

BOOKS

Knowing the Muslim milieu

Muslims in the Philippines

By Cesar Adib Majul

Published for the Asian Center by the University of the Philippines, 1973

There are about two million Muslim Filipinos living in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, having common traditions, culture and religious beliefs with other countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa. What binds them together is their strict adherence to Islam, not merely as a religion, but as a way of life. Of late, there has been a concerted effort to integrate them into the mainstream of Philippine national life, like other cultural minorities scattered throughout the country. Mainly because of the differences in culture and religion with the Christian majority, many Muslims, through the centuries, have felt isolated from the rest of the nation, even during Spanish regime. The so-called Muslim problem was in the limelight again recently, with the incursion of ill-motivated elements who tried to exploit the Muslims' valid complaints and make these seem their own interest. The answer of the government is two-pronged: the use of necessary force against those who violently resisted authority and the grant of amnesty to those who would lay down their arms and rejoin society;

and a massive social, economic and educational rehabilitation program to uplift the living conditions of the Muslims.

It is against this background that a timely book, "Muslims in the Philippines," by Dr. Cesar Adib Majul, assumes significance. The author hopes that, through the book, the "young Muslims in the Philippines would know more of their past in order to direct their future better just as it is desirable for the other peoples of the Philippines to know more about a potential source of strength for the national community."

He asserts that a better understanding of the Muslim people in the Philippines requires a knowledge not only of the impact of Islam on their social and early political development but also of the circumstances and manner by which their early history became part of that of a wider entity that has progressively become Islamized.

Dr. Majul's book is both a running chronology of and commentary on the early days of Islam in the 15th century, the development of Muslim culture and political institutions, the growth of the Sultanate in the Mindanao mainland and Sulu, the sallies of the Muslims in the Visayas and Mindanao in retaliation for the attempts of

the Spanish conquistadores and missionaries to obliterate their religion and folkways. In brief, the book explains the historical milieu of the Muslim in this part of the world.

The "Moro Wars" from 1565 to the last days of the Spanish regime are depicted in vivid realism. In various chapters are portrayed the heroism and gallant stand of the Muslims, in defending their faith and the institutions.

"At bottom," Majul writes, "the Muslim resistance against Spain in the Philippines was not an isolated or insignificant phenomenon but an essential part of the general resistance of all Muslim peoples in Malaysia against Western imperialism, colonialism and Christianity.

"From a more restricted perspective, the Muslim struggle in the Philippine South can be considered part of the heritage of the entire Filipino people in the history of their struggle for freedom. It is not only that the sultanates represented the most well developed native states in the Archipelago, but they represented peoples who had managed to keep themselves free from foreign invaders at the cost of so much blood, suffering and sacrifice.

Of interest to scholars and students in international law is an exposition on the background of the controversial Sabah claim. New insights are presented here, culled from materials and sources outside the Philippines. They throw a new light and meaning to the Philippine claim over this area.

The author concludes that ownership of the contested land passed on to the Sulu Sultan from the Brunei

Sultan in 1674. It was the same territory that was leased by the Sulu Sultan to the Austrian Adventurer, Baron Gustavus Von Overbeck, accompanied by William Treacher, the British Governor of Labuan on January 22, 1878. The author also concludes that the Sulu Sultan's claim that he never sold the North Borneo (Sabah) territory of the sultanate was quite consistent with the language of his contract with Overbeck which uses the word "pajak." Dr. Majul explains that although some persons have used this word variously to mean sale, cession or lease, to Sulu royalty it most probably meant the right to exploit the land and monopolize the sale of its products.

The importance of Dr. Majul's scholarly work is the fact that it contains new data and fresh observations, based on sources not heretofore tapped by other Filipino writers.

Dr. Majul, of course, has more than sufficient credentials to write this book, dealing with the Muslims from a historical perspective. A professor at the University of the Philippines since 1948, he was the recipient of the Republic Heritage Award for "the most outstanding contribution to historical writing during the period from May 1, 1960 to April 30, 1961." He is the author of other historical books, among them "The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Philippine Revolution," "Mabini and the Political Revolution," and "Apolinario Mabini: Revolutionary." His essays on Islam have been translated by Dr. Nabil Tawil Subji into Arabic and published in Beirut as "Al-Islam Fil-Sharqul Aqsa" in 1966.

