The Existence and Dynamics of Muslim Minorities in Southeast Asia

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Abstract. Southeast Asia has the largest Muslim population in the world, although in this region the majority of the population is Muslim, but in some areas, there are also Muslim minority populations who are under non-Muslim rule, causing conflicts and disputes between groups that lead to intimidation, attacks, and mass killings. The purpose of this paper is to find out and analyze the conditions and development of Muslim minorities in Southeast Asia and the government's efforts to reduce conflicts that occur with a focus on three countries, namely Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar. The condition of Muslim minorities under non-Muslim governments is certainly different from the condition of the Muslim-majority population under the rule of Muslim governments. This research is qualitative research, which collects various data and sources related to the study, both sourced from literature in the form of journal articles, books, and from the mass media using historical methods, namely heuristics, verification, interpretation and historiography. As for the findings of this study, the condition of Muslim minorities in Thailand and the Philippines despite pressure from the authorities, slowly began to be a concern of the government. However, in contrast to the condition of Muslim minorities in Myanmar, especially in Rohingya, they have not yet received recognition of their identity as citizens from the government and the Muslim side has always been concerned.
Keyword: Southeast Asia, Muslim, Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar.

Abstrak. *Asia Tenggara merupakan penduduk Muslim yang terbesar di dunia, meskipun di wilayah ini penduduknya mayoritas Muslim, akan tetapi di sebagian wilayah terdapat juga penduduk minoritas Muslim yang berada dibawah pemerintahan non-Muslim, sehingga menimbulkan konflik dan pertikaian antar kelompok yang berujung pada intimidasi, serangan, dan pembunuhan massal. Adapun tujuan dari tulisan ini untuk mengetahui dan menganalisis kondisi dan perkembangan minoritas Muslim di Asia Tenggara serta upaya pemerintah dalam meredam konflik yang terjadi dengan fokus terhadap tiga negara, yakni Thailand, Filipina dan Myanmar. Kondisi minoritas Muslim dibawah pemerintahan non-Muslim tentunya berbeda dengan kondisi penduduk yang mayoritas Muslim di bawah kekuasaan pemerintahan Muslim. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif, yakni mengumpulkan berbagai data dan sumber yang terkait dengan kajian, baik yang bersumber dari literatur-literatur berupa artikel jurnal, buku, maupun dari media massa dengan menggunakan metode sejarah, yaitu heuristik, verifikasi,*

interpretasi dan historiografi. Adapun hasil temuan kajian ini, bahwa kondisi minoritas Muslim di Thailand dan Filipina meskipun mendapat tekanan dari penguasa, namun dengan perlahan mereka mulai menjadi perhatian dari pemerintah. Akan tetapi, berbeda dengan kondisi minoritas Muslim di Myanmar, khususnya di Rohingya, mereka sama sekali belum mendapatkan pengakuan identitas sebagai warganegara dari pemerintah dan pihak Muslim selalu mengalami konflik yang tak kunjung selesai, meskipun beberapa organisasi internasional menjadi pihak penengah, namun konflik dan pertikaian tetap saja dialami oleh minoritas Muslim
Kata kunci: *Asia Tenggara, Muslim, Thailand, Filipina, Myanmar.*

INTRODUCTION

Talking about Islam in Southeast Asia is inseparable from the history of the arrival of Islam to this region. Debates and discussions related to this matter gave rise to several theories and long debates, thus attracting the attention of experts to conduct studies on Islam in Southeast Asia. However, according to Azyumardi Azra, the discussions and debates are related to three main issues, namely; *first,* the place of origin of Islam, *second*, the bearers, and *third,* the time when Islam came to this region (Azra, 2013; Thohir, 2009), as well as how the process of spreading Islam itself (WM et al., 2015). Although there is no consensus on these main issues, it allows for further research on Islam in Southeast Asia. However, the arrival of Islam to the region has had a significant impact, making Southeast Asia the largest Muslim population in the world with around 240 million Muslims or around 42% of the total population of Southeast Asia and 25% of the total Muslim population in the world which amounts to around 1.57 billion people (Helmiati, 2014).

This high percentage of the Islamic or Muslim population in Southeast Asia is historically undoubtedly true, although the majority of Islam is only found in three countries in this region (Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam). This is based on the development of Islam in Southeast Asia that has been going on for hundreds of years. The Muslim population in this region experienced growth and development starting from the coastal areas estimated between the 7th century AD and the 10th century AD starting from the archipelago, and then spread to various parts of Southeast Asia (Dahlan, 2013). The same thing was also said by Azra, that Islam was introduced to the archipelago in the 1st century AH or 7th century AD as believed by Arnold and held by Indonesian-Malaysian scholars, but the influence of Islam appeared after the 12th century, so the process of Islamization occurred between the 12th and 16th centuries (Azra, 2013; Hamka, 2016). In addition,

Islam teaches tolerance and equality, so Islam is easily accepted. Whereas other religions such as Hinduism emphasize differences in human status, at that time Islam indirectly attracted the attention of the local population (Helmiati, 2014).

