

THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF SALAFISM IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

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I. OVERVIEW

Muslim Mindanao under the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has demonstrated political moderation but its traditional religious openness is under increasing challenge from the puritanical Islamic stream known as Salafism.

Until now, all attention in Mindanao has been rightly focused on ending conflict, improving governance, building institutions and in the wake of the Marawi siege, preventing extremism. The rise of Salafism raises the question of what social values will be inculcated over time, now that the Islamic scholars (*ulama*) trained in Saudi Arabia have extensively penetrated the Muslim community, including the MILF's religious bureaucracy.

The establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in February 2019 under the control of the MILF seemed to presage a new era in the southern Philippines, where at least one of the major conflicts was now resolved. It was not just that the MILF and the government of the Philippines had worked out their differences and negotiated an agreement which was then enshrined in law, ending one of Southeast Asia's longest-running insurgencies. But in the aftermath of the 2017 takeover of Marawi by a pro-ISIS coalition, it also seemed to herald the triumph of a moderate Muslim leadership that had expelled foreign fighters from its territory in 2005 and worked with the government ever since to keep extremists out.

If anyone expressed concern about Salafism in the Philippines, it was only to worry that Saudi influence could produce violent extremism. That concern, while it has historical roots, is probably misplaced. The real question is what the long-term influence of Salafism will be in areas such as education, justice and the role of women. The first step towards an answer is to understand the many different versions of Salafism in the Philippines – some more tolerant than others – and the way they interact with other streams of Islam.

This report, which barely scratches the surface of the complicated picture of Islamic movements in Mindanao, examines the division between Salafis and Sunni traditionalists; divisions within the Salafi community; and the division between Sunni and Shi'a. Some of these divisions have been nurtured by competition among three Middle Eastern powers – Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey – for cultural and ideological influence. Others are the product of Mindanao's historical fault-lines of ethnicity, clan and region.

There is also a generational divide. Many of the older Salafi clerics, including those in positions of authority within BARMM, do not fit the stereotype of ideological zealots. Their long political struggle produced a pragmatism that is not only political, toward the central government, but also religious. Some have taken positions that would be anathema to Salafis elsewhere, for example in support of reproductive healthcare and contraception. At the same time, many younger Muslims, brought up in the smart phone era with access to online Islamic teachings, are becoming more knowledgeable, more observant and more socially conservative than their parents.

Whichever strand of Salafism prevails, it will be increasingly important going forward to understand BARMM and the MILF in terms of the precepts of their religious authorities, not just their anti-terrorist credentials or the performance of their political institutions.

II. THE GROWTH OF SALAFISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Salafism, which sees Islam as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and the three generations that followed him as the pinnacle of purity, is often portrayed as a backward-looking doctrine

more suited to the 7th century than the 21st.¹ But for many young Muslims in the Philippines – and for that matter, in Indonesia and Malaysia – Salafism represents modern, cosmopolitan Islam as opposed to the unthinking traditionalism of an older generation. It is the Islam of YouTube and Facebook, of younger preachers with rock star status like Mufti Menk, a wildly popular Zimbabwean cleric who visited Mindanao in 2015 to standing room-only crowds. As one young Filipina put it, “It’s cool to be pious.”²

Salafism has also become the dominant stream of most major Muslim institutions in Mindanao as Saudi Arabia gradually replaced Egypt as the preferred study destination for religiously-inclined Muslim Filipinos. One cleric interviewed in October 2019 estimated that 100 students from the Philippines leave for Saudi Arabia every year out of 300 to 500 who apply.³ Since 1995, a Salafi school in Baguio, Luzon, the Almaarif Education Center, has also become a key institute for Salafi propagation.

Three factors that have led to the growth of Salafism are the scholarships that made possible study in Saudi Arabia and centres of Salafi learning elsewhere; the crackdown after 9/11 that led some leading clerics to flee to Saudi Arabia rather than be wrongly suspected of supporting terrorism; and the growth of the Philippine migrant worker population in the Gulf countries (and to a much lesser extent, Malaysia).

As their ranks have grown, the Salafis have come into increasing conflict with the Asha’irah, the traditionalists, whom they condemn for engaging in “unwarranted innovations” (*bid’ah*) considered harmful to Islam. In Mindanao, the so-called Asha’irah are institutionally best represented by the Muslim missionary movement Tablighi Jamaat, a non-political Islamic missionary movement that originated in South Asia; Sabiel al-Muhtadeen, a local traditionalist Sunni organisation; and the local branch of the Sufi-inspired Turkish Risale-i-Nur movement.

A. *Doctrine in the Service of Activism*

If the expansion of Salafism through education has largely been a phenomenon of the 1990s and 2000s, it builds on a much longer history, linked to the rise of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF split from the secular Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1976, though only adopted the name MILF in 1984.⁴ A running theme in Mindanao has been the subordination of religious doctrine to political goals, and the story of the MILF’s early leaders is a case in point.

Salamat Hashim, the organisation’s founder, made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1958 and stayed behind to study with Salih al-Zawawi, a sheikh of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. He also attended Madrasah Sulaitiyah, the oldest traditionalist school in Mecca that produced many of

1 Islamic puritanism is often said to have originated from Ibn Taymiyyah, a 13th century Islamic scholar. But Salafism as a movement is a modern phenomenon despite its reference to the methodology of Muslim ancestors (*salaf al-salih*). The term Salafiyah was first popularised by Rashid Rida (1865-1935), an Egyptian Islamic reformist whose Maktabah Salafiyah publications were tremendously influential across the Muslim world in the early 20th century. Rida’s Salafiyah concept had some similarities but also important differences with the Wahhabi movement which emerged in the 18th century in Najd, today part of Saudi Arabia. They both advocated a return to Qur’an and Sunnah as the sole basis of Islamic law – instead of blindly following the established Islamic schools of law – and a purification of Islamic creed from folk traditions and syncretism which they consider groundless or idolatrous. However, while Rida envisioned a modern and rationalist Muslim society, the Wahhabis were much more scripturalist and used harsher methods in Islamic purification. In the 1920s, Rida tried to “rehabilitate” the image of Wahhabism by sending his students to assist the new Saudi kingdom in building a modern education system, although in the end, the more conservative Saudi version prevailed. Meanwhile Rida’s true followers came to be known as Muslim reformists or modernists, as represented by Muhammadiyah in Indonesia. See Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 2016).

2 IPAC interview, Muslim student, Davao, Philippines, 12 October 2019.

3 IPAC interview, Salafi NGO leader, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

4 For background on the MILF and its split from the MNLF, see International Crisis Group, “The Philippines: Counter-insurgency vs Counter-terrorism in Mindanao”, Asia Report No.152, 14 May 2008, pp.3-4.

Southeast Asia's prominent ulama.⁵ He then studied in al-Azhar University, Egypt in 1959 and returned home with a master's degree ten years later in 1969, just three years after the Nasser government had executed Sayyid Qutb, a scholar and ideologue for the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimin, IM). Qutb had argued that Muslims were obliged to wage war against corrupt regimes that prevented the application of Islamic law, even if they were nominally Muslim. Nasser considered this treason and had him hanged. While Al-Azhar taught traditionalist Sunni orthodoxy which condemned political rebellion, Hashim was deeply influenced by Qutb's writings, which continue to inspire insurgents and extremists to this day.⁶

As Egypt cracked down on the Brotherhood, many of its activists fled to Saudi Arabia. Several ended up as lecturers at the Islamic University of Madinah, which had been opened in 1961 to fight "Nasserism" and propagate the Saudi kingdom's version of Salafism through using generous scholarships to entice international students.⁷ The IM members maintained an uneasy co-existence with "purist" or "quietist" Salafis who considered their political activities to be a diversion from the focus on faith and a potential threat to the Saudi state.⁸

As Hashim was pursuing advanced degrees in Egypt, Abuhuraira Udasan, a member of MILF Central Committee and today the Grand Mufti of the Bangsamoro and the most senior cleric in BARMM, chose to study in Madinah. He recalled that his friends in Egypt warned him against going, saying they were worried he would become a Wahhabi. (The term "Wahhabi" used to be neutral adjective describing followers of the co-founder of Saudi state, Muhammad Abdul Wahhab. In Southeast Asia, it has become a pejorative term for Salafis.)⁹

The political goal of getting the MILF organised, trained and funded overshadowed any other aim, however, and MILF-inclined students in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia saw the IM as a model, even as Abuhuraira was absorbing Salafi doctrine.

Both Salamat Hashim and Abuhuraira found it tactically expedient to join forces with Jemaah Islamiyah, the Indonesian-led regional terrorist organisation, first for training, then in 2000 for operations, at a time when the MILF was being attacked in the "all-out war" of then President Joseph Estrada. But it was generally more a matter of organisational survival and solidarity than commitment to the global jihad.¹⁰

The doctrinal issues would take on more significance in peacetime.

5 The alumni of Madrasah Sulaitiyah include KH Hasyim Ash'ari (1871-1947), the founder of Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama; Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani (1856-1908) of Southern Thailand; and Sheikh Ahmad Bashir (1919-1989), the founder of Jamiatu Muslim Mindanao, the oldest Islamic college in the Philippines.

6 "Bio Data of Sheikh Salamat Hashim", *Nidaul Islam*, Issue 23, April-May 1998, available at <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/ph2.htm>. Some of his classmates at Al-Azhar who co-founded MILF were Khalifa Nando, today the wali of Bangsamoro, and Pangalian Solaiman, the current deputy chief minister of BARMM.

7 Stéphane Lacroix (George Holoch, trans.), *Awakening Islam*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 40.

8 This division between purist and politically active (*haraki*) Salafis deepened in the early 1990s as dissident *haraki* clerics, in what became known as the *Sahwa* movement, criticised the Saudi state for seeking protection from the U.S. during the first Gulf War and for fostering "secularisation". Both purist and *haraki* view democracy as un-Islamic, but the former believe a Muslim ruler must be obeyed, even if democratically elected, as long as he does not renounce his faith. *Haraki* Salafis hold that obedience to the government is conditional upon whether it governs according to God's law (*tauhid hakimiyah*). If not, then criticism through non-violent means is obligatory. See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29:3 (2006), pp. 208-210; International Crisis Group, "Why Salafism and Terrorism Mostly Don't Mix", *Asia Report* No. 83, 13 September 2004.

9 IPAC interview, Abuhuraira Udasan, Cotabato, Philippines, 7 October 2019. Wahhabism refers to a Salafi strand pioneered by the 18th century Najd cleric Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab who collaborated with the Saud family to establish the Saudi state. But it came to be such a pejorative – implying extremism and foreign influence – that even the followers of Ibn Abdul Wahhab prefer to call themselves Salafis.

10 International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Background: Terrorism and the Peace Process", *Asia Report* No 80, 13 July 2004, p. 12. There were exceptions to this tactical approach. Some members of the MILF Special Operations Group, like Mukhlis Yunus, were probably true believers.

B. Saudi Arabian Scholarships and Charities

The Saudi government increased its international scholarships and educational programs in the 1970s and 1980s in part because of its geopolitical rivalries with Egypt and Iran, but it also took a particular interest in the Moro struggle. In 1971, it established the King Faisal Center for Islamic, Arabic and Asian Studies and the big King Faisal mosque at Mindanao State University (MSU) in Marawi. It also overtook Egypt and Libya as the primary providers of scholarships to Philippine Muslims. In 1977 Saudi Arabia granted 55 scholarships to Moro students and 54 more in 1978. Meanwhile Egypt only gave ten scholarships in 1977 and seventeen in 1978, and Libya only funded one student in 1977, although it provided military training for many more MNLF fighters.¹¹

The 1979 Iranian revolution had a profound impact around the Muslim world, including in the southern Philippines, convincing many Muslims for the first time that an uprising in the name of Islam could succeed. The Shi'a revolutionary movement became hugely popular among young Sunnis as a result, and the Saudi government was determined to counter its influence – and had seemingly unlimited funds from the oil boom to do so. In 1979, Saudi Arabia funded 82 Moro students, a record high. One Moro student who studied there in early 1980s was Abdurajak Janjalani, later to found the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a splinter of the MNLF.¹² Saudi Arabia also gave sanctuary to MNLF and MILF leaders, including Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim.

