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Research Article

Pagdadalumat ng Pagkatao: Intersectionality, Praxis, and the Negotiation of Muslim Identity in the Philippines

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Abstract

Muslim Filipino identity is dynamic and ever-evolving, shaped by historical, political, social, and diasporic forces. It remains entangled with colonial legacies, marginalization, and persistent othering. Historically, Muslims in the Philippines have struggled to identify with the state; in the 1980s, “Filipino” was their least preferred nationality. In today’s globalized world, the transnational nature of Muslim identity often outweighs national affiliations, reinforcing its fluidity and complexity. Thus, this study analyzes the changes and current constructs of Muslim Filipino identity in contemporary Filipino society. The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of 10 purposively selected participants—five Muslim and five non-Muslim. While the sample size is limited, it aligns with the qualitative research emphasis on depth over breadth, allowing for rich, contextual insights into their experiences. The indigenous method of *pakikipagkwentuhan* (narrative dialogue) was used to gather data. Thematic analysis was conducted in a deductive manner based on the lens of Covar’s *Pagkataong Filipino*. Using the *pagdadalumat ng pagkatao* (inquiry into personhood) as an analytical process, the data revealed the following major themes: (a) Muslim Filipino resilience and resistance; (b) fluidity of Muslim Filipino identity; (c) challenging narratives on Muslim Filipinos; (d) Muslim Filipinos on the duality of political and Islamic identities; (e) Muslim Filipinos as citizens and as part of the greater *ummah*; and (f) Muslim Filipino identity in the continuum of struggle and healing. Although limited in scope, the study emphasizes the significance of political, cultural, and historical consciousness in shaping Muslim Filipino identity.

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The formation of Muslim identity in a globalized world is a complex interplay of self-ascription, beliefs, and constant negotiation of cultural expectations, religious affiliations, and socio-political realities. While Muslims across the globe share core Islamic principles and practices, the identity formation as a Muslim is formed and expressed across international, national, regional, and local contexts. Kurbanov (2023) underscores that the distinction between Islamic and Muslim identities is crucial, as they reflect different dimensions of self-consciousness and societal roles, one that is rooted in the lived and contextualized experience of each individual.

The constant negotiation and construction of Muslim identity are influenced by self-ascription, sense of belongingness, and affirmation in a volatile, unpredictable, and dynamic world (Azis & Azis, 2022). However, the unprecedented global changes impacted the 21st-century Muslims facing identity crises due to wars, diasporas, radicalism, and marginalization. While the core identities of global Muslims are well-established—monotheistic and the total submission of self to the will of Allah, as this study argues, Muslim identity formation in the minority groups is scarce. Bectovic (2011) emphasizes the need for contextual understanding of how Muslims define themselves with the majority and other Muslims.

In the Philippines, the national identity of ‘Muslim-Filipino’ as we know it today is still a contested construct for various reasons. Historically, according to Lacar (1994), Muslims in the Philippines had difficulty identifying with the national government. For instance, being a Filipino was consistently the fourth preference by Muslims as their nationality (Abbahil, 1984). The deep sense of alienation among the Muslim population from a hundred years of colonization to today’s changes in contemporary society is unprecedented. In contrast to pre-colonial Baranganic societies (a basic socio-political unit in pre-colonial Philippines), where power and sovereignty thrived coupled with distinct cultures and traditions (Woods, 2005), identity formation has evolved significantly over time.

According to Social Identity Theory, group membership serves as a primary driver of identity development. The interplay between nationality and ethnicity based on one’s affiliation continues to shape the identities of Muslims in the Philippines (Erasiah et al., 2023). Cinoglu and Arikani (2012) further argue that individuals derive a sense of self from their affiliations with social groups, impacting their perceptions. Given this, the identity praxis of Muslims in the Philippines, rooted in phenomenological experiences and shaped by contemporary societal dynamics, remains underexplored in the professional literature. Most local studies (Aguila, 2015; Marquez et al., 2018; Nuemann, 2010) focused on the identity formation of Filipinos as socio-political constructs rather than on the lived experiences of minority groups in the Philippines.

Kemmis (2012) defined praxis as part of a person’s self-formation, including one’s identity. The identity praxis gives valuable benefit to oneself and the entirety of the human community in turn, “creating the good society by acting for the good of society” (p. 87). In this study, identity praxis refers to the ongoing process of constructing, negotiating, and expressing identity, but not limited to historical, sociocultural, and political contexts. In the context of the Philippines, Prospero Covar’s *labas*, *loob*, and *lalim* serve as one of the key dimensions in understanding Filipino identity formation, helping explain its evolving nature as it balances historical roots with contemporary realities.

Literature Review

Society and Identity

In general, the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that the individual’s values and beliefs significantly influence identity formation. The strong sense of identity formation, as explained by the theory, highlighted the pivotal role of group membership as a primary driver of identity development in a society. As such, Côté and Levine (2014) highlighted the crucial role of agency, in which individuals negotiate their identities within the given cultural frameworks. This

negotiation is not merely personal but rather collective, as group membership shapes how individuals define themselves in relation to others. In Thailand, a Southeast Asian country that was never formally colonized by Western powers, Thai Muslims in the Koh Yao region exemplify this negotiation: they preserved their unique cultural traditions, expressed in folklore that has catapulted their distinct local identity (Thongsakul & Hussin, 2025).

However, in countries heavily influenced by colonizers, the impact of hegemony is deeply entrenched in the social strata and moral fabric of society. The clashes of settlers' worldviews with indigenous epistemologies shape and influence individual and collective identities even today. Cinoglu and Arikan (2012) further argue that individuals derive a sense of self from their affiliations with social groups, which, despite hybridity, shapes their perceptions. In contemporary society, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) decolonizing methodologies and indigenous epistemologies exemplify the crucial role and essence of indigenous worldviews, not the imposing worldviews of settlers.

In colonized societies, indigenous knowledge systems are shaped by hybridity and the Third Space. For Bhabha (1990), hybridity refers to identities formed through cultural mixing, while according to Kalua (2009), Homi Bhabha theorizes "Third space of confusion and paradox, or liminality, within the context of (post)colonialism" (p. 25). The concept of a Third space is somewhat obscure, and a return to pure, uncontaminated cultural origins is simply a paradox. From a Social Identity Theory perspective, such hybridity shows how groups define themselves through both membership and negotiation. In the Philippine context, the "Filipino" identity illustrates this hybridity—once a form of resistance, it has been hybridized and remains under constant negotiation to this day. However, Covar's conception of *katauhan* (personhood) roots identity in deeply embedded cultural and moral concepts of the Filipinos. In line with Virgilio Enriquez's notion of *kapwa*—the shared inner self—Covar highlights Filipino identity as relational and rather than individualistic. This framework has been applied in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology), where it helps explain how Filipinos negotiate identity in various contexts (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Filipino Identity Constructs

In his work, *Filipino Identity: A Haunted Question*, Mulder (2013) explores the complexities and ambiguities of Filipino identity, describing it as both problematic and confused. He attributes this confusion, in part, to the "absence of vigorous national sentiments," which weakens a unified sense of Filipino identity. Furthermore, Mulder (2013) described cultural imperialism as a force that thwarts nation-building, arguing that it has undermined the Filipino sense of collective becoming. The concepts of Filipino identity and nationalism became more pronounced during the period of American imperialism, preparing the nation for eventual independence.

