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Understanding the diversity of cultural and religious learning institutions for Muslim Filipinos

Yusuf Roque Morales¹ and Sheryl Morales²

ABSTRACT ■ The Philippines is part of the bigger cultural crucible of Southeast Asia, composed of continental and archipelagic Southeast Asia. Both areas have been the melting pot of various cultures and faith traditions creating culturally symbiotic and multicultural communities and tribes.

This is manifested in the different tribal customs and social norms exhibited in different places in the Philippines. Among them is the culture of the circumcision which, although a predominantly Southeast Asian Muslim tradition, is also practiced as a rite of passage for Filipino males.

Islam in the Philippines, like in other countries, has developed a level of indigenization, and this has resulted in a clash between indigenization and Arabization of Islam in the public sphere, where because of a globalized culture and easier access to information through technology, there has been social friction between cultural and religious institutions that form Muslim communities in the Philippines.

It is important to highlight that Islam is a mosaic and not a monolith. As such, different schools of thought are manifested in the practice of Islam in the Philippines and in the religious educational institutions that

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enforce their respective practices through religious education (*tarbiyah*). As multiple schools of Islamic thought have embedded themselves into Filipino Muslim culture, this paper will try to differentiate and clarify unique distinctions in each school of thought and how they have influenced Filipino Muslim culture and spirituality.

This discussion aims to present the roles and influences that cultural and religious institutions provide in the context of cultural and religious education and their role in strengthening multiculturalism and religious pluralism in the Philippines.

This paper is part of a bigger research in understanding the cultural and religious education of Muslims in the Philippines and aims to provide a clearer perspective in understanding the role of Muslim culture.

KEYWORDS ■ Multiculturalism, cultural and religious education, cultural pluralism, *madrasah* education



Introduction

Southeast Asia is a mosaic of cultures, a melting pot of civilizations and religious traditions. As these traditions were passed from generation to generation, innovations took place and shaped the expression of a Southeast Asian nation.

The analysis of the impact of globalization on culture is very unsatisfactory.³ The globalization of knowledge and culture carried along by transnational movements has been elaborated to advance a new set of religious and cultural education paradigms.

³ Edmond Malinvaud and Louis Sabourin, eds., *Globalization: Ethical and Institutional Concerns (Proceedings of the Seventh Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences)* (Vatican City: The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2001).

Religious and cultural education have always been the hallmark and benchmark for assessing the impact of cultures and religious traditions, and this can also be used as a template for understanding the country's cultural resilience and depth of tolerance.

In the Philippines, like in other countries, there has been a big struggle on the clash between indigenization and Arabization of Islam in the public sphere. The globalized culture and the easier access to information have resulted in social friction between cultural and religious institutions that form Muslim communities in the Philippines.

The primary objective of this paper is to present a framework in understanding the multiple schools of thought (*aqeedah*/ideology) of Islam that are embedded into the Philippine Muslim culture. Therefore, this paper attempts to differentiate and clarify the unique distinctions in each group and how they have influenced Filipino Muslim culture and spirituality.

This paper is part of a bigger research in understanding the role and influence of different groups in the cultural and religious education of Muslims in the Philippines and their proximate role in strengthening multiculturalism and religious pluralism.

Context

The Philippines is part of the bigger cultural crucible of Southeast Asia, composed of what is termed as continental and archipelagic Southeast Asia. Both areas have been the melting pot of various cultures and faith traditions creating culturally symbiotic and multicultural communities and tribes.

This is manifested in the different tribal customs and social norms exhibited in different places in the Philippines. Among them is the culture of circumcision which, although a predominantly Southeast Asian Muslim tradition, is also practiced as a rite of passage for Filipino males.

Learning institutions for Muslim Filipinos

Cultural Learning Institutions. It is important to contextualize the two types of indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) that exist in the Philippines: (1) *non-Islamized* and (2) *Islamized* cultural communities. Both communities preceded the present Filipino nation-state and are accorded state protection through legislation and policies. These cultural communities preserve their identities through cultural learning institutions (CLIs).

Cultural learning institutions are the oldest form of learning in the Philippines, classified under the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) as indigenous knowledge skills and processes (IKSP). Each indigenous cultural community has a set of identified and documented IKSP which is endemic and native to each group. These cultural traditions are taught by either a cultural shaman (*pakil* or *guru*) or established indigenous people (IP) education schools that are set up either as private educational entities or by the Department of Education (DepEd) and are recognized by the NCIP. Notable samples of IKSP models are the IP school of the Sama Banguingih of Simariki Island and that of the Subanen in Labuan, Zamboanga City.⁴

Another form of a cultural learning institution is the School of Living Traditions (SLT) which is created under the auspices of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA).⁵ The SLTs cultural masters who know traditional cultural arts and crafts teach and mentor the traditional skills and crafts to members of their cultural communities.

These learning institutions ensure cultural and religious preservation and instill institutional memories that may transcend generations.

⁴ This information was provided by the Ateneo Center for Community Extension Services of the Ateneo de Zamboanga University.

⁵ "School of Living Traditions," National Commission for Culture and the Arts, accessed December 3, 2018, <http://ncca.gov.ph/school-of-living-traditions/>.

It is important to note that the cultures and traditions that the thirteen ethnolinguistic Filipino Muslim tribes (Badjao, Iranun, Jama Mapun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Maguindanao, Palawanon, Maranaw, Molbog, Sama, Sangil, Tausug, and Yakan) fall under the category of SLTs, wherein both the local culture predating Islam has merged successfully with the incoming religious tradition.

Religious Learning Institutions. Generally, these learning institutions focus on the religious education aspect and depend on the level of indigenization of faith tradition involved. For purposes of categorization, the authors focus on Muslim religious learning institutions. Originally the definitive term for a Muslim religious institution is *madrasah* (plural *madaris*), taken from the root word *dorus* (study). *Madaris* are learning institutions that taught Islam to Filipino Muslims. However, as further researches and studies were made to understand the types of educational institutions that are used to teach religious education, the authors decided to use the broader term of religious learning institutions to be more inclusive of the different learning systems.

