Islamization or Secularization?
Educational Reform and the Search for Peace in the Southern Philippines

Jeffrey Ayala Milligan
Florida State University

Abstract
Since 1001 many observers of education in the Muslim world have expressed concerns about the radicalizing influence of madrasahs. These critiques often assume that the dichotomization of sacred and secular common to civic society in the West is a necessary ingredient of any educational reforms designed to prevent the spread of religious extremism in the Muslim world. This essay critically
examines this secularization thesis through an analysis of current educational reforms in the southern Philippines, where local officials have initiated efforts to Islamize education in the context of a decades-long secessionist movement.

Introduction
Since September 11, 2001, there has been growing concern in the West about the allegedly radicalizing influence of Islamic schools-- madaris-- in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and other Muslim countries. In some contexts-- Pakistan, for instance--the failure of government schools to meet the needs of Muslim children is seen as providing an opening for private madaris that function largely outside government control. In others, such as Saudi Arabia, the government schools themselves are accused of teaching extreme interpretations of Islam. In both contexts, an implicit assumption of Western critics is that one major cause of Islamic radicalism is the focus on religion in these schools. Secularization, therefore, is often seen as an important step toward a modern, and moderate, educational system. Such prescriptions for change, however, run counter to the belief that Islam is a complete way of life that does not recognize the dichotomization of sacred and secular that is commonly accepted in western democracies (Ghazi, 2003). These differing perspectives represent a challenge for educators inside and outside the Muslim world who seek reforms that will honor the place of Islam in the lived experience of Muslim communities while delivering an education that will foster their peaceful development.

The education of Muslims in the southern Philippines has faced this challenge for more than a century. Almost four hundred years of Muslim resistance to Spanish and later American colonization have left a bitter legacy of animosity and mistrust between the Muslim minority and Christian majority in the Philippines (Majul, 1999). For the last century, successive colonial and postcolonial governments deployed secular educational policy as a primary weapon in their effort to heal that social rift (Milligan, 2004, in press). Those efforts have failed, however, to integrate Muslim Filipinos into the national mainstream or to prevent the outbreak of an Islamic secessionist movement that has since raged for more than three decades and taken on disturbing international ramifications (Vitug & Gloria, 2000). Recently, however, the government of the Philippines has allowed a measure of local political and educational autonomy in Muslim Mindanao. This has provided Muslim educators with a new freedom to conduct policy experiments that challenge the secularization thesis and map out possible

alternatives for the reform of education in Muslim communities wracked by religious and political conflict.

Historical Context

Islamic education arrived in the southern Philippines with Islam itself some time in the late 13 th or early 14 th century. Over the next two hundred years, it spread throughout the southern islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (Majul, 1999). Thus, by the time Spain arrived to colonize the Philippines in the 16 th century, Islam had become a key feature of cultural identity and, hence, education throughout the region. Spanish colonization, however, with its policy of aggressive Christianization, introduced a dichotomization of Philippine cultures along religious lines that would eventually lead to a series of armed conflicts over the next three centuries (Majul, 1999). From this point forward, Muslim Filipinos' adherence to Islam would be seen by successive colonial and postcolonial governments as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, an unmitigated evil impeding the political and economic integration of Mindanao and Sulu into the Philippine body politic. Educational policies would come to reflect those views.

Though Spain gradually introduced a system of higher and later public education in those regions of the country it controlled, this had little impact on Muslim Filipinos due to their aggressive resistance against colonial integration. The U.S. invasion of the Philippines in 1898, however, brought that resistance to a bloody end in the ensuing decade. While American rule of Muslim Filipinos generally eschewed the violent anti-Islamic policies of the Spanish regime, it was implemented through a colonial discourse that posited a continuum between civilization--epitomized by white, Euro-American, Christian culture--and savagery--epitomized in the Philippines by the Muslim Filipino. Thus, Islam became a marker of ignorance, backwardness, and the need for education. U.S. colonial rule in Muslim Mindanao, therefore, became peculiarly pedagogical in character. In fact, one academic observer at the time described it as a "new experiment in colonization, an experiment that has been, and still is, the story of a great modern advance in race pedagogy, a notable example of colonization that gets its theory and justification from the principles of modern pedagogy" (Torrance, 1917, p. 1).