However, cultural hybridization (Kipng'etich, 2024), shaped by power dynamics, played a crucial role in identity formation through the United States of America's colonial influence on education. This impact was especially significant during the Commonwealth period, as it redefined and negotiated Filipino identities within the broader national framework. Iletto (2001), in his article, "Orientalism and the Study of Philippine Politics," notes that the United States of America, just like Spain, attempted to export its political and social values into the social stratum and moral fibers of the Filipino society.

The "Benevolent Assimilation" of President William McKinley was framed to give Filipinos hope for enlightenment, as hegemony was implicit in the form of subjugated education to instill American national imagery as a dominant mentality. Therefore, "creating an ideal colonial child," as argued by Habana (1989), fostered the idea that the benevolent mission to civilize the children of the Philippines was best actualized through the public education system. Constantino (1966) expressed dismay at the mis-education of the Filipino learners during the American occupation. The education that was implemented was highly colonized. Constantino argued that schools became a leeway for

the mis-education of the Filipino learners as he called for a more relevant education geared towards “economic emancipation, political independence,” and “cultural renaissance” (p. 1).

Furthermore, the conceptualization of national identity during the transitional government in 1935, despite the intention to adopt a normative approach to building communities, failed to incorporate the narratives of minorities. Instead of homogenizing cultural and class differences, Milligan (2005) pointed out that these related acts instituted the “ethno-religious conflict” among the dominant and non-dominant cultures, especially among Muslims in the Philippines. In Yakat’s (2005) article, the dimensions of being a Filipino were discussed as *pinagmulan* (origin), *kamalayan* (consciousness), and *kinalakhan* (upbringing). One dimension that is significantly problematic for Muslims is the *kamalayan*. As argued, their *kamalayan* is historically constructed, continually reshaped through lived experiences, and subjected to pervasive hegemonic influences imposed by colonial powers. The praxis of colonization was apparent in the psyche of most Muslims; thus, confusion still exists, and a deep sense of alienation. Consequently, this was one of the pressing factors why Filipinos, most especially the Muslims, had difficulty identifying with the Philippine government.

Muslim Identity in the Philippines

Muslim Filipino identity is not a static construct but a dynamic, ever-evolving one. Various factors contribute to one’s identity formation. The emergence of policies on national integration, socioeconomic affairs, political autonomy, and Muslim-Christian struggles has played a critical role in shaping Muslim Filipino identity within the sacred democratic space of a predominantly Catholic nation. In the pre-colonial period, Muslims in the Philippines had their own indigenous knowledge systems, which were largely influenced by Islamic principles. However, these knowledge systems were marginalized and excluded from relevant policies and across levels of governance. For instance, the limited recognition of madrasah education within the mainstream curriculum (Sali, 2023) and the exclusion of indigenous conflict-resolution practices in the formal governance structure (Candelaria, 2018). Smith’s decolonial approach recognizes and legitimizes Muslim epistemologies as valid and has a significant role in nation-building. For context, Islamic influence in Philippine education was already present as early as the 14th century, predating Spanish colonization (Milligan, 2006).

Absari and Morados (2020, p. 10) discussed that the negative stereotyping of Muslims in the Philippines was a “colonial blunder” that portrayed Moros in a negative imagery and reinforced the colonizers’ “divide and rule” policy, thereby undermining internal cohesion and the development of national consciousness. In addition, Majul (1895) explains in his scholarly article “The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines” that the term “Moro” was originally a pejorative label used by the Spanish conquerors. The rise of counter-consciousness against dominant cultural narratives underscores the binary distinction between East as colonized and West as colonizer, wherein Moros were projected as backward, uneducated, and uncivilized.

Furthermore, during the Spanish colonization, as part of the externally imposed identity, it was seen that the most efficient method of changing the intercultural narratives between Muslims and Christianized natives was through the literary medium of stage theater—the “Moro-Moro” and “Linambay”. In general, art fosters social inclusion and intercultural dialogue, challenging existing norms and advocating for marginalized voices (Silva et al., 2024). However, until the 1950s, these theater portrayals had been very popular in the Province of Cebu and some parts of Luzon and Mindanao; they depicted the identity of Muslims as murderous and treacherous. Most significantly, the plays revolved around the theme “the only good moro is a dead moro”. In colonialism, hegemony is also the imposition of settler worldviews while limiting the freedom of knowledge systems among the oppressed and colonized communities (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). For instance, Spanish colonization suppressed indigenous beliefs by imposing Christianity as the dominant worldview, while U.S. rule privileged Western education and marginalized local languages. Inevitably, the identity formation of

colonized communities was influenced and shaped by colonialism even to this day – for instance, the continued privileging of English as a marker of social status and a hybridized education system where the focus on Western epistemologies remains apparent.

In essence, Muslims in the Philippines were never subjected to colonial rule, thus retaining their pure faith in most of their culture and tradition. In Mindanao, even before the Spanish colonization, there were already established socio-political structures, for instance, the Sulu Sultanate established as early as the 13th century. The Sulu Sultanate was considered one of the strongest Southeast Asian thalassocracies governing the vast archipelagic and coastal zones. However, Spanish colonization became instrumental in curbing the growth and expansion of these thriving socio-political systems in Mindanao, including the disruption of indigenous governance. Moreover, Ingilan and Abdurajak (2021) argued that Sulu (Lupah Sug), for instance, is a reminder of the longest history of anti-colonial resistance in Southeast Asia—an assertion of sovereignty and the practice of Islamic faith that predates the formal birth of the Philippine nation-state.

Between Faith and Philippine Nation-State

In Mindanao, the established socio-political structure, at least among the Muslim sultanates, held localized powers. However, some polities existed without a set of strong socio-political structures, as Woods (2005) mentioned that, “...this fluidity, in part, was due to the nature of socio-political organization. They were based on relationships” (p. 6). Therefore, in a contemporary sense, the existence of multiple conceptions of nation-state emanating from the nature of polities and the imminent effects of colonial experiences among the natives, “impacted the production of the country’s historical narratives which shaped Filipino ideas and concepts of nation-state, religious and cultural orientations, and domestic relationships of the Filipino people” (Absari & Morados, 2020, p. 2).

The political aspect of identity formation among Muslims in the Philippines can be attributed to the development of the earliest conception of the nation-state and to the interplay between the political structure (Abinales, 1998). *Bayan* is not a new concept for the Muslim Filipinos. For emphasis, the word *Bangsa* in most Islamized ethnolinguistic groups and their languages associated with the Austronesian linguistic family tree means nation. However, early Philippine polities, such as the Rajahnates and Sultanates, inevitably prompted a strong sense of regional autonomy that persists today. These cultural diversities across the Philippines contribute to what Mulder (2013) describes as Filipino-ness, expressed through “little-traditional” forms deeply embedded in rich cultural practices and traditions, rather than representing history or the nation-state in general.

