

## MUSLIM MINORITY IN MANILA

### Ethnographical Studies of Minority Expression on the Archipelago

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#### Abstract

*This article describes the spiritual experience of being a Muslim and minority in Manila, the capital of Asia's most populous Catholic country, the Philippines. This research used an ethnography approach to understand how Muslims in Manila negotiate their identity as Muslims as well as Filipinos who live in Barangay as a minority and face bad sentiment, especially after the Battle of Marawi and the Maguindanao Massacre. This research found that even when facing negative stigma on most of the national media coverage after the Battle of Marawi and the Maguindanao Massacre, Muslims in Manila feel that they are free to express their identity as Muslims, as Anak Bansa, and as Filipinos with their limitations.*

*[Artikel ini menggambarkan pengalaman spiritual Muslim minoritas di Manila, Filipina, negara dengan umat Katolik terbesar di Asia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi untuk melihat bagaimana Muslim di Manila menegosiasikan identitasnya sebagai orang Islam sekaligus sebagai orang Filipina yang hidup di Barangay sebagai minoritas, terutama dalam menghadapi sentimen buruk pasca Perang Marawi dan Pembantaian Maguindanao. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa meskipun menghadapi stigma buruk dalam hampir semua media nasional pasca Perang Marawi dan Pembantaian Maguindanao, orang Islam di Manila tetap merasa bebas mengekspresikan identitas mereka dengan segala keterbatasannya sebagai Muslim sekaligus sebagai Anak Bangsa dan orang Filipina.]*

**Keywords:** Muslim minority experience, Muslim Filipino, media negative stigma.

## A. Introduction

*Sana Balikan, Muslim o Kristiyano, parehas ang bangarin ng mga ina. Magkaroon ng magandang kinabukasan ang mga anak!* [Hopefully, Muslim or Christian, all mothers have the same desire. For their children to have a great day!]

That sentence was one of the last statements from Fatimah during our conversation on the corner of Plaza Rajah Sulayman in front of Malate Church. Fatimah, a mother of two children, is a street peddler in one of the oldest red-light districts in Manila, Malate. As a Muslim, Fatimah, with the other 100,000 Muslims who live in Metro Manila, is facing some consequences and limitations as a religious minority. Some of them experience difficulties in finding Halal Restaurants or Cafeteria in town. Other Muslims also feel discriminated against in their work lives. Muslims are less than 1% of the total Metro Manila population. Most of them are ancestors of the followers of Rajah Sulayman or Sulayman III, the last Sultan of Sultanate Maynila.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, migrants from Maguindanao, Sulu, and ARMM<sup>2</sup> make up about 40% of the total Muslim population in Manila.<sup>3</sup> Fatimah was chosen as an informant representing Low Education Muslimah in Manila. Fatimah works as an informal worker (street peddler) who lives in the heart of a predominantly Catholic slum area.

In November 2009, most Filipino National Media released the horror story of the Maguindanao Massacre,<sup>4</sup> which tarnished press freedom in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> The cruel killing of journalists was carried out alongside the recital of a *takebīr*.<sup>6</sup> Riots in the Autonomous Region

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Donoso and Mourad Kacimi, "A Royal Letter, in Arabic, by Sultan 'Azīm al-Dīn I of Sulu (1747)", *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>2</sup> ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), which is now Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, is the only Muslim majority region in the Philippines. It covers about Cotabato, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, and part of North Cotabato.

<sup>3</sup> Akiko Watanabe, "The Formation of Migrant Muslim Communities in Metro Manila", *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>4</sup> France Jeanne L. Sarmiento, "The Maguindanao Massacre", *Politikon: The LAPSS Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19 (2013), pp. 55-68.

<sup>5</sup> Edson C. Tandoc Jr., "Watching Over the Watchdogs: The Problems that Filipino Journalists Face", *Journalism Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>6</sup> "Filipino Who Lost Wife in Massacre Files for Office", *The Associated Press*

of Muslim Mindanao significantly represented how Muslims look in the Filipino Media.<sup>7</sup> Reports from ABS-CBN, the largest Filipino Media Holding, revealed that after the Mindanao Bombing in 2019,<sup>8</sup> Muslims have been “compelled to expel their hijabs in schools or their working environment just to fit in with the consistency” or “change Muslim-sounding names in their resumes just to get a shot at being met or considered for occupations”.<sup>9</sup>

This research was conducted in June 2019, four months after the Mindanao Bombing in Jolo. The ethnographic observation was conducted in Manila. Researchers interviewed three Muslim-born Filipinos living in the Manila area (Santa Mesa, Malate, and Ermita). The reason for picking informants from these areas is that they are the most significant Muslim community in the Manila area based on National Commission of Muslim Filipino (NCMF) statistics in 2016. The first informant, Fatimah, represents the low middle-class Filipino with little education. The second informant, David, represents the Muslim transmigrant from the most Muslim populous region, Maguindanao, with a college education background. David also represents Muslims who practise inter-faith marriage. The third informant, Salma, represents highly educated Muslims (scholars). Salma also represents the Muslimah who work as government officials in the Philippines. Each interview was conducted in English mixed with Tagalog for two to three hours. Interviews were usually conducted during or after work, either in the workplace and cafeteria where Muslims meet during work or through personal networks during August 2019.

