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MABINI AND NATIONALISM

The problem about nationalism is its recurring changes in meaning when related to current situations and circumstances. For example, some five years ago, the following statements on nationalism were made by premiere Asian leaders at an international conference in Bangkok on the subject "Beyond Nationalism," which I had the privilege of attending.

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The Foreign Minister of Singapore, the erudite Rajaratnam, said on that occasion: "Today's youth has never suffered. Thus, it does not understand nationalism and our struggles to obtain it. Hence, their fight today is against the present authorities, meaning us, the Establishment."

When asked by Djakarta newspaper columnist Roshwan Anwar if it was not true that a national government could also be oppressive, Minister Rajaratnam answered: "Happiness is relative. Asian society always wants what it itself cannot give."

He went further: "Regional unity must not be in terms of a common past, as a colonial exper, or a common culture. But unity must be in terms of future needs. We should get together by looking and planning ahead for what is good for us all ... we have to make a decision. Either we modernize, or we get out of the race, out of the economic competition, and stay as backward as we now are,

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Lecture delivered by Mrs. Maria Kalaw Katigbak during the 3-day Symposium on Apolinario Mabini held at Nasugbu (Batangas), Batangas City and Lipa City on 17-18-19, July 1974, respectively, under the auspices of the Provincial Government of Batangas, Municipality of Nasugbu, City of Batangas and City of Lipa, in cooperation with the National Historical Commission.

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where our life span is only 35 years, without technology, scientific learning, and so on."

Then he said conclusively: "Nationalism is like a Rolls Royce, a prestige car. It maintains the same outside appearance; but inside, its parts are no longer the original ones, having been changed one with the progress of time. But externally, the car still looks like the same status car."

Foreign Minister Malik of Indonesia also gave his own point of view. He said, "Through regional cooperation we can look for a solution to our problem of nationalistic extent. Regional cooperation does not sacrifice national sovereignty, but it can develop a country faster. If we do not open our country to the outside world, nationalism and regionalism, become narrow. The first step, then, is nationalism, then regionalism, then opening up our country to the world."

Ashoka Mehta, member of the Indian Parliament, added: "A renaissance is necessary for nationalism. A country has to look back at its culture and its past before it can go forward into its future."

Then he asked: "To what extent shall we be allowed to safeguard human rights as part of nationalism? Freedom is more important than nationalism. If human rights will be suppressed, nationalism will mean nothing. Every nation should safeguard freedom in its charter, and freedom for all groupsⁱⁿ that country... The floods of nationalism must be controlled and not loosened up The young are not happy because there is a gap between what we say and what

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we do. But now that there is a resurging of nationalism, there is no more need to feel fear for them."

Said Dr. T. McHale, delegate from the Philippines: "There is no other way for Asia to develop except through nationalism. There is no alternative to nationalism."

To which, as another delegate, I took the opportunity to add: "Hunger can be a substitute for nationalism, and also as a factor for development, to force Asian countries to move forward and develop, economically speaking. Nationalism and democracy are not indigenous to our Asian culture... our loyalty is to family and tribe. The idea of nationhood is Western. We used the idea of unity to fight an enemy, after which we lapsed into disunity again...."

"Nationalism was propagandized and pushed, just as the idea of regionalism is now being propagandized and pushed...."

This was in 1968 in Bangkok.

It is at this point that I want to bring in the hero we are honoring today, Mabini, as far back as 1899, or 75 years ago, already had also conceived of the idea of regionalism, calling it a confederation of Asian states; except that, with true nationalistic pride, he conceived of it as being led by the Filipino nation which, in its march to freedom via the Revolution, had shown its capacity for self-government, thus, by example, beckoning the other Asian nations to follow. He called his people Malay-Filipinos belonging to a wider race, the Malay race. (From Cesar Majul's book, Apolinario Mabini, the Revolutionary.)

After this preliminary statements with which I have tried

to update the meaning of nationalism to that of our times, a meaning that conceives of nationalism as narrow as if it does not lead to unity in the region and the opening up of a country to the outside world, I come now to the subject assigned to me: Mabini and Nationalism.

The approach I shall attempt to present is to relate Mabini's nationalism to the situation prevailing in our country today: namely, the implementation of Presidential Decree 1801, which has imposed martial law in the Philippines. I am sure I am not bringing up anything new when I mention the present dilemma regarding nationalism in a current situation in terms of what I surmise is in the silent minds of many of our leaders and intellectuals who, caught by surprise by a martial law suddenly imposed, are placed in a quandary of whether or not to cooperate with a strange set-up obviously unlike in its many factors, to the previous set-up of their political experience, where legislation, execution, and judgment did not emanate from one single body or person.