In addition, it should be noted that Islam in Southeast Asia has a distinctive character and character, and is very different from the character and character of Islam in other regions. This is due to the process of adaptation to local conditions, thus shaping the dynamics of Southeast Asian Islam with different characteristics and characters from Islam in the Middle East, Africa and other regions. As said by Azra, the typical character of Islam in Southeast Asia is more peaceful, friendly and tolerant (Azra, 1999). Therefore, it is interesting to be studied to find out how countries whose populations are Muslim minorities are able to live and settle with people of different religions and in non-Muslim government areas.

Based on the results of searching for various studies, there are several writings about Muslim minorities in Southeast Asia, including; Dian Ekawati entitled "Migration and Problematics of Thai Muslim Minorities". According to her, the Muslim minority conflict that occurred in Thailand was due to coercion by the government by requiring *Thai* assimilation (Buddhism) to the Muslim minority of Pattani in Southern Thailand, thus eliminating their Malay identity. The conflict has an impact on socio-economics and security which causes Muslim migration in an effort to maintain and preserve Pattani culture. Even though the Thai Government has tried to stop the insurgency in the southern part of Thailand, conflicts and disputes still continue to occur (Ekawati, 2020). In line with Ekawati, Rusli in his writing entitled "Islam in Thailand ", he stated that in the social order people who are Muslims do not get a good welcome, because they are considered foreigners or *khaek* who sometimes get unfavorable treatment. Then with the factor of the minority Muslim population, so that Muslims in Thailand often get attacks, intimidation and mass killings from Buddhists (Rusli, 2017). Then, Hasaruddin's writing entitled "Islamic Social Development in the Philippines". According to Hasaruddin, the Muslim minority factor in the Philippines is due to the many countries that colonized the country, such as Spain and America. Apart from colonizing, these countries became missionary agents, thus complicating the development of Islam in the Philippines (Hasaruddin, 2019). Furthermore, an article entitled "Islam in

Myanmar" was written by Nasruddin. According to him, the Muslim minority conflict that occurred in Myanmar was due to discrimination between Muslims and Buddhists, both in the social, political, cultural, economic and educational fields, which eventually led to conflicts that led to violence against the local Muslim community (Nasruddin, 2017). Several writings from the author's search related to Muslim minorities in Southeast Asia, especially Muslims in Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar, there is no writing that comprehensively examines the dynamics of Islam that occur in Muslim minorities in three countries in Southeast Asia. Tracing the root of the problem and the government's efforts to reduce conflicts and disputes against Muslim minorities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and analyze further the condition and development of the Muslim minority population and the government's efforts to reduce conflicts that occur in Southeast Asia with a focus on three countries namely; Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar. The minority referred to in this paper is a country with a Muslim population of less than half of the total population, so it is classified as a minority. Minorities are also defined as groups of people who are not written in history, whose existence is unknown and whose hopes and aspirations are ignored by the government or ruler.

This paper is qualitative research, which is research focused on describing the nature or essence of the value of an object or certain symptoms due to a paradigm shift in viewing a reality, phenomenon or symptom (Abdussamad, 2021). Then in order to achieve the objectives of this paper, the author uses historical methods in analyzing the existence and dynamics of Muslim minorities. As stated by Gilbert J. Garraghan, the historical method is a set of systematic rules and principles for collecting historical sources effectively, assessing them critically and proposing a synthesis of the various results achieved in the form of writing, with steps and stages that include *heuristics* (source collection), *verification* (criticism), *interpretation* (analysis) and *historiography* (writing) (Abdurahman, 2011). Then the sources or materials needed in this paper are collected based on the relationship with the topic chosen by the author.

