

Unrealized Ambitions of Proyecto de Colonización: Exploring Spanish Colonial Projects and Identity in 1890s in Mindanao

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ABSTRACT

Characterized by demands for reform and calls for revolution, Spanish colonial rule was perceived to be at its waning phase during its last decade in the Philippine historical memory. The *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas: Remitido por varios españoles residentes en Buenos Aires por conducto del Ministerio de Estado* provides a contrarian response and a new perspective on Spain's design in Mindanao, one of the many overlooked regions in Philippine historical studies during colonial period. This study aims to extract the historical narrative, uncover the authors' intentions, and clarify the underlying ideology behind the colonial project outlined in the *Proyecto de colonización*. The 17-document folio, with additional context, reveals that Spanish immigrants in Argentina suffered from the political and economic aftereffects of the Baring crisis in South America. Seeking to pursue their economic aspirations under the tutelage of Spanish protection, they ask the Madrid government's permission to migrate to its overseas territories. In 1895, the news of the Spanish victory in Marawi inspired various personalities in Buenos Aires to submit proposals for an agricultural colony in Mindanao by acquisition of land favorable for settlement. Nevertheless, analysis of the documents written by the authors in the folio reveals their intention to implement settler colonialism in the Philippines, a departure from the existing Spanish policy of imperial and commercial exploitation. Even though the proposals failed to seek approval for implementation, early perspectives were provided of what was to come when Christian settlers arrived in Mindanao. The study demonstrates that the 1890s Philippines transcends the age of revolution and highlights the understudied nature of settler colonialism in the country, both in the hands of foreigners and fellow Filipinos.

Keywords: *settler colonialism, Mindanao, Spanish immigrants, Spanish colonial rule, agricola*

Introduction

In the national historical memory of the Philippines, the burgeoning wave of Philippine nationalism, wishing to separate from Spain, dominated the last decade of the Spanish colonial rule in the country. This narrative saturation eclipsed Spanish activities elsewhere in the country as if the colonial government was gasping for air as the Philippine Revolution breathed its first. When Katipunan was discovered in Manila, the Spanish military had just concluded an expedition into Lanao establishing a firm position in Marahui (Marawi). This shows that the Spanish colonization process in the Philippines was not yet at its limits but was still in development.

Moreover, historical literature in general circulation focused on the Filipinos' struggle for independence in Luzon, mainly, and, just barely, in Visayas. What happened in Mindanao during those times, though increasingly being covered historically, had not yet attained a prominent part in the Filipinos' mainstream awareness. In addition, the focus on the revolutionary struggle marginalized discussions on the turn of the 20th-century Philippine economy, social life, class struggles, cultural development, and, the intended area of the study, intellectual history.

It is still a noticeable trend that the discussion on Spanish colonial thought still centers on the Church and State as the significant actors and contributors to the evolution and realization of Spanish colonial thought in the Philippines. In turn, this overshadows any role that individuals, including the indigenous population, played in its development.

Throughout the three-hundred-year stint of Spain in the Philippine archipelago, no historical study had satisfactorily addressed the evolution of Spanish colonial thought in the Philippines. Furthermore, covering extensively the various perspectives of historical actors and agents toward such evolution had demonstrated to be challenging. The solution rested on settling for "histories" instead of the "history" of one of the significant intellectual evolutions in the Philippines' colonial past.

One of the promising breakthroughs in such a discussion is the digitization of some documents coming from various Spanish national archives. Gaining access to them opens more pathways and perspectives to the discourse on how Spanish colonial ideology varied and evolved throughout the centuries. One of them is entitled *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas: Remitido por varios españoles residents en Buenos Aires, por conducto del Ministerio de Estado*.

Proyecto de colonización is a collection of various correspondences received by the *Ministro de Ultramar* of Spain from Spanish immigrants residing in Argentina who had dreams of establishing their agricultural colony (agricola) in the Philippines, eyeing the island of Mindanao in particular. In the initial examination of its title, the folio can be considered some sort of novelty for it is relatively unstudied and deviant due to it being a colonial proposal coming from private individuals rather than officials and religious persons, atypical of Hispanic Philippine historical discourse.

As the proponents intended themselves to be settlers of what was known to be an underdeveloped land at the time and now, linking the project to the concept of settler colonialism is not outside the realm of possibilities. Their aspiration to develop and cultivate Mindanao is closely associated with trends embodying the said ideology, in which settlers from a host country establish long-term, if not permanent, communities in recently acquired territories to aid in the extraction of resources and its defense. As settler colonialism remains a contemporary issue on the island due to the decades-long influx of Christian settlers turning the Muslim and indigenous populations into a minority, the study of the folio remains relevant in finding solutions to this social dilemma.

This historical study tries to contribute to the discourse on the Spanish colonial ideology during the last decade of its rule. Specifically, this attempts to extract from *Proyecto de colonización* answers to the following questions: What is the historical narrative of *Proyecto de colonización*? How did the authors intend and design their colonial project? Lastly, how did Spanish immigrants in Argentina perceive and contribute to the colonial ambitions in Mindanao? Answering these questions helps in the researcher's elaboration on how this expands the horizon of Philippine colonial ideology and his recommendation to future researchers to further this discourse.

Before the discussion on the contents of the folio and the extraction of answers to the research questions, a literature review is made on the existing discourses on the narrative of the settlement of Mindanao, of the variation and evolution of the Spanish colonial policies in the three hundred years of its rule over the Philippines, and on the ideology of settler colonialism in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, where colonies governed by such ideology are profound, if not prevalent.

