

EPILOGUE

THE OCTOBER WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST: REFLECTIONS ON THE MUSLIM RENAISSANCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

The events that occurred in Mindanao and Sulu since 1973, more than 15 years ago, may be considered illustrative of the events that had occurred in other areas of the world, like the Middle East. Mindanao and Sulu, a segment of whose population are Muslim Filipino peoples conscious of their ethnic roots and identities, have become an arena of dynamic and pulsating cultural developments and change.

The following Epilogue to this collection of essays, would therefore be an attempt to bring into focus one of the great events in the Middle East as a point of reference to the renaissance, cultural as it were, among the Muslim Filipinos in the Southern Philippines :

The concept behind the term "renaissance," as used in this brief paper, does not have a long historical background in the context of the term's traditional meaning. Rather, as the theme of the present conference-seminar brings to mind the events that unfolded in the Sinai desert on the 6th day of October 1973, which are now called the October '73 War, the use of the term may not be appropriate. However, looking at the events that occurred during the date referred to above and the corresponding reaction to these events within the cultural sphere in the Philippines, the term certainly becomes very significant and replete with far-reaching implications. Before discussing these implications, I would like to present a very brief historical background of the

events, telescoped back into the past, because these events in history give full meaning of that "renaissance" that occurred after October '73.

Events in the Southern Philippines, particularly from the time Islam began to assert itself as a way of life among the ethnic groups—the Tausog, the Maguindanao and the Maranao — stands in contrast to the pre-Islamic animism of the other cultural communities in the area. The encounter between Islam and animism did not necessarily create a problem of great magnitude because the former created a very viable base for social, economic, religious and cultural stability, which the animism of those who had embraced Islam did not provide. However, the influence of Islam was challenged by the appearance of another system of social life, that of Christianity, which created a problem that telescoped even into our times. The encounter was indeed terrible to ponder. The events in our times did not only confine themselves in the Islands but became international in nature, which certainly was inevitable considering the philosophy and its following involved.

While on a broader context, the logic that Islam identifies with the Arabs may be gravely erroneous, in terms of Philippine perception the Arabs are inevitably believers in Islam. However, the appearance of the Arabs in the Philippines did not only involve the introduction of Islam, but it went beyond the confines of the belief system. It enriched the society to a point that it could resist the inroads of a similarly stable social system. The literary tradition of that society became more meaningful, its art became more symbolic than in the animistic period of its life, its language was enriched by the many concepts that Arabic lent to the local speech systems; new concepts blended with the old, and became the springboard for the development of broader and newer ideas. A political system based on Qur'anic precepts began to give foundation of the very unstable village system of personal leadership.

Thus, one could see in the societies of Southern Philippines a kind of vitalization that gave them meaning and persistence in the years that followed, punctuated only by the vicissitudes of attempts at supplanting this vitalization with some other system, equally strong but not strong enough to replace it. Hence, the present status of this system shows

that its persistence is the best commentary of its holding power—a viable, meaningful social system, which no other system can replace.

The War and its Ramifications in the Cultural Scene

I shall not attempt to present here a cursory view of the War since there has been discussions on its causes and effects elsewhere at this Conference-Seminar. It is my intention here, however, to show some of its ramifications, albeit very briefly, in the Philippine cultural scene.

In a very broad perspective, the effects of war are always viewed with much depression; its physical and mental devastations seem beyond alleviation and repair. But out of this destruction often rises the human spirit which tends to succeed in overcoming those devastations. The best of that spirit seeks to bring out of the ravages of war the most profound of cultural works of the society—the epic struggle of a people depicted in literature, in art, in music and dance. Nay, it is not only in the creation of new pieces of cultural heritage, but war also creates fervor in a people over its past heritage. The people seek to bring together their past heritage in literature, in art, music and dance to make these meaningful in the context of the holocaust. In other words, the people affected by war undergo a kind of *renaissance*, a process in which the war's meaning and its spirit become part of the totality of their heritage.

