

ISLAMIZATION IN THE PHILIPPINES: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Islamization refers to a process of recasting the corpus of human knowledge to conform with the basic tenets of 'aqidah al-Tauhid. Islamization process in the Philippines faces the biased policies of the Philippine government in establishing a conducive Islamic da'wah environment in order to advance the message of Islam for the whole people in the Philippines. The study is carried out through critical analysis on political issues, economic problems, educational programs and Islamic organizations involved of Islamization in the Philippines. A qualitative method is applied in this study which mainly involved analyzing contents. Findings of the study show that there are some establishments of Islamic schools, political Islamic movements, Islamic da'wah organizations, authoring of Republic Act in favor of Muslim societies and implementation of shari'ah banking.

Keywords: *Islamization, Economy, Republic Act, Education, Shari'ah Banking, Islamic Organization*

INTRODUCTION

Issues of Islamization in the Philippines quite facing a lot of difficulties specially in relating with the problems of Islamic da'wah in the Philippines. In 20th century some of the efforts made by Muslim scholars specially the late Ahmad Domocao Alonto since when he was elected as Senator in 1956. Alonto established and authored a number of Republic Acts while he was in the Senate. Others are spearheaded the Islamic awakening in the Philippines in the early 1950's through the revival of the moribund Muslim Association of the Philippines (Mohammad Nashief Disomimba 2012). The early Islamizational process in central Mindanao and the adjacent Islands was largely interrupted by foreign domination. The early da'wah activity of the Moro people had encountered the colonial penetration such as Spain and America who sought to expand their political, economic and religious domination in Mindanao and the adjacent Islands. The colonial penetration in Philippines started from 1521 up to 1898 when Spaniards arrived in the Philippines and was continued by America up to 1946. The da'wah activity was largely affected that led the crisis of Islamic identity in the

society. The Muslims lost their political authority which was known as 'sultanates' that governed their entire social, economic, religious and political affairs. The Muslim people also lost their native land to the Filipino Christians who are known as settler people came from Luzon and the Visayas Islands (Salem Yunos Lingasa 2007). Considering all of the statements above, Islamization is the key to secure and preserved the cherished religion Islam as well as the land of the Filipino Muslims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are some research which is done by an academic researcher in and outside the country. One of the research made was written by Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman (1973) entitled *The Theory of the Economics of Islam: The Economics and Brotherhood*. It deals with Islamic philosophy as it pertains to economic relationship in an Islamic society and to the relationship of that society to other societies. Abu Sulayman maintains that without a clear understanding of Islamic vision, philosophy and goals, it is impossible to express the Islamic precepts in a modern society which uses forms of economic life different from those which prevailed at the time of the Prophet (pbuh).

According to al-Faruqi (1982) in his paper entitled *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*, to Islamize, to him, is to recast knowledge as Islam relates to it. Al-Faruqi describes the necessary steps that must be taken and these could be restated such as mastery of modern disciplines and the critical assessment of their methodologies, research findings, and theories within the Islamic perspective. Second, mastery of the Islamic legacy and the critical assessment of Islamic scholarship against a pristine revelation perspective, current needs of the ummah and modern advances in human knowledge and lastly, creative synthesis of the Islamic legacy and modern knowledge; a creative leap to bridge over the gap of centuries of non-development.

Al-Attas (1978) mentioned in his book *Islam and Secularism* explains the Islamization of contemporary knowledge as 'the deliverance of knowledge from its interpretations based on secular ideology; and from meanings and expressions of the secular'. Al-Attas clearly identifies and explains the foreign elements and key concepts that should be removed from the body of contemporary Western secular knowledge comprising as the concept of dualism which encompasses their vision of

reality and truth. Second, separations of dualism of mind and body. Methodological cleavage pertaining to rationalism and empiricism. Third, doctrine of humanism; the secular ideology and lastly concept of tragedy.