## **B. Muslim Filipinos and Their Belief**

Muslim Filipinos can be traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century when the Persian trader came to the islands.<sup>10</sup> Islam can be considered the

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(26 November 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Rommel A. Curaming, “Mediating and Consuming Memories of Violence: The Jabidah Massacre in the Philippines”, *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>8</sup> The Mindanao Bombing 2019, known as Jolo Cathedral Bombing, is a terrorist attack, in which 21 people were killed and 102 were injured during the regular Sunday Mass. Islamic State (IS) claimed took responsibility for the bombings, which they said were committed by “two knights of martyrdom” against a “crusader temple”.

<sup>9</sup> Basilio H. Sepe, “Group Wary of Discrimination vs Muslims in Urban Areas After Mindanao Bombings”, *ABS-CBN News* (1 February 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Jan Stark, “Muslims in the Philippines”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. *Al-Jāmi’ah*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2023 M/1445 H

oldest monotheistic religion recorded in the history of the Philippines. Most of them are practising Sunni, and there is only a small number of Shiah and Ahmadiyah Muslims. During the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, the Sultanate of Brunei attacked Manila and installed some Muslim *Rajah*<sup>11</sup> to rule the vassal area. However, when Legazpi, a Spanish Captain, arrived in Manila, they brought Catholicism, built Pamantasan Santo Tomas (University of Santo Tomas), and started the mission to baptise the Filipinos.<sup>12</sup> The daughter of the last Sultan of Manila, Dona Maria Laran, was baptised by the Spaniards, which marked the end of the domination of Muslims in Manila.<sup>13</sup>

The only predominantly Muslim area in the Philippines, ARMM, have strong roots and connections with the Sulu Sultanate and Maguindanao Sultanate. Some key figures and Filipino heroes from this region, like Sultan Kudarat, were Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

The most well-timed Muslims to arrive in the Philippines were the Arab brokers who ruled the Red Sea-Indian Ocean-South China Sea. They exchanged courses from the ninth to the eleventh for hundreds of years. They set up their first solid footing in Sulu and frequented the Borneo-China exchange course through Sulu, Palawan, and Mai-I (Mindoro). Muslim evangelists from Malacca and Borneo additionally landed in Sulu and Maguindanao to strengthen Islam among its devotees and convert the non-Muslim occupants.<sup>15</sup>

By 1500, Islam was well established in Sulu. With no focal government to oppose the northward push of the sultans, Islam easily spread through the region and arrived in Manila by 1565. Islam was effortlessly incorporated into the islands' social orders as the indigenous people groups were isolated into barangays (groups dependent on family relationships). Muslims also carried with them a composed political idea of regional states controlled by *rajās* or sultans. The Muslim heads

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23, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Rajah* in Tagalog means king or lord.

<sup>12</sup> William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-century Philippine Culture and Society* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Luciano P.R. Santiago, "The Houses of Lakandula, Matanda and Soliman (1571-1898): Genealogy and Group Identity", *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1990), pp. 39-73.

<sup>14</sup> Stark, "Muslims in the Philippines".

<sup>15</sup> William Larousse, *A Local Church Living for Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Relations in Mindanao-Sulu, Philippines: 1965-2000*, vol. 4 (Roma: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 2001).

practised suzerainty over the town leader, and, in the long run, the Arabic language, composing, culture, and government turned into a lifestyle in the archipelago.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the innate contrasts, the Islamization of Mindanao and Sulu brought about an ideological bond among these gatherings of individuals in the area that prompted the development of another feeling of ethnic personality that differentiates the Muslim from the non-Muslim population. Muslims label the indigenous people as *lumad*.<sup>17</sup> Islam arose as a revitalising strict, political, and authentic power that empowered the Muslims to oppose the attack of Spanish colonisation and later American dominion. Islam and its endurance are as yet the hidden factor for the ill will among Muslim and Christian Filipinos.<sup>18</sup>

Inevitably, the Philippines government perceived a requirement for a structure to oversee Muslim presence inside the prevalently Christian nation. The government established the Commission for National Integration in 1957.<sup>19</sup> It was later subbed by the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities. The ideal condition is a nation made up of Christians and Muslims who might be acclimatised entirely into the prevailing Filipino culture.<sup>20</sup> One issue would be the strict inclination and the refusal of Muslims to consume pork. This proposition seems to be inadequate to Muslims or Christians, even when the legislatures happily make concessions for strict traditions. For instance, Muslims were absolved from Christian Philippine laws which denied polygamy.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, all endeavours appeared to have

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<sup>16</sup> Ethan P. Hawkey, “Reviving the Reconquista in Southeast Asia: Moros and the Making of the Philippines, 1565–1662”, *Journal of World History*, vol. 25, no. 2-3 (2014).

