

A REVIEW OF BENTLEY'S REVIEW

Samuel K. Tan

[The following article is Dr. Tan's reply to a review article by G. Carter Bentley, "Historical Perspective on the Muslim Armed Struggle? (Critical Review of Samuel Tan's The Filipino Muslim Armed Struggle, 1900-1972)," Mindanao Journal, V, 2 (Oct.-Dec. 1978), 135-152. Due to the delay in the production of said issue of the Journal, Dr. Tan was unable to read Bentley's work until later in 1979.]

Carter Bentley's review of my book has certain misconceptions and misleading generalizations which are, perhaps, attributable to either lack of sufficient information or to pre-conceived notions. Briefly, his numerous points can be categorized, for purposes of simplicity, into technical, conceptual and personal criticisms. I hope to be able to raise some valid objections to these criticisms which must have taken the reviewer considerable time and effort. I would have used a finer language for this response but Bentley's roughness has to be answered in kind.

I

The technical criticisms involve references to certain omissions of events and "outright mistakes." Cited as proofs, presumably the most glaring, were the battles of Bayan and Bacolod. If Bentley had been as thorough as he appeared to be, he could have seen that events chosen for illustrative purposes were those that had marked differences. Bayan and Bacolod were actually the same except for the time, place, and people involved. Whatever usefulness the two battles had would be to show

the number of people killed and/or wounded compared to that of Taraca, Maciu, etc. But they all fall under the same category of conflict which differ from the type of conflict like the Binidayan incident whose cause might seem trivial and personal but nevertheless significant because it eventually ended in the same "anti-American" reaction which marked the numerous battles including the ones omitted. The same is true in Sulu and Cotabato where the incidents or conflicts chosen included what to Bentley appeared "trivial" and insignificant but to me "significant" because they also developed into "anti-American," "anti-Christian," anti-government," or "inter-Muslim" disturbances as the case may be. To Bentley, such incidents as the "Balabac incident," the "Kidapawan incident," etc., which showed seemingly "irrational" causes, cannot be included. But it is precisely the somewhat irrational nature of their causes that make them very important in understanding both the nature of Muslim reaction and the nature of colonialism. Conflict is not only expressed in rational, massive, or bloody confrontations, such as those in Bayan or Bacolod, but also, in the less prominent incidents which I included. In brief, if the trivial incidents, which Bentley considers insignificant, did not result in a mass movement, bloody or otherwise, then Bentley's comment is in order. Besides, what is to be included or not is a controversy that is not new and anyone, especially one who has very little substantial issues to say, usually loves to articulate it. Perhaps, the difference is one of perspective or orientation.

The question of "outright mistakes" concerns documentation and dates. Bentley pointed out the case of the Ali rebellion. Is it 1903 or 1906? Or, the date of Alamada's surrender. Is it 1913 or 1914? For his authority, he refers to Gowing (1977:277) first, and to Majul, second (1973:314). This is rather surprising for a doctoral candidate from the University of Washington to suggest that secondary works or sources are conclusive for critical evaluation. It is one of the cardinal principles in historiography that primary sources are to be given priority in historical writing and, more so, in historical criticism. In this regard, Gowing and Majul are not primary sources for obvious reasons unless Bentley is referring to another Gowing or Majul who was an eyewitness to the Ali rebellion or Alamada's surrender. Otherwise, the elementary rule of historiography requires that Bentley refers to an archival or eyewitness ac-

count to correct my dating. Being a Minister of Christ or a Pandita does not make one a primary source.

The issue of documentation pertains to Henri Fancouneir's view (1931) which, on page 13 of my book, immediately precedes that of Sheridan. Footnote number 52 should have been placed at the end of the sentence on Sheridan, clearly an error in numbering which is common in even the most thoroughly-checked works. But Bentley's intellectual integrity and scholarship apparently feeds on this kind of technical obsession. It certainly does not take a lot of second thought to recognize that footnote 52 was clearly for Sheridan, not Fancouneir. What Bentley could have said, if he was after the truth instead of playing with Sheridan's prophetic qualities, was that the documentation for Fancouneir was lacking. This is more factual and scholarly, not to mention "refined." But Bentley obviously preferred the vulgar side of the American mind for purposes other than scholarship or Muslim progress. Moreover, the documentation of Datu Santiago (No. 20) is clear and correct as well as that for Sulu on page 22. What Bentley should have pointed out is that the Sulu paragraph should have been on page 23 immediately before "In 1903," a printing error. This is more accurate instead of making a sweeping comment on the 1971-1972 events, especially the radical nationalist alternative, which should be documented in his view, I can only say that I had no compulsion to footnote my observation because I was giving my own interpretation of developments which are of common knowledge in the Philippines as Bentley readily admits. Bentley should also have realized the degree of freedom a historian is reasonably allowed to speculate or comment on a period of which he is a part. But I realize that to a reader like Bentley, who may be unfamiliar with general developments during the period involved, a documentation would have been absolutely necessary.

