DECEPTIVE NATIONALISM AND THE 1998 PHILIPPINE CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION: A PHILIPPINE MUSLIM'S VIEW

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In a country like the Philippines where people are not homogenous, the concept of nationalism and its associated notions of national interest and national consciousness can be misleading and deceptive. This view is supported by the fact that in this country, the so-called nationalist elite -- among them politicians and academicians -- have been marginalizing the national minorities and disenfranchising them of their rights to indigenous property and identity. Through the instruments of the mass media and books and reinforced by "sacred" symbols and imposed consciousness, these "nationalists" are responsible for alienating the minority groups from their very notion of nationhood, which has perpetuated their marginalization as a people.

Framed within a highly centralized and unitary structure of government, the elite notion of nationalism assumes the form of internal colonialism which has been eroding the life supports of the nationalist minorities and the trust of these people in the central authority. In such unitary set-up, these minority groups are stagnated in their disadvantaged conditions making them vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and elite manipulation. A classical case has been experienced by the Muslims as citizens of this Republic. In a particular case of Philippine history, the Muslims in the Philippines have been victims of Philippine historical manipulation.

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Muslim Side of Philippine History

The Muslims as citizens of the Philippine Republic, have been demanding that their right to Philippine history be given justice. Their right to an honored place in Philippine history has been denied by the so-called Filipino nationalist historians, such as Teodoro Agoncillo, who, according to Azurin, "is oversimplifying the history of the Philippine revolution by associating it only with Bonifacio, Rizal, Aguinaldo, and their associates in the Propaganda Movement and the Katipunan."[1] This kind of chauvinism had disenfranchized the Philippine Muslims of their glorious and heroic participation in the struggle for Philippine national liberation, for which the "nationalist" scholars are guilty of intellectual bias and selective scholarship which ran counter to the facts of true Philippine history. The Muslims as citizens of the Philippine Republic deserve an honored place in that history. Such important role should be given recognition, not only in history books, but also in national symbols, such as the Philippine flag, where Agoncillo, in particular, was the most stringent oppositionist to the clamor of the Philippine Muslims in the 1970's to add a ninth ray to the Philippine flag's sun to symbolize the long anti-colonial struggle of the Muslim communities. Azurin, in his article, reveals that Agoncillo debased such clamor as ludicrously unhistorical.[2]

Two Faces of Philippine Revolution

Cesar Adib Majul, a highly-respected scholar on Philippine Muslim affairs, argues, on behalf of the Muslim citizens, that "if the Philippine revolution is to be considered not just a movement of some Christian natives against Spanish colonialism, but of the Filipino people, then there is no reason why the more than three centuries of Muslim struggle against Spain and America cannot be considered as a significant part of the Filipino struggle for freedom."[3] Surely the Muslim struggle was not a mere case of revolt, as being belittled in Philippine history books. It was a patriotic struggle of the duration, scale, and magnitude, which may even surpass that of northern Philippine revolution -- albeit struggling for the same goal of national liberation.

Philippine national historians should not blur the fact that in the Philippines there were parallel struggles of racially and ethnically related peoples -- the Muslims and the Christians, with the former defending hard to maintain their in dependence as the latter were struggling to

regain their independence that was lost to the colonizers. Both peoples helped to bring about the present situation where they find themselves trying to integrate into the nation of Filipinos.[4]

Questionnable Philippine Independence Day

In the light of this clarification and in consideration of the foregoing historical arguments, the present Ramos administration, through its Centennial Commemoration committee, must reassess its position on the date June 12 as Philippine Independence Day. The June 12 Independence Day declaration was a product of Aguinaldo's military dictatorship "which was bloated by the dictator's *kabayan* as historically valid and nationally representative." Actually, the June 12 Aguinaldo's declaration lacked civil participation and people's endorsement. In the words of former President Macapagal: "Aguinaldo's 1898 declaration was made in his capacity as agent of [U.S. admiral] Dewey who brought him back from Hongkong, armed him and told him to resume his fight with the Spaniards."[5]

Macapagal Proclamation No. 28 declared in 1962 the transfer of Philippine Independence Day from July 4 to June 12. Hurt by the US Congress rejection of the bill on Filipino Veterans claims, and probably aroused by some sense of nationalism, Macapagal branded July 4 as "tantamount to the celebration of the Philippine subordination to and dependence on the United States ... [and] recollects more the peaceful independence mission to the United States and not to the heroic and successful revolution against Spain."[6] Macapagal deserves sympathy for these comments. However, his choice of June 12 as the alternative date of Philippine Independence, does not do justice to historical events. This can be gleaned from the following text of Macapagal Proclamation No. 28, which has no historical basis:[7]

> "Whereas the establishment of the Philippine Republic by the Revolutionary Government under Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo on June 12, 1898, marked our people's declaration and exercise of their right to self-determination, liberty and independence" (Underscoring mine).

