

MIGRATION, *BALIK-ISLAM*, AND IDENTITY FORMATION OF MUSLIMS IN PALAWAN OF THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, Muslims in Mindanao, Philippines have had a conflict with the government. The religious-based conflict not only caused deaths but also forced people to migrate from Mindanao. One of the targeted places was Palawan Island. It is situated in the southwest of the Philippines – rather far from any other islands in the Philippines. It is then called “The Last Frontier”. This research focuses on studying the reasons for their migration to Palawan, Philippines and keeping their Islamic identities from 1970 to 2001. This research uses a socio-historical and socio-anthropological approaches. Survey methods and structured interviews are utilized to complete the literature study as primary or secondary sources. The theory of migration conflict from Nancie L. Gonzalez is used to analyse the migration in Palawan whereas for the analysis of the identity establishment, the theory of collective identity is utilized. As a result, the migration of the Muslims of Palawan, Philippines in 1970-2001 was a complex and recurrent event. The motive of the migration was the conflict in Mindanao resulting in economic opportunities in Palawan. As for the identity establishment, building the mosque became a symbol and a starting point for the Muslim migrant in Palawan. They had shared meaning in the phenomenon of Balik-Islam and their sense of belonging to Palawan as an Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) via plebiscite–referendum for integration into Muslim Mindanao or not.

Keywords: *Internal Migration; Balik-Islam; Identity Formation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is a Christian-majority country, where 90% of the population embraces the faith. After Christianity, Islam is the second major religion with 10-11% of the population. The arrival of the Spanish conquerors led to the spread of Catholicism all over the Philippines and brought about marginalized Islam. Spain that Islam had conquered made the Spanish keen to spread Catholicism in the Philippines. Spain conquered Muslims called Moro in the Philippines (Kamlan, 2004). They have been called Bangsamoro, a symbol of the Muslims' struggle in the Philippines. In the country, Bangsamoro consisted of thirteen ethnics – Badjao, Iranun (Ilanun), Jama Mapun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Maguindanao, Maranao, Molbog (Melebugnon), Palawani, Samal, Sangil, Tausug, and Yakan, which have occupied Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan Island (Kamlan, 2004).

In 1969, the Muslims formed Moro National Liberation Federation (MNLF) – a military force which waged war on the Philippines government a year after a massacre of the Muslim soldier known as Jabidah Massacre (Kuntowijoyo, 1994, p. 18).¹ Then between 1970 and 1975, there was the first conflict between the Muslims and the Christians in Mindanao (Costello, 1981, p. 171). This took hundreds of lives and made the situation more frightening. Accordingly, the remaining people preferred to save themselves. One of their choices was to migrate from Mindanao to other islands such as Manila, Quiapo, and Palawan. This last island is located southwest of the Philippines, which made it disconnected from other parts of the Philippines and did not join Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).²

Unfortunately, Islamic studies in the Philippines are synonymous with subsequent conflicts. This situation led to overlooking studies other than conflicts. This has drawn Isaac Donoso's attention who wrote about the "missing link" between the Islamic history in the Philippines and Andalusia (Donoso, 2015, pp. 247–273). This hints at the importance of the connection between the migration process and the keeping of Islamic identity. During migration, the identity of migrants will change to adapt and accommodate new life.

Based on the data above, this article focuses on why the Muslims of Mindanao migrated to Palawan and how they kept their Islamic identity in a new place from 1970, the starting point of the migration of Mindanao Muslims to

¹ Jabidah Massacre is the massacre of 28 Muslims by the Philippines forces. This massacre happened in Corregidor Island. This incident happened in March 1968.

² Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is an organization in Philippines that consists of five provinces, which are Basilan (not included Isabela city), Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao, and Lanao Del Sur.

Palawan because of the on-going conflict in Mindanao, until 2001, in which the third plebiscite - referendum for the Muslims who lived in the area other than Mindanao to join or not join with Mindanao. This research ended in the year of 2001 as there was a rare event which was: the third plebiscite – a referendum for the Muslims who lived in the area other than Mindanao to join or not join Mindanao – took place. This article aims to explain the argument for the migration of South Philippines Muslims to Palawan and to analyse the dynamics of their Islamic identity establishment in Palawan. Therefore, this article uses a socio-historical approach to explain the migration process to Palawan chronologically and systematically. In addition, the social anthropological approach is also used to see how the collective identity based shared sense – oneness and “we-ness” that was the glue to their actual experience or their shadows reforms the collective identity and their relationship with other Muslims in Palawan (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015, p. 175). These approaches complete the historical method of this article –the method which consists of four steps: data collection (heuristic), source test (critic/verification), data analysis (interpretation/*auffassung*), and historical writing (historiography).

