

CONFLICT IN THE "LAND OF PROMISE"

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May 15, 1972

Looking for causes of the current Muslim-Christian conflict will be less fruitful than finding reasons why the situation persists. Successful accomplishment of the latter implies defining what the problem is, a task which in turn has been made very difficult because of seven factors, each of which is briefly explained. By understanding the conflict's present dynamics and form we may arrive at a definition of what the problem really is.

When I left the plane in Manila after a three-hour flight from Iligan, the taxi driver eyed my batik shirt and asked where I had come from. I answered that I had just come from Marawi City. Probably because of my Manila Tagalog accent, he guessed that I was not from Marawi, so he said, "That is not the place to go to — particularly these days." I asked if he had ever been there. The answer was No, but from what he had learned of Lanao — it was an awful place. I told him that I was living and working there and that, after the initial shock of seeing armed men all the time, it was not so bad as most people thought it was, nor what the papers had made of it. At an earlier and calmer period, Lanao had been a superb place to renew one's energies, because of its terrain and invigorating climate. He responded with an "is-that-so?" expression on his face and we went on to disappear into the haze of the mid-day traffic pollution of the rambunctious city that is Manila.

It was with a touch of irony that this discussion was titled; "Conflict in the Land of Promise." I disclaim any responsibility for the title. It is obvious that what the early American colonial administrators referred to as "a land of promise" is hardly that now. It may even be, as one taxi driver described it, "that awful place!" The continual accounts in the mass media of mayhem and carnage in "the land of promise"

hardly picture it as a place in which to build one's dreams.

Too Late to Talk of Causes

What has turned a very rich land into a battleground, reviving once more the age-long enmity that beset earlier relationships? What has brought about the present situation? Asking these questions inevitably brings us to causes, and the whole problem of changing relationships. These seem to be valid questions to ask if we wish to make some sense out of the present anarchic situation.

But the question of what caused the conflict, though very valid at an earlier phase, is no longer relevant. It was not a simple conflict in the beginning nor is it getting simpler. On the contrary, the entire conflict has grown to such an extent that there seems to be no single clear-cut solution. What is needed is a series of solutions aimed at different aspects of the problem and focused at different levels. The earlier willingness among some of the protagonists to work towards a solution has been superseded by hatred. No amount of reason can move people who have seen the blood of their relatives spilled, their houses burned, and their lands taken over.

To talk about causes at this point is irrelevant. The fact that the causes have been listed countless times before by competent authorities and

reported extensively in the mass media has not contributed toward a workable solution. *Why the situation persists*, in spite of repeated efforts to resolve it, *is the more relevant issue*. Further details of bloodshed will not clarify the issue any further. This gloating over day-to-day happenings and the intense preoccupation with details have only made assessment of the situation terribly difficult. A pattern is now evident which allows us to state what is to be hoped for in the present situation.

Impediments to Any Early Resolution of Conflicts

The main focus of this discussion is why there is no hope for an immediate solution. The reason for this is that there has been a general neglect of the general principle involved in all problem solving — *first define what the problem is*. Previous efforts have all been directed toward finding out what happened. Voluminous data, no matter how detailed, do not constitute insight if viewed in a compartmentalized perspective. The difficulties involved in defining what the problem is have to do with the following factors.

- a. Failure to see that the Cotabato and Lanao del Norte problems are related to the general malaise permeating the larger society;
- b. Failure to recognize the differences between conflicts in the two areas and to adopt separate policies for each area;
- c. The endemic ethnic conflicts inherent in the power and authority system;
- d. The absence of leaders who could represent the general sentiments without taking advantage of the situation for their own self-interests;
- e. Incompetent investigating committees which have operated only on a superficial level;
- f. The repression by fear of the main sources of reliable information; and
- g. Lack of trust on both sides.

Let us elaborate these points.

a. *Cotabato and Lanao del Norte reflect the larger society*. One cannot discount the impact that the larger society's rising level of hooliganism, murder, gun smuggling, and gross immorality has on the local context. The political arena

of the Philippines often serves as the vehicle for externalizing and justifying behavior which in another context would elicit general condemnation. This situation will persist for as long as the political socialization of groups subscribing to customary traditions remains incomplete. Ethnic groups utilize the central government system for gaining ends within the traditional system and vice-versa. Local situations are often used as a vehicle in the struggle to gain some foothold within the context of the larger society's power structure.

