

## Faith in School: Educational Policy Responses to Ethno-Religious Conflict in the Southern Philippines, 1935–1985

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*The expansion of public education is often seen as an effective tool for the promotion of national identity and the mitigation of ethno-religious tensions in diverse post-colonial states. This essay questions such assumptions via an examination of successive Philippine governments' efforts to deploy educational policy as a response to chronic tensions between the nation's Christianised mainstream and a restive Muslim minority on the southern island of Mindanao. It suggests that the expansion of education to foster a cohesive national identity without careful reconsideration of the religious, cultural and political biases inherent in its content is likely to fail in achieving peaceful, cohesive relations between different ethno-religious communities in religiously diverse multicultural states.*

The colonial and post-colonial experience of the Philippines is illustrative of a commonly held faith in educational policy to foster national unity and development in contexts of socio-linguistic diversity and endemic poverty. Systematic analyses of the outcomes of these policies in the Philippine context, however, have been relatively rare. This essay explores the efforts of successive Philippine governments to deploy educational policy as a significant tool in their efforts to mitigate ethno-religious tensions that have repeatedly erupted into inter-religious violence in the twentieth century and have contributed to an armed secessionist movement on its southernmost island of Mindanao that has waxed and waned repeatedly for three decades.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the history of educational policy in this context not only contributes to the improvement of educational policy-making in the Philippines but can improve understanding of the potential and pitfalls of educational policy as a tool for mitigating ethno-religious tensions in comparable contexts as well.

### Historical context

By any measure one of the central features of Philippine history is its four-century colonisation by Spain from the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, and then by the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. For two centuries prior to the arrival of Spain, however, Islam had been gradually spreading in the Philippine

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<sup>1</sup> Marites Danguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, *Under the crescent moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy & Public Affairs/Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000).

South, fostering the evolution of more complex and cohesive cultural communities with the power to successfully resist Spanish attempts to extend political control and Christianity throughout the archipelago.<sup>2</sup> While Spain ultimately succeeded in establishing a tenuous political presence in some areas of Muslim Mindanao by the latter half of the nineteenth century, the region was not brought under the control of a Manila-based government until the first decade of the twentieth century. US colonial rule was characterised by the selective use of overwhelming military force to subdue resistance in Muslim communities and the systematic deployment of a public educational system framed within a discourse of civilisation and savagery designed to remake Muslim Filipino identities in accordance with ideals embodied in white, Western, Christian norms (which Christian Filipinos exemplified) in immediate practical terms.<sup>3</sup> This mix of coercive and attractive policies elicited a complex of responses among Muslim Filipinos ranging from acceptance to accommodation to outright resistance.

Direct Filipino rule – under US colonial authority – began in 1920, and, inasmuch as it largely continued US policies, elicited similarly complex responses.<sup>4</sup> By 1935, however, with the inauguration of the Philippine Commonwealth, the Muslim-dominated areas of Mindanao had been administratively and politically integrated into the Philippine colonial state in ways that gave rise to a Muslim political elite that functioned as an intermediary between the state and Muslim communities and contributed to state formation in Mindanao.<sup>5</sup> Political and administrative integration, however, did not bring about the resolution of the Muslim–Christian dichotomisation of society in Mindanao even though it did, paradoxically, contribute to the beginning of a common Muslim Filipino identity among the various Islamised ethno-linguistic communities of the region.<sup>6</sup> Thus the legacy of 300 years of misunderstanding, mutual hostility, and open conflict between Christian and Muslim Filipinos continued beneath the surface of apparent political stability, ready to erupt into scholarship on the historical, political and cultural roots of the so-called ‘Moro open warfare’ again in the early 1970s.

Since that time the conflict has inspired a rather extensive body of scholarship on the roots of the so-called ‘Moro Problem’.<sup>7</sup> Much of this literature – though by no means

2 Cesar Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1999).

3 Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, ‘Democratization or neocolonialism? The American education of Muslims under US military occupation, 1903–1920’, *History of Education*, 33, 4 (2004): 451–67.

4 Peter G. Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American government of Muslim Filipinos, 1899–1920* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983).

5 Patricio Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the formation of the Philippine nation-state* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000).

6 Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim rulers and rebels: Everyday politics and armed separatism in the southern Philippines* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 1998), pp. 3–4.

7 Thayil J. S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The rise of Islam in Philippine politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980); W. K. Che Man, *Muslim separatism: The Moros of southern Philippines and the Malays of southern Thailand* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990); Kenneth E. Bauzon, *Liberalism and the quest for Islamic identity in the Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991); Macapado Abaton Muslim, *The Moro armed struggle in the Philippines: The nonviolent autonomy alternative* (Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1994); Hilario M. Gomez, *The Moro rebellion and the search for peace: A study on Christian–Muslim relations in the Philippines* (Zamboanga City: Silsilah Publications, 2000); *Rebels, warlords and ulama: A reader on Muslim separatism and the war in southern Philippines*, ed. Kristina Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000); Soliman M. Santos, *The Moro Islamic challenge: Constitutional rethinking for the Mindanao peace process* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of terror* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

all – analyses the conflict within the framework of a popular social discourse that dichotomises Philippine society between Muslim and Christian. This approach thus tends to posit monolithic identities that obscure the complex range of identities among Muslims and Christians in the country, hindering more nuanced analyses of Muslim Filipinos' responses to state policies. As Thomas McKenna and Patricio Abinales have argued, it is important to recognise and understand the complex, multilayered responses of Muslim individuals and communities to the Philippine state and social mainstream even as we acknowledge the parallel utility of structural analyses of repression and resistance like that posited in the internal colonial model, especially as the invented categories of 'Moro' or 'Muslim Filipino' have gained some (albeit tentative) salience in the colonial and post-colonial eras.<sup>8</sup> It is necessary to read this complex history of acceptance, accommodation, avoidance and outright resistance by Muslim Filipinos as the strategic manoeuvres of socially strong, though militarily weak, ethnic communities to sustain distinct though shifting religiocultural identities in the face of a militarily stronger state's efforts to assert a national identity. As social identity theory suggests, these manoeuvres will include the construction and maintenance of in-group/out-group categories that nevertheless tolerate varying internal differences with a corresponding variety of responses to other social groups.<sup>9</sup>

Given the constraints imposed by the relative paucity of educational policy analysis in the Philippines, it is difficult to offer a detailed accounting of the variety of effects of educational policies in Muslim communities or the range of responses of individuals in those communities to such policies. Where the record reflects a level of detail that permits an accounting of the complexity of Muslim Filipino responses to state educational policies, I will attempt to do so. Where it does not, I will rely upon evidence such as the growth of Islamic education or the continuation of ethno-religious tensions as useful, if crude, measures to assess educational policies deployed to achieve the integration of the Muslim minority into the mainstream of Philippine society. Even without such a desirable level of detail, it is possible to make broad judgements regarding the efficacy of such policies and to begin to explore how they might be reconsidered to better meet the needs and interests of Muslims Filipinos and Philippine society.