The Moro graduates of Saudi schools began returning in larger numbers in the mid-1980s and slowly transformed the Islamic landscape in the southern Philippines. The more open political atmosphere after President Ferdinand Marcos lifted martial law in 1981 enabled them to build new *madaris* (plural of *madrasah*) that not only taught Qur'an recitation, as the traditional teachers did, but also Arabic language, Prophetic traditions (*sunnah*) and other subjects. These new teachers aimed to replace existing folk Islam with the more legalistic and purist Salafi approach.

Ma'had Minbar al-Islam wa al-Jihad, a madrasah inside MILF's Camp Abu Bakar (operational between 1981 and 2000) was apparently modelled after the curriculum of Umm al-Qura University in Mecca. The teaching staff reportedly included Muhammad Gharib, an Arab national and alumnus of Umm al-Qura; and Muhammad Dzabbah, an Azhar-trained Muslim Brotherhood affiliate.¹³ The school principal, Esmail Dalinan, studied Islamic law while accompanying Salamat Hashim to Pakistan in the 1980s.¹⁴ In 1996, MILF also established an Islamic court system under a Madinah-trained cleric, Ali Ismael.¹⁵

Saudi-funded NGOs, ostensibly created for humanitarian aid and Islamic propagation, sprang up in the Philippines in the 1990s. The chief Saudi organisation operating in Mindanao was the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO), under the oversight of the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Propagation and Guidance.¹⁶ IIRO's Philippine branch was founded by Jamal Khalifa, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, who headed it from 1988

11 Wan Kadir bin Che Man, "Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand", Dissertation, Australian National University, September 1987, p. 86.

12 Ibid.

13 IPAC interview, NGO leader and alumnus of Ma'had Minbar al-Islam wa al-Jihad, Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, 28 February 2017.

14 Esmail Dalinan was the political affairs chairman of MILF provincial committee in Damakling, Maguindanao between 2014 and 2016.

15 Rodolfo B. Mendoza, *Philippine Jihad Inc.*, unpublished manuscript, 2002, p. 21.

16 The Ministry also controlled the Muslim World League (Rabitah Alam al-Islami) and World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY). Beginning in 1970s, Rabitah built many mosques and *madaris* in Indonesia. It also hired some prominent Filipino clerics to serve as Rabitah preachers in the Philippines, Malaysia and Southern Thailand. Rabitah – and many of its affiliates in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait – was controlled by *haraki* Salafis until the 1990s.

to 1994.¹⁷ While legitimate humanitarian and educational projects constituted a large part of IIRO's activities, Khalifa also used it as a front for Al-Qaeda operations in the region.

In 1988, IIRO sponsored the establishment of Darul Imam Shafi'ie Islamic centre in Marawi city, a facility later used by ASG for religious and military training.¹⁸ In 1993 Khalifa helped reconnect Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind of the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing, with ASG founder Abdurajak Janjalani.¹⁹ Yousef previously visited the ASG camp in Basilan in early 1990s and contacted the group again as he fled the U.S. after the 1993 bombing. In 1995, Philippine authorities discovered Yousef's Bojinka Plot to blow up several commercial airlines over the Pacific Ocean. IIRO was shut down and Khalifa was immediately deported. While the extent of IIRO's funding for Yousef and ASG remains unclear, the personal connection between Khalifa and Al-Qaeda operatives tainted all Saudi programs from then on as potentially extremist in the eyes of many non-Muslim Filipinos and their Western donors.

Another Saudi-linked NGO that was accused of terrorist financing was the Islamic Information Center (IIC) in Makati, the upmarket business district of Manila.²⁰ IIC was reportedly a funder of Fi-Sabilillah Daawa and Media Foundation, an above-ground organisation that produced Islamic publications and radio programs.²¹ Its founder was Ahmed Santos, a convert to Islam (Balik Islam) who became engaged in terrorism, first with ASG and then with the Rajah Solaiman Movement, a group of militant converts known for its role in the 2004 SuperFerry attack, the largest mass-casualty terrorist attack in Southeast Asia after the 2002 Bali bombs.²²

Ahmed Santos also cultivated close relations with other charity foundations run by Jamal Khalifa's close associates including the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM), a Quezon-based NGO whose director Mohammed Amin al-Ghafari was expelled from the Philippines in 2002.²³ IIC leader Nedal Al-Dhalain was deported in 2002, and other Middle Eastern teachers shared the same fate. Many local Salafi ustadzs also voluntarily left for Saudi Arabia around the same time to avoid being linked to terrorism.²⁴ The connection before the 2001 World Trade Centre bombing between Saudi funds and terrorist groups often involved a web of licit and illicit entities which were not necessarily aware of one another. Even though the links were largely severed after 9/11, they generated a perception of a link between Saudi Arabia, Salafism and terrorism that has persisted to this day.

Today the major channel of influence is through education. As of December 2019, an estimated 500 to 600 Filipino students were studying at Saudi universities and thousands of Saudi alumni were living and teaching in Mindanao and elsewhere.²⁵ (By way of comparison, as of October 2019, there were 300 Moro students in Turkey with scholarships from the Turkish government and various Islamic NGOs.) While there are no reliable figures of Saudi-funded mosques and *madaris* in the Philippines, the sheer number of Saudi alumni means that they control a

17 International Crisis Group, "Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Converts", Asia Report No. 110, 19 December 2005, p. 6

18 Mendoza, op. cit., p. 32.

19 Quinton Temby, "Jihadist Assemble: The Rise of Militant Islamism in Southeast Asia", Dissertation, Australian National University, July 2017, p. 172.

20 Mendoza, op. cit., p. 121. Established in 1997, IIC's incorporators included Abdullah Alsegair, a Saudi national and Nedal Fallah al-Dhalain, a Jordanian – although the sources of IIC's funding have never been clear IIC website vaguely mentioned "financial and moral support" from "generous brothers".

21 One Balik Islam terror suspect arrested in May 2002 in connection with an RSM bomb plot revealed that he had been converted by his cousin who worked for IIC; the cousin then advised him to attend a two-month Islamic course at Almaarif Educational Centre of the Darul Hijra Foundation in Baguio, another organisation headed by al-Dhalain (some relatives of Janjalani also studied there). Mendoza, op. cit., p. 120.

22 International Crisis Group, op. cit., 2005.

23 "BI Departs Jordanian Suspect", Philstar.com, 19 October 2002.

24 "Jordanian Terror Suspect Deported", Gulfnews.com, 14 May 2002.

25 UNESCO, "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students: Saudi Arabia", <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>; IPAC interview, president of Assunnah Foundation, Zamboanga, Philippines, 3 December 2019.

huge network of mosques, imams and religious teachers. The principal of a Salafi madrasah in Zamboanga city estimated in October 2019 that at least 60 per cent of the mosques there were Salafi.²⁶ Academics in Cotabato and Davao gave higher estimates of 90 to 95 per cent.²⁷ A study conducted in 2018 on traditional *madaris* in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) reveals that 35 per cent of the *madaris* adopt foreign curricula and among those, half use the Saudi curriculum.²⁸ Many Salafi foundations over the years donated money, Saudi school textbooks and other printed materials to the under-resourced local *madaris* – to the dismay of traditionalist Muslim groups.

C. Conflict with the Asha'irah

In order to affirm their superior status within Sunni Islam, Salafis often refer to themselves as *ahlus sunnah* (the Sunni) and use “Asha'irah” as a derogative label for their Sunni rivals. In the Philippine context, the Asha'irah label has been appropriated by Salafis to cover a diverse array of groups including Sunni traditionalists, Sufis, followers of syncretistic folk Islam (*kamaasan*), and even the Tablighi Jamaat.

Sunni traditionalists – who dominate the Muslim populations of Southeast Asia, Turkey and Egypt, among other places – are essentially those who adhere to the Ash'ari or Maturidi school of theology (*kalam*) and follow one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madzhab*) namely Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'ie.²⁹ Southeast Asian Muslims are predominantly Ash'ari-Shafi'ie traditionalists, hence the label Asha'irah (followers of Ash'ari creed). Ash'arism allows the use of reason to interpret and contextualise Qur'an while Salafis take it literally. But in terms of jurisprudence, traditionalists emulate one of the four *madzhab* while Salafis in general prefer to take cues directly from Qur'an and Sunnah.³⁰ Another key difference between the two is that traditionalists tend to accommodate pre-Islamic local traditions and Sufism (Islamic mysticism) while Salafis consider them heretical.

Filipino Salafis associate Ash'arism with Shi'ism and Sufism. This is in part because traditional folk practices in southern Philippines, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, were historically influenced by Shi'a culture – even though it was (Sunni) Sufi missionaries and traders who first spread Islam in the region.³¹ For example, some traditionalist Muslims still observe the Ashura holiday on the 10th day of Muharram (the first month in Islamic lunar calendar) to commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn bin Ali, a grandson of Prophet Muhammad whom Shi'a recognise as Islam's third imam. They also used to prohibit weddings and travels during the mourning month of Muharram. Folk Muslims would conduct ceremonies to prevent bad luck (*talak bala*) and the elders would recite songs that tell the story of the Karbala Battle – where Husayn was

26 IPAC interview, principal of Ma'had al-Qur'an wal Hadith, Zamboanga, Philippines, 15 October 2019.

27 IPAC interview, staff member of Al-Qalam Ateneo de Davao University, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

28 Institute for Autonomy and Governance, *Research on Traditional Madaris in ARMM and Adjacent Regions*, (Manila, 2019), p. 60.

29 Ash'arism and Maturidism are two of the major schools in the discipline of Islamic scholastic theology (*ilm al-kalam*) which developed between the 7th and 13th century. Opponents of theologians (*ahl al-kalam*) were known as Atharis. Atharis reject reason in favour of the literal meaning of divine texts; they also vilify the theologians' scholastic method for allegedly mixing Islamic creed with Greek philosophy. See Jeffrey R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam*, (New York, 2010), pp. 1-2.

30 Salafis disagree among themselves regarding the permissibility of following a specific madzhab (*taqlid*). Wahhabi founder Ibnu Abdul Wahhab was a Hanbali in madzhab (most Atharis were also Hanbalis). However, many contemporary Salafi scholars such as the Syrian Nasiruddin al-Albani strongly reject *taqlid* due to the influence of Rida's rationalist conception of salafiyah (see footnote 1). Some prominent Saudi scholars, notably Assim Alhakeem, still call themselves Hanbali, although they claim to not just “blindly” follow it but also scrutinise its sources in Qur'an and Sunnah.

31 R. Michael Feener and Chiara Formichi, “Debating ‘Shi’ism’ in the History of Muslim Southeast Asia” in Chiara Formichi and Michael Feener, eds, *Shiism in South East Asia: Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions*, (London, 2015).

killed – in local languages.³² At the time Salafism was making inroads into the Philippines, most Muslims did not understand, let alone worry about, the difference between Sunni and Shi'a.

Such syncretic practices are exactly what Salafis tried to abolish. Conflict took place in 1980s between the young scholars who just returned from the Middle East and the traditionalist elderly teachers (*pandita*) who assisted the local aristocrats (*datu*) in religious matters. The scholars criticised *pandita*-led rituals such as holding ceremonies on the third, seventh and fortieth day after the death of a relative. They termed it *bid'ah* and said it was wasteful. They also challenged the *datu*'s claim of politico-religious authority – which was derived from their claimed blood lineage to the Prophet Muhammad – by promoting the idea of Islamic egalitarianism.³³

In the following decades, doctrinal differences among the ulama did not generate open conflict in part because the elders kept them in check. For instance in Sulu, many young Muslims who went to study the Middle East (either in Salafi or traditionalist institutions) in the 1980s and 1990s were former students of Ustadz Ibrahim Ghazali who graduated from al-Azhar in 1968 and became the most senior cleric in the area. Elderly leaders like Ghazali were reportedly able to mediate ulama disputes internally. It was only after Ghazali's death in 2003 that Salafis in Sulu founded a separate organisation and conflict began to surface in public.³⁴

Internet and social media allowed intra-Islamic debates to proliferate beyond the ulama to other groups including lay Muslims. Facebook increasingly became the new battleground where Salafis and traditionalists argued over various issues, including the legality of celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Maulid). For the Salafis, neither the Prophet nor his companions ever did so, making it *bid'ah*. On Facebook, they circulated a ruling signed by Abuhuraira Udasan stating that Maulid "is not among the occasions being celebrated in Islam".³⁵ To defend Maulid, traditionalists circulated another fatwa by Abdulbaqi Abubakar, the traditionalist Grand Mufti of Region IX (Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi).³⁶ In addition, they cited the 1977 Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Presidential Decree 1083) that declared Maulid a national holiday for Muslims. The code also recognised the four *madzhab* and was thus seen as pro-traditionalist.