The "Philippine Republic" nor "the Revolutionary Government" referred to by Macapagal was not yet existing on June 12, 1898. The so-

called "First Philippine Republic" was claimed to have been established on June 23, 1899 and the Revolutionary Government was organized after the June 12 declaration. Besides, the June 12 declaration did not carry the blessings of the Filipino people's representatives. There was no congress to mention for even the Malolos Congress was established only three months after on September 15, 1898 at Barasoin Church in Malolos, Bulacan. June 12 proclamation was an Aguinaldo-dictated independence day. Even Apolinario Mabini seriously expressed the opinion that June 12 independence declaration was the exclusive handiwork of the military without people's endorsement on popular criteria. Macapagal's "people's declaration" is a gross misinterpretation of that fact of Philippine history.[8]

Muslim View of Philippine Independence Day

To the Muslim citizens in the country, the June 12 independence declaration is the act of Aguinaldo alone as "Commander-in-Chief" of his military which cannot be Philippine or national in scope, involving all the inhabitants of the Philippines. June 12, 1898 did not include the Muslims who were then still independent, albeit trying hard to maintain it. In fact, Aguinaldo's message to the Malolos Congress on January 1, 1899, "proposed that his government be empowered "to negotiate" with the Moros (Muslims) of Jolo and Mindanao for the purpose of establishing national solidarity upon the basis of a real federation with absolute respect for their beliefs and traditions." (Underscoring mine) This message of Aguinaldo manifests the recognition of an independent government of the Sultanate of Sulu and Mindanao and the independence maintained by the Muslims at large, otherwise, he could not have proposed "a real federation" and "a national solidarity"

What should therefore be the appropriate Philippine Independence Day? "Without personal feeling to determine history," Ambassador Pacis proposed July 4 as the independence of all inhabitants of the Philippines. He argues that "as there was no united national aspiration and no common independence goal among the Philippine inhabitants prior to American colonization, the cause became common only when the whole Philippine archipelago was subjected to American colonialism and the struggle of the Filipino peoples became common which was to regain their lost independence."[9] Ambassador Pacis was right in calling attention to the fact that Gen. Aguinaldo's independence declaration has no connection with the Philippine Independence obtained in 1946. June 12

which precedes American colonization has no meaning as far as freedom from American colonialism is concerned. If an argument, like that of Macapagal, is raised to the effect that "a nation is born into freedom on the day when such people moulded into a nation by a process of cultural evolution and sense of oneness born of struggle and suffering, announces to the world that it asserts its natural rights to liberty and is ready to defend it with blood, life, and honor,"[10] then certainly, that day was not June 12, 1898. Way back in the past, this had been the cry of Rajah Sulaiman, of Sultan Kudarat and of several other Philippine Muslim revolutionaries, whose vision of a nation greatly surpassed the Aguinaldo notion of Philippine nation. The best expression of this vision was the extent of jurisdiction of the Sultanate of Sulu which was symbolized in its flag composed of a crescent moon with five stars set against a green background. The five stars represented the areas of Sulu Sultanate territories which include: 1) Kalimantan, Indonesia with Balikpapan and Batarakan as the seat of power; 2) Sabah with Sandakan and Marudu as the seat of power; 3) Palawan, as overseer of Visayas and Luzon; 4) Basilan, as overseer of Mindanao, and 5) Sulu, as the overall central government.[11] The statutes of the Sulu Sultanate as a sovereign and independent state were recognized by the Spanish Crown, its chief colonial adversary, as well as by the British, the French, the Dutch and the American governments in most of their treaty relations with the Sulus. Commenting on the Peace Treaty of 1737 between Spain and Sulu, a Jesuit scholar named H. de la Costa made the following comment:

> "... it is important to note in view of later developments that it was a treaty, strictly so-called, that is one between two sovereign and independent states, each recognized as such by the other."[12]

A noted Philippine Muslim historian, Najeeb Saleeby, pointed out that the power of the Sulus all over Luzon and the Visayan islands, the Celebes Sea, Palawan, North Borneo and China Sea, and their trade extended from China and Japan at one extreme to Malacca, Sumatra, and Java at the other.

