Upon the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521, led by the Portuguese Conquistador Ferdinand Magellan, this southeastern part of Mindanao was named “Calaghan Island,” derived from “calag,” meaning spirit or soul. The Spanish government referred to it as “regio de gente animosa,” signifying the region of spirited men when creating the Caraga Province [16].

In 1543, Ruy Lopez de Villalobos and his crew anchored in a bay they named Malaga (*Baganga*) during early Spanish explorations of the Davao area. Another significant event occurred in 1546 when St. Francis Xavier, later canonized as a saint, propagated the Christian faith in eastern Mindanao, specifically in *Kabuaya* or *Cabuaya* near Cape San Agustin, one of the barangays of Mati today. The Papal Bull confirming St. Francis's activities in Mindanao attested to his apostolic endeavors (Schreurs, 2000: p. 01).

The early missionaries settled in places like Caraga, Baganga, and Cateel, establishing churches and baptizing locals. These missionaries, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, played a pivotal role in creating towns and villages under the “Incomienda system.” The towns of Caraga, Cateel, Baganga, Manay, Mati, and Sigaboy, now known as the “centennial” parishes of the Diocese of Mati, were established during this period [17].

In 1847, Governor General Narciso Claveria y Zaldúa commissioned Don Jose Oyanguren to explore regions south of the Encomienda de Bislig, which was then part of the Province of Caraga. Oyanguren organized inhabitants into municipalities such as Baganga, Mati, and Sigaboy. His conquest against Datu Bago, a Bagobo chieftain, marked the end of the Datu Empire. As a result, on February 27, 1849, Governor General Narciso Claveria partitioned the Caraga Province into Surigao Province and Nueva Guipuzcoa, which later became Davao, honoring Oyanguren's successful conquest [18].

The initial Spanish presence in Mati dates back to 1546, when the esteemed Spanish Jesuit Missionary, St. Francis Xavier, visited a place called *Kabuaya* or *Cabuaya* near Cape San Agustin, aiming to propagate the Christian faith [19]. Presently, *Kabuaya* or *Cabuaya* is one of the barangays in Mati City. Another significant Spanish mission occurred in the early 17th century when missionaries were sent to the island known as the “*Provincia de Caraga*” or Province of Caraga in 1622 [20]. These missionaries played a crucial role in establishing towns and villages along the east coast of Mindanao, including Mati, under the governance of the “*Incomienda* system”. During this period, Mati was not yet an official Spanish town, despite sporadic missionary visits. The Spanish Government's seat in the *Provincia de Caraga* was in Surigao, which was far from Mati but closer to the Moro territories, making it challenging for the Spaniards to establish a government in Mati.

Mati became a proper town of the Spaniards after 1848, following the victory of the Spanish Conquistador, Don Jose Oyanguren, against Datu Bago, a formidable Muslim ruler who controlled much of what is now Davao City. After Datu Bago's defeat, the threat of Moro presence was eliminated, marking the end of the Datu Empire in the Davao territory. Mati's settlement evolved into a “*visita de Caraga*” and was formally founded around

1861, attributed to the efforts of Prudencio Garcia and Juan Nazareno, influential political leaders of the east coast who were also instrumental in building the towns of Baganga and Cateel.

6.1.1. Creation into a Parish

The historical and cultural narrative of Mati mirrors that of the colonial Philippines, tightly interwoven with the Church's role in the colony. Spanish colonization in this region was a collaborative effort between the State and the Church, sanctioned by the King of Spain. The Spaniards justified their conquest through the lens of evangelization, making religion a fundamental aspect of colonial life. Consequently, the extensive record-keeping by the Church in the Philippines becomes a valuable resource for historical research, given the integral role of religion in the colonial society. These Church records offer insights into various facets of Mati's history, revealing that the Mati Parish was among the Centennial Parishes in the Davao region. Some records indicate that as early as the 19th century, the Spaniards had established their Parish in Mati, as noted by Dr. Peter Schreurs in his writings.

...a few years later another small *visita* name Mati was founded in the bay of Pujada, which was at a distance of a two-day travel overland from Sigaboy. About the middle of the 19th century, some sizable settlements aside from Caraga and Baganga had sprouted on the stretch of the Pacific coast. The area was under the Military *Commandancia* of Mati. A certain Ricardo Rodriguez was mentioned as Spanish Commander of Mati [21].

