A Historical Overview of Muslim Minority Identity and Positioning in the Philippines

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Abstract

The discriminatory treatment of the Philippine Muslim minority dates back hundreds of years due to Spanish colonial politics that were highly allergic to Islam. Furthermore, minority nationality and ethnicity issues relate to national integration, class struggle, and economic dispossession. This study aims to explain the historical forces that shaped the identity of the Filipino Muslim community. The research method used is the historical research method, where the collection of research sources is done by literature study. This research analysis uses a political history approach closely related to power as a governmental tool in policymaking. The results show that the identity issues experienced by the Muslim minority in the Philippines in positioning themselves in the process of national integration are caused by several factors, such as history, religion, and the concept of the nation-state. However, in contemporary times, political and economic issues, in addition to religious issues, have emerged as new forces in the matter of Muslim identity in the Philippines.

Keywords: Muslim Minority, Moro, Philippines, Identity.

Abstrak

Perlakuan diskriminatif pada minoritas Muslim Filipina sudah terbentuk ratusan tahun lalu akibat politik penjajahan Spanyol yang sangat ‘alergi’ dengan Islam. Selanjutnya, Isu kebangsaan dan etnisitas minoritas bermuara dalam persoalan integrasi nasional, perjuangan kelas, dan perampasan ekonomi. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan kekuatan sejarah yang menjadi indikator pembentukan identitas masyarakat Muslim Filipina. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian sejarah, dimana pengumpulan sumber penelitian dilakukan secara studi pustaka. Analisis penelitian ini memakai pendekatan sejarah politik yang erat kaitannya dengan kekuasaan sebagai alat pemerintah dalam mengambil kebijakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, persoalan isu identitas yang dialami oleh muslim minoritas Filipina, dalam memposisikan diri dalam proses integrasi nasional yang diinginkan pemerintab Filipina yang mayoritas Katholik, disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor, seperti: sejarah, agama dan konsep negara bangsa. Namun pada masa kontemporer ini, selain persoalan agama, persoalan politik dan ekonomi muncul sebagai kekuatan baru dalam perjalanan identitas Muslim di Filipina.

Kata Kunci: Minoritas Muslim, Moro, Filipina, Identitas.
A. INTRODUCTION

In today’s globalized world, the position of minorities is becoming increasingly important. Their position is insufficient for traditional democratic models and systems, so it is necessary to consider the roots of democratic systems and human rights to demand their rights, especially by granting them legal participation rights, and to ensure they have sufficient participatory capacities to exercise these rights.¹ Even in former communist countries, there are still forms of discrimination against minority groups in the form of incitement to violence, incitement to discrimination, and incitement to deny the dignity of minority groups.²

Furthermore, nationality and ethnicity have been widely debated by scholars, and their impact on modern states boils down to the problems of national integration, class struggle, and economic deprivation, which can be partly explained politically and economically. The crucial difference between minority and majority lifestyles can be traced to the cultural conflicts that require political control.³ The discriminatory treatment of Muslim minorities in various countries has been a long-standing dilemma. Mubasirun⁴ said that the dilemma they face is whether to join the mainstream political system, remain Muslim wherever they live, follow the rules of Allah, or use extremist methods to identify themselves as minorities. I explained that this was due to the uncertainty of what to choose. They face a clash of identities associated with these opportunities, and every choice carries risks the Muslim minority must bear.⁵ This situation can be seen in what the Philippine Muslim minority faces.

This discriminatory treatment is evident in the experience of Filipino Muslims, who were highly "allergic" to Islam formed hundreds of years ago due to Spanish colonialism. The arrival of Spanish and later Americans in the Philippines as colonizers is said to have had far-reaching effects on the Filipino Muslim community as social, political, and economic conditions have undergone fundamental changes.


³ Some politicians have used the aftermath of 9/11 to demonise Muslims in Europe and other regions with Muslim minorities. See Alana Lentin, “Post-race, post politics: the paradoxical rise of culture after multiculturalism”, *Ethnic and racial studies*, Vol. 37, No. 8 (2014): 1268-1285; Political control also has a major impact on the lives of Muslims as a minority in the Philippines. See Anne-Marie Hilsdon, Violence against Maranao Muslim women in the Philippines. In L. R. Bennett, & L. Manderson (Eds.), *Violence against women in Asian societies* (pp. 20-40), (London: Routledge, 2013); Dennis Quilala, "Narratives and counter-narratives: Responding to political violence in the Philippines", *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2018): 285-296.