Discussion

The Proyecto de Colonización en Filipinas Folio

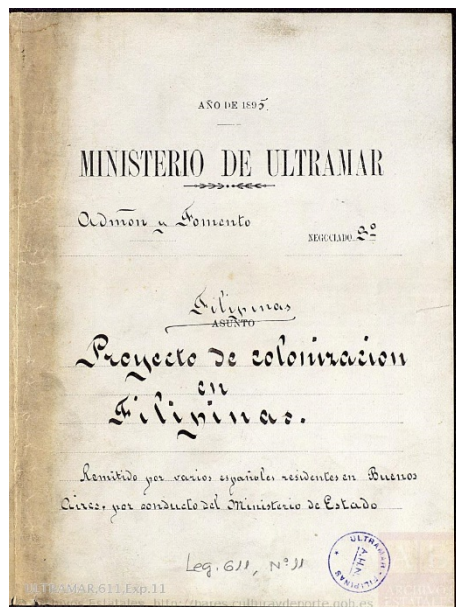


Figure 1. First Page of the Proyecto de Colonización. (Madrid: Ministerio de Ultramar, 1895). Dissemination of the image has been authorized by the owner of the intellectual property rights exclusively for private use and teaching and research activities. This

Agricultura, Industria, y Comercio. It has the original reference number of Ultramar,611, Exp. 11 which is ascribed in the documents as 611/11.

Supposedly, it is made up of 14 documents in total. This is attested by the presence of a number aside from the original reference number. However, a deeper examination of the documents presented reveals that there are 17 primary documents in the folio, with varying page lengths leading to a total of 116 pages in total, including blank pages and illustrations. Moreover, the starting date of its formation may be taken as back 1891, and the final pages revealed that the formation of the said folio did not end at least until November 1897. This is in contrast to the earlier archival claim setting of the formation date from 1895 to 1896.

For this study, the documents in the *Proyecto de Colonización* folio were arranged based on their relationship with the release of the November 14, 1895, Royal Order regarding the proposal of the colonization of the Philippines by Spanish immigrants in Argentina. Aside from the Royal Order, only two documents should be included in the study of the *Proyecto* Period: the letter written by Piera, Poli de Marco, and Julia on October 10,

1895, and the proposal they made finished on October 22 of the same year. All documents before October 10, 1895, will belong to the *Pre-Proyecto* Period and all after November 14, 1895 will belong to the *Post-Proyecto* Period. However, there is an exception. The periodical *El Correo Español* published on June 27, 1895, will not be included in the documents to be presented in any of the periods, the *Pre-Proyecto* Period in particular. This is a result of the researcher's examination and findings that no relevant information to the colonization project will be found in the said document.

Henceforth, for this study, the documents will be divided into three subperiods, which are, namely *Pre-Proyecto*, *Proyecto*, and *Post-Proyecto* periods. The division of the documents to be studied will be as follows:

***Pre-Proyecto* Period (1891-1895)**

1. Letter of Juan B. Romero to the Overseas Ministry, July 9, 1891
2. Letter of Antonio Maria Fabie to Juan Bautista Romero, August 6, 1891
3. Letter of Governor-General of Cuba to Juan Bautista Romero, September 4, 1891
4. Letter of Juan Bautista Romero to Governor-General of the Philippines, May 8, 1895
5. Letter of Juan B. Romero to the Overseas Ministry, June 22, 1895 (1)
6. Letter of Juan B. Romero to the Overseas Ministry, June 22, 1895 (2)
7. *El Correo de España* Buenos Aires June 16, 1895
8. Letter of Juan B. Romero to Palace Chamberlain, June 30, 1895

***Proyecto* Period (1895)**

9. Letter of Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia to the Overseas Ministry, October 10, 1895.
10. Colonization project for the Philippines, Buenos Aires, October 21, 1895
11. Letter of Marquis de Amposta to the Overseas Ministry, November 14, 1895

***Post-Proyecto* Period (1896-1897)**

12. Letter of Mariano Codina, Sarbador Pratz, Agustin Martin, Manuel Castegor, Timothy Lapuste, and Ventura Santos to the Ministry of State, August 27, 1896
13. Letter of the Undersecretary Marquis de Amposta to the Governor General of the Philippines, September 11, 1896.

14. Letter of the Spanish Immigrants in Argentina to the Queen Regent, September 18, 1896
15. Letter of the Undersecretary of the State Ministry to the Overseas Ministry, December 22, 1896
16. Letter of Undersecretary of the Overseas Ministry to the State Ministry, December 28, 1896
17. Letter of Mariano Codina to the Overseas Ministry, October 11, 1897.

As the periodization of the historical development of the colonization plan of the Spanish immigrants in Argentina formulated with the *Proyecto de Colonizacion* proposal as the center of its timeline, the historical arrangement of the documents contained in the folio has been finalized to fit the purpose of this study. Using the concepts of historical imagination and inference through implied evidence, the researcher can fill the chronological gaps between documents. With the two problems in writing the historical narrative of the folio addressed, the paper could now present the historical narrative of the *Proyecto de Colonizacion en Filipinas*.

Historical Narrative of the Spanish Immigrants' Proposal to Migrate to the Philippines during the 1890s

The historical narrative behind the auspicious birth and the natural death of the Colonia de San Ramon Plan unveils anew a new Philippine connection to the 19th century increasingly globalized world.

When it comes to the Spanish immigration to Argentina during the turn of the 20th century, Alicia Vildaureta demonstrated that the structural changes in Spain pushed the migrants away and the promising policy of Argentina pulled them.¹ The economic depressions of the second half of the 19th century forced Spanish nationals to find greener pastures elsewhere.²

Nothing explained better the immigration of Spanish subjects to Argentina except the work of Jose C. Moya. He extensively presented five macrostructural dimensions as to why Spanish inhabitants in the Iberia Peninsula set off for Argentina.³ First, through examination of Spanish and Buenos Aires censuses, Moya demonstrated that emigration from Spain was

¹ Alicia Vildaureta, "Spanish Immigration to Argentina, 1870–1930," *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 19, no. 1 (2021), 287.

² Vildaureta, "Spanish Immigration to Argentina, 1870–1930," *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, 289.

³ Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 13–14.

an indirect result of population explosion in areas, such as Galicia, Basque country, Catalonia, and Andalusia, where most of the migrants originated from. However Moya emphasizes that this “demographic explosion by itself does not lead to mass migration,” leading him to explain the other four macrostructural dimensions: the liberal, agricultural, industrial, and the transportation revolutions.

Moya explained that the spread of liberalism led to the lifting of immigration restrictions in Spain. The penetration of liberal ideals prevented the political elite from enacting legislation to curb emigration except for the intent of maintaining military draft. Freedom of movement became part of what can be discerned as natural law. It later became part of popular culture, uprooting the concept of mercantilism in the stage of public morality.

