

A BOOK AND A NEW NATION

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CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUCH THAT, IN OUR PRESENT WORLD, IT IS the academic community we look to for the writing of books: for the development of theories, for the explanation of phenomena, for the definition of the clues that give us the order and the stability we look for in our national life. It can hardly be otherwise, for not only is there already the inclination to put in writing the ideas that could well prove decisive at some future point in time; there is also the moral compulsion exerted by academic institutions themselves, so well put in the phrase "Publish or Perish."

For this reason perhaps, not too many books coming from academe can be considered socially relevant. There is a tendency, instead, to discuss too generally, often to the point of meaninglessness, to argue in relation to very little, to develop cosmological dimensions that play on words rather than on issues, events, decisions, and policies.

Having said this, it would be clearer now why Dr. Cesar Majul's book, *Muslims in the Philippines*, which we are launching this afternoon, is even more important than its very large and intrinsic merits may at first glance call for. For, first of all, this is a useful book and a timely one at that; one which has an operational focus, a specific application in the understanding of a specific problem, an approach that may well presage the changing of our own present approaches and the building of our New Society.

How, you may ask, can a book be of direct service in building a Society? A book, as we all know, is the product of intellectual effort; the output, therefore, belongs in the realm of ideas. A book's importance lies in the idea, or the collection of ideas, contained in it. In an important sense, a nation is built, a nation is founded, on an idea or a set of ideas.

Some of the ideas underlying the founding of the New Society, as President Marcos has said, lie in the awakening of the Filipino consciousness, the re-identification of self, and a rediscovery of the power and purpose of the Filipino people.

* Speech delivered during the booklaunching of Dr. Cesar Majul's book *Muslims in the Philippines*, May 25, 1973 at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

I find such ideas implicit throughout this book; they are obviously back of the fervor by which it must have been written. Because the book strikes these chords, and relates them to the burning issue of national integration, and to our relations with the Asian world, no Filipino can ignore the message of this book. Dr. Majul speaks of "Islamic consciousness" as a force that binds together a conglomeration of diverse peoples, enables them to stand up to external aggression, and to relate themselves with pride and integrity to a larger international community. In the expanded and more inclusive context of a national society, Dr. Majul is telling us that some such consciousness, whose components could very well include Islam as it now includes Christianity and other faiths and creeds, may be necessary for the ultimate success of our common endeavor.

In this book, Dr. Majul has, to my mind, accomplished a number of things. It looks to me a prodigious effort of scholarship; on scholarly grounds alone I am sure it is a landmark in the rewriting of Philippine history. But here I would like to concentrate on what it does to relate to our current pre-occupation — that of building a nation anew. If you remember, our history books usually treat Philippine history as congruent with the story of Western colonialism in the Philippines; usually, they deal with our pre-European history in cavalier fashion, as if it can be glossed over. This work is among the first, if it is not the first, to correct this perspective; it links our cultural identity with the larger civilization of Southeast Asia, and it makes the Philippines an integral part of the cultural mainstream of Southeast Asian peoples. In doing so, it also brings forward the reconstruction of a neglected area of the region's past: the story of the sultanates and the datuships, in Sulu, Mindanao, and Borneo, through which our ancestors virtually lived as nation-states in themselves, in lively interaction with similar political entities throughout the Malaysian world.

This last point is important because the successor states to earlier societies now exist all around us; the New Society itself *is* emerging as an authentic successor state alongside the others. In a sense, we are resuming an interrupted process of political development in our region.

I have said earlier that the building of a nation is essentially a voyage of discovery of the collective self, in certain cases the re-discovery of self. President Marcos, in this connection, has reminded us that the establishing of the New Society is the occasion for gaining new perspective on ourselves — by reviewing and whenever necessary, revising our ways, habits, institutions and our concepts of democracy and of nationhood.