Furtherly, Abdel Aziz Dimapunong (2009) in his research entitled Sharia Banking in Philippines describing the history of Islamic banking in the Philippines. This research telling that the founder of Islamic banking in the Philippines was the late Senator Mamintal Tamano, and started to conceptualize a Muslim bank in the Philippines as early as 1971. The first bank was called Philippine Muslim Bank (PMB) and later became Philippine Amanah Bank in 1972. The main purposes of establishing an Islamic banking in the Philippines was to avoid from any involvements in riba (interest) and taking qur'anic ordinance as a reference in regarding its ordinance and applicable rules.

Salem Yunos Lingasa (2007) in his doctorate thesis entitled Islamic Da'wah in Mindanao: The Case of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) analyse the Islamic da'wah activities of MILF in Mindanao. He mentioned in his findings that the MILF da'wah activities is facing several problems such as government's policies and restrictions remarkably after the September 11 incidents in which the MILF is always intertwined with the issue of terrorism due to its armed activity. The various problems facing by the MILF Da'wah Committee are government's restriction, the penetration of Christian missionaries and difficulties in disseminating da'wah due to the variation of dialects and languages among the Moro people in Mindanao and the adjacent Island. The da'wah activity of the MILF is directly dealing with its social, political, economic security and educational programs as it tries to trace the role of Islam in all of its programs.

Basically, one of the most important reference in behalf of Islamization in the Philippines was the researched conducted by Mohammad Nashief Disomimba (2012). In his doctorate thesis entitled Islamic Thought of Ahmad Domocao Alonto (1914-2002): A Critical Analysis. This research focusing about Ahmad Domocao Alonto and his contributions in Islamization in the Philippines. Some of the establishment and contributions of Ahmad Domocao Alonto are establishments of the first Islamic University in the Philippines known as Jami'ah al-Filibbin al-Islamia (Islamic University in the Philippines) located at Islamic City of Marawi. Also, founding of Ansar al-Islam Movement in 1969 which its main role is to preserve and develop Islamic Thought in the Philippines. Furthermore, among Alonto's major contributions

as a member of the Philippine Constitutional Commission is to draft the Philippine Constitution to make Arabic language as one of the foreign languages in the school curricula, until now, the provision remains enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, and also, the principal author of Republic Acts in favor Muslims society in the Philippines.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the Islamization process in the Philippines. Among the specified objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To explore the Islamization process occurred in the Philippines from political issues, economical problems and educational aspects.
- ii. To identify the involvement of Islamic organizations in the issue of Islamization in the Philippines.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH

This study used the qualitative approach which focuses on analyzing the contents as a main source of data gathering such as published and un-published papers of the movement, Republic Acts in the Presidential Decree, journals, study covered relevant books, newspapers and magazines. Throughout this study the descriptive and critical analysis on the gathered data were applied.

FINDINGS

Islamization process in the Philippines were already begun before the coming of Spaniards in the Philippines since 1521. According to the historians, among the known Arab missionaries who played a vital role in Islamization in the Philippines especially Moroland was Sayid Abu Bakar. He was known as knowledgeable in theology and shari^cah. His mission was to spread out the doctrines of one Abu Ishaq embodied in the book Darul Madlum (The House of Oppressed) within Malay world (Cesar Adib Majul 1965). Nowadays, Islamization activity in the Philippines promulgated in some aspects and field of thought especially in economical issues, Presidential Decree, educational programs and Islamic Organizations.

ECONOMICAL PROBLEMS

According to T.J. George (1980), economic exploitation in the Philippines was a good idea gone badly. Instead of raising standards in the South and generally helping integration, it developed into a greedy exercise, brought the Philippine government into the picture as an apparent collaborator with Christian private enterprise, dispossessed numerous Muslims and gave the community as a whole a pervading persecution complex. It was the single most important factor behind the Muslim unrest which was to spawn an insurrectionary movement in the Marcos era.

Existence of Mindanao Development Authority became as a corporate body in order carries out and spreading the broader policy of integration and more specifically the socio-economic development of the region of Muslim in the Philippines. It was authorized to develop important western strategies towards increased and balanced growth of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan regions, provide quality of western leadership in the setting up of pioneering manufacturing and agricultural enterprises. The Philippine Government organized the diverse efforts of the various public and private entities directly involved in the plan and several projects affecting power, manufacturing, production, construction, mining, transportation and communications, conversation, and this is accurately implemented in Mindanao Island in order to grab the Muslim area (Ahmad Domocao Alonto 1975).