In the context of Egypt, all these matters become extremely meaningful if one looks into her history—that history not only within the past one hundred years but over the past millenia. The War becomes valid indeed in terms of its ramifications in her cultural history; the events that led to it are understood in terms of that past now enshrined in her monuments of art, in her folktraditions, in music and dance and her literature.

To quote an influential writer in the Philippines, who was writing on the Philippines and the Arab countries, “the renaissance now taking place in the Arab countries south and west of the Mediterranean actually has a poignant parallel in the Philippines” (Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, in *Salam*, March-April 1975). While this renaissance may not have

direct reference to the War, it becomes meaningful in the context of the Philippines' having awakened to the truths of her Islamic past. It is not foolish to say that the War intensified the Filipino's search for his not very distant past, his experience in the enrichment of his culture. For as the Filipino digs deep in search for his cultural moorings as well as his identity as a people, he finds to his pleasant surprise that part of that anchor and part of that identity lie in his not so distant Islamic past, reinforced continually by the annual pilgrimages, as well as the constant contact in trade and traffic.

The Best of Their Culture

In public statements reported in both the national and international media and taken as instruments of national policy, President Marcos of the Republic of the Philippines expressed sentiments of support to the Arab, vis-a-vis the Egyptian, struggle against the Israeli occupation of Arab lands. These sentiments of support are certainly conscious efforts on the part of a nation whose population is partly composed of believers in the religion of peace, that is Islam. These conscious efforts are not merely statement of facts of governments for the development of the Muslim population of the country.

While not deprecating the importance of these efforts, I would like to mention here the silent efforts of those who in their academic activities are equally active in giving meaningful manifestations of those conscious efforts in the highest level of Philippine officialdom. These activities have not been the direct result of the events that occurred in Egypt in October 1973, but they are manifestations of intensified activities owing to these events. The October 1973 war brought to the forefront a greater desire on the part of the people to learn more about their brother Filipinos who are Muslims, who through hundreds of years had lived by the precepts of Islam. In the process of learning about their Muslim brothers they have tended more to go into the basic history of the development of Arab culture and history and inevitably Islam.

In the process of learning more and more of the Muslim Filipinos,

two streams of culture and history have been brought to the consciousness of the learners—the local and the Arab streams. Both these streams are manifestations of the best of the Muslim Filipino culture. At this point, therefore, I would like to present the works of some of those scholars who over the past few years have pursued the path of bringing out to the public the best of this culture, which in my country is very much equated to Islam, and for that matter, Arab culture. Young and exuberant in their new-found tasks of bringing out the best of their culture, enriched and revitalized by the infusions of new elements, they contribute to the bulk of materials that attempts to put the Muslim Filipino in the best of light.

Perhaps one of the important misconceptions that these scholars have been concerned with has been that unhappy equation that anything, cultural or otherwise, that is of the Southern Philippines is Muslim. Thus, while attempting to show how much Islam has changed the Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausog and the Samals, ethnic groups who have become followers of Islam, Datumanong Sarangani and Nagasura Madale, both Maranao scholars, have discussed in separate articles the distinctions between the local elements of culture and the influence of the greater tradition of Islam. Sarangani, for instance, attempted to bring into focus the very significant development in these ethnic groups' outlook vis-a-vis their belief systems. He wrote :

Islam gave the native a sense of spiritual guidance which made him depart from the meaningless teachings of the *pandita* (native religious teachers) and the magicians. It reaffirmed in him his awe-inspiring feelings, *though not in a different context*, (*italics supplied*), and gave him a new sense of direction—the path of Allah. Islam simplified man's laborious beliefs in a pantheon of gods and goddesses to a simple but tacit belief in one Supreme God as the source of his life and well being. It changed his tedious and inhuman rituals under the intercession of a complicated priesthood to a simple pattern of daily prayer. Finally, Islam fostered in him a new sense of moral and ethical values in his

relationships with every member of his family and community of Muslims. (*Mindanao Journal*, I, 1, 1974, p. 66)

