

The Re-emergence of Islam in the Context of Muslim Separatism in the Philippines

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the political relevance and/or implications of religious diversity in the Philippines, focusing on the re-emergence of Islam as an important socio-political factor among the “Moro” (Philippine Muslims) society in the context of the Muslim secessionist movement. In pre-colonial times, Islam had a strong influence among the Moros not only in the purely cultural or religious domains, but also in the broader socio-political and public domain in several ways. However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the substantial influences and public significance of Islam in the public sphere diminished considerably because of US colonization and the secularization policy of Moro society in general. However, this de-facto “de-politicization” of Islam has notably reversed as a consequence of both Muslim secessionism and the Islamic resurgence trend, which have both ethno-national and transnational characteristics. As a matter of fact, Islam has been emphasized as one of the ideological pillars of the MILF, the largest Muslim separatist organization in the Philippines. For example, the MILF practices various activities in accordance with Islam, such as establishing *Madrasahs*, *Sharia* Courts, and promoting Islamic resurgence or *Dawwah* as well. Once marginalized, Islam has re-emerged in the Southern Philippines in the context of Islamic resurgence and a political Muslim secessionist movement.

Key words: Muslim Secessionism, Moro, Mindanao, MILF, Islamic Resurgence

1 Introduction - Islam and the “Moro” in the Context of Philippines Cultural Diversity

This chapter addresses the relevance or implication of religious diversity in the Philippines by focusing on the social relevance of Islam among the “Moro” (ge-

neric term for Muslims in the Philippines) in the socio-cultural context of the Southern Philippines, including its relation to the Muslim secessionist movement.

I will begin with a general social and historical overview of the Moro Muslim minority community in the Philippines. In Section 3, I examine basic cultural characteristics of Moro society by focusing on its “intra-religious” diversity, namely, dynamics between so-called “folk-Islamic” belief and Islamic resurgence. I will then analyze a more public and/or political dimension of Islam, especially the relevance of Islam in the Mindanao conflict and the Moro secessionist movement in the Philippines. In particular, I will shed light on the complex interplay between national and transnational dimensions of the Muslim Secessionist movement, its ideological background, its various social activities, and so on. In doing this, I will show how Islam – a once marginalized religion in the Philippines - re-emerged as a significant social factor in the context of Islamic resurgence and the political Muslim secessionist movement.

2 Socio-Historical Overview of Islam and the Philippines Muslim Community

The Philippines is in fact a multi-cultural (multi-religious) country although over 90% of the population are Christians (especially Catholic). There are also various ethno-religious minorities scattered throughout the archipelago. The so-called “Moro”, or Muslim minority in the southern Philippines is particularly distinctive and relevant in several ways. It is highly difficult to estimate the exact population of the Moro, but according to various estimates, they number about five to seven million persons; 5–7% of the Philippines population. Originally, most dwelled in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, in the southern border zone of the Philippines. However, some recently migrated to other areas including Luzon and Visayas. Hundreds of thousands of Moro also live in the north Borneo area of Sabah state in Malaysia, having escaped from Mindanao conflicts since the 1970s. The Moro are distinctive in preserving their unique historical

and cultural heritage, and ethno-political identity to this day.

Anthropologically, the Moro consist of thirteen different ethno-linguistic groups including the Magundanaos, the Maranaos, the Tausugs, and the Samas. However, they have all practiced Islam since the thirteenth to fourteenth century and are thus known commonly as the “*Bangsa Moro*” (the Moro nation). As we will see in the next section, the Moro had already established independent Islamic Sultanates in Mindanao and Sulu by the fifteenth century. The Muslims in the Philippine archipelago strongly resisted colonization by the Spanish in the sixteenth century and effectively repulsed colonial invasion until the end of Spanish colonial rule of the Philippine islands in the last part of the nineteenth century. Partly because of this historical trajectory and partly because of religious differences, the Moro preserve, up to this day, an ethnic or socio-political identity as a Muslim minority distinct from that of majority Christian Filipinos in the Philippines¹.

Though exact details of Islam’s introduction to the Philippines remain sketchy, we can trace its process through the *tarsila* (royal genealogies) of the Muslim rulers of Mindanao and Sulu, and from other relevant sources. The term “*tarsila*” comes from the Arabic “*silsilah*” (“link” or “chain”). It is used in the southern Philippines - as in other parts of the Indonesian and Malay worlds - to refer to written royal genealogies. According to Majul’s detailed interpretation of the Sulu *tarsila*, a certain Tuan Mashaika came to Sulu as one of the earliest known Muslim (Arab) missionaries². He was buried in Jolo Island in the Sulu archipelago, and was presumed to be one of the founding members of the Muslim community in Sulu. Though the exact date of his coming to Sulu is still unknown, one can estimate it as the early fourteenth century.