The spread of liberalism also started the onset of capitalism in the Spanish economy that also fueled the internal and external migration in Spain. Moreover, he demonstrated that Spanish emigres who went to other countries were from communities who were well-off instead of the more impoverished ones. Moya’s study of literacy, rural poverty, and landownership had demonstrated that the lower classes mostly decided to stay more than their well-off counterparts.⁴ Moya explained that the changes and opportunities presented by capitalism are more causal than its induced poverty for the emigrating Spaniards from the Iberian Peninsula.⁵

Moya found this no different with industrialization and the improvements in transportation. Industrialization saw urban centers as staging points from the Spanish countryside towards overseas migration supplemented by new product demands among the young population.⁶ The progress in the realm of transportation offered new avenues of emigration both as a source of enticement as well as a cause poverty engenderment.⁷

Aside from the factors that encouraged emigration from Spain, discussion of what made Argentina their destination is also vital. By 1852, In the 1853 constitution of Argentina, all foreigners who will migrate to the country were given “all civil rights of citizenship”. Moreover, the constitution turned the encouragement of foreign immigration a legal mandate for the federal

⁴ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 27-31.

⁵ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 31.

⁶ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 31-34.

⁷ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 35-44.

government.⁸ Even though only few subscribed to the subsidized immigration, the waves of immigration was sustained by allowing immigrants to send letters and remittances to their families back home, encouraging further emigration from their countries to Argentina.⁹

A rapid expansion in the Argentine national economy opened the way for the settlement of large number of immigrants. The expansion of agriculture, particularly in cattle raising, attracted an influx of immigrants willing to work in dairy farms and eventually opened to crop farming making Argentina one of the biggest dairy exporters and breadbaskets in the world.¹⁰ With agricultural development, industrialization occurred in the urban centers of Argentina. This opened opportunities for immigrants wary of the life in the countryside. This is particularly true for the Spanish immigrants who employed themselves in the factories and retail.¹¹ Expansion of these industries only became possible with the introduction of the railroad and deep harbors transforming the system of transportation in the country, not only for products but also humans.¹²

Argentina, during the second half of the nineteenth century, became home to thousands of Spanish immigrants hoping to find a greener pasture in the former colonies of the New World.¹³ These immigrants preferred Argentina because of the economic advantage brought on by their mastery of the Spanish language as well as the promise of employment and reasonable wages.¹⁴ However, this immigration trend failed Argentina's state policy to settle immigrants in the countryside as the inflow only resulted in increasing urbanization of already-established Argentine urban centers.¹⁵

⁸ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 49-50.

⁹ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 52.

¹⁰ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 52-55.

¹¹ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 55-57.

¹² Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 58.

¹³ Leticia Arroyo Abad and Blanca Sánchez-Alonso, "A City of Trades: Spanish and Italian Immigrants in Late-Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires, Argentina," *Cliometrica* 12, no. 2 (2017), 5-7.

¹⁴ Vildaurreta, "Spanish Immigration to Argentina, 1870-1930," *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, 292.

¹⁵ Vildaurreta, "Spanish Immigration to Argentina, 1870-1930," *Jahrbuch Für Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, 302-303.

Blanca Sanchez-Alonso studied the nature of Spanish emigration during the years 1880–1914. Most went to Latin America.¹⁶ Cultural similarities, according to Alonso, could have greatly contributed to the reason behind the destination choices of these immigrants.¹⁷ She also found a large portion of these immigrants are young and unmarried adults. Single males initially composed the majority of the demographic. However, an increasing share of women and families occurred over time.¹⁸ Alonso was also not shocked that agricultural occupation and high literacy dominated this population since Spain during the 19th century was an agrarian country and, assumingly, access to information facilitates emigration.¹⁹

The onset of the Baring Crisis caused the collapse of the financial market in Latin America, particularly the bank's biggest client Argentina.²⁰ The Baring Crisis, which ran from 1890 to 1891, was a result of the Baring Brothers and Co. involvement in the Buenos Aires Water Supply and Drainage Company and the Argentine government's economic policies and political situation at the time. The bad business prospect of Buenos Aires Water Supply and Drainage Company due to mismanagement and overfloated expectations caused Baring Brothers and Co., one of Argentina's biggest lenders to go into bankruptcy.²¹ At this time, Argentine President Juarez Celman and his partisans disregarded inflation, making debt servicing much harder. The political chaos, manifested by net emigration in Argentina for the first time and rioting in the cities, led to the ouster of Celman and the institutionalization various reforms in Argentina that helped it recover by 1897.²²

¹⁶ Blanca Sánchez-Alonso, "Those Who Left and Those Who Stayed Behind: Explaining Emigration from the Regions of Spain, 1880–1914," *The Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 3 (2000), 731.

¹⁷ Sánchez-Alonso, "Those Who Left," *The Journal of Economic History*, 732.

¹⁸ Sánchez-Alonso, "Those Who Left," *The Journal of Economic History*, 733–734.

¹⁹ Sánchez-Alonso, "Those Who Left," *The Journal of Economic History*, 734–735.

²⁰ A.G. Ford, "Argentina and the Baring Crisis of 1890," *Oxford Economic Papers* 60, no. 2 (1956), 148–150.

²¹ H. S. Ferns, "The Baring Crisis Revisited," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 2 (May 1, 1992): 241–73, 251–258.

²² Ferns, "The Baring Crisis Revisited," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 241–73, 258–260.

The ensuing Panic of 1890 resulted in despair of these immigrants, where their expectations turned to disappointments as their labors yielded no results.²³ Juan Bautista Romero, a former Spanish administrator turned immigrant in Argentina, was one of them. Relaying of his experience during this tumultuous period, he expressed:

*...dela numerosa colonia Española existente en la Republica donde me consta hay muchos disponase de algunos recursos y otros sin ellos, con propositas de abandonarla cuanto antes, por la mala situacion que el pais atrabiesa, faltando trabajo y siendo la vida sumamente cara por el tipo de 400% a que al canzo el cambio de papel (unica moneda circulanta) a oro, ce plata estrangera, que necesita para sus transacciones con el exterior, de donde se importa en cantidades infinitamente Superiores, a las ques rinden los productor que se exportan...*²⁴

(...numerous Spanish colonies existed in the Republic where I know many had some resources and others without them, to abandon it as soon as possible, due to the bad situation that the country was facing, with a lack of work and life being extremely expensive at the rate of 400% at which It achieved the change from paper (the only currency in circulation) to gold, such as foreign silver, which it needs for its transactions abroad, from where it is imported in quantities infinitely higher than those produced by the exporting producers.)