Side by side with this very important development in the whole cultural perspective of these ethnic groups is an equally important and certainly salient phenomenon in culture inter-influence and encounter, that is, the blending of the local and the alien system (in "historic" terms, the blending of the old and the new, seemingly with no visible conflict). Madale, in describing an indigenous Maranao rice ritual, which is called *kashawing*, presents in vivid terms the modifications made on the ritual to admit Islamic elements. He writes that the ritual leader commences ceremonies by intoning the *fatihah* first, and proceeds, thus

Praises to Allah! Pray (to Him) that we will not commit sin in invoking the *tonong* of the Lake. . . . All the *tonong* . . . we wish to invite today, Allah willing. . . . Pray to Allah that all farmers will have a bountiful harvest. . . .

x x x

Pray to Allah that we will not commit sin for invoking the *tonong* and for the things we say here. He created all *tonong* and gave them power. Pray to Allah that our offering will be materialized. Xx x x We are calling you *tonong* of Masiu, and all *tonong* of the Four Sultanates of Lanao . . . We are inviting you today, . . . offering you food . . . In return, we ask you to pray to Allah so that all farmers will have a bountiful harvest. . . . We ask you to pray to Allah so that our crops will be safe from rats, and others. (*Mindanao Journal*, I, 1 (1974), pp. 75-78).

Certainly, the above prayer may be considered by the devout Muslim as heresy, or, to use the stronger term, blasphemy, in the whole context of Islam. But if we analyze the prayer more closely we find two levels in which the perspective of Islamic influence on the

culture are discernible. In the first level, the leader of the ritual enjoins every person participating in the ritual to "sing" praises unto Allah and to ask His forgiveness for invoking the *tonongs* of the lake. The second level is even more interesting, since here the ritual leader brings to the recognition of all that the *tonongs* are the creation of Allah and should pray to Him for bounty and harvest. In spite of Madale's report that this ritual is considered un-Islamic and is a vestige of pre-Islamic practices, it gives us a very clear picture of the phenomenon that occurred and is still occurring in Maranao society.

It is not only in this very narrow aspect of culture that Madale has attempted to bring together materials in the full understanding of this phenomenon in his own culture, but in others within the full compass of Islamic beliefs in the country. In the wake of an earlier work ("Notes on Islamic Literature in the Philippines") which I published in 1970 in view of the continuing distortions of the picture concerning our brothers in Southern Philippines who profess Islam, Madale published in 1974 an improvement of the above work, entitled "A Preliminary Classification of Muslim Literature in the Philippines." Madale, who had worked with me since 1968, considers this a contribution to the continuing efforts at bringing out the best of the culture of Muslim peoples of the Philippines, which in many senses was impelled by the events that happened in October 1973. Let us give Madale's work a cursory review and bring it within the perspective of the present paper.

Though preliminary as Madale's work is, it covers practically all possible types of literary pieces as perceived by the Muslim Filipinos. Perhaps what is preliminary may be seen in the very few paradigms that were used to illustrate the types and forms. In terms of orientation, he categorized this literature into two groups, namely, *Islamic* and *non-islamic*. But he thinks that this is too arbitrary and that "What to our mind is non-Islamic may embody Islamic beliefs and tenets. For the beauty of Muslim (sic) literature is its absorption of foreign elements, while, at the same time, it remains indigenous." In the final analysis, Madale sets himself to the task of classifying this literature according to type and form. He recognizes eleven groups or types, namely, the epics, the *Salsila/tarsila*, (genealogy), *Masaalla* ((proverbs),

Daman (poetic dialogue), *Tarasul* (love letter), *Malikata* (punning), *Tigum-tigum* (riddles), narratives (both lyrical [*karang*] and narrated [*sudsugid*]), ritual literature (the *Salaam* greeting, *Bang-asan*, *Salat*, the Holy Qur'an, *Parokonan* or Book for Beginners of Islam, Qur'anic Exegesis and Explicatory Statements), Songs (religious, lullaby, secular, songs for the dead, heroic songs) and lastly, tales.