⁵ This discrimination is economic, social and political. Economically, the Muslim minority has experienced a significant loss of economic power and assets such as land. In the social sphere, discrimination can take the form of coercive social assimilation, which can undermine or even eliminate the original Islamic identity. It takes the form of denying Muslim groups the political right not to recognise their ethnicity for a variety of reasons. See M. Ali Kettani, (2005), *Minoritas Muslim di Dunia Dewasa Ini*, translated by Zarkowi Soejoeti, Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, p. 12-18.
Muslim communities will experience internal conflict if they follow secular rules and lifestyles because they contradict Islamic teachings. If they follow a secular style, their Muslim identity will undoubtedly fade with many daily restrictions on practicing Islamic values. If they do not follow these rules, they will be labeled as a group opposed to national policies. On this basis, Muslim minorities will be divided into groups that follow, assimilate, or oppose the mainstream.  

Understanding the dynamics of relations between Filipino Muslims and the majority group is primarily related to the question of Western relations with Muslim minorities, which cannot be separated from the influence of the historical aspects of the two communities. The question of identity faced by the Filipino Muslim minority is one they face in determining the path they should take to position themselves in the process of national integration desired by the Catholic majority government of the Philippines. This is due to the following factors:

First, it can be seen from the root cause of the identity problem in the Muslim Philippines. More than just an issue of economic inequality, the roots of the minority versus majority problem in the Philippines lie in religious conflicts during the Spanish colonization of the Philippines in the 16th century. The source of the problem can be traced to a study of the history of the formation of the social identity of Muslims in the region, related to the arrival of Spain in the region.

Second the concept of the nation-state. Apart from religion, development after introducing the concept of the nation-state after colonialism in colonized countries included the desire to form a separate state with its style and ideology. In the Philippines, separatism among Muslims in southern Thailand is declining slowly, as most Muslim minorities in Singapore and Thailand are assimilated and given autonomy, especially in Thailand. Meanwhile, what is now seen as a separate part of the Philippines, the "Bangsamoro" movement, is a product of historical divisions between various ethnic groups. The Philippines suffers from inequality between its "north" and "south" populations, with the north predominantly Christian and the south predominantly Muslim. A significant debate in the study of indigenous-migrant relations concerns barriers to integration due to ethnic and cultural differences and socio-economic disadvantages. The situation in the Philippines shows how changing socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups affect ethnic relations in fragmented societies.

6 Like Nur Misuari, the MNLF’s struggle focuses on addressing the issues of racial injustice and discrimination faced by the Moro people. Throughout the period before and after the founding of the MNLF, Nur Misuari continued to call on the international community to resolve the Moro conflict with the Philippine government. Misuari founded the MNLF as a battlefield. Armed with his experience in the BMILO, Nur Misuari's MNLF gained the support of international Islamic organisations, including the OIC, the Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers (ICFM) and the then Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. The influence of Nur Misuari's resistance movement and his MNLF is very strong in Bangsamoro life. See Fikri Surya Pratama, “Nur Misuari Pejuang Muslim Filipina: Pasang Surut Karir Politik dan Perjuangan Muslim Moro (1939-2018)”, Hadharah: Jurnal Keislaman dan Peradaban, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2022), 11-32.

7 Mely Caballero-Anthony, Revisiting the bangsamoro struggle: Contested Identities and Elusive Peace. In A. L. Freedman (Ed.), The Internationalization of Internal Conflicts (pp. 159-190), (London: Routledge, 2016).

Muslims in the Philippines want independent sovereign "Bangsamoro" or at least their regional autonomy. Inspired by the romantic past of the glorious Sultanate of Mindanao and Sulu. Thus, depending on the point of view, the struggle or rebellion of the Bangsamoro movement, nationalist MNLF, Islamist MILF, and terrorist Abu Sayyaf arose.

Interestingly, the ‘Bangsamoro’ themselves are also divided on defining their national, social, or political identity as a minority. This shows that Philippine Muslim minorities still struggle with their internal issues when looking at the future of their group. If Abu Sayyaf is obsessed with a one-state community in one ideology, namely Islam, their implementation is wrong and deviates from what Islam teaches. While the MNLF led by Nur Misuari upholds Bangsamoro Nationalism, gradually split with Nur Misuari’s peace efforts with the Philippine government, the MNLF split gave birth to a new movement, namely the MILF which has an Islamist ideology, wanting an independent Bangsamoro in an Islamic state.

The Moro problem can be understood by examining various theories of Islamic invasions in the Philippines. Along with increasingly diversified views on the invasion of Islam into the Philippines, they have added points to the identity grid upon which Filipino Muslims are positioned. Introduces new alternatives for terminology. This diversity affects the availability of religious tolerance, social inclusion, and political stability. This depends on different local histories and social groups of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Philippines. Therefore, contemporary Filipino Muslims, commonly referred to as "Moros" or later converts, cannot be fully understood without understanding the historical forces that have helped shape the identity of Islamic societies into what they are today.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the historical research method, with its stages: 1) heuristics or source collection. Source collection was conducted using the literature method. The primary sources for this research were the Religious Conditions Archive of the U.S. Commission on Foreign Relations. U.S. Senate and International Relations 2002, online news about the status of Filipino Muslims, as well as articles and books related to the research, and 2) Source Criticism. The process of source criticism has been carried out since the beginning of the research; sources are criticized and compared interactively. 3) Data analysis: This research uses a political history approach. This approach is used where politics is synonymous with power in determining policies so that it becomes one of the major forces driving historical events. Through a history study, we can explore the causes and effects of events in society and draw lessons to promote the development of a multicultural society. 4) Historiography or writing of the results of historical research.

