

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM LITERATURE

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It may be necessary to define the meaning of "Muslim literature" as it is used in this paper. It may either mean *literature written produced by Muslims* or *literature written on or about the Muslims*. Correctly so, the logical reference is more to the latter because there has been very little literature written by Muslims who have only recently awakened to the significant role written literature plays in the struggle for social progress and well-being. The Muslims failed to develop the kind of intellectual societies in the Middle East where one of the richest repositories of knowledge is found. The apparent lack of interest in literary pursuits was not due to lack of native talent or intelligence but was due to a number of factors which tended to hinder or discourage the development of intellectual activities.

1. There was no intellectual atmosphere in Philippine Muslim societies in which debate or controversy could stimulate the production of a variety of literary forms in the same way that Hellenistic and other non-Islamic influences created in the Middle East the kind of intellectual exchanges which resulted in voluminous literary achievements. The Muslims, relatively secure from outside fears, were content to just the verbal articulation of their intellectual energies.

2. The Spanish language was never encouraged in the same manner that Latin, Greek, or Arabic was in the Middle East or Europe. So that, Spanish anti-Muslim literature never got into Muslim consciousness and, therefore, could not generate any meaningful intellectual reaction, vital to literary development. The only contact Muslims and Spaniards has was in armed conflict which persisted throughout the Spaniards rule.

3. There was no common linguistic vehicle in Muslim societies through which Muslim intellectual resources could be channeled. The *jawi* which was derived from the *Arabic* and which could have served as an excellent means was limited to a few in the upper crust of Muslim societies. It was not properly developed and propagated through a system of mass education in the same manner that other languages were. The local languages thus remained the oral vehicles of intellectual communications within Muslim societies but devoid of the scriptological compliment essential in the development of written literature. It was not until Frank Laubach introduced the literary method in the

1930s, first, in Lanao, and then, in other parts of the Philippines that the Muslims were able to acquire at least an elementary knowledge of English and the use of the modern alphabet which subsequently opened their vast literary traditions.

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4. The frequencies of conflicts in Muslim societies prevented in development of a leisure class which could provide a nucleus for intellectual stimulation and growth. The energies of the people, particularly the intelligent, the creative, and the upper class, were consumed in costly feudal warfare, colonial wars, and non-productive labors.

The Muslim people, however, have not lost their vast literary talents and their love for poetry, narratives, epics, etc. They have, in their own unique way, succeeded in preserving a vast amount of oral literature which has been handed down from group to group, from generation to generation by poets, reciters, and singers.

II

As already said, Muslim literature may be categorized into written and oral. The oral literature are the poems, riddles, wise sayings, short narratives, sermons, and epics which are called in the native by various names: *darangan*, *parangsabil*, *kissa*, *katakata*, *tukud-tukud*, *khutbas*, etc. There are as many varieties of forms and themes, not necessarily structures, as there are Muslim ethnic groups in the Philippines. An examination of some of the oral literature will reveal certain patterns of development which might permit some degree of facility in the classification and analysis of this type of literature.

Perhaps, Muslim epics might offer a good basis for study and analysis of Muslim literary talents. The *Bantugan* epic is a good specimen to show the kind of native talent or mind which went into the creation of the Magindanao epic tradition. The development of the story from Bantugan's successful search for his sister, Princess Ulaunan, to his triumphant conflict with a Spanish general over Sultan Manialungan's daughter, and, finally, to his miraculous transformation with his Princess into a mountain and an island in the face of an impending military defeat by the Spanish General reveals the kind of optimism which has always characterized the attitudes of the Muslims in battle. It is an optimism which is not affected by difficulties nor obliterated by death. This epic seemed to have undergone variations. Another version of this epic is found in Maranao literature suggesting possible borrowing between the two societies and not

necessarily the primacy of one epic tradition over another. The geographic proximity of the two societies might explain the dual existence not only of the Bantugan epic but also of other similar stories.

A good example of Maranao epic literature is *Maharadia Lawana* which is not duplicated in other Muslim societies including Cotabato. It portrays the triumphant but risky adventures of two datus, Manangini and Mangarwana, who end up killing the wicked Lawana in his own palace and recovering from him the abducted Princess Potre Taia whose purity has been preserved by some kind of supernatural intervention. The absence of any reference to colonial influence or features makes the epic a Pre-Hispanic creation and the absence of any reference to Islam takes the time of the epic to Pre-Islamic. Its similarity in theme and structure to the *Kamayana* makes it, one of India's contributions to the development of Maranao literature.