Research about Muslims in Palawan can be found in the book *Muslims in the Philippines – a Magnum Opus* about Muslims in the Philippines by Cesar Adib Majul. This book was published by the Philippines University Press in 1973. This book explains the long history of Muslims in the Philippines from the Sultanate of Sulu to the nineteenth century, specifically in Mindanao, rather than Palawan. Also, *The Making of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Cases and Resolutions* (2004) by Jamail A. Kamlian was published by the Center for Security and Peace Studies. The chapter is called “Ethnic and Religious Conflict in the Philippines: The Bangsamoro Experience” and chronologically discusses the struggle of Bangsamoro in negotiation with the Republic of the Philippines’ government and what happened in Palawan until 2001. Besides, there are also other works about the Muslims in Palawan. There is a chapter in the book *Migration and Disruptions: Toward a Unifying Theory of Ancient and Contemporary Migrations* (2005, University Press of Florida) edited by Brenda J. Baker and Takeyuki Tsuda. The chapter was written by James F. Eder (American anthropologist) with the title of “Migration and Disruption on Palawan Island, the Philippines: A Comparison of Two Cases”. This chapter deals with two migrations which happened in Palawan in 1930 by the nomads from Luzon and Visayan and in 1970 up to the 1980s by Muslims. The focus of this chapter using an ethnographic approach is the impact of the development and the change that took place in the two migrations, rather than the process of the Muslims migration like in this research. Eder also analysed

the social integration between the Muslims and the non-Muslims there (Eder, 2010b, pp. 407–420) (Eder, 2010a, pp. 317–332) with his anthropological approach. Besides, Eder also wrote an article called “Ethnic Differences, Islamic Consciousness, and Muslim Social Integration in the Philippines” in the *Journal of Minority Affairs* (2010). This article discussed the Muslim ethnics and their differences with other religions in the Philippines in general, their plural characters and identities, the root of the conflict in Mindanao and the ecumenical nature of Palawan, and the social integration of Muslims in Palawan. Lastly, there is one chapter entitled “Palawan in the World of Islam” in the book *Palawan and Its Global Connection* (2014). Oscar Evangelista and James Eder wrote it to test the Muslims population in detail within the scope of global Islam using a historical and ethnographic approach about the Muslims in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. However, the information about the migration and the dynamic of the Palawan Muslims’ identity has not been analysed yet—the theme of this research.

MUSLIMS IN PALAWAN

Under President Ramon Magsaysay, the Philippines was in favour of such national programs as National Authority for Reforestation and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA), Land Settlement and Development Corporation (LASEDECO), and Economic Development Corporation (EDCOR) (Gross, 2007, p. 180). These policies caused significant migration to Bangsamoro (Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan) (Gross, 2007, p. 109). For example, the population of the Christians in Mindanao slowly exceeded Bangsamoro - it can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.
Estimated Population of Muslims and Non-Muslims in Mindanao 1960-1980

Year	Muslim Population		Non-Muslim Population	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
1960	1.321.060	23	4.364.967	77
1970	1.669.708	21	6.294.224	79
1975	1.798.911	20	7.348.084	80
1980	2.504.332	23	8.400.911	77