Moreover, Muslims in the Philippines believe in the concept of *ummah*, as the Muslim Brotherhood, where the concept of no race transcends across the world. However, the concept of *bayan* provides a leeway to expound such a phenomenon among Muslims in the Philippines as *bangsa*, especially those who do not identify themselves as Filipinos. The concept of *bayan* (Elumbre, 2014) is limited to a nationality-based framework rather than an inclusive, collective identity. This attenuated interpretation seemingly contributes to the weakening of Muslim Filipinos’ integration into the broader scope of national identity, which somehow shapes an incomplete and often exclusionary understanding of what could have been a collective consciousness.

Abinales (1998) mentioned in his study that the term Muslim-Filipino was a stamp of political allegiance to the colonial state. The Muslims recognized the finality of American rule despite the premise that Mindanao would be kept separated from the Philippines, as ruled by Filipinos who were non-Muslims. Years after the institutionalization of such a political structure, Maboloc et al. (2025) examined the structural poverty in Muslim Mindanao, where “the extent of the poverty of the people is caused by an uneven system that is driven by the vested interests of political families and clans that benefit directly from an underground economy” (p. 32). Moreso, Muslim (1994) also critiques

Mindanao's political dynamics, arguing that patronage politics and entrenched dynasties perpetuate inequality and obstruct genuine autonomy for Moro communities. Inevitably, these societal schemas on bad governance become social realities of Muslims and shape conceptions of identity that somehow influence the center-periphery dynamics in the country.

Conversely, in education, the institutionalization of the madrasah education program (MEP) in public schools (initiated by DepEd Order No. 51 s. 2004) provided Muslim learners with relevant and appropriate education. The mainstreaming of madrasah education offers essential exposure to Muslim Filipinos' culture and tradition in mostly non-Muslim communities where the MEP is implemented (Sali, 2023). However, according to Sali and Marasigan (2020), cultural variances are particularly evident in MEP implementing schools where exposure to Muslim culture and practices is limited. These cultural variances somehow reinforce unintentional biases as a product of historical conditioning and socio-political structures in place. The scenarios provide concrete examples of interplays between Muslim identity and the various forces—historical, political, social, and educational—that shape it within the multicultural context of Philippine society.

According to Azis and Azis (2022), the constant negotiation and construction of Muslim identity are influenced by self-ascription, sense of belongingness, and affirmation in a volatile, unpredictable, and dynamic world. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the experiences and praxes of select participants, both Muslim and non-Muslim, from an emic perspective. In this study, Muslim Filipino is used to refer to individuals residing in the Philippines, acknowledging both religious and national affiliations despite contention over the term's origin. More specifically, it attempts to answer the following question: What are the Muslim Filipino identities in contemporary Philippine society?

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to examine the complex and nuanced construction of Muslim Filipino identity within the contemporary Philippine context. Anchored in an interpretive paradigm, the research sought to illuminate participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes as they reflected on intersectionality, praxis, and the negotiation of Muslim identity in the Philippines. To capture these dimensions, the study employed culturally grounded methods that enabled participants to articulate their perspectives in an open and reflexive manner, thereby generating rich and contextualized responses and insights.

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of 10 participants who were purposively selected, half of whom were non-Muslim, and the other half were Muslim. The following were the inclusion criteria for participants: all participants must be Filipino citizens; non-Muslim participants must have relevant experience and exposure to Muslim communities; and Muslim participants must be knowledgeable about Muslim issues in the Philippines. Lastly, both Muslim and non-Muslim participants were expected to articulate their perspectives and narrate their lived experiences, particularly in the formation, negotiation, and expression of Muslim Filipino identities in a contemporary Philippine society.

Since the study was focused on the participants' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences, the indigenous method of *pakikipagkwentuhan* was used to gather data (Orteza, 1997). *Pakikipagkwentuhan* through *pasalita* (oral communication) was utilized, as it allows the free flow of information through their relevant responses rather than verifying facts. The salient factors influencing the conceptions of the participants are crucial to unfold through the use of *pakikipagkwentuhan* (narrative dialogue), a culturally grounded method of interaction. Moreover, in line with Foucault's (1972) notion of "discontinuities" and "ruptures" that question any central or dominant narrative,

pakikipagkwentuhan creates space for marginalized voices to challenge linear accounts of identity and history.

Thematic analysis was conducted deductively, guided by Covar's concepts of *Pagkataong Pilipino*. As an analytical tool, the triad of *labas* (expression; observable), *loob* (inner self), and *lalim* (depth) provided a framework for making sense of participants' narratives—a culturally grounded lens that enabled a nuanced understanding of Muslim Filipino identity in a multicultural society. The metaphor of *katawan at banga* (body and clay jar) was used to analyze the interplay between the internal and external dimensions of identity, making it deeply rooted and suited to the Philippine context. Furthermore, Filipino personhood perspectives on *makitid* (narrow) and *malawak* (wide) provided a contextualized understanding of Filipino personhood. In addition, a comprehensive literature review (Jaakola, 2020) was conducted prior to data collection to deepen understanding of a relatively narrow concept or empirical phenomenon. This ensured review coverage aligned with the study's objectives and conceptual grounding.

Finally, the participants were thoroughly informed about the nature of the study, including its purpose, the type of participation solicited from them, and their right to withdraw. The researchers were guarded by their personal beliefs and biases, as highlighted in the analytic memoing. The researchers, conscious of their personal biases, documented insights, assumptions, and evolving interpretations to maintain reflexivity in data analysis. The role of the researcher was that of an outsider.

Limitations of the Study

This study included 10 participants, who were purposively selected. The interview dates were initiated in November 2024. The participants' place of origin varied from Luzon and Mindanao. Other limitations are enumerated in the discussion that follows. First, the emergent themes may apply only to selected participants, not to all non-Muslim Filipinos or Muslim Filipinos. Second, participants are mostly from the lower-middle to upper-middle class and may have different experiences and praxes from the rest of the Filipino income class across regions, provinces, and districts.

The ten (10) purposively selected participants whose diverse sociodemographic backgrounds reflect a range of experiences and perspectives relevant to the research focus. Five participants identified as Muslim and five as non-Muslim, with the latter all identifying as Roman Catholic and tracing their origins to various parts of Luzon, specifically Batangas, Pasig City, Manila, and Bataan. They all belong to the Tagalog ethnolinguistic group. They are professionally engaged in education-related fields, including roles such as education program specialist, textbook author, university professor, policy analyst, and independent museum curator. Their ages ranged from 30 to 40 years.

The Muslim participants, on the other hand, were predominantly from Mindanao, specifically from Marawi City, Dimataling (Zamboanga del Sur), Jolo, Siasi, and Tongkil (all in Sulu), and represent various ethnolinguistic groups including Maranao, Maguindanaon, Tau sūg, and Sama. Their occupations span both academic and public service sectors, including roles such as Ph.D. student in Islamic Finance, government employee, madrasah teacher, master's student, and Arabic language instructor. They ranged in age from 25 to 49 years. The inclusion of participants from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds enabled the study to capture a more nuanced and comparative understanding of identity formation, particularly in the context of identity praxis rooted in the intersectional dynamics and negotiations within Philippine society.