<sup>17</sup> It is a collective term used to describe the indigenous people of Mindanao. It has become pejorative word equal with *kafir*, the infidel.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas A. Marks, “From the Front Lines of the GWOT: CPP Alive and Well in the Philippines”, *Journal of Counterterrorism & Homeland Security International*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>19</sup> Stark, “Muslims in the Philippines”; Ronald Hall, “Intervention with Muslim Filipino Families: The Implications of Spirituality for Psychology”, *Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Ayala Milligan, “Religious Identity, Political Autonomy and National Integrity: Implications for Educational Policy from Muslim-Christian Conflict in the Southern Philippines”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2001).

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Franco, “The Philippines: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front - A Pragmatic Power Structure?”, in *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition*, ed. by Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic (Washington D.C.: National Defense *Al-Jāmi'ah*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 2023 M/1445 H

come up short. In 1990, the legislature started to work together with the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This strategy allows Muslims in the region to exercise control over explicit government territories that are deprived of national security and remote problems.<sup>22</sup>

Several studies regarding Muslim Filipinos, especially the Muslim migrants in Manila,<sup>23</sup> show the rapid trend of Muslims who lived in the provincial area (like Maguindanao, Cotabato, and Jolo) migrating to Manila unskilled, and almost half of them did not attend any formal school or madrasah.<sup>24</sup> Otherwise, limited studies discuss the Muslim Manilad, especially after the rising rebellion in the Battle of Marawi. This research focuses on how Muslim Filipinos, especially in Manila, negotiate identity after the Battle of Marawi. Previous studies conducted after the Battle of Marawi and the Jolo Cathedral bombing<sup>25</sup> show Muslims in Manila acquired negative labels not loyal to an integral part of Filipino society.<sup>26</sup> Studies from Franco found that most of the local madrasahs actively promoted the narrative of jihad at the barangay levels.<sup>27</sup> This background is also highlighted by our informants, David and Salma, who originally come from Maguindanao. They were afraid to be labelled as jihadists by their fellow Manilad. It is complicated for Muslim migrants from Maguindanao or other ARMM regions as they are labelled and identified as not integral to the society of Filipinos and not loyal to the nations of the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> This present study would

University Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Stark, "Muslims in the Philippines".

<sup>23</sup> Nimfa B. Ogena, Nimfa B., "Social Survey on Muslim Migrants in Metro Manila", Final Report (Tokyo: Waseda University, 2012); Luis Q. Lacar and Carmelita S. Lacar. "Maranao Muslim Migration and Its Impact on Migrant Children", *Philippine Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1989), pp. 3-14.

<sup>24</sup> Ogena, "Social Survey on Muslim Migrants".

<sup>25</sup> Captain James Lewis, "The Battle of Marawi: Lessons for Developing Urban Capabilities", *Australian Army Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2019), p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Dexter Dave R. Valdeavilla and Maria Teresa R. Pulido, "Bias in Filipino Newspapers? Newspaper Sentiment Analysis of the 2017 Battle of Marawi", in *Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Internet of Things, Big Data and Security IoTBDs* (2019); Dexter Dave R. Valdeavilla and Maria Teresa R. Pulido, "Quantitative Newspaper Sentiment Analysis of the 2017 Battle of Marawi", *Proceedings of the Samahang Pisika ng Pilipinas* (2019); Joseph Franco, "Detecting Future 'Marawis': Considering Alternative Indicators for Assessing the Potential for New Manifestations of Violent Extremism in Mindanao.", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>27</sup> Franco, "Detecting Future 'Marawis'."

<sup>28</sup> Ryan Fertakos, "Social Media and Extremist Groups Online: An Examination of Methods of Radicalization and Its Implications", M.A. Thesis, The University of

challenge how Muslims in Manila renegotiate their identity as Muslims and as Filipinos within the complex situation. This study discusses how Muslims in Manila express their belief as Muslims and Filipinos and how they renegotiate their belief of practising Sharia law as a minority.

### C. Living as Minority

#### 1. *Being Muslim, Being Filipino, Being Anak Bansa*

Fatimah, our informant, starts her day with an early morning prayer or *Fajr* prayer. As a single mother, she and her family live on the block next to the Malate Church, the old church on the corner of Manila Red-light District. She peddles candy and some snacks near Jollibee, the biggest Filipino Fast-food chain. She told us that it is tough to look for a well-paying job for an uneducated Muslim Filipino like her. It became a triple disadvantage to search for a better job: as a woman, a Muslim, and a lower education. She obtained her secondary school during the EDSA Revolution when People Power impeached Marcos.<sup>29</sup>

Fatimah and her two sons and three daughters peddle from seven in the morning until eight in the evening. Most of her customers are congregation members of the Malate Church who attend the daily mass and students at a school near the church. During our conversation, Fatimah, a Filipino Muslim who undoes her hijab when she peddles, brought her *bunso*,<sup>30</sup> a three-year-old boy.