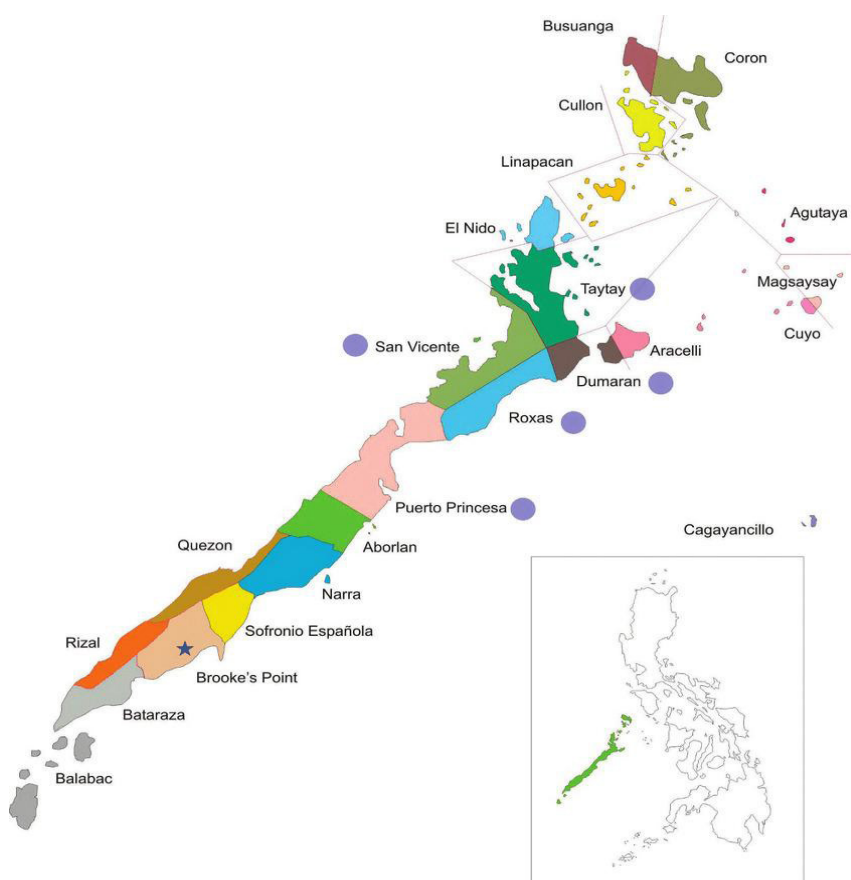
Source: *National Economic and Development Authority of Philippines*, 1980a

To respond to these policies, Bangsamoro formed Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968 led by Datu Udtog Matalam. The Bangsamoro

demanding that Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan be released from the control of the Philippines Government. Lately, the word “Muslim” was replaced with “Mindanao” allowing non-Muslims to join the movement (Gross, 2007).

The following years signed tension between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). This signifies that the mentioned-above national integrity approach failed and was replaced with political autonomy or self-governance for Bangsamoro after signing the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 (Gross, 2007, p. 91). The agreement was facilitated by the Late President of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, who served as the Chairman of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). As a result, MNLF took down their demands—from demanding independence from the Philippines to asking for autonomy for the Muslims in Mindanao.

Making the Muslim community the center or periphery was negotiated continuously, without exception with the Muslim community in Palawan. Eder sees Palawan as peripheral in the context of geography and politics (Eder, 2010a, pp. 320–321). Palawan is far from the recent center of the Philippines’ government, Manila. While politically, Palawan is far from Mindanao and not yet included in the area of Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).



Map of Palawan Province

Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sabine-Schoppe/publication/232683939/figure/fig1/AS:669003492102148@1536514270425/Map-of-Palawan-showing-the-municipal-boundaries-and-distribution-of-S-leytensis-Blue.ppm>

Historically, Palawan was an important region from the invasion of Spain in Manila and the Malay Sultanates in Sulu. Both of them fought one another to conquer Palawan because of Palawan strategic location despite its island which was far away and periphery (Eder & Evangelista, 2015a, p. 4). For centuries before Spain came, Palawan was one of the regions under the Islamic influence of Borneo and Sulu (Ocampo, 1985, pp. 77–78).

After the independence of the Philippines, Palawan has been a name of an island, ethnic, and also a province in the Philippines. Palawan covers an area of 1,703,075 hectares half of the area of Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (MIMAROPA) and becomes 5% from the national territory of the Philippines. It is the biggest province and the fifth most oversized island of the Philippines and is a province in the Philippines whose population growth is faster than that of the national population growth of the Philippines (2002 *Philippine Statistical Yearbook*, 24 September 2020). This is going to be explained in the following part.

In the 1970s, there were twenty cities in Palawan's census. Those cities were Aborlan, Agutaya, Araceli, Balabac, Bataraza, Brooke's Point, Busuanga, Cagayancillo, Coron, Cuyo, Dumarán, El Nido (Bacuit), Linapacan, Magsaysay, Narra, Puerto Princesa (Ibukota), Quezon, Roxas, San Vicente, Taytay. However, due to the area reorganization until the 1990s, there were already twenty- four cities in the year of two thousand. Table 2 shows the comparison of the population growth of Palawan and the Philippines.

Table 2: National Composition of the Population of Palawan

	1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1990	1990-1995	1995-2000
Philippines	2.8%	2.7%	2.4%	2.3%	2.4%
Palawan	4.9%	4.4%	3.6%	3.7%	3.6%

Source: 2002 *Philippine Statistical Yearbook*

The number of Muslims in 1970 and 2000 can be seen in the following municipalities as shown in Table 3. From the 1970 census, it can be said that there were 7.2% Muslims in Palawan whereas from the year 2000, there were 6.9% Muslims in Palawan - there is a 0.3 % decrease.