While Romero saw the economic crisis as the apparent motivation for the Spanish national intentions to leave Argentina, agricultural experts Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia saw government neglect and political instability to be blamed for the situation of the Spanish immigrants in their agricultural colonies across the country. They exclaimed:

Nuestra profession nos ha llevado repetidas veces al seno de esos decantados centros de colonizacion Argentinos o Brasileños, a los que causas que no son del caso, han hecho fracasas casi siempre, reduccion dolos a grandiosos esbozos de colonias en las que sobra lo superfluo y falta lo primordial e indispensable; en que el coste del transporte imposibilita y mata la produccion en que la monocultura es un peligro real, mas que un vicio ignorante, en que la vecinos a teoria del cultivo extensivo prevalece, en que se carcu de organizacion administrativa, de iniciativa dirigente conocedora y bien informada, en que la

²³ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, June 22, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 1.

²⁴ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, June 22, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 1.

*extraccion es dificil, el apoyo financiero suelo, el credito ilusorio o usurario: en que el agriculturos se ve desamparado, abandonado a sus salas y propias fuerzas desde los primeros momentos de su penosa lucha en pais nuevo y extraño; en que los vaivenes de una politica partidaria y personal, ponen a cada momento en peligro su propiedad y su vida y hemos comprendido perfectamente desasumo profundo que se apodere del colono, desde que se concence de la inutilidad de sus esfuerzos.*²⁵

(Our profession has repeatedly taken us to the heart of those decanted Argentine or Brazilian colonization centers, which have almost always failed for reasons that are not relevant, reducing them to grandiose sketches of colonies in which there is plenty of superfluity and lack. what is essential and indispensable; in which the cost of transportation makes production impossible and kills, in which monoculture is a real danger, more than an ignorant vice, in which the theory of extensive cultivation prevails, in which it is devoid of administrative organization, of knowledgeable leadership initiative and well informed, in which extraction is difficult, financial support is low, credit illusory or usurious: in which the farmer sees himself helpless, abandoned to his wards and his strength from the first moments of his painful struggle in a new and strange country; in which the vagaries of a partisan and personal policy put his property and his life in danger at every moment and we have perfectly understood the profound disappointment that takes hold of the settler, as soon as he becomes aware of the futility of his efforts.)

This led Spanish nationals like Romero,²⁶ Piera, Poli de Marca, and Julia²⁷ to petition the Royal Government of Spain for a resolution beneficial to both parties.

²⁵ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Letter of Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia to the Overseas Ministry, October 10, 1895.", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 8, 3.

²⁶ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, July 9, 1891", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 2.

²⁷ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonizacion para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 3-6.

Juan Bautista Romero, a Spanish civil servant turned immigrant, proposed the idea of helping these desperate and impoverished Spanish emigres find new homes and employment in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.²⁸ Romero only found limited success in Cuba,²⁹ finding work for thousands of his countrymen. Romero, in the year 1895, found a window of opportunity after the news of Blanco's expedition in Lake Lanao and its victory in Marawi reached his part of the world.³⁰ In his imagination, this newly pacified and acquired Spanish dominion in a distant island called Mindanao would be the most appropriate location for eager, able, and committed Spanish nationals to find their new home.³¹ He used his access and influence in periodicals to stir public awareness and opinion for his proposal of colonization of Mindanao.³²

In his proposal,³³ Romero laid down the conditions for the establishment of his envisioned colony. He asked:

- a. The payment of the transportation of 50-100 families to a designated point in the Philippines to establish a rural center with 200 hectares assigned to each family;
- b. A refundable advance payment for each family, amounting to 200 hundred pesetas, with instructions not allowing the families to jump ashore except at their final destination in the Philippines;

²⁸ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, July 9, 1891", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 2.

²⁹ Antonio Marie Fabie, "Letter to Juan Bautista Romero, August 6, 1891" in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.2, 1-2.

³⁰ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to the Governor-General of the Philippines, May 8, 1895" in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.4, 1.

³¹ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to the Governor-General of the Philippines, May 8, 1895" in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.4, 1.

³² There were features in Buenos Aires periodicals *El Correo Español* (June 27, 1895) and *El Correo España* (June 16, 1895) regarding the plight of the Spanish emigres in South America and the proposal to colonize Mindanao respectively.

³³ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, June 30, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 3, 2-3.

- c. Another payment of the same value should be made upon reaching Manila;
- d. Provision of the necessary farming tools and implements, provisions, provisionary shelter, and armaments for those capable of handling a firearm;
- e. Distribution of military rations for settlers during their first year of settlement;
- f. Payment of debts Romero incurred will be made in eight installments, the first during 2nd year of the settlement and the seventh during the subsequent years;
- g. The land would be transferred to Romero once he repaid the advance payments made for the colonization, with the rest to be treated as a form of mortgage;
- h. Non-payment of the debts will incur a cumulative interest of six percent by the end of the contract;
- i. The colony would be exempted from paying taxes;
- j. Once one hundred families were settled in the colony, Romero had to provide a school and a church without additional expense to the State;
- k. It would be named *Colonia San Ramon de Mindanao*; and
- l. If the government would directly control the colony, Romero agreed to put himself at its service, as a compensated employee. However, he felt it would be in his interest if he was granted eight hundred hectares of land as a possible inheritance for his children.