Traditionalist Muslims are still relatively strong in Region IX and they have banded together with Tablighis to oppose what they perceive as "Wahhabi aggression".

D. Tablighis

At the same time that Salafism was taking off, another conservative transnational Islamic movement arose in the Philippines: the South Asia-based Tablighi Jamaat, whose members are called Tablighis. Tablighi Jamaat was formed in India in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi who was linked to an older Deobandi movement. Tablighis focus on lay missionary work while Deo-

32 IPAC interview, faculty member of Ateneo de Davao, October 2019. On the Malay and Maranao versions of the story of the Battle of Karbala, see Kawashima Midori, "History of the Collection of Sheikh Muhammad bin Said Imam sa Bayang in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, Philippines", Occasional Papers No. 27, 2019, Institute of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern, Sophia University, p. 52.

33 Thomas McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), p. 221-222.

34 Alan Muktar, "Sulu Islamic Formation", in Jose Canuday, ed., *Agama, Bangsa, Hulah: A Participatory Study on the Islamic Foundation in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga*, unpublished manuscript, July 2015.

35 Regional Darul Ifta-BARMM's letter to Murad Ebrahim regarding "Maulidun Nabi", signed by Abuhuraira Udasan, 6 November 2019. It was circulated online including through a Facebook group, Anti Bid'ah Shirk - Sufi Tasawwuf Shi'a Asha'ira Exposed, which had been taken down as of December 2019.

36 Abdulbaqi Abubakar was a contemporary of Salamat Hashim and Ust Ibrahim Ghazali in Egypt.

bandis emphasise formal education.³⁷ South Asian Tablighis and Deobandis mostly follow the Maturidi creed and Hanafi madzhab.

Tablighi groups from Pakistan and India began coming to the southern Philippines in the 1950s. In Marawi – today’s Tablighi stronghold – its local structure was first established in 1984 under the initiative of Camarodin “Sukarno” Dimaporo who joined the movement while studying in the U.S.³⁸ Maulana Faisal, the late leader of Tablighi Jamaat in Lanao del Sur, was trained in Madinah Islamic University (he was one of the few Saudi graduates who chose Tablighi Jamaat over Salafism). Tablighi Jamaat also amassed followings in Manila, Sulu, and other parts of the country.

Non-violent and apolitical, it is a missionary movement which primarily aims to make Muslims more observant, for example in praying five times a day, rather than focusing on “purifying” their faith. The Tablighi handbook, *The Virtues of Good Deeds (fadhail al-amal or fazail e amaal)*, has been widely criticised by Salafi clerics for its supposed reliance on weak hadith and “fabricated” Sufi tales.³⁹ But the openness of Filipino Tablighis enabled them to coexist with all types of Muslims.

Tablighis initially got along well with Salafis; some even sent their children to the Saudi-sponsored Almaarif Education Centre in Baguio to receive high quality Arabic education. They became disappointed as these students later became the harshest critics of the movement.⁴⁰ Salafis themselves acknowledge the problem, as one ustadz said:

Tablighis are good people but they’re very vulnerable on *aqidah* (creed) because they focus too much on *da’wah*. Before, they used to be very friendly with us. But now they are very hostile. It’s partly the fault of some of our *da’iyat* (missionary) brothers. Of course we can see a lot of *bid’ah* in Tablighi Jamaat. But it’s a matter of how you correct them. Some of our brothers from Baguio and from Madinah, their method in correcting people is harsh. That makes the Tablighis distance themselves from us. And now the Asha’irah is using them.⁴¹

The institution that best represents the Tablighi-traditionalist union against Salafi is Sabiel al-Muhtadeen Foundation that boasts a network of 140 mosques and perhaps over 100 *madaris* in Zamboanga, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. Established in 2002 to empower traditional Muslims through reconciling folk practices with Islamic shari’a, its members now consist of Sunni traditionalists (including al-Azhar graduates), members of a small Naqshbandi Sufi order and Tablighis.⁴²

Part of the reason why Salafi-traditionalist tension resurged in late 2000s is that younger, more vocal *ustadz* came back from their studies overseas, including in Sudan and Indonesia. Elders in Zamboanga attributed the rising tension to the younger alumni of the International Islamic University of Africa, a Sudanese Salafi institute to which promising young Muslims in Mindanao got scholarships; and traditionalist ustadz trained in Darul Ulum Al-Fatah Temboro,

37 The Deobandi school began as an anti-colonialist, revivalist Sunni movement in Indian northern city of Deoband in 1867. Following the tradition of Indian scholar Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1627) that is characterised by a “combination of sober Sufism with reformist inclinations”, the Deobandis sought to reform mystic and superstitious Islamic practices, blamed for Muslims’ backwardness, in favour of rational and legalistic interpretation of Islam. See Nathan Spannaus, “Darul Ulum Deoband and South Asian Islam”, in Masooda Bano, ed., *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume I* (Edinburgh, 2018), p. 225.

38 Ali Panda, *Maranao Ulama in Philippine Politics*, (Marawi, 2009), p. 29.

39 Abu Nu’aim Al-Atsari, “Kitab Fadhail Amal, Kitab Pokok Pegangan Jamaah Tabligh, Apakah Isinya?” [Fadhail Amal, the handbook of Tablighi Jamaat, what is it about?], *aslibumiayu.net*, 8 October 2012.

40 Filipino Tablighis began to send students to Indonesia in mid-2000s, although some of the older Tablighis had previously made *khuruj* to Indonesia. IPAC interview, alumnus of Al-Fatah Temboro, Zamboanga, Philippines, 17 October 2019.

41 IPAC interview, Salafi NGO leader, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

42 Canuday, *op. cit.*

a Tablighi Islamic boarding school in Indonesia.⁴³ Al-Fatah Temboro is unique because unlike its parent schools in South Asia that follow Maturidi creed and Hanafi jurisprudence, it adopts Indonesia's Ash'ari-Shafi'ie traditionalism.⁴⁴ The Sudan graduates took control of the Federation of Muslim Students Association (FMSA) in Zamboanga in 2012. Meanwhile several alumni of Al-Fatah Temboro – mostly from Sulu – had returned home by 2014 and re-energised the traditionalist camp with their engaging lectures off- and online. These young Tablighis joined their seniors in the Sabiel al-Muhtadeen network.

In attempting to counter Saudi influence, traditionalist groups have worked with some elements within the National Commission for Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), a government agency with branches across the country that advises the central government on Muslim affairs. In the latest iteration of the Maulid debate, NCMF's Region IX office issued a formal letter recognising Maulid as a national Muslim holiday.⁴⁵ Salafis thus lost the little remaining trust they had for the central government and NCMF, even suspecting one NCMF commissioner of being a Shi'a agent.⁴⁶

Traditionalist groups, assisted by some in NCMF, also tried to bring in charismatic traditionalist sheikhs from Indonesia and Malaysia to the Philippines. In January 2016, for instance, they invited Imran Angullia, a Malaysian Sufi sheikh of Hadrami descent for a da'wah tour in Sulu, Zamboanga, Manila, and other cities. In Manila, Angullia established a branch of his Erth Ul Mustafa Organisation, a humanitarian and educational foundation which is a subsidiary of the Turkish Islamic (traditionalist) humanitarian group IDDEF.⁴⁷ Erth Ul Mustafa has constructed or renovated a number of mosques in the Philippines, although the number is tiny compared to Saudi-funded projects. In 2017, it funded a new madrasah project at Blue Mosque, a Tablighi center in Manila, which was named Ma'ahad al-Imam as-Shafi'ie to emphasise its traditionalist identity.

The main problem with Tablighis is that the movement has sometimes been considered a gateway to more militant movements – Abdurajak Janjalani, for example, was briefly a member – or misused by extremists who exploit the Tablighis' openness. Its practice of *khuruj*, going outside one's community or country to carry out da'wah, has often been used as a cover by extremist groups to move personnel across borders.⁴⁸ It was no coincidence that the Marawi siege broke out just after an international Tablighi gathering at the Abubakar Mosque, Marawi which was attended by hundreds of foreign nationals. The Maute group allegedly used the gathering to bring in fighters from Malaysia and Indonesia disguised as Tablighis.⁴⁹

III. DIVISIONS WITHIN THE SALAFI COMMUNITY

As with every Salafi community in the world including in Saudi Arabia, the Salafi community is divided along ideological and generational lines, but in the Philippines, clan, ethnicity and political affiliation are also factors. The Madinah University alumni who now control the Fatwa Council (Darul Ifta), the highest religious body in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), represent what might be called “establishment Salafism”. They

43 IPAC interview, leader of Sabiel al-Muhtadeen, Zamboanga, Philippines, 17 October 2019; Canuday, op. cit.

44 This is because Al-Fatah Temboro was formerly a Nahdlatul Ulama boarding school (pesantren). The tablighi school in Sri Petaling, Malaysia also adopts the Shafi'ie madzhab. Farish Noor, *Islam on the Move: The Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia*, (Amsterdam, 2003), p. 57.

45 Memorandum of NCMF Region IX-A Zamboanga Peninsula on “Observance of Muslim Holiday”, 6 November 2019, signed by Zulbikar J. Abantas, the Regional Director.

46 IPAC interviews with various Salafi clerics in Zamboanga, October 2019.

47 See <https://erthulmustafa.org/about/>

48 Noor, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

49 IPAC, “Marawi, The East Asia Wilayah”, Report No. 38, 21 July 2017, p. 5.

follow classic Saudi-style doctrine, modified by involvement in the MILF – which purists would shun as too political – and by the much more open environment of the southern Philippines where, among other things, men and women generally mix freely.

Younger Muslims, who came of age with the Internet and social media, are more interested in charismatic preachers they can find on YouTube, running the gamut from very hardline to “Salafi-lite”, but the medium is as important as the message. The preachers who make most effective use of platforms used by millennials, including with music, have the best chance of attracting them, and the Salafis are far savvier in this respect than the traditionalists. Some of the Philippine groups bear a strong resemblance to Hijrah Youth (Pemuda Hijrah) in West Java, Indonesia, whose founder recognised the value of starting with the kinds of entertainment that appealed to smart phone-addicted teenagers and gradually adding ideological content.⁵⁰

A very small, much more hardline, puritanical Salafist group emerged in Davao in 2016. Sometimes referred to as “neo-Salafi”, it came from the teachings of Yemeni cleric al-Madkhali via the website of his followers in the U.K.

Finally, there are the salafi jihadists, the men and women committed to violence against the forces they see as Islam’s enemies. Since 2014, they have been mostly committed to ISIS, but shaped, as always in the Philippines, by clan, ethnicity and previous affiliation with one of the Moro insurgencies.

A. *Establishment Salafis*

“Establishment Salafis” are mostly an older generation of ulama who control many of the religious institutions in Muslim Mindanao, including within BARMM. This is not to say that all members of BARMM’s religious bureaucracy are Salafis, but rather that Salafis are increasingly filling up its ranks. Salafi principles are therefore likely to affect BARMM policies on education, justice and treatment of minorities like the Shi’a.

One of the best examples of an establishment Salafi is Abuhuraira Udasan, Grand Mufti of BARMM, long-term member of the MILF Central Committee and an early graduate of Madinah Islamic University. He spent almost 40 years in Sabah, Malaysia from 1974 to 2012 working as an Islamic missionary of the Saudi-sponsored World Muslim League (Rabitah al-Alam al-Islami) but was in regular communication both with the MILF leadership and Islamic organisations around the region, including Jemaah Islamiyah.