On the basis of the paradigms, Madale has shown very significant infusions of Islamic/Arabic elements in the literatures of the ethnic groups who had accepted Islam as a way of life. In conclusion, Madale cites a portion of my work (mentioned above), which he thinks is relevant to the attempt to present the real picture of literary development among the Muslim Filipinos :

The literary outlook of Mindanao and Sulu is deeply permeated by dominant Islam. Islam being a religion practically penetrated the entire cultural orientation of the people. Aspects of Islamic culture, religion, history have been infused into literature of the Tausog, Magindanao and Maranao . . . From the early years that Islam began to exert pressure upon the cultures of these peoples, attempts to islamicise their literatures through the convenient changes in the names and titles of heroes, setting of such literary pieces—such heroes are even made to pray to Allah through the intercessions of the angels . . . In the recitation of long narratives, actual stories are always preceded by a long prayer very much Islamic in nature. (Francisco, 1970).

I would like to think, at this point, that my earlier view is still relevant to the continuing developments in southern Philippines. More and more Filipinos are beginning to be aware of a heritage too rich to be ignored. Somehow, the term used above may have to be changed to one that is broadest in perspective, that is, the process of Arabization. I would not, however, dismiss the use of the former if it refers primarily to the religious development in the region. But over a broader process of cultural influences the latter term may be most

appropriate.

The discussion above has been primarily concerned with the literature of the Muslim Filipinos as an expression of their identity within the national community, but which transcends ethnic and socio-religious barriers to ramify into the national consciousness of one unified community. This expression somehow has been seen in the context of the events of October 1973, perhaps even taking this point in time as the *terminus a quo*.

There are other aspects of culture in which the Arab/Islamic elements have made their influence. These are in the languages of these ethnic people, their socio-political institution and in art. Equally interesting is their legal system which has been influenced deeply by Qur'anic precepts. All these require extensive studies to show the Arab overlay in these aspects of culture. But a beginning has been made as a result of the events of October 1973.

Contributing to this renaissance in the cultural heritage of the country is the appearance of the performing arts in the field of cultural events and the upsurge in these performances that came about the late part of 1973. Whether or not this phenomenon has been the result of the events in October 1973 is difficult to say. But over the past 15 or so months performances by many dance and drama groups have increased and the themes exploited have been based primarily on the epic as well as narrative and lyric literatures, which show the influence of themes that present both the indigenous as well as Arab/Islamic themes. The performing groups themselves are generally composed of Maranao, Maguindanao or Tausog.. And every time these are billed in the media there is always the reference to the Islamic heritage of these groups. In the performing arts, one can immediately discern the "collaboration" between literature and dance-drama arts.

Conclusion

It is difficult to conclude a paper the subject of which is still in the process of unfolding itself before the world. The events that occurred in Egypt in October 1973 are vivid enough to create the most

meaningful reaction of a people, a good number of whom identify themselves in the brotherhood of Arab, and Islamic, culture. This reaction becomes equally meaningful in the whole context of bringing the best of their ethnic cultures to be transcended into the national consciousness as part of that greater heritage.

While the events of October 1973 are too close to our time to be considered a landmark by which cultural happenings have occurred, it is not wishful thinking to say that, at least, in the Philippines a sharper focus on the Arab overlay is being undertaken, so that the continuing attempt at acquiring a deeper understanding of the Muslim Filipinos may be achieved. This heritage which cannot be regarded apart from the national life and community is greatly fused into the culture of the Filipinos; so that the indigenous and the alien have found themselves indistinct from each other. The fact is that this Arab/Islamic heritage has been equated with everything that these ethnic groups Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausog, Samal—possess as cultural treasures, and such equation has given a single identity to both elements.

Whatever history shall say about the effects of that war in October 1973 whether or not that war was a very important event from which great things have started to occur—like a kind of reawakening to one people's past and a glorious past at that— it is not yet our task to speculate on. Rather, it is enough at this point in time that as a people, the Filipinos have become more conscious of the heritage that it received from the Arabs. Culturally, and I use the term in its broadest meaning, the Philippines cannot but be grateful for the enrichment of her heritage.