This is what we should seek for when we look up and study the thoughts of the leaders of our glorious past. Guidance, comment, clarity of vision. In times of confusion, our heroes are our source of knowledge. Experience is still our best teacher.

Hence, in relating the term nationalism to our present political situation, where PD 1081 is being enforced and prevails, and where many leaders and intellectuals are quietly rationalizing on the attitude and course of action to take without violation to conscience and to belief in democratic traditions, I have chosen to select as pertinent to the situation, what I consider a nearly parallel experience in the

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life of Mabini, which is: those restless and perturbed days when, while still in Guam, he had to arrive at a decision on whether or not to take oath of allegiance to the United States of America. Mabini's problem included that of the physical act of assent, the signing of the form of the oath.

The problem of our leaders and intellectuals today is purely mental. Although no paper has to be signed that we know of, nevertheless, they have to arrive at a decision, too.

To understand and explain Mabini at this time, we should tread once more the steep and narrow labyrinths of his self-examination, from the moment he had to re-assess the motives for the coming of the Americans to the Philippines (Aguinaldo and Mabini had at first believed they had come to help throw out the Spaniards) to the bitter moment of self-surrender to them.

It must be pointed out that Mabini laid such great importance to the virtue of nationalism, which he interchanged with love of country, service to the people, submission to the will of God, that from out of the ten commandments that he issued in his True Decalogue, four, plus two in his Notes at the end, were on nationalism.

Said Palma in his Biographical Study of Mabini: "His point of departure and his goal were the people. That is why he wanted to consult the people in all things... he decided to join the Revolution because he thought the people were for it. When he was consulted on autonomy of government, he proposed that the people be consulted about it..... he submitted to peace when he became convinced that the people wanted peace."

In his Memorias de la Revolucion Filipina, Mabini, himself

defined patriotism thus, as quoted by Senator Jose W. Diokno in Mabini, the Herald of Hope, 1966, (The Sunday Times): He alone possesses true patriotism who strives to do the greatest good for his countrymen."

Palma describes further, in his Estudios Biograficos de Mabini, the nationalism of Mabini, whose most prolific writings all referred to the days of the Revolutionary struggle. Said Mabini, according to Palma: "Strive to obtain the happiness and independence of your country before your own. One should not recognize any authority that does not emanate from the people..... One has to love his neighbor, specially one's fellow-citizen and fellow patriot."

Further, explains Palma, in Mabini's articles on What Imperialism Says and Does, America in the Philippines According to the Foreign Press, and American Protests Against the War in the Philippines, Mabini had words of subtle irony, of virile condemnation, against the pernicious conduct of those "who take advantage of the promises of foreign domination, the greatest benefits, and base on these the progress and happiness of the Philippines."

We shall soon see how these considerations served to allow him to arrive at his last momentous decision.

From the time of his capture by the Americans in December of 1899, and imprisonment at the then Calle Anda prison, Mabini was entreated by Generals MacArthur and Bell to take the oath of allegiance in recognition of American sovereignty in the Philippines, in order that he could help in the pacification campaign preparatory to the establishment of a government that would work for the welfare of the Filipinos. In his La Revolucion Filipina, Mabini says that he desisted, explaining that

if he did take the oath, his countrymen, whose state of mind was still for the continuation of the struggle, would forthwith withdraw their trust in him. The result would be a loss of confidence in his judgment, making him useless for the work of pacification, or anything else involving the people.

Consequently, the Americans banished him to Guam, without benefit of trial. He stayed there for a little more than two years. Majul, in his Apolinario Mabini, Revolutionary, says Mabini expressed wonderment at what his exile could have accomplished to bring about the desired peace and end the Revolution. In fact, Mabini claimed he had nothing to do with the cessation of hostilities, as this had been brought about because there were no more means to continue fighting, and also by what he called internal factors: the people and the leaders had not cleansed themselves to be worthy of success.

On July 4, 1902, with Mabini already almost two years in Guam, the American government offered amnesty to all those who would take the oath of allegiance to its Peace was already considered accomplished and a government established. Mabini's companions in exile took the oath and sailed away on a transport, leaving behind on the island prison only Mabini and General Artemio Ricarte.

Then begun for Mabini the self-tortures of indecision on what to do, on how to act in the face of his former firm principles, his longing to be home with his people, his fear that death was near, his doubts as to the course of action that would best serve his people under the circumstances of imposed sovereignty.