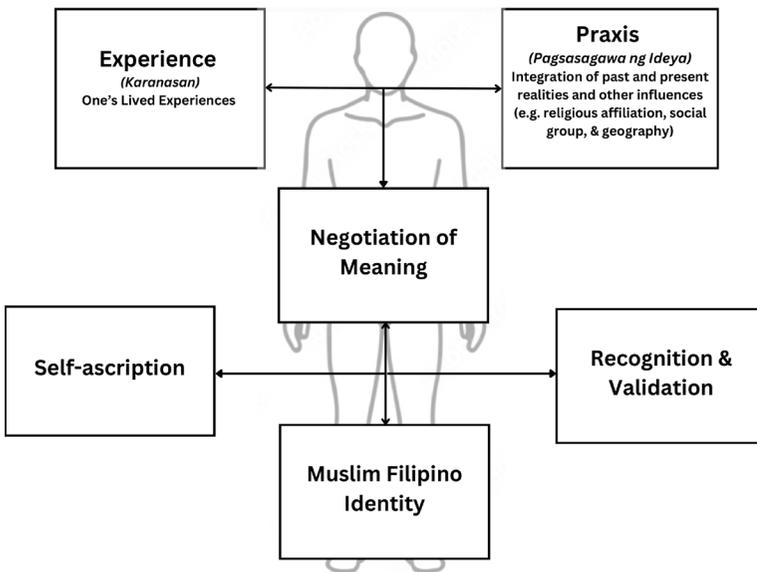
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, illustrates the *Pagdadalumat ng Pagkatao* (inquiry into personhood) as an analytical process of understanding the nature of identity within the context of Philippine society. The Muslim Filipino identity is not static but rather dynamically shaped

through the interaction of one's experience and praxis. The experience (*karanasan*) provides the foundation through one's lived realities, while praxis (*pagsasagawa ng ideya*) reflects the integration and enactment of past and present influences such as religion, community, geography, environment, circumstances, and collective narratives. These two forces converge in the negotiation of meaning, where individuals actively interpret and reconcile both their personal and social realities. From this internal process of making meaning, it influences the two crucial dimensions of identity formation: (1) self-ascription, or the internal claiming of identity, and (2) recognition and validation, the external acknowledgment of identity by others. The interplay of these elements ultimately leads to the formation of Muslim Filipino identity. In varying contexts, the identity formation of Muslim Filipinos is dynamic, continuously constructed, and shaped by historical, political, social, and diasporic forces in contemporary Philippine society.

Figure 1

The Conceptual Framework



Results and Discussion

The qualitative data gathered from the 10 participants ranged from thirty to one hour until data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interviews were recorded with consent, and the interview responses were transcribed verbatim. The horizontalization was performed to provide equal consideration to each statement of the participants, analyzing their rich experiences of the phenomenon (Sali, 2020).

Lastly, a thematic analysis was judiciously conducted, utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to identify common themes in the gathered data, guided by Covar's concepts of Pagkataong Pilipino. Table 2 summarizes the themes revealed in the data analysis. The subthemes highlighted both commonalities and nuances in the responses of Muslim (M) and Non-Muslim (NM) participants. These responses were carefully situated within the discussion of the major themes.

Table 2

Summary of Themes

Research Questions	Thematic Analysis	
	Subthemes (Combined from M & NM Participants)	Major Themes
What are the Muslim Filipino identities in contemporary Philippine society?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brave/courageous/<i>matatapang</i> (M & NM) • unsubjected/free people (M & NM) • struggle for self-determination (M) • resistance to colonization (M & NM) • historical injustices (M) 	Theme 1: Muslim Filipino Resilience and Resistance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identity as dynamic (M) • rooted in faith in Allah (M & NM) • relational identity through shared faith and practices (M & NM) 	Theme 2: Fluidity of Muslim Filipino Identity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media stereotypes and negative projection (M & NM) • discrimination and exclusion (M & NM) • othering of Muslims (M & NM) • limited exposure to Muslim communities (M & NM) • spirituality and transcendence (M & NM) • curriculum and teaching gaps on Muslim history and culture (M & NM) 	Theme 3: Challenging Narratives on Muslim Filipinos
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangsamoro as a political identity (M) • faithfulness as a marker of Islamic identity (M & NM) 	Theme 4: Muslim Filipinos on the Duality of Political and Islamic Identities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizens of the Philippines (M & NM) • sense of belonging within the <i>Ummah</i> (M & NM) • recognition of madrasah education as integral to identity (M & NM) 	Theme 5: Muslim Filipinos as Citizens and as Part of the Greater <i>Ummah</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • narrated stories and generational memory (M & NM) • identity marked by trauma (M) • structural marginalization (M & NM) • ongoing processes of exclusion, resilience, and healing (M & NM) 	Theme 6: Muslim Filipino Identity in the Continuum of Struggle and Healing

Muslim Filipino Resilience and Resistance

The results revealed through a thematic analysis that most of the participants, especially non-Muslims, agreed that the apparent characteristic of Muslim Filipinos is *matatapang* (brave). However, it has both connotative and denotative meanings, as indicated by participants' responses. The connotative meaning provided context for participants' experiences and praxis in describing *matatapang* as an attribute of the resilience of Muslim Filipinos who have endured historical injustices in both the past and present, while the denotative meaning captured the direct observation of the act of courage.

Based on the non-Muslim responses, *Matapang* is mostly denotative, and their experiences reflected the *labas* component in Covar's theory, since their conceptualization of Muslim Filipino identity was largely based on observable experiences as outside observers. Furthermore, the experiences of the non-Muslim participants are vast, and they range from what they read in books, watch in the media, and even from the narratives passed down from generation to generation. Some of the relevant responses from the non-Muslim participants:

"For example, my student Iman would say, 'I am brave... I am Muslim.' He had that kind of mindset back in third grade."—P2-NM

"So, I feel that Muslims always project a strong image because they refuse to subject themselves to the long history of struggle—fighting to remain outside the influence of colonization. That's the lens of history."—P4-NM

Matapang, as expressed in action, is related to Covar's *loob*, where internal values and beliefs are outwardly expressed, as manifested by the Muslim Filipinos. However, the characteristic of *katapangan* (bravery) is also seen to reinforce remnants of colonial stereotypes that present Muslim Filipinos unfavorably. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) critiques how Western colonial powers constructed the idea of "Orient" to include Muslims as irrational and backward, and "a problem to be solved and confined" (p. 207). During the Spanish colonial rule, Muslims in the Philippines were considered barbaric, uncivilized, and uneducated. These attributes align with the term *indio*, which referred to the native inhabitants of the Philippines (mostly a Christianized population) during the colonial period. This label imposed inferiority and servitude.

Furthermore, one significant form of Muslim resistance to colonial rule was the act of *juramentado*. It is a pejorative term coined by the colonizers used to describe Muslim warriors negatively with dehumanizing connotations, reducing this act of resistance to merely people who ran amok. It contributed to the enduring negative stereotypes of Muslims in a national discourse, which perpetuated an idea of fear. Two of the non-Muslim participants mentioned how this negative stereotype of being *matatapang* was evident during their formative years.

