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Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan

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The politics of voicelessness: voices of community elders in ethnic and religious minorities in the Philippines

Sheryl R. Morales^{1*)}, Roque S. Morales², Randy D. Sagun³

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the phenomena of minoritization, which involves the imposition of the beliefs and culture of dominant groups onto minority groups, leading to social exclusion and conflicts. The study utilizes data analysis to identify themes related to the process of minoritization. The study illustrates that minoritization occurs when dominant groups perceive themselves as superior and endeavor to dominate others, resulting in violence, oppression, and social exclusion. This study focuses on the perspectives of grassroots voices, going beyond traditional inquiries on equalities between different groups to provide a deeper insight into the systemic challenges encountered by minority communities. It emphasizes attributes such as dominant groups imposing their beliefs on others, perceiving them as inferior, and forcing them to adopt their culture or traditions. To address the issue of minoritization, the study emphasizes the importance of carrying out dialogues at all levels, promoting understanding across various cultures and religions, implementing policies that protect the rights of minority groups, and preventing systematic minoritization. This study enhances broader discussions on inclusivity and equality through exploring its findings in relation to global issues of prejudice. It advocates for the increased recognition and valued of minority voices in society. This emphasizes the need for holistic strategies that promote mutual respect among different communities and prevent conflicts arising from social exclusion.

Keywords: cultural and religious minorities, social exclusion, equal access and valuing

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Introduction

Systemic racism, as well as racial and ethnic discrimination, is still prevalent on a global scale. Despite significant achievements made as a result of decades of progress in the anti-racism movement, people all over the world continue to be subjected to racial inequality and ethnic, cultural, and other forms of discrimination that perpetuate socioeconomic inequities and oppression.

The challenges faced by the Philippines, including fragility, terrorism threats, and linguistic minoritization, are not unique to the country but are also observed in other Southeast Asian nations (Stach, 2022). In ASEAN countries, terrorism dynamics pose security threats and challenges to stability. Regional disparities leading to poverty (Umam et al., 2023), a common issue in the Philippines, are also prevalent in other Southeast Asian countries, highlighting the struggle for balanced regional development and inclusive growth. Linguistic minoritization affecting local languages in the Philippines is a shared concern across the region (Yaniz, 2023), where indigenous languages face the risk of marginalization and extinction.

Following the tragic death of George Floyd, senior African-descent UN officials highlighted the pervasive nature of systemic racism and the urgent need to address it. Plunkett (2020) emphasizes the critical role of the United Nations in addressing and combating systemic racism that targets explicitly marginalized communities. While the Philippines' historical ties with the West and its archipelagic state concept development set it apart, commonalities exist in the shared goal of promoting regional security cooperation and addressing development disparities within Southeast Asia. This comparative analysis underscores the complexities of these issues in the region, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to address fragility, terrorism threats, and linguistic minoritization (Andriese, 2017; Garcia, 2017). By recognizing both unique factors influencing the Philippines and shared concerns across Southeast Asia, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards holistic solutions that promote stability, development, and cultural preservation in the region.

This study examines the phenomenon of minoritization, which refers to the process by which dominant groups enforce their beliefs and principles upon minority groups, resulting in their social exclusion and the emergence of conflicts. Although prior studies have examined horizontal disparities and ethnoreligious classification, there is still a lack of understanding of grassroots viewpoints on minoritization. This research explores the narratives shared by community elders and traditional leaders to identify the challenges minority groups face and provide approaches for promoting social inclusion. This study seeks to enhance broader discussions on inclusivity and equity by evaluating and comparing global approaches to address systemic racism and prejudice.

By September 21, 2020, at least eighty-six international organizations will have endorsed a declaration recognizing the United Nations' 75th anniversary. This declaration calls for the genuine realization of the rhetorical promise "No One Left Behind" by integrating the eradication of systemic racism and racial and ethnic discrimination into the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The global campaign resonates with the Philippine scenario, especially in terms of its diverse ethnic and religious composition and the systemic discrimination and social exclusion Tungpalan & Laguilles-Timog (2019) it has encountered. The appeal for the United Nations to take a stand against systemic racism Banaji et al., (2021) corresponds to the problems experienced by marginalized groups in the country. The affirmation of a statement by worldwide bodies on having an element concerning anti-discrimination within the Sustainable Development Goals indicates that inclusive development measures towards these challenges are crucial.

The Philippines, an archipelago of 7,107 islands, is a complicated assemblage of ethnic groups that have been absorbed into a shared set of Filipino values and ethics as part of a nation-building process. The Mindanao Island group is home to more than 25 million people with diverse ethnic and religious groups. Also, Mindanao is a Muslim outpost in what is mainly a Roman Catholic country. Mindanao serves as a blueprint for the country's complex ethnic groups (consanguine in nature), meaning that links are determined by blood and traced through one's family genealogy. Thus, ethnicity relates to the household member's identity by blood rather than by choice or adoption/confirmation for any ethnic group, particularly Indigenous Peoples (IPs), and religious conflicts over the years. Hence, the Philippines is dealing with serious issues relating to its ethnic and religious minorities (Kamilan, 2011), which has resulted in widespread unrest. Among them are documented cases of recruitment into armed groups that either espouse political violence or violent extremism. Options are

available for addressing disputes and serious extremism concerns through indigenous (traditional) conflict resolution. Traditional conflict resolution mechanism (Achumi & D’Souza, 2017; Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Endalcachew Bayeh, 2015; Ragandang III, 2018) involves elders and community leaders generally mediate indigenous conflicts drawing on indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and rituals, as well as their relationships. Community elders serve as a sounding board and a representative of the community's opinions among minorities—regarded with utmost respect, credibility (Ragandang III, 2018), and knowledge (Muchie & Bayeh, 2015).