The *parangsabil* is the epic tradition of Sulu. It is distinct from that of Lanao or Cotabato and does not show any influence from either Magindanao or Maranao literature. Nor does it also show any converse influence on the two literary traditions. The geo-political isolation of Sulu from the rest of Mindanao prevents any meaningful exchanges between Muslims of Sulu and those of Mindanao. The *parangsabil* is usually recited in the evening and over some kind of merriment. It lasts from seven to ten days or more depending on the speed of the reciter and the length of the epic. It varies from community to community or from region to region. It increases in length through time incorporating the most notable events or conflicts in the course of its development. Its principal characteristic is *conflict* around which revolve all poetical, musical, and literary elements. It is in effect a primary source for the study of Tausug armed struggle as viewed from local perspective. Because of its assimilating process, it is in reality a distinct type of historical narrative which complements the *sarsila*----- the brief and chronological account of the Sultanate. An example of this type of literature is the "Parang Sabil of Abdulla Putli", sung by Indah nnura of Jolo. This epic might have been developed in the Spanish or post-Spanish period because of its reference to the "kastila". But the *parangsabils* of Takbirul, a noted reciter-singer of Siasi go probably to pre-Spanish origin because of the absence of references to the Spanish era. There are, however, later *paransabils* which include Sulu's struggle against Spanish and American power Majul thinks that this type of literature might have been introduced from Southeast Asia, possibly Sumatra although an indigenous origin might not be highly improbable.

The *kissa* and *katakata* are distinctly Sulu narratives usually told overnight. There is, however, no source or study describing the characteristic of each type. But it seems that the *kissa* is shorter and is generally intended for immediate completion in one story-telling.

But the *katakata* may be told over a period of one to two days or nights and assumes variations in context or plot although not necessarily in characters. Therefore, it stands as an intermediate form between the *kissa* and the *parangsabil*. An example of the *kissa* is *Ama Iyun, Ina Gandil, Lunsay Buhok, or Manik Buwangsi*. An example of *katakata* is *Abunnawas* or *Pusung* which is common among Tausug and Samal societies of Zamboanga, Basilan, and Sulu. But there is one point which should be mentioned in connection with the Sulu narratives: the *parangsabil* is recited and sung while the *kissa* and *katakata* are only recited or told. There is no explanation suggested by any study. It seems that the integration of literary and musical elements in the *parangsabil* was needed as a literary device to neutralize the boring effect of the long and continuous recitation of the epic. But whether the *parangsabil* is literature or music is a question to which there is no definite answer. It requires a determination of the point where literature ends and Music begins and this is difficult.

Other types of Muslim oral literature include the *khutbas* and *tukud-tukud* which are common in Muslim societies of Mindanao and Sulu. The *khutbas* are sermons of *imama, panditas, hadjis*, and other religious leaders containing references to political matters as well as religious obligations. The *tukud-tukud* are riddles which are usually references to local interests or settings. They are complimented by a rich amount of wise sayings which are attributed to sages who have *nabu* or *ingat* (wisdom and intelligence).

III

Written literature of and about the Muslims may be conveniently divided into Hispanic, American, Filipino and Muslim according to certain changes in literary direction and distinct periods of history during which such changes emerged. The Hispanic literature on the Muslims was a product of socio-political conditions. By this is meant that the only kind of Muslim literature the Spanish period could produce was the type that the state of affairs and research in the colony could allow. Since the Muslim areas were never placed under real Spanish control except for a few brief interregnums of uncertain peace and truces, Spanish institutions such as schools, missions, etc. could not be really developed as centers for studies. It was almost impossible to conduct any empirical study of Muslim culture, tradition, ethnology, history, and society since the Spaniards and Christians were not received well in Muslim societies. The biased pre-conceptions of Spanish society in so far as Islam and its followers were concerned prevented Spanish scholarship from developing along empirical lines. Therefore,