Historical facts show that the Muslims maintained their own system of government separate and independent from the Christianized Filipinos, who lost their independence to the Spanish colonizers. In the process of the Filipino Christians struggle to regain their independence, the Muslims had no participation as they were busy struggling to maintain their

independence which the Spaniards tried to wrest from them but failed to exercise control. This is why the Muslims did not have participation in the Propaganda Movement, the Katipunan, the Aguinaldo's dictatorial government and the declaration of the Philippine independence on June 12, 1898.

Conclusion: In Search for a More Meaningful Philippine Independence Day

In our time, the concept of one national community should not be based on one side, however socially powerful and numerous they are. The revolution of 1896 and the consequent declaration of independence on June 12, 1898, could not be truly considered Philippine revolution and Philippine independence declaration. At most, it was a Tagalog rebellion or an armed uprising. Philippine historians, like Agoncillo, tend to credit Tagalogs, Pampango, and other northerners as the only nationally significant opposition to colonialism because they are the ones writing and interpreting Philippine history. Even then, they are not licensed to manipulate facts of history for which they are morally and intellectually bound to defend its integrity and accuracy. Commenting on Agoncillo's scholarship, Glen May (1992)[13] reveals that Agoncillo self-consciously juggled his data and analysis to suit his bias or his intention to write hagiography of his own fellow Cavitenos and kinsmen. That Agoncillo was the strongest opposition to the Muslim clamor for honorable place in Philippine history through symbols such as the Muslim clamor for the ninth ray of the sum in the Philippine flag as already mentioned, is a manifestation of this regional, if not religious bias.

In sum, since June 12 is a strange Philippine Independence Day -- which is historically incorrect, a one-man dictatorial proclamation without popular or Congressional consent and limited in scope, there is a need to change this Philippine independence day and to forego the 1998 Centennial Commemoration. For the Philippine Muslims, the Centennial celebration has no meaning. Whatever amount of money being appropriated for the celebration should better be channeled to the indigenous communities where such resource is very much needed. Filipinos, especially national minorities do not want to be fed with symbols which suffer from lack of integrity and national representation.

July 4 is not also an appropriate national independence day for valid subjective reasons. Macapagal was right in declaring that "July 4 perpetuates unpleasant memories of subordination and dependency to American colonialism." In addition, even after July 4, 1946, the Filipinos have been suffering under the pseudo state of so-called freedom and independence which was an euphemism for neo-colonialism.

Since June 12 and July 4 do not symbolize true independence day for the Filipinos, what could be the appropriate Philippine independence day? That day should be historically correct, nationally representative, and FOUGHT FOR, NOT OFFERED.

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Endnotes

[1]Arnold Molina Azurin, "The City Versus Ethnicity," *Philippine Free Press* November 20, 1993, p. 36.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]Cesar Adib Majul, "The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People," *Asian Studies* Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 304.

[4]Jainal Rasul, *The Philippine Muslims: Struggle for Identity,* 1970, p. 4.

[5]Vicente Albano Pacis, "Personal Feelings Should Not Determine History," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* November 30, 1993.

[6]*Ibid.*

[7]Jainal Rasul, *The Philippine Muslims: Struggle for Identity,* 1970, p. 118.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 117.

[9]Vicente Albano Pacis, "Personal Feelings Should Not Determine History," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* November 30, 1993.

[10]Diosdado Macapagal, "In Support of the 1998 Centennial," *Bulletin Today* 1970, p. 113.

[11]Jainal Rasul, *The Philippine Muslims: Struggle for Identity,* 1970, p. 113.

[12]Asiri Abubakar, "Sultanate of Sulu," *Filipino Muslims: Their Social Institutions and Cultural Achievements,* Jocano, ed., 1983, p. 20.

[13]Arnold Molina Azurin, "The City Versus Ethnicity," *Philippine Free Press* November 20, 1993, p. 36.

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