By the time Filipinos finally regained self-government with the inauguration of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935, faith in education as an indispensable tool in the achievement of social cohesion and economic modernization had been firmly established among politicians, educational policy makers, and ordinary citizens. This faith, moreover, generally included a belief in the effectiveness of education in helping to resolve the ethnic and religious tensions that continued to plague the Philippine south. However, the ongoing nature of these tensions revealed this assumption of education’s efficacy in resolving such a conflict as in fact a form of faith, a belief, held in the absence of or in spite of evidence regarding its warrantability. Guided by this faith, policy makers would tend to continue the general policies established by the American colonial regime, leaving unexamined the fundamental assumptions about civilization, progress, and the nature of Muslim Filipino relations with the emerging state that had shaped American policies since 1898. Thus, trusting to the efficacy of schooling to resolve the so-called Moro Problem in the fullness of time, Filipino leaders could turn to what was perceived to be the more pressing problems of the reborn Philippine republic. In doing so they not only failed to attend to a continuing chronic problem in the Philippine body politic, they also missed an opportunity to rethink the sorts of educational policies that might
have been more likely to further the goal of mitigating ethno-religious tensions in Mindanao and Sulu.

**Educational Policy in the Philippine Commonwealth**

In 1935, the Philippines began what was planned as a decade of self-rule under a commonwealth government in preparation for the reestablishment of full independence in 1945. After centuries of colonial rule, after the brutal suppression of the Filipino independence struggle by American troops between 1898 and 1902, and after more than three decades of peaceful, but persistent, agitation for independence, Filipinos embarked upon complete self-government and eventual independence determined to forge a free, independent, and prosperous Philippine state from the northernmost extremes of Luzon to the last islands of the Sulu Archipelago. One of the greatest challenges to building this new nation on the foundations of colonial borders would be the tremendous geographic, cultural, and linguistic diversity contained within those borders. And nowhere in the archipelago was this challenge greater or more pressing than in Mindanao. For here, where much of the natural resources crucial to the economic success of the nation lay, was also where some of the greatest threats to the security of the new state festered. Mindanao was farthest from the centers of political power. It contained a large and restive Muslim minority and growing Japanese economic concerns. Measures had to be taken to ensure the future of a unified Philippine state.

The Commonwealth government’s response to this challenge was to cultivate and promote the spirit of Filipino nationalism that had begun to develop in response to colonial domination toward the end of the Spanish rule. It pursued this goal primarily through the medium of the school. No less a person than the president of the Commonwealth, Manuel Quezon, took an active interest in educational policy, seeing in it the means to a national spiritual reconstruction that world reorient Filipino identity and values from their primary affiliation with family and province toward loyalty to the emerging Philippine state. According to Quezon, the primary purpose of education was to make the individual a better servant of the state.1 “The schools teach nationalism,” wrote one educational leader of the period, “not only through the textbooks, but through every activity that may inculcate patriotism.”2

Camilo Osias, Quezon’s technical assistant on educational matters and later education leader and senator in the Philippine Republic recommended in 1940, for instance, that all students be taught to revere a “patriotic shrine” consisting of a “trinity of objects” to include a portrait of Jose Rizal, the