The Subanens, original Inhabitants of Western Mindanao

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Immigrants from Luzon and the Visayas, and some from foreign countries who adopted Zamboanga Peninsula their permanent residence are now called Zamboanguenos. And they are all Zamboanguenos for all intents and purposes.

There are hundreds of thousands of immigrants here that made up the chore of economic, social and religious life of this Peninsula. We have to take note that the expertise, investments and presence of these immigrants contributed to the present progress and glitter of cities and towns in the Peninsula that we now enjoy.

What is the physical composition of Zamboanga Peninsula? There are three (3) Provinces and four (4) Cities within Zamboanga Peninsula, contiguous and its people similar in culture and aspirations.

But who populated Zamboanga Peninsula before immigrants from Luzon and the Visayas, and some foreigners immigrated here and stayed for good and are now certified Zamboanguenos?

We are talking about three to four hundred years ago. It is established by historical facts and by oral history handed down from generations that Zamboanga Peninsula was populated by the Subanen tribal peoples.

When the Chinese came to trade and the Spaniards came to colonize this place centuries ago, they found no one but Sama people populating the coastal areas and the Subanen tribal peoples populating the highlands of Zamboanga City. The Subanen Timu-ay (Chieftain) resided in Pulo
Bato, now renamed Pulong Bato in upper Pasonanca. This whole area then was named Sembu-an (A Subanen word for a “place to welcome people”).

As the years went on, the Subanens imitated the Spanish Language and it then evolved into what is now known as the Chavacano dialect.

Many Subanen maidens were also impregnated by the Spaniards and gave birth to blue or yellow eyed and fair complexioned babies we call Meztizo! Are there still remnants of this beautiful people hereabouts?

My Maternal Subanen ancestors did not like the Spaniards so they left their villages built around at what is now Plaza Pershing and Pasonanca and settled to what is now the province of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Sibugay Provinces.

One of the many reasons why the Subanens did not like the Spaniards was because they were forced to adopt a strange religion that worship idols and burn incense on their altars.

The Subanen tribal peoples were then Animists. They believe in a supreme being with many gods to guard practically anything on Earth. So the Subanen had lesser gods to guard rivers, houses, forests and even farms, among others.

Hopefully, these historical facts will correct certain misconceptions about who is a Zamboangueno. The fact is any man on Earth can come here, established his residence, learn the Chavacano dialect and presto! We will have a brand new Zamboangueno!

But history leads the way to shed light on those who may have misconceptions on our history or cannot distinguish between a Zamboangueno and a Chavacano, or putting it more clearly, between immigrants and original inhabitants.

Although we agree that as of now all permanent residents are known as Zamboanguenos in this Peninsula, we cannot ignore historical facts proving that before immigrants from Luzon and the Visayas, and some foreigners settled here, the Subanens and Sama Tribal peoples were already established as residents of what is now the Zamboanga Peninsula centuries earlier.

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