Minoritization of ethnic and religious groups, being a part of the broader socio-cultural and political concerns (Burity, 2016), the Philippines' cultural communities have established several government agencies to address these claimed injustices. Upon receiving much-needed support from the February 1986 revolution, President Corazon C. Aquino signed Executive Orders 122-A and B, which established two separate Offices for Cultural Communities in the country, namely The Office for Northern Cultural Communities (ONCC) and the Office for Southern Cultural Communities (OSCC). Muslim affairs were handled by the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA), which was replaced with the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos in 2010 on a national level. As stipulated in the Presidential Decree No. 1618, 1979, the Regional government interventions were the creation of the Lupong Tagapagpaganap ng Pook (LTP) which has two regions: Region IX- Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte including the Cities of Dipolog and Dapitan, and Zamboanga del Sur including the Cities of Pagadian and Zamboanga; and Region XII- City of Iligan, Lanao del Sur including the City of Marawi, Maguindanao including the City of Cotabato, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat. Later, through Republic Act 9054, most of these provinces were united to form the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Eventually, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (RA (Republic Act 8371) created the Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs). The continuing peace process in Muslim Mindanao with the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) led to the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) at present (see figure1).

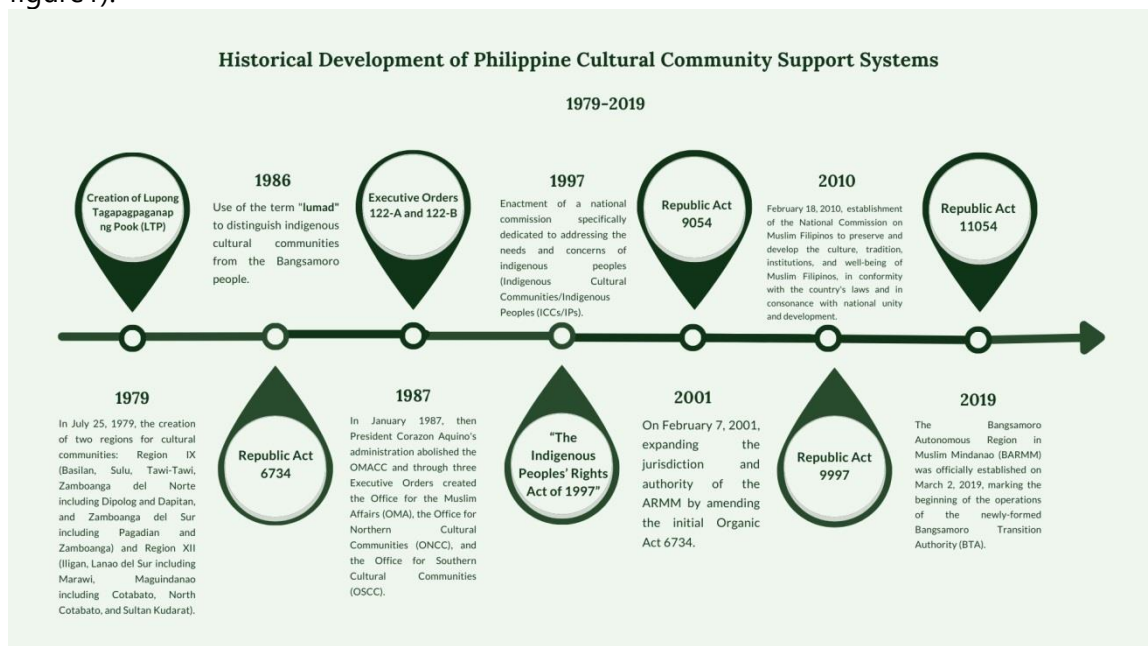


Figure 1. Historical Development of Philippine Cultural Community Support Systems
Source : processed by author

The Philippine government's approach to ethnic and religious minorities is complex, exhibiting strengths and weaknesses. The approach acknowledges the existence of diverse identities by establishing separate administrative zones for Muslim populations, distinguishing between "Lumad" and Bangsamoro individuals, and creating unique government offices for Muslim and non-Muslim minorities. This acknowledgment is essential for tailoring approaches that efficiently address the distinct issues encountered by different groups.

The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) establishes a legal structure that acknowledges the entitlements of Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) and Indigenous Peoples (IPs) to their ancestral lands, self-rule, and the safeguarding of their cultural heritage. This enhances the autonomy of these communities and provides legal safeguards for their way of life. The creation of the ARMM and, subsequently, the BARMM provides substantial self-governance to territories with a Muslim majority, acknowledging their entitlement to sovereignty. This empowers them with enhanced authority over local governance and the decision-making process. The NCIP (National Commission on Indigenous People) and the NCMF (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos) are government agencies that focus exclusively on addressing the interests and problems of minority communities.

Nevertheless, there are constraints on the efficacy of these policies in actual-life situations, with potential gaps between policy formulation and administration in everyday circumstances. The emphasis on Muslims in the establishment of distinct governmental entities and self-governing areas could potentially result in other ethnic minorities seeking more assistance and acknowledgment that is customized to their distinctive need. Challenges to implementation, such as territorial disputes, internal divisions among minority groups, and insufficient resources for effective implementation, can impede the complete successful outcomes of the desired advantages. The presence of security concerns, especially in the southern Philippines, can pose difficulties in efficiently implementing policies that are designed to safeguard minority groups.

The effects of these policies on various minority groups are expected to differ based on their particular circumstances, including factors such as geographical location, population size, and degree of organization. Researching the actual experiences of minority groups might yield significant insights. It is essential to consider civil society organizations' role in lobbying for minority rights and ensuring that the government is responsible for implementing policies.