This pedagogical imperialism would come to be characterized by policies and practices that were similar to those developed in the Americans' earlier encounters with African-Americans and Native-Americans. Boarding schools--particularly for girls and indigenous elites--were established. Farm schools worked to eradicate indigenous systems of land tenure and fix individual farmers on small plots of land. Vocationally-oriented curricula prepared Muslim children for their roles in the colonial economy. Language policies attempted to replace local dialects with a single lingua franca. In effect, American schooling replaced militant Spanish Catholicism as the weapon of choice in integrating Muslim Filipinos into an emerging Philippine state as a marginalized and subordinated minority stripped of all but a nominal Muslim identity (Milligan, 2004). These policies, as well as the underlying conception of Muslim Filipinos as uncivilized, backward, and dangerous passed largely unchanged into subsequent independent governments. They were encoded in textbooks and curricula that virtually erased the history, experiences, customs and religion of Muslim Filipinos. Such policies presented Muslim Filipinos with a stark choice, a choice put rather bluntly in a history of the Commission on National Integration: "In the process of helping them attain a

higher degree of civilization, they have to discard some of their traditional values and customs" (Clavel, 1969, p. 71). Tragically, through a combination of unchanging attitudes and bureaucratic inertia, this educational dispensation continued more or less intact into at least the 1980s (Milligan, in press).

Unsurprisingly, these policies were met with various forms of resistance. The most obvious form of this resistance has been an armed movement to establish an independent Islamic state in Mindanao. The ensuing conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives since the early 1970s and earned Mindanao the dubious distinction of being a "front" in the war on terrorism (Vitug & Gloria, 2000; Abuza, 2003). But resistance has taken educational forms as well. The parallel system of formal and informal Islamic education that had existed in Muslim Mindanao for centuries continued right through the 20 th century. By the 1950s, however, larger and better-organized schools patterned on Arab models had begun to emerge in several cities in Muslim Mindanao. As the secessionist movement gained momentum in the early 1970s the numbers of madaris grew rapidly to well over 1,000 in the western provinces of Mindanao (Boransing, Magdalena and Lacar, 1987). While some of these schools received international support from the Middle East, most were supported by the tuition of Muslim families, one of the poorest populations of an already poor nation. Finding no support for their distinct cultural and religious identities in the public schools, many Muslim families sent their children to the madaris-- exclusively or at least on weekends--in order to sustain their Islamic identity. These religious schools, however, offered little in the way of social and economic mobility within the larger Philippine society. Muslim Filipino children thus attended school seven days a week and tried to negotiate as many as five separate languages in an often futile attempt to secure a future as both Filipino citizens and Muslims. By the mid-1990s private madaris that attempted to integrate government authorized curricula and Islamic curricula emerged to fill the need that public schools had long neglected. Thus the parallel system of Islamic education strengthened from the 1980s forward.

From Secularization to Islamization
This history of conflict and forced integration into a social mainstream shaped by centuries of anti-Muslim bias and a clearly western, Christian-oriented conception of modernity is the backdrop against which current efforts to Islamize education in Mindanao must be understood. From the beginning of the 20 th century, the cornerstone of Philippine educational policy for its Muslim minority was integration. The underlying assumption of this policy was that the dichotomization of Philippine society between Muslims and Christians was an unfortunate legacy of Spanish colonization. This mistrust was no longer justified in a postcolonial state in which everyone was an equal citizen. It was largely perpetuated, however, by the backwardness and ignorance of the Muslims. The integration policy assumed that a unified curriculum, common textbooks and unified policies, combined with efforts to increase Muslim Filipinos' access to secular public education, would gradually resolve Muslim-Christian tensions. From the early 1950s on this resulted in efforts to expand secular public schools and establish a government university in the Muslim regions (Isidro, 1979). At about the same time, the government created the Commission on National Integration, an agency intended to provide a broad range of development assistance but which put most of its efforts into the provision of college scholarships for Muslim youth (Clavel 1969). A highly

centralized national department of education administered these policies. These efforts failed, however, to head off the eruption of the armed secessionist movement in the early 1970s. Many of the CNI scholarship recipients never finished their education (Clavel, 1969). Some of those who did, such as Moro National Liberation Front chairman Nur Misuari, turned up as leaders in the secessionist movement (Majul, 1999; Vitug & Gloria, 2000).

The overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship and reinstitution of elite democracy in 1986 created a political rupture within which new possibilities for Muslim Filipinos began to take shape. The new administration of Corazon Aquino, which saw lingering communist and Islamist insurgencies as artifacts of the Marcos dictatorship, was sympathetic to Muslims' claims of oppression and relatively willing to acknowledge the historical legacy of Christian Filipinos' biases in furthering that oppression. While this new openness did not go so far as to interrogate the extent to which new policies perpetuated those biases, it did create a climate in which decentralization and local autonomy could be seriously entertained as viable political responses to the conflict (Brilliantes, 1987; Tanggol, 1990; Ocampo, 1991). This new climate led to the creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 1990. The act creating the ARMM charged its regional government with the creation and maintenance of a public educational system that would teach "the rights and duties of citizenship and the cultures of the Muslims, Christians and tribal peoples in the region to develop, promote and enhance unity in diversity" (Republic of the Philippines, 1990). It also went on to require Arabic language instruction for Muslim children, to require schools to "develop consciousness and appreciation of one's ethnic identity," and to give the autonomous government the power to regulate the madaris. Responsibility for the educational measures delineated in the Act was devolved to a Regional Department of Education, Culture and Sports in 1991. Thus, by the mid-1990s the legal and policy frameworks were in place to, theoretically, allow Muslim Filipinos to determine the content and direction of their education for the first time since losing their independence to the U.S. at the beginning of the century.