In 1380, Sheikh Karimul Makdum (Tuan Sharif Awliya), an Arabic missionary/trader, came to Simunul Island, Southern Sulu. He founded a mosque there, which is the oldest mosque ever built in the Philippines. Majul says that the coming of these *makdumim* (Islamic missionaries) to the Philippines at that time was an event contemporaneous with similar phenomenon in other parts of

the Malay World, and they were not without Sufi elements. After the coming of Sheikh Makdum, a Muslim fleet from Minangkabau, Sumatra, came to Jolo, and its leader, Raja Baguinda, established himself as leader of the Muslim community in Sulu³.

In 1450, Sayyed Abu Bakar, an Arabic descendant of the Prophet Muhammed, came to Jolo, and married the daughter of Raja Baguinda. After the death of Raja Baguinda, Sayyed Abu Bakar founded the Sultanate of Sulu and established Islam as the religious and political foundation of the Sulu Sultanate. Around the end of the sixteenth century and in the first decades of the seventeenth century, political alliances with the other Malay Muslim principalities, such as the Sultanate of Brunei, against the increasing dangers of Western colonization guaranteed the preservation of Islam in the southern Philippines.

During the pre-colonial period in general, both the Sulu and the Maguindanao Sultanates were typical Malay coastal states in maritime Southeast Asia. The political and economic center of the Sulu Sultanate was Jolo Island. The trading zone of the Sulu Sultanate extended far beyond the Sulu Archipelago itself. According to Warren, the trade was systematically incorporated into long distance maritime trade between the maritime worlds of Southeast Asia and China⁴.

Similar to other Malay maritime states, the Maguindanao and the Sulu Sultanates embraced Islam as a state religion. Because of this, Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu followed quite different patterns of historical development compared with the rest of the Philippines archipelago. The latter was colonized and Christianized by Spanish colonial power. In contrast, Muslims in the south fiercely resisted colonial invasion by the Spanish up to the end of colonial rule of the Philippines in the end of nineteenth century⁵.

To this day, Muslim society in Mindanao and Sulu maintains its distinctive Islamic cultural heritage within the Christian dominated Philippines republic. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a Spanish military outpost was constructed in Jolo Island. In 1898, the United States won a war with Spain resulting from rivalry over Cuba and consequentially took possession of the entire Philip-

pine Archipelago, including Mindanao and Sulu. It was only after colonization by the United States that the Moro Sultanates were finally brought to an end.

3 Intra-Religious Diversity — Dynamics between Traditional “Folk-Islamic” Belief and Islamic Resurgence

Here we describe the general features and internal cultural diversity of Islamic practices among the Muslim community in the southern Philippines. Generally speaking, the basic framework and tenets of Islam for Muslim Filipinos is not so different from those in other regions, including belief in Allah or almighty God, and the so-called five pillars of Islam based on the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

However, if you observe the details of beliefs and religious practices of Muslim Filipinos from ethnographic points of view, you will notice a variety of folk belief elements which are not necessarily consistent with Islamic tenets or practices of other regions, especially practices of Middle Eastern origin. For example, we can easily observe the existence of so-called animistic beliefs among the Moro in some parts of Mindanao and Sulu. In this belief system, people believe in the existence of various spirits in non-human things, e.g. animals, plants, trees, stones, and so on. In some cases, local Muslims give offerings to the spirits as signs of respect and worship. Shamanism is another notable folk belief element among some of the Moro in several, mainly rural, parts of the southern Philippines, especially Sulu (Kiefer 1985).

As an example, I will introduce the case of the Sama people in Tabawan Island in the Sulu archipelago, in which I conducted a field research during the 1990s. The Sama people in Tabawan are, without exception, Muslims, and comprise one group of the Moro or Muslim Filipino population. Though the Sama in Tabawan are Muslims, they are also known for their strong adherence to “folk” or “pre-Islamic” elements among their local religious practices. In particular, Tabawan Island people are famous for shamanic belief even compared with other Sama speaking groups on neighboring islands in Sulu. Traditionally, Tabawan shamanism is based on belief in spirits called *duwata* (spirits).