A conflict theoretical approach was also used to analyze research data sources. As a result, the process of national integration in the Southeast Asian region from the perspective of multiculturalism and democracy has not always been smooth and conflict-filled. Historical events in Southeast Asian countries have chapters linked by chronology and causes. According to Dahrendorf’s explanation, no conflict

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occurred without prior consensus.\textsuperscript{12} In discussing the events of regional and national political upheavals, which are the subject of this study, the study uses conflict theory to assist in analyzing the study's data. Conflict is a social reality that often occurs in society. However, not all conflicts are ultimately destructive, and modern conflict theory also analyzes constructive conflicts for society.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, conflict can be seen from two perspectives: what it "destroys" in society, and what it "builds" in society? In some cases of conflict between social classes or groups, the conflict itself can foster awareness of the importance of weakening, melting, and blurring differences that occur in society. Thus, conflict in certain relationships can reestablish social unity.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Implications of Western Colonization in the Making of Filipino Muslim Identity, Legacies of Religious 'Competition'

The modern Filipino Muslim condition cannot be separated from the collective legacy of Spanish colonization of the country. Conflicts between Muslims and Spaniards began in the 16th century when Spain took control of Luzon and Visayas and sought to extend its dominance as far south as Mindanao and Sulu did. Because of Mindanao's strategically important position, the Spaniards recognized the island's importance in seeking a permanent foothold in the Moluccas. Their conquest of Mindanao enabled them to participate in the thriving Moluccan spice trade and extend their influence to neighboring countries. At the same time, the neighboring kingdoms of Sulu and Brunei may also be required to comply.\textsuperscript{14} Spanish arrival in the Philippines in 1521 under the pretext of the 'Regalian Doctrine'\textsuperscript{15} dispossessed the indigenous people of their wealth and then implemented cultural assimilation and Christianization practices.\textsuperscript{16}

During the occupation, Spanish colonial authorities seriously tried converting Muslims into Christians. The move was based on Spanish missionaries' beliefs that conversion to Islam was necessary for Muslims to remain loyal to Spain. Determined to eradicate "Morosism" in the archipelago. The hatred they brought to the Philippines was a remnant of their struggle for independence from "Moorish" rule in their Iberian homeland (the 2nd Umayyad Dynasty of Andalusia). Missionaries also speculated that if Muslims converted to Christianity, it would be easier for Spaniards to take and accumulate wealth in Mindanao and Sulu. Conducting business with fellow Christians was also safer than with questionable Muslims. In a sense, missionaries were the tools of the invaders, just as soldiers served the invaders.

\textsuperscript{16} Simbulan, “Indigenous...", p. 29.
Spain's occupation of Mindanao and Sulu was cruel and destructive. For over three centuries, settlers and Muslims have waged the so-called "Moro War," motivated by political, economic, and religious ends.

The politicization of the "Brainwashing" of northerners with propaganda that politicizes ethnic sentiments against southern "Moro" Muslims still has an effect today. The politicization of ethnic sensitivities results from structural inequalities in the socio-political and economic spheres of Philippine society and has helped fuel conflict. As a result, many ethnic groups formed their organizations. They were responsible for developing strong group identities, leading to the emergence of separatist groups in the southern Philippines that threatened the fundamental values of the Republic of the Philippines. This "inherited" conflict was also caused by the differences in views of Christian groups on religious diversity in the Philippines.

It should be noted that there are multiple reasons why the 'Bangsa Moro' movement is fighting for the rights that they have been deprived of or cannot have, which boils down to several layers of identity in their movement. First, it has historical legitimacy. Although Spain successfully colonized the land of the Philippines, the land of Mindanao has never been politically controlled since the Spanish colonial period. Therefore, when the Philippines became independent from U.S. colonization, there was a rejection of Bangsamoro when it was incorporated by the U.S. into the Northern Philippines (Luzon Island Government), which undoubtedly led to a variety of different responses in the Muslim and Bangsa Moro