Fatimah argues that she needs to take off her hijab to look more like other Filipinos. Most Filipinos are Catholic, and Fatimah worries

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North Carolina at Charlotte, 2019; Richard Javad Heydarian, “Philippines’ Counter-Terror Conundrum: Marawi and Duterte’s Battle Against the Islamic State”, in *Countering Insurgencies and Violent Extremism in South and South East Asia*, ed. by Shanthie D’Souza (New York: Routledge, 2019); Cristina J. Montiel, Erwine de la Paz, and Zahra Ibrahim Cerafica, “(De)humanization and Trust in an Asymmetric Muslim-Christian Conflict: Heroes, *Kafirs*, and *Satanas*”, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2019); Jeffrey Ayala Milligan “Faith in School: Educational Policy Responses to Muslim Unrest in the Philippine Republic”, in *Islamic Identity, Postcoloniality, and Educational Policy* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> EDSA Revolution, popularly known as Philippine People Power, is the massive demonstration along Epifanio de los Santo Avenue as protest of assassination of Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr in Mabuhay International Airport, Manila. This long march resulted in the fall of Ferdinand Marcos and the rise of Corazon Aquino as the President of the Philippines.

<sup>30</sup> Youngest child in *Tagalog*.

about the perception of her customers if she looks ‘different’ from other Filipinos. Her fear was reflected in her personal imagination about the image of the Philippines as a strong Catholic devotee in Asia. The strong power of the Catholic church after the EDSA Revolution has increased the image of Catholic church leaders as influential public opinion makers in Philippine politics.<sup>31</sup> As the lower class of a Filipino family, Fatimah understands English but not fluently. Her native language is the *lwer* Tagalog.

Most of the Filipino Muslim feels that they are ‘the other’ in Filipino society.<sup>32</sup> Fatimah told the researchers about her feelings as a Muslim and Filipino. Sometimes, as ‘the other’, Fatimah feels different from other Filipinos. Most of the Manila residents are Roman Catholics who practice the Angelus Prayer. Fatimah sometimes feels jealous of her inability to do *salah* at noon.

*nananalangin sila Angelus tuwing tanghali. Hindi ako pwede manalangin sa Islam.*  
[They can do Angelus<sup>33</sup> prayer in the noon. I cannot do *salah* (Islamic daily prayer) at the same time.]<sup>34</sup>

In issues concerning their education, Muslim Filipinos have communicated their demands for proper and quality education secured in both public and private schools. Secular education is significant because it empowers Muslim Filipinos to be able to keep pace with their Christian brethren in terms of capacity, information, and aptitudes.<sup>35</sup> Fatimah sends her two daughters to Malate Catholic School and her son to a public secular school. She argues that to be a 100% Filipino, she has to forsake her religious education. She is very concerned with the future lives of her daughters and son. She hopes that her children can work overseas as Overseas Filipino Workers and free her from living in the slum area.

Fatimah does not name her children with names associated with Muslim identities like herself because she fears that Muslim names

<sup>31</sup> Tandoc Jr., “Watching Over the Watchdogs”.

<sup>32</sup> Ma. Arsenia C. Gomez et al., “The Politics of Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education in Selected Philippine Schools”, *Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asian Education Symposium (AES 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Angelus Prayer is a Catholic devotion commemorating the Incarnation of Christ through the News from the Angel to Mary.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Fatimah (Malate, 14 August 2019), all original transcript was in Tagalog.

<sup>35</sup> Rudy B. Rodil, “Husay, Sandugo, and Kapatiran: Peace Process and Education for Development”, *BANWA Series A*, vol. 11 (2015-2016).

may cause adversity to the future of her child. Fatimah mentioned that after the Maguindanao Massacre, some of their relatives felt scared and worried about their identity as Muslims. They renegotiate their identity as Muslim by changing their Muslim or Arabian names to become more Spanish or Filipino. Instead of converting to Christianity, being more secular is the best option to maintain an identity as *anak bansa*.<sup>36</sup>

Similar to Fatimah, David, a Muslim Filipino who works as a call centre operator, renegotiates his identity as a Muslim to be more compliant with other Filipinos. David was chosen as this research informant representing Muslim white-collar workers. David also represents Maguindanao migrant Muslims in Manila who married a non-Muslim wife (Catholic Manilad). David is a migrant from Maguindanao who lives in Ermita, about 1 km from Malate. David and his wife, a Catholic-born Filipino, have faced some discrimination upon their decision to marry and start a new life as a married couple. Some of David's co-workers have asked him why he did not convert to Catholicism to follow his wife. Nonetheless, as Brubaker has stated, just like sexual orientation and ethnicity, religion speaks in a distinctive method of recognising oneself and others, developing equality and organising oneself in proportion to others.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, David renegotiates his identity as a Muslim Filipino to be more secular. He had forgotten when he last did the Friday *salah*.<sup>38</sup> His last daily prayers (five times of *salah*) were half a year ago when he went to Maguindanao for homecoming to his parents.