### **Educational policy in the Philippine Commonwealth**

In 1935 the Philippines became a self-governing commonwealth in preparation for eventual independence planned for 1945. Though World War II cut this period of self-rule short, the first five years of Commonwealth policy saw an end to the notion of separate governing bureaucracies for Muslim Filipinos even while exhibiting continuity with the policies of the US colonial regime in the use of education as a tool for integration.<sup>10</sup> The President of the Commonwealth, Manuel Quezon, took an active

8 McKenna, *Muslim rulers*, pp. 272–8; Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, pp. 45–68; John Liu, 'Towards an understanding of the internal colonial model', in *Postcolonialism: Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*, vol. I, ed. Diana Brydon (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1347–64.

9 Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, *Social identity theory: Constructive and critical advances* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

10 James F. Eder and Thomas M. McKenna, 'Minorities in the Philippines: Ancestral lands and autonomy in theory and practice', in *Civilizing the margins: Southeast Asian government policies for the development of minorities*, ed. Christopher R. Duncan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 63, 65.

interest in educational policy, seeing in it the means to a national spiritual reconstruction that would reorient Filipino identity and values from their primary affiliation with family and province towards loyalty to the emerging Philippine state. According to Quezon, the primary purpose of education was to make the individual a better servant of the state. ‘The schools teach nationalism’, wrote one educational leader of the period, ‘not only through the textbooks, but through every activity that may inculcate patriotism.’<sup>11</sup>

Camilo Osias, Quezon’s technical assistant on educational matters and later education leader and senator in the Philippine Republic, recommended in 1940, for instance, that all students be taught to revere a ‘patriotic shrine’ consisting of a ‘trinity of objects’ to include a portrait of Jose Rizal (the father of the independence movement against Spain), the president of the Philippines and a map of the country.<sup>12</sup> Thus nationalism became a central value to be inculcated through education in a concerted effort to subordinate provincialism, ethno-linguistic identity and familism to national identity and loyalty to the state. In doing so, Quezon was effectively trying to radically reorient Filipino cultural values along lines that he believed were necessary for the success of an independent Philippine state and which were, not coincidentally, in the interests of the social elites who would govern it.

While patriotism was ‘the keynote of this educational policy’, religious faith was a second broad goal of educational policy in the Philippine Commonwealth. Though this objective was never stated in anything more specific than a broad monotheism, its implementation in an overwhelmingly Catholic country ruled for more than three centuries through Catholic religious orders could hardly avoid being interpreted in explicitly Christian terms. From the Commonwealth period to the present, the promotion of a monotheistic faith in God and nationalism has been at or near the top of the list of values to be inculcated through Philippine education. Quezon’s Code of Civic and Ethical Principles, which by executive order supplemented educational goals stipulated in the Commonwealth Constitution, listed ‘faith in Divine Providence that guides the destinies of men and nations’ as the first of 16 ethical principles which should be promoted among Filipinos through the medium of the schools. Love of country was a close second.<sup>13</sup> Although Philippine constitutions would include language almost identical to that guaranteeing church–state separation in the US Constitution, they contained language that made clear that the nation might aspire to neutrality between monotheistic faiths, but not to neutrality between such faiths and secularism.<sup>14</sup>

In this aspect and many others Quezon’s Code represented a mix of Philippine historical experience, longstanding socio-cultural biases and political hope. By the end of the nineteenth century a nascent Filipino identity had emerged out of the colonial encounter with Spain. While American intervention in 1898 thwarted the initial effort to

11 Antonio Isidro, *Education in the Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1939), p. 61. On Quezon see Rolando M. Gripaldo, ‘Quezon’s philosophy of Philippine education’, *The Technician*, 3, 2 (1990): 40.

12 Camilo Osias, ‘Notes on education’ (Report to the President of the Philippines, 16 Sept. 1940).

13 Aurelio O. Elevazo and Fortunata C. Villamor, *Educational objectives and policies in the Philippines, 1900–1972* (Manila: Division of Educational Planning, 1973), p. 12.

14 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, Article III, Section 5; Department of Education, Culture and Sports, *Values education for the Filipino* (Manila: Department of Education, Culture and Sports, 1997), p. 10.

establish an independent state, the desire for independence continued, increasingly expressing itself in an American-inspired democratic political discourse. That discourse, however, obscured a deeply rooted cultural and historical reality in which the marriage of religious and civil authority in the Spanish regime had given rise to a semi-feudal society where a handful of elite families dominated the political and economic life of the emerging nation.<sup>15</sup> This also meant that the culture of the political classes, as well as the vast majority of ordinary Filipinos, was profoundly influenced by Catholic Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Thus nationalism, interpreted as loyalty to a state defined by colonial borders and reverence for the pantheon of heroes (largely from Luzon) who led the independence movement against Spain, was erected upon a cultural foundation shaped by Filipino Catholicism, effectively defining Filipino identity as a dialogical product of the encounter with Spanish imperialism. An intimate relationship between religious and political authority, therefore, was of long standing in the Philippines and unlikely to be supplanted by an American rhetoric on church–state separation continually contradicted by its own Protestant Christian biases. Thus, many Muslim Filipinos interpreted Philippine government assertions of respect while implementing policies designed to effect their integration into this national mainstream as an effort to destroy their cultural and religious identities.

The principles of the Quezon Code, moreover, reflected democratic aspirations, loyalty to the state and elite contempt for the masses. The Code counselled Filipinos to love their country and to be prepared to sacrifice for it, to live a clean and frugal life and to respect the dignity of manual labour, among other maxims. Elsewhere Quezon condemned the ‘easygoing parasitism’ and ‘social inefficiency’ of the common Filipino.<sup>17</sup> Thus the Code, in setting out ideals, also contained an implicit critique of the masses. Reading beyond the veneer of democratic principles, Quezon’s Code and the educational policies designed to promote its objectives defined his agenda for national spiritual reconstruction. In drawing on a more or less common religious identity to help bring about a national identity defined in terms of loyalty to a state ruled by traditional elites, it more or less successfully obscured – at the policy level if not the practical – the competing class interests of the elite and the masses and inadvertently reinforced the long-held sense among ordinary Muslims and Christians that Moro and Filipino were separate national identities.

This effort to homogenise cultural and class differences that might impede the promotion of nationalism was thought to require a centralisation of educational decision-making in which, it was assumed, a unified curriculum and educational policies imposed throughout the country would gradually unify the disparate ethnic and linguistic communities of the archipelago into a single Filipino identity. This meant, in part, denying the significance of such differences. In Quezon’s address to the first national assembly of the Commonwealth government, he stated that ‘the so-called Moro Problem is a thing of the past. We are giving our Mohammedan brethren the best government they ever had and we are showing them our devoted interest in their welfare and

15 Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A past revisited*, vol. I (Manila: Renato Constantino, 1975).

16 Raul Pertierra, *Religion, politics, and rationality in a Philippine community* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), pp. 170–94.