While he was away, Darul Ifta institutions emerged in MILF and MNLF strongholds. Modelled after the Egyptian shari’a ruling establishment, also called Darul Ifta, their existence was formally recognised by the 1977 Muslim Code. The Egypt-trained ulama that pioneered these institutions include Sheikh Omar Pasigan of Cotabato (died in 2018), the highly respected former Grand Mufti of Central Mindanao and brother-in-law of MILF chairman Murad Ebrahim; and Sheikh Abdulbaqi Abubakar, the Grand Mufti of Region IX and MNLF secretary-general for foreign relations. These local fatwa councils operated independently from one another although in some occasions they issued joint rulings on behalf of the Assembly of Darul Ifta of the Philippines.

In September 2013, Mujiv Hataman as governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) began a series of steps that would lead in 2015 to the creation of Darul Ifta of ARMM, to issue rulings on the “full breadth of Islamic jurisprudence.”⁵¹ Aboulkhair Tarason, a Tausug Islamic jurist trained in Madinah, served as the Grand Mufti of ARMM.

50 Quinton Temby, “Shariah, Dakwah and Rock ‘n Roll: Pemuda Hijrah in Bandung”, *New Mandala*, 30 June 2018, available at <https://www.newmandala.org/shariah-dakwah-rock-n-roll-pemuda-hijrah-bandung/>

51 <https://bdic.bangsamoro.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/APPROVED-IRR.pdf>

Abuhuraira returned to Mindanao just as the Syrian conflict was beginning to attract notice in Southeast Asia. After the declaration of ISIS so-called caliphate in 2014, groups of extremists – from prisoners to Abu Sayyaf fugitives – began taking oaths to ISIS leader Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi. At the same time, MILF appointed Abuhuraira as the Grand Mufti of Bangsamoro. Still on the MILF Central Committee, he incurred the anger of some other Salafi ulama in late 2015 when he voiced an opinion in the name of Bangsamoro Darul Ifta condemning ISIS as “*haram*” (forbidden) and “un-Islamic”.⁵²

As an NGO leader in Cagayan de Oro said in 2017:

You can't issue a fatwa about a group unless you see it very closely. Who knows, maybe it really is the caliphate that's been prophesied.⁵³

Abuhuraira's anti-ISIS stance, however, was consistent both with the MILF's rejection of violence ever since it had expelled foreign jihadis from its camps in 2005 and with the anti-ISIS stance of many Saudi-aligned Salafis who saw the new caliphate's leaders as extremists.⁵⁴

When BARMM was formed in February 2019, Abuhuraira was immediately declared as the Grand Mufti of the Regional Darul Ifta-BARMM (RDI-BARMM). He apparently wished to turn the RDI-BARMM into a centralised fatwa-making body, subsuming other fatwa councils.⁵⁵ RDI-BARMM also immediately began taking on a much more pronounced Salafi orientation. Before, the Islamic officials in ARMM came from different Islamic denominations, and in ARMM's library, one could easily find Shi'a books donated by Iran displayed side by side with Salafi literature. But the new ulama in BARMM were committed to altering the *madaris* curriculum, school textbooks, and religious rulings to comply with Salafi teachings. By October 2019, Abuhuraira had recruited 100 Saudi graduates and they were trying to influence the drafting of the Bangsamoro Education Code.⁵⁶

Another area in which Salafi ulama are trying to exert control is the application of shari'a. Salafi influence can already be seen in the final version of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that established BARMM. In a clear departure from the 1977 Muslim Code (Presidential Decree 1083), BOL does not acknowledge any of the four madzhab and only recognises Qur'an, hadith, ulama consensus (*ijma*) and deductive analogy (*qiyas*) as the sources of Islamic law.⁵⁷ That said, the scope of shari'a jurisdiction (personal and family law) is almost the same, as BOL was meant to complement rather than abolish PD 1083. The only major difference is that BOL has a provision on *ta'zir* which is defined as “criminal jurisdiction on minor offenses” which is equivalent to *arresto menor* (imprisonment of up to 30 days) in the Philippine Penal Code.⁵⁸ It does not, however, recognise Islamic corporal punishments (*hudud*), such as cutting off hands for theft or death for apostasy.

The Salafis in BARMM believe in a gradualist Islamisation strategy. As Abuhuraira said:

It takes a long process to be able to implement *shari'a* fully. It is mentioned in Qur'an that thieves must get their hands cut off... But right now we are still in the process of Islamising the society. The current situation is not yet suitable to implement [such punishment]. Because we don't have any *zakat* (alms collection) institution yet, there is no

52 “Grand Mufti Says ISIS is Haram, Un-Islamic”, Ndbcnews.com.ph, 2 December 2015

53 IPAC interview, Cagayan de Oro, 28 Feb 2017.

54 “Saudi Clerics Declare ISIS Terrorism a ‘Heinous Crime’ Under Shar’a Law”, Theguardian.com, 17 September 2014.

55 Other muftis, especially those from Region IX, reportedly opposed the planned centralisation of Darul Ifta. IPAC interview, staff member of Al-Qalam Ateneo de Davao University, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

56 IPAC interview, Abuhuraira Udasan, Cotabato, Philippines, 7 October 2019.

57 For BOL full text, see https://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2018/ra_11054_2018.html

58 The original meaning of *ta'zir* is punishments that can be determined at the discretion of the judge; it applies on offenses for which the punishments are not fixed in Qur'an and Sunnah.

Islamic social welfare system yet. People who suffer from hunger cannot be punished for stealing food.⁵⁹

Thus the short-term priority for BARMM ulama is to set up Salafi-compliant institutions than can strengthen commitment to Islam in the general population.

Murad Ebrahim, BARMM chief minister and MILF chairman, envisions yet another kind of Islamisation that he terms “moral governance”.⁶⁰ In his view, moral governance denotes the implementation of Islamic values such as transparency (anti-corruption), justice and democratic accountability rather than the formalisation of *shari’a* per se. As he put it:

When people join the government we let them take oath to the constitution and take oath to Allah – a noble oath – to ensure that this moral governance will be the basis. So, we say we are not imposing Islamic governance, but we are imposing the moral virtues of Islam. Because if you look at the moral virtues of Islam, it is for mankind, it is not only for Muslims.⁶¹

However, some BARMM ulama clearly wished to apply moral policing as in Aceh, Indonesia where they understand public caning to have been instituted as punishment for “gay sex and drinking”.⁶²

In September 2019, some Salafi clerics in the new Darul Ifta tried to repeal a 2004 fatwa on reproductive health and family planning that was issued by the Assembly of Darul Ifta of the Philippines under Omar Pasigan.⁶³ They believe that family planning and especially the use of contraceptives are prohibited by Islam. Local NGO activists affiliated with the United Nations Population Fund worked with Abuhuraira to retain the fatwa although some of his younger subordinates simply refused to promote it.⁶⁴ Indeed, Abuhuraira is seen by some progressive Muslim intellectuals as more open-minded and pragmatic than some of his younger colleagues. For instance in 2015, he endorsed the Model Family Fatwa which prohibits early and forced marriage as well as domestic violence.⁶⁵

The second generation of the MNLF is also more pious and arguably more Salafi than the founders, who were decidedly secular in orientation. Some MNLF commanders sent their children to study in Salafi institutes in Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The best example is Mahir Gustaham, a renowned Sudan-trained ustadz and former leader of Zamboanga’s Federation of Muslim Students Association (FMSA) who has become an inclusive peace activist.⁶⁶ MNLF chairman Nur Misuari had expressed Marxist views in his younger days, though he later raised all his six children (from the first wife) to become Islamic scholars.⁶⁷ His first wife, Desdemona Tan, was said to have been traumatised by the MILF’s “betrayal” and concluded that the future leaders of MNLF must possess strong religious credentials in addition to revolutionary fervour.⁶⁸ Their

59 IPAC interview, Abuhuraira Udasan, Cotabato, Philippines, 7 October 2019.

60 “Ebrahim Wants ‘Moral Governance’ for Bangsamoro”, *mindanews.com*, 25 March 2019.

61 “Bangsamoro Chief Minister Focuses on Moral Governance”, *Yenisafak.com*, 16 December 2019.

62 IPAC interviews with ulama in Cotabato, Philippines, October 2019. This is a simplification of Aceh’s application of *shari’a* which regulates Islamic dress and penalises illicit relations between men and women and same-sex couples, gambling, and sale and distribution of alcohol.

63 The fatwa was supported by the United Nations Population Fund and USAID which organised a series of seminars where “selected ulama” drafted the fatwa. They also facilitated some Filipino ulama to conduct a comparative study in Indonesia. Once the final draft was ready, they helped the Darul Ifta secure a formal endorsement from al-Azhar Grand Sheikh, Ali Gomaa. This endorsement apparently made it difficult for RDI-BARMM to repeal the fatwa. Cynthia Dionco, “Muslim-Initiated/Related Population Development Program: Development of a National Fatwa on Family Planning and Reproductive Health”, *International Movement of Development Managers*, 2008, available at <https://www.pcpd.ph/uploads/products/546c3a58ea50a505322b36dd47249ecb.pdf>

64 IPAC interview, former member of the Assembly of National Darul Ifta of the Philippines, Cotabato, 6 October 2019.

65 “The Model Family in Islam”, UNFPA Philippines, 3 November 2015.

66 For Mahir Gustaham’s profile, see his interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZuyfb515q4>

67 Tom Stern, *Nus Misuari: An Authorised Biography*, (Mandaluyong, 2012).

68 IPAC interview, a member of Misuari family, Zamboanga, Philippines, 15 October 2019.

eldest son, Abdulkarim Tan Misuari who is currently the vice chairman of MNLF, holds a master's degree in shari'a from a Libyan university and reportedly had a stint in Egypt where he was involved with the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶⁹ Abdulkarim, however, has shown a flexible attitude toward non-Salafi Islamic interpretations. For instance he wrote in a Facebook post that Muslim scholars should stop debating over the permissibility of Maulid and respect each other's opinions for the sake of Islamic unity.⁷⁰

Abdulkarim and his siblings spent years in United Arab Emirates under the protection of a Sharjah emirate leader. His younger sister lived in UAE between 2000 and 2012, studying business at the American University in Dubai before taking another degree in Islamic studies at the Ajman University, where the Islamic department was set up by Bilal Philips, a Madinah-trained Canadian preacher (see below). In 2015, she worked with her uncle Rauf Tan, a retired businessman, to establish Al-Husna Foundation in Zamboanga city which provides Arabic and Islamic education for both the orphans of MNLF (for free) and the better-off Muslim community (with fees). Al-Husna was one of the Salafi organisations that facilitated the visits of global celebrity preachers to the Philippines. Its Islamic classes reflect Salafi doctrines but it has been open to cooperation with other Muslim organisations, even with the Sufi-inspired Turkish group Risale-i-Nur.⁷¹

Risale-i-Nur, also known as Nurculuk (the Nur Movement), is one of several Turkish Islamic NGOs operating in the Philippines. It first entered in 2003 and as of October 2019, operated an orphanage and several learning centres (*darsane*) that cater to some 300 members, including some live-in university students. In 2011-2012, as Salafis made inroads into Zamboanga's Muslim Students Associations (MSA), the Nur preachers were banned from local universities as MSA leaders accused them of being closet Shi'a.⁷² Risale-i-Nur provided a non-Salafi alternative to traditionalist-inclined Moro youth. Among Turkish organisations in Mindanao, its operations are much smaller than those of the Gulen movement, another Sufi-inspired transnational movement which runs several private Islamic schools and businesses in the Philippines. The largest and most influential of the Turkish organisations in Mindanao is IHH, a conservative humanitarian NGO close to Turkish President Erdogan. IHH representative sat on the Third Party Monitoring team, part of the machinery of the MILF-government peace process.⁷³ Turkey, instead of Saudi Arabia, seems to be the preferred partner of Murad Ebrahim and the MILF leadership. Murad has praised and visited Turkey multiple times, including to IHH headquarters in Istanbul.⁷⁴

B. YouTube and Salafi Rock Stars

Before the social media era, Filipino Muslims were already familiar with media-savvy Islamic missionaries including the controversial Canadian Salafi preacher Bilal Philips who had long stirred anti-west sentiment while avoiding open endorsement of violent jihad. Philips, who was known for converting a number of US troops stationed in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War

69 "Philippines: MNLF Votes Son of Wanted Leader Vice Chair", Aa.com.tr, 2 September 2016.