Tabawan shamans, locally called *papagan*, allegedly communicate with *duwata* as spirit-mediums, cure the sick, and perform divination, while possessed by these spirits. Most female shamans also serve as midwives. Most shamans develop their ability after recovering from a serious illness or after having mystical visions in their dreams. This belief in *duwata* has strong connections with the traditional cosmology of Tabawan Island. Generally speaking, this kind of belief is called “folk Islam” and thought to be an amalgam or syncretic mixture of Islam and “pre-Islamic” folk traditions.

In contrast, there are emerging trends among the Muslim Filipinos calling for a form of “more correct Islam”; in general, an Islamic resurgence. Concrete examples of the Islamic resurgence phenomenon notably include: an increase in numbers of mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools), strict abstinence from alcoholic drinking, veil-wearing by women, and increasing numbers of Islamic campaign seminars, *Quran* reading contests, and other events. Activities such as Islamic Seminars in *madrasas* aimed at propagating more “correct”, “orthodox”, or “pure” forms of Islam have become more visible in recent years. These activities are part of what is sometimes called the *dawwah* (or *dakwah*) movement. One distinctive feature of local *dawwah* movements and activities is their strong connection with foreign *dawwah* groups or movements in other Islamic countries.

In Sulu, for example, most activities by local *dawwah* groups are performed in coordination with foreign *dawwah* groups in Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and so on. Their main areas of influence are in relatively urbanized areas like the city of Jolo in Sulu province and the city of Bongao in Tawi Tawi province. Both of them are provincial capitals and are socio-economic centers of their respective provinces. *Madrasa* teachers, generally named *ustadz*, are among the most active members of the *dawwah* movement. It is pointed out that sometimes these trends raise tensions among local Muslims, especially between members of *dawwah* movements and more traditional/conservative Muslims who cling to folk-Islamic traditions⁶.

Though Islamic resurgence itself is not necessary a “political” phenome-

non, it is hard to dis-entangle it from the socio-political context of Muslim secessionism and the Mindanao conflict. For example, at the height of Mindanao conflict in the 1970s, the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front, a secessionist organization founded in the early 1970s) and other Muslim rebels in the Philippines were strongly supported, both morally and substantially, by other Islamic countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Pakistan, etc.. In this political environment, Islamic resurgence or a deepening sense of Islamic consciousness drastically grew into a significant social phenomenon in Muslim areas in Mindanao and Sulu during the Mindanao conflict.

Even the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the most significant secessionist organization active since the late 1990s) has quite actively engaged in *dawah* activity in some parts of Mindanao for the propagation of “correct” or “true” versions of Islam to local Muslims, as I will explain later.

4 The Mindanao Conflict and the Rise of the Moro Secessionist Movement

4.1 Background of the Mindanao Conflict

As I have stated in previous sections, unlike the colonized Christian majority in the north, Muslims in the southern Philippines had historically formed their own sultanates or Islamic kingdoms. Because of this, they maintained their distinctive cultural traits and identities, fiercely resisting colonization by the Spanish. But since the turn of the twentieth century, through colonization by the United States, Muslim society in the south, known as “Moro Province”, gradually became incorporated into the colonial framework of the time⁷.

After the Second World War, the Muslim area of the southern Philippines was totally incorporated into a newly independent nation-state: The Republic of the Philippines. But this was not at all a happy union, at least for the Moro. Facing the massive influx of Christian farmers to the “land of promise” - a synonym for Mindanao - the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu began to feel more and more marginalized in their own homeland. Eventually during the second half of the

1960s, land disputes between Christian migrants and Muslim locals gradually lead to sporadic armed confrontation. In 1968, Datu Matalam, a traditional Muslim politician in Mindanao, declared the beginning of the “Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM)”.

In the first half of the 1970s, armed conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the MNLF led by Sulu born Muslim intellectual, Prof. Nur Misuari, escalated almost to the level of conventional warfare. Even Jolo, the capital city of Sulu province, was totally destroyed in 1974 as a result of heavy fighting. This “Mindanao conflict” has profoundly impacted many areas in Mindanao and Sulu, even to this day⁸.

In 1996, the MNLF agreed to sign a so-called Final Peace Agreement with the Philippine government, then headed by President Fidel Ramos. By this agreement, the MNLF accepted autonomy within the framework of Philippines sovereignty instead of total secession from the Philippines. In accepting this agreement, Misuari became the governor of ARMM (Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao).