"Secondly, there is this stereotype that Muslims in Mindanao go 'juramentado.' I grew up in Luzon hearing stories about rido (clan feuds) and how they are fierce. That's the common narrative. They are seen as brave, but it's also a stereotype that instills fear."—P3-NM

"As children, we were told things like, 'If you misbehave, I'll give you to the Muslims on the corner.' That kind of narrative was common—Muslims were seen as people who would take you away. I grew up in an environment where Muslims were viewed very negatively."—P4-NM

In the context of Tau sūg, Ingilan and Abdurajak (2021) discussed the term *parang sabil*, which may have been derived from the *Bahasa Sug* "parrang", which means to fight, and "sabil" from Arabic *fi sabilillah* (in the way of Allah). The term *parang sabil* has been contentious, and an attempt to explore its axiological meaning as academic discourse is understudied. However, we argue that *parang sabil*, although it encapsulates the concept of *matatapang*, can also be viewed as part of the Filipino national value for two reasons: (1) its nature as an ascetic practice characterized by the absence of worldly pleasure employing *agama* (religion) for liberation; and (2) a patriotic act in defense of one's homeland against colonizers and invaders.

In addition, *martabbat* (honor or pride) is a cultural value closely intertwined with the proud identity of Muslims in the Philippines. However, *martabbat* is closely intertwined with *rido* (clan rivalries), which frequently reframe bravery as part of Muslim culture in the Philippines (Kreuzer, 2005). In this context, identity is negotiated and shaped through social interactions and communal

duties, with displays of valor sometimes contested within the framework of Islam and *Matapang* in Filipino society. Consequently, in Tau sūg culture, *martabbat* is more than honor or pride; it encompasses one's emotional-moral compass and social respect within the community. Moreover, the experiences are more drawn from the colonial past, where hegemony was apparent from the colonizers and the struggle to resist subjugation.

Admittedly, Muslim participants explained that various factors like colonization, projection, marginalization, and protection of the religion influence the characteristic of being brave. The Muslim participants shared the following responses:

"Our bravery is often used against us, but there were times when we truly had to stand by that identity. There were moments when we were oppressed [...] Our struggles have lasted for so long—from the Spanish era to the American colonial period, and now under the Philippine government. At some point, we had to uphold our bravery to ensure that our identity and recognition as true Muslims remained intact, in contrast to the colonizing powers. That connection was never broken."—P6-M

"Perhaps our bravery comes from the fact that we are denied justice. You see, I believe that a true Muslim upholds integrity. And if you have integrity, then fairness, humility, and justice naturally follow. That is where the depth of Muslim bravery lies."—P7-M

Inevitably, there is a need to safeguard oneself and one's beliefs from subjugation, to resist historical injustices, and to uphold true identity. According to Absari and Morados (2020), colonial experiences among Filipinos impacted the production of the country's historical narratives and greatly influenced the present identity as a confused nation. Lastly, the characteristic of *katapangan* in this context has shaped the resilience of Muslim Filipino identity amid societal challenges that seek to undermine it.

Fluidity of Muslim Filipino Identity

The identity praxes formed from years of colonization led to more nationalistic sentiments, at least in various movements across the country, and fueled a people's revolution longing for freedom and independence from the foreign colonizers. One of the participants emphasized the significance of recognizing that both Muslims and non-Muslim endured similar colonial experiences. Furthermore, the participant recognized that Muslim Filipino identity is pure in the sense that it was never subjected to any colonial influence, especially Islam as an integral religion among its followers.

"Looking back at history, I would say that Muslims in the Philippines were never truly conquered. Their identity as Filipino Muslims remains pure. You can't blame them for feeling different because their fate was not the same as those in Luzon and the Visayas. You can't fault them for not seeing themselves as part of the broader Filipino identity."—P3-NM

In general, the Filipino struggle against colonization should not be seen in isolation but as a part of the national collective consciousness. At present, the experience of Muslim Filipinos occupies a distinct and yet often misunderstood narrative where resistance was deeply rooted in their deep spiritual and cultural foundations. These foundations of faith in Islam provide clear adherence to the principles of *tawhid* (oneness of God) and a profound sense of belonging to a larger community rooted in *ummah* (the global Muslim community). Also, it is evident that the fluidity of Muslim Filipino identity is grounded in the principle of relationality and the sincere practice of doing good for others—whether Muslim or non-Muslim—despite experiences of othering and exclusion in society. A non-Muslim participant shared experiences showing that Muslims in the Philippines are more than what the *labas* (outward expression or observable traits) reveal, emphasizing instead the *loob* (inner self), where the practice of goodness is evident, despite the negative stereotype and discrimination:

“And I also saw that there is unfairness on their part, that the discrimination or persistence of discrimination against people like them is undeserved, since they are actually more good, fair, and humane than most—especially in their practice of prayer and devotion. It is truly admirable. [...] Moros are seen as restless in the marketplace—selling. But only to find out that they actually possess the full qualities of a liberated mindset, of a consciousness that has not been subjugated, with a perspective of goodness and freedom.”—P1-NM

Woods (2005) noted that in some pre-colonial societies, “the nature of socio-political organization [...] was based on relationships” (p. 6). In a broader sense of relationality, this fluidity can also be attributed to core beliefs that form the *lalim* (depth) of their identity, which greatly influences how Muslim Filipinos navigate their place in contemporary Philippine society. The *lalim* is anchored in a strong belief in God’s existence and transcendence. It is evident in their practices where Islam’s core tenets became the basis of doing *kabaitan* (goodness) to *kapwa* (our shared identity) as a way of life.

“First and foremost, we are all human beings created by God. But for me, being Muslim comes before being Filipino. It is deeply ingrained in both our thoughts and emotions. As Muslims, everything we do is done with sincerity (ikhlas) for the sake of Allah (SWT).”—P9-M

Challenging Narratives on Muslim Filipinos

Covar’s metaphor of *katawan at banga*, the concept of *Labas* as *ibang tao* (outsider/not one of us) highlights the term *makitid* as a narrow perspective (knowing someone only as an individual) in understanding others within the Filipino society context. Results provide evidence of some challenging narratives about Muslim Filipinos, mostly rooted in adverse constructs. Based on the analysis of data, two sub-themes emerged: negative stereotyping and othering portrayed in the media.

The negative stereotyping of Muslim Filipinos, according to non-Muslim participants, often stems from limited exposure to Muslim culture, particularly in predominantly non-Muslim communities. The concept of *makitid*, unlike *malawak*, illustrates how narrow perspectives may obscure the true identity of a person. Narratives revealed that a handful of non-Muslim participants admitted that negative stereotypes were already evident during their upbringing, as reinforced by media portrayals:

“This current generation has likely heard stories from their families about their early interactions with Muslims, and those narratives may have simply carried over—reinforced by media portrayals.”—P6-M

“Proper education at home is still crucial, but the reality is, it doesn’t always happen. The question is, what if parents themselves are not properly educated? These biases are simply passed down from generation to generation.”—P4-NM

Furthermore, the advent of new media technologies has provided a platform for biased coverage and news sensationalism, leading to the processes of othering among the Muslim population. Such negative stereotypes have fueled unnecessary fear of Muslims, portraying them as barbaric and lawless, which parallels the colonial-era depiction of *juramentados* during Spanish rule. Some participants expressed how othering and exclusion are becoming prominent in various media platforms:

“For me, this is where the role of media really comes in—the importance of how Muslims are represented. I just wish that those working in media, like directors and scriptwriters, were more knowledgeable about these people. Because right now, some portrayals are very bad.”—P4-NM