70 <https://www.facebook.com/UstadzKharz/posts/732751953870923>

71 IPAC interview, Risale-i-Nur's women leaders in Zamboanga, Philippines, October 2019. IPAC interview, local representative of IHH, Cotabato, Philippines, 7 October 2019.

72 IPAC interview, Risale-i-Nur member, Zamboanga, 17 October 2019.

73 IHH, which has been operating in the Philippines since 1997, is the group that organised the aid flotilla to Gaza on the Mavi Marmara that was attacked by Israel in 2010. Occasionally accused of extremist links because of its support for Hamas and various Palestinian groups, IHH does not appear to be propagating any particular doctrinal stance in its institutions in the Philippines and therefore has been welcomed by Filipino Muslims of all streams, including some Shi'a.

74 "DFA Chief Threatens to Cut Ties with Turkey", Philstar.com, 28 December 2019.

(1990-1991), moved to the Philippines in 1992.⁷⁵ Between 1992 and 1994 he taught Islamic studies at the Shariff Kabunsuan College in Cotabato. He made friends with Jamal Khilafa, though he denied any connection to bin Laden.⁷⁶ Philips returned to the Philippines in September 2014 for a da'wah tour only to get arrested in Davao and immediately deported. By 2019, his popularity had waned, although his Islamic Online University remained an alternative for Filipino Muslims who could not study abroad. Some of his books also continued to be used as standard academic texts at the King Faisal Centre, MSU Marawi.

Today, the pop Islamic missionaries adored by Filipino Muslims are softer and less political in their rhetoric but nevertheless committed to a purist Islam. The most popular is Ismail Menk, the Grand Mufti of Zimbabwe and who has 5 million Twitter followers and 3.5 million more on Facebook. A graduate of Madinah Islamic University, the 44-year-old ustadz is famous for his motivational speeches that touch the hearts of young Muslims all over the world. His best-selling books, *Motivational Moments* (volume I and II) are compilations of his famous motivational tweets encouraging people to do good things to others and get closer to God; they are rather different from conventional Salafi books which usually focus on identifying the mistakes in one's faith.

Mufti Menk appeals more to the universal Islamic brotherhood than the exclusive Salafi identity. While some hardline Salafi groups in the UK have criticised him for mixing Salafism with Sufi-like creeds (due to his Deobandi family and educational background), he is widely accepted by Filipino Muslims precisely because he avoids divisive *aqidah* issues. While visiting Davao in February 2016, he met with the then Davao mayor Rodrigo Duterte to talk about interfaith tolerance. A year later, he was banned from Singapore for his alleged intolerant views such as prohibiting Muslim men to marry non-Muslim women and to say Merry Christmas to non-Muslims.⁷⁷

Menk first came to the Philippines in 2014 on the invitation of fellow Salafi rock star Wael Ibrahim. Ibrahim is an Egyptian pop singer-turned ustadz who until 2017 lived in Hong Kong with his Filipina wife and established the Serving Islam Team (SIT) there in 2003.⁷⁸ SIT runs free Islamic classes and apparently has converted hundreds of Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong.⁷⁹

In 2014, Ibrahim established Connect Institute in Manila with the assistance of some Filipina Muslim activists, including those from Mujaddidat, a Manila-based Muslim women organisation. Connect Institute organises da'wah roadshows annually involving famous international speakers such as Mufti Menk that are held in Manila and Mindanao cities in partnership with local NGOs like Al-Husna. Sayfa Gilman, the woman leader (Amirah) of Connect Institute and a Mujaddidat member, reportedly crossed over to ISIS in 2017 – to the shock of her friends – and was allegedly involved in the bombing of the Shi'a centre in Quiapo, Manila.⁸⁰ Wael Ibrahim himself has spoken against violent extremism and focused his da'wah on youth development and mental health problems.

The local Amir of Connect Institute is Ustadz Ahmad Javier who has 250,000 Facebook followers and owns the Islam in Focus Production that creates da'wah contents on social media and radio.⁸¹ He was one of the IIC staff members who went into exile in Saudi Arabia from 2005

75 J. M. Berger, "A Conversation about Jihad with Controversial Preacher Bilal Philips", Intelwire.com, 19 April 2011. Some of the American troops he converted became volunteer trainers in the Bosnia War that began in 1992. Philips had also been linked to other terror plots in the U.S. which he denied.

76 Ibid.

77 "Intolerant Views on Non-Muslims, Falsify of Other Faiths, Are Divisive", Todayonline.com, 13 December 2017.

78 As of 2019, Ibrahim and his wife were based in Perth, where he worked as teacher at the Australian Islamic College.

79 IPAC interview, representative of Serving Islam Team, Hong Kong, May 2017.

80 IPAC interview, Salafi leaders in Zamboanga, 15 October 2019. Sayfa was reported to have been killed in Marawi but Philippine sources say that as of late 2019 she was living in North Cotabato.

81 For Ahmad Javier's fan page, see <https://business.facebook.com/ibnulqaysar/>

to 2010 to avoid what they perceive as wrongful arrests.⁸² Ahmad and his brother Eisa Javier are converts who went on to become popular ustadzs; they are both media da'wah enthusiasts and specialise on working with "new Muslims".⁸³

Wael Ibrahim and the Javier brothers represent a less-strict type of quietist Salafism, a kind of "Salafi-lite". Like other quietist Salafis, they are keen to help the government in countering violent extremism.⁸⁴ They are relatively more relaxed in terms of interaction with non-Muslims and control over women's bodies. For example, they do not force women to wear black abaya and *niqab* – although they encourage it – and occasionally allow female speakers to address a mixed-gender audience. They believe in cultivating good relations with non-Muslim and the secular government for they have learned that the only way they can conduct da'wah freely is if the state does not suspect them as being closet rebels or radicals. They are generally very personable in their manners and speaking style, preferring jeans and t-shirts to white tunics when conducting da'wah on the street or in the classroom. They do not mind incorporating some music in their videos even though many Salafis consider it *haram* (forbidden).

C. The "neo-Salafis" before Marawi

A small group of Salafi polemicists emerged in Davao in 2016 which caused a stir within the city's growing Salafi community. Called Salafi-Madkhali, they follow a strand of purist Salafism developed by Rabi al-Madkhali, a former hadith professor in Madinah University. It is characterised by an extreme antagonism toward other Islamic movements including fellow quietists, jihadists, and especially toward Islamist political movements like IM.⁸⁵ The Madkhali movement grew in the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Often referred to as "super Salafi" or "neo-Salafi" due to its intolerance toward other Salafis, the group is led Abu Khadeejah who founded the Birmingham-based Salafi Publication that published voluminous English translations of Salafi tracts and audio lectures.⁸⁶

In Davao, a small group took inspiration from Salafi Publication. They would have weekend gatherings at the Wisdom School's mosque – even though the school is not necessarily Madkhali – and listen to the Telegram lectures of British Salafi clerics. They created a Facebook page, a Telegram channel and a website called Salafi Da'wah Davao which gained influence among some members of Inter School Muslim Organisation (ISMO), an umbrella organisation for all Muslim students in the city including those from Ateneo de Davao University.⁸⁷

Many ISMO members were regular attendees of Mercy Islamic Foundation, a major Saudi-funded Salafi NGO in Davao, located near Ateneo. Mercy is where Eisa Javier worked.⁸⁸ But a charismatic young ISMO leader apparently defected to the local Madkhali group and recruited other ISMO members. They started criticising the Mercy ustadz for being insufficiently Salafi (e.g. wearing jeans when performing prayer) and ridiculing female students who took part in

82 "About Ahmad Javier", <http://www.ahmadjavier.com/about/>

83 Unlike most Salafi clerics, the Javier brothers never received any formal education from Saudi universities although they had been employed by Saudi da'wah organisations as translators and teachers for Filipino migrant workers.

84 Eisa Javier's Mercy Foundation in Davao has repeatedly praised Duterte and publicly endorsed him in the 2016 presidential race. See "Muslims Launch Ad for Duterte", Sunstar.com.ph, May 2016.

85 Sadek Hamid, "The Development of British Salafism", *International Institute for the Study of Islam (ISIM) Review*, No. 21, 2008.

86 Ibid.

87 IPAC interview, Muslim student leader at Ateneo de Davao, Philippines, 12 October 2019. See also <https://www.facebook.com/SalafiDVO/>

88 Mercy Islamic Foundation was established in 2013 with full funding from Saudi donors. According to its director, Saudi national Muhammad al-Khoulaqi, Mercy was created out of concerns that Filipino workers who had converted in Saudi Arabia found it difficult to continue their Islamic learning upon returning home. They specifically chose Davao City because they saw Davao as being one of the easiest places to register an Islamic centre and because of the city's strict regulations on alcohol, cigarettes and drugs which accorded with Salafi moral values. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0Y-2vDuYaTM>

community service because it meant they mingled with men.⁸⁹ They also condemned Mercy for allegedly accepting a Christmas gift from Duterte. So far, there is no evidence that neo-Salafi members joined ISIS or other violent extremist groups.

IV. THE SUNNI-SHI'A DIVIDE

If there is one group that Salafis dislike more than the Asha'irah, it is the Shi'a.

The Shi'a population in Mindanao remains tiny. In October 2019, Shi'a leaders estimated the number at 25,000 out of a total Muslim population of 10.5 million.⁹⁰ They are concentrated in Marawi, Zamboanga, Cotabato and Manila, but one impact of Salafi influence has been to vilify them as a community and expose them to threats and occasional attacks. The most serious was the letter bomb delivered to the Imamate Islamic Centre in Quiapo, Manila on 6 May 2017 in which two people died.

A. History of Shi'ism in Philippines

Shi'ism in Mindanao got its biggest boost in the early 1980s, when in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Iran began sending cartons of books about Shi'ism into the Philippines through the Iranian Muslim Students Association (IMSA). Books arrived in Manila, Cebu and in most of the major towns in Mindanao and Sulu. In Zamboanga:

We'd get 20 or 30 cartons of books in English every three months, even at the height of the Iran-Iraq war.⁹¹

One of the first converts there was a police officer who moonlighted as a guard at a local mosque that had received some of the books and who read them in his spare time. Through his efforts, Zamboanga soon had the first indigenous group of Shi'a in the Philippines, growing to 30 families by 1985, many of them linked to the MNLF. Given the influence of ethnicity and clans in Mindanao, the central Shi'a concept of *ahl ul-bait*, leadership from the bloodline of the Prophet, was easily absorbed.⁹²

Recruitment in universities drew in Christians as well:

I was a former Catholic. We were well aware of the twelve apostles, twelve months of the year, twelve signs of the zodiac. It was an easy leap to twelve imams.⁹³

The first missionary from Iran came to Zamboanga in 1987, expecting to preach to the untutored. He found instead a highly knowledgeable group of followers, steeped in doctrine and history, thanks to the books.⁹⁴ The same year saw the first group of Salafi graduates return from Madinah University, and the two communities have been at odds ever since, though statistically it is no contest since the number of Shi'a is so small. The Zamboanga Shi'a community founded the Ahlul Bayt Islamic School in 1996 but it closed in 1999 after its director was murdered.⁹⁵

89 IPAC interview, Muslim student leader at Ateneo de Davao, Philippines, 12 October 2019.

90 The figure was based on the NCMF's estimate. According to the Philippine Statistic Authority, the Muslim population as of 2015 was only six million.

91 IPAC interview, teaching staff at Ahlul Bayt Islamic School, Zamboanga, February 2019.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 There are different accounts of the murder. One theory held by the Shi'a community is that he was killed by the American military. During the 1999 Balikatan joint military exercise, several Shi'a leaders were summoned for questioning by the military although most of them were released. The Salafis, however, suggest that he was murdered by ASG because Abdurajak Janjalani, before he was killed in 1998, apparently had instructed his men "to kill the Shi'a wherever you find them". IPAC interview, Shi'a leader in Zamboanga, 14 October 2019; IPAC interview, a Sudan-trained Salafi ustadz in Zamboanga, December 2019.