It is important to understand that Muslims have a way of looking into how their Islam is translated into beliefs and into everyday practices. Generally, there are three basic elements of how a Muslim views his religious practices or his spirituality:

- (1) *Aqeedah*. In Arabic, this may mean ideology or worldview. This is how a Muslim views his existence and is to be considered rightful (*wajib*). *Aqeedah* basically refers to the mandatory requisites of belief that a Muslim has to learn and understand for himself. Among them may include the Islamic creed or articles of faith and Qur'anic formulations such as belief in God, angels, prophets, scriptures, and the Day of Judgment. More comprehensive formulations stress a triad—belief in God, the Prophet, and the Day of Judgment—as constituting the essence of the Islamic belief system.⁶

⁶ "Aqidah," Oxford Islamic Studies Online, accessed November 3, 2018, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e176>.

- (2) *Shariah*. This is the legal system that a Muslim adheres to, which defines the rights-based approach (*haqq*) and governs the relationship of man towards other creations and towards his God. Shariah refers to a set of rules and guidelines of how man is to engage his transactional activities with all forms of creation, whether this may involve his relationships with family, friends, or other people and their relative engagements. It is also defined as

God's eternal and immutable will for humanity, as expressed in the *Qur'an* and Prophet Muhammad's example (*Sunnah*), considered binding for all believers; the ideal Islamic law. The *Qur'an* contains only about ninety verses directly and specifically addressing questions of law. Islamic legal discourse refers to these verses as God's law and incorporates them into legal codes. The remainder of Islamic law is the result of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), human efforts to codify Islamic norms in practical terms and legislate for cases not specifically dealt with in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.⁷

- (3) *Tariqah*. This refers to a personal spiritual regimen that is undertaken by a student of Islam under the guidance of a religious teacher. It may be alternatively called the *manhaj*, which means path or way. This normally is the spiritual regimen of a specific teacher or master, including devotional practices, recitations, and literature piety. Others may alternatively use the word *manhaj* to refer to this methodology or system such as the Salafi Manhaj, which uses its own system of interpreting or understanding Islam from its perspective.⁸

⁷ "Shariah," Oxford Islamic Studies Online, accessed November 3, 2018, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2168>.

⁸ Prof. Moner Bajunaid, Secretary General of the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines (NUCP) and Convenor of the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy

From the perspective of indigenous Islam, they may refer to these three elements as *Qauli*, *Fi'ili*, and *Qalbi*. Although the Arabic and Malay translation of *Qauli* is speech, it refers to the spoken set of beliefs. Though *Fi'ili* are the translations of actions, their understanding is actions in tune with *Shariah*. Finally, the term *Qalbi* refers to what the heart desires to do, and may also refer to the path (*manhaj*) each person would undertake as he goes through his whole life.

It is important to highlight that, since each of these groups tends to interpret Islam and their worldview according to their perspectives, the authors attempted to use the term “schools of thought” to define these groups. Although some of these groups may not agree, their distinct attributes made the authors categorize them as such using specific context as historical, philosophical, ideological, and other elements.

Using this reference point, in the Philippines, authors see that there are nine schools of thought manifesting how Muslim Filipinos interpret and view their religious practices or spirituality aside from the classification perceived by other researchers based on current literatures:

- (1) **Indigenous Islam.** This is known as *Ilmu Kamaasan* among the people of Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Islam sa *Matua/Matoa* among the mainland Muslims. Considering that Indigenous Islam is an evolution of pre-Islamic practices and the fusion of the first three schools of thought that arrived in the southern Philippines (Sufism, Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaah, and Shiism), then many practices of indigenous Islam contain a combination of these belief systems. They are preserved through two types of learning institutions:
 - (a) *Pag Guru* (mentorship). Wherein individuals normally seek out “masters” to train them to understand Islam

(PCID), explained the concept of the *manhaj* during the Multi-stakeholders Meeting on the National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP PCVE) held on December 14, 2018 at Cebu City.

and indigenous knowledge and to become the masters' apprentices. This is generally informal and revolves around the relationship between teacher and student and may involve martial prowess (*Ilmu pag-usug iban bunu*), romantic prowess (*pagsihil* and *paghinanghinang*), healing (*pag-ubat*), and other forms of esoteric knowledge. This learning is a sort of a lifelong learning process of teachers⁹ (called affectionately *Kah Tuan* for a male teacher or *Kah Dayang* for a female teacher) wherein they both learn the fundamentals of understanding Islam but are also provided an opportunity to learn wisdom through reflection discernment and experiences.¹⁰ Instruction may focus on mental and physical preparation before acceptance by teachers.¹¹

(b) *Paglibal* (*Qur'an* memorization). This is normally a female *Qur'an* reciter. They are asked to set up their *Qur'ans* on a *libal* (bookstand) to be able to read. After the student finishes the mandatory and ritual readings of the Holy *Qur'an*, a student undergoes a ceremonial rite of passage called *pagtamat* or completion of reading the Holy *Qur'an*.¹²

(2) **Sufism.** The arrival of Sufism and Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah through the Shariffs and the Makdumins has led to indigenization, and this can still be observed through some old customs practiced by Filipino Muslims. However, the current Sufi groups that arrived in the post-1970s use two types of religious learning institutions:

⁹ Guru Nuh Musa (Indigenous Muslim religious teacher), interview, Zamboanga City, September 2018.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Aliazer Abdurajim (Erthul Mustafa Philippines), interview, September 2018.

¹² Ibid.

- (a) *Dergans/Khanaqahs* where their Sufi sessions and lessons are undertaken.¹³ These are the systems provided by the Sufi teachers that arrived after 1970;
- (b) *Madrassahs* that are either run by Sufi scholars themselves or scholars belonging to the Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah (ASWJ).¹⁴

Sufism currently continues to provide spiritual guidance through these systems and some offer a mentor-student approach to understanding and learning Islam. In the Philippines, the Shadlihiyah, the Naqshabandis, and the Qadiriyaahs are known to be active Sufi groups who continue to conduct educational activities.