Due to the continuous efforts of the Jesuits in Mati, as mentioned by Dr. Schreurs in 1994,

They anchored next in Mati where Father Heras promised the inhabitants a statue of their patron saint San Nicolas de Tolentino which he did send to them afterward, and also a church bell and things for the adornment of the future church and the convent which the people had proposed to build [22].

Certainly, Father Jose Arcilla, a Jesuit priest, illustrated the completed Mati Church in 1895. A decade earlier, in 1885, Father Pablo Pastells, the parish priest of Caraga, documented this event in his diary.

I went on to visit the southern barrios (of Caraga) until Mati which are under the jurisdiction of the Parish of Davao. I returned to Caraga after celebrating the feast of Mati on September 10 [23].

These historical documents indicate the Spanish missionaries and authorities were established in Mati well before 1897. Fr. John Schumacher, a Jesuit residing in Manila, corroborated the information from the Jesuit archives at the Ateneo de Manila concerning the formal establishment of the Parish of San Nicolas de Tolentino in Mati, stating the following:

Governor General Camilo Polavieja responded favorably, but provisionally, to the request of the Jesuits to separate Mati from the mission of Sigaboy on December 1896. As a result of this approval, a priest and a brother were appointed in January of 1897, and the ROYAL ORDER OF THE QUEEN OF SPAIN, giving the definitive approbation (of the church of Mati), was communicated to the superior general of the Jesuits in Manila by May, 1897. The year 1897 then is considered the formal creation of the Parish of Mati with a resident

priest and a brother; hence the Centenary Church of Mati be celebrated in 1997 [24].

The nascent parish of Mati, termed as "*mission activa*", had a short-lived privilege of having a resident priest due to the outbreak of war in 1899. The Jesuits, guided by their constitutions at that time, were missionaries rather than officially recognized parish priests. Consequently, Mati only briefly benefited from the presence of a resident priest. Despite the imminent revolution, extensive evangelization efforts were carried out in the Mati territory. Fr. Miguel Saderra Mata, SJ, reported that by 1899, when the Jesuit fathers departed from Mati, the Christian population exceeded thirteen thousand [25]. This fact finds support in the circumstances of nearby settlements such as Hijo of Tagum and Maa of Davao, illustrating the widespread impact of the evangelization efforts.

6.2 During the American Era

The initial American presence in Davao occurred on December 14, 1899, when General James Bates of the 23rd Infantry, Commanding General of the Mindanao-Jolo forces stationed in Zamboanga, arrived. Six days later, the first contingent of American occupation troops, led by Major Hunter B. Liggett, comprising companies "I" and "L" of the 31st Infantry, U.S. Volunteers, reached Davao aboard the steamer Brutus. The American flag welcomed them in Davao as the local president and his aide guided the steamer to a secure anchorage. Company "I" was stationed in town, while the remainder proceeded to Mati (Davao Oriental), where they were met by Presidente Señor Francisco Rojas (later the first appointed mayor of Mati) and Jefe de Policia (Chief of Police) Manuel Garcia y Nelia. Upon confirming the peaceful conditions in Mati, Major Liggett moved to Baganga (Davao Oriental) on December 22, where, despite most locals being absent due to farm work, the town officials and some civilians welcomed him. In response to the local president's request, an American flag was hoisted instead of a white flag at the church. Due to Baganga's peaceful environment, limited food supplies, and challenges posed by the upcoming northeast monsoons, Liggett decided to relocate to Mati with his troops aboard the Brutus, leaving Company "I" in Mati and establishing his headquarters in Davao (now Davao City) [26].

In the early days of American occupation, the initial two companies of the American forces in Davao were later bolstered by the arrival of companies "K" and "M" of the 31st Infantry U.S. Volunteers on January 2, 1900. While Company "K" remained stationed in Davao, Company "M" was promptly dispatched to Baganga aboard the Brutus, reaching the destination on January 8. By May 23, a detachment of 14 men from Company "M" had been established in Dapnan, a village situated 6 kilometers to the north of Baganga. On the same day, Company "L" in Mati, except for one officer and 25 enlisted men, was transferred to Caraga [27]. This marked the extent of American occupation in eastern Davao, a situation formalized by the creation of the military subdistrict of Davao through General Orders No. 18, Department of Mindanao and Jolo, U.S. Army, on July 23, 1900.

