

ONE

The Sarimanok and The Torogan: Maranaw Symbols of Traditional Power

Introduction

Societies, either in the early or late stages of their development, are replete with symbols to represent certain aspects of their social, cultural as well as political existence. Such symbols may have been taken from various sources like the animal world or the simple tools that they use for livelihood or even the structures that in general are occupied by the leaders. Thus, we have for instance the hammer and the scythe and the Kremlin to the Soviet Union, the Eagle and the White House to the U.S.A., or the Chrysanthemum and the Gofu, the Emperor's residence, to the Japanese nation. We are certain that all the nations of the world have such symbols which identify them and for which its people will give their lives to protect their integrity. However, the same symbols explicitly express the nature of the country's ideals, like *E Pluribus Unum* (Unity in Diversity) for the United States of America or Satyam Eva Jayate (The Truth Indeed Always Triumphs) for India. But I must not forget the Philippines which has for its symbols of national identity, i.e., socio-cultural and political, respectively, the Monkey Eating Eagle and Malacañang, representing the official residence of the most powerful personage in the country.

The focus of this essay, however, is micro rather than macro since it deals primarily with one of the ethnic societies in the Philippines, the Maranaw with the Sarimanok and Torogan as the focus of the discussion. At this point, some historical notes on both the terms are in order, and in so doing some cross reference or overlap in our presentation will be inevitable.

The Sarimanok as an art form developed from its earlier reference in the Darangan (Imao 1977:852), in which it was said to be the messenger of the Lanao royalty.¹ Thus, "the original Sarimanok is represented as a decorative bird clutching a fish with its claws or dangling a fish on its beak" (*ibid.*).

More precisely, Madale (1977-78:154) wrote that Sarimanok

literally means "artificial cock";

... The figure has the complete representation of the fowl with wings, tail, feathers and head, which are distorted... with embellishments of scrolled and pointed designs of leaves, spirals and feather like forms. It usually stands on a fish and another one hangs on its beak. It could have represented an eagle or hawk often seen picking up fish from the surface of Lake Lanao...

Quoting a brass-smith who was interviewed over the subject, Madale (*ibid*) further wrote that "Sari means not pure-- has no life, while manok means chicken - has life. The reason why we call it Sarimanok is that it has some feathers -- of a manok, but it is not chicken completely."

It has somehow fired the imagination of the Maranaw as people that it is not just the Lanao royalty who cherish it as an artistic symbol, but the commonfolk considers it their own as well.

In discussing the Sarimanok's development as an art form from its earliest beginnings to the present, we cannot evade its relations to the naga motifs in Maranaw art. It is perhaps not ill-considered to speculate here that as the Maranaw underwent the process of Islamization, there was a corresponding change in their perceptions of their artistic life, i.e., Islam's prohibition of human or animal figures as artistic representations had signalled to the Maranaw the direction toward stylization of the Sarimanok to a representation of lines later to be identified as naga- motifs (cf. Francisco 1960; 1971:177-178). In more specific terms, vis-a-vis its role and form in Maranaw art,

... the Sarimanok has somehow been understood in the context of its own cultural milieu rather than its impressionistic manifestations. The role that the present Muslim Filipinos are now playing have brought them to the fore[front] of studies thereby bringing out the best of their culture, one of which is the Sarimanok, stylized in naga-like designs and lines forming the basic factors of understanding the Maranaw (*ibid*).

Even as we have referred to the stylization of the Sarimanok to the naga-like motif in view of the Maranaw's exposure to Islam, it

is perhaps likewise interesting to note here that in contemporary times, it is represented as such without its being reduced to its stylized form.² This is with reference to its role and place in the Maranaw isa ka labo-ai, lit., a set of flags displayed as one drops anchor³ (Madale 1974:13). In pursuing his discussions on Maranaw flags, Madale (*ibid.*) enumerated at least ten flags in the set, which represent (specific) occasions for their display. One of these flags is the Sarimanok.

...other flags can be displayed without the Sarimanok. [It] is never displayed by itself. When the Sarimanok is displayed with other flags, informants believed the occasion would be maipened meaning "dignified," "complete". It is because the Sarimanok is considered a paraboat, an elaboration of the set of flags (*ibid.*:20).