At the moment, we are trying very hard to get our people up here to develop a new outlook towards our cultural brothers, especially to the Muslims; at the same time we are trying to get the Muslim peoples to take a fresh look at themselves, at the national government, at the rest of us. The problem, as I see it, lies in the very concept of majority-minority relations, the chasm that has opened between people who fancy themselves to be closer to the seats of power, because they are the majority, and the people who think of themselves as deprived, neglected and exploited, because they are the minority. One reform that is needed is to erase the idea that the nation is made up of a majority and of minorities. We are all majorities, no one is a minority.

Reading this book will make it easier to effect such a reform in our thinking, for it will lay bare the roots of enmity between our peoples, and the sources of the gap that has grown between us. It reveals how this gap was deliberately fostered because it served the ends of an alien power. Indeed, the roots of unity and of a common identity are laid, in spite of this book's emphasis on the Islamic elements of our heritage.

From these basal origins we, both Christians and Muslims, have come a long way, but we have diverged far from each other. The divergence is a historical product; as Dr. Majul reminds us, the Spaniards, with their native allies, felt they were reenacting in these far-off isles the struggles that not so long ago they waged against the Muslim Moors on the Iberian peninsula. The question is asked, "why do we, the Malays, Muslim or Christian, why do we always have to reenact the foreign wars of foreign peoples?" Can we not live in peace with each other; can we not live side by side as Filipinos regardless of any dissimilarities among ourselves.

To me, the value of this book in the context of the present times lies in two things: first, in revealing to all Filipinos the manner and degree of their differences among themselves; and second, in bridging the gaps that have arisen as a partial result of these differences. These two may appear, to some, a paradox, but it is the function of the new concept of national integration to dissolve the paradox. From being a vice, cultural and religious differences become a virtue. When the time comes that Filipinos who are Christians take pride and glory in the achievements of the Filipino as Muslims, and conversely, when Filipinos as Muslims can take pride in the achievements of Filipinos as Christians, and when one can learn from the other — when we can do all these,

without requiring that one lose his uniqueness, then surely we are one people.

The first step toward reform in this matter is, therefore, a change in outlook and perception among Filipinos. In the days to come, the whole nation will be busy pushing forward a development plan that in sheer physical terms, may very well change the face of Mindanao and Sulu, affecting the people there in a very profound and fundamental way. But development is not just infrastructure projects or a question of how much resources we can pour into Mindanao. Development has an even more important dimension — the human dimension — of getting people to think more rationally and to act more effectively. Unless we can effect this change of outlook and perception, everything will be meaningless. This is admittedly the toughest aspect of development. But it has to be done.

It must be done, because the problem in reconstituting society is in making a modern nation out of many tribalistic communities. One of the happy effects of martial law was to begin the process of breaking down the many tribalistic enclaves into which the Filipinos had come to enfold themselves, and merging all of them as so many cooperating units into one single, unitary society. It is a process which we have come to refer to as a matter of instilling discipline. But the demand for cooperation is specific and functional, it is not totalistic. This means, in effect, that one could be a worthy member of the New Society in terms of one's contribution to the welfare of the whole, to the goals of society which in turn is reciprocated in terms of the benefits of society that the New Society can confer upon one as a result of participation. But nothing more is really demanded of anyone beyond such loyalty and commitment.

President Marcos has made it quite plain: this new nation which we are now building requires the participation of all its citizens; it will draw upon the special abilities or characteristics of every one. As you know, an ability or characteristic may derive from one's training, or from one's membership in a group, class, or association, or it may derive from one's religion, or even from one's ideology. Thus, participation in the positive sense is premised on the existence of variety; on the other hand, it does not require the absence nor the erasing of a distinction or difference. In this concept of nationhood, following Dr. Majul's example, we are building a new nation in the Philippines which is based on the necessity for variety, but which renders the existence of variety irrelevant for the purpose of creating a single nation. I regard this as the operative message of this book.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Asian Center for having published this book at this time and, I think I voice the sentiments of all Filipinos and all our friends who would wish as well, when I extend our grateful thanks to Dr. Majul for having written this book at such a timely period in our country's history.

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