According to Gowing, in 1903, Davao was established as a district of the Moro Province under the Organic Act of Moro Province. Section 253 of the act outlined the division of the Moro Province into five districts, namely Sulu, Zamboanga, Lanao, Cottabato, and Davao. This district was incorporated into Mindanao under American administration, with General Leonard Wood assuming the role of the first Military Governor [28]. Subsequently,

in December 1913, the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 2309, renaming the Moro Province as the Department of Mindanao and Sulu. In early 1914, under the leadership of Frank Carpenter as the first Civil Governor, the department and its constituent districts were reorganized into regular provinces. On January 1, 1915, Davao saw the inauguration of its inaugural Provincial Governor, Don Gulalio E. Causing.

6.3 During the Japanese Era

The precise arrival of the Japanese in Mati lacks specific documentation; however, historical accounts indicate their presence in the Davao Region before the outbreak of the War. Similar to the American settlers, the Japanese were actively involved in cultivating extensive plantations. While the Americans focused on cultivating vast coconut estates, the Japanese primarily cultivated abaca, marking it as their main crop, as highlighted by Corcino [29]. According to Ternita Kuheyama Madanlo, the daughter of a Japanese laborer working on an abaca plantation in 2014:

Kyaka dumduman pako yang kanak ama nangaong wapay gyeraya yang kanilan mga trabaho na sang dagko na panagat, adto sang kanami ge uyaan sa may San Isidro yang kanilan trabaho adto sang abacahan aw sagingan, kay trabahanti ng sagingan aw abacahan yang kanak ama pati isab mga mais na genatanum nilan. [I still remember my father, during the post war era his job was in the big fishing industry, at the place that we live which is part of San Isidro. (Municipality of Davao Oriental since 1966 but used to be part of Mati.) They engaged in abaca and banana plantation, because they were workers at the plantation. They also engaged in producing crops like corn.]

In the process of accumulating funds for investment sourced from their homeland, the Japanese acquired the vast American-owned coconut plantations. Subsequently, they expanded their endeavors to include logging, fishing, and extensive merchandising. These products were shipped to significant business entities in Japan. Additionally, many Japanese immigrants established diverse shops ranging from barbershops and foundries to eateries, bars, and high-end restaurants [30].

Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, Japanese aircraft bombed nearly the entire Davao region on December 8, 1941, just a day after the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii [31]. However, the actual landing of the Japanese Imperial Forces occurred on December 20, 1941, a few weeks subsequent to the initial bombings. Ternita Koheyama Madanlo, in her interview discussing the arrival of the Japanese, recounted:

Yang pagka dumdum ko ng pag ulbo ng gyera kay 1941, kay pag panaw ng ama ko tungod yagka gyera da idto isab yang pagka utaw ng kanami kimud adto sa Dahican mga December 1941 da idto. Pag ulbo ng gyera na yang kanami ama na yumuli da silan adto sang kanilan banwa kay dyada da silan ng kanilan labaw-labaw pabarik adto sa kanilan. (What I can remember is that the war broke out in 1941, because it was the time that my father left and also because that was the time that our youngest sister was born in Dahican a barangay in Mati. After the war broke out our father returned to their country because they were taken back by their superior.)

Regarding Japanese atrocities, akin to documented instances in various regions of the Philippines, notably in

parts of Luzon, Visayas, and specific areas in Mindanao, there are no recorded instances of such brutality in Mati. Interviews conducted by the researcher with elderly residents who lived through the Japanese occupation in Mati shed light on this matter. Angelita Comanggoc has stated:

Wa sa silan a panghilabot maliban da gaid kung kalaban kaw kung myebro kaw ng USAPE, yanag pakatingun sagaid silan. Wa say kyakatigaman ko aw yamabalitan ko na pyapanghilabtan aw gi abuso ng mga Hapon. Yang kanila sa gaid na dapat kaw magpakita ng passes ngengyang yasing ng ID ng mga iso, aw awn passes mo na di kaw sa a unon. Yamanghatag man yan silan ng passes kay ngenyan yang kanilan tanda na ikaw di ng myembro ng USAPE kung way kanmo passes na a laongun dakaw na membro ng USAPE. Pero yang laong na yamanghilabot silan ng mga kaubayan aw mga iso na wa. Awn kaisa na inagka gyera silan sa may bitanagan na banda kung wain way mga utaw adto silan sang mga hilit mag atang ng mga kalaban na sundalo. [The Japanese did not hurt anybody unless you are considered enemy or you are a member of the USAFFE (United States Army Forces in the Far East). They just lived quietly. I did not know nor hear about the atrocities and abuses of the Japanese. They just required passes like an ID for the kids at school, if you have “passes” then they won’t hurt you. They gave “passes” to everybody because that was their way of knowing if you are not a member of the USAFFE. If you do not have “passes” then they would consider you a member of USSAFE. But regarding reports that they hurt women and children I have not heard of it. There was one time that they had an encounter with the guerilla in Bitanagan but it was a place in which there were no civilians. They ambushed or attacked their guerilla enemies in this place.] [32]