Table 3:
The Population of Muslim Palawan in Each Municipality in 1970 and 2000.

No	Municipality	1970			2000		
		Total population	Number of Muslims	Muslims Percentage to Population	Total population	Number of Muslims	Muslims Percentage to Population
1	Aborlan	8,410	129	2%	25,488	258	1%
2	Agutaya	4,203	0	-	10,413	63	1%
3	Araceli	4,444	0	-	10,870	12	0.11%
4	Balabac	7,912	5,360	68%	25,231	20,326	81%
5	Bataraza	10,176	4,408	43%	41,414	9,761	24%
6	Brooke's Point	26,961	3,702	14%	48,900	6,159	13%
7	Busuanga	5,905	0	-	16,287	13	0.08%
8	Cayagancillo	3,598	0	-	6,339	26	0.4%
9	Coron	17,852	21	0.11%	32,243	83	0.25%
10	Cuyo	12,534	0	-	18,253	5	0.03%
11	Dumaran	5,158	0	-	16,610	36	0.2%
12	El Nido (Bacuit)	7,358	0	-	27,029	31	0.11%
13	Linapacan	3,107	0	-	9,178	0	-
14	Magsaysay	9,840	0	-	10,883	2	0.01%
15	Narra	19,019	112	1%	56,845	909	2%
16	Puerto Princesa	37,983	278	1%	159,322	2,200	1%
17	Quezon	18,735	3,039	16%	41,669	2,060	5%
18	Roxas	16,341	20	0.12%	47,221	131	0.27%
19	San Vicente	5,179	0	-	21,654	17	0.07%
20	Taytay	11,920	0	-	53,430	80	0.14%
21	Kalayaan	-	-	-	120	0	-
22	Rizal (Marcos)	-	-	-	31,697	4,803	15%
23	Culion	-	-	-	14,229	7	0.04%
24	Sofronio Española	-	-	-	26,789	4,847	18%
Total		236,635	17,069	7.2%	752,114	51,829	6.9%

MINDANAO MUSLIMS' MIGRATION TO PALAWAN

This section discusses how migration from Mindanao to Palawan (internal migration) took place. There were three categories of Muslims ethnics that can be found in Palawan. The first was the Molbog Tribe the native Palawan ethnic who embraced Islam at the time of Sulu Sultanate. The tribe inhabited Balabac, the southern tip of Palawan Island. Secondly, there were Muslims who had been living in Palawan since the time of the Sulu Sultanate, like the

tribe of Tausug. Third, there were Muslims who migrated in 1970 due to a conflict in Mindanao which consisted of Maranao Tribe and Samal Tribe. From the third group, there were at least two reasons why Muslims chose to stay in Palawan, i.e.: civil conflict that took place in Mindanao and economic reasons. These will be discussed in the following sections.

A. Migration Flow to Palawan

Migration to Palawan took place due to the heated socio-political conflict in Mindanao where the largest Muslim population in Philippines had been living. There was an incident in Mindanao that resulted in a civil conflict in the country. It was Jabidah Massacre on 21 March 1968 which led to the massive migration of the Christians from the northern and center part to the southern one, i.e.: Mindanao. The Jabidah Massacre was the massacre of some Muslim soldiers on Corregidor island which was located in bay mouth of Manila, the place of a secret project "*Operation Merdeka*" (George, 1980, pp. 122–123). This event, then, brought about, for instance, MNLF and MIM to send young soldiers to Sabah, Malaysia for military training by a Malaysian professional, which was also supported by the State Minister of Sabah, Tun Mustapha bin Datu Harun (Gross, 2007, pp. 184–185).

Tun Mustapha's reason for helping Philippines Muslim was that most of the victim of the massacre was from the Tausug tribe – a native tribe of Tun Mustapha. Another reason why Tun Mustapha accepted to train them was that he wanted to put Sulu into the area of Sabah just like at the time of Sulu Sultanate. Tun Mustapha also helped MNLF with weapons supply to that group as Libya, under the governance of Muammar Qaddafi (Gross, 2007, p. 185). As a result, there was an inevitable civil war between Muslims, non-Muslims, and the government. That not only takes people's lives, but hundreds of thousands of people should also leave Mindanao to find safety. Costello argues that the implication of the conflict is not only migration, but also the increase of settlement segregation in Mindanao. On most of them chose to migrate out of Mindanao, for instance, to Palawan (Costello, 1985).

Regarding the choice of Palawan, Eder mentioned that at least there were two reasons for migrating to the southwest Philippines regions (Eder, 2015, p. 224). Migration had occurred there in the 1930s due to the interest in industrialization and agriculture while another took place in the 1970s due to a conflict in Mindanao. The second will be discussed in the following paragraph.