To achieve a more comprehensive and successful strategy in safeguarding the rights and well-being of all ethnic and religious minorities, the Philippine government should recognize both the positive aspects and limitations of the current policy framework. There have been published studies in the Philippines that have explored horizontal inequalities of opportunity, cultural status inequality, ethno-religious categorization, and divisions among ethnic communities. These findings gave suitable data, but significantly, they did not provide a comprehensive understanding of grassroots voices concerning minoritization. Even the coined term 'minoritization' is debatable among minorities, with some claiming that it does not exist and will only contribute to further dividing them.

Given this gap, there is a growing need at the grassroots level to comprehend the views and experiences of cultural and religious minorities about minoritization. Previous studies have illuminated horizontal inequalities and ethno-religious categorization, but a deeper understanding of these communities' lived realities is now

being sought. This research will explore the stories shared by older adults from the community and traditional leaders to identify the problems faced by minority groups and devise approaches that will enable social inclusion, which embraces equal opportunity within such societies. Moreover, this study attempts to make its findings global by comparing them with similar issues faced by minority groups in other countries. By looking at how various cultural societies worldwide deal with systemic racism leading to discrimination and social exclusion, this paper advances broader conversations on worldwide inclusiveness and equity.

Research Methods

The research methodology employed in this study was designed to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the life experiences of specific minority groups within the culturally diverse Zamboanga Peninsula region and the Sulu Archipelago. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) identified residents of the Zamboanga Peninsula as having a low level of cultural value and appreciation, so these people were carefully considered when choosing respondents. Moreover, the study included individuals who migrated from particular locations within the Sulu archipelago to the Zamboanga Peninsula. The selection process considered various aspects such as the study's scope, societal background, available skills, resources, and the aim of conducting a detailed exploration into the lives of these particular minority groups. This research centers on a specific set of ethnic and religious minority groups, thoroughly investigating their lifestyles. Leveraging their expertise, the researchers delved deeply into the intricacies of these cultures. Adhering to the ethical standards stipulated in Republic Act 10173, rigorous measures were put in place to safeguard the privacy and well-being of participants. These measures involved the use of aliases to preserve anonymity.

The initial data collection phase involved integrating narrative analysis, which entails scrutinizing stories or artifacts for data. The researchers opted to utilize newspaper articles as a primary information source regarding historical and contemporary events. By analyzing these narratives, the researchers aimed to deepen their understanding of the living conditions of minority groups in the Philippines. This systematic approach involved thoroughly examining and interpreting the content of newspaper articles related to minorities, their challenges, and societal perceptions of them. Through this analysis of newspapers, the researchers sought to gain insights into how the media portrays issues concerning marginalized minority groups in public discourse. This method provided a broader perspective on how minority groups are perceived, discussed, and impacted by societal influences, thereby contributing to a more profound comprehension of the intricacies surrounding minoritization in the Philippines. The incorporation of content analysis of newspaper stories enhances the transparency and verifiability of the research by offering comprehensive information on all data utilized in the examination of minoritization.

In the second phase of data collection methods, the researchers primarily conducted both in-person and telephone interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2019) with traditional religious leaders and community elders from March to April 2021. This methodology was purposefully selected to encompass diverse viewpoints on the experiences of being part of a minority group within the region. Throughout these interviews, participants were posed with specific questions crafted to elicit detailed narratives regarding their experiences, challenges, and aspirations within their respective communities.

The study specifically targeted participants from Moro communities, excluding Indigenous peoples populations. The individuals involved in this research were selected from various Moro cultural and religious tribes in the Zamboanga Peninsula region and Sulu archipelago. They were chosen randomly and were not affiliated with any particular groups. It is essential to acknowledge that the NCIP requirement for free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) primarily focuses on indigenous peoples (IPs), as outlined in NCIP Administrative Order No. 3 Series of 2012. Hence, the ethical responsibility of obtaining free and informed consent (FPIC) did not apply to this study. Moreover, it is worth noting that the lead investigator held the position of Commissioner at the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) during the research, which was within his official duties and mandated him the necessary access to conduct the study during his tenure.

In compliance with the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) national ethical guidelines concerning human participants, participants provided informed consent before the interviews. Subsequently, a final transcript of the interviews was electronically transmitted to ensure the absence of any discrepancies or modifications in the participants' statements. Following the data collection phase, the research undertook a qualitative assessment, incorporating thematic analysis and coding by the guidelines outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). This systematic approach involved categorizing and analyzing the data to identify recurring themes present in the dataset. Diagrams and tables were employed throughout the study to improve the clarity of the researchers' interpretation of participants' personal experiences, enhancing the overall comprehensibility of the findings.

Hence, the study has significantly enriched the understanding of cultural identity and diversity within the Zamboanga Peninsula area by shedding light on the concept of 'minoritization'. These insights likely played a crucial role in interpreting the collected data and identifying potential avenues for promoting social cohesion and inclusion within these communities. Consequently, this study is poised to significantly impact policy-making and the development of programs aimed at safeguarding minority rights and fostering social harmony in the Philippines, thereby enhancing its relevance and potential influence in this domain.

Results and Discussion

The concept of minoritization

Minoritization as defined is a way to conceptualize "minoritization" as the process governed by speech as "constructed and governed by every act of oral interaction" (Léglise & Alby, 2006). Chavira-Prado (2018) explained that minoritization refers to a group's and its members' status compared to the socially dominant group. Minority members usually have fewer or fewer opportunities to obtain or participate in education.