17 Gripaldo, ‘Quezon’s philosophy’, p. 43; the Code’s stipulations are in Elevazo and Villamor, *Educational objectives*, p. 12.

advancement'. Osias, by now Chairman of the National Council of Education, echoed these views in 1940, claiming that 'the education of minority groups and other special classes is simplified by the absence of deep seated racial divisions or prejudices and of social castes in the Philippines'.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of such an effort to create a common national identity, differences tended – as they were during the American regime – to be recast as deficiencies if they were seen as undermining the nationalist project. Therefore, the erasure of differences and assimilation of minorities into a mainstream defined by the traditional elite was redefined as economic and cultural uplift. This perspective had been expressed in the Jones Law, which created a Philippine legislature in 1916 and ultimately led in 1920 to the direct administration of Muslims by Christian Filipinos through the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. It also clearly articulated the policy to be followed towards these tribes:

Foster by all adequate means, and in a systematic, rapid, and complete manner, the moral, material, economic, social and political development of those regions, always having in view the aim of rendering permanent the mutual intelligence between, and complete fusion of, the Christian and non-Christian elements populating the provinces of the Archipelago.<sup>19</sup>

In short, to the extent that educational policy in the Commonwealth addressed Muslims at all, it envisioned the gradual erasure of differences and their eventual assimilation into the mainstream of a Philippine state defined by a civil-religious nationalism growing out of Christian Filipino experience and governed by conceptions of modernity premised on Western and particularly American models.<sup>20</sup> While Philippine governments never expressed any overt intention of destroying Muslim Filipino culture, the perhaps unintentional subtext of the policy of integration suggested just that.

### **Muslims and educational policy in the Philippine Republic**

After 1946 educational policy in the newly independent Philippine state continued the trends established under the Commonwealth government. The National Council of Education, drawing on the educational aims stipulated in the Philippine Constitution, listed the educational system's primary goal as 'impress[ing] upon our people that they are citizens of the Republic' and the second as promoting among Filipinos 'an abiding faith in Divine Providence'. In 1950 the Philippine Congress, in a concurrent resolution, reversed the order of these overall aims in charging education with teaching Filipinos to live a 'moral life guided by faith in God and love for fellow man' and 'to love and serve the Republic of the Philippines'. The Board of National Education defined the schools' aims as inculcating 'moral and spiritual values inspired by an abiding faith in God' and producing an 'enlightened, patriotic, useful and upright citizenry' in 1957.<sup>21</sup> While these expressions ought not be interpreted as evidence of the government's desire to

18 Osias, 'Notes on education', p. 172; Quezon's remarks are quoted in Ralph Benjamin Thomas, 'Muslim but Filipino: The integration of Muslim Filipinos, 1917–1946' (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 263.

19 Osias, 'Notes on education', p. 17; Gowing, *Mandate*, pp. 267–8 discusses the policy.

20 Eder and McKenna, 'Minorities in the Philippines', p. 63.

21 Elevazo and Villamor, *Educational objectives*, pp. 16–19.

Christianise Muslim Filipinos, they can be read as authorising the inclusion of broadly spiritual-ethical material in school curricula and policies. Moreover, given the centralisation of policy and curriculum making in Manila and the fact of an overwhelmingly Christian school population, it is unsurprising that both reflected a Christian bias that, while perhaps undetectable by mainstream policy-makers, was quite evident and problematic for many Muslims. Such mistrust had long been especially problematic in Lanao, where it led to the burning of almost half of the school buildings in the province in the 1920s and led many Maranao parents to resist sending their children – especially girls – to public schools even into the late 1940s.<sup>22</sup>

While nationalism and religious faith continued to be expressed as the first or second broad goal of Philippine education, other policies addressed more concrete objectives which reveal the practical challenges the educational system faced in a newly independent country just emerging from a devastating war. Educational policy-makers faced the challenge of extending access to elementary and secondary education to more children and providing the teachers, facilities and books to accommodate them. Educators needed to find ways to keep children in school once they started. There were deep concerns about the training and compensation of teachers. Adult education and vocational training also absorbed policy-makers' attention. However, the values explicitly articulated in the goal of fostering a common Filipino identity consistently posited that identity in essentialist terms, such as the 'true Filipino'.<sup>23</sup> While the religious values to be inculcated were not generally articulated in such explicit terms, there can be little doubt that where that objective was explicitly implemented, it was most likely expressed within a Christian framework.

While educational policy-makers were not blind to the challenge religious and ethnic diversity posed for their social and economic agendas, they had considerable faith in the power of a centralised educational system and a unified curriculum to subordinate, if not entirely erase, that diversity to a common Filipino identity. The particular challenge posed by a largely unintegrated Muslim minority was not entirely ignored. However, it was widely assumed that education would solve that and just about all other problems.

We underline the imperative necessity of developing among the non-Christian elements a spirit of dynamic Filipinism, love of country, and loyalty to the government and free institutions. . . Widespread education, sound and liberal and patriotic, is the best defense against ideological fifth elements.<sup>24</sup>

As long as the old Moro Problem was not an active revolt, it could be safely regarded as just another element of the diverse cultures lumped together under the label of non-Christian tribes in need of benevolent modernisation and assimilation.

By the time of the transfer of authority to the Commonwealth government, the Muslim areas of Mindanao had been successfully integrated politically and

22 Lloyd G. Van Vactor, 'Education for Maranaos: A perspective on problems and prospects', *Dansalan Research Center Occasional Papers*, 9 (1978): 18–27.

23 Benigno Aldana, *The educational system of the Philippines* (Manila: University Publishing Co., 1949), pp. 369–89 (training), 162–3 (values); Camilo Osias, 'Speeches on education' (unpublished manuscript, 1963), pp. 3–4.

24 Osias, 'Notes on education', p. 175.

administratively into the mainstream of the Philippine body politic, an integration that enabled some elite members of Muslim communities to claim political power in the Republic.<sup>25</sup> In addition, education made headway in reaching more Muslim Filipinos. According to the Superintendent of Schools for the Department of Mindanao and Sulu more than 40,000 children were enrolled in 478 schools in Cotabato, Lanao, Sulu and Zamboanga – almost 25 per cent of the school age population as compared to a national average of slightly over 36 per cent.<sup>26</sup>

Administrative and political integration, however, did not mean social integration. Muslim and Christian Filipinos – despite internal divisions along lines of class, language and culture – continued to constitute two separate, mutually suspicious social groupings in a religiously dichotomised Mindanao. According to Abinales, it was this continued oppositional identity that enabled the rise of Muslim leaders as political brokers between the state and Muslim communities and, paradoxically, facilitated the expansion of state authority in Mindanao.<sup>27</sup>

The tenuous accommodation to the Philippine state was revealed in the reassertion of former attitudes and habits towards external authority by some Muslim Filipinos after the collapse of governmental authority in Mindanao during World War II.<sup>28</sup> After the war this oppositional identity rooted in Islam and ethnicity exhibited itself again in the continuing mistrust of many Muslims towards government education, the expansion of Islamic education throughout the region, and the periodic outbreak of armed violence in response to government policies. One Filipino educator of the period wrote that 50 years of American education had had little effect on the life of common folk, who still identified themselves as Muslims rather than Filipinos.<sup>29</sup> Many Muslims continued to eye government schools with deep suspicion, believing that their purpose was to convert their children to Christianity. The curriculum, standardised throughout the country by a Manila-centred bureaucracy, was widely dismissed as ‘basically Christian’ and hence anti-Muslim. Textbooks were criticised for content that was either offensive or culturally unfamiliar to Muslim students. One textbook series authored by Camilo Osias and published into the 1950s, for instance, ignored Muslim Filipinos, and referred to Islam as ‘the most warlike religion of all’ which ‘forced its way by fire and sword’.<sup>30</sup> This situation of neglect and outright bias was compounded by the shortage of resources and poor facilities that plagued other areas of Philippine education. The result, for instance, in Lanao province was extremely low participation rates among school age children. Where children did attend school, Muslims and Christians tended to self-segregate. One

25 Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, pp. 134–55.