There were a few reasons for the migration to Palawan triggered by the conflict

in Mindanao. First, it was said by one interviewee, Abdul Haq, that his family decided to move from Zamboanga (Mindanao) because of the relentless of the civil war, and finally led him to move to Palawan (Datumanong, 05 August 2021). This decision was taken because in Palawan they had relatives who had been living there. The first time of arriving in Palawan, his family depended on the help of the relatives they lived with. The immigrants in general already had relatives in Palawan. They lived there and their living expenses were borne until they were independent. Their link to relatives and friends promoted their migration and helped them to rebuild their lives in a new place (Pooley & Turnbull, 1998, p. 15). Second, another interviewee, Norfatimah Sunggod, said that some Muslims families from Lanao del Sur and Maranao Tribe (Mindanao) who migrated to Palawan aimed to look for a job and economic chance (Sunggod, 10 August 2021). They migrated to Palawan, whether directly or had transit first to other places, because they considered it more conducive even though most of the people were non-Muslims (Omar, 12 August 2021).

B. The Migrants in Palawan

The Palawan island was a home for the Pa'lawan Tribe who had not known any religion along with Molbog Tribe, the natives from Balabac island, the southern tip of Palawan island (Eder, 2015, p. 226). This last tribe had accepted Islam since the time of the Sulu Sultanate. It was known that the southern tip of Palawan was included in the Sulu Empire. In the time, there were Tausug Tribe, Jama Mapun, and other Muslim tribes from Mindanao and Sulu in Palawan (Eder, 2015, p. 229). Datu Alimuddin governed the south area of Palawan and made it into a commerce area (Warren, 1981, p. 138). Palawan's famous commodity at that time was paddy. It would be exchanged with coconut oil and woven pandanus. The Muslims were centered in the south of Palawan. This was a mix of Muslim migrants who had stayed from generation to generation and the Muslims who had just migrated from the 1970s and after. Then, there was Jama Mapun Tribe who came from Cagayan de Sulu (now it is known as Cagayan de Tawi-tawi). The Muslim tribes in Palawan generally played a role making Palawan a trade route at the time of the Sulu Sultanate (Casiño, 1976). For example, Muslim tribes such as Tausug who came from Sulu island became bureaucrats and merchants in Palawan (Warren, 1981, pp. 137–138).

The people of Palawan consist of Muslims, Christians, and atheists. The Muslims in Palawan consists of the native Palawan people who accepted Islam when Palawan was still part of the Sulu empire, the only one in this category

was Molbog tribe who lives in Balabac island, the southern tip of Palawan Island. Besides, some Muslim migrants came to Palawan from the time of Sulu Sultanate to the middle of the 20th century. They included the tribe of Tausug, Jama Mapun, Maranao, and Pangutaran/Bisaya. Then the last category was the native people of Palawan and the Christians who embraced Islam and were called as *Balik-Islam*. This phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* will be explained later in chapter four.

C. Migration Motives

The migrants went to Palawan using boats that were called *lancha*. Sometimes cruises were cancelled due to the high waves that hit Sulu. Lail (informant, 43 years old) still remembers that her travel took a day and a night from Cagayan de Sulu to Palawan with 500 for the ticket for adults and 300 for children. Now, it costs at least 1500 from Cagayan de Sulu to Palawan, said Lail. The following is the result of interviews with a few informants. Lail and his brother, Hadi (37 years old) were born to a father from Java, Indonesia, and a mother from the Tausug tribe, Mapun island, Cagayan de Sulu Tawi-Tawi Philippines. According to Lail, his father first came at the time of the second world war:

“I have a father from Indonesia. He is Javanese. He has a father (Lail’s grandfather) who was famous, like a village chief in Jakarta. In the second World War, my father was sent by *Jepun* (Japan). Because he was fluent in Arabic, he let people know (teach) and people liked him. At the time, he wanted to marry for the second time, and my mother wanted him also. Father has two wives. I have a mother who is an old ancestor of Tausug, she was called *dayang-dayang* (princess). She has royal blood. If you talk to Haji Zainuddin here, people will know. That is why if you are smart in religion and Arabic, you will have the same respect as my father. My father teaches the Quran in Mapun and Palawan (Sahid, 15 August 2021).”

The migrations that were conducted by Lail’s family is called a return migration.