The Mindanao Development Authority also provides such as western education to Muslim minorities, extension work, health and other activities leading and ahead to the socio-economic growth of the Mindanao Island in order to seize Muslim area and extending financial administration and technical support to worthwhile several manufacturing and business ventures within the Mindanao Island specifically in the area dominated by Maranao Muslim inhabitants in Lake Lanao, Marawi city (Said 1981).

Alonto mentioned that due to the country's economic challenges, the Commission on National Integration however, did not enjoy full financial support from the Philippine government. Alonto defines, the policy of integration means '*to foster, accelerate and accomplish by all adequate means and in a systematic, rapid and complete manner the moral, material, economic, social, and political*

advancement of the national cultural minorities, and to render real, complete and permanent their integration into operation'(Rowena Awliya Javier-Alonto 2009).

This is another solution proposed by the Government of the Philippines to easily control Muslim Filipinos' ancestral lands in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. It is very clear that one of the methods adopted by the Philippine Government in the control of the whole Mindanao Island was to establish many industrial enterprises such as manufacturing, mining, transportation and communication, conversation, resettlement, western education and etc. This may be justified in the fact that if the Philippine Government established infrastructures in Mindanao Island, they can claim ownership and control, to the detriment of Muslim Filipinos (Mohammad Nashief Disomimba 2012).

On the other hand, in 1973, the late Senator Mamintal Tamano started to conceptualize a Muslim bank in the Philippines as it was stated in the Presidential Decree No. 264 in Marcos era. The bank known as the Charter of the Philippine Amanah Bank and later became Al-Amanah Islamic Investment Bank of the Philippines in 1990 as it was signed into law Republic Act No. 6848 by President Corazon Aquino because of the complaint from Muslim societies about misleading Islamic teaching. The Shari'ah advisory boards not only consider the conventional project viability and feasibility but also include appropriateness, fairness, trust, transparency, the ethical nature of transactions, as well as social responsibility, especially to the poor, the wayfarer and those in need (Abdel Aziz Dimapunong 2009).

POLITICAL ISSUES

One of the most influential Muslim scholars in his time is Ahmad Domocao Alonto especially when he represents the voice of Muslim society in the Philippines. He authored a number of Republic Acts while he was in the Senate. The most popular was Republic Act No. 1387 which led to the establishment of the Mindanao State University (MSU) in 1961 (Tocod Macaraya 1988). Another milestone was the *Sharī'ah* Center which conducts research and organizes seminars, conferences and studies on Islamic jurisprudence. Through **Republic Act No. 1888**, Alonto's vision to take cognizance on integrating the various ethnicities in the Philippines became a reality with the creation of the Commission on National Integration (CNI). This was a

cabinet level office in the Philippine government whose principal mission was to integrate Muslim Filipinos with other cultural minorities together into the national body politic (Said 1981; Rowena Awliya Javier-Alonto 2009; Mamitua Saber n.d.).

To uplift the economic well being of the Muslims, Alonto authored **Republic Act No. 3034**, which led to the creation of the Mindanao Development Authority. Primarily designed to propose and implement projects to develop Muslim-Mindanao, MDA was also concerned with the other cultural minorities' problems (Tocod Macaraya 1988). Alonto continued to fight for the cause of the Muslim Filipinos, and he authored **Republic Act No.1515**, which was aimed at promoting political development of Muslim areas through elections. His strong belief on the power of the majority to decide what is best for the community, municipality, city, district, and province changed the system of choosing leaders from being appointive to elective (Rowena Awliya Javier-Alonto 2009).