Thus, minoritization is the process by which an institution or group attempts to coerce another group or institution into adopting its beliefs, culture, or practices; the result is that the dominant group successfully imposes its institutional or organizational culture, thereby destroying the other group's collective identity. The process of minoritization may occur as a result of the dominant institution's or group's perception of superiority or moral righteousness, in which they believe it is their obligation and duty to impose their system on other groups, which may result in persecution or oppression unless the other group submits to their dominance or is eliminated, figuratively or literally (Laurie & Khan, 2017).

The result of the study provided a similar concept of minoritization from Laurie & Khan (2017). It surfaced the following characteristics: (1) an institution or group that has an innate certainty that they would need to dominate over others to impose their belief, culture, or system; (2) group or groups that the belief of the domineering group is inferior and should therefore assimilate the system, culture, beliefs or else be eliminated; (3) a belief system that may appear to have elements of intolerance for incompatible systems; and (4) a competing belief system that is viewed to be inferior and should be subsumed.

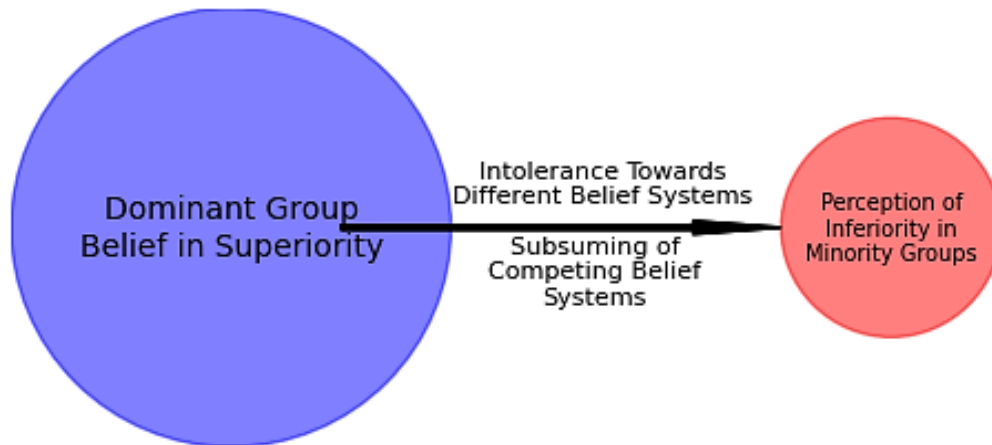


Figure 2. Characteristics of Minoritization
Source: processed by author

As illustrated in Figure 2, the characteristics of minoritization encompass the dominant group's conviction of superiority, the feeling of inferiority in minority groups, the lack of tolerance towards divergent belief systems, and the assimilation of opposing belief systems. It demonstrates how these components interrelate and perpetuate the process of marginalization within societies.

Minoritization in the Philippines

The Philippines' indigenous cultural communities (ICC) are estimated to make up around 10% of the national population. In 1986, fifteen (15) of Mindanao's more than eighteen ICC grasped the moniker lumad, a Bisayan word for "native" or "indigenous," to separate themselves from the island's Christians and Muslims. During Corazon Aquino's presidency, Republic Act 6734 used the phrase to distinguish these ethnic communities from the Bangsamoro people. The lowlanders anticipated societal growth through the transformation of towns and cities. The ICC was reduced to a minority status into a broader civilization or community as a result of this. Various mechanisms, such as discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, or assimilation, also occur. They have been pushed to the mountains and forests, where they endure discrimination and find it challenging to integrate into mainstream culture. It enables the affected group or individual to relinquish power, resources, and opportunities, as well as their cultural identity and social cohesion.

Cultural minoritization

Table 1. Ethnic and religious profile of cultural minorities

Minoritization Type	Minority Group	Ethnic Profile	Religious Profile
Cultural	Aeta	Descendants of the Philippines' earliest inhabitants, Negrito, with shorter stature, curly hair, and dark skin tone.	Indigenous beliefs and practices.
	Subanen	Known as Subanen/Subanon, which translates as "those who reside near rivers," they live in the hinterlands and coastal lowlands of the Zamboanga peninsula.	Indigenous beliefs and practices.
	Dumagat	Indigenous peoples in the Calabarzon area have distinct physical characteristics: dark brown to black complexion and curly hair.	Indigenous beliefs and practices.

Source: processed by author

The Aetas' minoritization in Central Luzon. The Aeta are descended from the Philippines' earliest inhabitants, the Negrito. With their shorter stature, curly hair, and dark skin tone, the Negrito are pretty distinct from the rest of the Filipino population. Aetas are subjected to social discrimination and have begun denying their ethnic origins in order to avoid it. Aetas attempted to adopt the lowland farmer's way of life, which led to the loss of the identity and culture of many Aeta subgroups in these areas (Acaba, 2008). The Aetas face bullying from the lowlanders, and in a recent incident, COVID-19 infection in their communities has been blamed on them. According to a report by local media, some Kapampangans implied that the virus originated with the Aeta because they eat bats. As a result, they are avoided in downtown and lowlands areas. The lowlanders saw them as inferior and marginalized. Lowlanders discriminated against and misunderstood Aetas due to their lack of understanding of their culture (Espiritu, 2018).