II.

Now let me comment on the conceptual or theoretical remarks which tend to show lack of awareness and information except what had been obviously gathered from secondary sources. First, his prescriptive comment that the description of Tausug qualities, based on oral litera-

ture, applies only to the Sulu leaders is rather too simplistic, if not over-presumptuous. Referring to Kiefer for his authority appears too patronizing, considering that Kiefer's research does not indicate enough of oral traditions to support Bentley's comment. If Bentley knew that I have been doing research on the Sulu oral traditions, he would have learned to use the words "perhaps," "seems," "appears" etc. in his evaluation of something that he is quite unfamiliar. My completed study of the "Narrative Traditions of the Sulu Archipelago," under the UP-NSDB project, will certainly show that the qualities I referred to in my book are indeed applicable to the Sulu masses. In effect, to be able to pontificate as he did in his review, Bentley should show that he had done a reasonable study of Sulu traditions, not just a cursory reading of a secondary source or a dependence on an anthropological orientation that is still open to question.

On the issue of conflicting, contrary, or absurd statements, again it appears that Bentley was misleading. For instance, there is no inconsistency between my reference to ethnic groups and my use of the terms "Muslim Struggle, etc." It should have been clear to him that the latter was used for convenience, not for theoretical negation of my "pluralistic view." Maybe it would have been simpler, for Bentley's understanding, for me to repeat all the terms. And to raise a point of scholarship on such a basis, in disregard of the pluralistic treatment in the entire book, is simply dishonest. In fact, my point from the first chapter to the last had been to stress the pluralistic pattern of the Muslim armed struggle (again I'm using "Muslim"). Also, it is presumptuous of Bentley to expect connections between all the Muslim revolts or disturbances in the Philippines as if they were a Revolution, or to look for causes as if history were biology or physics. The "Covering Law" controversy of the 1940s and 1950s is still unresolved. Perhaps, Bentley hopes to finally put and end to Patrick Gardiner, William Dray and Maurice Mandelbawn! (Do I have to document this reference or elaborate?).

Similarly, the elaboration of a passage on p. 140, "colonialism helped reinforce the status of the ruling class" and its juxtaposition with a line on p. 19, "colonialism reduced traditional leaders to virtual impotence," pointing these as contradictory, is wresting them out of contexts. The first is clearly made with reference to the Muslim ruling

classes, whereas the latter was made with reference to traditional leadership in Philippine society. To disagree with this differentiation is certainly welcome and reasonable, but to categorically say that it is wrong is puritanistic or dogmatic. Not even a faint trace of American liberalism is seen in Bentley's criticism. Then, to dispute that "education, wealth, prestige, and influence" served as basis of the colonial system, which tended to prejudice the Muslims who were not as educated as others, is clearly evasive, if not dishonest. It is obvious from the reading of American colonial histories, writings, letters etc. that American policies vis-a-vis the natives stressed such criteria for meaningful participation in the system. To prove his point, Bentley has to show that an illiterate or unpropertied native was given priority in the American colonial bureaucracy over an educated, influential, or wealthy native. Otherwise, his comment represents a distortion for convenience, a popularization of the American image at the expense of historical justice. Then, Bentley's comment on the ethnic-Muslim-national process of integration in Chapter 11 as contradictory to Chapter 12 is again reading the two "out of context." In Chapter 11, I was referring to the *process* and in Chapter 12 I was talking merely of *terms* which should be eliminated for psychological reasons. It is difficult to comprehend how Bentley could fail to see the distinction. The same lack of critical insight seems to appear in his reaction to my statement on ethnic similarities and differences on page 155 in which I said that ethnic similarities are external and superficial because they exist through constitutional and legal means. If Bentley is familiar with the issue of Filipino identity which has been debated in many of our forums, he will readily see that even Claro M. Recto could only define the Filipino in constitutional and legal terms. That is, the ethnic groups in the Philippines had remained distinct and were only tied to the state by force of Law or something political. This is not to say that we could or cannot be culturally or historically one. I was simply pointing to the historical fact that our ultimate integration, in the non-political sense, depends on the rediscovery of our ancient base culture which has been affected by both Islam and Christianity. If we have remained culturally unintegrated it is because of the institutionalization, in a dominant sense, of Christianity and Islam. It is in this latter direction that Bentley, Gowing and the rest

have contributed a lot! In a similar manner, Bentley's reference to my radical statements, which he took as proofs to belittle Christianity and Islam, is again suspect. He failed to note that I was talking of "the radical of nationalism," not nationalism *per se*.