The other acts he authored are: **Republic Act No. 2133**, for the establishment of a Junior College (University of the Philippines) in Dansalan; **Republic Act No. 1848**, to convert the Maigo High School in Kolambogan, Lanao del Norte, to Maigo Trade School; and **Republic Act. No. 1259**, to establish a public high school in Malabang, Lanao del Sur. A lawyer by profession, Alonto knew that the promulgation of laws is the bastion of democratic governance (Said 1981). He reviewed the Civil Service Law of 1959 and found that Muslim Filipinos and cultural minorities were not afforded privileges. As result, he authored a law for its amendment to grant civil service privileges to all citizens of the Philippine country (Mamitua Saber n.d.). He also authored the establishment of technical schools and colleges in Mindanao and the nationalization of the existing ones. These include the Lumbatan Agricultural School in Lumbatan, in Lanao del Sur which became National Agricultural School; Lanao High School that was renamed National School of Arts and Trades; and Iligan High School in Iligan City which was changed to National School of Technology. Alonto was also aware on the potential of Lake Lanao for scientific research with MSU as the pool of experts, he established the Limnological Experimental Station in the Lake Lanao (Said 1981).

Motivated by his conviction to give access to Muslim youths outside Lanao, he established the Mindanao Institute of Technology at Kabacan, Cotabato City, Philippines. Alonto succeeded to make the national government recognize the importance of integrating Muslim holidays in the calendar and he insisted on declaring

two religious days as national holidays, namely, *id al-Fitri* and *id al-'Adhā* (Mohd Manzoor Alam 2005). With this realization, Muslims and non-Muslims in the Philippines now celebrate these feasts by not reporting to work, giving time for the Muslim Filipinos to practice their Islamic faith in a jovial mode of respect from other Filipinos.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

In 1962, the Mindanao State University (MSU) was set up in Marawi City to answer the need for a government institution of higher learning in Mindanao Island. The thrust of its creation was to implement and expedite the Philippine government's western educational policy for traditional minorities such as Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausog, Kalagan, Samal and others Muslim minorities in Mindanao Island, and to increase professional and technical training and teaching of literature, philosophy, sciences, and the arts through western education. Special attention to culture and to conduct several researches in these fields of study specifically those related to Filipino culture was also part of its mission and vision so as to facilitate better implementation of integration policy through the opinions of the Philippine Government. As predicted earlier by William E. Stevenson, the United States Ambassador to the Philippine Government, the Mindanao State University, located in the center place of Muslim Filipinos land has become a major integrating force and will help bind together the different cultures of Moro Muslims and Christians in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan and all over the Philippine Island (Ahmad Domocao Alonto 1975).

This is because students study and live in harmony despite the fact that they represent Muslims from all over Mindanao region as well as Christians from the regions like Luzon and the Visayas. It should also be noted that the Mindanao State University has uphold educational standards comparable to the best universities all over the Philippine Island (Michael Beringuel 1959). Mindanao State University is one of the distinguished educational institutions of the Philippine government in Mindanao Island providing western education to residents of these areas. This type of education may be considered as a sharp tool but it slowly removes the Islamic ethics, attitude and ideas specifically the Muslim women and this is one of the negative effects of western integration in Mindanao Island (Mohammad Nashief Disomimba 2012).

According to Tocod Macaraya (1988), the next efforts of Alonto was establishments of the *Jāmi'ah al-Filibbīn al-Islāmia* to preserve Islamic religion and to reeducate the Muslim societies on the importance of Islamic religion to the Muslims in the Philippines. Alonto founded in 1954 the first modern Islamic School in the Philippine Archipelago which later became the first Islamic University in the Philippines known as the *Jāmi'ah al-Filibbīn al-Islāmia*. Alonto appears to have founded his legacy of service through fulfilling the residents of Lanao quest for Islamic knowledge. In 1955, this University was called the *Kāmil al-Islām* College initiated by a group of educated Muslim Filipinos and *ulamā*. It was organized in accordance with certain legal requirements in order to obtain official recognition. *Jāmi'ah al-Filibbīn al-Islāmia* offers courses on Islamic religion and is taught as part of the curricula, together with the Arabic language.

From 1955 onwards, this university has increased its enrollees to two thousand and four hundred Muslim students. The board of trustees decided to offer complete Islamic education package from elementary to secondary as feeders to the tertiary education. Soon the number of faculties also increased. The Faculty of Education offers teachers' training to Muslim teachers around the Lake Lanao area who are employed in public schools. These trainings are aimed at enhancing their skills as Muslim teachers. The Islamic University also offers Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education (BSEE) and Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE). The Faculty of Liberal Arts prepares Muslim students in different degrees for Bachelor of Arts (AB), while the Faculty of Business Administration trains Muslim students in economics, commerce or business administration. This university has a big role to spreading the Islam because thousands of Muslim teachers who graduated from this university are playing active roles in various Islamic institutions in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, and over all Philippine Island, and even abroad (Mohammad Nashief Disomimba 2012).