It follows naturally that if the models that are held in high esteem are characterized by a modus operandi that is generally unacceptable, but nevertheless permeates the system — then we must not be surprised to find evidence in the Cotabato and Lanao areas of a marked breakdown of peace and order.

b. *Cotabato and Lanao del Norte are different from each other*. The failure to delineate the conflicts in the different areas has a lot to do with the problem. A recognition of these differences necessitates the implementation of a different solution for each case. To adopt a monolithic solution for what is so easily dismissed as "the Muslim problem" is to ignore the distinctiveness and highly unique roots of conflicts in the two main troubled areas of Mindanao.

The use of the term "Muslim" has added a further confusion, for it tends to lump many distinctive groups into one category. There is a need to recognize the uniqueness of each culture and society. Simply stated, their being Muslim does not mean that they are all the same. For each of the different Muslim ethnic groups speaks a different language, is differently structured politically, has varied customs and practices, and has responded differently to the role of the Philippine central government. To lump them into a single category, which may be done at times for verbal convenience, is not a realistic response to their social and cultural differences. These differences are the very reasons why Philippine Muslims themselves find it very difficult to present a united front, for the differences among them are often as great as the differences between them and outsiders.

The solutions resorted to in the past have

always been military ("Trouble over there? Send a platoon or a company; that should take care of it!"). In some ways, the armed forces are not totally to be blamed. Historically, it is clear that what the Muslims seem to respect most in any enemy is might and prowess in battle, or intimidation when one has come to the negotiating table. What is taken to be a mark of insolence or arrogance reveals a central psychological character trait of the people.

To submit in the face of armed conflict is to accept a socially inferior position — a situation that is highly insulting. To be trampled on and humiliated, with a gun pointed at one's ribs or at one's temple, is a most shameful and degrading situation, to be avoided at all costs.

How many of our negotiators really know the *modus operandi* of the Muslim? This might explain why one hardly ever hears accounts of negotiation proceedings. It is always confrontation, and confrontation always proves to be bloody.

c. Government must deal with many power figures, not just one or a few. One aspect of Muslim society that is often glossed over is the nature of the system of power and authority, which is basically *multicentric*. There is not a *single* institution or role from which authority and power emanates. The system allocates power and authority among many individuals in many different localities who hold legitimate ranks in the traditional hierarchy. Each grouping of communities or individuals is independent of other groupings and will recognize only the equality of all, rather than any subservient positions. This surfaces in a phenomenon that the outsider often notes: the insolence of the people.

In a system, then, where the government has failed to deal with the many centers of authority and has not recognized the importance of this system, we should not be surprised that troubles erupt so often after the government has just concluded "peaceful negotiations," because the government has taken only one small step in the whole negotiation process.

This multicentric nature of the political institutions is evidenced by intense intramural feuding. Even before the beginning of the conflicts in Cotabato, the province was divided into

several major domains, each domain held in tight control by an overall lord. A considerable number of intramural fights have occurred in these areas. But such incidents, since they involve the native political factions, are never reported in the newspapers.

d. Altruistic local leaders are scarce. There is a general absence of leaders capable of representing the general sentiment without taking advantage of the situation for their own self-interest. In a system where rank differentiation is very marked, there is a constant struggle to find channels for social mobility in an effort to shed social backgrounds that smack of servility. To this end there are constant shifts in the operative values: sometimes the traditional values predominate, sometimes the central government's, particularly if these values have to do with centralization of power. Unscrupulous politicians will use government officials and they in turn will allow themselves to be used in exchange for short-term concessions that serve only as a palliative for the festering economic problems that beset the area.

The pattern of one-upmanship evident in the traditional leadership has compartmentalized and fragmented efforts that otherwise would have been devoted to common ends. There are no common grounds for reconciliation. Political demarcations and fragmentation have operated against the efforts of the "marginal man" who at times makes considerable attempts to reconcile viewpoints and differing perspectives.

There also are some leaders who would prefer the continuance of the conflicts rather than their resolution. The presence of conflicts can galvanize splintered forces, and in a context where sheer naked power is an index of one's position within the hierarchy, conflicts are desired for highly functional ends.

e. Investigations have been superficial. A situation exists where investigating committees sent by the central government never go beyond the superficial aspects of the problem. Part of this has to do with the very short time these investigators spend in the place. In a situation which calls for some knowledge of social dynamics as well as cultural responses, the people who are sent do not yet fully appreciate,

for example, the uniqueness of the dynamics of power in a small Lanao or Cotabato community, which are markedly different from the lowland Philippine pattern. Walking into a situation with very little foreknowledge of the main traits of the group, an investigator will miss the charades, facades, and games people play to buttress their vested positions.