The implication of this reference is quite clear that the Sarimanok occupies a paramount place in the hierarchy of flags, thus indicating that the personage displaying these flags indeed occupies a high if not the highest rank in society. Moreover, it is never displayed at a place lower than any of the flags, but at a point that it sits far higher than even perhaps that one recognized as identifying rank and honour, i.e., the Sambolayang, or if placed on the payong, the umbrella, of the Bai a Labi and the Sultan, confers upon them honour, prestige and power, that they represent.

The Torogan represents both traditional art and power (hence wealth, honour and prestige). In presenting the Torogan (before this Congress), let me take David Baradas's (1968:136-137) very precise description of it in full because to paraphrase him may do the Torogan some damage and mis-representation, in view of our attempt to present it in the light of our proposed analysis of its role and function in Maranaw society and culture. Moreover, it is least known in the field of art that has evolved, i.e, emanated, from the Lake area. Let me now cite Baradas directly.

The oldest evidence of the flowering of the okir motif in Lanao is in the Torogan, the ancestral home of the highest title holder of the major descent line within a community. It is a multi-family dwelling, with the closest relatives residing within the household. Big ceremonies are celebrated and held

in the Torogan. Weddings, wakes, religious gatherings make use of the Torogan as the center of activities. Major conflict resolutions between individuals, descent groups, or territorial divisions are deliberated upon within the Torogan.

The Torogan is symbolic of rank, prestige, and status. Its erection connotes only lineage of the highest rank, for only the dato class and in particular those holding the highest titles are allowed to build such a structure. Its construction is only made possible through communal efforts, as a manifestation of the support for the ruling class, as well as an indication of the power that the ruling body wields within a particular area. Enormous efforts go into its construction considering the size of the structure.

The Torogan stands out in any community not so much for its size, for some members of the dato class may have just as big a house, but for its use of the panolong -- the carved floor beam that protrudes in front of the house.

This beam flares out in an upward direction by adding another piece of wood and then heavily carving it, in particular lavishing it with the naga figure...Its particular location in the house is believed to drive away evil spirits which can bring misfortune to the members of the household. It is believed that the naga is worshipped by the evil spirits and the sight of the naga scare them away (Baradas 1968:136).

It is evident from the above that the Torogan is not just a structure where resides the Sultan/Datu and his family, representing or more precisely, symbolizing prestige, wealth, power and honour. In effect, the Torogan, evokes images of datos living in opulence, exercising power that is heir to their status, receiving the honour and prestige that naturally emanate from such exalted position. And these were not merely reflected in the datu's being the power holder of the "realm", these are conferred upon his descendants and relations--genetic/affinal - as well.

Symbolism in the Maranaw Socio-Cultural-Political System: The Sarimanok-Torogan Synergy (S-TS)

Whether or not the Maranaw understood the process of stylization of the Sarimanok to the naga and vice-versa is not necessarily the task of this section. However, our discussion on the S-T synergy has a very important relevance on the transformation to or from each art motif vis-a-vis the Maranaw's perception of this specific culture form/symbol in the course of their art/religious history.

Madale (1976) was quite precise when he analyzed the Sarimanok as an art form in the terms of its relation to rank; and in the process had developed from the naga-motif. I am not quite certain whether or not this could have been the proper sequential development for in his discussion, Madale (ibid), seemed to have argued that the naga motif had been stylized to the Sarimanok. However, he did not seem to have considered the fact of history, with which the Maranaw had to contend in the Islamization process which tended to abstract all physical forms to their most indistinguishable state. But this situation is only half of the picture, which Madale did not readily recognize. For instance, it is possible that he was operating only on the contemporary developments in which the Maranaw recognized more and more their traditional art without regard to their religious status. Thus, in illustrating this more graphically, Madale as we have stated above may have perceived only half of the story, so to say, thus - Sarimanok-to-Naga-to-Sarimanok. He must have seen only the Naga-to-Sarimanok transformation without looking back to really understand the cyclical nature of the process hence the Sarimanok-to-Naga development, the influence of the process of Islamization.