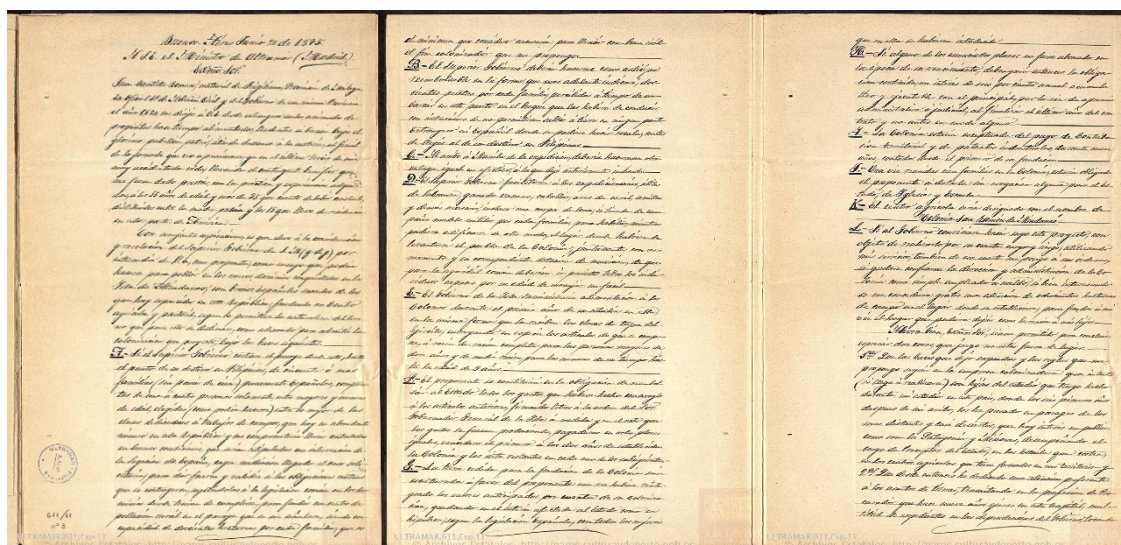


Figure 2. From L-R: Pages of the letter depict conditions laid down by Juan Bautista Romero regarding the establishment of his colony in Mindanao. Dissemination of the image has been authorized by the owner of the intellectual property rights exclusively for private use and teaching and research activities. This is not-for-profit.

The proposal, despite Romero's promotion and constant correspondence with the people essential in the realization of his project, left a lot to be desired by the Spanish government, particularly the Ministerio de Ultramar. However, what finalized the agreement for the Spanish government to consider such an ambitious undertaking was the proposal made by the agronomist and mechanical engineer Estanislao Piera, agronomist Baldomero Poli de Marca, and forester Mariano Julia.³⁴

They wrote a technical paper providing the details of the said colonial plan. Their proposal envisioned a colonization project with the participation of 100 to 20,000 families or an equivalent of 100,000 individuals, with structured urban and rural planning, and the added benefit of net profits to the Spanish government by its end in 5 years.³⁵ It consisted of five parts. They are amply titled as the following:

- I. Purpose, need, and advantages of the project
- II. General Colonization Plan
- III. Technical Details
- IV. Financial Elements for the Project Development

³⁴ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, October 10, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 8, 1.

³⁵ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonizacion para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 18-29.

V. Calculations on the Production

The first part dealt with the authors' statement of purpose and what is to be gained from this colonization project. They believed that Spain's overseas possessions were scarcely populated, which became a constant source of anxiety. Instead of sending Spanish immigrants to these lands, they were sent to places ruled by foreign governments and suffered due to the latter's misgovernance. The authors believed that these migrations would have taken a different course if they were diverted to Spanish possessions suitable for acquisition. The increasing population in those overseas possessions will resolve the disillusionment of the identified migrants and along with it, major political and economic dilemmas of the State. The authors think that the Philippines and its lands will be a good setting for this project.

The second part deals with the general colonization plan. The authors proposed that the colonization effort in the Philippines would be private with direct government aid. They saw this model as the most successful one as observed in colonies of foreign countries. In their proposal, the authors suggested, for the first colony, the giving of 100 hectares for each family with only 25 hectares ready for occupation, as the other 75 will be available for acquisition if he so chooses in the next ten years. They also formulated plans for the division of lots, the establishment of a colonial center, and the initial cost of \$1,165 the government had to bear for the settler families each, which the latter would repay in turn. After five years of continuous occupation and payment, the settler family will be declared owner of the occupied land. After the success of the first colony, the authors intend to attract a total of 20,000 settler families (100,000 individuals) to the Philippines which they think would be sufficient to create a natural and spontaneous movement of people to the Philippines.³⁶

³⁶ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonizacion para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 14.

The third part supposedly contains the chosen locations and the architectural and agricultural designs for the said proposal. However, this simply contains an admission of the authors of their ignorance of the geographical and topographical realities in the Philippines. Until they set foot in the Philippines, they offered a conventional plan working under certain assumptions. They suggested starting their first colony near the mouth of the river to utilize the potential of water transportation. Furthermore, they also discourage the concept of extensive cultivation. They believed that intensive production or tending well to a small space of land is better than a wide but largely neglected piece of land. The colony project will