- (3) **ASWJ (Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaah, Shafil Madhab and Ashari Aqeeda)**. Both the ASWJ and the Salafi have similar institutions except for the content that their religious learning institutions teach. Their *madaris* normally have three levels: (a) *I'daadi/Ibtidai* or primary, (b) *Thanawi* or secondary, and (c) *Kulliyah* or higher education.^{15, 16}

One of those examples that offer these levels is the Sabiel al-Muhtadien Madaris that are in Zambasulta (Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) areas. Sheikh Khadzraji Tapsi, also known as Guru Batah, leads this school network.

There is also another category of learning among the ASWJ known as Talaqqi (memorization and transmission of knowledge), where students, instead of levels, “read certain foundational books” that may categorize their level

¹³ Ustad Parmanan Hajul (Mahad Shafii, Marhalika, Taguig City), interview, September 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Sheikh Abduljabbar Mahmoud (Mudir, Mahad al Loom Islami at Tabuk, Tabuk, Basilan), interview, October 2018.

¹⁶ Sheikh Kadzaji Tapsi (Amir Sabiel al-Muhtadien Foundation), interview, August 2018.

of understanding of Islam. *Madaris* such as Mahad Uloom at-Tayfuri in Baliwasan Seaside and Darul Makhdumin in Suterville, both in Zamboanga City¹⁷ offer this category of learning to their students.

Their scholars may primarily come from abroad such as Al-azhar University (Egypt); Maahad Al Fatah Al Islami (Damascus, Syria); Markaz Nizamuddin (Syria); Darul Mustafa (Tarim, Hadramaut, Yemen); Pesantren Darul Uloom al Fatah (Temboro, Indonesia); Institutions in Libya, Pakistan, Turkey and other countries where ASWJ remains strong and influential religious group.¹⁸

What differentiates the classical Sunni/ASWJ from the Salafi Muslims is that ASWJ follows one particular madhab from the four Sunni schools of Islam. Their *Aqeeda* (creed) is either Ashari or Maturidi while the Aqeeda of the followers of the Salafi Manhaj is Athari. This can be demonstrated in both their foundational texts. The ASWJ uses classical texts like *Aqeedah Tahawiyah* to teach theology while the basic text for Salafis on creed is *Kitab Al-Tawhid* by Mohammad ibn Abdulwahab (MAW).

Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1083, also known as the Code on Muslim Personal Law (CMPL),¹⁹ passed during the Marcos era, recognizes the Shafi'i Madhab among the three other madhabs (Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali) as the official madhab of the Filipino Muslims following the ASWJ. Their practice and celebrations, other than the two major Eid festivals (Eidl Adha and Eidl Fitri), such as Mauluddin

¹⁷ Sheikh Mokhtar Waning (Administrator, Darul Uloom at-Tayfuri, Baliwasan, Zamboanga City), interview, November 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Presidential Decree No. 1083 ("Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines"), The LawPhil Project, accessed September 2018, https://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1977/pd_1083_1977.html.

Nabawi and Isra wal Miraj, Ashhora and others are mentioned in PD 1083.

- (4) **Shiism.** Although Shiism came earlier together with ASWJ and Sufism in the early period, it dissipated until the return of Shiism in the 1960s.²⁰ This was because like the other earlier schools of thought, they have merged and integrated into the indigenous culture and assimilated into Indigenous Islam.

This can be noted from the names of the Maguindanao Sultans, the expressions of “*Anak Tilaka Yajid*” and invectives which involve the name of Muawiyah and Yazid and archival documents in possession of Muslim inherited as “*Pusaka*” (inheritance or heirlooms). The religious education system employed by Shias in the country are of three classifications:

- (a) *Regular madrasah.* This may (or may not) have elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. An example of which is the Khatamol Anbiyah Madrassah in Karbala, Marawi City;
- (b) *Weekend madrasah.* This is primarily an English-based instruction with curriculum developed for non-Arabic speakers focusing on teaching the essentials of Islam from a belief, jurisprudential, and practical levels;²¹
- (c) *Preparatory Hauza (seminary).* This prepares students before they are deployed for traditional Hauza studies either in Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, or Iran. The content is predominantly Arabic language preparation and

²⁰ Yusuf Roque Morales, “Signifikansi Syiah Periode Alawi Pra-Hispanik Hingga Itsna Asyariyah Modern di Filipina” (The Significance of Shiism from Pre-Hispanic Alawi to Modern-day Ithna Ashari in the Philippines and Its Historic Relevance), in *Sejarah & Budaya Syiah di Asia Tenggara (History and Culture of the Syiahs in Southeast Asia)*, ed. Dicky Sofjan (Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2013).

²¹ Salman Galang (vice president of ABPIA), interview, September 2018.

introductory Hauza subjects. This is done for the student's ethical behavior and mental discipline as they go to Shia Hauza²² abroad. The Madrasatul Ahlul Bayt in Suterville Zamboanga City is one example.

- (5) **Salafi Manhaj.** The Salafi Manhaj arrived and started their rise to influence during the 1980s when students were sent abroad for religious scholarships to Salafi educational institutions like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Sudan among others.²³ Their religious educational institutions differ as follows:
- (a) *Regular madrasah.* This may (or may not) offer multi-level classes from elementary, secondary to college-level.²⁴ Examples of this model are the Mahad Moro al-Islami in Sta. Barbara, Zamboanga City and the Mahad Quran wal Hadith in Talon-Talon, Zamboanga City.
 - (b) *Mahad* which focuses on higher Islamic education classes. These *madaris* prepare their students to be Islamic scholars such as the Al-Maarif Education Center in Baguio City, Mahad as-Sunnah in Zamboanga City, and the Darul Imam Shafii in Marawi.²⁵
 - (c) *Islamic centers.* These primarily offer Islamic education for those who may not have the luxury of time to study formal Islamic education. Their clientele may range from students studying in high school or college, professionals

²² Sheik Denil Anawari (principal and rector, Ahlul Bayt Islamic School), interview, August 2018.