Hispanic literature on the Muslims was mainly based on Spanish perceptions of situations or realities in Muslim societies. In fact, a great deal of the literature produced were accounts of Muslim raids, piracies, slavery, and Spanish military expeditions. These were experiences which Spanish chroniclers or observers could easily write. In short, the Spanish sources could not be objective especially in the light of the fact that Spain had been, for over seven centuries, under Moorish rule, which, although benevolent in some ways, was never truly accepted by Christian Spain and Europe. The prejudice carried by the conquistadores and religious missions to the Philippines tended to influence Spanish interpretations of Muslim societies. Thus, the works of Francisco Combes (*Historia de Mindanao . . .*), Jose Montero y Vidal (*Historia de la Pirateria . . .*), Vicente Barrantes (*Guerras Piraticas*), Pio del Pazos (*Jolo: Relato Historico . . .*), and other historical studies were based on an anti-Muslim interpretation. Therefore, it is logical not to rely too much on them for any interpretation of Muslim history and culture except where the Spanish view of Muslim problems is desired or needed. In brief, Hispanic literature on the Muslims had two basic assumptions:

1. That the Muslims or "Moro", as they were called, savages, pirates, and warlike and should either be christianized or put to the sword.
2. That all the Muslims belonged to only one ethnic group, uncivilized in culture and debased by the "Mohammadan religion".

American literature on the Muslims developed along two distinct lines. One continued the anti-Muslim assumption of Hispanic literature. This was reflected mostly in the papers of American militarists such as Leonard Wood, John Pershing, Tasker Bliss, Harry Bandholts, and others. The other lines was set by Najeeb Saleeby, an American Arab, who served in the Moro Province for quite a time and was in a position to write on the Muslim people. His contributions to Muslim studies: *History of Sulu, Moro Problem, Studies in Moro History, Law and Religion*, and pursued the thesis that the Muslim people were a united, proud, and sensitive race, rich in culture, loyal to tradition, and devoted to the Islamic faith. The papers of Frank Carpenter, Henry Stimson, and school officials such as Charles Townsend and Mrs. Llorillard Spencer had some sympathetic references to the Muslims. Some American adventurers and travelers including missionaries began to look more critically at Muslim studies. They collected data by actual observations and interviews. Examples were the Bateman collection of Myths and Legends (1906), the Ziegler collection of Sulu folklore (1932), the travel memoirs of Percy Hill, and the

literary materials of Frank Laubach.

Since the postwar period, American interest has somewhat developed along historical and anthropological directions. Historical studies were undertaken by Clifford Smith (1949), Dorothy Rogers (1955), Peter Gowing (1970), and Ralph Thomas (1972). Studies on various aspects of Muslim culture and society were done by Mednick on Maranao social organization, Kiefer on Tausug armed conflict, Nimmo on Badjao culture, Ashley on Sulu linguistics, Speher on Sulu-Zamboanga archeology, and Rixhon on Sulu oral tradition.

The main thrust of the American contributions to Muslim studies has been largely on what the Americans did in Muslim areas during the colonial era and on the systematic collection of cultural data. American historical studies justified colonialization (Smith) and underlined American significant impact on administration, progress, and integration (Rogers, Gowing, and Thomas) to such an extent that Peter Gowing in *American Mandate Over Moroland* (1969) challenged any power to match America's record in the Muslim areas. Anthropological studies were concerned with testing theoretical models or hypothesis and the collection of valuable data for theses, dissertations, books, and other publications. Generally, however, the post-colonial period did not alter the dichotomy of Pre-Muslim and Anti-Muslim literature with the latter still getting a dominant emphasis particularly in Christian literature. Christian literature, especially those propagated by fundamental or conservative groups has been stressing the soteriological aspect of the Christian ministry. The non-Christians are regarded in Christian doctrines as "lost" or "unsaved" and are in need of what is often referred to as "the saving knowledge of Christ". This slant is subtly interwoven in biblical stories, human interest testimonies, and Sunday school lessons. It has remained in both Catholic and Protestant literature. To remove this slant means in reality a fundamental modification of the Christian Mission and a reinterpretation of the Great Commission. It will mean the abandonment of soteriology in the Christian doctrine and its possible replacement by some kind of Christian sociology which emphasize the improvement of the practical or material aspects of human society.