The Dumagats' minoritization in Luzon. The Dumagat are members of the Agta Negrito peoples of Luzon. They exemplify the outstanding physical characteristics of the Negrito people, which include a dark brown to black complexion and curly hair. A few individuals may have straight hair and a light complexion, resulting from mixing with lowland Christians. According to report of Cariño (2012), the Dumagats have relocated to the Sierra Madre Mountains in eastern Luzon provinces and along the Pacific coast to the Bondoc and Bicol mountains. Historically, these people lived along the coasts of Aurora and Quezon provinces and were considered lords of their domain. However, they were pushed into the mountains and dispersed in small groups due to the arrival of Filipino homesteaders in the Agta area. When the pandemic (COVID-19) struck the country, the Dumagat were in the midst of a struggle against the Kaliwa dam. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), an institution mandated with the duty of promoting and defending indigenous rights, has failed to protect the Dumagat's right to their land by refusing to endorse their unanimous decision opposing the dam. The community felt that the NCIP's free, prior, and informed consent process was divisive and deceptive, resulting in conflicts between Dumagat

members. Despite the COVID-19 threat, the community continues to see road construction from Tanay, Rizal, to the interior areas of General Nakar, Quezon.

The minoritization of the Subanen in Zamboanga. The Subanen live in the hinterlands and coastal lowlands of the Zamboanga peninsula, particularly on the plateaus of Bukidnon, and are known as Higaonon, which translates as "mountain dwellers." The Subanens claimed kinship with the Moros of the region. They acknowledged the sovereignty of the Moro traditional elder in Sibugay, which is now part of the Zamboanga Peninsula, as the source of their authority (Ampuan & Lingga, 2013). For centuries, the entire province of Zamboanga has been regarded as the ancestral domain of the Subanen, with some areas of the peninsula having been colonized by Muslims and others by Christians. They arrived in Mindanao Islands as early as 4200 B.C., as evidenced by archaeologists' discoveries of artifacts within the ancient Subanen territory (Imbing & Viernes-Enriquez, 1990). The discrimination against the Subanen tribe, in addition to other factors, contributed to the decline in the viability of the Subanen language in some tribal communities (Pantao, 2021). The insurgency in Mindanao never ceases, even during the COVID-19 quarantine, resulting in continued military combat operations. The bombings took place in a forest area in Zamboanga del Sur. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a sizable portion of Subanen's ancestral land was destroyed, jeopardizing their livelihood and survival.

In this context, cultural minoritization refers to a specific form of minoritization that impacts populations characterized by unique physical features and indigenous customs and traditions. The Aetas in Central Luzon, the Subanen in Zamboanga, and the Dumagats in Luzon are representative of ethnic minorities in the Philippines. These communities have experienced discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, or acculturation, resulting in losing their cultural identity and social cohesiveness.

Religious minoritization

Table 2. Ethnic and religious profile of religious minorities

Minoritization Type	Minority Group	Ethnic Profile	Religious Profile
Religious	Shias in the Philippines	A small minority of Shia Muslims live in Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur in Mindanao.	Shia Islam.
	Sunnis in the Philippines	The majority of Muslims in the Philippines are Sunnis.	Sunni Islam.
	Lumad	Indigenous peoples in Mindanao use the term 'lumad' to distinguish themselves from the Bangsamoro people.	Indigenous beliefs and practices.
	Bangsamoro people	Muslim inhabitants of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan, including the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).	Islam.

Source: processed by author

When one religious group oppresses and socially isolates another religious group, this is referred to as religious minoritization. Initiated during American rule and

expanded by the post-independence Philippines government, the influx of Filipino migrants from the Luzon and Visayas island groups substantially changed Mindanao's demography and is at the core of the island's indigenous-settler conflict. The provinces hosting the largest Muslim populations in Mindanao manifest concerning levels of poverty, education, and health, as reported by the United Nations Development Programme (McDoom & Gisselquist, 2016). Moro and Lumad believe that their marginalization results from indifference, if not outright discrimination, on the part of the Philippines' central government (McDoom & Gisselquist, 2016). In January 2020, weeks before the first COVID-19 case in the country was reported, the Manila district law enforcement unit issued an internal memo requiring all high schools, colleges, and universities in Metropolitan Manila to identify Muslim students. A social media outcry erupted when it was revealed that the move had promoted Islamophobia and discrimination, especially against the Muslim minority in Metro Manila.

Religious minoritization occurs even among the 'marginalized' Muslims. The majority of Muslims in the Philippines are Sunnis at present, and a small minority of Shia Muslims live in the province of Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur as well as among other areas in Mindanao. Shias in the Philippines also recognize the threat of violent extremism, which is still quite potent even after ISIS' defeat in Marawi. Shias in Zamboanga are being bullied online, and their children are being harassed. Historically, Filipino Muslims have been divided, and the various groups, which are divided by degrees of Islamic orthodoxy as well as linguistic differences, are often antagonistic toward one another. Nonetheless, they shared a common hostility toward the central authorities – Spaniards, Americans, and then Christianized Filipinos from Luzon after independence.

Religious minorities, such as the Shias, have faced similar situations in other countries, including Saudi Arabia, where Shia leaders are labeled as fundamentalists or extremists, resulting in the execution of some Shia clerics (Kumar, 2016). Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and other non-Muslim minority groups in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia have endured persistent verbal harassment, as documented in excerpts from the International Religious Freedom Reports in 2021. The contemporary dialogue surrounding religious minorities challenges the notion of structural subordination in place and portrays discrimination as a reprehensible and eradicable practice. Its premises that religious minorities are marginalized, subjected to violence, or experiencing a power imbalance in the form of restricted access to or exclusion from institutions, in comparison to the majority population, are unjust and morally objectionable (Stausberg et al., 2023). In this context, religious minoritization refers to the process of marginalizing groups with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Lumad and Bangsamoro communities in Mindanao exemplify religious minority groups in the Philippines.

The Shia and Sunni Muslims in the Philippines have experienced religious marginalization, marked by the systematic oppression and social exclusion of these communities. The process of marginalization discussed here is deeply connected to the historical and political circumstances of the nation, specifically during the period of American governance and the time following independence. The arrival of Filipino migrants from the Luzon and Visayas island groups had a significant impact on the population composition of Mindanao, resulting in a conflict between the indigenous people and the settlers.