The Torogan cannot be called as such without the panolong, its identifying element, because the Sarimanok in its highly stylized forms is carved on it (the panolong). The stylized form is recognized as the Naga. In other words, it is the naga, the stylized form of the Sarimanok carved on the panolong provided the symbolic link between the Sarimanok and the Torogan, hence the synergy. The inevitability of the S-TS cannot be ignored, and at the same time, the essence of power, prestige, honour and wealth become evident.

Our recognition of the S-TS becomes very meaningful during occasions of special significance to the power holder like celebration

of his "enthronement" as datu, or wedding of a son or daughter, or even the celebration of the birth of the Prophet. The Torogan on these occasions would be festooned artistically with flags of all types (see Madale 1974, 1976) representing all levels of rank, but the flag that occupies the highest or loftiest position in the hierarchy of all these is the Sarimanok flag, which during most important celebrations is placed at the highest point of the Torogan roof. The picture in our mind, therefore, becomes vivid because we see the Sarimanok flag 'perched' at the highest point of the Torogan and at the floor level of the Torogan is the panolong carrying with it the stylized Sarimanok, the naga. Thus, the Sarimanok on both ends of the synergy cannot but be the manifestations of its importance to the Maranaw in the maintenance of the power and prestige of his leader, the datu, the paramount holder of that power, further understood in terms of the stability of the realm, and the harmony that it generates among all his people. Thus, the assertion, So Solotan (datu) na piakasem-sem ka minaganaga [The sultan is to be feared (i.e., honored, respected) like a naga] gives us the idea about the role as well as the function of the sultan/datu in the society.

Moreover, in the display of flags in which the Sarimanok occupies the loftiest position is in itself symbolic of the protocol and rank among all participants in the occasion. The Maranaw phrase paraboat o pandi (embellishment) signifies the elaboration of the set of flags, while another phrase miapened so darpa (the occasion is formal and complete) signifies the highest, hence, loftiest manifestation of rank and protocol. This is on the physical-real level of the synergy.

On the religious-metaphysical order, the power holder, i.e., the datu, is understood in terms of his being the protector/defender of the faith, Islam. He is the spiritual leader par excellence. He provides spiritual stability, hence the paradigm for harmony among his people, between this physical world and the metaphysical world. He provides the synergy between the two worlds; just as the Torogan provides the synergy between the physical Sarimanok and the metaphysical Sarimanok, i.e., the naga.

Current Local Power Structure

In an attempt to read meanings or perhaps even create roles of

these symbols in contemporary local power structure, the effect of which the full development of the Maranaw may be achieved, we may be stretching our imagination too far as to end up snapping the links between tradition and modernity thus bring our moorings for a stable and harmonious social order untenable. But I think it should not be so, because there is so much at stake that the traditions have to play in the movement towards modernization, as evidenced by the enactment of the Local Government Code (R.A. 7160, 1991) which will be the basis for that structural change but without losing the underlying cultural as well as social foundations in tradition.

It is suggested here that Government must not overlook the role of the traditional sources of power, and the structures they not only support but engenders as well, in order to achieve the most effective devolution of power to the local communities. Here we have to include all local communities. We have used the Maranaw here as our classic example because there has been a tremendous amount of study of this group. We are certain that other areas or local communities with all the peculiarities they possess, Government could avail of these to foster greater and much more accelerated development. These are mechanisms that are now in place, and it is but natural that they be adapted to ensure the objectives of Government as evidenced in the enactment of the Code. We believe that all efforts have to be taken to bring in the participation of these local traditions in that Government function of governance in order that its goal for national development (the goal that is overworked in the total perspective of nation building) be achieved for the benefit of the people in the outlying areas, for are they not the REAL OBJECT of this development?

It is our contention at this point that to achieve the goal for full devolution, hence achieve the prospective goal for real participation of the local people as well as avail of their traditions as the door to acceptance, Government MUST not overlook the role of the social scientists to assist in emphasizing the symbols and meanings of these traditions to the bureaucrats who in their enthusiasm to implement the provisions of the Code lose sight of these. Because it is only in the understanding of these (both the Code and Tradition) by both sides that full development can proceed at a pace beyond even our imagination. When we referred to the social scientists, we mean the anthropologists who spend their precious time among these local people studying them, not merely for the sake of knowledge, but

at this point in time the continuing search for commonalities by which NATIONAL UNITY, based on that common identity, can be achieved. In the process, however, also strengthen as well as give great meaning to their ethnic identities. The case of the Maranaw illustrates our view, as well as recognition of the value of the traditional power if in terms of the symbols described in the previous sections of this essay.