Filipino literature on the Muslims did not depart from the Hispanic-American pattern and heritage. Since there is a correlation between literature and the kind of orientation people tend to develop, the Christian Filipinos, being educated in the colonial tradition, acquired and, later, preserved the colonial bias against Muslim history and culture. The expression "a good Moro is a dead Moro" was a popular concept in the colonial era and had become an important ingredient in Filipino literature. There were, of course, some exceptions such as the *El Renacimiento* which was one of the few sources to call Jiki-

ria a "patriot". But as a whole and until more recent times, Filipino writers still looked at the Muslims as uncivilized and warlike, and, therefore, ought to be Christianized and "integrated". Official reports and comments on Muslim affairs and problems, particularly related to conflicts, were filled with suspicions and mistrusts except for comments and views of Filipinos of the type of Teopisto Guingona who served in various administrative capacities in Mindanao. Guingona, in several of his communications and statements believed in the policy of attraction which involved what he fondly referred to as "New Deal" policy. Jorge Bacobo, President of the University of the Philippines, believed in teaching the Muslims their own culture and tradition. But the persistence of colonial influence in Philippine policies and education prevented any meaningful change in the direction of Filipino literature on the Muslims. The change came only in the 1950s when unity and integration of what official sources could the "cultural minorities" were strongly felt. The costly Kamlun Uprising in Sulu which intermittently lasted from 1952 to 1954 stirred Filipino writers and analysts to look deeper into Muslim history and culture. Essays in the *Free Press* by journalists like Jose Rodriguez, Filemon Tutay, etc. represented an efforts to go beyond Army reports. Today, many Filipinos have taken a sympathetic look at the Muslims because of the outbreak of numerous conflicts in Mindanao and Sulu, greater in magnitude and complex in nature. But the main responsibility of rectifying literary injustice lies in Muslim scholarship.

Literature by Muslims, not counting the *huntar* and *tarsilas* which are royal annals and genealogies, appeared about the 1950s apparently to offset the great amount of anti-Muslim literature. Noteworthy were the short stories and essays of Ibrahim Jubaira who is nationally recognized for his distinctly Muslim stories. Later contributions came from a few rising and concerned scholars and academicians: Saber on Maranao social problems, Imao on Sulu art, Santanina Rasul on Sulu education, Baradas on Maranao customary law, Madali on Maranao literature, Mastura on Islamic law, Ikali Jainal on Sulu kinship, Kasman on Badjao-Tausug rituals, Glang on Muslim political problems, Jainal Rasul on Muslim identity and law, and this writer on the history of Sulu and on Muslim uprisings, movements, and disturbances. Perhaps, of more influence has been the works of Cesar Majul particularly his recent *Muslims in the Philippines* (1973) and his essays on the Sultanate and National integration.

The main concern, however, of Muslim writers has been to demoroize the Muslim image. This has been provided by essays or contributions in two aspects of Muslim studies:

1. a re-interpretation of Muslim raids, depredations, attacks,

and wars as *reactions* of the Muslims to Spanish colonization. This is the main emphasis of essays by Cesar Majul, Mamintal Tamano, Alunan Glang, Jainal Rasul, this writer, and practically all the Muslim scholars and writers.

2. a resuscitation of the Pre-Hispanic culture of the Muslim people mainly through the reconstruction of Muslim pre-history and its essential relation with the high level of Islamic civilization, complemented by the presentation of contemporary remains of Muslim art (*ukil, julis, sarimanok, etc.*), music, and dances (*sowa-sowa, lugo, dalling-dalling, pangalay, singkil, duldang-duldang, etc.*). Majul's *Muslims in the Philippines* is the first effort to reconstruct Muslim pre-history and the essays of Imao, Baradas, Madali, and non-Muslim writers such as Casiño, Arce, Szanton, Trimillos, Sphoer, etc. are efforts to bring to light Muslim pre-hispanic culture.

The serious drawback, however, of Muslim scholarship lies in three areas of research which are vital to any "validate" effort of Muslim studies. The first is *folklore studies*. A cursory survey of Muslim literature reveals that there is very little that has been done to systematically collect the tremendous amount of oral literature which pertains to each Muslim group in the Philippines. Some commendable efforts have been done by Ateneo de Manila's Institute of Public Culture and the Notre Dame of Jolo for Sulu's oral tradition and to a certain extent by the Mindanao State University for Maranao Cultural tradition. But serious efforts are yet to be seen in the collection of the oral literature of the *Magindanao*, the *Yakans*, the *Samals*, and other non-Christian groups. Still undone is credible interpretation of folklore materials already collected. And until a reasonable body of oral literature is developed, the reconstruction of Muslim pre-history remains anchored on the fragile structure or purely historical sources which are plagued by colonial limitations and biases.

The second area is *archeology*. Thus far, a modest beginning has been attempted by American scholars in Zamboanga and Sulu but similar undertakings are yet to be seen in all the Muslim areas where archeological potentials for Muslim art and other aspects of culture are vast. Until this is done, the reconstitution of Muslim pre-hispanic artistic tradition remains completely dependent on contemporary survivals of indigenous art which has been affected by time and change.