One cannot just march into such a situation, as a former Defense official once did, and start to ask "Now, tell me what happened." The session, attended by as many representatives as there were factions, turned out to be more like Divisoria market than a serious meeting in which the lives and destinies of people were being decided. Watching the Defense official being bombarded by countless arguments was a pitiful sight. Like most other investigators, he was not equipped with the perspective needed to sort out the minutiae into a coherent and meaningful pattern.

f. *Knowledgeable informants are afraid to speak out.* The intimidating atmosphere to which local residents, who realistically assess the problem, are subjected has prevented their contributing their knowledge. One does not discount the possibility of their bias as well, but their long-time residence in the area has provided them with the kind of historical perspective not readily acquired by visiting investigators. Yet they are fearful of the repercussions they may suffer if they tell what they know.

g. *Lack of mutual trust abounds.* The lengthening of the conflict, with no foreseeable solution in sight, has solidified the response of the parties toward each other. The most evident example of this is the lack of mutual trust.

In such a situation, a dialogue can never start. Yet this is what is most crucially needed: the ability to sit down together and talk sincerely with one another.

Summary

To recapitulate, it was stated that to devote one's energies to finding the initial roots of the Mindanao troubles would be an exercise in futility, for the dynamics of the problem have

changed through time. The complexity of factors presently involved in the problem necessitates looking in a different direction — towards an attempt to understand *why the problem has persisted* in spite of well-meaning attempts from so many quarters to bring about a solution. Factors impeding a consensus about how to resolve the problem were explicated. From the study of this instance one learns that quite often the solution to a perceived problem may not lie in finding its original cause, but in understanding its present dynamics and form and so arriving at a definition of what the problem really is.

Note

This is the revised version of a paper read on February 24, 1972, in the public lecture series, "Social Issues '72," at the San Miguel Auditorium, Makati, Rizal, under the sponsorship of the Philippine Sociological Society, Inc. Dr. Baradas, who received the Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Chicago (1971), was at the time of this lecture on the staff of the Mindanao State University, Marawi City. On July 1, 1972, he became Research Director for Panamin.

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Comment on the Baradas Paper

JAMES C. STEWART

February 24, 1972

Much has been written about the causes of the present conflict in Mindanao. Here I intend to deal only briefly with causes and will concentrate instead upon some of the principal effects of the conflict and the new sets of problems which these present. My remarks refer specifically to Cotabato, but most are relevant to the wider Mindanao situation as well.

Causes of Conflict in Cotabato and Lanao del Norte

Let me emphasize first that there are major differences between the conflict in Lanao and the conflict in Cotabato. The violence in Lanao del Norte seems to have been triggered by a bitter rivalry between two political leaders — one a Muslim and the other a Christian. It erupted suddenly and spread quickly, but now it seems to have been fairly well contained. While the conflict has resulted in great loss of lives and property, and has caused massive displacements of the population, it seems so far to have brought only a stand-off. The balance of power between Christians and Muslims in the province does not appear to be radically altered.

In Cotabato, by contrast, the trouble began much earlier and spread more slowly. It started as a series of sporadic encounters in which the opposing sides were not well organized and were not part of any larger struggle or movement. In one area there were clashes between the Tiruray, led by the Ilongo "Toothpick," and the Magindanao, while elsewhere there were bloody encounters between Iranun farmers and Christian loggers. When these early skirmishes were left unchecked they gradually led to a deterioration of peace and order in adjacent areas. The struggle was soon interpreted to be one between the Christian settlers and the Magindanao and Iranun. Within a few months, the fight was being portrayed as a contest between two well-

organized groups — the Muslim Blackshirts, presumed to be connected with the Mindanao Independence Movement, and the Christian Ilagâ who had organized "for their own self-defense."

Today, a year and a half later, the conflict in Cotabato has still not been effectively contained but continues to spread to other parts of the province. Certainly political rivalries have been among the direct causes of the hostilities, but the underlying causes are far more diverse and more difficult to specify. Suffice it to say that these causes include land disputes, a variety of economic problems, unchecked lawlessness, old grievances involving different ethnic groups, considerable crosscultural misunderstanding and suspicion, and a history of abuses by wealthy and powerful individuals, both Muslim and Christian.

Effects of the Conflict

While it may be difficult to unravel this complexity of causes, many of the effects of the hostilities are clear. In the November 1971 elections, Muslim candidates in many parts of the province suffered a devastating defeat at the polls. They lost offices ranging from governor and members of the provincial board to municipal mayors and councilors. It is still too early to assess the full impact of this defeat upon the Muslim leadership in Cotabato, or upon the welfare of the Muslim population as a whole. However, it does indicate a dramatic and perhaps irreversible shift of power which may have profound influence upon traditional leadership patterns and political relations in the province.

