

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF MORO HISTORY

Abdullah T. Madale

This paper intends to discuss the educational implications of Moro history, a subject which, recently, has not only become popular but controversial as a result of current developments in Southern Philippines. However, in this short paper I shall define Moro history without attempting to go into the deeper implications of that term. It is my hope that the other papers in this seminar will serve that function.

For my purposes, Moro history refers to the history of Islamized peoples in Southern Philippines, whom the Spaniards called collectively "Moros" or "Moors," because of their similarities with the Moors of Morocco. Until a few years ago, "Moro" carried a pejorative meaning¹ and even the most educated Muslim tended to avoid using the word to refer to himself and other Filipino Muslims. Today, however, the term Moro and most everything that it stands for has become a badge of acceptability if not of honor, although there are still Filipino Muslims who would rather be known just as "Muslims" than by any other name.

On this subject, there are questions that may be raised such as follows: If the term Moro died with the Spanish regime in the Philippines, did it get resurrected only in present times? Or, did the term continue to survive unaltered since the Spanish times? Also, can we consider Moro history distinct from Philippine history; that is, did these two histories begin separately only to reach a point of congruence? And finally, how far can we penetrate into Moro history?

We shall now leave the above questions for historians to answer while we deviate a bit to see how Filipino scholars — or at least some of them — now perceive the term Moro. The writings of Dr. Cesar Adib Majul,² for one, use the term Moro almost interchangeably with Muslim, although the term Moro is preferred when he discusses the confrontations between Muslims and Spaniards; calling these confrontations the

Moro-Spanish Wars. Melvin Mednick,³ for his part, wrote seven Moro historical studies. He used the term Moro to refer to Muslims in Southern Philippines in his articles. As a matter of fact he titled one of his major articles "Some Problems of Moro History and Political Organization." Another Filipino historian of some importance, F. Delor Angeles, wrote about "Moro Wars," referring to the wars between the Islamized peoples and the Spaniards.

A cursory examination of Philippine history books including textbooks used in the three levels of education in Philippine schools indicates a growing awareness on the part of Filipino writers to use the term Muslim and not Moro, presumably in their desire not to hurt the sensibilities of Muslims.

One notes from the preliminary discussion above why it is important that a clarification of the definition of "Moro" (and subsequently, "Moro history") is necessary, if only to guide unknowing scholars and students from being misled by the historical development of the meaning of that term. In other words, we need to agree whether in the context of Philippine history, "Moro" can be used interchangeably with "Muslim," or whether "Moro" refers to "Muslim" in the Spanish and American times. Of course, still a third meaning of the term would be even possible. It could refer to a group of Filipinos who have lost their identity and now seek it.

A clear definition of "Moro" and "Muslim" should be the first step, therefore, in minimizing the pejorative connotations of the former, so that the Moro peoples can be viewed as part of this nation – the Filipino people. Also, this definition should be the first step in correcting an old and popular but erroneous notion regarding the role that the Moros have played in Philippine history, in order that this role can be properly presented to the impressionable minds of students who, as a result of colonial educational training, have viewed the Moros as acting on the side of the villains rather than of the heroes in history.

Who are the Moros and where are they found? To some scholars, this question may be seeking for answers that are much too obvious to dwell upon. However, one cannot disagree with Melvin Mednick who made the observation that "despite their importance, the Moros are probably the least known major group in Mindanao" – the least

known, that is, to a good number of people, many of whom are themselves Filipinos. Probably, therefore, to dwell briefly on the obvious at this point of this paper would not be entirely a tedious undertaking.

If we accept the fact that the Moros are the Islamized Filipino groups, then the term "Moro" certainly refers to the Tau Sug of Sulu, the Maguindanao of the Cotabato provinces, the Maranao of the Lanao provinces, the Samal of Tawi-tawi, the Jama Mapun of Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi, the Melebugnon of Davao, the Yakan of Basilan and the Sangils of Davao Gulf. To the uninitiated the term Moro may be taken to mean only one ethno-linguistic group. Actually, the Moros possess different and varying socio-cultural backgrounds. They speak different dialects belonging to the Philippine group of languages. Each Moro group occupies more or less a separate geographical area. The terrain in these areas ranges from coral reefs, as in the case of the territories of the Tau Sug and the Samal, to upland plateaus as in the case of those of the Maranao, and from volcanic islands to lowland plains, as in the case of those of the Maguindanao.

The various groups also differ in size of population and density as well as settlement pattern. Four of the Moro groups, namely, the Tau Sug, Maranao, Maguindanao and Samal constitute fully ninety-two per cent of the Moro population while the Yakan numbered only 30,000 and the smallest groups only 6,000.