26 Glenn Whitman Caulkins, ‘Public education in Mindanao-Sulu Philippine Islands under the American regime’ (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1934), pp. 22–4, 64.

27 Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, pp. 134–55.

28 Melvin Mednick, ‘Encampment of the lake: The social organization of a Moslem-Philippine (Moro) people’, *Research Series No. 5* (Philippine Studies Program, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, 1965), p. 38.

29 Liceria B. Soriano, ‘Our Moro problem and the community school in Mindanao’, *Philippine Journal of Education* [henceforth *PJE*], 32, 5 (1953): 428.

30 Camilo Osias, *The Philippine readers, book VII* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1932), p. 257. On the textbook issue see Musur M. Mangadang, ‘The educational problems of the Muslims in Lanao’ (M.A. thesis, Arellano University, 1957), pp. 125–30; and Abdullah T. Madale, ‘Ghost schools and the Maranaw’, *PJE*, 36, 6 (1957): 523–4.



Muslim educational scholar laid much of the blame for the sad state of Muslim Filipino education at the time on 'a highly centralised bureaucracy and non-flexible curriculum that doesn't reflect local culture'.<sup>31</sup>

Muslim Filipinos, of course, were not monolithic in their response to public education in the new republic. Enrollment in public schools generally grew throughout the colonial period, enabling some of the American teachers of these schools to have lasting influences on future Muslim Filipino leaders. Many educated Muslims saw greater participation in public education as an indispensable factor in the socioeconomic development of their communities and the emergence of Muslim leaders capable of bridging the cultural gap between their local communities and the modern state.<sup>32</sup> This willingness to participate in public education, moreover, was not confined to the already educated or political elite. By 1960 well over 60 per cent of the total school age populations in Cotabato and Sulu were enrolled in public schools, a figure not too far below enrollment figures in non-Muslim provinces. However, participation rates varied significantly, indicating not only varying levels of access but different levels of faith in public schooling as well. In 1939, for instance, less than 10 per cent of Maranao children age 6 to 19 – less than half the Mindanao-wide average – were enrolled in school, a figure that rose to only 17.7 per cent two decades later and included relatively few girls. As late as 1978 an observer in Lanao could claim that the province had 'still not been effectively penetrated by the public school system'.<sup>33</sup> More generally in what was Region XII at the time – the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat – Muslims comprised 70 per cent of the total population but only 43 per cent of the elementary school enrollment.<sup>34</sup>

While these uneven rates of participation in public education were undoubtedly influenced by issues of access and poverty, the frequent complaints about biased textbooks and curricula emanating from Muslim educators at the time suggest that resentment of cultural denigration and fear of religious alienation were at the very least contributing factors. Muslim Filipinos' growing tendency to send their children to Islamic schools reinforces the argument that their ambivalent response to government education resulted at least in part from a common perception that public schools were alienating young Muslim Filipinos from their cultures and religion.<sup>35</sup> While Islamic instruction had been a feature of Muslim Filipino society ever since the arrival of Islam in the fourteenth century, the early 1950s saw an Islamic revival among the new generation of Muslim leaders educated in secular Filipino schools.

31 Mayug M. Tamano, 'What of education in the Muslim provinces', *PJE*, 38, 3 (1959): 141. On the problems of attendance and segregation see Mednick, 'Encampment of the lake', pp. 36, 40; and Soriano, 'Our Moro problem', p. 428.

32 Mamitua Saber, 'Marginal leadership in a culture-contact situation' (M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1957). Lloyd G. Van Vactor, 'Four decades of American educators in Mindanao and Sulu', *Mindanao Journal*, VIII, 1–4 (1981–82): 225–51 discusses the colonial period.

33 Van Vactor, 'Education for Maranaos', p. 35; the statistics are from Antonio Isidro, *The Moro problem: An approach through education* (Marawi City: Mindanao State University Research Center, 1968), p. 33 and Mednick, 'Encampment of the lake', p. 36.

34 Project Development and Evaluation Division, *Projects for the Muslim areas* (Manila: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1978), pp. 1–2.

35 Tamano, 'What of education', p. 141.

One consequence of this resurgence was the establishment of formal Islamic schools such as the Kamilol Islam Institute in Marawi City in 1954, which expanded to collegiate level in 1959 under the name Jamiatul Philippines Al-Islamia. Muslim missionaries from the Middle East as well as Filipino Muslims educated in Islamic countries contributed to the growing network of *madaris* (Islamic schools) in the region throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>36</sup> This network provided educational alternatives for those suspicious of government educational objectives and desirous of fostering their identity as Muslims rather than Filipinos. Thus, in some respects, the development of two educational systems with the contradictory aims of orienting Filipino Muslim identity either towards an essentialised Filipinism or a purified Islamism contributed to the division between Muslim and Christian Filipinos.<sup>37</sup>

Dissatisfaction with government policy in the early 1950s was not confined to the development of Islamic educational alternatives, however. In 1951 an armed rebellion broke out in Sulu that took four years and 3,000 troops to put down; during the same period the Datu Tawantawan uprising in Lanao del Norte further refocused government attention on the Moro Problem.<sup>38</sup> Other predominately Muslim areas remained relatively peaceful through much of the 1950s and early 1960s, however, and it must be recognised that such incidents of relatively localised violence erupted in response to local problems and did not constitute a general Muslim insurgency. Even so, these outbreaks of violence must also be read as further examples of localised struggles to maintain a high degree of political, cultural and religious autonomy in the face of increasingly intrusive state power in the service of essentialist nationalism. In short, while Muslim ambivalence towards state education, the growing popularity of Islamic education and sporadic violence against state policies did not yet constitute assertions of a monolithic Islamic identity or Bangsamoro ['Moro nation'] nationalism, they strongly suggest the active maintenance of an oppositional identity defined against the essentialised Filipino identity that educational policy was explicitly designed to promote.

The government's response to such opposition was more of the same. During the Sulu rebellion the House Committee on National Minorities of the Philippine Congress appointed a commission of three Muslim Congressmen to investigate the causes of the turmoil. The Committee's report to Congress in 1954, known as the Alonto Report, stated:

More than any other factor involved which had given rise to the so-called Moro Problem is the educational phase. For if the Muslims had been prepared and their ignorance, which is the root cause of the problem, had been wiped out by education . . . little if any at all would be such problems as economic, social, and political which now face the government . . . Education could have nipped the whole problem in the bud . . .<sup>39</sup>

36 Michael Mastura, 'Assessing the madrasah as an educational institution: Implications for the ummah', *FAPE (Fund for Assistance to Private Education) Review* (May 1982): 9–10.

37 Manaros Boransing, 'Oplan bangsa Pilipino', *FAPE Review* (May 1982): 17.

38 Leothiny S. Clavel, *They are also Filipinos: Ten years with the cultural minorities* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1969), p. 15; Geoffrey Salgado, 'Development policies for Muslim Mindanao in the pre-martial law period (1955–1971)', *The Mindanao Forum*, IX, 1 (1994): 106–7.