According also to Carlos Emelio as he reminisced his past during the Japanese period he said that:

Mairap nangaon kay di kaw makapag panaw panaw abir alaw kay sigi maglayog-layog yang eraplona sang tas ng atop, awn pa gani kani mga ompo na tyatanam timbakon dusang bay na inag meeting duwang kawtaw yang patay. Pero yang pyag-laongan na yamangilabaot silan ng mga kubayan aw iso na wa sa wa ako makabalita nay maynan na panghitabo, yadtong mga kalaban sa gaid yang anapun nilan ngaong mga armado, pero yang mga iso aw mga bobay di silan mag pangilabot. [It was hard before because you cannot stroll even in the daytime. The planes of the Japanese were flying over the roof. I had a grand uncle who was killed by the Japanese in their house because they had a meeting, including another person who also attended the said meeting. But the report that they hurt women and children, there was no incident here. I did not hear about that kind of atrocity, what they just wanted to find and punish were their enemies and those people who had weapons. The children and the women were spared.] [33]

According also to my interview with name Vicente Cambang in 2014, he has related his experiences during the Japanese occupation:

Pagdatung ng Hapon na ya bakwit kami, idto kami sang tas ng San Ignacio. Ya abutan pa kami ng Hapon Idto sang kaguangan yang Hapon. Dumduma sa, na yang kanak babo ng pagadagan nami na yama luwas yang kanan dagmay, pero pyuputi pasa ng kanak babo yang kanan dagmay, ininga’o sa kami ng Hapon pero w asa kami a barila ng Hapon, wasa sa kami ilabti pya pasagdan sa kami. Tuyo kay yamang kallok sagaw kami amo yamang bakwit kami. [When the Japanese came, we evacuated. We went to the mountain of San Ignacio (part of

the Municipality of Manay, Davao Oriental). We were still here when the Japanese came and they were in the forest. I remembered that when my aunt ran, she was wearing her “dagmay” (famously known indigenous groups as malong, which were used like a skirt by the natives of Mati) and it fell, but my aunt took back her dagmay. The Japanese saw us yet did not shoot us, they did not hurt us and just left. But because we were shocked and afraid, we evacuated.] [34]

The researcher asked again Lolo Vicente about the passes that the other old folks were talking about and he said that:

Od awn passes nangaon, kaso na kami wa kami a kamang kay kung kumamang kami ng passes na patay ng mga military. Awn passes sidtong mga Haponano, na kami di man kami ng Haponano dapig man kami sang military sang USAPE, kung katigaman ng military na Haponano kaw na patay kaw. Awn gani kanak tiyo nangaon na pyapatay ng mga Military, kay yusip yang tiyo ko kung dapig yan sang mga Hapon, na laong ng tiyo ko na dili yan dapig, na adun laong ng sundalo na ga agad-agad kono yang tiyo ko sang Hapon tapus magalaong yan na dili yan dapig, na sunguri yang liyog patay yang tiyo ko. Awn pay kanami isa ka kila nangaon name na dyadakop gyapon ng military aw usipa kung dapig sang Hapon, galaong sa silan na dili silan dapig, pero nangasa piyapatay, pyag-agad dasa silan ng sundalo aw subariya. Agaw sa kami nangaon na kuyaw na kuyaw, yang kuyaw kay yang sa pikas aw kung Hapon sa gaid na arang-arang. Pero kung kung katik-tikan kaw gyapon ng Hapon na dapig kaw sang USAPE na patay kaw gyapon. Amo na grabe kairap nangaong panahon nag Hapon, way makabuno adun na panahon. [Yes, there were “passes” before, but we did not get “passes” because if the army knew that we had “passes” they will kill us. There were “passes” to those “Haponano” (what they call to people who sympathetic of the Japanese), but us we were not “Haponano.” We are on the side of the army in the USAFFE. If the army knew that you are “Haponano” you will be killed. I had an uncle who was killed by the army. They asked my uncle first if he was on the side of the Japanese, my uncle told them no. But the army insisted that he used to accompany the Japanese and refused the allegations but still they cut his throat and my uncle died. We used to know those people who were captured and interrogated by the army. They were asked if they were supporters of the Japanese, and even if they were told the army that they were not, but they were killed and slaughtered by the army. That was why we were more frightened with the army than the Japanese. At the same time if the Japanese would know that you were in the side of the USAFFE, they will kill you too. That is why it was very hard during the time of the Japanese. It was incomparable to the present time.] [35].