²³ Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, "Egypt: The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and Whether it is Involved in Funding Terrorist Activities," Refworld, January 28, 2003, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3f7d4d901c.html>.

²⁴ Sheik Abduljabbar Mahmoud, (Mudir, Mahad al-Loom Islami al Tabuk, Tabuk, Basilan), interview, October 2018.

²⁵ Ibid.

or converts to Islam. Among the examples are Mahad Assunah in Zamboanga City, Discover Islam in Baguio City, Mercy Islamic Center in Davao City, and Ibn Abbas Center in Caloocan City.

In the Philippines, though there is still no consensus and agreement among Muslims on the usage of the term Salafi or Salafi Manhaj as an external identifier, there are identifiable indicators if a *madrasah* group or individual follows the Salafi Manhaj. Among the indicators are the strict observance of only two major festivals: (1) The Eidhul Adha, and (2) Eidul Fitri. The Salafi Manhaj are opposed to celebrating Maulidin Nabawi (birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and other festivities celebrated by mainstream Sunni groups. Other institutions identified with this model (school of thought), but are not limited to the Ulama Council of Zamboanga Peninsula (UCZP), the Regional Darul Ifta of ARMM, Majlisul Shura (which was convened during the events of the Marawi siege), and the National Ulama Cooperation of the Philippines.

As observed in social media sites, like YouTube and Facebook the presence of Salafi practices are shown in social media channels; however, there are still some denials among their adherents on the term Salafi as coined to them instead identify themselves as Sunnis. So far, this group is well-financed and well-organized and can influence people to change their mindsets and listen to their teachings.

- (6) **Jamaah Tabligh.** The Jamaah Tabligh began in South Asia as a movement to bring people back to mosques. Being a social and religious movement, the Jamaah Tabligh has several mechanisms in religious education.²⁶

²⁶ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "The History of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia: The Role of Islamic Sufism in Islamic Revival" (Paper presentation, Workshop on Islamic Culture, Nation Building and the Media: Contemporary Issues, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, September 23–24, 2006).

Like any social movement, the Jamaah Tabligh has established mechanisms of instruction and formation (*tarbiyah*) to ensure that its leaders and members would understand the direction, orientation, and general course of action that the movement undertakes as an institution. In the Philippines, they have the following mechanisms for *tarbiyah*:

- (a) They have a centralized system known as **Markaz** (centers) located in areas where they have a strong presence such as in the Philippines. They conduct religious classes for the guidance of their members.²⁷ The Markaz is their institutional structure wherein leadership instructions come from, starting from the municipal, the provincial, the regional, the area Zonal Markaz, and finally the National Markaz which takes guidance from the Nizammuddin Markaz in India.²⁸
 - (b) They also conduct **Bay'an** (discussion sessions) in Masjid during their Khuruj (proselytization) in the mosques.²⁹ These Bay'an are the formation processes wherein the Tabligh members are gradually provided religious instruction and guidance and are provided opportunities to show their preparedness by handling groups that go on Khuruj (journey to other Muslim communities). On the later years, they will also be handling their own Bay'an.
 - (c) Some of their religious leaders/ulama set up *madaris* that follow what is elaborated by their Nizammuddin Markaz (main center in India).
- (7) **Hizmet (Fetullah Gullen)**. Hizmet, being a religious movement (Jemaat), has a system that is based on discussion circles

²⁷ Hajj Alfrazer Ahalul (Tabligh elder, Zamboanga zone), interview, September 2018.

²⁸ Maulana Abdulfattah Tanog (National Tabligh Zonal elder), interview, September 2018.

²⁹ Hadji Almuabdi Salaam (member, Jamaah Tabligh, Zamboanga City), interview, September 2018.

(Derssanes) wherein they talk about religious issues. Founded by Fethullah Gullen, a cleric exiled in the United States, their group advocates a set of teachings promoting modernist and rationalist understanding of Islam centered on a spirituality of service (*Hizmet*) to humanity, respect for differences of beliefs (interfaith dialogue), and acceptance of Western ideals of democracy.

The *Hizmet* movement, a Sufi modernist movement, evolved from and was heavily influenced by ideas of *Resale Noor*. Their group arrived in the Philippines in the early 1980s. Their educational institutions founded in the Philippines are primarily secular and focus on the K-12 system, particularly on science and mathematics.³⁰

Among their notable institutions in the Philippines are the Fountain Academy in San Juan City, Metro Manila, the Pacific Dialogue Foundation in Greenhills, Metro Manila, and the Filipino Turkish Tolerance School in Pitago, Zamboanga City.

- (8) **Nurculuk (Resale Noor)**. The *Resale Noor* group was founded by followers of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and arrived in the Philippines in the early 1990s. Their religious learning institution is **Dersane**, also known as *Madrasah Nurriyah*.³¹ Since the tradition is based on Said Nursi's guidance, it has remained a large informal system where knowledge and advancement in understanding religion is based upon mutual recognition of one's understanding of Islam as understood in Nursi's *magnum opus*, the *Resale Noor*, a 20-volume commentary of the *Qur'an* and Islam for the modern era.³²

³⁰ Dr. Cihangir Arslan (former president, Turkish Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines), interview, November 2018.

³¹ Dr. Mehmet R. Derindag (International Office, Istanbul Gelisim University), interview, November 29, 2018.

³² *Ibid.*

Their Dersanes are separated according to gender, which also function as boarding houses for their young people who study in colleges and universities. The uniqueness of this group is that they have developed teaching materials for Islam suitable for integration into Islamic subjects from elementary, secondary to college levels.³³

Their curriculum has been adopted by several schools in the Philippines and, as of present, this group has been designing appropriate value-centric Islamic curriculum which aims to answer Muslim challenges in this modern day and age.