*Kabit asawako* not forcing me to be secular; it is part of negotiating and *pagsasaayos* with her *pamilya* and society. My wife does not force me to be secular; it is part of negotiation and adjustment with her family and society.<sup>39</sup>

David interprets that he has to be more secular to be accepted by his wife and her family, his neighbourhood, and his work life. David also mentions how his in-laws suspect that he is forcing his wife to be

<sup>36</sup> *Anak bansa* is a Tagalog term for the son of countrymen.

<sup>37</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches", *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2012), pp. 2-20.

<sup>38</sup> Friday *ṣalah* or *Jumu'ah* is compulsory for Muslim men instead of *Zuhr* prayer on Friday. It is one of the most exalted Islamic rituals and one of confirmed obligatory acts.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with David (Ermita, 12 August 2019). Original transcript in Taglish (Tagalog-English).

a Muslim. David's only son goes to a secular public school in Ermita. Access to quality secular education is profoundly important for Filipino Muslims because of their current situation, which is being underestimated. Moreover, a good education is essential to succeed in an increasingly competitive work environment due to the changing worldwide standards, which excessively require information and aptitudes. Rigorous teaching has an important impact on their primary development stages. Islam has a unique set of values for its followers. Muslims are required to live with profound devotion and with a strict Islamic personality.<sup>40</sup> David believes that it is the best choice to send his son to a secular school and hopes for the best future for his son.

## 2. *Imagining Muslim-friendly Society*

As a migrant from Davao City now living in Santa Mesa, Salma is a big fan of President Duterte.<sup>41</sup> Salma was chosen as an informant to represent Muslimah scholars. Salma also represents the aspiration of Muslim politicians in Metro Manila. During the 2016 Philippine Presidential election, Salma voted for Duterte, hoping for better Muslim treatment in the Philippines. Salma is a lawyer staff member in the Muslim family-owned law firm. She was overjoyed when Duterte won the 2016 Presidential Election.

President Duterte has said that changing the constitution to introduce federalism is the answer to guarantee certified self-rule and harmony for the South.<sup>42</sup>

Salma believes that federalism in the Philippines is the only way to make the Philippines more Muslim-friendly. She is concerned about significant issues related to Muslim violence in the Southern Philippines, which significantly affects non-Muslim voices and is stereotypical of Muslims.<sup>43</sup> Salma mentioned previous research related to

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Hunt, "Book Review: Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia", *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>41</sup> Rodrigo Roa Duterte is a former President of the Philippines (2016-2022) and former Mayor of the Davao City in the Mindanao Island.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Carijane Dayag-Laylo, "Exploring conflict management in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao", *4<sup>th</sup> Asian Regional Conference of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR)* (Asian Institute of Management Conference Center, Makati City, Philippines, 2004).

the ARMM concept as the promised nation.<sup>44</sup> Muslims would advocate for the establishment of Islamic laws, while non-Muslims believe in coming back to the old framework with no self-sufficiency. By ethnicity, Maranaos<sup>45</sup> overwhelmingly support the establishment of Islamic laws, while Cebuanos<sup>46</sup> lean toward the old framework. However, it should be noted that only Cebuanos has abandoned the ARMM concept.

After the long endeavour of peacebuilding on ARMM, Salma argues that being a Muslim means implementing the Islamic organic law (Sharia) in its entirety. Peace can be accelerated with federalism in the Philippines to guarantee the autonomous status of Muslim areas. Salma envisions that a Muslim-friendly nation means that Muslims can have the right to express their Muslim identity without fear. Salma thinks the Catholic Church firmly controls the Philippines parliament and Senate.<sup>47</sup>

Fatimah and David have a different concept from that of Salma about a Muslim-friendly nation's perspective. However, they all have simplified their concept of a Muslim-friendly society and become more focused on the same opportunities to achieve dream jobs, schools, and access to economic empowerment.

*Kailangan suitable trabaho are the most important issue for Muslims. Sama-sama access of edukasyon and economic empowerment* [Decent employment is the most important issue for Muslims, in addition to equal access to education and economic empowerment.]<sup>48</sup>

David thinks that Filipino Muslims are facing many challenges in their workplaces. He believes that the easiest way to create a Muslim-friendly society is by being nice to everyone and always working hard so people recognise the effort.<sup>49</sup> Salma also mentions the concept of a Muslim-friendly society during the interview.<sup>50</sup> Salma's primary contention is that Islamism is an advanced urban development engaged

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<sup>44</sup> The concept of Moro region as an autonomous region with Islamic Law (Sharia) to nurturing for Muslims in the region.