Concluding Remarks

This essay does not have any conclusion because it is only suggestive in nature, if provocative in its purposes. Indeed, there can never be full development as perceived by Government if it relies primarily upon structures, roles and functions based on the western introduced science of government. There must not be any equivocation on its part to bring in all sectors, utilize all mechanisms (after fully examining their worth in the business of governance) available in the local communities and bring them in as direct participants in the process.

We would not be surprised if in the long run there will be achieved those that have been set to be goals of the Government -- stability, harmony and again, the overworked word, DEVELOPMENT, for it is only when these are evident in the total environment of governance, we believe, we can never err if every one is galvanized to these goals.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES

In the first National Folklore Congress (NFC) in 1968, the late Professor Dr. Mamitua D. Saber, and Dr. Abdullah T. Madale, both Maranaws as well as members of the faculty of the Mindanao State University, at Marawi City, participated and presented papers on Maranaw folklore. The papers were basically descriptive in nature. Over the following quadrennial congresses organized by the Philippine Folklore Society (PFS), the nature of the presentations on Maranaw folklore, if there were any, were also the same. The following second PFS-NFC held in 1972, as well as the one held in 1976, had hinted on the utilization of folklore in the process of development. In fact one of the papers presented was primarily on the

role of folklore in the process of change, i.e., (pardon the personal reference) J.R. Francisco, "Folklore and Change," Mindanao Journal, IV, 1-2, 1977-1978:77-85). Essay No. 2, in this volume.

The present essay is inspired by that initial attempt at utilizing Folklore as an instrument of change. The principal source of analysis, however, were drawn from the essays of Nagasura T. Madale, namely, "Sarimanok and the Maranaw Set of Flags," Mindanao Journal, I, 2 October- December 1974 (pp. 11-22), "Myth, Symbolism and National Unity: The Case of the Sarimanok," Mindanao Journal, IV, 1-4, July 1977-June 1978 (pp. 153-173); Abdulmari Imao, "Sarimanok and Okkil Art with a Recent Adaptation," Mindanao Journal, IV, 1-4, July 1977-June 1978 (pp. 187-193); David B. Baradas, "Some Implications of the Okir Motif in Lanao and Sulu Art," Asian Studies, VI, 2, August 1968.

Other materials consulted in the process of writing this essay were Abdulmari Imao, "OKKIL Art," Filipino Heritage, Volume 4, 1977, pp. 849-854; David Szanton, "Art in Sulu: A Survey," in Sulu's People and Their Art, ed. F. Lynch, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1963; Mamitua Saber and Dionisio Orellana, Maranaw Decorative Designs and Patterns: A Study of Folk Arts. University Research Center, MSU (unpublished), 1963; Mamitua Saber and Abdullah T. Madale, Editors, The Maranao (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1975) with special reference to Charles R. Warriner, "Myths, Moros and the Maranao" (pp. 32-36), "Myth and Reality in Social Structure," (pp. 37-44), "Traditional Authority and the Modern State: The Case of the Maranao" (pp. 74-81), "The Maratabat and the Maranaw" (with Mamitua Saber and Mamuyag Tamano, pp. 88-94); Melvin Mednick, "Sultans and Mayors: The Relation of a National to an Indigenous Political System" (pp. 82-98) and Mamitua Saber, "Pangampong, An Ancient Confederation" (pp. 71-73).

TEXTUAL NOTES

¹ Cf Madale (1924:11-22) who wrote that "it is possible that in earlier texts... mera borawan was more prominent than... Sarimanok, which in later Darangan texts was the word used (sic)...the Sarimanok may indeed be viewed in the Maranaw Darangan texts..." (p.12)

² Cf this with Madale (1977:160), which is in direct contrast to his

view that the naga was stylized (sic) into the Sarimanok.

³ This term may have something to do with maritime trade and commerce in ancient times.