“And then, if you look at social media, there’s a lot of teasing and banter. I’ve read many posts—though I don’t engage in them—where people from Luzon, particularly those from so-called Imperial Manila, act as if they are superior. There’s mockery toward the Bisaya, and Muslims are often excluded from the conversation, even though many of them have moved to Manila to seek better opportunities.”—P3-NM

"I would say that if I had been exposed to documentaries and media coverage with a different perspective, my perceptions in high school or even grade school might have been different. I remember in Grade 2, there was the Burnham kidnapping in Palawan, where two Americans were abducted. At that time, the narratives revolved around those two Americans. While there were attempts to be fair, you could still see the discrepancies."—P2-NM

Moreover, the lesser emphasis on relevant Muslim conceptions in the competencies of the basic education curriculum influenced the current perceptions of non-Muslim Filipinos, where limited knowledge on the contributions of Muslims in nation-building is often overlooked. (Sali, 2020; Sali, 2021; Sali, 2022). One of the participants implicitly stated the need for proper and comprehensive integration of Philippine Islamic history in the basic education curriculum:

"If we look at the AP (Araling Panlipunan) curriculum from elementary to secondary school, there is no proper narration of Islamic history in the Philippines. Sir, it's really not there. It's only in college that discussions about it happen—actually, even that is disappearing now since the subject has been replaced by Readings in Philippine History."—P4-NM

Additionally, in the slightest expression, Covar's *labas* is evident among Muslim Filipino identity, as one of the Muslim participants mentioned his experience that other people misconstrued his strong accent as being mad or angry. The participant expressed:

"I'm not saying that I don't experience discrimination—for example, having a strong accent that makes others think you are immediately angry—but I try not to pay too much attention to it. As Muslims, we need to engage and interact with others."—P9-M

The likely assertive manner of speech is apparent to most Islamized ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Tau sūg and Maranao. They are known for their strong, assertive voice in normal conversation; however, this might be offensive to others unfamiliar with the language. However, the potential for misinterpretation highlights the need for cultural sensitivity and, most importantly, for creating mutual understanding by bridging gaps among ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines.

Muslim Filipinos, as minorities, occupying Bhabha's (1990) Third space, exemplify a hybridized negotiation of identity amid a dominant structure in the Philippine society. Based on the participants' responses, Muslims are often subjected to exclusion and marginalization in various aspects, including policies. Their minority status further reinforces this in a predominantly Catholic nation, and by negative stereotypes fueled by news sensationalism. However, Covar's concept of *Lalim* (depth) articulates that the true essence of a Filipino person lies within their innermost self. Some of the participants conveyed *lalim* as spirituality and transcendence:

"Second, it is admirable that they prioritize their God and faith over the pursuit of material life in this world. Realities like this make me feel guilty, realizing that I was the one making judgments when, in truth, I was the one mistaken [laughing]."—P1-NM

"I learned a lot from the course and realized that Muslims are no different from us Christians. We are the same—we share the same beliefs. Perhaps we only differ in names and certain dogmas, but we both believe in God."—P4-NM

"But if we follow the Muslim model, aside from being courageous, it also emphasizes patience. This is what we follow in the Qur'an and Hadith—qualities that a true Muslim must embody."—P7-NM

For Muslims, spirituality entails full submission to the Creator and adherence to Islamic teachings (e.g., peace and brotherhood). Thus, the negative portrayals of the *Labas* (expression; observable) of Muslim Filipinos misrepresent their genuine spirituality, making such depictions a misnomer. The

next theme will capture the continuous recreation and negotiation of Muslim Filipino identities, influenced by intersectionality within one's culture and Philippine society.

Muslim Filipinos on the Duality of Political Identity and Islamic Identity

Truth is socially constructed, as is one's identity. Most of the Muslim participants categorized Muslim Filipino identity as the duality of the term *Bangsamoro* as a political term and the 'Followers of Islam' as an Islamic identity. The latter is based on ascription, and the former is non-negotiable. Most of the Muslim participants highlighted Islam as a non-negotiable identity. This Islamic identity is heavily influenced by the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the monotheistic belief in the oneness of God—Allah.

The concept of the Third space, as articulated by Bhabha (1990), is apparent in the narratives of the Muslim participants. One of the participants shared that identifying as a *Bangsamoro* adds another layer of complexity to being a Muslim in the Philippines context:

"I agree that Bangsamoro identity adds another layer of complexity to being Muslim in the Philippines. For me, it is a recent phenomenon. As a Tau sūg, I don't consider it synonymous with being Muslim in the Philippines. Many Muslims do not identify as Bangsamoro. For example, if an Arab comes to the Philippines, you wouldn't just give him a Bangsamoro identity card—it's an entirely different context and history."—P8-M

The *Bangsamoro*, as a political term, refers to a community with an ethno-religious identity shaped by Moro struggles and aspirations for self-determination. This collective history among Islamized ethnolinguistic groups (as Muslims) in the Philippines is continuously shaped by resistance and negotiation, both internally (within their cultural affairs) and externally (such as other relevant stakeholders like the government). Kurbanov (2023) underscores that the distinction between Islamic and Muslim identities is crucial, as they reflect different dimensions of self-consciousness and societal roles, one that is rooted in the lived and contextualized experience of each individual.

For many Muslim Filipinos, *Bangsamoro* identity is not static but rather shaped continually and negotiated as argued in the third space of being a Muslim and a Filipino. However, Muslim participants differ in terms of their *Bangsamoro* ascription and its non-negotiability in one respect. One of the Muslim participants is proud to be called a *Bangsamoro*, highlighting the sense of pride ascribed to the term in the context of resistance against colonization.

"That's how it is. I only knew the term Moro, but I wasn't really familiar with Bangsamoro before. However, when I learned about it and became curious about its origins, I realized that I am proud to be Bangsamoro—especially considering our history, where our Muslim heroes fought against colonization by the Spaniards. In that aspect, I feel even prouder."—P7-M

The rest of the Muslim participants, however, prefer not to be associated with it, recognizing the potential constraints and limitations that come with ascribing the political identity. These findings are consistent with the previous studies that underscore the dynamic nature of identity formation.

Based on the analysis of data, there is a clear distinction between the duality of political and Islamic identity among Muslim participants. While some Muslim participants embraced duality as complementary, others prefer to prioritize Islamic identity as non-negotiable and transcendent. As such, navigating through secular and pluralistic contexts inevitably creates a duality of political and Islamic identity. The analysis of data suggests that the term *Bangsamoro*, as a political identity, becomes increasingly context-dependent and carries geopolitical implications among Muslim participants. Some of the participants expressed their narratives:

“Does being geographically or politically separated by law diminish one’s identity as a Moro or Bangsamoro? As a Moro who grew up outside the BARMM territory, does that lessen my identity as a Moro or Bangsamoro, just because I have lived outside of it for a long time? That’s how I see it. It might just be a political perspective.”—P6-M

“I don’t want to confine myself to a single political affiliation. I was born in Sulu, studied in Marawi, and now work in Zamboanga. Because of that experience, my perspective on these matters has broadened. [...] If we look at Islam on a wider scale, it goes beyond that. Nowadays, many people are converting to Islam (Balik Islam). If we limit ourselves only to the Bangsamoro identity, it feels restrictive to me. Whereas being Muslim is much broader—it is about submission to the will of God.”—P9-M

“If your political mindset is rooted in the Sultanate, or if it is revolutionary, then you are boxed into a particular ideology. But if your ideology is shaped by foreign education, that is another framework altogether. When you return home, the discourse shifts. In the madrasah framework, the discourse is about establishing a just and moderate nation. These are two similar but fundamentally different realities.”—P10-M

Muslim Filipinos as Citizens and as Part of the Greater *Ummah*

Contrary to the study conducted by Lacar (1994), where Muslims in the Philippines had difficulty identifying with the Philippine government, and Abbahil (1984), being a Filipino was consistently the fourth preference as their nationality, most of the Muslim participants accepted the term Filipino as citizenship despite the colonial connotation, except for one participant where acceptance came from uncontrollable factors of the national system and policies in place.