Second, there have been significant population adjustments in Cotabato as a result of the conflict. During the evacuations, some Christian settlers fled to other parts of Mindanao or returned to their home provinces, but most

Christian residents and nearly all the Magindanao and Iranun remained within Cotabato. The Christians simply moved to towns where they were an overwhelming majority, and Muslim evacuees took refuge in towns or barrios traditionally controlled by Muslims. At present there are many municipalities which have mutually recognized lines of demarcation between the "Muslim" and "Christian" parts of town, with only minimal traffic across this line. Elsewhere, boundary lines between municipalities perform a similar function, delimiting the territory of one group from that of the other. Limited interaction continues, to be sure, but one tragedy of the conflict is that it has destroyed much of the integration which had been achieved in various towns and barrios. Also, the present arrangement is a temporary solution at best. The potential for further conflict is apparent, especially because the two groups often continue to share the same roads and highways and even the same markets.

As in Lanao, the conflict has caused severe economic hardship for thousands of people who desired no part in the trouble but simply wanted to be left alone. Many of these people were in economic distress even before the trouble began. Around Midsayap, for example, the outbreak of violence came on the heels of three successive crop failures due variously to the tungro epidemic, the effects of typhoons Sening and Titang, and widespread rat infestation. The addition of this man-made calamity of conflict has simply aggravated a situation which was already desperate for many farm families. These farm families represent productive resources which have been rendered temporarily non-productive through no fault of their own. Even apart from compelling humanitarian considerations, there are convincing economic reasons for the government to give its full support in terms of time, energy, and material aid to restore these farmers to productive status in the shortest possible time.

The plight of many of these refugees is compounded by the fact that the farms they had to leave behind are mortgaged. They cannot redeem their land unless they can plant and har-

vest their crops, but they cannot even return to their farms until a reasonable measure of peace and order is restored in their towns and barrios. By the time peace finally comes, they may not have any farms to go back to. Action is urgently needed to avoid the possible dispossession of large numbers of farmers simply because they have been unable to work their farms during the conflict. Government authorities should seriously consider "freezing" all mortgages on farmland in Cotabato and Lanao and imposing a moratorium on foreclosures for the duration of the hostilities.

Reservations not the Answer

I cannot leave the topics of land and population adjustment without a comment on one of the proposed solutions to the conflict in Mindanao. This proposal seeks to create special "reservations" for Muslim Filipinos in selected provinces. It is hard to conceive that anyone who has studied the record of American Indian reservations would propose such a plan for his own people. The disadvantages of this alternative are myriad, but I would like to mention only two of the possible consequences which seem most undesirable. The first is that the concentration of Magindanao, Maranaw, and other Muslim groups in exclusive enclaves would inevitably reinforce the authoritarian control of their *datus*. At least among the Magindanao, this control has gradually declined during the past half-century and is slowly being replaced by more democratic forms of organization and leadership. The comparative isolation of the proposed reservations would be almost certain to reverse this trend and restore much of the *datus'* eroded power. The long-range effect would be to arrest the process of democratization and to make the Muslim population increasingly less prepared for integration into the national body politic. Second, even at present there are major educational and economic disparities between most Muslims in Mindanao and their Christian neighbors. In all probability the reservations would remove much of the pressure for modernization, would hinder improved education and economic development, and would ultimately increase the existing disparity in these

areas. Once again, this would mean an increasing lack of preparation among the Muslims to join the mainstream of Philippine life.¹

Solution is in Renewed Law and Order

There is a widespread feeling among both Christians and Muslims in Cotabato that all that is really needed to end the conflict is sincerity on the part of political leaders — and this means leaders from the barrio and town level up to those in the highest offices of the land. Many people believe that if these leaders sincerely want peace they have the power to dissolve the private armies, to restrain both sides in the conflict, and to restore stability in the troubled areas. Without question, there is sound reasoning to this argument. However, before we place too many hopes in such a solution there are certain facts about the Mindanao conflict which must be understood.

If we based our assessment purely on newspaper accounts and so-called "intelligence reports," there would be considerable danger of overestimating the degree of organization of the different armed groups in Mindanao. How often do we read that a particular group of marauders was "believed to be Ilagá" or "believed to be Muslim Blackshirts"? Often these statements seem to be mere inferences based upon the ethnic identity of the victims. Now it may be that the "Barracudas" of Lanao are well-organized and carefully directed, but it is doubtful that there is any central coordination among all groups of "Blackshirts" or even among all groups of "Ilagá." In addition, many groups tagged with these names are simply bands of outlaws who are outside the immediate control of political leaders from any side. There is also evidence that some depredations, such as house-burnings, are committed by teenagers who are essentially juvenile delinquents. Others are the work of persons who have no real organizational affiliation but who are simply settling old grudges or taking revenge. Once again, much of this criminality is beyond the control of even the most sincere leaders, and it points up the fact that it will take a combination of skillful leadership and efficient law enforcement to bring the situation under control.