39 Antonio Isidro, 'Education in the Muslim regions', in *Muslim Philippines*, ed. Antonio Isidro and Mamitua Saber (Marawi City: Mindanao State University Research Center, 1968), p. 100.

The Moro Problem, the committee reported was a problem of ‘inculcating into Muslim minds that they are Filipinos and this government is their own and that they are part of it’. The solution was ‘integration of the Muslim Filipinos into the Philippine body politic in order to effect in a more complete measure their social, moral and political advancement’.<sup>40</sup> In language almost identical to that of the Jones Law of 1916, the Committee reiterated the government’s policy of integration, whether those being integrated wanted it or not, and prescribed the same tool used for this purpose since the beginning of the century: education.

One of the first official government responses to the Alonto Report was the passage of Republic Act No. 1387 in 1955, which provided for the establishment of a state university at Marawi City in the Muslim-dominated province of Lanao del Sur. The Philippine Congress created the Mindanao State University ‘to serve primarily as a vital government instrument in promoting greater understanding between Muslims and Christians’.<sup>41</sup> Aside from providing higher educational opportunities to local Muslim students, the university’s objectives included the economic development of Mindanao, the preservation of indigenous cultures and, most importantly, promoting the integration of Muslims into the Philippine mainstream. The university faced many challenges, among them recruiting and retaining faculty to come to an area whose image had long been shaped by a colonial pioneer discourse which cast life there as a frontier existence threatened by cattle rustlers, petty outlaws and violent Moros. Another serious problem was the lack of Muslim students ready for college work. By the time the university began operation in 1961, for instance, only 18.2 per cent of school-age children in the province were in school, and only 2 per cent of these were in high school. The university responded by establishing its own network of feeder schools, but by the late 1970s the university had only managed to graduate a little over 300 local Muslim students.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, from the beginning the Mindanao State University faced the challenge of retaining the character of a national university in the face of the pervasive influence of a local culture whose values were often powerfully at odds with the fundamental values of a modern, Western university. After an initial decade or more in which the administration and faculty of the institution were composed largely of Christian Filipinos, Maranao Muslims gradually came to dominate the administrative structure and non-teaching staff of the university. While this was the intent of the legislation creating Mindanao State University, one consequence was that the university became a major source of patronage employment and thus an important component in local politics, not only for the education it provided but for the access to government monies that control of its budget afforded as well. Thus, an institution founded to foster the assimilation of Muslim Filipinos was instead assimilated into Maranao political culture. Local Muslims’ selective response to this manifestation of government educational policy represented yet another instance of tactical accommodation and resistance in defence of locally independent political, cultural and religious identities. Today, while the university can claim numerous successes, it has clearly not lived up to the goal of integrating Muslim Filipinos into

40 Salgado, ‘Development policies’, p. 107.

41 Antonio Isidro, *Muslim-Christian integration at the Mindanao State University* (Marawi City: Mindanao State University Research Center, 1968), p. 376.

42 Isidro, ‘Education in the Muslim regions’, pp. 103–4 (1961 figure); Van Vactor, ‘Education for Maranaos’, p. 29 (1970s figure).

the national mainstream: Lanao del Sur remains one of the centres of Muslim resistance to the national government.<sup>43</sup>

Two years after passing legislation establishing Mindanao State University, the Philippine Congress passed Republic Act 1888 creating the Commission on National Integration (CNI), tasked with fostering the development and integration of Muslim Filipinos. The Commission's objectives were relatively comprehensive, focusing attention on economic and agricultural development, land reform, legal assistance, infrastructure development and more. Only two of the Commission's 15 objectives were explicitly educational. The education division, however, soon became the most active and best-funded of the five divisions since 'the Commission considers education as one of the powerful forces that can accelerate the efforts toward national integration. After the National Cultural Minorities have been properly schooled, they will find it easy to adapt themselves to our ways and customs.'<sup>44</sup>

The activities of the education division, however, were focused largely on providing scholarships for minority students to attend university; approximately 70 per cent of its funding was devoted to this purpose. However, the effectiveness of even this effort was severely limited by corruption revealed in government investigations in the early 1960s, which found that many scholarships had gone to relatives, recipients of political favours and ghost students.<sup>45</sup> By the time the Commission was disbanded in 1975 it had enabled 3,000 students – mostly Muslims – to obtain a college education but had achieved little else. Writing just a few years before the dissolution of the Commission in a retrospective report of its impact, Leothiny Clavel reported that few CNI scholars had made use of their educations and that 'the Commission has . . . not permanently improved the socio-economic conditions of the minorities'. Two years later the Filipinas Foundation reported 'an embarrassing lack of concern on the part of the national government and private sector to understand Muslims as Filipinos, much less to contribute toward their social and economic uplift'.<sup>46</sup> Apparently, by the early 1970s, the effort to promote integration via educational policy had accomplished little.

Aside from the obvious problems of inadequate funding, corruption and mismanagement that often plague development efforts, the Commission's integration effort was further complicated by a conceptual framework with its origins in the earliest days of the US colonial regime. The American effort to develop and integrate Muslim Filipinos was framed in a discourse regarding civilisation which drew on social Darwinism and political progressivism to place cultures on a continuum of civilisation running from savagery on one end – epitomised by Muslim Filipinos – to civilisation on the other – epitomised by white, Euro-American, Christian culture. Education was the progressive means of moving cultures as far along that continuum as they were naturally capable of moving.<sup>47</sup> While both colonial and post-colonial official government discourses expressed respect for Islam and the cultural diversity of all Filipinos, both deployed conceptions of

43 Vitug and Gloria, *Under the crescent moon*.

44 Clavel, *They are also Filipinos*, pp. 19–21 (quotation from p. 25); for the CNI's creation see pp. 17–18.

45 Filipinas Foundation, Inc., *An anatomy of Philippine Muslim affairs* (Manila: Filipinas Foundation, Inc., 1971), pp. 27–28; the funding figure is on p. 162.

46 Clavel, *They are also Filipinos*, p. 71; Filipinas Foundation, *Anatomy of Philippine Muslim*, p. 192. The 3,000 figure is in Salgado, 'Development policies', p. 110.

47 Milligan, 'Democratization or neocolonialism?', pp. 451–67.

modernity and progress premised on Western, Christian models. Whether or not it was official intent, the message was clear: to be modern Filipinos, Muslim Filipinos must stop being Maranao, Maguindanao or Tausug as understood and expressed within their cultural and religious traditions. While the more or less benevolent assimilation embodied in this civilisation discourse represented an improvement over the genocidal violence carried out against Native Americans, it remained fundamentally racist and hostile to anything but superficial expressions of Muslim Filipino identities.

By the 1950s and 1960s proponents of integration had largely dropped the rhetoric of civilisation, but had more or less retained the framework of the civilisation discourse in the language of development. In attempting to define who and what constituted the National Cultural Minorities that were to be the target of CNI integration efforts, the Commission defined its clients largely in terms of their proximity to modern, Western culture:

It is a Cultural Minority in that its culture differs from that of most natives of the Philippines whose original native, or Asian-influenced culture has been strongly modified for many generations of contact and changes in ethical, cultural, and religious beliefs, practices, law, customs, government, education . . . from Euro-American sources.<sup>48</sup>

Thus development and modernity continued to be defined in a civilisation discourse articulated in Western terms, and integration via education was the means of bringing minorities, particularly Muslim Filipinos, into conformity with that ideal. This view is rather clearly articulated in the conclusion of Clavel's 1969 report on the first decade of the CNI.