Lancha Boat

Source: FB Manilla Bulletin Lifestyle

Different from the other informant, Ria (62 years old) now lives in Sofronio Española. She came to Palawan when she was 30. She lived there using her savings before she found a job. Together with ten family members which include her parents, husband, and her siblings, she left Mapun for Palawan in 1989.

Then, Jean (33 years old), born in Zamboanga del Sur, migrated to Palawan when she was five years old with her parents in 1993. Jean came from the tribe of Sama Pangutaran/Bisaya. However, Palawan was not their first destination. In three previous years, her family lived in Jolo. The reason why they migrated was because of the conflict that took place in Mindanao. Other than Palawan, she thinks there were a few other locations such as Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi, Tawi-Tawi Province, and Visayan area. They already had a family who lived in Palawan. This family were the one who provided for them for a while before they got a job. When asked whether she still had any contact with the family from Mindanao, she explained that most of her family had migrated to Palawan and other regions in the Philippines.

In 1994, Fat (29 years old) must live apart from her father who moved from Lanao del Sur to Brooke's Point, Palawan. She was only two years old at the time. She and her mother still lived in Lanao because his mother worked as a middle school teacher. She, along with his mother and two brothers, moved to Palawan in 2002. Fat explained the reason why her father first migrated to Palawan:

“When he was still 24 years old, my father went to Palawan because he wanted to look for a job for our little family. He worked hard to have an income. Together with a family of his friends, he opened a roadside store that grew from time to time (Sunggod, 14 August 2021).”

Fat herself could memorize the condition of Lanao del Sur, despite her life in Palawan. Her family had to go shopping for daily life in the city once a week. Her homeland in Maranao, Lanao del Sur was undeveloped. Transportation to the town was still limited at that time. There, his father could not get a good job so ~~that~~ his father decided to leave and go to Palawan.

ESTABLISHING PALAWAN MUSLIM IDENTITY

This chapter explain the existence of mosque, *Balik-Islam*, and Plebiscite – Muslim collective identity in Palawan. Mosque became an effort and a symbol of establishing Muslim migrants’ identity in Palawan. At the same time, *Balik-Islam* phenomenon shows that there was a collective identity which shared meaning among Palawan Muslims with all of the Muslims in the Philippines. Lastly, the plebiscite which was a voting mechanism to decide whether Palawan Muslims wanted to be a part of Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) or not.

A. Islamic Teaching in Mosques

Akiko Watanabe explained that at least two functions of the mosque built among the Muslim migrants in Manila were there. First, the government built a mosque as a political symbol even though there was no Muslim community there. Accordingly, a Muslim community was gradually created there. Secondly, a mosque was built independently by the Muslim migrants who had long lived in the area (Watanabe, 2008, p. 3).

In Puerto Princesa, the capital of Palawan province, Muslim migrants worked together to build mosques (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 111). There is still no exact data on numbers of mosques in Palawan, but there was, at least, research about some mosques in the capital of Palawan. The first mosque that was built in Puerto Princesa in 1977 was Abad Santos Mosque which was initiated by Hadji Sirad from the Tausug tribe. The second one, *Dawwah* mosque, was built in 1991 when the immigrants from Maranao tribe came to Palawan and formed a community in San Pedro in the 1980s. Then the third mosque, Al-Farouq which was also a school was inaugurated in 1994.

Interestingly, the donation for constructing the third mosque came from an

Indonesian General. He donated about 100.000 thousand American dollars to buy the land of this mosque. Al-Farouq was located in *Barangay* Sicsican, Palawan. But mosques were built only because of the growing population which needs mosques. The fourth mosque, Al-Akhdar, was built in 2002 for such a reason (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, pp. 120–123).³ This mosque was established for any tribe. Consecutively in 2003 and 2007, mosques were also built. Behind this construction of these mosques was a story of how Mindanao Muslim migrants organized themselves despite of the difference in their ethnicity. Migration and Mosque are interesting phenomena that can be found in the community of Muslim migrants in the Philippines (Watanabe, 2008).

Islamic activities in Palawan were centred in mosques. Mosque was not only a place to pray five times a day, but to have Friday prayer, *Eid al- Fitr*, and *Eid al- Adha*. But learning activities were also held there, mainly Arabic and Quranic chapters memorization – there has not been any attempt to lecture about the wearing of *hijab* (head covering) (Omar, 24 September 2021). These Islamic activities are the wish of the community to provide Islamic teaching not only for adults but also for their children (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 129). This differs from the conditions in Mindanao where informal education had been there while in Palawan such education did not grow (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 132). Up to now, Islamic teaching like memorizing Quran and learning Arabic is still held in mosques and take place on holidays or long holidays like Sunday School in Churches.