Among their institutions in the Philippines are the *Nur Factory* in Manila and the *Risale Nur Institute* in Cagayan de Oro City. They have collaborated previously with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED-ARMM) and the Philippine Teachers Collge in Marawi City.

- (9) **Ahmadiyyah Groups.** Ahmadiyyah Imam Institutions are called Jamia Ahmadiyya where potential propagators join after high school or after earning a bachelor's degree. The degree is called Shahid, which takes seven (7) years to finish and be considered as a graduate.

For Imams, they also have degrees for a shorter duration like three to five years depending on the need of the country specifically.³⁴ They do not have an official degree-issuing *madrasah* in the Philippines, but they have regular weekend classes for children. To prepare missionaries, they have to send their people to another country for the theological studies.³⁵

Because of some of their unique beliefs and practices,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Imam Talha Ali (Ahmadiyyah Missionary), interview, July 2018.

³⁵ Ibid.

other groups consider them either as heretics or non-Muslims which resulted in making their religious learning institutions more discreet to avoid conflict with other groups.³⁶

- (10) **The Department of Education Categorization of *Madaris*.** This classification was originally crafted by Dr. Maranos B. Boransing; however, his paper presentation does not make reference to the different schools of thought practiced by Filipino Muslims.

The former Department of Education Undersecretary for Muslim Affairs, Dr. Maranos B. Boransing gave the following definition and types of *madaris* in the Philippines³⁷ as:

- (a) *Traditional madrasah.* This type of *madrasah* is basically on religious instruction. It is considered as non-formal education due to its characteristics: (1) classes are held on Saturdays and Sundays only or days agreed upon by the teacher and the students/pupils; (b) it does not have a formal curriculum; (c) it is non-graded and many have multi-age groupings, and (d) it only requires its teachers to be graduates of a *madrasah* or to be an imam (Muslim religious leader).
- (b) *Developmental madrasah.* This type of *madrasah* offers hierarchically structured education and sequential learning generally attuned with the formal education system.

³⁶ Abdulwahab Salvatierra (Ahmadiyyah Philippine Elder), November 2018.

³⁷ "DepEd ALIVE Program," accessed November 3, 2018, <http://depedalivaprogram.weebly.com/>.

The teachings concentrate on Islamic religious and cultural subjects and include some mathematics and sciences courses, with Arabic as the medium of instruction. Expectedly, the *madaris* students lack competitive skills required for employment and are not eligible for transfer to regular schools because the *madaris* do not implement the standard curriculum of the Department of Education.

- (c) *Standard madrasah*. This type of *madrasah* has been harmonized, upgraded, and modified to become a component of the Philippine education system through the issuance of DepEd Order no. 51, s. 2004, prescribing the Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris. Henceforth, all *madrasah* institutions in the country shall be required to adopt and implement the said standard curriculum to obtain government recognition and accreditation. In public schools, the enriched curriculum is likewise prescribed mandating the offering of Arabic language and Islamic values for Muslims students throughout the country in areas where there is a Muslim population.

The Department of Education in August 11, 2017 issued a memorandum on the Policy Guidelines for *Madrasah* Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program that aims to: (1) provide Muslim learners with appropriate and relevant educational opportunities while recognizing the cultural context and unique purposes for participating in the program offerings; and (2) integrate content and competencies which are relevant and of interest of Muslim learners.

(11) Other Religious Learning Institutions

Other religious institutions may be dependent on the orientation of the manager of the institutions or, if by under the Philippine government, dependent on the curriculum. Among these other institutions are:

- (a) *Toril*. These are local boarding schools which are an adaptation of the Southeast Asian Pesantren model. In the Philippine context, this has evolved into more of an orphanage/boarding school where children are sent for formation (*Tarbiyyah*).
- (b) *National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)-supervised* madaris. The NCMF since 2014 has embarked on consolidating *madaris* and has attempted to design a *madrasah* curriculum. Together with Commissioner Abdulhadi Daguit, a Tahderriyah curriculum was developed (from Kinder to Grade 4) which followed a Salafi religious education curriculum.³⁸
- (c) *Department of Education–Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (DepEd–ARMM)-supervised* madaris. As the DepEd ARMM consolidated *madaris* in the ARMM area (of which Salafi Madaris were consolidated in this manner). They followed either the DepEd ARMM mandated curriculum which was proximate to their educational models.³⁹

To be able to see the context of the evolution of the different Islamic religious educational institutions, one must

³⁸ Director Laman Piang (Bureau of Muslim Cultural Affairs, NCMF), interview, January 2018.

³⁹ Harris Tanjili (Coordinator for Volunteers, Madaris Volunteers of the Philippines), interview, November 2018.

be able to see that this evolution came out at a particular historical period in the Philippines' educational system. The level of localization of each type of these religious institutions are dependent on the level of indigenization and Arabization.⁴⁰

While the diversity of these religious educational institutions welcome these developments, showing both the depth and level of how Islam has been indigenized in the Philippines, it also presents many challenges on how government must help in empowering these religious educational institutions.

Government agencies involved in Muslim cultural and religious education

It is important to understand that government supervision and regulation is crucial in the development of cultural and religious education for Filipino Muslims. The following agencies possess the mandate in these areas:

The National Commission for Cultural and the Arts. The program for Schools of Living Traditions (SLT)⁴¹ was anchored on the mandate of NCCA to:

- (1) Conserve and promote the nation's historical and cultural heritage by encouraging and supporting the study, recognition, and preservation of endangered human cultural resources such as weavers, chanters, dancers, and other craftsmen, as well as the conservation and development of such artistic, linguistic, and occupational skills that are threatened with extinction; and

⁴⁰ Arabization is the growing Arabic influence on non-Arab populations, causing a language shift by their gradual adoption of the Arabic language and their incorporation of the culture.

⁴¹ "School of Living Traditions," NCCA.