If the minorities are to become active members of the national community, they should abandon, as the price they have to pay, their backward ways and adopt those that are in consonance with modern living. Inevitably, they have to observe some values upheld by the majority group . . . in the process of helping them attain a higher degree of civilisation, they have to discard some of their traditional values and customs. It is suggested that they retain those [values and customs] [that] do not constitute a barrier to national progress and an irritant to their relations with one another or with the members of the majority group.<sup>49</sup>

These were precisely the terms offered Muslim Filipinos by the American military governors of the Moro Province 60 years before, terms that had been largely resisted. While a few individual Muslims had achieved enough success in the larger society to perpetuate the illusion of the permeability of the Muslim–Christian cultural divide, such terms often meant that ‘the educated Muslim all too often becomes a part of a rootless intelligentsia, unable to go back wholeheartedly into his own traditional culture, but unwilling because of his religion to assimilate himself completely in the Christian society’.<sup>50</sup> Most Muslims continued to lack access to the resources that would enable them to pursue integration on these terms or any others. In Lanao del Sur, for instance,

48 Clavel, *They are also Filipinos*, p. 4.

49 Ibid., p. 71.

50 Peter G. Gowing quoted in Salipada Tamano, ‘The educational problems of the Muslims in the Philippines’ (M.Ed. thesis, Ain Shams University, Cairo, 1971), p. 126. On the importance of model minorities in supporting myths of social mobility see Liu, ‘On the internal colonial model’, pp. 1347–64.

80 per cent of children dropped out of school before completing the sixth grade.<sup>51</sup> The situation was somewhat better in other Muslim provinces, but they still lagged behind the rest of the country.

Meanwhile, the pages of educational journals increasingly gave voice to hopeful – most often non-Muslim – voices on the issue of Muslim integration. Other studies, however, suggested that the effort to achieve integration through uniform educational policies and curricula left ethno-religious differences untouched if they did not in fact exacerbate them. In fact, more than 65 per cent of Muslims surveyed in 1971 identified themselves as Muslim rather than Filipino and significant majorities held unfavourable views of government education.<sup>52</sup> Many continued to reject integration in favour of an Islamic education at home or abroad. Many others accepted the education, but put it to use resisting integration. The outbreak of an armed secessionist movement led by government-educated Muslim intellectuals in the early 1970s demonstrated as definitively as anything else the inadequacy of education alone to diffuse ethno-religious tensions. As Filipino historian Cesar Majul noted in retrospect, ‘the fact that the secessionist movement among the Muslims began to germinate in the late 1960s shows that it [the CNI] failed to integrate the bulk of the Muslim population into the body politic’.<sup>53</sup>

The almost simultaneous re-emergence of the Muslim secessionist movement and a nascent communist insurgency in the late 1960s and early 1970s offered a pretext for the declaration of martial law by President Ferdinand Marcos in late 1972.<sup>54</sup> As the Marcos regime launched a series of policies designed to bring about what it called the New Society, it responded to Muslim unrest with two of the same weapons deployed by the US colonial regime: military assaults and education. In 1972 full-scale military operations were launched against the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), initiating what soon became a conventional war that did not formally end until the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile educational policy shifted in the New Society to prioritise economic development. While the long-standing objective of promoting moral values through religious faith did not disappear from official policy statements, Marcos’ educational policies gave top billing in their lists of objectives for Philippine education to economic development, nationalism and the promotion of the goals of the New Society.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, specific policies attempted to target Muslim concerns in order to mitigate hostility towards the government and facilitate the continuing policy of

51 Antonio Isidro, ‘Education of the Muslims’, *Solidarity*, 4, 3 (1969): 8–12.

52 Filipinas Foundation, *Anatomy of Philippine Muslim*, pp. 116–7. See also, for instance, Jose Ante, ‘Muslim-Christian integration in the Notre Dame schools of Sulu’, *Solidarity*, 5, 3 (1970): 48–50 and Jose Roberto T. Arong, ‘Schooled in conflict: The impact of education and culture on ethno-religious conflict in southern Philippines’ (Ph. D. diss., Stanford University, 1976).

53 Quoted in Salgado, ‘Development policies’, p. 110. On the outbreak of the armed secessionist struggle see George, *Revolt in Mindanao*; Nur Misuari, the Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front, was a former political science professor at the University of the Philippines.

54 Stanley Karnow, *In our image: America’s empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), p. 439.

55 Che Man, *Muslim separatism*, pp. 149–51.

56 Josefina N. Navarro, ‘Curricular directions in the new society’, *Educational directions in the new society* (Manila: Philippine Association of School Superintendents, 1973), pp. 22–38; ‘School year 76–77 sees more reforms in RP’s educational system’, *New Philippines*, 41, 2 (1976): 1–3; Aurelio O. Elevazo and Rosita A. Elevazo, *Philosophy of Philippine education* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1995), pp. 61–78.

integration. In 1973, for instance, Marcos issued Letter of Instruction No. 71-A allowing the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction ‘in schools and areas where the use thereof permits’.<sup>57</sup> Any meaningful implementation of the policy, however, was severely limited by the lack of teachers capable of teaching Arabic and other resources. Moreover, the presence or absence of Arabic instruction had never been a major concern of Muslim Filipinos regarding the public schools. Consequently, few significant steps were taken towards the implementation of the order until the early 1980s, when Mindanao State University began a formal programme to train Arabic-language teachers.<sup>58</sup> In spite of this effort, Arabic language instruction remains limited and largely ineffectual. Regional Departments of Education in Mindanao also launched small-scale literacy projects, awarded scholarships to MNLF rebels who had ‘returned to the fold of the law’, prepared new textbooks with basic information about Muslim culture and attempted to foster the ‘integration’ of Islamic schools by introducing public school curricula into the *madaris* and helping them seek official government recognition.<sup>59</sup>

Most of these efforts were seen as ineffective and insincere attempts to improve the lot of Muslim Filipinos, mere window dressing rather than substantive educational reforms. Thus, by the mid-1970s, after 40 years of government policies designed to effect the integration of Muslim Filipinos through education into the mainstream of Philippine society, their access to and participation in public education had increased significantly, yet most Muslims still lacked confidence in the government. Enrolment in the predominately Muslim regions had risen to more than 350,000, participation rates were two-thirds of the national average, and drop-out rates were roughly comparable, yet fewer than one-fifth of Christian and Muslim Filipinos had favourable attitudes towards each other.<sup>60</sup> In a 1975 study of relations among nine Filipino ethnic groups the Filipinas Foundation found that Filipino Muslims were consistently ranked last by other groups in terms of their desirability as neighbours, employers, employees, friends or marriage partners. ‘Muslims are regarded above all as unreliable, hostile and proud people, and lead all other ethnic groups in being extravagant, non-progressive, lazy, hostile, unreliable, poor, proud, conservative and stingy.’<sup>61</sup>

The most common reasons for disliking Muslims were listed as ‘fierce’ (24.8 per cent), ‘treacherous’ (19.9 per cent), ‘killers’ (11.8 per cent), ‘warlike’ (10.9 per cent), and ‘religious difference’ (10.9 per cent). Interestingly, the charge that Muslims were ‘anti-government’ was cited by only 5.4 per cent of non-Muslim respondents as a reason to dislike them.<sup>62</sup> Thus the savage image of the Muslim Filipino posited in the American

57 Department of Education and Culture, *A year of progress under martial law* (Manila: Department of Education and Culture, 1973), p. 48.