Abad Santos Mosque: The first mosque built by Mindanao Migrants in Puerto Princesa.
January 4, 2008

Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/musa_abuaisha/2273135733

³ I had contacted Eder to obtain the information about the Indonesian General who donated this mosque. But unfortunately, he did not know.

Recently, rather than in the mosques, Palawan Muslims prefer to put Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) in schools. Therefore, the availability of the ALIVE teachers is also considered by ARMM as an agency that handles the implementation of the idea. Palawan State University became one institution that provides teachers training and offers elementary school teachers with Arabic and Islamic studies concentration (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 133).

B. *Balik-Islam*

Balik-Islam has been a growing phenomenon in the Philippines, no exception in Palawan. *Balik-Islam* is a term for the Christians who embraced Islam. *Balik-Islam* is also called *mualaf*. *Balik-Islam* refers to people who weren't Islam before, then embraced the religion. However, in the context of the Philippines, the Muslims in Palawan believe that people there are initially Muslims. Still, because of the political "condition" – the successive colonization from Spain to America, they left Islam. They assumed if there was not any colonization, most people would embrace Islam. However, Luis Lacar is confused about this phenomenon. He wonders how we can classify a person who does not know Islam, born from Christian parents, baptized in the church, and goes to a church regularly as a revert (*Balik-Islam*) when they embraced Islam – they are not considered a convert, as though they already accepted Islam, then converted, and then re-embraced Islam (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b, p. 42). *Balik-Islam* came up in conjunction with the conflict in Mindanao in the 1970s (Eder & Evangelista, 2015b). From 1970 to 1998, Lacar notes there were at least 498 Christians who converted to Islam in Palawan – the Muslims there call them *Balik-Islam* (2001, p. 41).

Nevertheless, this term at least has a historical-sociological root in the Muslim Community in the Philippines. They believe they are back to their first and original religion after they were "separated by a mistake in history". They have no control over the force of the colonial government (Lacar, 2001). The *Jamaah Tabligh*, a congregation that scripturally exercises the Prophet's *da'wa* model, supposes that if there were not any imperialism in the 16th century, the Philippines would be a Muslim majority country (Lacar, 2001, pp. 41–42). Instead to be called "convert", those who embraced Islam are happier to be called "*Balik-Islam*" or "revert". According to Lacar, they are displeased to be called converters (Lacar, 2001). The religious leaders from *Jamaah Tabligh*⁴ who converted those people also called them *Balik-Islam*.

⁴ *Jamaah Tabligh* is an Islamic missionary movement which was established in India in 1926 M.

The *Balik-Islam* phenomenon happened a lot. From 1970-1998, Lacar noted that at least 498 Christians embraced Islam or *Balik-Islam* in Palawan (Lacar, 2001, p. 41). While at the end of the 1990s, there were at least 3700 *Balik-Islam* who were known in a few provinces, such as Lanao del Sur (including Marawi city and Malabang), Lanao del Norte (including Iligan city), North and South Palawan (including Puerto Princesa, Balabac, Bataraza, Narra, Aborlan, San Vicente, and Taytay) (Lacar, 2001, p. 43), Zamboanga (Norte and Sur), Cotabato city, General Santos, Sultan Kudarat, and Davao. In Puerto Princesa, there is a non-profit organization called “Balik-Islam Foundation” which is managed and operated by the *Balik-Islams* who serve its’ members economic or religious needs (Lacar, 2001).

From the phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* which happened in Palawan, it can be seen that Palawan Muslims have a collective identity which is the same as Mindanao Muslims. This phenomenon confirmed what Snow had written that common origin, colonisation, then “history mistake” as a destiny based the feeling of *we-ness* that forced the Palawan Muslims not only to spread Islam, but also to do collective agency to form an organization to help the revert.

C. Plebiscite: Integration with the Government

On 23 December 1976, Imelda Romuáldez Marcos, as a representative from the Philippines Government, sat with Ali Abdussalam Treki, signed the Tripoli Agreement in Libya. This agreement was facilitated by Libya’s leader at the time, Muammar Qaddafi. The point of this agreement was a ceasefire between the MNLF military and the government of the Philippines. Then on 25 March 1977 President Marcos made a presidential decree No. 1628 which was an instrument to form an autonomous area in the South Philippines. The decree was signed at the National Palace of Malacañang, Philippines (*Proclamation No. 1628, s. 1977*, 2021).