Regarding Japanese brutality, according to local accounts, there were no reported instances of abuse or mistreatment, especially towards women and children, as testified by the interviewees. This stood in stark contrast to the widespread reports of Japanese atrocities in many parts of the country. One possible explanation could be the pre-existing positive relationships between the Japanese settlers and the local population in the Davao region prior to the war. It's likely that the Japanese had established friendly ties with the natives and treated their plantation employees well. However, despite the apparent kindness of the Japanese in Davao, the inevitable arrival of war brought destruction and suffering to the people. While the Japanese in Mati may not have been cruel or abusive, the war they brought resulted in turmoil and significant property damage. This unfortunate consequence highlighted the reality that war, regardless of the intentions of those involved, always

brings trouble and upheaval rather than peace to humanity.

In terms of local administrative power, government records of Mati indicate that the arrival of the Japanese did not significantly alter the existing governance structure. The mayor during the Japanese occupation was Tomas Rodrigues, who had been elected in 1940, a year before the Japanese arrival, and served until 1946 after their defeat.

The liberation of Mati in 1945 was achieved through the efforts of Allied Philippine Commonwealth troops, including the 6th, 10th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 106th, 107th, and 110th Infantry Divisions of the Philippine Commonwealth Army, the 10th Infantry Regiment of the Philippine Constabulary, and local guerrilla units from Davao. These forces engaged in fierce battles against the Japanese Imperial forces until the end of World War II, ultimately leading to the liberation of the town.

7. Creation of Mati into a Regular Municipality

On June 15, 1903, the Department of Mindanao and Jolo underwent a significant transformation when it was restructured into the Moro Province through the enactment of Philippine Commission Act No. 787 [36]. Following this change, Mati was designated as a municipality under the Davao district, a status conferred upon it by the Organic Act No. 21 on October 29, 1903 [37]. This reorganization was clearly stipulated in the Laws of the Moro Province, specifically in Section 1 of the Acts of The Legislative Council.

The municipalities of Mati, Davao, Makar, Cottabato, Malabang, Dapitan, Cateel, Baganga, and Caraga are hereby established with boundaries as prescribed for each in sections two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten, and municipalities of Iligan and Zamboanga are hereby enlarged with boundaries as prescribed in sections eleven and twelve. The provisions of the Municipal Code now in force in the Philippines Island, except as hereinafter modified, are extended to the municipalities established by this act.

In section 2 it states that:

The municipality of Mati shall include all territory between the seventh parallel of north latitude, and Cape Saint Agustin, bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the west by the waters of the Seno Davao, and shall include, in addition to the mainland, all the islands lying off the coast within a distance of three marine leagues except the Islands of Taluna, Samal, and Santa Cruz, which shall be included in the municipality of Davao. The municipal town shall be Mati.

According to the records of *Sanguniang Panglungsod*, Francisco Rojas was appointed as the first mayor of Mati when it was established as a municipality. However, his tenure was short-lived, lasting only until 1904. Following Rojas, Jose Lementa assumed the role of mayor after his appointment, serving from 1904 to 1908. Lementa held office during a significant period when the organic act governing Mati, known as Organic Act No. 21, was amended in 1907 through the Acts of The Legislative Council No. 189 (p. 305). Section 1 of this amendment stated:

Sections two, three, eight and eleven of Act Numbered Twentyone of the Legislative Council as amended by Act Numbered Sixty-six, entitled “An act providing for the establishment of the municipalities of Mati, Davao, Makar, Cottabato, Malabang, Dapitan, Cateel, Baganga, and Caraga, and enlarging the municipalities of Iligan and Zamboanga” are hereby amended to read as follows:

Section 2. The municipality of Mati shall include all territory between the seventh parallel of north latitude and Cape San Agustin, bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the west by the crest of the watershed terminating at Cape San Agustin, and shall include in addition to the mainland all the islands lying off the coast within the distance of the marine leagues. The municipal town shall be Mati. [38]

According to the Comprehensive Development Plan of Mati City in 2008, when Mati was established as a regular municipality, the initial four barangays—Bobon, Buso, Dawan, and Tagabakid—were encompassed within the jurisdiction of the Municipality of Mati, as per the provisions of Organic Act No. 21. Later, on May 24, 1907, following amendments made by Organic Act No. 189, Central became an additional barangay in Mati [39].