With this description and explanation of the existence and dynamics of Islam in three regions in Southeast Asia, it is hoped that it will provide an understanding of the conditions and development of Muslim minorities who

are able to live and settle with non-Muslim majority governments and populations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islam in Southeast Asia

Islam entered Southeast Asia for centuries peacefully, without political turmoil or through military expansion and not through the imposition of power structures. Instead, Islam was brought through trade, marriage, proselytization and the blending of Arab, Persian and Indian Muslim communities with indigenous communities. And Islam entered various regions in Southeast Asia not at the same time, but took place over centuries and even then, not evenly distributed throughout the place (Arisman, 2017). There are several theories that discuss the origins of the arrival, spread (penetration) and Islamization in Southeast Asia. In this paper there are at least four main theories of the origin of Islam in Southeast Asia, namely: Indian theory, Arabic theory, Persian theory and Chinese theory (Nor Huda, 2015). Dutch scholars believe that the Indian theory is the origin of Islam in Southeast Asia, including those put forward by Pijnappel (Gujarat and Malabar), C. Snouck Hurgronje (Deccan), J.P. Moquette (Gujarat), Marrison (Coromandel), Thomas W. Arnold (Coromandel and Malabar), S.Q. Fatimi (Bengal), R. Q. Fatimi (Bengal), R.A. Kern (Gujarat), R.O. Winstedt (Gujarat), G.H. Bousquet (Gujarat), B.H.M. Vlekke (Gujarat), J. Gonda (Gujarat), B.J.O. Schrike (Gujarat) and D.G.H. Hall (Gujarat) (Azra, 2013; Nor Huda, 2015; WM et al., 2015). Although the Indian theory generally states that Islam originated in India, some scholars supporting this theory have differing views on the origin, bearers and timing of Islam's arrival.

Then the Arab theory was put forward by Dutch, Indonesian and Malaysian scholars, such as Crawfurd (Arabia), Keijzer (Egypt), Niemann (Hadramaut), de Hollander (Hadramaut), P.J. Veth (Arabia), Naguib al-Attas (Arabia), Hasyimi (Arabia), and Hamka (Arabia). Furthermore, the opinion that Islam originated from Persia, which was put forward by P.A. Hoesein Djajadiningrat based on an analysis of the influence of Persian Sufism on the teachings of Sufism in Indonesia (Azra, 2013; WM et al., 2015). And the last theory of China as the origin of the arrival of Islam which is the opinion of H.J. de Graaf and Slamet Muljana, according to them great figures such as Sunan Ampel and the king of Demak are people of Chinese descent. Denys

Lombard also stated that there are similarities in some elements of Chinese culture found in Indonesian culture and a very large influence in various aspects of Indonesian life, so it needs to be considered, that there is a role of Chinese descendants in the process of Islamization in Southeast Asia (Nor Huda, 2015). From various literature searches, it can be said that Islam entered Southeast Asia directly from Arabia in the 1st century AH or 7th century AD by Arab merchants doing business (Hamka, 2016), but the influence of Islam became apparent after the 12th century which was introduced by professional teachers and broadcasters (people who specifically spread Islam), so that the process of Islamization accelerated between the 12th and 16th centuries (Azra, 2013).

Regardless of the theories of the origin, spread and Islamization of Islam in Southeast Asia, Islam has significantly given a new outlook on life to the population in Southeast Asia. This can be seen since the arrival of Islam, people who initially had no contact with religion at all, then had religion and worship. However, the arrival of Islam to Southeast Asia did not necessarily eliminate the existing culture of locality, precisely with this Islam became a frame that helped color the traditions of the population.

As we already know, Islam is the majority religion in several countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, so it is an important factor in social, cultural, political and educational processes. The more influence Islam has on its adherents, so that religion enters an unlimited public space, which affects various lines of life, both in social, cultural, economic, political aspects and so on. Likewise, the influence of religion in daily behavior, in accordance with the character of the Malay people who inhabit this region. Islam appears in a tolerant, peaceful and moderate face. However, the region is not entirely devoid of violent reactions, especially when dealing with the state and adherents of other religions deemed intolerant.

Meanwhile, countries in Southeast Asia with Muslim minorities, such as Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia are struggling to maintain their identity and faith. Such conditions reveal the varied faces and dynamics of Islam that emerge as a response to social and political conditions in the region (Helmiati, 2014). Thus, it can be said that Southeast Asian Muslims experience quite varied dynamics towards changes

that occur according to the socio-cultural, political, legal and economic conditions of their respective countries.

However, it cannot be denied that the occurrence of Muslim minority groups in a nation-state is caused by certain factors. There are several factors that cause the creation of Muslim minority groups in various places, including: (Hasan, 2019)

Establishment of the Nation State

One of the historical events that occurred in the 20th century was the process of disengagement of colonized nations in Asia and Africa from the colonizers. The process of disengagement led to the creation of a large number of nation states, and the delimitation of territorial boundaries was dominated by the colonizing power or the approval of international institutions such as the United Nations (UN). In the process of demarcating a nation state, it can create a minority when it ignores traditional boundaries of cultural influence, ethnicity, or religion. Such is the case with Muslim communities in Singapore, the Southern Philippines and Southern Thailand.