However, this was not the end of the conflict in the southern Philippines. The final peace agreement and the new autonomous government led by Misuari did not fulfill expectations of peace and economic prosperity in the region, because of lack of promised support from the central government, corruption/nepotism, malfunction among officials of the autonomous government, etc. Besides that, the MILF, the largest secessionist organization remaining, was not included in the peace agreement and thus vowed to continue their armed struggle.

So far, at least 150,000 people have died and more or less 1 million people have been displaced as refugees or as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). Recently, in March 2014, the MILF finally signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Philippines government, led by President Benigno Aquino III. Still, other armed rebels like the ASG (Abu Sayyaf Group) and the BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters: a splinter group from the MILF, led by

Commander Ustadz Kato) continue their activities and sometimes cause sporadic armed encounters with government forces in the southern Philippines.

4.2 The Peace Process between the MILF and the Philippine government

As stated previously, the MNLF's popularity had rapidly waned among local Muslims after it became clear that the autonomous government led by Misuari did not achieve the peace and development promised for the region. In contrast, the MILF has gained popularity as a remaining legitimate movement for the cause of the Moro. One factor for this rising popularity is, as I stated before, the failure of the MNLF. Another factor is the MILF's various local activities, including social-welfare activities which I will describe later.

Originally, the MILF split from the MNLF in 1984. Since the 2000s, it has become the largest armed secessionist group in the Muslim south, counting at least 10,000 members. During the 2000s, the MILF caused intermittent armed confrontations with the government. At the same time, it has continued peace negotiations brokered by Malaysia and several other countries. One of the turning points in this peace process was in August 2008. Before that, the government refused to recognize a right to so-called "Ancestral Domain", claimed by the MILF as Muslim territory appropriated by Christian settlers throughout American colonization. By July 2008, the Philippine government and MILF had agreed to settle this issue by setting up an autonomous political body called the BJE (Bangsamoro Juridical Entity) to administer the area claimed as "Ancestral Domain."

However, before the formal signing of the MOA-AD (Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain) in Kuala Lumpur, the arrangement was rejected by the Supreme Court of the Philippines as "un-constitutional". Subsequently, the Philippine government cancelled the signing. This cancellation was due partly to strong opposition to the peace deal by some Christian politicians and businessmen who had political and business interests in the area. After the

abrupt cancellation of the MOA-AD, the peace process between the MILF and the Philippine government collapsed entirely.

Soon after this development, severe fighting between some elements of the MILF, especially a faction led by Umbra Kato, then a commander of the MILF 105th Base Command, and government forces assisted by Christian vigilantes broke out in Mindanao. The armed clashes continued until 2009.

The fighting inflicted incredible damage to the lives and assets of tens of thousands of local people, both Moro and Christians. In one estimate, more than 700,000 people were displaced as IDPs, and thousands of houses were destroyed in battle.

The author visited several “Evacuation Centers (EC)” or de-facto refugee camps in Maguindanao province in 2009 and 2010 for field research on the conflict. I noticed a lot of Muslim evacuees were forced to settle in these camps under miserable health and food conditions. Though several government agencies, international organizations like the UNWFP (United Nations World Food Program), and foreign NGOs have engaged actively in assisting the evacuees, it was not uncommon for some evacuees to get sick and/or die during their time in the camps, because of ill-health and lack of nutrition, especially for children.

In my field interviews, several Muslim evacuees told their stories, including one woman who witnessed five relatives killed by government bombardment. Some human rights groups and activists have raised criticisms that some elements of government forces committed serious human rights violations during the fighting, including indiscriminate attacks on Muslim civilians, torture and extra-judicial killings by the military and police of suspected rebel sympathizers.

When Senator Benigno Aquino III assumed the office of President of the Philippines in June 2010, he vowed and kept a promise to back the peace process. The Philippine government and the MILF resumed the peace process through the brokerage of foreign countries, especially Malaysia. A breakthrough came when both sides signed the FAB (Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro) in October 2012. In March 2014, after amending additional points includ-

ing power-sharing and the distribution of revenues from natural resources in the proposed new autonomous territory called Bangsamoro, both sides finally agreed to, and signed, the CAB (Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro). In doing so, the MILF and the Philippine government established a new milestone in the peace process in Mindanao⁹.

5 “*Bangsa*” and “*Ummah*” — National and Transnational Dimensions of the Moro Secessionist Movement

5.1 Ideological background of the MILF

In this section, I will examine the ideological background of the MILF as a social movement in detail. It is often pointed out that the MNLF is a more “secular” oriented ethno-national movement, while the MILF is more “religious”, putting their political ideology in the broad context of Islamism. However, in my view this evaluation is just a rough generalization. The real situation is more complex and contains internal dynamics and developments.