During the American period, the first six mayors of Mati were all appointed officials. Following Jose Lemente, Don Bonifacio G. Serrano assumed the mayoral role, appointed in 1908 and serving until 1912. Luis Huertas succeeded Serrano, holding office from 1912 to 1916, succeeded in turn by Don Enrique Lopez Sr., who served from 1916 to 1920. Patricio Cunanan then took office, appointed mayor from 1921 to 1922 [40].

The transition from appointed to elected mayors occurred in 1923, with Patricio Cunanan being the last mayor appointed by the American government. He served until 1927. Subsequent elected mayors included Don Salvador Lopez Sr. from 1928 to 1931, Pedro Ilustre from 1931 to 1934, Inocentes Marundan from 1934 to 1937, and Primitivo Gambong from 1937 to 1940.

7.1 Struggle of Mati to become a City

After a span of nearly 104 years following its establishment, and guided by Mayor Francisco G. Rabat alongside the collaborative endeavors of Congressman Joel Mayo Almario, the Mayor, and the Sanguniang Bayan led by Cesar R. de Erio, Mati attained the esteemed status of a city through the enactment of Republic Act No. 9408 [41]. The details of this transformation were outlined in sections 1 and 2 of Republic Act Number 9408.

Section 1. Title - This Act shall be known as the Charter of the City of Mati.

Section 2. The City of Mati – The municipality of Mati is hereby converted into a component city to be known as the City of Mati, hereinafter referred to as the City, shall comprise of the present territory of the Municipality of Mati, Province of Davao Oriental. The territorial jurisdiction of the City shall be within the present metes and bounds of the Municipality of Mati.

On June 20, 2007, the Commission on Elections officially declared the ratification of Republic Act 9408, transforming the Municipality of Mati into a component city, now recognized as the City of Mati. The final tally

revealed 18,267 votes in favor ("Yes"), while only 846 opposed ("No"). Out of the 51,287 registered voters across 26 villages and 266 polling precincts during the June 18 plebiscite, 18,267 individuals cast their votes [42].

However, Mati's status as a city was short-lived. On November 18, 2018, Mati, along with 15 other cities, lost its cityhood following a ruling by the Supreme Court of the Philippines. The court granted a petition by the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP), declaring the cityhood law that granted Mati its status as unconstitutional. The court's decision was based on the cities' failure to meet the required annual income threshold of at least P100 million for cityhood.

Initially, the League of Cities of the Philippines won the case. The Supreme Court, in its ruling on November 18, 2008, stated that the 16 towns, including Mati, were not exempt from the new income requirement and thus couldn't be considered cities. The court reiterated its decision in May 2009, closing the case. However, on December 22, 2009, responding to an appeal by the "League of 16 Cities," a group of local government units whose cityhood status had been revoked, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier ruling. In a 6-4 vote, the court declared the Cityhood Laws constitutional, including Republic Act 9408 that had granted Mati its city status.

Nearly a year later, on August 24, 2010, the Supreme Court accepted a motion for reconsideration filed by the League of Cities of the Philippines. The court reinstated its original decision, asserting that the municipalities, including Mati, did not fulfill the requirements for cityhood.

On August 27, 2010, Mati City in Davao Oriental reverted to its former status as Mati Municipality. It shared the fate of 15 other cities, as the Supreme Court reinstated its 2008 decision, declaring the cityhood laws that transformed these municipalities into cities as "unconstitutional." The court's resolution now definitively upholds the constitutionality of the 16 Cityhood Laws, leading to the reversion of Mati and other cities to their original municipal status.

Atty. Estelito Mendoza, counsel for the 16 new cities, in a motion for entry of judgment dated May 9, 2011 has urged the Supreme Court to make an entry of judgment to make the cityhood laws final and executory and for the much needed Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) of the new cities to be finally released by the Department of Budget and Management [43].

Congress undeniably gave these cities all the considerations that justice and fair play demanded. Hence, this Court should do no less by stamping its imprimatur to the clear and unmistakable legislative intent and by duly recognizing the certain collective wisdom of Congress," the Supreme Court ruling added.