Conversion

A Muslim minority is formed when a small group of people from a particular nation decide to convert to Islam, while a larger group does not. The process of conversion in one region may take a different pattern elsewhere. Thus, it becomes decisive whether a Muslim minority group will continue to be a minority or gradually transition as its numbers grow comparatively with other population groups.

Migration

Migration or the movement of people from one country to another is also a process of forming Muslim minorities. Population migration can occur with a variety of factors, including; economic development gaps, generally from countries with less developed economic levels to countries with more developed economic levels. The motivation for this migration is to improve the level of life. In addition, migration also occurs due to conflict or war that makes it impossible to inhabit an area and its inhabitants are forced to move, sometimes even beyond national borders. And this migration process can take place gradually over a long period of time, but it can also happen quickly.

Expulsion

The expulsion of Muslims on a large scale will form a Muslim minority group, due to the control or power exercised by the majority group. This Muslim minority group is forced to follow the religion of the majority group, and will be expelled if they are not willing to follow the religion of the majority group. However, there are also those who still survive, but only a small portion of them by hiding their religious identity. And they became a very small and persecuted minority.

These factors have led to the formation of Muslim minority groups in various parts of the world. These minority groups experience different dynamics according to the conditions in which they live and certainly encounter challenges and obstacles that are more severe than other groups.

Muslim Minority Dynamics in Southeast Asia

This section will describe the condition of Islamic minorities in Southeast Asia, but only a few countries will be described because they are considered more relevant to the development of modern Islamic history when compared to other countries. In addition, these countries are considered relevant because of their dominant Muslim population or strategic position in today's world civilization.

Thailand

The Dynamics of Islam in Thailand

Historically, Thailand was popularly known as *Siam* and also known as *Muangthai* (C. F. Yusuf, 2013). Thailand has an area of 513,120 km^2 with a population of ± 68 million based on 2018 data. Looking at the composition of the Thai population in terms of religious diversity, the majority of the Thai population is 94.6% Buddhist, while Islam is only about 4.3% and Christianity and other religions 1.1% (Hasan, 2019).

The entry of Islam into Thailand, especially to Southern Thailand (Pattani) did not only come from one region, but Islam spread from Arabia, China, India and Persia estimated in the 10th or 11th century through trade routes carried out by Sufis and traders from Arabia and coastal India. And there is also an opinion that Islam entered Thailand through the kingdom of Samudera Pasai in Aceh (Mania, 2019). The entry of Islam into the Pattani

region is because this region is a developed region and a strategic area to visit.

According to Saifullah, the Muslims in Thailand can be divided into two; *first,* the immigrant Thai Muslim population who usually live and live in the cities of Bangkok and Chiang Mai (Northern and Central Thailand), and *second,* the native Thai Muslim population who are usually located in Pattani, Southern Thailand (Muh. Arif, 2020; Saifullah SA, 2010). With the majority of Muslims living in the four southern provinces of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, Satun, and Narathiwat as well as parts of Songkhla Province with a percentage reaching 74% of the total population (Arisman, 2017; Hasan, 2019).

In Thailand, the Muslim minority is viewed with a negative attitude as *the Khaek* people. Literally "*Khaek*" in Thai means "guest", this nickname is directed at Muslims from Southern Thailand as Malays. *Khaek* also connotes people who are lazy, slovenly, selfish, poor, stupid, traitorous, cruel, uncooperative and bigoted (Rudolf Yuniarto, 2005). The existence of the nickname *Khaek* against the Muslim minority according to the circles is an insult to Muslims (Sanurdi, 2018). They accuse the government of deliberately dubbing them "*Thai Muslims*" in an effort to obscure their identity as people who are completely different from other Thais (Thohir, 2009).

The problem of Muslim minorities in Thailand has arisen for a long time since 1909 related to the British-Siamese (Thai) agreement (C. F. Yusuf, 2013), officially taking over the states in Northern Malay, such as Pattani, Yala, Satun, Narathiwat and Songkhla, which later became provinces in Thailand. While other Northern Malay states, such as Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis were included as part of Malaysia by the British (Helmiati, 2014; Suaedy, 2012). Since the unification of these five regions into Thailand, there has been a cultural clash between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists. The government's policy in cultural assimilation is a clear form, that Thailand wants to erase the culture of Malay Muslims and be replaced with Thai culture throughout Thailand. In this policy, there is a ban on using Islamic names, language and so on (Ekawati, 2020). Government policies that force integration and assimilation in Muslim communities are seen as unfair, feeling treated unfairly as a minority. The government's policy could jeopardize and eliminate their identity as Malay and Muslim. So, the

integration and assimilation policies of the government received a strong response from the Muslim minority in Thailand, and have led to armed conflict between minority groups and the government (Helmiati, 2014).