21 In February 1920, the United States granted the Philippines independence. One of America's controversial policies was to cede the Mindanao-Sulu region to the Northern Philippines. This was strongly opposed by the indigenous leaders of the south, who told the Americans that they wanted independence separate from the Philippines. However, this was ignored, leading to the armed insurgency of the Moro group since 1921. See Oliver Charbonneau, “Civilizational Imperatives: American Colonial Culture in the Islamic Philippines, 1899-1942”, Dissertation, The University of Western Ontario Canada, 2016; Ali Geno Berutu, “Sea Muslim Minoritas: South Thailand/Pattani, South Philippines/Mindanau and Thailand”, OSF Preprints, (2019).
communities themselves\textsuperscript{22}. In the collective memory of the history of their identity, although the Spanish succeeded in Christianizing and apostatizing the majority of the Northern population and were invited to partner against the South, they (Sultanate of Sulu, Manguindanao/Mindanao, Buayan) were never successfully touched by the religious and political power of Spain from the North.\textsuperscript{23} Communities in these three regions already have better political unity than other regions. One reason is that the Islam that emerged in Mindanao gave the people a more developed social and political system than in the northern region of the Philippines. The Moro people, represented by the MILF stated that for 377 years, Spain never succeeded in subjugating the Moro people as a colony. The colonizers used all means to subjugate the Moro people.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Secondly}, there is the "Malay brotherhood" relationship, i.e., the historical-cultural-ethnicity relationship between Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, Brunei, Malay Peninsula, and Indonesia (Sumatra in particular), where they feel very close in their religious practices, practices, and ideas about religion and culture. Malay played a major role in bringing Islam south in one of the countries. Several philological discoveries exist in handwritten Qur'an manuscripts from the Meranaw and Manguindanao regions. These are beautiful and unique and share significant similarities with manuscripts from other parts of the Malay world.\textsuperscript{25} These historical roots of ethnicity may also have influenced the construction of the Bangsamoro identity in the face of contemporary Philippine politics, where the North, since Spain colonized it, experienced mass apostasy for those who were Muslim and had to assimilate into Spanish culture, both converting to Catholicism and absorbing the Spanish language in life. In contrast, the South has maintained its local language, and its Malay roots are well preserved with Malay 'cousins' in the archipelago.

\textbf{Third}, religious and political factors play a significant role in this issue. Although these countries still have constitutions, the influence of one dominant religion cannot be separated in influencing state policies and constitutions: Thailand with Buddhism and the Philippines with Catholicism.

In general, the Philippine government has several policies to address the above issues by applying the concept of the nation-state, particularly the vision of national unity as a representation of the will of the Philippine state itself. The "pro-

\textsuperscript{22} The Philippines became independent after World War II (after 1941), and Christianity is now the dominant religion. Since the 1950s, Muslims from around the world have tried to strengthen Muslim communities in the southern Philippines by giving them money and other aid. Today, Moro nationalism is gaining support in other Muslim countries, including the idea of secession from the Republic of the Philippines. In recent years, several news sources have identified the southern Philippines as the home of terrorist groups.


Catholic" Philippine government has expressed such a desire. Therefore, both countries use the assimilation policy to achieve a nation-state that fits the concepts of the government and the majority group. However, this assimilation action creates a sense of discrimination against minority groups (Muslims), which leads to the elimination of specific minority interests. This policy has been implemented in the education, legal, economic, and language sectors. Furthermore, despite proclaiming that the country has a secular constitution, the influence of certain religions has colored Philippine politics. The worldview of the majority group, especially its religion, strongly influences the state's policies on running the government.

Democracy must listen to the needs of minorities as they relate to human rights because these minority rights are related to their history, culture, and religion. Unlike Indonesia, which seeks to contradict the political style of its colonial rulers, the reality of Philippine political culture is shaped by the political style of its colonial rulers, Spain, and the United States, thus embedding elite control over government policy. The issue of Philippine democracy and multiculturalism after the fall of Marcos now revolves around Moro, Muslims, and the South (Mindanao).

The Philippine Constitution provides freedom of religion, and the government respects this right. However, the irreparable gap between Northerners and Southerners, especially in economic terms, has led to ongoing conflicts in the South since the independence of the Philippines. It is not uncommon for Christian missionaries to work and preach in Mindanao's Muslim community.

The Assistant to the President for Muslim Affairs helps coordinate relations with countries with large Islamic populations, contributing to Mindanao's economic development and the peace process with rebel groups. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was established in 1990 to respond to Muslim demands for local autonomy in areas representing a majority or substantial minority. As the

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26 During the Spanish colonisation of the Philippines, many churches were used as tools to facilitate colonial policies. The friars instilled a feudal and colonial consciousness in the natives to facilitate their acceptance of Spanish rule. They helped to organise dense lowland settlements for agricultural, administrative and religious purposes. See Craig S. Stapley, “Terrorist attacks on non-governmental organizations”, Open Journal of Political Science, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2014). The Catholic Church remains a social force with the moral high ground in the political transformation of the modern Philippines, especially in its major contribution to the ouster of Marcos under the pretext of 'people power'. The Church has identified and represented the political will of the Filipino people. See Dennis Shoesmith, “The Dichotomous Legacy of the Catholic Church’s Opposition to the Philippine Revolution of 1896”, The European Legacy, Vol. 25, No. 5 (2020): 502-518; Robert Youngblood, Marcos against the church: Economic development and political repression in the Philippines, (Arizona: Cornell University Press, 2019).