The failure of law enforcement agencies to apprehend and prosecute criminals was one factor which led to open hostilities in the first place. The same problem continues to provoke further bloodshed, for when murderers in particular go unpunished there is likely to be an attempt at personal revenge. As one Ilongo farmer from Midsayap told me recently, "I want no part of this fighting, and I am sure that most of the Muslims here feel the same way. But last night there was a killing in Pikit. If that was my relative, and the killer was allowed to go free, then I would have to revenge the death myself. It is the same with the Muslims." Those concerned with bringing peace to Cotabato and Lanao will have to worry not only about how to disband armies and apprehend outlaws, but also how to break this cycle of revenge.

A Proposal

In conclusion, I would like to return to the question of leadership and offer a proposal which might help to improve the present situation. I mentioned earlier that the power of the Muslim datus has been declining in recent years. This is most evident among the Magindanao, whose contact with non-Muslim Filipinos has been most extensive, but it seems true to some degree among all the Muslim groups. The erosion of traditional authority has caused a crisis of leadership within these groups. This crisis is heightened by the low educational level of the general Muslim population. This hinders the development of leadership potential from the lower ranks and causes the burden of leadership to revert to the better-educated upper-class Muslims who are precisely those who have the most to lose by a widespread process of democratization. Some of the well-educated younger datus have managed to overcome this bind to become true representatives of their people, but the transition between the two systems is understandably slow and difficult.

In these circumstances, it would seem that certain non-Muslim leaders could perform an important role in reducing the antagonisms in Mindanao and in making the Muslims there feel that the Philippine government — "the govern-

ment of the Christians" — really does represent their interests as well. Specifically, I would propose that certain senators might "adopt" the provinces which have mixed Christian and Muslim populations. They would consider the people in these provinces a special group of constituents and would devote an appropriate amount of their time and energies to guaranteeing that the interests of these constituents were adequately represented in the Philippine Congress. As it is now, there is only one senator — Senator Mamintal Tamano — who is specifically from any of these provinces. It is unreasonable to expect one man to be able to represent this entire population, or for that matter to wield sufficient influence in the Senate to guarantee adoption of the measures needed in these areas. Besides, there is the danger that this lone Muslim senator may be seen as representing a special interest group rather than the welfare of the region as a whole.

To overcome these difficulties, a group of several senators might take special interest in this region, study the needs of the people carefully, and then act as a group in promoting necessary legislation and appropriations for the different provinces. After all, senators are elected at large so the people who need their help are in a very real way their constituents. Also, it must be realized that the needs of both Muslims and Christians in these provinces are usually quite similar, so there is little need for special legislation or special treatment for any one group.

To illustrate how this might work, I would go farther and — with all due respect — suggest a few names of senators who seem especially qualified to undertake a program like this. For Palawan and Sulu, I would suggest Senator Ramon Mitra and Senator Ernesto Maceda — the former because he is from Palawan and would probably have little trouble in understanding the problems of Sulu as well, and the latter because of his experience in community development work as head of PACD and his noteworthy reputation of concern for barrio people. For the two Lanao provinces, Senator Tamano of course, and possibly Senators Emmanuel Pelaez and John Osmeña. Senator Pelaez is from nearby

Cagayan de Oro and is currently involved in the rural electrification program in this region, while Senator Osmeña should have particular rapport with the Christian settlers in Lanao del Norte, most of whom are Cebuano Visayans. Finally, for Cotabato I would suggest either Senator Almendras or Senator Elizalde, as the case may be decided, and possibly Senator Gerardo Roxas.² Mr. Almendras is from neighboring Davao and is very familiar with the situation in Mindanao. Mr. Elizalde is well-known for his work among the hill peoples in Cotabato as head of Panamin and should easily enjoy the confidence of the Magindanao and Iranun as well. Senator Roxas, being an Ilongo, has a natural concern for the present problems and could achieve major gains toward improved inter-ethnic relations by working for the welfare of the province as a whole.

These bi-partisan teams of senators, working together for the benefit of the region, would represent a little more than one-fourth of the Senate. This is consistent with the fact that the region they would take as their special charge contains a fourth of the nation's population and continues to grow at a rate surpassing that of the country as a whole. Let me stress that I am not suggesting the creation of a special Senate body. This would be purely an informal arrangement among senators willing to accept such a charge. Through their cooperation, and through coordination with congressmen from Mindanao, these senators could wield sufficient power and influence to bring about much-needed legislation to rectify the situation in Mindanao. Together, they could achieve more in terms of economic development and true national integration than all of the agencies such as the PACD, Commission on National Integration, and others could ever hope to do without this type of support. I can only hope there will be senators willing to accept such a trust.