In the first place, the political ideology of the MILF started from a realization that the ancestral homeland of the *Bangsa* Moro (the Moro nation) had been illegitimately grabbed by Christian settlers since American colonial times. So, the MILF demands the right of return of this grabbed land and the right of self-determination or secession from the Philippines. In a more abstract way, we could say the political ideology of the MILF starts from the discourse of “forced de-territorialization” by colonization, then claims the right of “re-territorialization”. In this sense, the MILF has commonality with the MNLF in its “secular” (ethno-) national character in seeking secession or substantial autonomy based on the right of self-determination of “*Bangsa*”, or ‘Nation’.

On the other hand, we can also notice to a certain degree, a more “religious” or “Islamic” orientation in the ideology and discourse of the MILF. Interestingly, some of these “Islamic” elements of the MILF are quite trans-national in nature. Thus, the ideology of the MILF as a social movement is based on, a bit paradoxically, both national and trans-national (or even “global”, or de-territorialized)

dimensions. Concretely speaking, the MILF practices activities based on the transnational Islamic network and the idea or concept of *Ummah*. *Ummah* generally refers to a transnational (or global) Islamic community and it has been conceived as borderless and global in a sense that it contains all Muslims regardless of race, nationality, country of origin, and so on. I found this distinctive politico-religious ideal of the MILF in my own field research. Since 2007, I have intermittently directly interviewed MILF activists, including some of the members of the Central Committee, the highest decision making body of the MILF. From the results of my research, it is easy to observe a kind of transnational networking supporting the MILF's social movement.

For example, if you look at the life histories or backgrounds of MILF staff and activists, it is not rare to find a person who has travelled in various Muslim countries such as Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, or Indonesia. Some activists sojourn in these countries to study in Islamic schools and/or make pilgrimage to Islamic holy sites. Some are de-facto exiles from the Philippines, avoiding arrest. Small numbers of them join volunteer Muslim armies to fight a "*Jihad*" in Afghanistan or Pakistan¹⁰.

Additionally, in the MILF political consciousness and discourse, we can observe such "transnational" dimensions of Islam classing the MILF as part and parcel of development of the *Ummah*. The discourses of the late Salamat Hashim, a MILF founder, quite obviously positions MILF in the context of transnational political Islam. Hashim is a Maguindanaoan Muslim, originally from the Maguindanao region. He studied in Al-Azhar, a prestigious Islamic University in Cairo, Egypt. He was then influenced by political thought of the Muslim Brotherhood and Sayyid Qutub, a dominant figure of political Islam at the time. Besides that, he also formed his own political thought by examining various foreign Muslim intellectuals including Maududi of South Asia and Khomeini of Iran (Lingga 1995, Decasa 1999).

In his statements, he frequently legitimatizes the cause and struggle of the MILF in the context of solidarity with the global *Ummah*. For example, he has

stated that support for the *Bangsa Moro* by the Muslim *Ummah* worldwide is decisive and necessary in the struggle. He also appealed for material and moral support for the MILF from all Muslims in the *Ummah* (Hashim 2008: 245–246).

According to Salamat, the *Bangsa Moro* (Moro Nation) as a Muslim nation is itself part and parcel of the *Ummah*. As a result, he continues, it would be influenced by developments in the global *Ummah*, which includes all Muslims on earth (Lingga 1995: 57). In addition to this, he also reiterates that the ultimate purpose of the MILF is to establish a “truly Islamic” government in the ancestral domains of *Bangsa Moro* (namely; Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi Tawi, Palawan) and by doing this, fulfil the law and order which was given to humans by Allah. In the political thought of Salamat, this endeavor is conceived as jointly fulfilled for the sake of establishing a unified Islamic governance of the *Ummah* with Muslims in other regions, regardless of race or country (Lingga 1995: 5).

In terms of actual activities in the field, we can identify the influence of transnational political Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in the realm of social welfare, which I will relate in the next section. In any case, the MILF’s political ideology has two aspects/dimensions. On the one hand, it has a strong (ethno-) national character seeking the return or re-territorialization of lost homeland, based on the concept of “*Bangsa*” or ‘nation’. On the other hand, it also contains distinctively “trans-national” Islamic dimensions, both in discourse and actual activity, especially in its emphasis on the *Ummah*, or global Islamic community, which encompasses all Muslims regardless of national borders. Thus we must grasp the MILF in more complex dynamics between these dual aspects or dimensions.