Even the history and political development of the Moros differ. The Tau Sug, for example, have a long and important direct contact with Borneo, Malaya and Indonesia and more remotely with India and China. On the other hand, the Maguindanao had much the same contacts although to a lesser degree, while the Maranao had their contacts with other Muslim group outside the Philippines in more recent times.

These are some of the differences which may be lost when we take the Moros as one group and not as ethno-linguistic groups tied together by their profession of Islam, the religion of peace.

But what are the educational implications of Moro history?

First: It is time we give serious consideration to the study of Moro history, not only because of its importance in the making of Philippine history, but because very little is known about it. This paucity of knowledge contributes to misunderstandings between Moros and Christians.

It is significant to note that President Marcos has given recognition to Moro culture when he said that the culture of the Muslims and Islam is a part of Philippine culture.

However, giving serious thought and consideration to Moro history and studies is, of course, easier said than done, if we consider the fact that even the little that is known in this country of Moro history and culture is distorted and insufficient to give the Moros the importance that they deserve in the making of the Filipino nation. If I may recall my study on the textbooks used in public elementary schools in the Muslim areas, I found that fully ninety per cent of these textbooks surveyed either contained very little true facts about the Muslims or tended to paint the wrong picture about them.

Courses in Social Studies in the elementary grades and History in high school and college do not treat Moro history and culture fairly. In fact most of the information presented in these courses are those that were written by Spanish writers or by Filipino scholars who merely echoed the writings of the former. Consequently, when Muslim students finish their courses they end up befuddled over the little or indeed the lack of contribution of their forebears to Philippine history, while their Christian classmates proceed to become professionals, carrying with them wrong information about the Muslims. A situation such as this certainly cannot develop unity among Filipinos.

If I may cite some examples to illustrate my point, I wish to recall the time when I enrolled at Philippine Normal College, a leading teacher-training institution in the Philippines. As soon as our classmates found out that I was a Moro, they bombarded me with silly questions like: Do Moros have tails? Is it true that Moros have black teeth? Then one would sidle up to me and ask with a glitter in his eye: *Ilan ba ang asawa mo?*

On other occasions I became the center of attraction in parties when our hostess would announce, pointing to the food on the table: *Muslim ito si Abdullah, kaya hindi siya puwedeng kumain nang baboy.* Then she would point out the dishes containing pork. Later I would

find my plate loaded with chicken, fish and vegetables by solicitous friends who think that my not eating pork should be compensated for by lots of chicken, etc.

My suggestion as a first step would be the inclusion of Moro history and culture in the curriculum of Philippine schools in all levels. This would mean the revision of textbooks and reference materials, including history books dealing with Philippine history, in order to include Moro history and culture. In this task Muslim writers and scholars must play an important part. Rather than curse the darkness of Philippine history we should now begin to light the candle which would illumine us all.

Second: we must consider Moro history and culture as part and parcel of Philippine history and culture. If we do this then we can eliminate the gap that divides Moros and Christians of this country. This is possible especially if we can reexamine and place Moro history and culture in their proper lights in such a manner that they would become a part of an enriched and invigorated history and culture which need not depend upon western influences.

One common misconception which many Christian Filipinos entertain is that Islam, the religion of the Moro people, is merely a religion and not a culture or a civilizing force. And yet, a cursory reading of world history will show that the history of Islam is rich, long and dynamic and had been, as it still is, an active component in the shaping of mankind's destiny. For example, the history of members of Dar-ul-Islam is a force to reckon with in any discussion or consideration of world peace, because in the areas where Muslims are found peace cannot be achieved without their active and positive involvement.

Third: Being a historic people, the Moros possess a culture and religion of their own which are distinct from those of Christians. On the other hand, both Moros and Christians also possess similar traits or characteristics which identify them with the Malayan race. It is therefore important that in the educational system we give due recognition to the culture and religion of the Moros by maximizing areas of congruence and minimizing areas of disagreements. Such effort could result in developing tolerance to and acceptance of a culture and a religion different from what a person possesses. This, in turn, leads to broad-

mindedness and effective and peaceful co-existence.

It is a truism in Philippine education that while there are efforts to relate this education to the Moros and other cultural communities, the effort is at best a mere *palabas*, because of the insistence of educational policy makers to "mold" Philippine education in their own images, if I may borrow a religious cliché. We must therefore abandon the idea of making educational policies which use only one pattern or one mold. We should create a synthesis of several different but ultimately similar molds in order that schools in various parts of the country, including both Christian and Muslim, could become effective instruments not only for the development of skills and trades, but also for the achievement of different and varying socio-cultural and religious needs, ambitions and aspirations.