<sup>45</sup> Maranaos is used by the Philippine Government to refer Muslims who lived near Lanao Lake in the Mindanao.

<sup>46</sup> Cebuanos is the largest ethnic groups in the Philippines, originating from Visayan Region. They are predominantly Roman Catholics and small number of Protestant and Aglipayan.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Fatimah (Malate, 14 August 2019), original transcript in Tagalog.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with David (Ermita, 12 August 2019).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019).

by a significant digressive move, including social classes, genders, and status groups. Ironically, most grounded in urban areas generally incorporated into the worldwide framework, the vitality driving Islamism is concentrated among taught urban youth trapped in the miasmatic snare of various post-pioneer emergencies. Islamism is a discernible power shown in any urban space: social and media creations, daily utilisation, urban society gatherings, instructive organisations, and social developments.

Salma mentions a sensitive issue propagated by the Philippine government to control Muslims. In the Southern Philippines, there is Muslim hatred for the Christian Filipino government and the invasion towards Christian Filipino (mostly Cebuanos) migrant farming. Assistance in any part of that development by the national government could give a premise to the rise of Muslim perspectives. Thus, a legislatively supported family arranging project is the administration's answer to the Muslim issue.<sup>51</sup> Salma argues that this issue is like a time bomb unless the Philippines' government is shifting to federalism.<sup>52</sup> She has obtained reports about Muslims feeling insecure and organising more violence after a deadlock in the discussion related to federalism in the Philippines parliament.

### 3. *Halal Food and Practising the Islamic Shariah Law*

Following the Philippine independence, the issues of the Muslim minority did not vanish. If anything, they were exacerbated. The Philippines' government extended segregation between Cebuanos and Moro with tax relaxation and an easy-to-open realm for Cebuanos.<sup>53</sup> The socio-segment change occurring in Mindanao becomes a huge factor in the expanding strife. Legislative resettlement plans for assuaging man/land conflicts and, in specific occurrences, political turmoil in the thickly settled zones of the Visayas and Luzon prompted a minor underlying inundation of Christian pioneers. Hence, the sizeable non-legislatively financed relocation.<sup>54</sup> Even Muslims living in Manila are facing several

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<sup>51</sup> William F. Stinner and Paul Douglas Mader, "Government Policy and Personal Family Planning Approval in Conflict Settings: The Case of the Muslim Minority in the Southern Philippines", *Population Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1975).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019)

<sup>53</sup> Stinner and Mader, "Government Policy".

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*; R.F. Dorall, "Muslim Refugees in Southeast Asia, the Malaysian Response", *Asian Migrant*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1988), pp. 88-93; Michael Salman, "The United

issues, such as halal food and a sense of being “the other”.

The most important thing to understand in minority Muslim lives is how they practice the Shariah law, which tends to be comprehended as a unique philosophical idea or general meta-standard approximating the standard of law.<sup>55</sup> To practising Muslims, it is something more profound and higher, mixed with good and powerful reason. In essence, Sharia speaks of the possibility that every individual and all government concerns are subject to justice under the law. In the context of Filipino Muslims as a minority, Shariah law also can be negotiated and practised more casually by Filipino Muslims.<sup>56</sup>

David married his Catholic wife, which resulted in reproach from his parents in Maguindanao. He married his wife with a civil marriage service. David’s parents reminded him that marriage is not just a civil contract but a social institution. David rebelled from his parents and chose to be more relaxed with the Shariah law. In certain social orders, interfaith relationships among Muslims and non-Muslims are uncommon.<sup>57</sup> David emphasises that his current neighbourhoods are predominantly Christian, making him experience difficulties in finding a Muslimah wife. David reveals that although what he did is sinful according to strict, conservative Islamic preachers, he believed that God is merciful.<sup>58</sup> He also cites that a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman.

Salma has a more conservative view of Sharia law. Salma has never consumed any products from Jollibee, the largest fast-food chain in the Philippines. Although Jollibee sells chicken, beef burgers, and tuna, Salma pays close attention to halal certification. Salma suspects that the spaghetti Jollibee sells contains pork ingredients. Moreover, Salma also criticises the process of slaughtering chickens and cows that did not comply with Islamic law.<sup>59</sup>

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States and the End of Slavery in the Philippines, 1898-1914: A Study of Imperialism, Ideology, and Nationalism”, Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University (1993).

<sup>55</sup> Dominic McGoldrick, “Accommodating Muslims in Europe: From Adopting Sharia Law to Religiously Based Opt Outs from Generally Applicable Laws”, *Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>56</sup> Interview with David (Ermita, 12 August 2019).