27 There are several things that the movements in the southern Philippines and southern Thailand have demanded, such as: 1) the guarantee of religion and worship; 2) the possibility of implementing Sharia law for the Muslims themselves; 3) guarantees for the preservation and expression of local culture, such as language; 4) control over land and natural resources based on ancestral heritage; 5) the right to have their own system of government that regulates their natural and human resources. These last three demands are usually very difficult to realise because they are closely linked to the Philippine-Thai integration programme, which is very close to the group identity of the majority.

conflict with the Muslim South has progressed, although neither side has 'won' the long-running war, the Moros have gained significant local autonomy from government control.\(^{29}\)

In 1996, the Philippine government, led by President Fidel Ramos, signed a peace agreement with the Islamic Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), ending more than two decades of violent conflict. Following the 1996 peace agreement, an effort to expand the ARMM took place in August 2001, when another province, Basilan, and another city, Malawi, joined ARMM's local governments (formerly Sulu, Tawi, Tawi, and Lanao Del Sur and Maguindanao). The government is working with its MNLF leaders in various development programs to reintegrate former MNLF combatants into the market economy through employment and business opportunities. The Philippine government has made peace efforts with other Bangsa Moro movements and the Abu Sayyaf group.\(^ {30}\)

Even with all the new policies in place, economic issues still seem to make it very difficult to find the best solution for the development of the Mindanao region. Some religious leaders assert that Muslims suffer from economic discrimination, which is reflected in the government's failure to provide finances that stimulate the development of the Mindanao region. It can be concluded that if the conflict during the Spanish colonial period was due to Christianity vs. Islam, then the contemporary Bangsamoro separatist rebellion was more about social and economic inequality.

The difficulty of economic equality is due to the stigma attached to Muslims by Christians due to Spanish colonial politics in the past. National culture, emphasizing family, tribal, and regional loyalties, creates informal barriers where access to jobs or resources is given first to one's own family or group. Some local Filipino employers often see Muslims as being poorly educated. Muslims reported difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail jobs if they used their real names or wore distinctive Muslim clothing. Therefore, some Muslims use Christian pseudonyms and do not wear distinctive clothing when applying for housing or jobs. Muslim-majority provinces in Mindanao continue to lag in aspects of socio-economic development.\(^ {31}\)

Against this background, initiatives by the Filipino religious community, such as non-governmental registered interfaith groups, have joined forces with representatives of the Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant churches to support the Mindanao peace process. In addition to providing social and economic support, interfaith groups want to encourage Mindanao to teach Islam to their children. The bonds of friendship between religious groups are reflected in many informal organizations, such as several church guards and clergy meetings. This is because


\(^{30}\) According to the archives of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the MNLF split into several groups in 2002. This split occurred because some parties did not see the MNLF as serious about establishing an Islamic Bangsamoro state in Mindanao. MNLF splinter groups such as the MILF, as well as more radical and dangerously terrorist organisations such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, broke away in 1991 to demand a separate Muslim state. The Philippine government entered into peace talks and a ceasefire with the MILF in 2001.

these religious groups have more knowledge about the Mindanao conflict. The conflict in Mindanao is not religious; it is economic and can only be resolved with respect, justice, and trust.

'Balik-Islam,' Looking at the Identity Management of Muslim Converts who Emulate 'Real' Muslims

Islam was already thriving in the North and South before the Spaniards colonized it, with Filipino convert having "astonishing" customs. Once converted to Islam, they call themselves "Balik Muslim" people. "Balik Islam" is the Filipino term for people who converted from Christianity to Islam. These can all be called converts, but no one wants to be called a convert. They claim to be labeled as "Balik Islam' (those who return to Islam), not as converts. This phenomenon can be explained using the term "balik." This means that, historically, the early settlers of the Philippines were either general or pre-colonial Muslims, so those who converted to Islam were only reverting to their religion. These 'Balik-Islam' adapt individually and collectively to their interpretations of Islam and expressions of religiosity. They have taken on the characteristics of 'Moro' ethnic Muslims as the Muslims of change that the 'Balik-Islam' seeks to change.