ISLAMIC ORGANIZATION

One of the most important Islamic organization in the Philippines is *Ansār al-Islām*. The purpose of establishing the *Ansār al-Islām* Movement was to strengthen Islamic brotherhood, to defend Islamic religion, to help the Moro Muslim Filipinos, and to inform the Philippine government on the noble ideals of the Moro Muslims' desire to

re-establish Islamic institutions in Mindanao Island (Pantona Said 1981). The *Ansār al-Islām* Movement was formed to counter the *Ilaga*'s activities with the military of the Philippine government. They killed Moro Muslim Filipinos, burned their mosques and institutions. The Muslim Filipinos suffered, more violent encounters were launched, and Mindanao was bleeding. The Philippine military with the *ilagas* intensified their campaigns, and to justify the atrocities, Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law September 21/1972 in order to liquidate Islamic religion in the Philippines (Ahmad, Domocao Alonto 1972).

Ansār al-Islām Movement was formed to defend the Islamic religion and rights to believe the Oneness of God and it is from this historical context. The movement was aimed at re-establishing the ideology of Islamic religion in the Philippines. Alonto as a founder understands of the meaning of the Holy Qurān through education and his effort in re-establishing the Islamic religion through the *Ansār al-Islām* Movement are his concrete contributions as a Muslim leader and a Muslim intellectual in the Philippines. The Islamic religion was already established two hundred years before the coming of the Spaniards to the Philippines, and Alonto's role was simply to revive the Islamic thought after it was relegated to the background through Spanish and American colonizations (Mohammad Nashief Disomimba 2012).

Ansār al-Islām Movement in order to implement Islamic activities and support *Jāmi'ah al-Filibbīn al-Islāmiya* to teach Islamic belief among the new Muslim generations in the Philippines. The *Ansār al-Islām* Movement was directed towards the attainment and re-establishment of Islamic religion and *Sharī'ah* in areas inhabited by Muslim Filipinos and to re-Islamize the Philippines. The role of the *Ansār al-Islām* however was to forge unity among Muslim Filipinos in the Philippines and to create a religious awareness of Muslim Filipino's duties towards their fellow Muslims. It appears that the *Ansār al-Islām* was never intended to provoke tension between Muslim and Christian Filipinos or to encourage political or economic interest of any individual or a group, including the members of the movement themselves. It was certainly concerned with social Islamic reforms to take place in the Philippines as well as to promote Islamic peace and understanding among the inhabitants of Minsupala region and over all the Philippines. The *Ansār al-Islām* was committed to implement Islamic freedom and to co-exist peacefully with other communities. As long as there was no plan to eliminate Islamic religion openly or secretly, the movement was

reconciliatory with other religions to exist in Mindanao Island (Ahmad, Domocao Alonto 1972b).

Another Islamic organization which is important for the Muslim societies in the Philippines is Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which is currently using armed struggle to facilitate the flow of Islamic da'wah activities and at the same time to defend and emancipate the Moro people and their homeland from the rule of the Philippine government. MILF engaged in da'wah activities focusing on educational approach, publication and communication, military and diplomacy approach (Salem Yunos Lingasa 2007).

CONCLUSION

The issue of Islamization in the Philippines encountering a huge problem in facing the Westernization from Western countries. Survival of Islam in the Philippines should be the priority for every political Muslim leaders, preachers, professionals, Muslim scholars, etc. exceeding their own interest and benefits. In order to re-Islamize the Philippines, it needs to restructure the mind of every Muslim planner to focus on how to dedicate themselves in accordance to Islamic perspective.

Every Filipino Muslim should dedicate themselves to involve in re-Islamization of the Philippines especially in developing the socio-political, economic, education and spreading of Islam as a main objective.

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