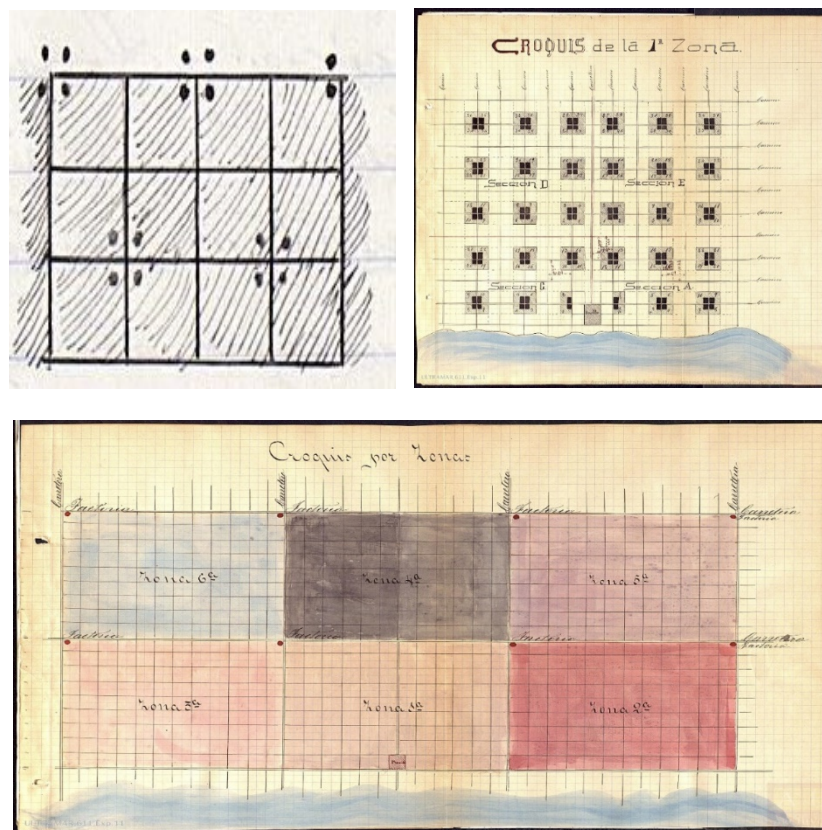


Figure 3. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Sketches of architectural plan on land use from plots, sections, and zones by Piera, Poli de Marca, and Julia (Madrid: Ministerio de Ultramar, 1895). Dissemination of the image has been authorized by the owner of the intellectual property rights exclusively for private use and teaching and research activities. This is not-for-profit.

be undertaken through a colonization plan with the settlement hierarchy consisting of zones, sections, and the respective plots. Each colony will be established in a section, which will contain an urban center with a

manufactory in it. They believed that the division plan was ideal for greater sociability and mutual defense.³⁷

The discussion on the financial elements of the colonization plan consists of ways in which the Spanish government would benefit from this colonial venture economically. The authors believed that migrants, as treated in places like Australia and the United States, not only as labor but also as capital. Providing calculations using the first 100 families of the colonization project, the authors iterate that the Spanish government would have no expenditure for the said project. Instead, it will profit \$4,813,100 based on their projections. However, this is on the condition that the Spanish government will give an initial financial package of \$116,500 for the first 100 families and the opening of securities for the efficient delivery of services required for the operation of the colonies.³⁸

In its final discussion, the authors proposed coffee as one of the primary cash crops in the colony just like in the South American countries. The authors believed that introducing coffee in every plot of the colony would double its value in 3 years. The capital gained in the agricultura, the authors posited, will stay for the settler will put it in a country that protects and cares for the people who prospered because of their work. Although the authors warned that such capital might be used for importation, a poor source of national income, they believed that this would spur growth for manufacturing and commerce. This, in turn, would draw foreign capital that would bolster the national wealth.³⁹

Even though there are still numerous subjects in the Iberian peninsula that could be viable candidates for this colonization project, the Spanish immigrants made this proposal as a result of the circumstances they experienced in Argentina. Furthermore, Spanish economic policies in the 1890s suggest that sending Iberian subjects to the overseas colonies would be the last thing on the Madrid government's mind since it is pursuing a

³⁷ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonización para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 14-18.

³⁸ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonización para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 18-29.

³⁹ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonización para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 30-33.

policy of anti-globalization, protecting its traditional sectors and local industries.⁴⁰ Moreover, it is also no surprise that it was the immigrants who made these proposals due to the fact that they were voluntary migrants. Citing the study of Portes and Rumbaut, there are two types of immigrants: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary immigrants have the physical, economic, educational, social and emotional resources to make the transition process. They also tend to be motivated by socio-economic factors.⁴¹ Immigrants like Romero, Piera, Poli, Julia, Codina, and others migrated in line with the spirit of the times as indicated by Moya on the four macrostructural dimensions in his book on Spanish immigration to Argentina.

In the proposals written to the Ministerio de Ultramar, all proponents (Romero and Piera and Co.) suggest themselves to be colonial agents, wholly in charge of the recruitment, selection, and transportation of the settlers for a fee.⁴² However, a full presentation of the applicants was presented to the Queen Regent of Spain in a September 18, 1896 letter expressing the applicants' desire to undertake the said colonization project. The letter contained the names of the heads of 124 families, amounting to 470 individuals.⁴³ However, the list was also shelved for approval pending the conclusion of the study of the proposals.

The project, unfortunately, was left to be studied by the Ministry for years. By 1896, the Philippine Revolution broke out and started a breakdown of public order that the Spanish colonial government never recovered from. No significant additions were made to the folio beyond October 11, 1897, when a cabinet formation in the Spanish government introduced a new Ministro de Ultramar.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Albert Carreras and Xavier Tafunell, *Between Empire and Globalization* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2021) 93-95.

⁴¹ Uma Anand Segal, Doreen Elliott, and Nazneen S. Mayadas, *Immigration Worldwide: Policies, Practices, and Trends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 6.

⁴² Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, June 30, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 3, 2-3. ; Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonizacion para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 18-23.

⁴³ Letter of the Spanish Immigrants in Argentina to the Queen Regent, September 18, 1896.

⁴⁴ Mariano Codina, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, October 11, 1897", in the folio *Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 14.

The Spanish Immigrants' Settler Colonialist Designs in the Philippines

In line with Greer's structures of colonial development, *Proyecto de colonización* is evidence of the intended departure from what we can call imperial and commercial penetration policy in the Philippines. Rather than merely competing for control of native labor in support of trade and fulfillment of its imperialistic agenda, *Proyecto de colonización* presented a trend of ideas to permanently populate the Philippines with Spanish settlers for territorial integrity and economic development.

Throughout the folio *Proyecto de colonización*, the Spanish immigrants emphasize the need for the Spanish government to establish permanent colonies consisting of settler-farmers to its benefit. When Juan Bautista Romero first conferred with the Ministerio de Ultramar regarding the situation of Spanish nationals, he suggested that rather than allowing Spanish emigrants to travel to the South American republics, they should instead be diverted to existing colonies like Cuba, and Puerto Rico, and in the Philippines where emigrants should be assigned work in the agricultural, industrial, service, and professional sectors alongside giving them access to land ownership.⁴⁵ This letter presented the idea of turning Spanish colonies like the Philippines into permanent settlements for Spanish nationals with them serving as a labor force in all aspects of the economy. Such sentiments were not shared by Romero alone. Piera, Poli de Marca, and Julia also expressed:

*Estos innumerables elementos de produccion hubiesen quiza, emprendido otro rumbo a haber tenido conocuento de que tanto Filipinas como Cuba ofrecian ancho y Seguro campo o su actividad natural ambicion, y ello sin salir de su patria en pasar aja estraños dominaciones, fomentando a la por su propia fortuna que la de su nacion, fin que habia de hacerlos doblemente llevadero el sacrificio que supone siempre un cambio de hogar y de pais.*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, July 9, 1891", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 1.