These groups adhere to either indigenous traditions and practices or Islam and have encountered comparable obstacles such as discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, or coherence.

Social exclusion and minoritization

Respondents' narratives emphasized the importance of providing equal opportunities and recognizing the value of excluded groups to prevent social exclusion and minoritization.

Table 3. Theme 1 on Social Exclusion and Minoritization

Interviewee	Statement 1	Statement 2	Sub-themes
Akbari	"The government needs to learn about and understand all of us because if they do not, dominant groups will use minority groups to stir up social anger and fight. "Normally, these domineering groups may have a sense or feeling of superiority that makes them susceptible to commit acts of violence against minority groups that they tend to dominate."		1. The government should understand and study cultural communities. 2. Minority groups may trigger social anger and conflict if mishandled. Some dominant groups might behave superior to minority groups, making them combative.
Daim	"Social exclusion due to differences in belief or culture can lead to conflicts and challenges for minority groups." "Maintaining social distance and showing patience and understanding are strategies used by individuals from minority groups to avoid clashes with dominant groups."		1. Social exclusion occurs due to differences in culture or beliefs. 2. These are the strategies minority groups employ to avoid conflicts with dominant groups.
Jafari	"Meaningful conversations and dialogue are crucial when dealing with social exclusion or minoritization situations." "If the person from the dominant group is not generally prejudiced but merely influenced by group think and behavior, that person would be influenced to change at times if done at the community level."	If these minority groups were to give in to the weight that is being put on them to give up their identity and assimilate with the dominant group, they would be subjected to more hostile actions.	1. To prevent social exclusion and minoritization, open communication is crucial. 2. Minority communities' struggles to fit in and the implications of upholding their cultural identity.

Interviewee	Statement 1	Statement 2	Sub-themes
Nuri	"Socially excluded due to difference in belief or culture."	"Individuals from minority groups may avoid shared spaces with dominant groups to prevent conflicts or clashes." "Maintaining contact avoidance or social distance is a common strategy when interacting with dominant groups to avoid potential conflicts."	1. Social marginalization resulting from variation in belief or culture. 2. Approaches utilized by persons belonging to minority groups to prevent conflicts or confrontations with dominant groups.
Satyamev		"This provides them with an excuse of a sort to isolate or oppress minority groups, and in general, if these minority groups are oppressed if they are isolated."	1. Social exclusion and the use of justifications for continuing discrimination.

Source: processed by author

As narrated by Tihaniyah (March 2021), minoritization and social exclusion generally happen due to differences in belief with the dominant cultural or religious group, which considers all those who oppose them as misguided or culturally inferior. This gives them a sort of justification to isolate or oppress minority groups. Generally, if these minority groups (Satyamev) succumbed to the pressure for them to surrender their identity and assimilate the dominant group, they would be subjected to more hostile actions (Jafari). Usually, these domineering groups may have a sense or feeling of superiority that makes them prone to commit acts of violence against minority groups that they tend to dominate (Akbari) and are socially excluded due to differences in belief or culture (Nuri & Daim). In another narration by Mansur (April 2021), such minoritization would be manifested by extreme social exclusion that would make targeted group members lose access to certain things, such as government services or being allowed to go about their everyday lives in school work or the community. Personalities from such minority groups who are targets of such minoritization may either avoid shared places of interaction with such dominant groups (Hasim), such as places of worship, public areas in school or work, or community interaction (Hasim). When they are forced to share a space or situation with dominant groups who dominate, they attempt to maintain contact avoidance or social distance (Pamungkas, 2018) in order to avoid any potential clash or conflict, such as the exchange of painful words or expressions (Satyamev), and to show extra patience, compassion, and understating when dealing with them (Daim). Should a situation arise wherein they would be allowed to clarify things, those coming from minority (Mansur) communities would try to enlighten and clarify by having meaningful conversations and dialogue (Jafari). Moreover, if the person from the dominant group is not generally intolerant but merely influenced by groupthink and behavior, he would be influenced to change

(Akbari) at times if done at the community level, and the community united in opposing social exclusion and minoritization then changes do occur (Mansur).

Equal access and value

To prevent social exclusion and minoritization, the narratives display the significance of promoting interfaith dialogue in education and involving minority groups with the government. The actualization of policies that penalize hate speech and cultural xenophobia while simultaneously safeguarding differences in belief can enable governments to promote peace and protection for minority groups. This necessitates the collaboration of diverse stakeholders to foster understanding and prevent conflicts in which minorities feel marginalized or excluded.

Table 4. Theme 2 on Equal Access and Valuing

Interviewee	Statement 1	Statement 2	Sub-themes
Nuh	"The government should institute strong policies protecting differences in belief, religion, and cultural origins to ensure peace and tranquility." "Penal provisions should be in place for violators engaging in hate speech and cultural xenophobia to safeguard the rights of minorities."		1. Importance of government policies to safeguard cultural diversity and minority rights.
Akbari	The government should learn about and understand everyone because if they do not, dominant groups will use minority groups to stir up social anger and fight.	"On an advocacy level, they should strengthen education through promoting interfaith dialogue and embedding it in students' curriculum." "Minority groups should engage with government and provide answers and creative solutions, so it understands the issues and encourage other agencies and institutions to be involved in such projects like interfaith, intrafaith and cultural dialogues."	1. Empower the voices of minority groups to advance social cohesiveness.
Tijaniyah		"Minorities should be granted equal access to dominant groups in addition to being acknowledged as marginalized and minority groups."	1. Consciousness and equal opportunity for minorities.