On the socio-economic aspect, there is discrimination against the Muslim minority in Pattani, as hundreds of hotels are built every year in Haytai (the second largest city after Bangkok) and several businesses in Pattani are controlled by Chinese Thais by taking labor from the Buddhist-majority north. Food products are marketed in Arab and Muslim countries with halal labeling, even though the companies are owned by non-Muslims and employ 100% non-Muslims, but halal certificates are still issued by the Sheikul Islam of Thailand, so according to the BRN (National Revolutionary Front) organization the honesty of the Sheikul Islam is questioned. In addition, Sheikul Islam is also considered to be pressuring the Pattani people, as some of them are chosen from Thai Muslims rather than Malay Muslims. BRN admits there is no direct economic pressure on the community, but the business freedom given by the government to China and bringing in workers from the Buddhist-majority north will have an impact on the Pattani economy (Arisman, 2017).

Then on the education aspect, initially the government did not prohibit the establishment of boarding schools by Thai scholars, but when more and more boarding schools were established, the government finally considered the boarding schools as places of radicalism and political activities against the government. So in 1968, the government decided to abolish all Malay lessons and the language used in the boarding schools, replacing it with Thai. In addition, the government did not provide legalization for diplomas for religious school students, so students could not use them to continue to public schools or to find jobs (Arisman, 2017).

In the political field, the issue of the Malay Muslim population who want to claim as an independent region, thus troubling the kingdom. The act of rebellion by Malay Muslim separatist groups gave rise to a number of organizations, such as the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), *Pattani United Liberation Organization* (PULO), Pattani Islamic Mujahidin Movement (GMIP) and several other groups although not very reactive. This organization is persistently fighting for autonomy in the Southern Thailand region (Sanurdi, 2018). According to David Wyatt, the emergence of this separatist movement was motivated by four things, namely; *first,* history and conquest by Siam;

second, economic interests; *third,* internal migration; and *fourth,* differences in accommodating differences in identity (Rudolf Yuniarto, 2005).

Cases of insurgency and attacks that killed civilians increased from year to year. In 2004 there was an attack on Muslim rebel forces by the state military. The Muslim rebels were hiding in the South near a mosque and were shot dead. This angered the Muslim population. Islamic movement organizations began to rise precisely in 2005, the goal was to free Pattani from Thailand's grip and this conflict took a lot of casualties, so that the population felt frightened and far from feeling safe in carrying out activities (Ekawati, 2020).

To anticipate this separatist movement, the government's strategy was to give Muslims the freedom to practice their religion and invite the Malay Muslim population to take part in Thailand's development (Thohir, 2009). It is known that in 2006, almost all rebel groups and organizations signed a reconciliation memorandum agreement; *"Join Peace and Development Plan for South Thailand".* Peace efforts were also made by Prince Sonkla University in Pattani and *The Asian Muslim Action Network* (AMAN) in an effort to rehabilitate the population of victims of violence and the younger generation who were negatively affected by the conflict. In addition, religious scholars, Islamic boarding schools, and madrasas support the reconciliation and peace efforts in principle, but their desire is not matched by government policies on security, educational progress, and employment opportunities in Southern Thailand (Berutu, 2019).

The Development of Islam in Thailand

In recent years, relations between the Thai monarchy and the Malay Muslim population have been harmonious. The crown prince is a regular visitor to the provinces bordering Malaysia. The construction of roads and school buildings marks significant attention from the monarchy. Since 1990, the kingdom has given freedom to Malay Muslims in practicing Islamic law, but they are still struggling to implement Islamic law. The good relationship between Malay Muslims and the government is due to the influence of democracy in developing countries (Mania, 2019).

According to Amad Omar Chapakia, an academic at Fatoni University, the current king Maha Vajirolongkorn pays special attention to the Muslim minority population, and has done so since he became crown prince. For example, the king often attends Muslim religious events and officially opens

them. The same thing was also said by Onanong Thippimol, an academic at Thammasat University in Bangkok, that the king's closeness was considered as an effort to reduce the tensions that had occurred so far in Southern Thailand, so that this effort would make a peaceful situation in the region (*Raja Baru Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn Di Mata Minoritas Muslim Di Kawasan Selatan - BBC News Indonesia*, 2019). However, this does not mean that the king's closeness to the minority population will solve the problem easily, because as long as Thailand has not achieved comprehensive democracy, it will be difficult for peace to be realized in Southern Thailand.