⁴⁶ Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonización para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 5-6.

(These innumerable elements of production, perhaps they would have taken another course if they had been aware that both the Philippines and Cuba offered a wide and safe field for their natural ambition, and this without leaving their homeland to pass under foreign dominions, promoting the country by their fortune than that of their nation, an end that had to make the sacrifice that a change of home and country always entails doubly bearable.)

Also, the group led by Mariano Codina argued:

Que en contrandor sus trabajo y teniendo aptitud intele[c]tual y fisco, para dedicarse a las labores agricolas, se han fijado en la exhaberante vegetacion, que ofrece la Ysla del Archipielago Filipino, yen particular, la de Mindanao, propoviendo a Vuestra Excelencia, si asi lo acordare, establecer alli una gran colonia agricola, que a lavez, que explote en provecho propio agual preciosisismo terreno, sin igual, proporciona al Estado, una nueva fuente de rigueza, a hun, improductiva.⁴⁷

(That in recognition of their work and having the intellectual and physical aptitude to dedicate themselves to agricultural work, they have focused on the exuberant vegetation offered by the Island of the Philippine Archipelago, and in particular, that of Mindanao, offering Your Excellency If so agreed, establish a large agricultural colony there, which at the same time, exploits the preciousness of the land for its benefit, without equal, provides the State with a new source of wealth, which is still unproductive.)

Settler colonialism should be treated as a surprise proposal of deviation from colonial policy within the Spanish empire. For three hundred years of control over its possessions, permanently populating these territories with settlers was not part of its colonial ambitions and beyond attracting the much-needed religious, bureaucratic, and military personnel needed to exert control over these lands. Henceforth, the folio suggests that settler colonialism was not a structure solicited by the government in Madrid. Instead, this was more of the Spanish immigrants' designs drawn from their

⁴⁷ Mariano Codina, Sarbador Pratz, Agustin Martin, Manuel Castegor, Timoteo Lapuste, and Ventura Santos, "Letter to the Ministry of State, August 27, 1896", in the folio Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 10, 1.

observations and experiences during their stay on the American continents. Piera and others, in a clear way, expressed:

*Ejemplas clamentes nos han ofrecido es su vida colonial Inglaterra, Francia, Italia y Portugal y nuestra Patria en su largo historia de brillante conquistas en todas partes del mundo perdidos casi todos, al cabo despues de enormes sacrifice de vidas y capitals.*⁴⁸

(Clear examples that England, France, Italy, and Portugal have offered us are their colonial life and our Homeland in its long history of brilliant conquests in all parts of the world, almost all of them lost, at the end after enormous sacrifice of lives and capital.)

These statements are in agreement with Kenneth Good's that settler colonialism is self-propelled, with settlers leading policy development more than the metropole. This is because they have a primary interest in considering the long-term consequences of the project more than the politicians and bureaucrats.

However, the folio cannot confirm Andrea Smith's theory about the idea of settler colonialism anchored on the concept of genocide, the systematic elimination of the indigenous population, and their eventual replacement with settlers. Noteworthy, proposals in the folio did not mention much regarding the status of the native populations except for certain instances in the Piera and company's proposal intending to use the indigenous people as a source of labor for the colony. Speculatively, Romero's mention of his supposed ventures in Misiones and Patagonia⁴⁹ indicates ominous implications for what might have happened to the native populations in Mindanao if his proposal went through. During his time, Misiones and Patagonia were Argentinian territories that experienced the onslaught of settler colonialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These led to indigenous populations' eviction of their lands in favor of the settlers as the Argentine government wished to develop the frontier. Since

⁴⁸Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonizacion para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 3.

⁴⁹ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Ministro de Ultramar, June 22, 1895", in the folio Proyecto de colonizacion en Filipinas compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 2.1, 1.

we cannot treat this colony proposal and the eventual settlement of Mindanao by Christian Filipinos as the same, we cannot confirm the insights of Bulag, Maddison, Mamdani, Hitchcock, et al., and Veracini would be true to the former just like with the latter.

However, a study of literature written about the American settlement in Mindanao and Japanese colonies in Davao may help us forebode possible consequences if the Spanish colonization project pull through. Charbonneau iterated that the American community viewed Mindanao as “empty space”, ready for settlement and occupation. Government and media positively promoted and covered the Moro province and its existing white settlers and entrepreneurs.⁵⁰ However, this encountered resistance since other sectors of the American community believed that the empowerment of the local population, particularly the Muslim and indigenous population, would contribute to Mindanao having a greater share in the global economy.⁵¹ According to Lualhati Abreu, the laws passed by the Philippine Commission did not only affect the Christian migrants intended by the Americans to settle in the island of Mindanao. Their provisions, which favors individual property, affected negatively the Muslim communities dependent on communal and semi-communal systems of land ownership. Most untitled ancestral lands were landgrabbed by American firms from the Moro and indigenous peoples.⁵²

Abinales’ writings on the Davao colonies of the Japanese (Davao Kuo) relayed how Japanese settled in Davao not by outrightly taking lands away from the natives but through the process of direct purchase, intermarriage, and the formation of joint ventures with Filipinos willing to play as dummies on behalf of the Japanese. The Filipino officials helped the Japanese in moving the indigenous populations away from land marked for cultivation. The Japanese contribution to the Philippine economy and their growing influence with it was threatened by increasing anti-Japanese sentiment due to international events. However, the soft political maneuvering of the Japanese

⁵⁰ Oliver Charbonneau, “A New West in Mindanao’: Settler Fantasies on the U.S. Imperial Fringe,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 03 (2019), 8.