The Society for Conversion to Islam in the Philippines (CONVISLAM) was founded by Lauhi De Leon in 1968 for conversion. Ironically, the office was built around the Quiapo Church in Manila. Since its establishment, CONVISLAM has undertaken missionary activities, propagated Islam, and published Islamic materials. The organization's membership is mainly limited to conversion and other Muslims. Balik Islam has successfully initiated and established many Islamic centers in Metro Manila. At least four main centers operate in the metro: the Islamic Information


33 However, there is a much deeper explanation behind the story. "Balik Islam" means that when a person accepts Islam, he actually returns to his fitra, and he must strive to return to that fitra. In fact, some say that the term conversion is not the right word to describe this phenomenon. Inversion is a more appropriate term. These three reasons for the Islamic "balik" phenomenon seem to be unique to the Philippines, as they provide some of the reasons why the trend or increase in new converts continues to grow. The idea of return or raja'a in the Qur'an has a very strong spiritual undertone. The Qur'an says: "Only to Allah do we return, and only to Him do we return (Al Baqarah: 156)." Although this verse is usually said when someone dies, it has enormous spiritual implications. For this reason, while the notion of the history or antecedents of Islam in the Philippines is valid to some extent as a basis for those returning or "balik" to Islam, it is the spiritual concept of return that is more significant. See Julkapli Wadi, (2014, Juni 1). CRUCIBLE: Balik Islam and the Idea of “Return”: Retrieved February 15, 2023, from Mindanews: https://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2014/06/crucible-balik-islam-and-the-idea-of-return/.

34 James F. Eder, “Converts to Islam and the Muslim Community in the Christian Philippines”, Contemporary Islam, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2022): 1-18; In addition, the 'Balik-Islam' Catholic women have also modelled their Muslim identity on the Moro women. Following their 'balik-islam', they have adopted Muslim dress as well as new ways of seeing themselves and their roles. This paper focuses on the conversion experiences of some Catholic women who are now part of the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), one of the many groups of Muslim converts. Vivienne S.M. Angeles, From Catholic to Muslim: Changing Perceptions of Gender Roles in a Balik-Islam Movement in the Philippines. Vol. 12, in Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia, edited by Susanne Schroeter, (BRILL, 2013), p. 181.
Center, Discover Islam, Hikmah Islam Hikmah Islam World, and Fisabilillah. Unfortunately, some of these centers were shut down due to their involvement in terrorism by the Philippine Government, an accusation that Muslims strongly condemned. This development has affected conversion activities in the country.\(^{35}\)

For example, the Rajah Soelaiman Movement (RSM) was founded in March 1971 by Ahmed Santos, a Roman Catholic who converted to Islam while working in the Middle East. The existence of the RSM was first revealed in 2002 after the police conducted a series of operations in the Pangasinan province, where weapons, training, and bomb-making materials were found, as well as documents directly linking the group to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The RSM grew and strengthened due to crucial tools that helped it develop into a well-organized and popular insurgent group with recruitment sources, resources, and support.\(^{36}\)

The form of 'attribution' of the Muslim identity of these radical 'Balik-Islam' to the 'Moro' as the Muslim change from the original ethnicity they want, the RSM group was inspired by the MNLF movement led by Nur Misuari in fighting for the rights of the Bangsamoro. This inspiration is reflected in the motive of social change promoted by the RSM and MNLF groups, where they appear as parties who represent the dissatisfaction of the Muslim community with the political regime. This dissatisfaction must be facilitated by an institution that can help them realize the revolution or change they aim for. Borer (2009) points out that the four-decade insurgency of the Bangsamoro movement has given these radical 'Balik-Islam' groups an ideological foundation. Like the MNLF, which has highly educated leaders, the RSM has also utilized higher education knowledge to frame the insurgency narrative. The RSM was effectively degraded or destroyed as a terrorist organization after the imprisonment of Ahmed Santos in 2005.\(^{37}\)

The growth of Balik Islam in the Philippines is also seen as a result of the bilateral economic relationship between the Philippines and Saudi Arabia, as stated by Balik Islam interviewees through the findings of Borer (2009), Angeles (2013), and Eder (2022). The growth of 'Balik-Islam' in quantity can be attributed to the fact that in Islam, a convert will gain a new identity by abandoning everything associated with their past (religion and sin). According to Borer (2009) and Angeles (2013), Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia are interested in learning Islam.

Given the long history of conflicts in the Philippines that are identical to religious conflicts rather than ethnic conflicts, it is necessary to make efforts for a

\(^{35}\) Yusuf Roque Morales, “The Evolution of the Concept of Hukumah Islamiyyah from the Perception of the Balik Islam Movement in the Philippines: Philosophical Reflections”, Available at SSRN 2686038 (2015); Nassef Adiong, Relationship between Balik-Islam (Muslim Reverts) and full-fledged Muslims under the Auspices of Islamic Teachings in Philippine Setting, (GRIN, 2008).

