

PEACE IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES: AN EDITORIAL NOTE

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The only legitimate excuse for another conference on the people's search for peace in the Southern Philippines, a topic about which a long laundry list of solutions has been posted on the wall, is the belief that a new (and perhaps more viable) approach to the subject can be discovered. This volume presents the views expressed in the seminar held at Mindanao State University on November 16-18, 1979.¹ Instead of one approach, however, it provides the reader with many alternative approaches to end the unspeakable violence in this part of the country.

Moroland, as the beleaguered Southern Philippines is sometimes called, has acquired an unpopular label owing to the long and costly fratricidal wars which seem to have no end unless the guns are silenced and the cannons cease roaring. Regarded as home by some three million Muslim Filipinos, the provinces comprising it (Lanao, Cotabato, Zamboanga, and Sulu) have been plagued by the violence which broke out anew during the 1970s. Since then it has wallowed in attention, manifest in the studies done on the subject of violence (cf. Abubakar, 1973; Baradas, 1972; Stewart, 1972; Magdalena, 1977; Utrecht, 1975; McAmis, 1973) to the neglect of establishing peace.

Peace and violence, although sides of the same coin, are not synonymous terms. Preoccupation with one does not mean concern for the other. The difference easily emerges when one reviews the history of some contemporary societies — their peoples itched for war and violence more than they did for peace and serenity. They preferred in their governments a Department of War rather than a Department of Peace; they clung to factionalism and rivalry; they were quick to succumb to jealousy, and

more. It appears that the trend also holds in Moroland, where greater efforts are exerted and more resources spent in violence than in peace. The time has come that the balance must be tipped in favor of the search for a lasting peace in this region.

Underlying the search for peace is the assumption that violence has claimed more than its price. Peace must be allowed to prevail now; the need to deal with it as a phenomenon in its own right is increasingly becoming urgent. To achieve peace, however, we must observe more than the absence of violence and chaos, or the signing of ceasefires and truces, or eschewing of violations of human rights. For peace involves, on the individual level at least, the triumph of these basic virtues in the hearts of men: loving, understanding, sharing, tolerating, sympathizing. Everybody is capable of evincing one or more of these virtues, but the sad fact is that only few are willing or have the facility to do so. On the societal plane, peace implies bilateral relations, mutual co-existence, solidarity, cooperation, integration.

Functionally speaking, peace can be an outgrowth of turmoil as it hides behind the facade of violent confrontations. While its immediate consequences to society are destruction and harm, violence is not in itself an unhealthy thing.² Nor is it a cancerous behavior emanating from an allegedly pathogenic sector of society. When men rebel, it is hardly the case that all they want is to ventilate their aggressiveness and give free rein to their animal instinct to hurt others. It could be that they demand reforms in the established social order. This is exactly what the Muslim Filipino rebels do. All the troubles associated with the militant Muslim National Liberation Front symbolize

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a plea for change. Their function is that of an indicator, informing the owner that his house needs some fixing.

Depending upon the legitimacy of the MNLF's demands, peace can be restored by negotiation and compromise rather than by decimating its ranks. The MNLF should also realize that complete secession, or some other kind of autonomy in the meaning they give it, may engender more problems than it solves. As Peter Gowing sees it, the parties to the conflict (government, MNLF, communists) have "contrasting agenda for peace." To use an analogy, they are like radio transmitters tuned at different frequencies, desperately sending messages to each other. On the one hand, the Philippine government has failed to see or continually ignores the fundamental character of the Muslim Filipinos as dimensionally different from the Christian majority. On the other hand, the MNLF asks for extremely difficult if not impossible concessions from the government. Hence, the prospects for conflict resolution in Moroland have rung hollow or are remotely possible at the present time. Meanwhile, violence and its attendant litany of abuses, sufferings, and anxieties linger, and the hopes for peace remain entrapped in the sand castle. The worst thing is that the warring camps claim that victory is on their side, when both are fighting a losing battle since it is the civilian population — Christians and Muslims alike — which bears the brunt of the internecine conflict. Each day of conflict means years of economic setback, miles of prolonged agonies, thousands of severed threads in social relations. If Christ and Mohammed were alive today it might come as no surprise to see them up in the hills firing their rifles in defense of peace in Mindanao.

We have thus seen that the basic stymy, if not enemy, of peace is man himself. Mahatma Gandhi, known for his advocacy of *satyagraha* (philosophy of truth and nonviolence), had earlier perceived this. He told us that "we, who constitute the social order, are the disease and

we must change, if civilization is to improve" (quoted from S. Radhakrisnan by Beal, 1979: 209). The long road to peace begins with an alley cleared by self-discipline and lighted by individual commitment. If the world is to be rid of wars, then individuals must purge themselves of the passion for disorder through personal transformation. The Gandhi way is approximated by Emily Marohombsar's paper which suggests that the disarmament of the mind must precede the disarmament of the nation. Hinting at education as an approach to peace and unity, the paper outlines its elementary requisites and consequences if it is to be used at all to shape the minds and personalities of the youth. It takes a special kind of education, not just any education; to impart the necessity of peace alongside the desirability of skills for social and economic development. It is obvious, however, that the educational road to peace is a long and winding one.

Godofredo Roperos articulates a similar position. The search for peace, according to him, must entail teaching the individual and imbuing in him a character called "mobile personality" in order to know himself and understand others more. Proper information, released through the various mass media, can create this intended effect, molding as it does the empathic ability of individuals to project themselves onto the souls of others. Patterned after, and following the groove of, the model developed by Daniel Lerner for selected Middle Eastern countries, Roperos is convinced that it can also work in the Philippine South where the forces of modernization are now at work.