5.2 Activities of the MILF and Islamic Resurgence

Here I will explain various MILF movement activities in the social, cultural, and/or religious fields from a more grass-roots level. In media coverage, the MILF is primarily known and described as an rebel organization engaging in armed struggle for a secessionist cause. Though this representation is not entirely false

in itself, it is not the whole picture, especially if you look at a more grass-roots level. In reality, military activity or armed struggle occupies just a small part of the various activities of the MILF movement. Mostly, armed struggle is conducted by the so-called BIAF (Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces), the military wing of the MILF. After the fall of Camp Abubakar, the largest MILF camp/stronghold, the BIAF has engaged relatively sporadic or small-scale armed encounters with government forces using guerrilla tactics.

Though military activity is an important characteristic which draws media attention, it is a relatively small part of the movement's activities. The majority of the movement's activists engage in various other non-military activities, including social and religious efforts. Before I elaborate, I will explain the internal organizational structure of the MILF.

Basically, the MILF has organized into a quasi-government, semi-bureaucratic structure. In some areas in Mindanao, it already provides de-facto governance, including legal courts based on *Sharia* (Islamic Law), *Madrasah* (Islamic Schools), a kind of police organization, and even a jail system. This de-facto informal shadow government consists of several "Committees" or "Departments". Each "Committee" has its own particular function and/or role for particular activities like the "Committee of Education", the "Committee of Information", and so on. Among these activities, social activities and *dawwah* (religious propagation activities) are especially interesting at a grass-roots level in relation to ordinary Muslims of the Moro community.

Firstly, I address the social activities of the MILF. From my research findings in the MILF influenced areas of Mindanao, I found that major social activities of the MILF are mainly conducted by the so-called "Social Welfare Committee", one of several committees of the movement. The Social Welfare Committee is in charge of various activities concerning the social welfare of Muslims in several MILF-dominated areas in Mindanao. For example, these social welfare activities include livelihood projects, management/assistance of *Madrasah* schools and orphanages for children of poor Muslims in conflict affected areas in the region.

Financially, so-called “*zakat*” (religious tax/alms giving) by Muslims is a major source of funding for these activities.

We highlight that this kind of social activity program shares strong similarities with that of several Islamic organizations/movements in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, or Hezbollah in Lebanon, (Clark 2004). At this point, we can observe other strong transnational influences from other regions (mainly the Middle East) on the MILF in the context of its social movement aspect.

Another interesting thing is that the MILF engages not only in social activity, but also in religious activity furthering Islamic resurgence, namely *dawwah*, or activities to propagate “correct” or “true” versions of Islam to ordinary local folks. This Islamic religious activity is conducted by the “Dawwah Committee” of the MILF and is mostly through cooperation and support from local *ustadzs* (teachers of Madrasah) *ulamas* (Islamic *Sharia* jurists/intellectuals), and so on. For example, in Magindanao province or in Sultan Kudarat province where I conducted field research, praying five times a day, eating “*halal*” foods, and wearing proper “Islamic” attire including “*hijab*” (head scarves), are emphasized among other practices as a result of Islamic resurgence, or the MILF *dawwah* movement. For more detail, please see Table 1, which reproduces the content of a MILF Dawwah Committee notice board.

This kind of *dawwah* activity is an important pillar for the MILF. As a matter of fact, it is thought to be an aim of the MILF Dawwah Committee to promote proper Islamization through propagating a “correct” or “true” version of Islam. In relation to this, I found that in some MILF areas, a kind of *Sharia* court system operates which judges criminal cases not by secular laws but according to principles of *Sharia*. One of my informants, a MILF activist, explained the issue of MILF Islamization as follows:

“The objective and intention of the MILF is to promote gradual Islamization (of the rural Moro community) in a consultative manner. On the issue of Sharia, it is already implemented in several areas (controlled by the MILF). However, it is not

Table 1 Contents of a Notice board by the MILF Dawwah Committee

Things you should do	Things which are “ <i>haram</i> ” (prohibited)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Friday Prayer 2. Conceal “<i>aurat</i>” (lower half of the body, and hair , if you are a woman) 3. Keep proper hygiene rules (such as limiting excretion to toilets) 4. Greet one another 5. “<i>Halal</i>” works/business (e.g. to refrain from selling alcohol, food containing pork, etc.) 6. Help each other as good neighbors 7. Read the <i>Quran</i> and obey the teachings of Islam 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To Skip/miss praying 2. To expose “<i>aurat</i>” to other persons 3. Failing to keep distance between different gendered unmarried persons 4. Smoking and drinking alcoholic drinks 5. Gambling or other amusements resembling gambling 6. Theft 7. Listening to music (this article was omitted recently)