⁵¹ Oliver Charbonneau, “A New West in Mindanao”, 9-10.

⁵² Maria Isabel B. Aguilar and Alvin A. Camba, “Sui Generis: The Political Economy of the Philippines during the Spanish Colonial Regime,” in *The Moro Reader: History and Contemporary Struggles of the Bangsamoro People*, ed. Bobby M. Tuazon (Quezon City, Philippines: CenPeg Books, 2008), 23.

community in various levels of Philippine government enabled them to stay longer until the onset of the war.⁵³

Penveene's establishment of settler colonialism's relation with foreign policy can be confirmed by the Spanish immigrants' suggestion that territorial integrity, promotion of foreign trade, and fiscal buildup to finance the overseas war through the approval of their settlement plans. They hoped to increase their proposals' chances of approval. They did this by presenting the benefits the Madrid government will reap at no great cost in pursuit of its international ambitions.⁵⁴ The writings showed their unabating awareness of various contemporary Spanish involvements abroad.

The *Proyecto de colonización* presented a different take and perspective on Spain's colonial attitudes. Concurring with Veracini's idea that settler colonialism is not an event but a structure, the proposal showed that Spanish policy towards its overseas territories was not static but was in flux. The intentions and designs of the Spanish immigrants fall within what would categorically be settler colonialism as established by the presented literature above. Greer's conceptualization of different structures of colonialism shows that the Philippines would have been on a different form of colonialism if the Argentine proposals or their likes were approved. Even though the proposal failed to seek approval and the chance to see it in action was lost, the dynamics of the Christian settlers, Moros, and Indigenous Peoples presented a tentative picture of what it would have looked like. However, it's also important to consider the implications of settler colonialism on the relations of the settler, the metropole, and the global stage.

⁵³ Patricio N. Abinales, "Davao-kuo: The Political Economy of a Japanese Settler Zone in Philippine Colonial Society," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 59–82, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656197x00127>.

⁵⁴ Juan Bautista Romero, "Letter to Palace Chamberlain, June 30, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 4, 1-2. ; Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia, "Proyecto de colonización para Filipinas, October 21, 1895", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 7, 3-7. ; Mariano Codina, Sarbador Pratz, Agustín Martín, Manuel Castegor, Timoteo Lapuste, and Ventura Santos, "Letter to the Ministry of State, August 27, 1896", in the folio *Proyecto de colonización en Filipinas* compiled by Archivo Historico Nacional as Ultramar 611/11 no. 10, 2-3.

Conclusion

The *Proyecto de colonizacion* is one out of many that proves the horizon for Philippine historical studies is ever-widening, particularly during the country's colonial era. As more documents become available and accessible to the public, more historians will be able to bring those hidden narratives to life. New narratives offer new insights. These new insights will lead to new ways on how the Philippines should be seen by itself and with the world.

The study of the conversation in the *Proyecto de colonizacion* folio has shed more light on the state of the Philippines' history that the 1890s is more than the age of revolution. Narratives and historical memories of the Spanish colonial period are still in flux and leave much to be desired. Furthermore, the study of *Proyecto de colonizacion* also gives a chance to Mindanao, often a victim of historical myopia or neglect to be at the forefront of discussion. It showed how the decisive defeat of the Moros, during the last Spanish military campaign in Mindanao, turned into an opportunity for Spanish emigrants to propose creating a permanent settlement for their benefit and the metropolitan Spain. It led to the realization the Philippines was more than just a lonely Spanish colony in Southeast Asia. *Proyecto de colonizacion* demonstrated how the Philippines is connected to a network of Spanish colonies of a waning empire struggling to come back.

The analysis of the folio also led to breaks from the routinary discourse that it was the Church and the colonial government that dominated a static Spanish colonial ideology in the Philippines. Giving opportunities for voices of individuals like Juan Bautista Romero, Estanislao Piera, Baldomero Poli de Marca, and Mariano Julia proved that there were attempts to deviate from what Greer labeled as imperial/commercial exploitation and give way to settler colonialism decades before Christian Filipinos started settling in Mindanao. Even though there is a strong reliance on institutions' overarching sway over a society's historical development, individual initiative and the role of luck should not be taken for granted.

Due to an economic crisis and the surmounting political instability in the countries they resided in, Spanish emigrants hoped to find any green pasture within the Spanish Empire short of repatriation. They sought arable land for their own in a place supposedly inhabited by an indigenous population under the control of colonial administrators. However, like any settler colony studied in the past, the authors of the proposals, in *Proyecto de colonizacion*, are self-propelled. They wanted to work with, not for, the Spanish colonial administration. They sought land already inhabited by an indigenous population. They are also not afraid to utilize violence to protect their interest. Even though the proposals were not given final approval, their

probable impact on the indigenous population would be no different in comparison to Christian settlers.

Proyecto de colonización does not delve into the question of whether Muslims and Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao could have avoided their present conditions as a result of settler colonialism and extractivism. However, the study of the folio helps in reaching an understanding of the motivations and intentions of individuals and groups, including Muslims and Indigenous Peoples acting on such a colonial structure, still pervasive in the present. What the Spanish immigrants, from Argentina, had proposed can be compared with settler colonialism embodied by Christian Filipinos and see what changes and what remains. The historical study of the evolution of settler colonialism in the Philippines can help in the creation of a new politico-economic system that is responsive and accountable for all.

While settler colonialism is acknowledged as a significant presence in the Philippines, its scholarly exploration remains limited, with the theoretical framework often overlooked. *Proyecto de colonización* exemplifies one of many proposals for establishing permanent settlements in the Philippines, offering valuable insights into settler colonial ideologies. Future research should prioritize investigating the pervasive nature of settler colonialism in Philippine society, its structural underpinnings, and its diverse manifestations. Additionally, there is a pressing need to explore the historical impact of settler colonialism on gender relations, culture, education, and health. Furthermore, it is essential to examine settler colonial dynamics in overlooked regions such as Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and the Cordilleras. Leveraging increased digitization and accessibility of archival materials, researchers are encouraged to delve into subjects diverging from national historical narratives, employing interdisciplinary perspectives to enrich analyses and broaden understanding.

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