Filipina

The Dynamics of Islam in the Philippines

The Philippines is a country of many islands with an area of about 300,000 km² and a population of ±106 million based on 2018 data. The majority of Filipinos are Catholic with a percentage of 79.5%, then Islam 6%, Iglesia ni Cristo 2.6%, Evangelical 2.4%, and other religions 9.5%. Although Islam is a minority religion in the Philippines, there are areas dominated by Muslims, namely the Southern Philippines, especially on Mindanao Island (Hasan, 2019).

The entry of Islam into the Southern Philippines (Sulu and Mindanao) in the 14th century or 1380 AD took place peacefully through cultural channels. Islam was brought by Arab, Chinese, and Parsi traders (Ahmad Hidayat, 2014). And the Muslim community in Mindanao Philippines is called Moro Muslims (Nasir, 2019) or better known as the Moro nation. Historically, "*Moro*" refers to the word "*moor*", "*moriscor*", or Muslim. The Moro nickname is a political national identity labeling, in fact Moro consists of various ethnolinguistics and there are three Moro ethnolinguistic groups, namely the Maguindanao-Iranun group in the Cotabato region, the Tausug group in the Sulu Islands, and the Maranawa group in the Lanao area (Rehayati, 2011).

The *Moro* people feel that they are different from Filipinos, the difference is consciously not in the ethnic aspect, but the difference is more in historical factors, politics, territory, religion, and socio-economic conditions. The majority of Moros are fishermen and farmers, but there are also Muslims who work in the government sector as teachers, administrators, armed forces personnel, judicial officers and some have even been elected

governors. Muslims who receive a secular education tend to integrate more easily with the Philippine state, but those who do not accept secular education and only receive traditional education usually do not want to integrate with the Philippine state (Thohir, 2011). Despite the variations and differences among Muslims, they share the same sense of religious brotherhood when it comes to problems.

In the Philippines, the condition of the Muslim population cannot be separated from the historical factors behind it. During the colonial period, Spain applied the politics of *divide and rule* and *mission sacre* (holy mission of Christianization) against Muslims. Spain launched attacks on Muslims on the grounds of competition and religious and political differences in various ways, both by means of persuasion and lure and by means of violence, the goal is that Muslims are willing to convert to Christianity, so that the Christianized population becomes an ally to expand its influence to the southern region. However, not all Filipino Muslims could be Christianized, such as the Sulu region, Mindanao and surrounding areas; they not only refused to be Christianized, but they also never stopped fighting, so the conflict continued during the reign of the independent Philippines (Saifullah SA, 2010). The Spanish even stigmatized Muslims as the *Moors* (Moro), meaning illiterate, evil, godless and murderous (*huramentados*). Since then, the nickname *Moro* for Muslims who live and live in the Southern Philippines. The politics of divide and conquer was carried out by Spain by involving the Filipino population. Where the indigenous population of the northern region who have been Christianized are told to fight with Muslims in the south, so that wars occur in the name of a holy mission (Arisman, 2017).

Although the Philippines as a nation state has gained independence twice, namely: *first* independence from Spain in 1989 and *second* independence from the United States in 1946 (C. F. Yusuf, 2013). The independence obtained turned out to have no meaning in the eyes of the *Moro* nation, this was due to the lack of attention of the central government and the neglect of the rights of Muslim minorities as befits an independent country. This condition raises new problems that have not been resolved until now, especially the problem of searching or affirming identity and prosecuting homeland rights. The main problems that occur in this minority group are based on marginalization factors carried out by the government, lack of attention and discrimination in development services (C. F. Yusuf, 2013). In

addition, the difficult economic problems, the harshness of life experienced by Muslims in the south and the government's policy of placing Christians in Mindanao upset the balance in the region to the detriment of the Muslim population, who felt economically exploited and politically alienated, giving rise to protest movements against the Philippine government (Muzani, 1993).

Basically, government policies from time to time towards Muslims have not changed because the government has a view of Muslim groups, namely; *first*, that a good *Moro* is a dead *Moro*; *second*, Muslims in the Philippines are second-class citizens; *third*, Muslims as obstacles to development; and *fourth*, *Moro* is an integration problem, so the strategy carried out by the government is how to integrate Muslims into the national democratic process. Basically, all of the government's development programs for Muslims are an attempt by the government to integrate and assimilate Muslims into the national (Christian-Catholic) culture. Meanwhile, the majority of Filipino Muslims have no sense of national identity at all, a factor in the difficulty of Filipino Muslims integrating totally into the government due to, *first*, the difficulty for Filipino Muslims to respect national laws, because they are derived from Western and Catholic moral values, such as the prohibition of divorce and polygamy, *Second*, the application of the same curriculum in every school in all regions, regardless of religion and culture, thus indirectly alienating their children from Islam; and *third*, the trauma and resentment of Muslims in the Philippines towards the government's policy of moving the population to their territory in Mindanao, thus changing their situation from a majority population to a minority in all aspects of life (Hasaruddin, 2019; Helmiati, 2014).