- (2) Preserve and integrate traditional culture and its various creative expressions as a dynamic part of the national cultural mainstream by helping set up or encourage, monitor, and subsidize companion systems at the regional, provincial, and local levels, intended to develop traditional cultures such as arts/crafts centers, preferably in community settings apart from the usual museum settings, enrich contemporary designs. Specifically, the program of NCCA aims to identify a cultural community that should be imparted to the young so that these aspects can be perpetuated.

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Its mandate, based on Republic Act 8371 (Section 44, Paragraph c), to preserve Indigenous Knowledge is described as “To formulate and implement policies, plans, programs, and projects for the economic, social and cultural development of the ICCs/IPs and to monitor the implementation thereof.”

Also, the NCIP is mandated to protect Indigenous Communities’ right to preserve their IKSP as explained in Section 34. *Right to Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and to Develop Own Sciences and Technologies.* ICCs/IPs are entitled to the recognition of the full ownership and control and protection of their cultural and intellectual rights. They shall have the right to special measures to control, develop, and protect their sciences, technologies, and cultural manifestations, including human and other genetic resources, seeds, including derivatives of these resources, traditional medicines and health practices, vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals, indigenous knowledge systems and practices, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literature, designs, and visual and performing arts.

The Bureau of Muslim Cultural Affairs, National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (BMCA-NCMF). The Bureau, as the main department under the NCMF, is responsible for the conduct of research and studies on the cultural development of Muslim Filipino

communities which would serve as the basis for policy and plans formulation and program and project implementation.⁴²

It shall formulate and implement education programs especially designed to improve the literacy level of Muslim Filipinos, including their study of the Arabic language and Islamic heritage, and to maintain the central library, museum, and audio-visual center to serve as repositories of information on the Muslim Filipino people.

The Bureau is also responsible for the *madrasah* institutions in the country, wherein it will assist and facilitate the applications for registration and accreditation with the Department of Education (DepEd).

Previously the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCFM) was under the Office of the Cabinet Secretary, and then in October 31, 2018 through Executive Order (EO) 67, NCFM was transferred to the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). This puts the DILG as one of the agencies that have direct and indirect roles in Muslim cultural and religious education

The Department of Education (DepEd). This is the main agency that is responsible for basic education in the country from kinder to grade 12. Its role for Muslim Education is mandated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution and Republic Act 10533, known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The policy for *madaris* education is stipulated in DepEd Order no. 41, series of 2017 which provides the policy and guidelines on *madrasah* education in the K to 12 curriculum. The program aims to provide Muslim learners with appropriate and relevant educational opportunities while recognizing their cultural context and unique purposes for participating in the program offerings, and integrate content and competencies which are relevant and of interest to Muslim learners.

⁴² Republic Act No. 9997 ("National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Act of 2009," Section 11, Paragraph b), The LawPhil Project, accessed November 2018, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2010/ra_9997_2010.html.

This policy seeks to harmonize existing DepEd issuances on Muslim Education, with new provisions for more effective and efficient program development, implementation, and evaluation. Moreover, this shall also serve as the basis for the development of the Manual of Operations for the Governance and Administration of the Madrasah Education Program (MEP). The order stipulates that, “The Islamic values component, on the other hand, aims to help learners acquire the desired Islamic values that would guide them to core values of the Department: to be *maka-Diyos* (God fearing), *makatao* (Humane), *makakalikasan* (nature loving), *at makabansa* (patriotic); thereby making them agents in advocating and promoting brotherhood, peace, unity, justice and equality.”

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED). It was created on May 18, 1994 through the passage of Republic Act No. 7772, known as the Higher Education Act of 1994. The Commission En Banc acts as a collegial body in formulating plans, policies, and strategies relating to higher education and the operation of CHED.

The creation of CHED was part of a broad agenda of reforms on the country’s education system outlined by the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) in 1992. Part of the reforms was the trifocalization of the education sector into three governing bodies: CHED for tertiary and graduate education, the DepEd for basic education, and the Technical and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for technical-vocational and middle-level education.

In 1997, Republic Act No. 8292, known as the “Higher Education Act of 1997,” was passed to establish a complete, adequate, and integrated system of higher education. The said law also modified and made uniform the composition of the governing boards of chartered state universities and colleges (SUCs) nationwide in order to: (a) achieve a more coordinated and integrated system of higher education; (b) render them more effective in the formulation and implementation of policies on higher education; (c) provide for more relevant direction in their governance; (d) ensure the enjoyment of academic freedom as guaranteed by the Constitution. As provided for under Section 8 (paragraphs d, h, and n) of Republic Act No. 7722, the following

powers and functions are given to the Commission concerning religious and cultural education:

...set minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher learning recommended by panels of experts in the field and subject to public hearing, and enforce the same;

...rationalize programs and institutions of higher learning and set standards, policies and guidelines for the creation of new ones as well as the conversion or elevation of schools to institutions of higher learning, subject to budgetary limitations and the number of institutions of higher learning in the province or region where creation, conversion or elevation is sought to be made

...promulgate such rules and regulations and exercise such other powers and functions as may be necessary to carry out effectively the purpose and objectives of this Act;

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

The TESDA was established through the enactment of Republic Act No. 7796, known as the “Technical Education and Skills Development of 1994,” which was signed into law by President Fidel V. Ramos on August 25, 1994. This act aims to encourage the full participation and mobilization of the industry, labor, local government units, and technical-vocational institutions in the skills development of the country's human resources.

In summary, TESDA formulates manpower and skills plans, sets appropriate skills standards and tests, coordinates and monitors manpower policies and programs, and provides policy directions and guidelines for resource allocation for the technical vocational education training institutions in both private and public sectors.

Current government and non-state responses and initiatives

A review of interventions in these areas has been more reactive, and seeking a systematic streamlining of these initiatives was hardly seen as each agency tries to implement programs independently. Moreover, cultural agencies are unable to fuse their initiatives with other educational and developmental agencies.