Interviewee	Statement 1	Statement 2	Sub-themes
		"Government should understand the broader background and situation of marginalized religious and cultural groups to prevent social exclusion and minoritization."	
Mansur		Reforms can occur if implemented at the community level and if the community comes together in an effort against social exclusion and minoritization.	1. Value of community-led reforms.

Source: processed by author

Tijaniyah (April 2021) stated that to prevent social exclusion and minoritization of religious and cultural communities, which is what he believes, minorities should be granted equal access to dominant groups in addition to being acknowledged as marginalized and minority groups and receiving the same level of access (valuing) as these groups. This means that the government should understand the context, background, and situation; many religious and cultural groups are being minoritized among Filipinos, and the government should not only pay attention or focus on the dominant groups. A similar argument was provided by Tripathi & Kumar (2022) that the dominant position of a majority poses a threat to the preservation of religious freedom and the continual existence of a system of plurality within the framework of a nation.

Another narration by Akbari (March 2021) is that the government should study and understand everyone significantly since, if unmanaged, it would push and mobilize minority groups to social anger and push to conflict by dominant groups (Nuh). On an advocacy level, they should strengthen education by promoting interfaith dialogue and embedding it in students' curricula. On the other hand, minority groups should engage with the government and provide answers and creative solutions, so it understands the issues and encourages other agencies and institutions to be involved in such projects as interfaith, intrafaith, and cultural dialogues (Nuh).

The government should institute strong policies protecting the differences Pfundmair et al., (2024) in belief, religion, and cultural origins as well as understand them so that it will lead towards peace and tranquillity, with penal provisions for those violating it with particular emphasis on those who engage in hate speech and cultural xenophobia (Akbari) that will ensure minorities will be protected. The state, as well as other people, groups, and institutions, should have a better understanding so that conflicts will not happen wherein minorities are not given importance or value. Minoritization forces those who are marginalized from recognition to seek viable alternatives, which exposes them to underground and extremist groups that may use them for political and terrorist purposes, which is violent extremism.

A Glimpse into the Philippine experience in comparison with neighboring countries and other regions

There are more than 350 distinct ethnic communities in Southeast Asia (2023). Within this crucible, cultural and religious minorities encounter a multitude of challenges, such as disparities in political, economic, and social spheres, prejudice, and limited opportunities for education and vital infrastructure.

Table 3 presents a comparative exploration of the process of minoritization, with a specific emphasis on the Philippine situation, surrounding countries, and global viewpoints. The text explores several facets, emphasizing distinctive characteristics of the Philippine encounter.

Table 5. Comparative Insight into Minoritization of the Philippine Experience and its Neighboring Countries and Other Regions

Aspect	Philippines	Comparison with Southeast Asian countries and other regions
Historical Background	The Philippines has a complex history of colonization, including Spanish, American, and Japanese occupations, shaping its cultural landscape and societal dynamics (Hopkins, 2021).	Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, like other Southeast Asian countries, have experienced colonialism by European powers such as the Dutch, British, and French, respectively. These historical events have significantly impacted their present social structures and power dynamics. These historical colonization events frequently led to the exclusion and marginalization of indigenous populations and minority communities.
Ethnic Diversity	Native Filipinos, including the Lumad and Moro in Mindanao, are among the many ethnic groups that make up the Philippines. These individuals have been subjected to discrimination and marginalization (Human Rights Watch, 2021).	The tribes of Indigenous peoples in Indonesia and Malaysia, among other Southeast Asian nations, confront comparable obstacles concerning political representation, cultural preservation, and land rights. Countries such as Myanmar, India, and Southeast Asia contend with ethnic diversity and tensions between majority and minority factions (Pheap, 2022).
Religious Landscape	The majority of the population in the Philippines adheres to the Catholic faith; however, there are also substantial communities practicing Islam, Protestantism, and indigenous religions. Religious minority groups, such as Muslims and Lumad, have encountered prejudice and experienced exclusion from social and economic opportunities (Paredes, 2018).	Islam is the prevailing religion in Malaysia, but there are also substantial Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities. Religious differences and differing treatment have led to conflicts in the country (International Crisis Group, 2019). Indonesia, known for its varied religious makeup, confronts difficulties concerning religious intolerance and bias against religious minority groups such as the Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims (Irawan & Adnan, 2021). Countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh also experience similar problems of religious prejudice and persecution (U.S. Department of State, 2010; Amnesty International, 2023).

Aspect	Philippines	Comparison with Southeast Asian countries and other regions
Legal Protections	Established in 1987, the Philippine Constitution guarantees the right to religious freedom and protects individuals from discrimination based on ethnicity and religion. Nevertheless, the implementation and compliance of these safeguards have displayed irregularities (Human Rights Watch, 2021).	The level of legal safeguards for minority rights differs among Southeast Asian nations. Although several constitutions include provisions that ensure equality and non-discrimination, the methods for enforcing these laws may be unsuccessful, and minority rights frequently encounter relevant challenges. Authoritarian regimes in nations such as Myanmar and Vietnam have repressed minority rights and silenced dissenting voices. Countries outside the region, such as Sri Lanka, have faced difficulties with ethnic tensions and accusations of human rights violations against minority populations, such as the Tamil community (Castellino & Redondo, 2006; Neo, 2021)
Socio-Economic Factors	There are economic inequalities among different cultures and faiths in the Philippines, with indigenous peoples and Muslims being disproportionately impacted by poverty, limited educational opportunities, and loss of property ownership (Asian Development Bank, 2020).	The number of indigenous peoples and religious minorities in other Southeast Asian countries also experience socio-economic disparities, which hinder their access to economic opportunities and social advancement. Economic development initiatives in nations such as Thailand have resulted in the displacement of indigenous communities from their traditional territories, leading to increased poverty and social exclusion (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In addition to Southeast Asia, nations such as Nepal also face challenges in addressing socio-economic inequalities based on ethnic and caste divisions, which impact the ability of minority groups to access resources and opportunities.