Following the February 15 Supreme Court Resolution affirming the constitutionality of the cityhood laws encompassing the League of 16, the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) took action on March 8, 2011, by filing an "Ad Cautelam Motion for Reconsideration." However, the Supreme Court dismissed the League of Cities of the Philippines' motion unequivocally in a resolution dated April 12, 2011. In this resolution, the Supreme Court reiterated that the 16 Cityhood Laws did not contravene the Constitution and the Local Government Code (LGC).

The League of Cities of the Philippines made another attempt by submitting a "Motion for Leave to File Motion for Reconsideration of the Resolution of April 12, 2011" on April 29. Nevertheless, in an eight-page resolution authored by Associate Justice Lucas P. Bersamin, the Supreme Court clarified that it could not entertain the LCP's "second motion for reconsideration." This was in accordance with Section 2, Rule 51 of the Rules of Court, which specifies that "no second motion of reconsideration of a judgment or final resolution by the same party shall be entertained." The Court emphasized that Congress explicitly intended that the local government units covered by the Cityhood Laws be exempted from the provisions of RA 9009, which mandated a higher income requirement of Php100 million for city creation [44].

The journey of Mati's cityhood resembled a roller-coaster ride. Initially, on November 18, 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that Mati, along with 15 other municipalities, was not exempt from the new P100-million income requirement, thereby retaining their town status. This decision was upheld in May 2009 by a narrow 6-5 margin. However, in December 2009, the Supreme Court reversed its stance with a 6-4 majority, asserting that the towns were indeed exempt from the new income requirement, validating the laws that granted them city status. Subsequently, the League of Cities of the Philippines sought a motion for reconsideration, which the Supreme Court approved on August 24, 2010, restoring the original decision that the towns should remain towns. On February 15, 2011, the Supreme Court en banc revisited its December 2009 ruling, affirming that the new cities could maintain their city status. Finally, Mati achieved cityhood for the third time.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study provides an examination on Mati's historical evolution. This study investigated the local history of Mati city. Beginning with the etymology of the city, the origin of the named '*Mati*' is from a Mandayan word "*Ma-ati*" or "*Ka-ati*," which means a tribute to a creek that defined the early settlement. This watercourse, nestled between the Provincial Capitol of Davao Oriental and the City Hall Building of present-day Mati, spoke volumes about the resilience of the native people who thrived by its side, adapting to its whims and incorporating its essence into their identity.

Moreover, this study delves into the pre-colonial era, illuminating the lives of the indigenous Mandayan and Kaagan communities. Here, societal structures were woven with threads of paternalistic leadership under figures like *bagani*, *datu*, or *raja*. Their lives were intertwined with nature, necessitating nomadic practices based on suitable soil for cultivation and defensive measures such as tree-dwelling houses, attesting to their resourcefulness and adaptability. The study vividly paints a picture of their livelihood, rooted in rudimentary agricultural techniques, hunting, fishing, and barter trading, painting a portrait of a community deeply connected to its surroundings.

With the advent of the Spanish era, the region underwent a transformation, becoming "*Calagan Island*," a designation resonating the spirit of its indigenous inhabitants. Hence, the researcher meticulously traces the impact of Spanish colonization, highlighting the fusion of state and Church, and the lens of evangelization through which conquest was justified, shaping the cultural and historical landscape of Mati City.

In addition, the American era brought new influences, marked by the arrival of troops and the subsequent intermingling of cultures. The study provides a picture of this period, showcasing the arrival of American forces and their encounters with local leaders, setting the stage for a new chapter in Mati's history. Similarly, the Japanese era is illuminated, revealing their involvement in extensive plantations and the cultivation of abaca, a testament to the diverse agricultural practices that characterized the region.

Furthermore, the study also meticulously documents Mati's administrative evolution, from its designation as a municipality under the Moro province (Davao district) to the arduous struggle for cityhood. The tale of Mati's cityhood is one of perseverance and determination, a saga of legal discourses. Through the ups and downs, Mati's residents, led by some dedicated leaders, stood resilient, and in the face of challenges, they emerged victorious, earning the city status they rightfully deserved today.

In essence, this study is not merely a historical account; it is a testament to the spirit of Mati, its people, and their enduring connection to their roots. It stands as a beacon of knowledge, illuminating the path from the past to the present, ensuring that the legacy of Mati's history continues to inspire generations to come. This study is a testament to the power of historical inquiry, reaffirming the importance of understanding our past to navigate the complexities of the present and shape a more informed, enlightened future.