While most Muslim participants accepted the concept of Filipino citizenship as a legal and civic identity, one of the participants expressed hesitation and uneasiness about the imposed national system over the lived cultural realities as a member of an unsubjected ethnolinguistic group. The participant recounted:

“I don’t debate with myself about whether or not I am a Muslim. But when it comes to being Filipino or Bangsamoro, it feels like there’s still an option. If you’re not politically active in the Bangsamoro region, you don’t necessarily have to claim that identity because I can still be who I am as a Muslim.”—P6-M

This finding is consistent with Malayang’s (2001) study, which argued that the present Philippine state inherited the colonial system and continues to impose various legal frameworks, including institutions rooted in colonial policies. For others, the contention also emanates from the term “Filipino” as a remnant of the violent and oppressive colonial past—King Philip II of Spain as a reminder of centuries of forceful assimilation and inhumane cruelties perpetuated against the Muslims who fought and resisted any foreign invaders.

The strong sense of identity formation, as explained by the Social Identity Theory, highlighted the pivotal role of group membership as a primary driver of identity development. Cinoglu and Arikan (2012) further argue that individuals derive a sense of self from their affiliations with social groups, impacting their perceptions.

In the Philippines, there are at least 13 Islamized ethnolinguistic groups recognized by the government. Although all groups are considered Muslims and followers of Islam, they communicate in various languages and have their distinct cultures and traditions. While the interplay between nationality and ethnicity continues to shape the identities of Muslim Filipinos (Erasiah et al., 2023), Islam has this unique concept of *ummah*, which means the whole Muslim world, that goes beyond the national and even racial divisions.

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individual values and beliefs significantly influence identity formation, with group membership serving as a pivotal driver of identity development in society. Based on the analysis of data, all Muslim participants generally agreed that “Filipino,” as both a socio-political term and a nationality, is acceptable despite its colonial origins. The group membership of being Filipino as citizens strongly influenced how most Muslim participants conceived their identity praxes. The intersection between faith (Islam) and nation (the Philippines) is evident, highlighting that identity is continuously negotiated, dynamic, and something individuals must actively ascribe to.

Some of the participants shared their responses:

“In my opinion, we now view the concept of Muslim Filipinos mainly as a nationality and as people living in the Philippines, where the country’s name is derived from the conquering king. It seems that the concept of being ‘conquered’ no longer holds much weight in how Filipinos perceive that identity. The term is no longer seen negatively. In fact, our leadership seems to have accepted it, as evidenced by the creation of BARMM. I think in that context, they have accepted the nationality as Filipino in the Philippines, and they still hold a Philippine passport. For me, in that context, the identity of Muslim Filipinos is okay.”—P6-M

“When people ask me what my religion and tribe are, I proudly say that I am Maguindanaon, and my religion is Islam. If I generalize, I am a Muslim Filipino. So far, I have no reservations and am proud to live in this tribe and follow this religion. And of course, living in the Philippines, I am proud to be Filipino and even prouder to be a Muslim Filipino.”—P7-M

“For me, I accept it as being Filipino, even though there’s a deep history behind it. But when I think of the Muslim Filipino identity, I associate it with the heart and acceptance of being Filipino, even if you are Muslim in the Philippines. Perhaps it’s due to their experiences, but for me, I easily accept it.”—P9-M

“Muslim identity in the Philippines is not as biased as it was in the early stage of my life. Although we can’t say it was just hearsay, based on my current experiences—being involved in interfaith dialogues, education, and NGOs—there’s no longer any problem. We are accepted in Philippine society as a whole.”—P10-M

However, one of the Muslim participants expressed that, similar to Covar’s concept of *Lalim* on innermost self, the notion of being Filipino remains contested. The narratives resonate with Mulder’s (2013) idea of an “absence of vigorous national sentiments,” which undermines the development of a unified Filipino identity.

“I have two answers at the moment. First, even the term Filipino has multiple meanings. And we know this well in our field. If you say Filipino as an identity, not really. But if you say Filipino as a legal citizenship, then yes. We can’t deny that. Everyone has citizenship right now, and to deny it would make a person illegal. But identity-wise, I lean towards a different definition. I feel hesitant about it, but it’s not a radical rejection. It’s more like, I accept what I cannot change.”—P8-M

Moreover, some of the Muslim participants highlighted the essence of the *ummah* as a community of believers, not just in the Philippines but across the world (transnational). The concepts of *bayan* and *bangsa* can further be explored in terms of how national consciousness is conceptualized, rooted in the same colonial past and experiences. Interestingly, the *bayan* often evokes a sense of homeland of the general population, while *bangsa* is more relational, rooted in the collective consciousness of being a Muslim and a follower of Islam, regardless of sociopolitical and geographical affiliations. The *bangsa* provides a culturally resonant alternative for many Muslim Filipinos, especially those who choose not to identify fully with the term Filipino.

In addition, the concept of *bayan* (Elumbre, 2014) appears somewhat limited to a nationality-based framework rather than to an inclusive, collective identity, which is the very essence of *ummah* and includes all Muslim communities regardless of their nationalities and races worldwide. This construct was then supported by one of the non-Muslim participants.

“Another aspect is the faith aspect. When you say Muslim Filipino, being Muslim doesn’t disappear. We are still anchored in a broader brotherhood. We adhere to the idea that our brotherhood as Muslims extends beyond being Filipino. We still claim our fellow Muslims as part of a greater community—the concept of the Ummah. It expands from the individual, to the family, to your relatives, your region, and beyond to other nations.”—P6-M

“And now, there are many lessons to be learned. If I cannot learn them, I accept that. Even though I am not a Muslim, I’ve realized the beauty of the word Muslim. It represents brotherhood. If you need help, anyone can offer assistance. That’s a beautiful lesson.”—P1-NM

The attenuated interpretation of *bayan* seemingly contributes to the weakening of Muslim Filipinos’ integration into the broader scope of national identity, which somehow shapes an incomplete and often exclusionary understanding of what could have been a nation-state’s collective consciousness. However, for the Muslim participants who fully accepted their political identity as Filipino, this provides clear evidence of Bhabha’s (1990) concept of a Third space, where identities are constantly negotiated and hybridized.