Bentley's comment that migration of non-Muslims should have been mentioned with reference to my statements on the population table (1903-1960) is not necessary since the title of the table embodies that and since the paragraph merely seeks to stress the *pressure* in the Muslim Provinces, not necessarily the Muslim pressure. Bentley is correct in pointing out the confusion because of the use of "Muslim population" instead of "population of Muslim Provinces." But it should have been sufficient for a reader without colored glasses to see that the paragraph clearly meant *pressure* in a general sense.

Bentley also pointed out, as a sort of strong argument, that my view of Muslim culture is rather reckless, that my suggestion to encourage intermarriage is contrary to Islamic law under which, according to him, "a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman, but not the reverse." This suggests that Bentley has the impression that *Islamic law* is the law established through the Muslim communities in the Philippines. He failed to realize that what we have in the Philippines is "folkislamic." Since he is an Anthropologist, this fact should have been easy for him to perceive. His statement applies, perhaps, to some countries of the Islamic world or to Maranao society where he does research at present and where indeed a Maranao woman is prohibited from contracting marriage outside her own culture. But it does not apply elsewhere, particularly in Sulu where intermarriages between Muslims and non-Muslims of both sexes have been going on for centuries. I would not have been born had my grandmother, Latia Jaham (a pure bred native), not married a Chinese trader. Or, the Schucks of Jolo, who have become a part of the Sulu leading elite, would not have risen to such a position if a native royal lineage had not married a German, a non-Muslim. Clearly, Bentley's misperception is understandably caused by a lack of sufficient knowledge of Filipino Muslim societies. For this reason, he should have minimized his prescriptive language and assumed a more humble, scholarly posture. Or, he should have corrected my grammar and diction!

Bentley's comment on the "Sulu Movement" is rather flimsy and

misleading. He should have known that "Sulu Movement" may not exist in sources. It does not, however, necessarily follow that it did not exist or that a historian or writer cannot create a terminology for something he is writing about. I cannot see his objection to something which abounds in books, articles, essays of all sorts, historical and non-historical. American authors are very fond of creating new terminologies. In fact, the anthropologists are notorious for this! Hence, when Bentley brought out the issue, does he mean that only Americans have the absolute right to initiate a term and all others just repeat them?

My ideas on the MNLF are mine and do not have to be documented. I had enough associations with those involved to be able to say something in print without depending on some secondary footnotes. My own personal knowledge of the movement being discussed provides me with a good basis for my opinion. If others do not agree with my view, it is natural. But I do not have to document something that I am an eyewitness to. This is recognized in historiography. Besides, if I can give credibility to a person who is an eyewitness, why can't I give myself the same? But I can understand Bentley's objection that I did not say so in a footnote that I was a witness to the Sulu Movement. If this is what he meant, then he is correct. Moreover, to regard the MNLF as purely Islamic and secessionist, as Bentley did, is at best superficial and subversive.

Finally, Bentley's observation that to emphasize ethnicity is divisive and, therefore, not integrative is rather questionable. On the contrary, it is integrative, because the pluralistic approach along ethnic lines ultimately leads to the "base culture," as I said earlier, which is the foundation of our Filipino heritage. Bentley may not agree with this, but he does not have the right to pontificate. Conversely, the introduction of Islam and Christianity, between which only about two centuries or so exist, precisely polarized the ethnic communities along religious lines which are divisive. In the ultimate analysis, Islam and Christianity are irreconcilable in doctrines and practice. Christians and Muslims are just practical not to admit it. Thus, national integration can best be achieved if the two opposing systems are not very much stressed (not eradicated as Bentley intimates), but are subordinated to a secular orientation. This is the substance of my view on pluralism. Bentley may

not believe this (it does not disturb me), but he has no justification to declare that my view is wrong and his is correct. The day of colonialism is over, although American influence is still very much around! Does Bentley really love the Muslims?

III.

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that considering the way Bentley has made use of some technical, trivial errors with a language that is, at best, prescriptive and, at worst, historiographical, betrays somewhat the reasons for his review. He sounds like Gowing, somewhat more Muslim than the Muslims themselves, more like *Time* magazine in perspective. Thus, I have no illusions that the book will not be of any use to anyone looking for some nostalgic evidences of "benevolent assimilation" or "mandate over Moroland." But, if feedback from my people in the South is any indication, then the book has certainly served its purpose. After all, it is dedicated to "those who have much in history and culture but less in life," not vice versa.