To be able to achieve this significant reform in Philippine education, we need to develop Muslim scholars and allow those who are already qualified to participate actively in policy-making. The leadership of Mindanao State University is a beautiful example of an opportunity for Muslim educators to assist the national conscience in rectifying past historical errors and in charting a new direction for Moro-Christian relationship which is based on equality.

Of course, Muslim educators must sever their umbilical cords from their political, fraternal or religious parents in order that they can act, think, and decide wisely and independently. For once in their lives, Muslim educators must become men and women with a single purpose: to spread the benefits of education to their unfortunate brethren. It is a herculean task for a Muslim to try to become independent and strong, but he has no choice if he desires to carve a name for himself not only as a Muslim educator but as an educator.

Fourth: The understanding and appreciation of Moro history and culture demands that we revise the educational system in a manner which would give the Muslim child an opportunity equal to that of his Christian brethren to acquire a decent and fruitful education. What this means is giving the Moro an education which must begin from childhood — from his highly impressionable years up to the time of his maturity. Such school system, aside from exposing him to the different world cultures, should equip him with the necessary skills, habits,

trades, and knowledges to make him a good Muslim and a good Filipino citizen. I vehemently disagree, however, with the contention of certain Filipino educators that, to become good Filipino citizens, the Muslims must renounce their indigenous culture and adopt the popular Filipino culture which actually means, in present times and under present circumstances, adopting the Christian culture.

What I propose is a system of education which would allow both Moros and Christians to achieve what they think are their aims and goals in life as Moros or Christians and, at the same time, as citizens of the Philippines. This means that we should draw up a curriculum which is not exclusivistic in the sense of appealing only to one group but eclectic in the sense of containing the best from the two cultures – of the Moros and of the Christians – in order to achieve the goals of both peoples.

The revision of the present system of education must also mean more financial support so as to allow the provision of classrooms, libraries and laboratories, books, i.e., textbooks, references and teachers' guides, better and well-educated teachers, spacious school sites and better-administered institutions of learning. This sounds like a tall order. However, we have no choice but to correct past mistakes and actively direct our course – or we shall continue to flounder in the ocean of failure.

Recent studies on education in Muslim areas are very disappointing, if not downright revolting. It we consider the fact that education has become acceptable only to the Moros in recent years, it is depressing to realize that, now that the Moros understand education, the available schools are irrelevant to their needs, ambitions and aspirations. Schools such as Mindanao State University, which are attempting to become relevant, can do only so much because of the poor elementary and secondary preparation of students from the Muslim areas. As a result we have a situation where, over a period of fifteen years, Mindanao State University spent more than P 200 million pesos to produce

about 1200 graduates, only 1/6th of which belong to the cultural community groups that it was established to serve.

The external units of Mindanao State University which are found in strategic cultural community areas in the Minsupala region are trying their best to be relevant, but without the necessary direction and financial support they can only do little, if at all. The solution, therefore, to all these problems is to set up a complementary system of education for the Moros which would give them a better chance to be competitive as Muslims and Filipino citizens. As we always say, the real battle is not in the highways, mountains and hills where bullets snuff out at a whiff the life of a person, but in the classrooms and schoolrooms where old maids and absent-minded professors give away to student the thread with which to weave of his life a web of goodness or evil.

Fifth: We must learn from the lessons of Moro history that in the making of educational policies or programs, we should be guided by the mistakes of the past, such as those committed by Spaniards and Americans in the development of an educational system. Moro history teaches us that we must accept other peoples and other religions as important, even if they are different from ours. We must also accept the fact that education should be not only for the elite but for everyone – young or old, rich or poor alike. As the Holy Qur'an so aptly puts it, one must seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. Islam also puts much emphasis on the worth and importance of scholars when it taught that the ink of the scholar is mightier than the sword of the martyr. The Hadith, the life and sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him), also recalls that scholars are forgiven from missing their prayers while others are not. In fact the scholars' place in the Muslim hierarchy is next to that of the Prophet.

These are only a few of the more significant educational implications of Moro history which we believe should be discussed in this seminar. To be sure there could be other educational implications but suffice it to say that there is an urgent need for the re-examination of Moro history in order to improve the present system of education among the Moros so that they may be able to achieve their aims and goals in life as Muslims and as citizens of the Philippines.

FOOTNOTES

¹ The term Moro used to mean "pirate," "brigand," or "ignorant," as found in most Philippine history books.

² Cesar Majul, **Muslims in the Philippines** (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973)

³ Melvin Mednick, "Some Problems of Moro History and Political Organization," as quoted in **The Muslim Filipinos**. Eds. Robert McAmis and Peter Gowing (Manila: Solidaridad, 1974) pp. 26-27.