Summary

In summary, whatever may have been the causes of the conflict in Mindanao, its effects pose many new and difficult problems for the future. It has resulted in economic disaster in

large, formerly productive regions. In a very personal way it has brought hardship and despair to many innocent families. It has displaced thousands of persons and has destroyed much of the physical integration which had been achieved. It is certain to leave a legacy of hatred and bitterness which will take years to pass away. In its wake have come realignments of political power which will have enduring consequences. It has emphasized a crisis of leadership among the Muslims which must be overcome, not only for the welfare of the Muslims themselves, but also for the sake of harmonious relations among all ethnic groups in Mindanao. And perhaps saddest of all, this brutal conflict has left unresolved the question of how Muslims and Christians can live together in a spirit of peaceful cooperation as members of one Philippine nation.

Notes

This comment was presented on February 24, 1972, in

the public lecture series, "Social Issues '72," at the San Miguel Auditorium, Makati, Rizal, under the sponsorship of the Philippine Sociological Society, Inc. Mr. Stewart, a candidate for the Ph.D. in anthropology (University of Hawaii), has done several years' fieldwork in Cotabato and was resident in Davao City at the time he gave this paper. He has since returned to Honolulu.

1. "Reservations" have as a matter of fact been declared in favor of several minority groups, most recently (April 6, 1972) for the Tasaday and Manobo B'lit of the mountains of South Cotabato. But these reservations are meant to give these peoples emergency, temporary protection from the inroads of logging and other interests, until such time as better arrangements can be made.

2. *Editor's note.* The Almendras-Elizalde election dispute was settled in favor of Almendras. He was proclaimed Senator by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) March 29, 1972. Manuel Elizalde, Jr., was on April 6, 1972 reappointed Presidential Assistant for National Minorities, the post from which he had resigned to run for senator in the November 1971 elections.

Comment on the Baradas Paper

ALUNAN C. GLANG

April 11, 1972

This report is only preliminary in nature. We realize how limited we are in our attempts to make an objective assessment of the root causes of any complex problem. We are especially hesitant to approach the escalating violence in the Muslim areas of Mindanao and Sulu, particularly in the provinces of Cotabato and Lanao del Norte. Yet when we find ourselves beginning to accept an almost total disruption of peace and order as the normal way of life, it is time to apply our powers of observation and analysis, however limited, to the problem at hand.

Two Views of the Conflicts

We can start by looking at the Muslim-Christian conflicts first from one viewpoint, then the other. The long-standing abuse of numerous Christian settlers, particularly farmers

and businessmen, by certain Muslim datus and political warlords was one of the causes of the present conflict. These abuses had bred deep resentment among the Christians, many of whom privately admit that they had waited for as long as 30 years for an occasion to avenge themselves. Listed among the abuses were the "tong" system practiced by some datus; cattle-rustling; reclaiming, sometimes several times over, of land sold to Christians; threats and intimidations of all kinds; and abuses against women, particularly in areas inhabited by non-Christian tribes. This litany of abuses could go on interminably, so that there was little reason to doubt that sooner or later alliances of political leaders would emerge who would call a halt to what most Christians regarded as an intolerable situation.

When we look at the other side of the picture, however, it is pointed out that what appear to

Christians as abuses of their landownership rights may well be seen in a totally different light by certain Muslim datos and leaders. Most Muslims neither understand nor accept the principle imposed on them by the Philippine land-tenure system, whereby private ownership is conferred through the exchange of land titles. Their traditional view is that land belongs to the tribe, represented by the datu. The ordinary Muslim owns practically nothing in his own name, and he finds it almost incomprehensible that his Christian counterpart should make claims over what he regards as the traditional property of his *sakop*, or clan.

Resettlement and Government Land Titling as Irritants

Early in this century, the traditional land practices of the Muslims began to be challenged by two related developments. The first was the resettlement in Cotabato of large numbers of Christians who had quite different notions of land ownership and land use. The second was a series of cadastral surveys which were undertaken by the American government to classify land in the province and establish ownership in accordance with civil laws of the government, with little or no reference to Muslim traditional tenure practices.

These two events met with varied responses from different sectors of the Muslim population. Some of the less well educated Muslims apparently saw the cadastral survey as a government device for imposing taxes upon them. As a result, when the surveys were conducted they simply abandoned their lands and moved to other areas which had not yet been surveyed, or which had been classified as public lands. Others in the same dilemma sold their lands to Christians for what were often only token amounts.