In Marawi, Sheikh Ulomuddin Said became the first prominent Sunni scholar to convert to Shi'ism in 1980. The son of a senior Maranao cleric, he went to Al-Azhar around the same time as Salamat Hashim (1957-1967) and went on to teach at different *madaris* in Marawi and at the King Faisal Centre of MSU. His conversion was very much influenced by Shi'a literature sent from Iran after 1979.⁹⁶ He translated the speeches of Khomeini and the books of Murtaza Mutahari into Maranao, the regional language. He also established the Husayniyah Karbala compound that included a library and a mosque (Masjid Karbala). In addition, some members of Maranao political clans also became Shi'a – including some Alontos and Omar Ali Solitario, later to serve as mayor of Marawi from 2001 to 2007.⁹⁷

In addition to the books, the Iranian government began offering scholarships to study in Iran and funding to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. A Salafi source (strongly anti-Shi'a) said the Iranians made the scholarship application process easy, without any of the requirements that the Saudi government imposed.⁹⁸ The first Filipinos to study in Qum, Iran in the 1980s includes Abu al-Mahdi Anwar Daniel from Tawi-Tawi and Najib Rasul Fernandez, a Cebuano convert who later wrote the Visayan translation of Qur'an.⁹⁹

By 1990, the cultural section of the Iranian Embassy in Manila was leading the promotion of Iranian culture and Shi'ism, and its outreach expanded after both countries signed a Cultural Agreement in 1996.¹⁰⁰ Iranian-funded activities included art exhibitions, interfaith seminars, Farsi classes in some local universities, and an enhanced scholarship program for Filipinos to study in Iran. One academic, himself a beneficiary who spent ten years in Iran beginning in 1998, said more Iranian scholarships became available after the 1996 peace agreement between the government and the MNLF, brokered by Indonesia. He said when he was there, first at Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran and then at the University of Tehran, there were some 60 Filipinos in the country, with 40 in Qom and the rest in Tehran. Few of the latter completed their studies, however, because the stipends were too low to live on and the student visas did not allow remunerative work.¹⁰¹

In 2010, the Iranian government established Al-Mustafa International College in Makati, the central business district of Manila, which offered courses on Farsi, Iranian history and Shi'ism. Some lecturers at Al-Mustafa were faculty members of University of the Philippines' Islamic studies department.¹⁰² A senior lecturer of MSU's King Faisal Centre said that al-Mustafa offered him a job with high salary which he turned down because it was against his belief.¹⁰³ Al-Mustafa was closed in 2018 because of financial difficulties, apparently the result of U.S. sanctions.

B. Sources of Hostility to Shi'a

The anti-Shi'a propaganda has increased in Mindanao since 2011 because of the growing visibility of local Shi'a community and the escalation of Sunni-Shi'a conflict in the Middle East.

96 Kawashima, op. cit.

97 *The Mindanao-Sulu Power Game*, unpublished commissioned consultant report, Zamboanga, undated, p. 102.

98 He estimated in 2019 that over 2,000 Filipinos were studying in Iran, a number far too high to be credible but no one seemed to have hard data. IPAC interview, Salafi NGO leader, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

99 The police once alleged that Najib Rasul Fernandez was involved in the 2001 Davao bombing, although IPAC could not confirm whether he was really found guilty in court. "Al-Qaeda Terrorists Hunted in Metro", Philstar.com, 1 November 2001.

100 See the official website of the Cultural Section of Iranian Embassy in Manila, <https://manila.icro.ir/index.aspx?fkey-id=&siteid=155&pageid=8866>

101 IPAC interview, Iran alumnus in Mindanao, October 2019.

102 Mariano A. Dumia, "50 Years and Beyond: The Genesis, Development, Challenges and Future of Philippine-Iran Relations", in Henelito A Sevilla Jr (ed.), *Philippine-Iran Relations: 50 Years and Beyond*, (Manila, 2017), p. 29.

103 IPAC interview, a faculty member of King Faisal Centre-MSU, Marawi, 8 October 2019. He was a graduate of the Saudi-sponsored Institute for Islamic and Arabic Learning (LIPIA) in Jakarta.

In Zamboanga, the “Anti Shi’a Rafidah Campaign” was launched in 2011 by the leaders of the Supreme Council for Islamic Preaching and Guidance, a Salafi dominated organisation established in 1977.¹⁰⁴ In 2011, they organised two big conferences on “Islam Awareness Program: Unveiling the Truth of Shi’ism”. One of them was targeted at the students of the Western Mindanao State University (WMSU).¹⁰⁵ The keynote speakers included Abdulwakil Tanjilil, a Syria graduate and member of Region IX Darul Ifta; Muhaimin Sakili, the Madinah-educated director of Moro Islamic Institute, one of the oldest madrasahs in the city; and Jamal Munib, a Tausug Azhar-trained cleric and director of Davao city Comprehensive Madrasah Development Program. They propagated the idea that Shi’a are infidels (*kafir*).

The campaign was arguably linked to growing confidence of the Shi’a community in Zamboanga. In 2005, the Qum-trained Abu al-Mahdi Anwar Daniel revived the defunct Ahlul Bayt Islamic School after reestablishing connection with Iran.¹⁰⁶ But the Shi’a mosque and school, combined in one facility, was in dire need of rehabilitation. An American Shi’a preacher who visited in 2009 described it as “a crumbling building that acts as a mosque and hawze (dormitory) that caters for 50 taalibs (students)”.¹⁰⁷ In 2010, an online fundraising appeal was circulated on international Shi’a websites and social media to renovate the Shi’a learning centre.¹⁰⁸ By 2011, the four-storey Al-Imam Al-Mahdi Mosque opened and a new building was purchased to accommodate the students of Ahlul Bayt School. For the first time in years the Shi’as were able to conduct their own Friday prayers.

In August 2012, a bomb exploded outside the mosque. No one was injured and it did not stop the Shi’a from building up a more visible public profile. In 2013, they created official Facebook accounts and joined the annual Mindanao Week of Peace campaign; they started to propagate openly including in universities. They also cultivated a closer relationship with the military so that in Ramadhan 2013 the Shi’a mosque was guarded by AFP officers.

In 2013, in response to this, the anti-Shi’a forces created a Facebook page titled Tausug Shi’a Are Against Islam (Tausug Aqeedah Shi’a Satru Sin Islam). One of the videos it posted in July 2013 was a fourteen-minute clip titled “Rejectionist Shi’a, Promoters of Adultery” [Shi’a Rafidha The Promoters of Mutta’ Zina].¹⁰⁹ It referred to the practice of short-term contractual marriage, which is common among some Shi’a but considered by most Sunnis as a disguised form of adultery. The video also showed the faces of local Shi’a leaders and a written instruction signed by Abdulwakil Tanjilil, saying, “Beware of them, they are not Muslims and Shi’ism is not Islam”.¹¹⁰ Other than the contractual marriage issue, Salafis – and many other Sunnis for that matter – condemned so-called Shi’a practices of insulting the Companions of the Prophet whom Shi’a considered to have betrayed the Prophet’s family.

Another source of anti-Shi’a hostility is political: Salafis believe that there is a Shi’a conspiracy to take control of the Islamic Holy Land (i.e. Saudi Arabia) and the entire Muslim community. One Salafi cleric said that his mentor, a Saudi national, showed him a blueprint of Iran’s 50-year plan to convert all Sunnis into Shi’a.¹¹¹ According to this narrative, Iran had selected young academics from renowned Philippine universities to be given scholarships to Iran and turn them into Shi’a agents. Salafis claimed in 2019 that they had come back and worked their way into the

104 Shi’a Rafidah (literally means the rejectionist faction) is a label commonly used by Shi’a opponents, denoting people who reject the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs whom Sunnis consider the rightful successors to the Prophet Muhammad.

105 “Event: Islam Awareness Program, Unveiling the Truth of Shi’ism (Part II)”, ummuabdulazeez.wordpress.com, 26 June 2011.

106 IPAC interview, Shi’a leader in Zamboanga, 14 October 2019.

107 Ali Yusuf Ali, “The Shias of Philippines”, aliyusufalimyworld.blogspot.com, 9 November 2009.

108 “Philippine - Shia Masjid and School Left Incomplete”, en.abna24.com, 17 June 2010.

109 <https://www.facebook.com/TausugAqeedahShia/videos/484702621621149/>

110 Interestingly, Abdulwakil later tried to approach the Shi’a community as he was running for the position of Zamboanga city councilor in 2018.

111 IPAC interview, Salafi NGO leader, Davao, Philippines, 13 October 2019.

central government including NCMF; some purportedly serving as military advisors to convince the armed forces that all Salafis are potential terrorists. This supposedly would enable Shi'ism to prevail.¹¹² Similar narratives have been used in Indonesia not only by Salafis but also by a group of ultra-conservative traditionalist Muslims who studied with Saudi traditionalist sheikhs.¹¹³

International contexts clearly played a role in this issue. The rise of anti-Shi'a propaganda in Southeast Asia coincided with the growing repression of Shi'a in Saudi Arabia that was triggered by a Shi'a uprising in the kingdom's eastern province between 2011 and 2012.¹¹⁴ At the same time, ISIS was trying to attract foreign fighters into Syria by spreading online propaganda that innocent Sunni Muslims were massacred by the purportedly Shi'a regime of Bashar al-Assad.¹¹⁵ While most Filipino Salafi leaders were smart enough to stop short of direct incitement, pro-ISIS groups did begin to use violence against Shi'a targets.

C. Threats and Attacks against Shi'a Institutions

A series of attacks against Shi'a institutions and individuals took place from 2015 to 2017 as pro-ISIS groups emerged in the Philippines.¹¹⁶

In September 2015, an ISIS affiliate, Ansharul Khilafah Philippines (AKP) based in Sultan Kudarat province, claimed responsibility for the killing of two Shi'a Muslim converts in Manila: Omar Floderliz and Ruel Mabato.¹¹⁷ The Sydney-based Shi'a cleric Sheikh Jihad Ismail confirmed the death of Ruel Mabato through his Facebook post; he also identified another surviving victim as a Filipino Christian who converted to Shi'ism while working in Sydney.¹¹⁸ Mabato was active in Sunni-Shi'a online debates, including through a Facebook group controlled by Nasser Abinal, a Shi'a preacher based in Quiapo, Manila.¹¹⁹

Several sources in Mindanao said that the Maute group, which led the ISIS group based in and around Marawi, killed two Shi'a in Marawi in 2016 although IPAC could find no confirmation of the incident.¹²⁰ A source in Marawi further reported an upsurge in anti-Shi'a hate speech in Friday sermons around the same time.¹²¹ While some Salafi clerics were responsible for the hate speech, they apparently were not involved in the attacks. One example is the principal of Darul Abraar school in Marawi, who had often cited the obligation to establish an Islamic state and eradicate Shi'ism in his lectures. But when the Maute brothers recruited some of his students, he did not give his approval. His students were reportedly confused and asked him, "Why won't you join us? Isn't this what you've been preaching all this time?"¹²²

In March 2016, a gunman shot Aidh al-Qarni, a Saudi cleric and author of *Don't be Sad*, a Muslim self-help book that became an international best-seller. Al-Qarni was giving a lecture at WMSU Zamboanga and his shooter was identified as Rugasan Misuari III, an engineering student at the university. Al-Qarni and a Saudi embassy official escorting him were wounded but

112 The assessment is based on IPAC interviews with Salafi leaders in Zamboanga, Davao and Marawi, October 2019.

113 IPAC, "The Anti-Shi'a Movement in Indonesia", Report No. 27, 27 April 2016.

114 Toby Matthiesen, "The domestic sources of Saudi foreign policy: Islamists and the state in the wake of the Arab Uprisings", Working Paper, Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, August 2015.

115 Assad is actually an Alawite, a sect in Islam that is categorically different from Shi'ism. Sunnis often conflate the two because Alawites also revere Ali bin Abi Talib, Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law whom the Shi'a consider the first Imam of Islam.