Muslim Filipino educators quickly seized upon this new freedom to Islamize education in the ARMM (Tamano, 1996). Their efforts led to two new initiatives in ARMM educational policy, initiatives that are also supported by the national Department of Education for Muslim children residing outside the region (Mutilan, 2003; M. Boransing, personal communication, July 7, 2004). The first of these initiatives involves the Islamization of public education in the region. Though the geographic concentration of Muslims in western Mindanao and the growth in the numbers of Muslim schoolteachers since the 1970s has meant that many Muslim children attend majority Muslim schools taught by Muslims and located in Muslim communities, the centralization of policy making in Manila ensured that curricula did not reflect, and at times conflicted with, local values (Bula, 1989; Pascual-Lambert, 1997; Rodil, 2000). Centralized testing policies enforced teacher compliance with this curriculum; those who chose to deviate from it jeopardized their students' already slim chances for social advancement. Thus the new autonomy to design curricula that reflect local values represents a significant shift in policy. Muslim educators in the ARMM have, therefore, seized upon that autonomy to infuse Islamic values into the public school curriculum both in the formal values education program and in the curricula of other subjects. Textbooks are to be written

and disseminated that depict Muslims and Islam favorably and accurately reflect their values. To this end locally respected ulama have been engaged to help review, revise, and write new curricula and textbooks. Arabic language instruction is to be expanded as well in order to enhance Muslim children's opportunities to interact with the rest of the Muslim world as well as enable them to read the Koran, the traditional purpose of Arabic instruction in the madaris. The goal of these efforts is to make public schools more attractive to Muslim families and thus reduce the incentive to send children to madaris outside of government control and susceptible, in some instances, to radical Islamist influences (M. Mutilan, personal communication, July 5, 2004).

The second initiative involves the so-called integration of the madaris (Macada-ag, personal communication, June 23, 2004). Ever since the introduction of government education under the American colonial regime, Islamic education, though respected and supported within the Filipino Muslim community, represented a social and economic dead end for Muslims as citizens of the Philippine state. The vast majority of madaris focused almost exclusively on religious instruction, thus students who attended them did not receive instruction in those subjects that would enable them to attend universities or compete for positions in the larger society. Even those madaris that did offer such instruction were often not recognized by the government or were of such poor quality that their graduates were equally handicapped. Thus graduates of the madaris, some of whom do go on to receive an advanced Islamic education in the Middle East, are employable only as poorly paid teachers in Islamic schools. This contributes to a sense of exclusion, frustration and discrimination that has radicalized many. The aim of madrasah integration, therefore, is to encourage and support madaris to expand their curricula to include subject matter taught in the public schools. This would enable those integrated madaris to seek government recognition and thus be eligible for limited public support under the Fund for Assistance to Private Education. It would also, theoretically, afford those students who choose a madrasah education a measure of social mobility through the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to transfer to public schools, attend government universities, or to seek employment in the national economy. In effect, these reforms aim to integrate what for centuries have been two separate systems of education: government education and Islamic education. Thus the century-long search for an approach to education that would enhance the prospects of peace between Muslims and Christians has shifted from the long-held faith in secularization to Islamization (Saligoin, 1997; Abdullah, 2003; Ghazi, 2003; Boransing, 2003).

This shift reflects and is reflected by a corresponding intensification of Islamic identity in the broader Filipino Muslim community (Milligan, 2003). Madrasah integration, for instance, began in the private sector with the establishment of institutions such as the Ibn Siena Integrated School in Marawi City. Established in 1995 by a consortium of Muslim intellectuals and local ulama, Ibn Siena offers both the traditional curriculum of the madrasah and an approved government curriculum. In the first five years of its existence, it grew to an enrollment of more than 2,000 students (C. Derico, personal communication, June 27, 2004). This intensification of Islamic identity in the broader community is also reflected in the growth of the Jema'at al Tabligh in the southern Philippines. From tentative beginnings in the region in the late 1970s, the movement has grown to include tens of thousands of adherents (Boransing, et al, 1987; Vitug & Gloria,

2000). It is described locally as a "roving university," a form of non-formal adult education that teaches an expression of Islam that strictly adheres to the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad while eschewing separatism (Manoga, 2002; M. A. Faisal, personal communication, June 28, 2004).