58 Ahman Mohammad H. Hassoubah, *Teaching Arabic as a second language in the southern Philippines* (Marawi City: Mindanao State University Research Center, 1983), pp. 24–5.

59 Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), *Report on educational development in the seventies* (Manila: MEC, 1979), pp. 82–5; Ministry of Education Culture and Sports (MECS), *Annual report 1980 (Regional Offices)* (Manila: MECS, 1980), pp. 227–35; MECS, *Annual report 1983* (Manila: MECS, 1983), p. 3; MECS, *Annual report 1984* (Manila: MECS, 1984), pp. 194–6, 218–24.

60 National Economic and Development Authority, *Philippine yearbook 1975* (Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, 1976), pp. 299–301, 321; Filipinas Foundation, *Anatomy of Philippine Muslim*, p. 124; Filipinas Foundation, *Philippine majority-minority relations and ethnic attitudes* (Makati: Filipinas Foundation, 1975), pp. 158–9.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

civilisation discourse survived 70 years of education for integration largely intact. The same study showed that each ethnic group tended to rank itself as the most desirable-admirable, while later research demonstrated the continuing importance of the extended family as ‘the most central and dominant institution in the life of all individuals’.<sup>63</sup> Thus provincialism and familism also survived the long effort by nationalist educators to replace them with a new Filipino identity. Administrative and political integration had been achieved, but social integration of Muslims and Christians appeared to be as far off as it had ever been.

By 1985 almost 1.2 million children, more than 90 per cent of the school age population, attended more than 5,000 schools in central and western Mindanao. Cohort survival rates approached, and in some areas exceeded, national averages.<sup>64</sup> Studies by Muslim educational scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, continued to claim that government textbooks contained little or nothing relevant to Muslim Filipino experience. Nagasura Madale’s surveys of Muslim Filipinos found that 97 per cent of his respondents believed that the ‘educational system in Muslim areas failed in its goals and objectives as evidenced by its inability to effect observable changes in local people’s culture and society’. Many Muslims, he reported, were still suspicious of government education because it tended to alienate them from their identity as Muslims, which superseded any sense of identity as citizens of the Philippines.<sup>65</sup> Schools in Muslim areas were dilapidated and lacking in textbooks, supplies and highly qualified teachers. A unified curriculum still failed to adequately include Muslim culture. After 50 years of Filipino rule, the Philippine government was still seen by many Muslims as a *gobirno a sarawang a tao*, a ‘government of foreign people’.<sup>66</sup> The MNLF refused to accept the autonomy implemented by the Marcos administration and continued – albeit at a lower level of intensity – its armed struggle against the Philippine government.<sup>67</sup> By 1985, Filipinos’ long-standing faith in education as the tool that would finally resolve Muslim–Christian tensions and bring about national integration had borne little fruit.

### Conclusion

Is it, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the policy of integration via education pursued by successive Philippine governments between 1935 and the demise of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986 was a failure? In terms of educational access and participation among Muslim Filipinos significant progress had been made. Between 1935 and 1985 their enrolment had risen from 3.5 per cent to roughly 10 per cent of national enrolment. The number of elementary schools had risen from 6 per cent to more than 12 per cent, while between 1960–85 the number of public high schools in Muslim Mindanao

63 Ibid., p. 118; Luis Q. Lacar, ‘Familism among Muslims and Christians in the Philippines’, *Philippine Studies*, 43 (1995): 42–65.

64 National Economic Development Authority, *Philippine yearbook 1985* (Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, 1986), pp. 220, 222, 231.

65 Abdullah T. Madale, ‘Educating the Muslim child: The Philippine case’, in *The ethnic dimension: Papers on Philippine culture, history and psychology*, ed. Z. A. Salazar (Cologne: Counseling Center for Filipinos, Caritas Association for the City of Cologne, 1983), pp. 15–42. On textbooks see Madale, ‘Educational implications of Moro history’, *Mindanao Journal*, 3, 1 (1976): 89–97.

66 Nagasura T. Madale, ‘Educational goals and the search for national identity’, in *The Muslim Filipinos: A book of readings*, ed. Nagasura T. Madale (Quezon City: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing, 1981), pp. 248–55.

67 Vitug and Gloria, *Under the crescent moon*, pp. 34–5.



had increased from 1 per cent to 9 per cent of the national total. Participation rates were roughly comparable.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the policy of integration enjoyed some administrative and political success in facilitating the emergence of Muslim political elites and thus helping to expand state authority in Muslim regions.<sup>69</sup>

The numbers, however, obscure continuing problems of quality, content, and retention as well as contra-indicators of successful Muslim–Christian integration. For instance, by 1985 as many as 2,000 *madaris* had been established in Muslim Mindanao; approximately 72 per cent were created between 1972–80.<sup>70</sup> This growth is all the more striking when one considers that local inhabitants of the poorest regions of the country established these schools without government support or encouragement. In addition, the apparently successful effort to bring government education to Muslim Filipinos coincided with a rise in secessionist sentiments rather than the decline predicted by advocates of integration through education. At the level of ordinary citizens, therefore, the policy of integration via education appears to have been met by at least four distinct responses: acceptance; rejection in favour of, or at least balanced with, Islamic education; assimilation of public education to local cultural and political ends, as in the case of Mindanao State University; or critical redirection of government education against state interests, as in the case of Nur Misuari and other leaders of the MNLF.

Thus, while 50 years of the policy of integration through education no doubt contributed to the social mobility of individual Muslims and led some non-Muslim Filipinos to a better understanding of their fellow citizens, it largely failed to achieve the goal of mitigating Muslim–Christian tensions in Mindanao. As recently as 1997 an analysis of inter-ethnic relations between Muslim and Christian Filipinos found that the ‘perceptions and understandings that Muslims and Christians have of each other lack objectivity and are coloured by strong biases and prejudices; but especially strong are the biases Christians have against Muslims’.<sup>71</sup> The continued alienation of so many Muslim Filipinos and the recent resurgence of the armed secessionist movement suggest that the policy had indeed failed as a mechanism for mitigating the ethno-religious differences that separated Muslims and non-Muslims. In fact, the conflict reached new levels and extremes of violence by 2000 as elements of the secessionist movement became increasingly linked with international terrorist organisations.<sup>72</sup> Peace talks recently underway in Malaysia offer hope for the end of overt violence, but they do not begin to touch the underlying tensions that have fuelled repeated outbreaks of violence over the last century.

It is important, however, to understand the reasons that such a well-intentioned policy failed to meet its objectives. One obvious cause was the inability of a relatively impoverished post-colonial state to effectively implement the policies it espoused. In this respect the shortcomings in public education for Muslims were no different from those

68 Caulkins, ‘Public education’, pp. 222–4, 64; Isidro, *Moro problem*, p. 29; National Economic Development Authority, *Philippine yearbook 1985*, pp. 220–2, 231.