- (1) *System mainstreaming and integration.* The indigenous skills knowledge and processes of Islamized IP tribes and the School of Living Traditions of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) have not successfully integrated. However, they form important parts integral to each other, while DepEd IP education has the only interphase with NCIP without considering the SLTs. The NCMF and DepEd have not integrated their *madaris* networks with TESDA in the area of technical-vocational education or with CHED for accreditation of tertiary education level for *madaris*.
- (2) *Curricular content.* When one would evaluate the content of the current curriculum of the ALIVE (Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education) program taught in public schools, instead of focusing on Arabic Language and Values Education, one would be able to note that some of the subjects are on the theological aspect of Islam such as the concept of *Tawhid*, *Shirk* and *Kufr* (dominant religious concepts used in violent Salafi narratives⁴³). Even the story on the incident of *Harb-ul-Fijar*; the “sacreligious” war in the early life of Prophet Mohammad before the *Qur’an* was revealed to him is being taught in the ALIVE curriculum. This is the same religious concept taught by ISIS (Daesh) and other *takfiri* (extremist) groups.

⁴³ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “Debates among Salafi Muslims About Use of Violence: Religious Concepts Central to Arguments For and Against Violence (Summary Report),” May 2017, https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_DebatesAmongSalafiMuslimsAboutViolence_SummaryReport_May2017.pdf.

The designer of both the ALIVE curriculum and the Tahderiyah Curriculum for NCMF and ARMM *madaris* are acknowledged Salafis. While in the case of *madaris*, there is no attempt to find common ground among all religious educational institutions.

- (3) *Teacher methodology.* Accelerated Teacher Enhancement Program (ATEP) beneficiaries were primarily graduates of Al-Maarif Education Center (former Darul Hijra Educational Institute, an identified Salafi educational center,) and other Non-Salafi educational institutions and graduates were unable to benefit from it. In the case of the School for Living Traditions (SLTs), there has been no standard training of masters/trainers so that there can be a transfer of both knowledge and skills of their respective traditions. The trainer development and methodology as the expertise of TESDA, should be a joint effort by the NCCA, NCIP, NCMF, TESDA, and DepEd towards the development of a comprehensive trainer's methodology in transmitting these traditions and life skills.
- (4) *Support for Madaris.* Most *madaris* that were assisted (throughout the Philippines) were identified to belong to one school of thought. This led to the detriment of other groups of religious educational institutions on the training of the tradition and the absence of mechanisms in ensuring the continued operation of schools and its fiscal independence.
- (5) *Interventions received from other organizations.* An example would be the interventions received from donor countries (e.g., for EQuALLS, PRIME, BEAM program) where DepEd and NCMF did not realize that much of the content of their curriculums moved towards Salafization of the *madaris* curriculum on several levels.
- (6) *Access to funding and technical support.* Those who have access to funding resources were predominantly Salafi educational institutions. This led to non-Salafi *madaris*

graduates from Salafi educational institutions and creating a cycle of Salafization of students taking up ALIVE subjects in DepEd public schools as well as in private *madaris* supported by the DepEd and NCMF.

- (7) *Employment opportunity.* Due to the lack of trade skills and technical vocational education taught in *madaris*, there is no opportunity available for *madaris* alumni to find employment. Aligning *madaris* curriculum to tech-voc education can provide *madaris* a wider array of opportunities for better employment.

This creates a cycle wherein teachers taken to teach ALIVE are Salafis or influenced by Salafis, which leads toward Arabization of the curriculum resulting in gradual loss of indigenization of Islam in the country. Salafi Islam is perceived as intolerant of local customs and traditions of Filipino Muslims, the teachers' reinforcement also would mean that students would become intolerant to non-Salafi Muslims and non-Muslims as Salafi views them as deviants or disbelievers. This would also mean that they would not welcome other Muslim celebrations that are stipulated by Presidential Decree 1083 (Code of Muslim Personal Laws) which moderate Sunnis accept and follow in the Philippines.

The Department of Education (DepEd) intervention programs such as Basic Education Assistance for Muslim Mindanao (BEAM) and Philippines' Response to Indigenous Peoples' and Muslim Education (PRIME) in collaboration with foreign donor agencies are not thoroughly evaluated by quality assurance officer as they were unable to personally visit some of the beneficiary schools and students in the area due to security concerns. Also, the unavailability of data needed for thorough evaluation is insufficient, an example is the data of learners per beneficiary school and other relevant information that are normally furnished to existing information systems.⁴⁴ It is also

⁴⁴ *Philippines Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao: End of Program Review* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, 2017).

important to note that the *madaris* beneficiaries of the BEAM program were *madaris* endorsed by DepEd ARMM.

This gradual shift of curriculum was not noticed by policy planners in DepEd, but researches by Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) practitioners and experts in the government (such as the National Security Commission and the Anti-Terrorism Council) and by other non-government experts on the field show this trend to have long-term negative effects. Some reports also show that it was easier for violent extremists (VE) to recruit from students who are taking up ALIVE and/or the *madaris* students in these DepEd- and NCMF-registered *madaris*.

Issues and concerns of cultural and religious learning institutions

Among the things that the researchers have noted that need to be addressed are the following:

- (1) *Cultural education and its preservation.* There has been lesser support in the guise of a provision of support for Muslim religious education; however, due to the support Salafi religious educational institutions receive over others, this has led towards Arabization, continuous de-indigenization and lesser importance given to Filipino Muslim cultural traditions and practices.
- (2) *Mandate of government agencies.* Agencies involved in cultural and educational programs for Filipino Muslims have not sat down to discuss the streamlining of the integration and creation of a common platform where both the cultural and religious education aspects of Muslims can be addressed.
- (3) *Different schools of thought in Islam.* Many Filipino Muslims are unfamiliar with the diversity of groups of Islam in the country and are only familiar with the two major schools of thought in Islam—Sunni and Shia. The presence of other

groups who harbor a binary narrative creates more confusion, leading to more conflict.