So, the government views, that integration is the main problem for the *Moro* nation, so the strategic policies taken by the government are through; militarization, transfer of Christians to Muslim areas, various Muslim activities considered as "Muslim Fundamentalists"; and extermination and massacre of the civilian population (Helmiati, 2014). The policies of the Philippine government led to protests and resistance from Muslim groups, resulting in the emergence of separatist groups as previously described.

The Development of Islam in the Philippines

Muslims in the Philippines have one common goal, namely the empowerment of Muslims and Islamic institutions, but in the strategy of

achieving it they have different views and are divided into two groups. *First*, the hardliners with a strategy of drawing international attention, especially from Islamic countries, to the plight of those oppressed by the arbitrariness of the rulers and waging guerrilla warfare to undermine the Philippine government. Then the *second* group, a moderate group supported by the Muslim majority by trying to defend themselves and their identity by being in the Philippine political system by using all legal and constitutional means. Meanwhile, the government itself takes two attitudes, namely *first*, conciliation with peaceful efforts to conduct open dialogues with all groups and discuss all issues and resolve them, so that they can be accepted by all parties. *Second*, regional development that involves all national resources to provide facilities both in the economic, social, cultural sectors and the expansion of population participation in the development (Saifullah SA, 2010).

In creating a peaceful and conducive country, various Philippine government policies were carried out in order to create peace and reconciliation, among others; by establishing autonomous regional governments, establishing the ministry of Islamic affairs, establishing the Philippine Hajj travel management agency, establishing the University of Manila's Islamic studies center, establishing *Arabic studies* and *the King Faisal Center for Islamic*, establishing Southern Philippines peace studies, and launching *the Philippines Amanah Bank* and Muslim development fund (Saifullah SA, 2014).

In addition, the Philippine government is trying to convince *Moro* Muslims to join in totality in the Philippine nation state through a persuasive approach by providing scholarships for outstanding and potential *Moro* students and young people. Then, involving Moro Muslim political and religious leaders in national politics. So, it is natural that many *Moro* people have careers in the Philippine government, although they are only accepted in certain positions (Arisman, 2017; Suaedy, 2012).

In 1981, for the first time, an office of Muslim affairs was established (*office of Muslim affair*). And it was from this office that it became known that many Filipinos were converting to Islam or in the national language of the Philippines (Tagalog) called the "*balik Islam*" group. Even since the September 11 attacks on the twin towers in the United States, an increasing number of people have "*balik Islam*". They embraced Islam after reviewing

the teachings of Islam, especially those with connections to the history of the Islamic world (Arisman, 2017). Today, Filipino Muslims are only second-class citizens, but efforts to reclaim a lost history continue.

In addition, the Philippine government's policy of appointing Murad Ibrahim, the leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as the Interim Minister of the Islamic Autonomous Region of Mindanao is expected to suppress radical groups, thus creating peace in the region (Ayp, n.d.). Likewise, during the Rodrigo Duterte administration, one of his policies was to declare Eid al-Fitr a national holiday. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, during Ramadan Muslims in Metro Manila usually broke the fast together at the mosque and continued with tarawih prayers. At the al-Dahab Mosque or better known as The Golden Mosque in Manila, the embassies of Islamic countries from the Middle East take turns providing menus for breaking the fast, so the atmosphere of the mosque is crowded in the month of Ramadan (Henry, 2020). With the steps and policies of the government that accommodate the rights of the Islamic minority, it is hoped that an atmosphere of peace will be created in the Philippines.

Myanmar (Burma)

The Dynamics of Islam in Myanmar

Myanmar has an area of 676,578 km^2 with a population of 55 million people. The majority of the population adheres to Buddhism, namely 87.9%, Christianity 6.2%, and Islam 4.3% (Nasruddin, 2017). Formerly, the state of Myanmar was known as *Birma* or *Burma*. However, since June 18, 1989 officially changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar and the transfer of its capital from Rangoon to Yangoon (Muh. Arif, 2020). The name change was intended to make non-Burmese feel part of the country.