69 Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, pp. 134–54.

70 Manaros Boransing et al., *The madrasah institution in the Philippines: Historical and cultural perspectives* (Iligan City: The Toyota Foundation, 1986), pp. 44, 59.

71 Rosalita Tolibas-Nunez, *Roots of conflict: Muslims, Christians, and the Mindanao struggle* (Makati City: Asian Institute of Management, 1997), p. 84.

72 Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*.

experienced by other poor Filipinos. Thus, to a significant extent, educational policies must be read as intentions rather than results. The objectives of the Commission on National Integration, for instance, which targeted economic development, land reform, legal assistance, agricultural development and more might – if successfully carried through – have had a significant impact on Muslim Filipinos' sense of belonging to the Philippine Republic. However, lack of resources, inefficiency and corruption – often by Muslim leaders themselves – troubled the CNI and other efforts, such as the Southern Philippines Development Authority.<sup>73</sup>

This common problem was complicated by the legacy of Muslim–Christian tensions. While the Philippine state could, when necessary, bring military power to bear on armed insurrections and put them down, generally it lacked the economic and political power to effectively impose its vision of Filipino national identity and modernity on strong societies such as the Maranao, Maguindanao and Tausug at the peripheries of state power. While this weak state–strong society dichotomisation captures the broad patterns of domination and resistance that have characterised this relationship, it does not adequately account for the variety of Muslim Filipino responses to state policy in education, as Abinales has demonstrated analogously in his analysis of the role of local 'strong men' in the political integration of Muslim-dominated provinces in the decades before and after independence.<sup>74</sup> As with these political figures, the spread of public education, accompanied by a growing number of Muslim teachers, facilitated the penetration of state education in Muslim-dominated regions and encouraged its acceptance in local communities. Paradoxically, however, it also elicited a variety of responses that tended to reinforce in-group/out-group distinctions as individuals saw the penetration of state schooling both as an opportunity to deploy Muslim identity as a justification for tapping into state power and resources – as students, teachers and administrators – for their own purposes and as a threat to traditional cultural and religious identities. Thus the variety of responses – acceptance, accommodation, subversion and resistance – does not necessarily contradict the notion of a relatively widespread Muslim Filipino suspicion of state educational policy between 1935 and 1985.

This relatively widespread suspicion strongly suggests that the educational policies pursued were so fundamentally flawed that they would have been likely to fail even if the post-colonial Philippine state had had the economic and political strength to fully implement them. These flaws had roots in the US colonial period, when American officials first deployed educational policy as a tool for integrating Muslim Filipinos and repeatedly used the history of Muslim–Christian relations and the supposed inability of Christian Filipinos to govern the Muslims as a justification for delaying Filipino rule of Muslim Mindanao. This helped create a tendency among Filipino officials to minimise the differences between Muslims and Christians and to adopt the same policy tools used by the Americans in dealing with Mindanao. Thus Philippine government officials continued the Americans' civilisation discourse (in no small measure because it flattered them as already possessing, in the words of one American colonial official, 'the highest form of religion') along with the tendency to see deviation from the ideal as deficiencies to

73 Salgado, 'Development policies', pp. 106–7.

74 Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, pp. 8–15.

be corrected.<sup>75</sup> The only change in this discourse in the post-independence period was rhetorical, substituting words like ‘modern’ and ‘development’ for ‘civilisation’ and ‘undeveloped’ for ‘savagery’. The underlying biases and objectives remained unchanged. Neither the American nor Filipino governments ever seriously considered, for instance, granting Muslim Filipinos the independence they fought so long to preserve and have fought so long to regain.

A nationalistic educational policy formulated from within the cultural, religious and political worldviews of a Manila-centred elite which dominated the centralised educational bureaucracy was widely experienced as a homogenisation of Filipino identity hostile to Muslim Filipino identities, regardless of that bureaucracy’s benevolent intentions. Pursued within the conceptual framework of civilisation-development, state educational policies gave integration a veneer of benevolence that masked a tendency towards prescription which Paulo Freire argues is ‘one of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed’ and which marked both the colonial relationship between the colonisers and the colonised as well as the traditional relationship between the elite, Christian and Muslim, and the masses.<sup>76</sup> This false generosity preserved the moral-epistemic and therefore cultural-political privilege of the Filipino mainstream behind a mask of benevolent concern for Muslims and cast their ambivalence towards an essentially oppressive pedagogy as evidence of ignorance, ingratitude or subversion.

The Manila-centred educational elite continued to hold the power to define national identity in terms of colonial borders and their own historical experience. This nationalism, moreover, was profoundly coloured by a Christian foil deeply rooted in mainstream culture by four centuries of Catholic cultural domination and given an opening to influence educational policy by official goals which charged schools with producing citizens with an ‘abiding faith in God’. Authorised by a centralised government bureaucracy and the nationalist ideal to compose and impose a unified curriculum throughout the country, this educational elite was positioned to define the ideological framework within which integration would occur. Therefore, when Muslim Filipinos rejected the offer on the grounds that it constituted assimilation into a Christian culture via a fundamentally Christian school system, their rejection could be read as further evidence of their ignorance, backwardness and parochialism.

Thus the Philippine experiment in the use of educational policy to mitigate ethno-religious tensions and effect national integration reinforces educational insights gained in other multicultural democracies: essentialist, monocultural nationalism is inherently oppressive in diverse societies and can only be accomplished through the application of both symbolic and real violence. Such an imposition inevitably elicits a variety of responses from groups on the margins of multicultural societies as they manoeuvre to survive in the face of state efforts to homogenise national identity. While this variety of responses may suggest a level of acceptance of nationalist educational policies, it constitutes – with the possible exception of those few willing to be assimilated – in fact a spectrum of survival strategies in defence of cultural and religious identities standing

75 The quotation is from Tasker H. Bliss, *Annual Report of Brigadier General Tasker H. Bliss, U.S. Army, Governor of the Moro Province. April 16, 1906 to August 27, 1906* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1906), p. 81.

76 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 46.

in relative opposition to the mainstream. Genuine integration, the opposite of such imposition, is a two-way street; it requires the mutual adjustment of both the minority and the majority community. As Abinales argues in a political context, ‘the ability to govern means finding a middle ground with other centers of power’, it means being able ‘to compromise with societal forces’.<sup>77</sup> The ability to effectively educate in multicultural, religiously diverse societies means, in addition to sufficient economic resources and political will, finding and expressing such a middle ground in educational policy.

Thus the Philippine experience in deploying education as a tool to mitigate ethno-religious conflict between 1935 and 1985 offers a cautionary tale for those who would subscribe to such faith: educational policies that posit, implicitly or explicitly, contemporary Euro-American civilisation as the ideal to which the education of Muslims must aspire are likely to fail. Educational policies that presume essentialist notions of national identity and blithely ignore the religious bias in that identity are likely to meet the same fate. Educational policies that grow out of the experience, needs, and interests of local Muslim communities while addressing the cultural biases of all religious communities might have a chance.

<sup>77</sup> Abinales, *Making Mindanao*, p. 183.

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