The Tripoli Agreement failed because of three reasons (Suaedy, 2018, p. 241). Firstly, President Marcos divided Mindanao into two regions whereas MNLF in the agreement was in favour of clause that the autonomous area of Mindanao consisted of 13 areas such as Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan as a single autonomous area unit. Secondly, the central government forced a referendum⁵ for each of the areas, despite no such a referendum in the Tripoli Agreement. Words like “to be discussed later” and “to be fixed later”

⁵ Referendum or plebiscite in the Philippines is a voting mechanism of yes or no to decide for an issue.

became a boomerang for Bangsamoro in the future. Thirdly, Marcos used *datu* to undermine Nur Misuari's leadership in MNLF which also resulted in the weakening of MNLF. Such situation worsened when President Marcos insisted on holding a plebiscite or referendum because the majority of the people in those thirteen provinces did not embrace Islam. On the other side, the MNLF objected to the plebiscite because it was not in the Tripoli Agreement. This plebiscite brought about a conflict between Bangsamoro and the government of the Philippines Republic.

To follow up on the decision of President Marcos, the first plebiscite was held on 17 April 1977. The result of the plebiscite was as follows: 90%: Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi; 70%: Basilan, North Cotabato; < 50%: Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat; and < 20%: Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, and Palawan. The result of this plebiscite was set in Republic Laws No. 6734 on 1 August 1989. Only four regions joined ARMM which were: Lanao del Sur Province (except Marawi city), Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Basilan. It is obvious that the plebiscite held by the Philippines government and was not mentioned in the Tripoli Agreement was unfavourable to Bangsamoro. The people at least 18 years old in the provinces or municipalities deserved the right to choose in the referendum. If in a province or municipality the number of Muslims was not more than that of non-Muslims, it would be sure that the result of the plebiscite was to disintegrate with the ARMM. On the other side, Palawan as High Urbanized City (HUC), which consisted of 23 municipalities and 1 capital, was the only province opted for the plebiscite. In contrast, other municipalities, especially in south Palawan where its people were mostly Muslims, were not given a chance to hold a plebiscite. Accordingly, the plebiscite resulted in the disintegration of the ARMM.

Furthermore, there was almost no difference when the second plebiscite was held in 2001. Based on the presidential decree No. 9054, only two regions were opted, i.e.: Palawan Province and Puerto Princesa.

“The plebiscite shall be conducted in the provinces of Basilan, Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Palawan, Sarangani, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur and the newly created Province of Zamboanga Sibugay, and (b) in the cities of Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Kidapawan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa, Digos, Koronadal, Tacurong and Zamboanga.”

Four regions that had already decided to integrate with the ARMM in the

first plebiscite remained there but with different sets of questions such as the following:

“Do you vote in favor of the amendments to Republic Act No. 6734, the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, as proposed under this Organic Act, which includes, among other things, the expansion of the area of the autonomous region?”

While other than those four regions, the question posed was: *“Do you vote in favor of the inclusion of your province or city in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao?”* The result of this plebiscite was the province of Palawan and Puerto Princesa refused to join. On the paper, there were only seven percent of Muslims in Palawan and one percent in Puerto Princesa. It was apparent that for the second time, Palawan and Puerto Princesa rejected to join ARMM. The result of the Plebiscite above shows that Palawan Muslims chose to integrate with the people’s government. So, it was understandable if the relationship there between Muslims and non-Muslims was peaceful. They tolerated one another. Eder even argues that they had so close social relationships that Muslims came to the religious activity in the church (Eder, 2010a, p. 328). The integration of Palawan Muslims can happen because economically and politically they had the same background as the non-Muslims in Palawan (Eder, 2010a) – the phenomenon of *Balik-Islam* proved it. In this case, Lacar notes at least 498 Christians embraced Islam or *Balik-Islam* in Palawan (Lacar, 2001, p. 41).

CONCLUSION

Migrations of Mindanao Muslims to Palawan in the 1970s could not be separated from the political and religious conflict in Mindanao. The flow of the migration afterwards showed that economic factors as well as family and friend ties became the main reasons for the Muslims to move to Palawan. In the new place they made efforts to establish their identity using the following media: mosques, the memory of *Balik-Islam*, and plebiscite. Palawan Muslims used mosques to learn the basics of Islam and overcome the lack of Islamic education in traditional schools. Then, *Balik-Islam* and plebiscite represented that Palawan Muslims were a collective part of Mindanao Muslims who had shared meaning which was “narrative bonding” to their view of Islam. Uniquely, in the context of plebiscite, the narrative bonding as Muslims from Mindanao did not appear even though the plebiscites were conducted more than once – they rejected joining Mindanao. They chose to integrate with the local people.

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