The datos, however, were usually the beneficiaries and therefore stood to benefit from the new system. Many datos titled their followers' lands in their own names. Later, many sold parcels of this land to the government or to other buyers, with the frequent effect of displacing or dispossessing their own followers.

In a study made by the Alonto Committee of the Third Congress in 1954, a specific case was cited with respect to land conflicts between Muslims and Christians. An excerpt from this report says this.

Land conflicts are aggravated by interference of Constabulary officers and enlisted men. This is particularly true in the case of Lt. Jose Escribano and his men assigned at Tacurong, Cotabato. Several complaints have been filed with the Committee during the hearing of the Committee in Cotabato, complaining against Lt. Jose Escribano and his men who are interfering in the settlement of land conflicts between native Muslims and Christian settlers, using force and intimidation against the Muslims.

It is quite obvious that there has been a woeful lack of government planning with regard to land ownership and distribution in Muslim areas. Going hand-in-hand with this has been a lack of appreciation for Muslim customs and values, which has resulted in a growing fear on the part of many Muslims that the government (which they regard as a tool of the Christians) is engaged in a long-range plan to deprive them of their ancestral homes and land. That there have been "abuses" on the part of Christian land speculators, government officials, and big business operations such as logging firms, cannot possibly be denied. Legalism in some of its most reprehensible forms has resulted in giving "outsiders" titles to land without the slightest regard for the sensibilities of Muslims or non-Christians. Sad to say, the resentment of the Muslims has been mainly felt by hardworking and well-intentioned settlers who acted, for the most part, in perfectly good faith.

Political Maneuvering as an Irritant

In a study of the Cotabato situation submitted to Senator Mamintal Tamano of the Senate Committee on National Integration on April 5, 1971, this writer said of the crisis: "The Cotabato situation was the off-shoot of the determination of an important segment of the Nacionalista Party of Cotabato to wrest the control of the province from the Matalam-Pendatun combined leadership." Again, in a speech delivered at the Fourth Annual Seminar on Islam in the Philippines at the Notre Dame

University, Cotabato City (August 18, 1971), it was pointed out that "the bloody incidents were not motivated by religious differences but by socioeconomic causes. They were largely political." This assessment was made just before the 1971 elections, the result of which in Cotabato confirmed these assertions.

Again in the dialogue conducted on January 15, 1972, politics was listed as one of the major causes of the present conflicts in Cotabato, as well as in the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Because of their educational background and their advances in scientific developments, the Christians have proven themselves to be more progressive than most of the Muslims in Cotabato. Even a cursory comparison of the Christian- and Muslim-controlled municipalities immediately reveals glaring differences in standards of living between the two groups. The ever-growing number and influence of Christian settlers have inevitably led to resentment by Muslim political leaders who are very often the *datus*, and this has gradually developed into what is referred to as a "dominance-diminishing complex."

While the early Christian settlers were welcomed by some Muslim leaders, since it was felt they could help in the development of the region, attitudes began to alter noticeably once Muslim supremacy was challenged. The recent elections show clearly that Muslim political control in the province of Cotabato and Lanao del Norte is now limited to a few rather underdeveloped municipalities.

Blackshirts and Ilagâ

Again in a study submitted to Senator Mamintal Tamano, it was noted that the existence of the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM, formerly dubbed the *Muslim* Independence Movement) had roused fear among the Christians, and caused some Christians, town mayors of Cotabato to organize a counteraction group known as the *Ilagâ* ('rats' in the Ilonggo language). As a matter of fact, just as some Christians in Cotabato view the emergence of

the MIM as the answer of some Muslim political leaders to their fast-fading power and influence in the province, so the *Ilagâ* may be seen as their Christian counterparts. The only difference between the two organizations is that the *Ilagâ* have been used to further the interest of some Ilonggo mayors, who are becoming "*datus*" in the process.

Well intentioned though the founders of the MIM may have been, this movement is regarded by most Christians as a very serious threat to their existence in Cotabato. Not a little of the success of Christian candidates in the recent elections is due to the polarization between Christians and Muslims brought about by the MIM. The political struggle has unfortunately boiled over into armed confrontations between the Blackshirts and *Ilagâ* with consequences that were, in all probability, not foreseen by the founders and supporters of the MIM. The policy of secession from the rest of the Philippines, openly advocated by the MIM, can only lead to further misunderstanding between the Christians and the Muslims, with unscrupulous leaders on both sides exploiting the situation for their own selfish ends.