(Posted in a MILF-dominated area in Sultan Kudarat province, February 2009. Original text is written in Maguindanao dialect.)

enforced in a rough-and-ready way. For example, we are not imposing the cutting of arms as punishment for suspects of theft. On the contrary, we obey proper rules and regulations, collecting sufficient evidence and witnesses before giving verdicts. And even if one is found guilty of theft, the ordinary punishment for him/her is not the cutting of arms, but fines, compensating the victims, and/or imprisonment, depending on the situation. Normally, local ulamas who studied Islamic jurisprudence in Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia would act as judges of the Sharia court¹.”

Previously, this kind of *dawah* activity and Islamization was more dominant in some parts of Mindanao, especially among the Muslim areas influenced by the MILF. However, in recent days, the socio-political influence of the MILF has substantially extended to areas beyond Mindanao island, including some parts of Sulu, Tawi Tawi, and Basilan provinces, previous strongholds of the MNLF. In the process of expanding MILF influence, it has been often emphasized that *dawah*, or propagating a “truly Islamic” way of living, is one of the movement’s objectives. For example, in a forum organized by the MILF in November 2007 in Sulu, a Central Committee member mentioned the Islamization of the lo-

cal Moro community as an important agenda item, on par with strengthening the organization, building up the military wing, and so on. As a matter of fact, members of the Dawwah Committee also joined this forum and emphasized the importance of teaching and practicing Islam (including *zakat*) as a guiding principle in the struggle for the Moro people.

We thus note that the political agenda of the MILF is, in a sense, also strongly connected to - or contextualized in more religious aspects of - Islamization in Muslim dominated areas in the southern Philippines. However, at the same time, it is too simplistic to say that the ultimate goal or agenda of the MILF is a “religious” one, and declare the Mindanao conflict a “religious conflict”. As I have explained, the basic and fundamental purpose of the MILF is to recover ancestral homeland, which had been grabbed/colonized by Christian settlers backed by the central government since the beginning of American colonization. In this sense, their ultimate purpose for struggle is not necessarily “religious” in the narrow sense of the term, but (ethno-) national; not unlike those of other various anti-colonization and self-determination/national-liberation movements in post-colonial third world countries.

At the same time, the socio-political movement that the MILF has adopted has been contextualized quite notably and distinctly into a cultural setting and religious character epitomized by complex dynamics between “folk” Islamic traditions on the one hand and a transnational Islamic resurgence movement on the other.

6. Concluding Remarks

In pre-colonial days, Muslim society in Mindanao and Sulu was strongly connected to that of the neighboring maritime Malay Archipelago. As a matter of fact, Islamization of the Philippines itself was a direct consequence of deepening maritime trade with other regions, including the Indian Ocean, since the thirteenth century. Islam was once an official political ideology in the Islamized sultanates of Mindanao and Sulu. Islam dominated not only religious and cultural, but also

political and legal aspects of life among the Moro at the time.

However, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the substantial influence and significance of Islam in the public sphere diminished considerably because of the US colonization and secularization of society in general. In this way, a kind of de-politicization of Islam had proceeded in Muslim areas in the southern Philippines since American colonization. Worse, Moro socio-economic status rapidly deteriorated and they became marginalized as a consequence of a massive influx of Christian settlers from Luzon and Visayas, and de-territorialization or displacement from their ancestral homeland.

However, the de-politicization of Islam has notably reversed as a consequence of both Muslim secessionism and the Islamic resurgence trend, which have a distinctive transnational character. As I have elaborated in this chapter, Islam has been emphasized as one of the socio-political or ideological pillars of the MILF. As a matter of fact, the MILF practices various social activities in line with Islam, including establishing *Madrasahs*, *Sharia* Courts, and promoting Islamic resurgence or *dawwah*.

In this way, I conclude that once marginalized Islam has re-emerged as an important socio-political factor in Muslim area in the southern Philippines, in the context of Islamic resurgence and the political Muslim secessionist movement. Another point I would like to emphasize here is that the MILF movement retains dual characters of both “re-territorialization” and “de-territorialization”. On the one hand, it seeks to re-establish autonomy and self-determination of its lost homeland. On the other hand, the movement itself has developed in the context of a quite “transnational” Islamic network based on a concept of a global *Ummah*. This transnationalism is also connected, for example, to cross-border migration (including pilgrimages, studying abroad, joining “*Jihad*”, and so on) of the Moros from the southern Philippines to Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc.