- (4) *Limited literature.* Due to the lack of information arising from research and appreciation of researchers of the diversity of Islamic schools of thought, although present, this article is the first-ever attempt to document and put all of these groups into perspective and identify the educational contexts that these institutions have. Most researches on *madaris* are based on classification and models developed by former DepEd Undersecretary Boransing that was unable to move from the classification and definition of *madaris* previously identified.
- (5) *An alternative mechanism for madrasah programs.* Since these schools come from very diverse backgrounds, there can be no single unified curriculum that can be implemented for all of these religious learning institutions; moreover, the lack of a standard curriculum and syllabus that can be universally accepted by these groups would mean that government would have to create an alternative mechanism for regulation, monitoring, and accreditation for these institutions. This means establishing an alternative mechanism that would not set aside the national footprint of Filipino Muslims culture and traditions in harmony to the national unity of the country.
- (6) *Four decade-old PD 1083 must be revisited.* While there is already an available *madaris* curriculum, inquiries about these other schools of thought show that they are not welcome to accept the curriculum as they mention that the content is primarily a representation of one school of thought and does not agree with the 1977 Presidential Decree 1083. The PD 1083 Article 6 stipulates, “The Muslim schools of law shall, for purpose of this code, be the Hanafi, the Hanbali, the Maliki, and the Shafi’i.” This would mean that the Filipino Muslims follow ahlul Sunna wal Jamaah (ASWJ) and Shafi’i

madhab which implies that the aqeedah should follow the Ashari creed, according to the ASWJ and Jamaah Tabligh groups.⁴⁵

- (7) *Indigenous Islam cultural education acceptance and toleration.* In the case of indigenous Islam, it should be treated like the indigenous knowledge systems and process (IKSP) that is being modelled by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) as the learning system for indigenous cultural communities. The Resale Noor, Shia, and the Ahmadiyya groups have already their format of religious education curriculum that differs greatly from the ones developed by the DepEd-ARMM, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, and the DepEd ALIVE curricula.
- (8) *Harmonization among and between concerned government agencies.* Seeing the different laws on the different aspects of culture and education of Filipino Muslims, there is an urgent need that these cultural and educational agencies sit down to develop a unitary framework to harmonize all these systems in terms of curriculum, teaching, program development, and implementation.
- (9) *Curriculum among non-formal madaris (such as Qur'an memorization schools).* These *madaris* should conform to commonly shared values and must be able to connect with established national values and Muslim values irrespective of *manhaj* (schools of thought) for non-formal *madrasah*. This has been raised a couple of times in several national consultation by scholars of the different *manhaj*.
- (10) *Integrated and inclusive madrasah curriculum for formal madrasah institutions.* There must be an active effort to

⁴⁵ Datu Fadh Jaljalis, Tabligh (elder and Muslim scholar from Basilan), interview, December 13, 2018.

develop an integrated and inclusive *madrasah* curriculum and subject matter for existing contemporary Islamic schools of thought (*manhaj*) to promote Filipino Muslim identity and solidarity in harmony with Philippine cultural traditions and national identity. This must be in relation to the concept adopted by Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia in order to promote religious and multicultural inclusivity and respect.

- (11) *Technical-vocational training and the Alternative Learning System (ALS)*. This should be part of the formal *madrasah* education to increase the opportunity more to ensure employability of learners after graduation.
- (12) *Convening of all cultural and educational agencies*. Policy should be crafted in harmonization with the National Development Plan and should use multi-stakeholders approach (e.g., inviting all the groups/schools of thought) to discuss these issues.
- (13) *Development of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) Education Code*. After the approval of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) was convened. Its Ministry of Basic, Technical & Higher Education has yet to promulgate an education code, which will include cultural and religious education.
- (14) *DepEd–TESDA–CHED–BARMM Inter-Agency Action Plan*. Since the Bangsamoro Education Code has not been promulgated, intended changes and reforms in cultural and religious education may still be found wanting. No final agreement has been reached among the DepEd, TESDA, and CHED together with BARMM regarding the development of the education code and its implication on the national education system. ■

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- Abdulwahab Salvatierra (Senior Leader, Ahmadiyyah Philippines, Bulacan)
- Aliazer Abdurajim (President, Erthul Mustafa Organization, Philippines)
- Hadji Alfrazer Ahalul (Tabligh Elder, Zambasulta Zone)
- Hadji Almubdi Salaam (Member, Jamaah Tabligh, Zamboanga City)
- Dr. Cihangir Arslan (Former President, Turkish Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines)
- Sheikh Denil Anawari (Principal and Rector, Ahlul Bayt Islamic School)
- Datu Fadh Jaljalis (Tabligh Elder and Muslim Scholar, Basilan Markaz Tabligh)
- Harris Tanjili (Coordinator for Volunteers, Madaris Volunteers of the Philippines)
- Sheikh Kadzaji Tapsi (Amir, Sabiel al-Muhtadien Foundation)
- Director Laman Piang (Bureau on Muslim Cultural Affairs, National Commission on Muslim Filipinos)
- Dr. Mehmet R. Derindag (International Office, İstanbul Gelisim University)
- Sheikh Mokhtar Waning (Administrator, Darul Uloom at-Tayfuri, Baliwasan, Zamboanga City)
- Prof. Moner Bajunaid (Secretary-General, National Ulama Cooperation of the Philippines)
- Datu Nasser Ali (Administrator, Lumpungan Madrassah)

- Guru Nur Musa (Indigenous Islam Religious Teacher)
- Ustad Parmanan Hajul (Mahad Shafii, Maharlika, Taguig City)

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As Muslim Filipino communities thrive in various parts of the country, there is a need to both celebrate their diverse cultures and traditions and confront the multifarious issues affecting them. The **Islamic Studies Program (ISP)** seeks to take the lead towards an active role for the academe in advancing the role of Islam in nation-building. It aims to encourage the wider Filipino community to know Islam deeper, and, consequently, deal with existing stereotypes against Muslims.

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