In another paper, the periscope for peace is focused upon the subject, magnifying it several times so that people with poor vision may see it. Reuben Canoy views the Mindanao problem as an old and enduring social conflict between Muslims and Christians, which occurred as a matter of historical accident and was later on reinforced by collusion of political forces. As he obliquely puts it, if the Philippines were an Islamized state and had a Muslim President, she

might now have an Ilocano problem. Of course it is too late to alter history, nor can one anticipate that it will repeat itself. But the Canoy paper offers a straightforward political solution, the "real" autonomy as he calls it, to placate the frustrated and angered Muslims "within the framework of Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity." This solution may create a different history removed from the bitterness of the present.

Still another writer, Mamitua Saber, suggests that one good way of knowing the present is by looking at the past to scan lessons from the pages of history. Although not a historian by training (Saber is a sociologist), the author, using the Maranao Muslims as a case, ventures as far as to say that the trouble in Mindanao is characteristically ethnic, tempered by ecological and cultural considerations. When the colonialists set foot on the shores of Lake Lanao, the Maranao quickly reacted in defense of their homeland by fighting, inspired by their cultural-religious definition that such incursion into their territory justified a declaration of *jihad* (Holy War) against the invaders. That instigating effect of culture was apparently absent among the placid non-Muslim minorities (e.g., the Manobo) of Mindanao, whose response to initial group contact was one of flight. The pattern was predictable in all of Moroland, where violent conflict repeatedly occurred whenever the balance of population number shifted. While Saber does not recommend any specific course of action to take, he has driven home a food for thought that past mistakes should not be allowed to happen again to forestall a similar crisis.

Manaros Boransing has put together a host of solutions in his suggestion of "total development," which is a package of long-term strategies designed to diminish the inequalities between Muslims and Christians and eventually terminate the "Bangsa" Moro Problem in Mindanao. In his paper, he offers an integrated approach — one clad with protectionist policies — which cuts across political, social, and economic spheres.

The approaches just cited to arrest the growing spectre of the Mindanao problem do not exhaust the domain of solution. Each of the proposals has its own weaknesses and advantages as well. An inherent limitation common among the views thus presented is that we are forced into a gray area containing hunches and debates on how the formula for a lasting peace may be calculated with a measure of precision. As the violence is "collective" (it involves groups of people who insist on a particular way of doing things), so too must be peace. What if one party does not agree?

Yet we cannot ignore that individual feelings are just as important in coming to grips with the web of conflict. Some of the rebels are known to be fighting for self-interests and are unfamiliar with the ideology for which their group is committed to fight. This group has thirst for vengeance or appetite to redress personal grievances. Still another kind of rebels (or who claim to be one) are those who sow chaos for a fee. They are extremely opportunistic deviants likened to the Marxian lumpenproletariats who take advantage of an already unruly situation. Robbing, stealing, or kidnapping others for a ransom are their forte. The ideological rebel himself brings to the conflict his own feelings about and definition of the situation.

The views reveal particular slants of thoughts. The Marohombsar and Roperos papers are both couched on psychological assumptions that the individuals must change first or be made to internalize certain patterns of thinking and behaving before the concept of peace is understood and eventually put to practice. On the other hand, the Boransing, Canoy and Saber proposals make as their points of departure the contextual attributes of the problem, emphasizing group-level variables and institutions more than the individuals making them. Neither the "micro" nor the "macro" perspective, as these slants of thought are technically known, is the most appropriate approach because each is addressed to particular aspects of the problem and, therefore, requires deployment of certain strategies to contain the present conflict.

It is difficult to assess the validity and meaningfulness of the various peace proposals at this stage. For sure there is hardly a yardstick against which to test them, nor are there easy rules to guide their evaluation. If anything, there is no harm in trying several alternatives one after the other until success is finally had, except that patience wears thin and errors accumulate over time. Whatever works cannot be decided upon through a referendum of

opinions. It is the practical side of the argument, according to the dictum that the "proof of the pudding is in the eating," which concerned citizens in Moroland expect to emerge. They do not care how much it will cost society to bring peace so long as it is peace, and so long as their lives and those of their loved ones are kept away from the aura of fear that hounds this region.

Notes

¹Due to limitation of space, background papers and materials distributed by the seminar speakers cannot be included in this issue. Most important among these materials is the informative variety of readings in the Mindanao Problem compiled by Alfredo T. Tiamson and Rosalinda N. Cañeda (1979), who at the same time were the Seminar Director and Chairperson of the Secretariat, respectively. Dean of Research Mamitua Saber also presented, in addition to his paper, a companion article entitled "Sociological View of the Mindanao Problem," which had appeared in series at the *Times Journal* (Manila, March 26 and April 7, 1975).

²More than one writer (Coser, 1965) had earlier argued that violence had beneficial functions to humanity. It created solidaristic groups, stirred awareness of one's own kind, energized members to work for common goals, and many more. A degree of conflict is necessary, acting as it does as a "safety valve," to carry on the normal activities of the group. A complete absence of it is potentially dangerous to the maintenance of group life, because it is when the energies for conflict are suppressed and finally released that all the imagined dangers are realized. The society self-destructs as a consequence.

³The term "paper," which repeatedly appears in subsequent paragraphs, refers to the material presented during the Conference at MSU.

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