\(^{36}\) Born out of an organised religious group, RSM calls on many people to act in the name of God. RSM also has a "Foreign Workers Abroad Programme" which provides them with a large number of potential candidates and contacts with Middle Eastern organisations for funding. In this way, funding from the Middle East brings international support to RSM. Douglas Borer, Sean Everton, Moises Nayve Jr. “Global Development and Human (In)security: Understanding the Rise of the Rajah Solaiman Movement and Balik Islam in the Philippines”, Third World Quarterly, Vol. 30, Issue 1 (2009), 181-204; United Nations. (2018, April 17). RAJAH SOLAIMAN MOVEMENT. Retrieved June 15, 2023, from: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/rajah-solaiman-movement

peaceful and safe path for Muslim minorities to blend in and abandon all attributes of radicalism in the name of Islamic jargon, such as terrorism in the name of jihad. The children of Muslim families should still be taught Islamic education and should be cautious of ideas that take away from Islamic life.

The other track of the Balik Islam campaign in the Philippines also had groups significantly different from the RSM. The 'Balik-Islam' movement, which chose the peaceful path, was generally accepted by the Catholic community and the local government. Amazona (2017) reported that these da'i had been given space to proselytize by the local government, campaigning for 'Balik-Islam' as a form of self-awareness to return to their previous beliefs. The da'i also reminded them to be cautious about radical movements. Since 2015, promoters of the 'Balik-Islam' movement have been observed in towns such as Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Tacloban, Maslog, and Dolores.

Validated information from village officials revealed that preachers offered livelihood assistance, housing assistance, and political influence in the community. However, not all of these new 'Balik-Islam' converts take the new religion for granted. They 'keep an eye' on whether the promises will be fulfilled. As happened in the Maslog region, 66 out of 100 people who have 'Balik-Islam' will generally return to Roman Catholicism because the da'i are too slow or do not fulfill the promises that have been made.

In 2020, research was conducted by The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) collaborated with the University of the Philippines Institute of Islamic Studies (UP-IIS) to shed light on the plight of converts to Islam in the Philippines. Following the signing of the partnership agreement during an introductory workshop in Makati City on March 6, 2020, IAG and UP-IIS began field research in selected areas in Luzon, Metro Manila, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). This study was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Early research on the Balik-Islam phenomenon shows that there are at least four categories of converts in the Philippines: those who converted to Islam through marriage, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who converted to Islam while working in the Middle East, those who converted to Islam based on personal beliefs, and those who converted to Islam due to the influence of social media. As Eder (2010)

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38 Relating to the Christianization by the Spanish during the invasion of the Philippines in 1521.
40 The reason for choosing Mindanao as the primary spatial dimension of this study is based on census figures. Based on the 2015 census, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that the number of Muslims in the Philippines reached 6,064,744 or six percent of the country’s total population. However, unofficial data from the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) in 2011 put the number of Muslims in the Philippines at around ten million, or seven percent of the total population. Mindanao is home to 93 per cent of the total Muslim population, according to POPCEN 2015. In the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) - now BARMM - where the majority of Mindanao’s Muslims live, nine out of ten residents are Muslim.
41 Wadi, CRUCIBLE: Balik Islam and the Idea of “Return”.
points out, Philippine Muslim issues and identity dynamics depend on the path of Islam's entry into the community. It may result in the RSM 'Balik-Islam' group if received in a radical or extreme environment. Alternatively, it could be through peaceful propaganda, as Amazona (2017) finds. Emphasized by these two research institutions, the empowerment of Muslims, including the 'Balik-Islam' group, must pay attention to equitable development and opportunities to obtain a high-quality education. The exact number of 'Balik-Islam' cannot be ascertained due to difficulty accessing data on 'Balik Islam.'

Responding to the Dilemma of Philippine Muslim Identity

As Tariq Ramadan explains, he is concerned about the poor relationship between the West and Islam, affecting the West and the world. Tariq tried to build positive solutions that do not protect but support minority Muslim communities. According to him, Muslims must understand their place on Earth as a group that actively and positively participates in all human affairs. According to Tariq, this reflects Muslims' faith in the guidance of the Quran, which consistently links faith with good deeds.

Tariq finds that in today's increasingly complex world, especially in the West, Muslims have more freedom to express their religious teachings in non-Islamic countries than in da'ar al-Islam (Islamic State). Tariq offers a new perspective that the West and the countries it influences are now at the center of the world, while others are on the periphery. Tariq's point here is that when a Muslim minority lives in the West or non-Islamic countries, he does not have to be 'rigid' in his thinking but must 'adapt' to existing Western products and strive to produce new products that contribute positively to his Muslim community and the world, to combat destructive deviations, promote virtue and justice through the human brotherhood of all people, regardless of race, origin or religion.