It is here that I attempt to project Mabini's nationalism

in a situation almost parallel to that in the minds of many of our leaders and intellectuals today. Having imbibed democracy as a system of government, with its three branches in equal balance and authority, a situation has now come about where they, too, have to make a decision on how best to serve their people.

Mabini's vacillations on taking the oath of allegiance before his exile to Guam are interpreted by Majul as a reflection of the logical actions of a non-conformist in confrontation with a superior force. He was not to be bullied into acting against his conscience.

However, on August 26, 1902, he wrote his brother Alejandro from Guam, as translated by Carlos Quirino from T. M. Kalaw's Cartas Politicas de Mabini: "After a thorough self-examination, I have asked myself many times if, seeing the people leading a tranquil life, I could at any time have the courage to disturb them. Reason has always answered, No, because the duties of a citizen in times of war are different from those he has in times of peace."

Mabini rationalizes further in his Manifiesto-Prologo, written also in Guam. Since, he said, the people had submitted to the authority of the United States in order to avoid ruin his continued stay in Guam could be interpreted as a contravention of their will, as his desire to persist in the fight.

"The authority of the people," he wrote, "resides in the people themselves."

He meant that the leaders of a people should recognize

a mandate from his people. He had joined the Revolution, he said, in which at first he did not believe, because he saw in it the avowed will of the people.

Now, he said, he was also quitting the Revolution for the same reason. The people had willed it. His duty was to be at their side again, to tell them not to despair, but to believe in themselves, in justice, and in their future. A continuation of the struggle, he said, is unjustified when a majority of the people have chosen submission to the "exigencies of force."

He again explains all these in a Manifesto addressed to the people when, on February, 1903, he had finally decided to take the oath. In the second paragraph, he says: "Notwithstanding many vacillations and anxious mental examination, I finally felt the peace produced by a firm decision. My conscience is now certain that it was legal for me to take the oath, because I could not avoid it for the reason that a necessity more demanding than the love for truth called for my return to the Islands. The more we read the history of mankind, the more we observe that in the frequent wars that have moved the nations of the earth, from the remote at times to our days, when plazas and cities had to always submit to the conqueror, reason and justice had to surrender also, many times if not always, to the exigencies of force. Conquered nations submitted themselves to the impositions of the conqueror, to save themselves, an indispensability for the preservation of the human race, the supreme necessity,

the law of Nature...."

"When the people launched the war, I thought it my duty to be at its side and help it to suffer until its end. Now that it feels itself without the strength to continue the fight for its rights, I believe that I should also be at its side, to tell it not to despair, but to have more confidence in itself, in justice, in the future."

Personally, I think of this heartbreaking decision to take the oath as a high form of nationalism. Mabini in sorrow recognized the path of duty and service to his people. He submitted to the will of its majority with pragmatic humility, fully aware that his action could look like a turnabout from his former position of intransigence and hostility to the foreign enemy. But the higher principle of service to country and fellow-men took the priority over his pride in his former utterances and convictions, effective as they had been. The re-assessment of a new political situation was difficult to acknowledge/^{but acknowledge} and admit it he did. On this basis, rather than on his emotions over a lost cause, his nationalistic spirit arose to accept the challenge of a new service under new circumstances.

Majul states that, apparently, Mabini, upon his return to Manila after taking the oath on board the ship that had brought him on February 26, 1903, had planned to work for independence through peaceful means, and that this was what he meant in his Manifesto-Prologo

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when he said he wanted to be at the side of his people, to instruct them on their next move.

Palma, however, describes rather pathetically Mabini's return to Manila. Things had changed, Palma said. Everyone had surrendered. There were even proposals heard for annexation to America. Under such circumstance, Palma said, Mabini was silent and abstained from giving any opinion. He felt he was no longer needed, and stated that "he wanted to return to the obscurity from whence he came."

Two months and 17 days after his return, on May 13, 1903, he died of cholera at the age of 38. The nation gave him a grand funeral. The press was full of eulogies and respect for the great nationalistic that had passed away.

Majul's testimonial on the last paragraph of his prize-winning book says: "No life as short as Mabini's presents as long a testimony on the liberal spirit."

But more parallel to our situation today which I have attempted to portray as similar to that in which Mabini found himself while making a decision about his oath, is also Majul's statement, in the same last paragraph: "Mabini's only advantage was that his adversaries, too, claimed to have been once before inspired by the same doctrines he postulated."

Such also I consider should be our considerations today.

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