<sup>57</sup> Jana van Niekerk and Maykel Verkuyten, “Interfaith Marriage Attitudes in Muslim Majority Countries: A Multilevel Approach”, *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2018).

<sup>58</sup> Interview with David (Ermita, 12 August 2019).

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019).

Based on our interview, only Salma refuses to eat Jollibee. Fatimah and David shared their experiences of eating Chicken Joy, a fried chicken menu from Jollibee. Fatimah also mentions that Chicken Joy is her children's favourite dish. Neither Fatimah nor David has criticised the fast-food chain's halal certification.

It is ok if I do not eat the pork-based dish. *Mura at sarap masaya!* [cheap and super delicious!]<sup>60</sup>

Our three informants have the same concern. In the Philippines, it is very difficult to find halal products. The difference between the three informants is that Salma prefers to consume only products from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East, that have clear halal certification. Meanwhile, for Fatimah and David, as long as they believe their food is free of pork and alcohol, they can consume it. Salma, who has a higher class status than the other two informants, tends to be more puritan regarding Sharia practice. What Salma practices is in line with Stark's research that Southeast Asian Muslims are more pious when they reach a higher status in society.<sup>61</sup>

Fatimah and David choose to relax the Shariah law as part of negotiating their identities and daily life to be more secular. Reflecting on the article written by Mayanthi Fernando, forms of easing from the Shariah are easy ways to integrate Muslim minority communities socially.<sup>62</sup> From David's perspective, having a Catholic wife requires a tolerance for identity. On the other hand, Fatimah, as a widow with many children, is renegotiating her identity as long as obeying the *iman* as her belief in Islam. Fatimah and David are repositioning themselves as a Muslim minority to be more integrated with other Manila residents who have a strong Catholic identity. Pragmatists like Fatimah and David are negotiating their lives the same way as Mamdani's findings on Muslim Americans. The pragmatics live as an effort to be inclusive in American society after the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> Being conservative, like Salma, can be understood as a way of struggle for minorities living in Metro Manila.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Fatimah, the original transcript in Taglish (Tagalog-English).

<sup>61</sup> Stark, "Muslims in the Philippines".

<sup>62</sup> Mayanthi Fernando, "Exceptional Citizens: Secular Muslim Women and the Politics of Difference in France", *Social Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>63</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005).

#### 4. *Pasko sa Pilipinas, Christmas in the Philippines: A Muslim Perspective*

The researchers were surprised during the interview that Fatimah wore a red t-shirt from the ABS-CBN Christmas campaign.<sup>64</sup> The t-shirt said “JUST LOVE” with the character t written like a Christian cross.

*“Tuning Pasko, I always join the ABS-CBN crowd para sa Christmas campaign. Masaya ang aking anak at nasisiyahan ang sitwasyon. Para sa T Shirt, simbolo lamang, hindi kailangang mag-alala sa aking pananampalataya. [Every Christmas, I always join the ABS-CBN crowd for the Christmas campaign. My children like it and the situation is enjoyable. For the t-shirt, just a symbol, there is no need to worry about my faith.]<sup>65</sup>*

Fatimah believes that wearing a t-shirt with the cross symbol does not corrupt her faith as a Muslimah.<sup>66</sup> She and her kids enjoy the Christmas atmosphere as an end-of-year festival in Manila. David has thoughts similar to Fatimah’s on Christmas. He thinks that Christmas in the Philippines is more of a cultural festival. David enjoys the festival and goes to his wife’s hometown in Antipolo to celebrate Christmas.<sup>67</sup>

On the other hand, Salma thinks that Christmas is a capitalist event and a *bid’ah* for a Muslim Filipino to participate in the celebrations. Salma is concerned with the dominance of Filipino media that broadcasts the Christmas preparation: the *Simbang Gabi*.<sup>68</sup> She thinks that *Simbang Gabi* is similar to *taramih* for Muslims before the Eid al Fitr,<sup>69</sup> but there is no national TV station reporting the *taramih*, not even the local TV station in the southern Philippines, a predominantly Muslim region. Salma argues that the Eid celebration in the Philippines should have the same exposure as the Christmas celebration. She underlines the Philippines constitution, which ensures equality for all Filipino citizens.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> ABS-CBN, the largest television network in Philippines, holds Christmas campaign in the road and distributes gift, t-shirt, etc., every year.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Fatimah, the original transcript in Tagalog.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Fatimah.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with David.

<sup>68</sup> *Simbang Gabi* is a devotional mass in nine nights for Filipinos to prepare Christmas, celebrated in malls, churches, and *barangay*.

<sup>69</sup> *Taramih* is an evening prayer involving the reading of long portions of the Quran during Ramadan.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Salma (Santa Mesa, 16 August 2019).