Source: processed by author

Several distinctive characteristics emerge when examining the Philippines in the context of minoritization in Southeast Asia and other regions. The Philippines' history was marked by successive colonial powers—Spain, the United States, and Japan—which profoundly influenced the country's cultural fabric and social dynamics. Due to the complex historical context that various external factors have shaped, the Philippines differs from other countries in the region. Furthermore, the Philippines is distinguished by its exceptional ethnic diversity, which includes a veritable quilting of indigenous peoples such as the Lumad and Moro residing in Mindanao. In juxtaposition with this diversity, the complex interplay of numerous ethnic groups distinguishes the Philippines in the Southeast Asian context. In a similar vein, the religious milieu of the Philippines is characterized by a distinctive mixture of substantial Muslim, Protestant, and indigenous religious communities coexisting harmoniously with Catholicism as the prevailing faith.

The Philippines' socio-cultural fabric is enriched by its religious heterogeneity, distinguishing it from neighboring countries characterized by diverse religious compositions. Furthermore, the Philippines' legal system, codified in its Constitution, ensures the preservation of liberties and safeguards against prejudice predicated on factors such as religion, ethnic origin, etc. Although the precise application of these safeguards may differ, the laws of the Philippines reaffirm its commitment to preserving the rights of minority groups within its territorial boundaries. Finally, socio-economic factors contribute to the picture of inequality, as indigenous peoples and Muslims are disproportionately impacted by economic disparities, specifically concerning land rights, education, and destitution. Intricately interwoven with matters of ethnicity and religion, these socioeconomic challenges further distinguish the Philippines' minority status situation in comparison to other Southeast Asian countries. Table 3 is a clear perspective, demonstrating the complex process of minoritization in the Philippines and its similarities and differences with adjacent countries and other regions.

Conclusion

In addressing the issue of minoritization, it is imperative to acknowledge the distinct circumstances and variations within regions, such as the Zamboanga Peninsula. To address the issue of Minoritization, it is crucial to see, understand, and see the connections between the different elements of minoritization as each layer has a phase-by-phase connection as it progresses. Progression of minoritization will trigger social hate and manifest itself in different ways, each becoming a barrier to understanding and mutual respect. Such systematic exclusion may even force mainstream minority groups towards siding with extremist-oriented groups to protect themselves and their constituencies, as the state isolates them by siding with groups that minoritize them.

Addressing these issues can be best done by engaging in more activities that would provide dialogues on multiple levels: Interfaith (dialogue between persons of different faith traditions such as Christianity-Islam-Indigenous religion), Intrafaith (inter-sectarian dialogue of individuals belonging to sectarian groups inside a faith tradition such as Catholicism-Protestantism-Baptist, or Shia-Sunni-Salafi), Inter-Religious (dialogue between different religious organizations or institutions) Inter-religious (dialogue between religious institutions coming from different sects from a faith tradition), Intercultural (dialogue between groups or divergent cultural communities, i.e. Igorot and Tausug, Subanen and Badjao), Intercultural (dialogue of more proximate tribal communities like Tausug-Badjao, Ifugao-Ibaloi).

Given the wide range of cultures and unique history of the Zamboanga Peninsula, it is crucial to consider the experiences of minority groups and create inclusive policies and programs in this region. To promote social inclusion, understanding, and respect for all inhabitants, the Philippines may make vast strides by acknowledging and navigating the differences and exclusions within its regions. To prevent more mission-oriented or messianic-oriented interventions from misinformed religious and developmental workers, initiating more empirical and engagement-type immersions would allow them better insight and conduct more appropriate and empowering interventions and projects.

Systemic and structural minoritization is caused because the government provides passive support for groups that engage in this, directly engaging these agencies to allow them to recognize minority groups through the instillation of policies that would not allow dominant groups to prevent recognition or accreditation of

minority groups which better serve the interests of the indigenous communities.

This can be done by implementing more capacity-building programs targeting government agencies, institutions, and groups that minoritize other groups, communities, and people. A complete overhaul of recognition and accreditation of people, organizations, and institutions that service communities must be actively engaging policymakers through strategies such as disseminating research findings effectively, engaging stakeholders, organizing policy dialogues, advocating for policy changes, providing capacity building sessions, and implementing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can lead to informed policy development that prioritizes the recognition and protection of minority rights. By fostering collaboration between researchers, advocates, stakeholders, and policymakers, a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by minority communities can be achieved, resulting in evidence-based policies that address systemic barriers, promote inclusivity, and uphold the rights of marginalized groups. This concerted effort towards utilizing research to inform policy decisions can create a more equitable and just society for all individuals, regardless of their background.

Furthermore, implementing education empowerment programs, economic empowerment initiatives and cultural expression platforms can significantly empower ethnic and religious minority communities. These communities can promote cultural pride and understanding by incorporating cultural heritage education, language preservation efforts, and intergenerational knowledge sharing in educational programs. Additionally, community-led economic development projects, financial literacy training, and market access support can create sustainable livelihood opportunities and enhance economic prospects for minority groups. Furthermore, establishing cultural centers, artistic workshops, and digital storytelling platforms allows community members to express their cultural identity and amplify their voices within society, addressing the challenges of voicelessness and social exclusion. Through these comprehensive programs, ethnic and religious minorities can preserve their heritage, improve their socio-economic status, and foster inclusivity and empowerment within their communities. They are done to ensure that no exclusion happens.

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