Making good on the potential inherent in these public policy and private educational experiments has been severely hampered by endemic poverty, continued financial dependence on the central government, corruption and infighting within the ARMM, and the lingering habits of a century of educational centralization (S. Tamano, personal communication, July 12, 1999; Chua, 1999; A.H. Macada-ag, personal communication, June 23, 2004). Over the last decade, however, officials of the Department of Education in the ARMM have begun to articulate policies responsive to the charge to teach Muslim culture, develop consciousness of one's ethnic identity, and "adopt an educational framework that is meaningful, relevant and responsive to the needs, ideals and aspirations of the people in the Region" (Republic of the Philippines, 1990). The general intent of these policies is the Islamization of education in the Autonomous Region. After a century of colonial and postcolonial government efforts to subordinate Islamic identity to national identity and to dismiss it as irrelevant to educational development in the southern Philippines, Muslim educational leaders in the ARMM have placed that identity at the heart of a program of educational reforms they think necessary for the social and economic development of Muslim Mindanao.

Islamic Education, Ethno-Religious Conflict and the Search for National Unity
Current responses to Muslim Filipinos' long struggle for educational equity remain, for the moment, at the level of policy statements. Their effective implementation faces challenges beyond the usual poverty, inadequate funding and bureaucratic lethargy that hinder most efforts to reform Philippine education. For instance, a key motive behind the century-long policy of integration via education was the threat to national unity inherent in the diversity of Philippine society. This became a national security concern as a result of the Muslim secessionist movement in Mindanao. The majority's insensitivity and outright bias toward Muslim Filipinos caused the policy of integration to be experienced as the attempted de-Islamization, assimilation and subordination of the Muslim minority to the Christian majority. Muslims generally resisted this. Current efforts to allow more autonomous policy-making in the ARMM may succeed in removing some of the oppressive, prescriptive aspects of elite-dominated centralization. Efforts to Islamize public schools serving Muslim students represents a profound shift from ignoring or actively denigrating Islam to giving it a place of honor in the curriculum comparable to the place it holds in the larger Filipino Muslim community. This is likely to enhance the sense of self-worth and dignity of Muslim children as Muslims. But is it likely to do the same for their sense of being Filipino? Perhaps more importantly, Islamization policies do not address the curricular silence and bias regarding Muslim Filipinos in the education of the Christian majority. This raises the possibility that, to the extent the policy is effective in strengthen Islamic identity among Filipino Muslim schoolchildren, it may leave untouched, if not exacerbate, the gulf between Filipino Christians and Filipino Muslims that the integration policy was meant to eradicate.

Madrasah integration faces its own hurdles. While it is unlikely that most owners of private madaris will object, in principle, to the addition of subjects such as science, mathematics, English, or social studies to their curricular offerings, there is considerable skepticism regarding the costs and the loss of control (A. H. Macada-ag, personal communication, June 23, 2004). Madrasah integration will require owners to re-train existing teachers or hire new ones. This represents an enormous expense for schools that are dependent on the tuition they can charge of generally poor families. The Department of Education in the ARMM and the national Department of Education are also unlikely to shoulder this expense. They simply do not have the resources. Assistance from the international donor community--particularly from Muslim countries--may address some of the need, but it is highly unlikely that such aid will meet all of it. Lacking financial leverage over the private madaris, therefore, it is unclear how the Department of Education in the ARMM will persuade them to integrate public school subjects into their curricula. The enabling legislation of the ARMM does give it the authority to regulate madaris ; however, unfunded mandatory integration or threats to close noncompliant madaris may simply further alienate and perhaps radicalize many madrasah owners and operators. Again, this would represent a defeat of one of the key objectives of the Islamization policies.

These problems are only possibilities at this point as Islamization policies are formulated and put into practice in Muslim Mindanao. Whether these, or other unforeseen challenges come to pass will have to await future analysis. However, the fact that they are being tried in a setting with such a long history of influence from U.S. political and educational ideals is enlightening (Milligan, in press). For this experiment seems to constitute a rejection of the notion that strict separation of sacred and secular, of religion and public education is the most appropriate response to religious conflicts in schools and society. Coming on the heels of a century-long effort to subordinate, if not actually eradicate, Islam as the center of Filipino Muslim identity, it represents a rejection of the secularization thesis in the U.S. 's last colony. When Muslim Filipinos were given the freedom to shape the ends and means of their own education they chose to foreground Islam. Thus, Filipino Muslim educational experience suggests that secularization of education may only be feasible where it is already culturally acceptable. Imposing secularization where it is not acceptable--in some Muslim communities, for instance-- may in fact be counter-productive, exacerbating rather than mitigating religious tensions. The Islamization of public education in Muslim Mindanao represents, in effect, a bet that lowering the wall of separation between mosque and state in the Philippines will create a space in which more moderate Muslim voices can articulate viable educational alternatives to the assimilative, alienating educational practices of the past that have contributed to the conflict in Muslim Mindanao. This makes it an experiment worth watching for the insight it may offer into the challenge of providing education to minority Muslim communities in other diverse societies.

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