What Tariq describes has been realized with the MNLF movement led by Nur Misuari in the Philippines. Although the organization was radical and engaged in a war of attrition, he was able to adopt Western concepts of nationalism in his movement, triggering internal divisions with his old comrades who insisted on the movement establishing an Islamist state independent of the Philippines. Misuari, for all his flaws, was able to realize sovereignty and equality for Bangsamoro by using the Western product of nationalist ideology, which was transformed into the autonomous region of Mindanao, which was free to implement the rules of Islamic Sharia. Bangsamoro can get what they are fighting for, even though it is still under one umbrella in the Catholic-majority Philippines. This is undoubtedly a significant contribution in the context of the lives of Muslim minorities that Muslim minorities can survive and adapt by 'utilizing' Western products that develop in this contemporary era, as Tariq (2004) previously mentioned.

On the other hand, the forms of extremist radicalism shown by the RSM

44 Ramadan, Western, 65-77.
45 As Pratama (2022) explains, he was involved in a gun battle with the Philippine police and military, and committed acts of corruption and political fraud in the Mindanao autonomous region's gubernatorial election.
46 Pratama, “Nur Misuari...” 11-32
'Balik-Islam' group and the Abu Sayyaf Group terrorist group are forms of excessive defense mechanisms in response to various forms of threats to identity and religious teachings in the mainstream of a civilization, which lead to identity losses in the Muslim group itself, such as the labeling of 'Islam is terrorism.'

The middle way to the solution is to re-understand the meaning of knowing each other, or in Islam, and it is referred to as ta'aruf. The word ta'aruf not only means knowing each other between people of different ethnicities, languages, skin colors, beliefs, and so on. When the word ta'aruf is placed in the context of harmonious relationships in a pluralistic society, it is interpreted to include three stages: knowing each other, understanding each other, and behaving wisely among different people. Departing from this attitude can build trust, communication, and networks to contribute to the greater good of humanity positively.

For example, the Church-Ulama Guardian Conference in the Philippines meets monthly to deepen the doctrinal understanding between Roman Catholic and Muslim leaders in Mindanao, helping to advance the Mindanao peace process. The conference sought to encourage exchanges at the local level between parish priests and local Islamic teachers. In line with the dialogue fostered by religious leaders, the SiSila Foundation in Zamboanga City organizes regional exchanges between Muslim and Christian academics, and local leaders intend to reduce waste and promote cooperation. Other active groups included the Mindanao State University Peace Institute, Ranao Christian Muslim Movement for Dialogue, Zamboanga Peace Advocates, Ateneo Peace Institute, and Notre Dame University Peace Education Center in October 2001; 85 Christians and 23 Muslims participated in a Youth Peace Camp. School teachers organized the camp in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte. At the end of the camp, the participants stated that they felt that the conflict in Mindanao was not religious but relatively economical and could only be resolved with respect, justice, and trust.47

To restore their good name and identity in the future, Muslim minorities must challenge themselves to socialize, communicate, and not isolate themselves. In this way, Muslims can explain faithful Islam and violence or terrorism that has nothing to do with Islam to the non-Muslim communities around them as championed by the 'Balik-Islam' group that preaches in the areas of Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Tacloban, Maslog, and Dolores City, in the previous section. Mubasirun (2015) explained that 48 Minority Muslims must revise and emerge as accountable Muslims for the nature of Islam and the flexibility of Islamic law. Isolation should not keep you in extremist groups, nor should you be relegated to a lifestyle that goes against Islamic values and norms.

D. CONCLUSIONS

The Filipino Muslim minority faces the problem of discriminatory treatment by the state authorities where they live, which always favors the Catholic majority. The identity problem as a Muslim being discriminated against in the Philippines is not far from the historical legacy since Spain colonized this country. Indirectly, historical, political, and especially religious factors become indicators of how the government and Catholic majority position Muslims in their country. There is no doubt that there is a radical form of resistance from a group of Moro Muslims in

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47 Committee on Foreign Relations of The U.S. Senate, Annual Report, p. 273.
48 Mubasirun, “Persoalan..., 119.
various forms of movements that have different ideological foundations, such as the nationalist MNLF, Islamist MILF, and terrorist Abu Sayaf. As for Filipino Muslims, these three factors are also why they feel the need to 'separate' from the mainstream government, especially for the Islamists and Abu Sayaf.

On the other hand, the MNLF tried to incorporate nationalism to achieve autonomy for Bangsamoro in obtaining a particular autonomous region, which was eventually achieved. Moro, as the mainstream of Philippine Muslims, is very influential as a representative of Philippine Muslims in showing their identity; this is said to be necessary because the 'Balik-Islam' uses Moro Muslims as 'role models' and 'examples' in compiling their social and religious identity. After starting to enter a period of 'calm' after the birth of the autonomous region, the problem is now more emphasized on the issue of eradicating radicalism, equitable development, and minimizing elements of racism in the economic sector. These issues can be resolved by trying to understand each other through studying the nation's history and the life of religious harmony, as initiated by the Interfaith Group.

E. REFERENCES
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