References

- [1] Guzman, Farrah Mastante. (2001). History of Tagum (1847-1998), Undergraduate Thesis, Department of History, CSSH, Mindanao State University Marawi City.
- [2] Sayman, Rolando F. (2003). Kasaysayan (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture and Arts. Davao Oriental: Council on History, Culture and Arts.
- [3] Schreurs, Peter. (2000). Caraga Antigua 1521-1910, Second Edition. Kalaw St. Ermita, Manila, Philippines: National Historical Institute.
- [4] Corcino, Ernesto. (1998). Davao History. Davao City: R.O. Tesoro and Sons Inc.
- [5] Socio Economic Profile, City of Mati, (2013).
- [6] Socio Economic Profile, Province of Davao Oriental, (2013).
- [7] Socio Economic Profile, Province of Davao Oriental, (2013).
- [8] Sayman, Rolando F. (2003). Kasaysayan (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture and Arts. Davao Oriental: Council on History, Culture and Arts.
- [9] Corcino, Ernesto. 1998. Davao History. Davao City: R.O. Tesoro and Sons Inc.
- [10] Sayman, Rolando F. (2003). Kasaysayan (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture

and Arts. Davao Oriental: Council on History, Culture and Arts.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Socio Economic Profile, Province of Davao Oriental, (2013).

[13] Sayman, Rolando F. (2003). *Kasaysayan (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture and Arts*. Davao Oriental: Council on History, Culture and Arts.

[14] Socio Economic Profile, Province of Davao Oriental, (2013).

[15] Socio Economic Profile, Province of Davao Oriental, (2013).

[16] Agoncillo, Tedoro. (1990). *History of the Filipino People*, 8th Edition Quezon City: GAROTECH Publishing,

[17] Sayman, Rolando F. (2003). *Kasaysayan (First Edition): An Introduction to Davao Oriental's Culture and Arts*. Davao Oriental: Council on History, Culture and Arts.

[18] Majul, Cesar. (1999). *Muslim in the Philippines*. Quezon City: UP Press

[19] Schreurs, Peter. (2000). *Caraga Antigua 1521-1910*, Second Edition. Kalaw St. Ermita, Manila, Philippines: National Historical Institute.

[20] Corcino, Ernesto. (1998). *Davao History*. Davao City: R.O. Tesoro and Sons Inc.

[21] Schreurs, Peter. (1994). *Mission to Mindanao, 1859-1900*. Cebu: San Carlos Publications, 1994 Volume 1.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Blair, Emma Helen and James Alexander Robertson. (1909) *The Philippine Islands (1493-1898)*. Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Company. Volume II.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Dabbay, Gloria. (1998). *Davao City: Its History and Progress*.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Gowing, Peter Gordon. (1983). *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos 1899-1920*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers.

- [29] Corcino, Ernesto. (1998). Davao History. Davao City: R.O. Tesoro and Sons Inc.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] Dabbay, Gloria. (1998). Davao City: Its History and Progress.
- [32] Comanggoc, Angelita. 95 years old. Barangay Tagabakid, Mati City, Davao Oriental. January 19, 2014.
- [33] Emilio, Carlos. 80 years old. Barangay Dahican, Mati City, Davao Oriental. January 14, 2014.
- [34] Cambang , Vicente. 87 years old. Barangay Tagabakid, Mati City, Davao Oriental. January 19, 2014.
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] Fluntecha, Henry Florida. (1974). A Historical Study of the American Military Occupation of the Lake Lanao Region (1901-1913).
- [37] Gowing, Peter Gordon. (1983). Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos 1899-1920. Quezon City: New Day Publishers.
- [38] Sanguniang Panglungsod, List of the Past Mayors of Mati.
- [39] City Development Planning and Development Staff. (2008). "Comprehensive Development Plan", City of Mati, Province of Davao Oriental (2008-2018), City of Mati.
- [40] Laws of the Moro Province, Organic Act and Legislative Act of American Government in the Moro Province, (1908).
- [41] Republic Act 9408. Republic of the Philippines, Congress of the Philippines Metro Manila, Thirteenth Congress, Third Regular Session. July 24, 2006.
- [42] Ibid.
- [43] Executive-Legislative Agenda (ELA) For 2010-2013, City of Mati, Province of Davao Oriental.
- [44] Ibid.