116 For background on ISIS in the Philippines, see IPAC, "Marawi, The East Asia Wilayah", op. cit.

117 <https://www.facebook.com/1485876968395912/photos/a.1512864975697111/1521142521536023/?type=3&theater>

118 <https://www.facebook.com/SheikhJihadIsmail/posts/salam-my-dearest-brothers-and-sisters-alhamdulillah-our-brother-muhammad-ali-hus/1647887908829072/>

119 https://www.facebook.com/groups/287777881329895/?ref=nf_target&fref=nf

120 IPAC interviews with academics and Shi'a leaders in Marawi, Davao, and Zamboanga, October 2019.

121 IPAC interview, a faculty member of MSU Marawi's History Department, 8 October 2019.

122 Ibid.

survived. The Salafis immediately blamed the Shi'a community, citing the gunman's visits to the Shi'a mosque, although the Shi'as vehemently denied it. The Saudi authorities also claimed that the perpetrator had been granted a visa to study in Qum.¹²³ Another theory among the Salafis is that the Iranian government planned the al-Qarni assassination to avenge the 2014 execution of Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shi'a cleric in Saudi Arabia.¹²⁴ However, international observers noted that ISIS was more likely behind the attack as al-Qarni was on its assassination list (published in its online magazine *Dabiq*, issue 13).¹²⁵ The Shi'a also blamed it on ISIS, citing some hardline Salafis who accused al-Qarni of being too soft toward the Shi'a.¹²⁶

In May 2017, an explosive package was delivered to the office of Shi'a leader Nasser Abinal, the president of the Imamate Islamic Centre in Quiapo whose day job was as a tax officer of the Manila government.¹²⁷ The bomb exploded and killed two people including Abinal's aide but he himself survived. The Imamate Islamic Center is a local organisation founded around 2013 with a self-declared goal of promoting Shi'a Jafari, the school of jurisprudence in Twelver Shi'ism that is known for allowing contractual marriage (which is rejected by other Shi'a schools such as Zaidiyyah and Ismailiyyah).¹²⁸

Salafis in Mindanao bear most of the responsibility for increased hostility to the Shi'a as they have been most active in spreading anti-Shi'a propaganda. None of that propaganda produced violence, however, until ISIS arrived in the Philippines.

V. BALIK ISLAM AND THE CONVERSION OF OFW IN SAUDI ARABIA

One important component of the Salafi community in the Philippines are the converts to Islam, most of whom became Muslims as overseas foreign workers (OFW) in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf, including Qatar and the UAE. They call themselves "reverts", or people who returned to Islam (Balik Islam), their original faith, leaving behind the Christianity forced on them by colonial powers.¹²⁹

The role of Balik Islam in propagating Salafism has been overshadowed by the involvement of a small minority who became involved in terrorism as part of the Rajah Sulaiman Movement and later as individuals, recruited as part of the pro-ISIS movement.¹³⁰ But Balik Islam members have also played an important role in the "reversion" of fellow workers and friends and the dissemination of Salafi doctrine. This is partly because of the huge number of Filipinos working in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries and elsewhere in the Middle East (57.1 per cent of a 2.34 million-strong labor force in 2017 with almost 600,000 in Saudi Arabia alone).¹³¹ The conversion is sometimes a calculated strategy to integrate in Muslim-majority host countries. But it is also because countries with a strong missionary impulse find Muslim minority countries particularly attractive as targets of conversion efforts. It is not by accident that the Saudis set up Almmarif Centre in Baguio rather than Basilan.

123 "Al-Qarni: Iran Behind Attempt on My Life", Arabnews.com, 17 September 2016.

124 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35213244>

125 Tim Jacoby, "Islam and the Islamic State's Magazine, *Dabiq*", *Politics and Religion*, 12 (2019), 32–54.

126 A Salafi online discussion forum mentioned that Al-Qarni advised Sunni and Shi'a to live in peace. See <http://www.salaf-talk.net/st/viewmessages.cfm?Forum=9&Topic=6562>

127 "Quiapo Blast Probe Focuses on Shiite Imam", news.abs-cbn.com, 7 May 2017.

128 "Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr: Saudi Arabia Executes Top Shia Cleric", bbc.com, 2 January 2016.

129 For background on the Balik Islam movement, see International Crisis Group, "Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts," op. cit.

130 IPAC, "Post-Marawi Lessons from Detained Extremists in the Philippines", Report No. 41, 27 November 2017.

131 Philippine Statistics Authority, "2017 Survey on Overseas Filipinos", 18 May 2018, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2017-survey-overseas-filipinos-results-2017-survey-overseas-filipinos>

A. Conversion in the Philippines

Before the advent of social media, *da'wah* efforts were often very personal. A friend or relative who had already converted would spark an initial interest, then invite the target to attend a meeting. In Manila, in the early 2000s, this could involve a four-step process: initial approach; encouragement to visit the Islamic Information Center (IIC) on Taft Avenue where classes in Qur'an reading and Arabic were held and visiting clerics gave lectures; invitation to get additional training at an Islamic study centre in Anda, Pangasinan; and for those who showed a serious interest in going deeper into law and doctrine, an invitation to study at the Almaarif Centre.¹³² All of these institutions were Saudi-funded and influenced, and they produced committed Salafis, some of whom would establish smaller Salafi NGOs in Luzon and Mindanao.

The largest and best resourced Balik Islam-initiated organisation remained the Islamic Studies, Call and Guidance of the Philippines (ISCAG). It was established by 1991 by senior reverts based in Riyadh including Omar Penalber, ISCAG's current president, who is active in anti-extremism campaigns. Its main Saudi patron was Sheikh Hamoud Muhammad al-Lahim who worked with Balik Islam preachers in translating Salafi tracts into Tagalog. Hamoud was forced out of the country in 2002 on allegations of terrorist financing, apparently because ISCAG assisted Santos in establishing his Fi-Sabilillah foundation.¹³³

The Saudi funds allowed ISCAG to buy 1.6 hectares of land in Cavite in 1996. Today, the ISCAG compound in Cavite constitutes one of the biggest Muslim communities outside Mindanao, with several apartment buildings, schools, mosques and a clinic. By 2008, ISCAG had funded the construction of seventeen mosques in different locations in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.¹³⁴ ISCAG has denied any link to terrorism and cited as proof the financial support from the Islamic Development Bank and the fact that its school accommodates non-Muslim students.¹³⁵

B. Conversion Abroad

Many Filipino reverts have been exposed to Islam while working abroad – not only in the Middle East but also in Muslim-minority countries particularly Singapore and Hong Kong.

In Saudi Arabia, conversion often begins as a strategy to retain jobs or gain new contracts after the first ones expire.¹³⁶ The conversion is also attributed to the systematic *da'wah* efforts of the Saudi government especially targeted at its Filipino residents.¹³⁷ As of 2005, there were 50 Islamic centres (*jaliyat*) in Saudi Arabia that provided free Islamic consultation and education to non-Muslims as well as Muslim migrants who are new to Salafism.¹³⁸ The Islamic centre in Al-Batha, Riyadh in particular caters to a huge number of Filipino “reverts”. Some Filipino Salafi preachers who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia in the 2000s had no problem finding employment as these Islamic centres could always use more Filipino translators and propagators.

In Singapore, a number of Filipina OFW embraced Islam through the outreach efforts of the Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore, popularly known as Darul Arqam.¹³⁹ Some converted for the purpose of marrying their Bangladeshi boyfriends and then went back to Catholicism

132 This was the path, for example, followed by a convert with initials MG who was arrested on 7 January 2008. Documents on the case made available to IPAC.

133 International Crisis Group, “Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts,” op. cit., p. 6.

134 See ISCAG profile, <https://iscagphil.wordpress.com/about/>

135 Vivienne Angeles, “The Middle East and the Philippines: Transnational Linkages, Labor Migration and the Remaking of Philippine Islam,” *Comparative Islamic Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1-2, 2011, pp. 157-181.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 International Crisis Group, “Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts,” op. cit., p. 4.

139 For more on Darul Arqam Singapore, see <https://www.darul-arqam.org.sg/history/>

once their husbands, also temporary migrant workers, returned home.¹⁴⁰ Others were attracted by the prospect of finding a new family and support group in the Muslim community, with the additional economic incentive of being included in zakat recipients.¹⁴¹

A similar trend can be found in Hong Kong, where 60 to 80 Filipina OFWs reportedly become new Muslims annually.¹⁴² The majority know Islam through South Asian, usually Pakistani, boyfriends. While most of them are law-abiding citizens, at least one Filipina worker in Hong Kong joined ISIS and married a British fighter in Syria whom she met online.¹⁴³

VI. SALAFISM AND SALAFI JIHADISM

The widespread perception among many non-Muslim Filipinos that Salafi influence leads to violent extremism stems from the past link in the 1990s of some Saudi charities to al-Qaeda figures; the religious training of some extremist leaders; and the fact that most violent extremists acting in the name of Islam practice a variant of Salafism known as salafi jihadism.

Few ISIS supporters or their commanders in the Philippines today would be able to name the five defining principles of salafi jihadism, which according to one authoritative source are *tawhid* (the unity of God); *tawhid hakimiyya* (the sovereignty of Islamic law over all other forms of law), *al-wala' wal bara* (closeness to one's allies and hostility towards one's enemies); jihad (holy war); and *takfir* (the practice of branding Muslims who deviate from accepted doctrine as *kafir*, or non-believers, tantamount to ex-communication from Islam).¹⁴⁴

Of these, the most important and the easiest to understand for those with little religious knowledge or training is jihad, which is elevated in this doctrine to a pillar of Islam equivalent to prayer or fasting during Ramadhan. Jihad is understood as physical war against Islam's enemies and can either be offensive or defensive. There is no love lost between "purist" Salafis and salafi jihadists. The former see jihadists as extremists, ready to condemn any Muslim with differing views. Salafi jihadists see Saudi-linked ulama as agents of a collaborationist government and hypocrites who sit on their hands and do nothing as Muslims around the world are being attacked.

Whatever linkage might have existed in the 1990s between al-Qaeda, the Saudi state and Jamal Khalifa's operations in the Philippines is largely irrelevant today, though individuals linked to that era periodically resurface.¹⁴⁵ Most of Mindanao's major insurgencies have had salafi jihadi factions at one time or another or units that were tactically allied to extremist groups without much concern for religious doctrine. It would be a mistake to read into this as a propensity of Salafis in the MILF, MNLF or broader public to violent extremism.

140 T. C. Rosario, "Return To Mecca: Balik Islam among Filipino Migrants in Singapore", *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*, Volume 2, Number 2, 2018, pp. 91-106

141 Ibid.

142 Nicole Constable, *Born Out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor*, University of California Press, (Berkeley, 2014), p. 75.

143 IPAC, "The Radicalisation of Indonesian Women Workers in Hong Kong", Report No. 39, 26 July 2017.

144 Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, (Oxford, 2016), p.14

145 In July 2019, for example, a Jordanian named Mahmoud Afif Abdeljalil, who had worked with Jamal Khalifa was deported as an "undesirable alien". He had been deported in 2003 for helping Khalifa transfer funds to al-Qaeda and Abu Sayyaf. Unbenownst to Philippine authorities, he had returned in 2007 and had apparently been living in or around Zamboanga ever since. In August 2018 he and an Algerian friend were stopped at a military checkpoint and he was placed under surveillance. Philippine officials said he was continuing to support the ASG through construction of mosques and madrasahs. His lawyer said he was a respected figure in the construction business who had been living in the Philippines for the past 14 years with a valid visa from the Philippines embassy in Jordan. "Family of detained Jordanian in Philippines deny terror finance allegations," Arabnews.com, 2 August 2019.

Salafis with strong religious credentials and Arabic language expertise can sometimes become the targets of Salafi jihadist recruitment, however.¹⁴⁶ Also, if political grievances continue to be the major driver producing militant splinters, disillusioned or disgruntled MILF or MNLF combatants might be more attracted to salafi jihadist-led groups if they have already been exposed to Salafi doctrine.

A. *The MILF*

The MILF as an organisation has been unequivocally opposed to terrorism, salafi jihadism and the presence of foreign fighters since November 2005 when the leadership took a decision to put all of its efforts into pursuing a peace agreement with the government. This led to expulsion of the ASG's Khadaffy Janjalani; Indonesians Dulmatin, Hari Kuncoro and Umar Patek; Malaysian national Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and others from central Maguindanao, and their setting up a new base on Jolo.

Several splinters have since emerged, initially defined by political disagreement and only later by affiliation to ISIS.

- Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), under the leadership of Ameril Umbra Kato, broke away from the MILF in 2008 over a failed agreement between the government and the MILF leadership on ancestral domain. Kato, a Saudi-trained ustadz, thought the MILF was conceding too much by giving up its demand for independence. He was always willing to protect jihadist fugitives, including Marwan, who was killed in a disastrous counter-terrorism operation in January 2015.¹⁴⁷ Kato, who was already ill, only survived him by a few months. BIFF eventually split into three, with one faction led by Kagi Karialan; one by Esmael Abubakar alias Bungos, said to be an expert in Islamic law; one by Abu Toraiife. The latter two joined ISIS. Abu Toraiife's faction, called Jama'ah Al Muhajirin wal-Ansar, had several clashes with the MILF in between 2017 and 2019.
- The Maute brothers, who led the Marawi siege, were also a breakaway group from the MILF. The two most senior, Abdullah and Omarkhayyam, were trained in the Middle East but not in Saudi Arabia. Abdullah studied in Jordan and was reportedly radicalised there, Omar at al-Azhar in Egypt, which generally produces moderate graduates. After the brothers were killed, their forces were taken over by Humam Abdul Najid alias Owayde alias Abu Dar, founder of the Khilafah Islamiyah Movement (KIM). An alumnus of Almaarif school in Baguio and Afghan jihadist military training, Abu Dar was killed in March 2019.
- Salahuddin Hassan's al-Khobar group broke away from the MILF around 2006 and became known for criminal extortion. Hassan worked closely with ASG on Basilan in 2008-9 in a variety of operations. After 2014 he became an important part of the pro-ISIS coalition in North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao provinces, calling his

146 One example, though old, is nevertheless instructive. MG was an MILF fighter from Davao Oriental arrested in 2008. He began training with the MILF in 1999, as a teenager. In 2001, he was selected by the imam of his unit to attend a two-year Arabic course run by the Almaarif Education Centre in Baguio. He was one of thirteen candidates accepted, out of 130 applicants; the candidates were interviewed by Sheikh Sogayer, a Saudi national. Three of the teachers were from Yemen, one was a Russian convert, one was from the Comoros and two were ethnic Maranaos. On graduation, he was told that he had been selected to study in Mecca but could not meet the visa requirements in time. He then returned to Davao Oriental to study information technology at a local institute. In early 2005, the local MILF imam asked him if he were interested in attending courses at the International University of Africa in Khartoum, Sudan. He accepted and studied for a year there, until he applied again to go to Saudi Arabia, this time to Madinah University. He failed the medical test and returned home. The local MILF commander asked him if he could teach Arabic at their base camp and it was here that he met two RMS converts and an Indonesian who had been working with the ASG. They asked him to help translate radical tracts into the local language, Kalagan. It was this connection that eventually got him arrested.

147 IPAC, "Killing Marwan in Mindanao", Report No. 17, 5 March 2015.

organisation Daulah Islamiyah Baqiyyah.

- Mohammad Jaafar Maguid alias Commander Tokboy led the ISIS group known as Ansarul Khilafah Philippines (AKP), though neither Tokboy nor his followers ever used that name. Tokboy, like Kato, left the MILF after the collapse of the 2008 agreement.

B. The ASG

The ASG also produced Salafi ulama. The most prominent example is the late Yasir Igasan alias Tuan Ya, reportedly killed in 2018. Igasan, who studied at Madinah University in Saudi Arabia as well as in Libya and Syria, returned to the Philippines from the Middle East in 2006.¹⁴⁸ In 2007, he was widely reported to be the new ASG commander after Khadaffi Janjalani was killed, but he never seemed to solidify that position. His return coincided in any case with the decentralisation and splintering of ASG, even as different factions nominally recognised the leadership of Radullon Sahiron.

Sahiron took a strongly anti-ISIS position after the caliphate was declared, further dividing the ASG. After ASG Basilan leader Isnilon Hapilon, the acknowledged amir of ISIS-Philippines, was killed in Marawi, the position of amir fell to Hajan Sawadjaan from Sulu. Sawadjaan is only a locally-trained preacher (hence his use of the honorific *hatib* instead of *alim*, the latter usually reserved for Middle East graduates). While he may be nominally a Salafi, foreign jihadis who joined his camp reportedly were upset at the lack of knowledge or serious observance of Islam among the ASG members.¹⁴⁹

The issue of violent extremism and the rise of ISIS have so dominated discussions of Islam in Mindanao that they have diverted attention from what the broader social impact of Salafism's growth could be.

VII. SALAFISM IN BARMM: POSSIBLE IMPACT

Salafism could affect Muslim Mindanao in several ways. Generally, when Salafi influence is backed by political power, as it is in BARMM, it brings a focus on state enforcement of morality and efforts to control “deviance” from state-defined orthodoxy. The BOL contains strong human rights guarantees and guarantees of gender equality, protection of minorities and freedom of religion. But given the broader penetration of Salafism in Muslim Mindanao, pressure from Salafi clerics to deliver on a conservative socio-political agenda could still be felt.

In schools and in other public areas, Salafi influence could lead to increasingly segregated public space, until now not an issue in the southern Philippines. In schools, this could lead to segregation of classrooms with boys getting the better teachers. It could also lead to greater pressure on women to keep to traditional roles and militate against more positions for women within the BARMM bureaucracy.

Salafi schools tend to produce Salafi teachers. Graduates of traditional *madaris* already find it difficult to enter the labour market because of weaker skills compared with public school students. But the production of more teachers could lead to the expansion of schools just to employ them, gradually pushing out other forms of schooling. The BARMM education minister, Mohager Iqbal, is unlikely to let this happen on his watch, but it is the long-term impact that will count.

148 International Crisis Group, “Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in the Philippines”, Asia Report No. 152, 14 May 2008. Igasan reportedly worked for IIRO in the 1990s. See Taharudin Piang Ampatuan, “Abu Sayaf’s New Leader: Yasser Igasan the Religious Scholar”, RSIS Commentary, July 2007.

149 IPAC private communication with the Philippine authorities in reference to social media postings from the Moroccan-German known as al-Maghrebi who was killed in the 31 July 2018 bombing in Lamitan, Basilan.

There could be new efforts to control gambling, prostitution and alcoholic consumption and distribution among Muslims. That in itself would not be a problem, indeed would be welcomed by many in the community. The problem comes when the poor rather than the politically well-connected become the target of enforcement efforts, as has happened in Aceh, the only Indonesian province allowed to apply some aspects of Islamic law. Many of those interviewed for this report mentioned Aceh as a possible model for Mindanao.

But the “morality police” in Aceh – who are generally Sunni traditionalist rather than Salafi but have taken similar positions on moral issues – have set a bad example in many ways. They have rarely gone after rich offenders who can pay their way out of any punishment. They have focused on women’s dress as an indicator of upright moral behaviour while ignoring violence against women and in some cases actively encouraging it, particularly in terms of vigilante punishment of unmarried couples. They have increasingly waged an anti-LGBT campaign that has led to caning of homosexuals.¹⁵⁰ Following the Aceh example would be in direct violation of the spirit of the BOL.

The BOL as it currently stands gives very limited authority to BARMM in terms of the shari’a justice system. It does not have any provision on the establishment of shari’a police (known as *wilayatul hisbah* in Aceh); it states that the Bangsamoro police will form part of the Philippine National Police. It also states that BARMM’s shari’a courts will remain under the national judicial system and be “subject to the supervision of the Supreme Court”.¹⁵¹ It requires shari’a judges to pass both the conventional bar and the shari’a examinations, which many shari’a students in Mindanao see as a hindrance.¹⁵² However, it is worth noting that moral policing and corporal punishment had been partially implemented inside MILF’s Camp Abubakar and some in MILF still aspire to reinstall these measures.

The increasingly “salafised” Darul Ifta of BARMM may in the long term produce more conservative opinions on so-called deviant Islamic sects. In neighbouring Indonesia and Malaysia, such rulings, while not explicitly condoning violence, have been used as justification for vigilante attacks and increased pressure for state regulations that discriminate against minority communities such as Ahmadiyah and Shi’a.¹⁵³ The Shi’a schools have been able to survive partly because there is no official regulation to restrict Shi’ism in the Philippines. This could change as Salafi clerics outside the government feel more confident of their ability to pressure like-minded clerics in BARMM to strictly regulate Islamic orthodoxy, despite the human rights provisions of BOL. Some Muslim activists in Mindanao are already worried about the possibility of worsening intra-Islamic conflict in BARMM.

150 International Crisis Group, “Islamic Law and Criminal Justice in Aceh,” Asia Report No.117, 31 July 2006; Human Rights Watch, “Policing Morality: Abuses in the Application of Shari’a in Aceh,” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/11/30/policing-morality/abuses-application-sharia-aceh-indonesia>, 30 November 2010; “These Political Games Run Our Lives: Indonesia’s LGBT Community Under Threat”, 10 August 2016.

151 https://www.lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2018/ra_11054_2018.html

152 Many shari’a students in Mindanao feel ill-equipped to pass the conventional bar examination because the shari’a faculties at MSU campuses only teach Islamic shari’a and not the national law. Some saw the requirement as another ploy by the central government to install “Manila people” as judges in BARMM’s shari’a courts. IPAC interview, Muslim students, Marawi, 9 October 2019.

153 Aan Suryana, *The State and Religious Violence in Indonesia*, (London and New York, 2020); Mohd Faizal Musa & Tan Beng Hui, “State-Backed Discrimination against Shia Muslims in Malaysia”, *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2017, pp. 308-329.

As BARMM looks into expanding Islamic finance and halal certification, it needs to guard against the corruption that has plagued these institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia, with the perpetrators there being some of the same people who argue for stricter enforcement of Islamic moral standards.¹⁵⁴ Just because institutions are run by clerics does not always mean they are clean.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Anyone interested in the development and governance of BARMM needs to appreciate the growing influence of Salafism, not because it will lead to violent extremism but because over time, it could move Muslim society in a much more conservative direction. As long as the MILF was engaged in a political struggle with the central government, the struggle itself acted as a moderating influence. The goal of reaching an agreement on power-sharing took precedence over all else, including working out the exact nature of religious institutions and the religious bureaucracy in an autonomous entity. If the pluralist vision enshrined in the BOL accurately reflects the thinking of top MILF leaders within BARMM, they need to be prepared to defend it against pressure from Salafi ulama for a greater focus on orthodoxy and morality, narrowly defined.

The MILF is not co-terminous with BARMM and while it will lead BARMM through to the all-important elections in 2022 to the Bangsamoro Parliament, its candidates will likely come under intense challenge from clan leaders in entrenched political dynasties. The growth of Salafism, however, goes beyond partisanship and will affect Mindanao society regardless of who holds political power.

Current and future BARMM leaders therefore need to understand why Salafism is so appealing to a younger generation, both in terms of the identity it conveys – international but anti-Western; cosmopolitan but not corrupt – and the means it uses for propagation, taking full advantage of smart phones and social media. BARMM leaders need to ensure they have communication channels open to Muslim student associations in high schools and universities to understand the aspirations that popular Salafi preachers promote.

One way to mitigate the potentially negative aspects of Salafi influence, especially relating to the role of women and minority rights, would be to ensure that the relevant provisions of BOL, for example on gender equality, religious freedom and indigenous people, are incorporated in the curricula used in all *madaris*, with training for teachers on what these provisions mean and how they should be implemented as well as regular evaluations of how well they are being taught.

This means as well that BARMM's education ministry needs to have a program for supervising teachers, with incentives to ensure that these progressive provisions are valued.

To balance the influence of Salafism in higher education, BARMM should encourage more scholarships for Muslim students to universities other than those in Saudi Arabia, especially Indonesia and centres of Islamic studies in the West. In Indonesia, the network of state Islamic universities and institutes (Universitas Islam Negeri, UIN and Institut Agama Islam Negeri, IAIN) would be particularly appropriate, and there is a well-established tradition of exchange programs.

Officials need to be conscious of how the competition for influence in the Muslim world among Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey plays out in terms of donor assistance from those coun-

154 Murray Hunter, "Documents Allege Corruption in Malaysia's Halal Certification Process", *Asiasentinel.com*, 7 November 2019; "Halal Industry Shaken As Certification Bodies Accuse Indonesia's MUI Official of Extortion", *Salaamgateway.com*, 19 April 2019.

tries to institutions in Mindanao, particularly in the educational sector.

The fact is that many in Muslim Mindanao have come to see Salafism as preferable to other Islamic strands. BARMM officials need to ensure that its religious bureaucracy remains open and inclusive, not just toward different religions but to the many interpretations and practices within Islam itself.

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