The third area is the *theoretical framework* of Muslim studies. There is something common in all the literature thus far produced by Muslims and non-Muslims, colonial and non-colonial, pro- and anti-Muslim. This approach is based on the assumption that there is only

one Muslim history, one Muslim people, one Muslim culture, and one Muslim problem. The effect of this unitarism has been clearly portrayed in the development and persistence of colonial policies and programs. The government applied one policy to all the Muslim problems. It assumed that an individual leader or group of Muslims could represent the entire Muslim people in the Philippines and that, by dealing with such an individual or group, the problems in Muslim societies would be solved. That this unitary approach is unrealistic, inappropriate, and ineffective may be seen from at least two perspective.

1. Culturally, the Muslim people are divided at least into six ethno-linguistic groups whose languages are mutually unintelligible and exclusive. The Lanao Muslims speak the *Maranao*; those of Cotabato, the *Magindanao*; those of Sulu, the *Tausug* and *Samal*; those of Basilan, the *Yakan*; and those of Zamboanga, a mixture of *Tausug*, *Samal*, and *Bangingi*.

2. Historically, the Muslim people have never shared in a truly meaningful way a common historical experience except in terms of the fact that they all fought the colonial powers just as did the other Christian Filipinos. The only difference lies in the fact that the Muslim resistance was more consistent and persistent lasting longer than any of the ethnic groups in the Philippines. The struggle, however, against colonialism did not involve any coordination of efforts or even aims. There was no connection between Muslims of Lanao, Cotabato, Sulu and other Muslim areas which had separate independent movements or struggles of their own. The only common thing was their nominal adherence to Islam.

In effect, the theoretical deficiency calls for an alternative based on a pluralistic approach to Muslim studies. It proceeds from realism and recognizes the basic differences of Muslim groups in terms of ethnology and language without necessarily overlooking the similarities in some aspects, especially Islamic. So that, pluralism assumes that basically there has been no Muslim unity either on the basis of history or culture and that the unity referred to as "Muslim" or "Islamic" is Moro of a desired goal of contemporary Muslim movements rather than a present or historical reality. Each Muslim group is a distinct society in itself and its own context and right. The only aspect in which unity is applicable is in adherence to the Islamic faith whose unifying influence has been seriously hampered or affected by indigenous pre-Islamic traditions. An adoption of this pluralistic approach puts any Muslim movement on a realistic basis from which a meaningful process of unification can be properly developed, otherwise, unity remains elusive.

To realize the aims of pluralism necessitates the utilization of a

"social science" methodology which seeks to divest Muslim literature of its emotional content inherited from colonialism and unrealism. The merit of a social science perspective lies in the fact that it is based on the integration of disciplinary contributions to the understanding of social phenomena and problems. But its success depends on social consciousness and pedagogic orientation and on the willingness of scholars and students of Muslim history and culture to change theoretical directions. A modest attempt can, perhaps, be made along the following:

1. A comprehensive bibliographical survey of all Muslim literature with extensive and proper annotations to provide information on the emphasis and content of Muslim literature from which meaningful areas of research can be identified. Alfredo Tiamson of the Ateneo de Davao has begun a commendable effort in this direction but a more extensive annotation is needed.

2. A historiographical survey of Muslim studies to identify the period during which certain type of literary emphasis arose and from which knowledge social studies can help reconstruct the context or conditions in which such emphasis and Muslim literature developed.

3. A sectoral research group on two mutually inter-dependent or inter-related studies. First is a systematic collection, classifications, and interpretation of oral literature by native scholars (*Maranaos* for Lanao, *Magindanaos* for Cotabato, *Tausugs* and *Samals* for Sulu, etc.) in the local languages. Then, the collected materials can be translated into Pilipino and English to provide Philippine society and the international community with a rich body of Muslim primary sources upon which social science studies can be made. Second is a translation of Filipinistic literature in the Muslim languages to provide a realistic channel for national values and nationalism to be disseminated among the Muslim people. The process of inter-cultural exchange through literature and language leads to the integration of values and the mutual appreciation of the distinct contribution and importance of each ethno-linguistic group to the development of Philippine society and to social progress. Ultimately, the process will result in the preservation of local cultures through the local languages, the enrichment of the Filipino as a truly national society in which the integration of the various ethnic group is not only brought about by the force of law but also by the dynamic sharing and participation of people in an ever synthesizing cultural milieu and symbiosis.