#### **D. Concluding Remarks: Renegotiating Identity and Memories**

“Do you truly feel Filipino?” was a question the researchers asked all informants before the end of the interviews. As minorities who face discrimination in the workplace and media exposure, Muslim Filipinos are facing negative stigma after the ISIS-connected Cathedral Jolo Bombing and the Battle of Marawi. All informants took a deep breath and were silent for several seconds. In the public imagination, being a Filipino is always associated with Roman Catholicism. The majority of Overseas Filipino Workers are known as devout Catholics.<sup>71</sup> They attend churches and practice strict Catholic life. This situation contrasts with the identities of the informants, who are all Muslims and live in full co-existence with the majority of Filipino people.

Fatimah traced back her memories to her ex-husband before answering our final question. Her husband was a Muslim-born Filipino who lived near Quiapo Church in Manila. Her husband’s name was Ali. He changed his name to Alonzo to be able to get a decent job. He left Fatimah with her children to marry his boss, a Catholic widow in Cebu, a metropolitan city in the Visayas Region. Fatimah remembers how she felt wounded and brokenhearted when she found out that her husband was taking a catechism class in one of the churches in Ermita. Shortly after that, he left Fatimah to marry his boss and moved to Cebu City to start a new life. Fatimah believes that aside from economic reasons, wanting to be recognised as a Filipino was the reason for her husband’s conversion. Fatimah explained that being a Filipino Muslim is difficult, but she remains proud and confident that she is still 100% Filipino and 100% Muslim. She only hopes that in the future, her children can become migrant workers abroad and live a better life.

David, who lives with his Catholic wife, said that he is still proud to be born a Filipino Muslim. He also considers himself a complete Filipino, even though he is Muslim. David has tried hard to integrate into Philippine society without having to renounce his faith as a Muslim. His wife can understand his background as a Muslim, even though he does not consume pork despite the fact that the majority of local Filipino food is not halal. His wife’s family, friends, and neighbours can accept him, even though he is not from Manila and is a Muslim. He can

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<sup>71</sup> Pura Velasco, “Filipino Migrant Workers Amidst Globalization”, *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2002); Roseanne Misajon and Tseen Khoo, “Pinoy TV: Imagining the Filipino-Australian Community”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2008).

fully integrate himself with the majority Catholic community of the Philippines, even facing some bad perceptions from his co-workers.

Salma also believes that she is a real Filipino and a true Muslim woman. Even though she is a native of the Southern Philippines, she still considers the Philippines as her homeland that must be defended. Her job as a lawyer for Muslim Filipinos fighting for their rights is her way of loving her motherland and her devotion as a Muslim to helping fellow Muslims. Salma interprets the bad stigma after the Battle of Marawi as a failure of integration of Filipino society in protecting Muslims, especially those living around the island of Luzon.

Salma argues that the Catholic Church around the island of Luzon should actively participate in educating the public to be able to accept Muslims as Filipinos without discriminating against them. Salma added that the reluctance of the church and the media to promote the integration of the Philippines makes her a little pessimistic that Filipinos can completely accept Filipino Muslims.

Fatimah and David's actions are similar to what Adida, Laitin, and Valfort conveyed about the integration of Muslim society in France.<sup>72</sup> Some Muslim communities of the Philippines have chosen to degrade themselves to become more secular by adopting the common Filipino name and taking off their Islamic names, as well as taking secular Catholic education to be able to integrate with Filipino society fully. On the other hand, some Filipino Muslims want the Philippine Federation to be realised to guarantee harmony in the Filipino community, especially in the majority Muslim region in the Southern Philippines. They also consider the Philippine Federation to indirectly affect themselves as an entity to be recognised by Filipino communities.

David and Fatimah reflect on their identity as a minority without erasing their faith. David and Fatimah choose to be more relaxed about their understanding of Islam. Both understand that being a Filipino and a Muslim is not a mistake, and neither is it a bad thing. Although there are many negative stigmas after the battle at Marawi, their pride as Muslims and as Filipinos are undoubted. Another way, Salma, who is more conservative, reflects the identity of being Muslim as her human right and can be negotiated in a legal way, such as the Philippine Federation idea, to guarantee the plural faces of the Philippines.

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<sup>72</sup> Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie Anne Valfort, "Identifying Barriers to Muslim Integration in France", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 107, no. 52 (2010).

Daniel Susilo; Rahma Sugihartati; Roberto Rudolf T. Santos

Islam and the Philippines are still interpreted as two irreplaceable identities for some Muslims. Renegotiating meaning is part of addressing the complex challenges of the pluralistic society of the Philippines and part of defending religious faith. The next forward question that can be for future research is: What causes the difficulty of integrating the Filipino Muslim community from the perspective of the majority of Catholic Filipinos? What are their views on migrants from the southern Philippines in their region? How do they regard Filipino Muslims as fellow Filipinos?

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