Muslim Filipino Identity in the Continuum of Struggle and Healing

In the case of Muslims in the Philippines, colonial violence isn’t just physical but rather psychological, and this historical trauma has persisted in a form of internalized marginality (Abdi, 2011). Fanon’s psychological effects of colonization help explain the dissonance of Muslim Filipinos trying to reconcile their national identity as Muslims in a government that was historically part of the colonization. In 1935, the conceptualization of national identity during the transitional government, despite its intention to adopt a unifying approach to nation-building, failed to meaningfully include the voices of minorities, particularly Muslims. The emerging vision of a Filipino identity was largely influenced by the dominant Christianized, Manila-centric view, which instituted “ethno-religious conflict” among Muslims (Milligan, 2005). Muslim Filipinos have faced a long history of war, marginalization, discrimination, violence, and conflict, which has left emotional scars. This trauma, caused by hegemony and ongoing struggles, affects their sense of identity and belonging.

The Legislative Act No. 4197, or the Quirino-Recto Colonization of Mindanao Act, was enacted on February 12, 1935. The law during the American colonial period aimed to facilitate the migration and settlement of Christian Filipinos from the northern and central regions (Luzon and Visayas) to Mindanao. Although the Act was framed as an economic and agricultural development initiative, in application, it institutionalized land redistribution policies that favored mostly settlers, often at the expense of indigenous and Moro land rights. The Quirino-Recto Colonization of Mindanao Act displaced and marginalized more Muslim and Lumad communities, deepening ethno-religious conflict and alienation in Mindanao, this time a colonization from within, with fellow Filipinos. In 2020, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) had a population of 4.4 million (Philippine Statistics Authority[PSA], 2021). However, socio-economic indicators reveal persistent underdevelopment in various provinces, which are among the poorest in the country. Maboloc et al. (2025) critically analyzed the persistence of structural poverty in Muslim Mindanao, which is not merely the result of individual circumstances but is deeply embedded in systemic mechanisms of governance.

Muslim Filipinos have experienced centuries of conflict, displacement, and social exclusion. Fanon’s theory helps explain the alienation that some Muslim Filipinos feel in a nation that often sees

them as either threats or liabilities. This may lead to an identity dilemma. Fanon's theory is generally associated with decolonization and postcolonial thought, where he viewed colonialism as a form of domination over indigenous "native" peoples that stripped them of their rights and humanity. At present, various progressive legislations have been passed that support the rights of Filipinos regardless of religious affiliations, ethnolinguistic groups, and gender, to name a few. In the larger Philippine contemporary society, many Muslim Filipinos still feel misunderstood and excluded, which is evident in their responses. The contention of trying to reconcile being a Filipino with being a Muslim in a state that historically "othered" them may take some time to effectively integrate oneself into the system.

As supported by Abdi (2011), the experiences of the colonized in terms of "psycho-cultural, educational, philosophico-epistemological and social development dimensions have been extensive" (p. 1). However, most Muslim participants continue to hold on to their cultural pride while dealing with these challenges in a postcolonial society. After all, this enduring sense of identity is rooted in centuries of resistance, resilience, and a deeper connection to spiritual and cultural foundations—the very core elements that colonial structures and other hegemonic forces failed to fully annihilate.

"I'm not saying that being Filipino is immoral, it's just that if you look at our history, we became Filipinos through annexation, through colonization, and that is not something to be proud of. [...] I think, collectively, we were traumatized. We can't blame ourselves either. There are constrictions that feel subjective. That's why you have to look at our identity as something that has been collectively traumatized, not just on an individual level. We can see the symptoms of our fear in how we react to things outside of us. For instance, recently, when someone from San Beda was going to teach Qur'an and Shariah, many Muslims were angry, asking why a priest was teaching it instead of a Muslim."—P8-M

"Historically, we also stood by that. I feel that the courage drawn from the earlier Muslims was rooted in ensuring that their identity as Muslims would not be lost. I think it was a last resort because we were generally very accommodating toward others. But when the point came that we were harmed—when there was harm to the community and when our Muslim identity and practice of religion were no longer allowed—it became necessary to take up arms."—P6-M

"Perhaps the courage is rooted in the sense that we are not receiving justice. Because I believe that a true Muslim carries integrity. And if you have integrity, it already includes fairness, humility, and a commitment to justice. That is where the true courage of Muslims lies."—P7-M

In Covar's metaphor of *katawan* at *banga*, beyond the *labas*, *loob*, and *lalim*, our shared identity (*kapwa*) emphasizes a broad perspective (*malawak*)—one that understands who you are in relation to others. Within Filipino society, the concept of *kapwa* extends from the self to others as a shared identity rooted in Sikolohiyang Pilipino (1995; 1989). However, negative stereotypes, exclusion, and othering from the dominant culture undermine the very essence of *kapwa*. Muslims in the Philippines have endured atrocities and hegemony since the onset of colonization, and their struggles persist today, albeit within the framework of the nation-state.

Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative research was to explore and analyze Muslim Filipino identities in contemporary Philippine society through the lived experiences of 10 purposively selected participants in the Philippines. The indigenous method of *pakikipagkwentuhan* was used to gather data from five Muslim and five non-Muslim participants, which were analyzed through deductive thematic analysis anchored on the lens of Covar's *Pagkataong Pilipino*.

The results of the study show that both Muslim and non-Muslim participants view Muslim Filipinos as brave and resilient, a characteristic rooted in various historical struggles (e.g.,

colonization, marginalization, and the protection of their religion). While non-Muslim participants viewed Muslim Filipino identity as pure and unsubjected, Muslim participants emphasized that both religious and socio-political ascriptions deeply influence their identity. This was evident in the duality of “Bangsamoro” as a political identity and Islam as a religious identity, the latter being non-negotiable. Muslim participants accepted the term “Filipino” as a citizenship identity, despite its colonial implications, suggesting that a sense of belonging to the nation is present but constantly negotiated.

Covar’s metaphor of the *banga* (clay jar) illuminates these identity dynamics. The *Labas* (outer form) reflects how Muslim Filipinos are perceived—often through stereotypes or by the dominant culture—as *ibang tao* (outsiders). The *Loob* (inner self), however, reveals their lived spirituality as Muslims whose daily practices are anchored in submission to Allah and adherence to Islamic teachings. Finally, the *Lalim* (depth) represents their innermost core, where their historical resilience, cultural pride, and sense of belonging to the global *ummah* reside. This study underscores the critical role of ascription and validation in the formation of political identity, particularly the concept of Bangsamoro as a distinct socio-political identity tied to the Muslim Filipino experience.

The idea of the *ummah*, or global Muslim community, plays a significant role in transcending national borders and reinforcing solidarity with Muslims worldwide, as noted by both Muslim and non-Muslim participants. Yet, despite these continuous struggles within the broader Philippine society, Muslim Filipinos persist in showing resilience—a testimony to the *Lalim* of their identity. The findings revealed that Muslim Filipino identity in contemporary Philippine society is not a static construct but rather a dynamic and evolving one, continuously shaped by historical, political, and cultural forces. However, given the scope and context-specific nature of this study, the findings are not intended to be generalizable but instead offer nuanced insights grounded in the lived experiences of the participants. Ultimately, this study contributes to a richer understanding of national identity as a plural, layered, and negotiated experience, especially for historically marginalized communities.

Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

The authors declare that this study was developed through the careful integration of ideas, analyses, and interpretations, all of which are solely those of the authors. Therefore, this paper remains original.

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