AMANTE F. PAREDES

Second guess on what ails this world

Briefing for a Descent into Hell

by Doris Lessing,

278 pages,

Bantam Books

This century is one of visions and apocalypses. Time for artists and mystics to see both glory and catastrophe riding the skies like cosmic Siamese twins, signalling the approach of a decisive turning for this harried globe. One prediction: "... a terrifying spiritual pressure will be exerted on the confines of the real, built up by the desperate efforts of souls tense with longing to escape from the earth. At the same time the world will be infected by a profound schism—some trying to emerge from themselves in order to dominate the world even more completely—others, waiting passionately for the world to die so that they may be absorbed with it...."

... This spoke Teilhard de Chardin, paleontologist-philosopher, and science, that headed, rather humorless uncle of 20th century thought, would be hard put to quarrel with such an expectation. Witness the initial exhilarations of its atomic and lunar exploits palling and the global ego science has inflated with notions of

man as matter's master, now turning wan with doubt. Have its problems so overlapped its achievements that, so close to material liberation, it now finds itself in a new and more terror-filled dimension of existence?

Briefing for a Descent into Hell by English novelist Doris Lessing has lately joined a growing procession of educated second-guesses on what really ails this strange globe. But as she threads together a long, often lyrical meditation on the yet untouched vistas of the human mind with a disappointingly simplistic plot, Lessing falls somewhat short.

An elderly classics professor is having a nervous breakdown. "Round and round and round" goes his mind as he is washed up on the bank of the Thames River in London, "round and round and round" as he is escorted into the psychiatric ward of a state hospital where he raves about being trapped in the North Equatorial currents on a windless, seemingly endless day.

Diagnosed as amnesiac, he is prodded to try remembering who he is. Jonah, he answers. Asked again, he says Sinbad, Bad Sin. The patient is ministered to by Doctors X and Y with the inevitable increasing dosages of tranquilizers. Which only make him sleep longer, thus fertilizing his ravings. We are taken into his mind, the memory of the beginnings of a sea voyage with a crew of bosom friends out to "seek what is." The journey, predictably, turns out to be the circular voyaging of a human mind back to the womb, further on to a pre-uterine existence, travelling

through time spirals and archetypal memories of innocence lost then found then lost again.

The ship encounters "a Crystal, a globe of luminous light" which descends on the deck and swallows all but the professor. In panic, he builds himself a raft and sets himself adrift. The expected storm comes and when the currents are calm again, he comes to a school of porpoises, one of which approaches his raft and takes him sailing on to a paradise island. Here, a potentially first-rate story turns third-rate.

In an ungraceful mish-mash of pop archaeology, anthropology, mythology, even ecology, we are treated to the adventures of a Jungian Robinson Crusoe with side games of Hunt the Symbol Down.

As if that journey on a porpoise's back weren't enough, the professor now finds himself successively in (a) the heart of the paradise island where rare fruits grow and tame tigers gambol (b) the ruins of an ancient stone city and (c) the very middle of this city's courtyard, which just happens to be a circle in square, surely the most easily available mandala of rationality vs. irrationality or art vs. science, whichever way you want to take this 19th century alchemical symbol.

There's more. Under a full moon, when madness is supreme, the hero participates in meat-eating rituals with some phantom toamads among who are the women in his past. Then he encounters two warring animal races, the Rat-dogs and the Apes whose main preoccupation seems to be

humping. And then, he meets a giant White Bird (for peace and sweet reason?) which takes him flying over oceans languishing in sloughs of chemical waste.

Finally, the plot brings us to the book's title. It turns out that there had been a Heavenly Conference of Deities representing all the other planets of our solar system. It had been decided there that Earth, with its wars and its organized greed, was tipping the cosmic balance dangerously close to disaster and it was time for these Deities to take human form. A Briefing for a Descent into Hell is given the rescue team plus a mental microprint of their mission to teach earth the Law of Harmony.

Which is all the poor old classics professor is trying to remember since he is no less than Mercury, that cosmic wit himself, so overcome by the experience of having been born and raised an earthling that he becomes a crotchety scholar of Greek and Latin and winds up in the psychiatric ward of a state hospital somewhere in London, England.

Novelist Lessing proceeds to take sideswipes at the educational system and the psychiatric profession—education as the process which warps the rich sensitivity of a child in molds poured by the blindness and egocentricity of previous generations and psychiatry as the tragic-comic dance of the lame leading the blind. We can empathize with the author as her arrows find their mark but reserve the right to note that blunted arrows do not stick.

SYLVIA L. MAYUGA