Breakdown of Law and Order

The inability to apprehend the guilty parties has greatly contributed to the gradual breakdown of law and order in Mindanao. Countless innocent civilians have been murdered over the past year alone, homes have been burned, families have been driven off their lands, work animals and ploughs have been stolen from people who look upon these as vital means of livelihood. More often than not it is the conviction of the victims of these crimes that the perpetrators will never be brought to trial, and that it would be a total waste of time to bring these crimes to the attention of those agencies entrusted with the enforcing of law and order. In the face of such a situation it is no wonder that many have decided to take the law into their own hands.

At the same time there has been a trend toward "warlordism" on the part of powerful

Christian and Muslim leaders who set themselves up as the defenders of "their people." There are rumors of vast amounts of arms and ammunition being issued and smuggled into the province; there is mention of secret training camps where private armies are being put in readiness for an all-out attack against the "enemy," and of some mayors having made municipal police forces their personal or tribal "striking forces."

Uncertainty, fear, and apprehension have thus gripped the people as a result of the failure of the government to provide them the protection they have a right to expect but have evidently been denied. Each side picks up rumors about the other concerning motives, activities, and projections. This has led to a deep and mutual suspicion and mistrust, leaving no alternative for the people but to buy guns and ammunition and be ready if and when the feared attacks should come. It is this mistrust and suspicion, more than anything else, that make prospects for peace and order in Cotabato so dim. Had the law-enforcing agencies in the province done their duty, this situation could not have developed.

Muslim Leaders' Unity

Some Muslim political leaders make it a point to absolve themselves of any personal blame for the poverty and lack of development in places which have for long been under their sphere of influence. Accusations are made of deliberate anti-Muslim prejudice coming from the government in particular and from Christians in general. Incidents have been exploited for their propaganda value in newspapers and radio reports. Faced by what it termed "threats to the existence of the Islamic community in the Philippines" on account of the past and recent events in the Muslim areas of the country, a group of Muslim political, civic, and religious leaders of the Philippines met on July 15, 1971 and issued a communique entitled "Muslim Leaders' Consensus of Unity."

The meeting which resulted in the forging of the so-called "Consensus of Unity" was held at the Bayview Hotel (Manila) and in the residence

of Senator Mamintal Tamano. In this meeting, the Rector of Al Azhar University and Libyan Ambassador Salem Buyasir were in attendance. As a result of the formulation of this consensus of unity and the sustained campaign of radical Muslim youth leaders, a charge of "genocide" against the Philippine government was filed with the United Nations and copies furnished to Muslim organizations, governments, and heads of state in the world. Libya even donated a huge sum of money (about 250,000 Libyan pounds, which is about 4.4 million pesos) as aid and relief for the Muslim evacuees.

Muslims and Christians Unite

During the first Muslim-Christian dialogue, the following measures were suggested:

1. To restore to the people their homes and lands;
2. To stop cattle-rustling, tong collection, and other crimes;
3. To act on long-standing land cases; and
4. To explore the possibility of organizing "Concerned Citizens" groups, to be set up on an ecumenical basis, in the hope that through these groups men of goodwill might find a way to recover lost trust;
5. To continue efforts to insure the impartial administration of justice among all groups, for only in this manner would the various groups be able to co-exist peacefully and a measure of stability be restored to the province;
6. To continue and intensify the government's socioeconomic efforts in the province of Cotabato, with greater attention given to the needs of the Muslims; and
7. To order all and sundry, particularly the warlords, the Muslim and Christian datus, and the oligarchs to surrender their firearms, on pain of being dealt with to the full extent of the law, regardless of faith or political following, should they fail to meet the terms of the ultimatum.

We must face the problem with resolute courage because no matter how much hatred there is, neither side can expect total victory; neither can they totally annihilate each other. If today's protagonists are killed, there will always be the next generation to carry on the

fight. And the enmity will never end. The gap will never be spanned.

We must begin to move towards a solution now. While it is possible that we might not be able to solve the problem at this time, at least our children will be left with a more promising prospect: instead of continuing a fight to the death, they will pursue the attempt to arrive at a peaceful solution of recognized differences.

Note

This comment was presented on February 24, 1972, in the public lecture series, "Social Issues '72," at the San Miguel Auditorium, Makati, Rizal, under the sponsorship of the Philippine Sociological Society, Inc. Dr. Glang (Ph.D. in history, University of Cairo) has played an active part in attempts to terminate the current "Muslim-Christian" conflicts in Cotabato. When not so engaged he is a professor of history at the University of the East.

FORTHCOMING IN PSR: a CONVENTION issue (July-October 1973)

The Philippine Sociological Society's 1973 National Convention will be held at Bacobo Hall, University of the Philippines at Diliman, January 20-21, 1973.

Papers and discussions resulting from the meetings will be featured in a special double issue of PSR.

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