In this way, the socio-political movement of the Moro is conducted in a much more dynamic way, which includes the complex inter-play of local, nation-

al, and trans-national dimensions.

Abbreviations

ARMM: Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao

ASG: Abu Sayyaf Group

BJE: Bangsamoro Juridical Entity

BIAF: Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces

CAB: Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro

CVO: Civilian Voluntary Organization

FAB: Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro

IDP: Internally Displaced People

IMT: International Monitoring Team

MILF: Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MIM: Mindanao Independence movement

MNLF: Moro National Liberation Front

MOA-AD: Memorandum Of Agreement on Ancestral Domain

OIC: Organization of Islamic Conference

Time Table of Peace Process (1996.9. -2014.3)

1996. 9:	Final Peace Agreement between MNLF and Philippine Government brokered by OIC. MNLF agrees to join ARMM, instead of total independence for Mindanao. MILF does not join the Agreement.
2000. 3:	President Estrada declares “All Out War” policy against MILF. AFP attacks and conquers Camp Abubakar, the MILF stronghold in Mindanao. Salamat Hasim, leader of MILF, declares “Jihad” against the Philippine government.
2000. 4:	ASG kidnaps more than 20 hostages from Sipadan Island diving resort in eastern Malaysian state of Sabah.
2001. 6:	MILF and Philippine government reach tentative cease-fire brokered by the Libyan government.
2001.11:	Misuari faction of MNLF attacks AFP base in Jolo.
2003. 2:	AFP attacks MILF base in Mindanao as part of “anti-terrorist” operation.

2004.10:	Malaysian government dispatches IMT to Mindanao as a peace monitoring activity.
2004.12:	Peace negotiations on “Ancestral Domain” between MILF and the Philippine government starts, brokered by Malaysian government.
2007. 7:	Fighting occurs between ASG and AFP in Sulu.
2008. 8:	MILF and the Philippine government agree to sign MOA-AD (Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain) which would make possible the establishment of BJE in Mindanao and finally end the conflict. However, just before the official signing ceremony, Supreme Court of the Philippines rules it unconstitutional. After the cancellation, heavy fighting erupts between BIAF and AFP (including CVO). Hundreds of thousands of IDP flee to various ECs in Mindanao.
2010. 6:	Benigno Aquino III, newly elected president of the Philippines, restarts peace process with MILF.
2012.10:	MILF and the Philippine government sign FAB.
2014. 3:	MILF and the Philippine government sign CAB.

Notes

- 1 For a general socio-historical overview of Muslims in the Philippines, see (Majul 1973, Gowing 1979).
- 2 See (Majul 1973, Majul 1985b).
- 3 See (Majul 1973, Saleeby 1963).
- 4 See (Warren 1981).
- 5 See (Abubakar 2009, Majul 1973).
- 6 For detail on the relationship between so-called “folk-Islam” traditions and the Islamic resurgence, please see (Tokoro 2006).
- 7 For details of American colonial administration of Moro society, especially its educational policy, please see the chapter by Suzuki in this volume.
- 8 For general background, outline, development, and impacts of the Mindanao conflict, please see (George 1980, Majul 1985a, Che Man 1990, Tan 1993, Jubair 1999, Diaz 2003, Mastura 2012).
- 9 However, the BIFF, another breakaway Muslim armed group led by Ustadz Kato (a former MILF commander) opposed the peace deal and continue armed struggle. Also, a faction of the MNLF led by Nur Misuari has strongly opposed the peace process and caused a relatively large armed confrontation with government forc-

es in Zamboanga City in September 2013. The Abu Sayyaf Group also remains a security threat and engages in various de-facto criminal activities like kidnapping, and sporadic fighting with the government forces.

- 10 Detail and descriptions of the organization and activities of the MILF in this chapter is based on my fieldwork which I intermittently conducted on Mindanao Island, particularly in Cotabato City, Davao City, Maguindanao, and Sultan Kudarat, between 2007 and 2012. I appreciate the substantial help and moral support from Datu Michael O. Mastura during my field research in the area. However, I am responsible for any mistakes or shortcomings in this chapter.
- 11 The interview was held at one of the MILF strongholds in Sultan Kudarat province in February 2009.

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