The history of the entry of Islam into Burma (Myanmar), especially to the Arakan region is estimated in the 1st century AH or 7th century AD brought by Muslim Arab traders who settled on the coast of Arakan. Then, in the Arakan region there are two main ethnic groups, namely; *First*, the Rohingya as the majority population of Arakan and the majority adheres to Islam or also called Rohingya Muslims. *The second*, the Magh (Rakhaing) population of the Buddhist minority (C. F. Yusuf, 2013). Rohingya is a different ethnicity for the people of Myanmar, this is because the majority of Rohingya Muslims and live in the middle of Myanmar's majority Buddhist

population. Then from the aspect of language and face shape in general, it is very different from the population of Myanmar, but the Rohingya ethnic group has a close relationship with Bangladesh, Indians, and Arabs (H Nanda, 2020).

The entry of Islam into the region was not brought by Arab traders alone, but Malaysian and Indian Muslims also played an important role in the spread of Muslims in Myanmar. Please be aware that in Myanmar, there are different ethnic groups like Burmese, Karen, Chin, Kachin, Shan, and Rohingya. The Burmese ethnic group is the largest and mainly consists of Buddhists who have a dominant presence in Myanmar. They have a larger population and hold control over various aspects of life in the country. Ultimately, they have a strong political influence (Haif, 2016).

After Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, the Burmese government promised Arakan special autonomy. However, after Burmese rule grew stronger and became a large country the promise was never given. In fact, the human rights of Rohingya Muslims are violated, this situation has worsened when the military junta came to power causing the minority to be increasingly oppressed. Various efforts are being made to get rid of Muslims or Rohingya Muslims, they want to replace the Muslim population with the Buddhist population in the area. Even in 1961, the Burmese government declared that Buddhism was the state religion and all Muslims should learn the value as well as the culture of Buddhism (Arisman, 2017).

Burmese Muslims are generally grouped into three distinct communities, and each has a different relationship with the Buddhist majority and the government. These communities are; *firstly*, the *Zerbadee* or Burmese Muslim community which is the longest established and rooted community in the *Shwebo* region. There are the descendants of preachers who came from the Middle East and South Asia, as well as the first Muslim residents who have mixed ancestry with the Burmese community. *Secondly*, there are Indian Muslims, who are immigrants of Indian descent and formed Muslim communities during British colonization. *Lastly,* there are Rakhine or Rohingya Muslims, who settled in the Arakan state or Rakhine region near Bangladesh (Ahmad Hidayat, 2014).

Unlike the other two Muslim communities, the Rohingya (Rakhine) are one of the most impoverished groups in Burma. They are consistently denied citizenship status and access to schools and hospitals (H Nanda, 2020). Even

though they are accepted, they are forced to pay exorbitant fees. In addition, difficulties are also caused by wars, dislocations and disputes. But there are also those who say Chinese Muslims or Hui-Hui/Panthay belong to the Islamic community in Myanmar and they work as traders. However, these Chinese Muslims are more cooperative and more likely to blend in with the people of Myanmar (Muzani, 1993; I. Yusuf, n.d.).

In 1982, the situation for Rohingya Muslims worsened when the Burmese junta government enacted *the Burma Citizenship Law of* 1982. These laws, filled with religious discrimination, caused immense suffering. Rohingya Muslims were not recognized as citizens of the country and instead were labeled as "migrants" in their own homeland. Additionally, Muslims were arrested, tortured, and forced into labor, while Rohingya Muslim women faced violent harassment (Arisman, 2017). Muslims are not given the opportunity to participate in politics or access social institutions that provide assistance to them. They are also prohibited from performing the Hajj pilgrimage and sacrificing animals during Eid al-Adha. The Myanmar government has formed alliances with extremist Buddhist groups to systematically oppress Rohingya Muslims, subjecting them to intimidation and human rights violations (Helmiati, 2014). Despite facing ongoing discrimination and mistreatment from the government, Muslims have consistently resisted and rebelled against these injustices. However, they continue to be persecuted and forcibly displaced from Myanmar.

The Growth and Progress of Islam in Myanmar

The government's discrimination and mistreatment of Muslims has been going on for a long time. The prejudice against the Rohingya is not just rooted in religious differences, but also driven by political and economic motives. From 1988 to 1997, the Myanmar government, under *the State Law and Order Restoration Council* (SLORC), frequently instigated anti-Muslim movements, resulting in escalating violence against Muslims in different areas, with the intention of dividing the Muslim community. In 1991, around 500,000 Muslims were expelled from Myanmar after the opposition party won the election, which Muslims had voted for. In early February 2001, a conflict erupted in the Sittwe area due to a dispute between Muslim traders and some monks. Later in 2012, there was a conflict between the government and Rohingya Muslims, as well as violent acts of Buddhist

extremism in 2013 in the cities of Meiktila and Yangon. In January 2014, the UN reported that over 40 Rohingya men, women, and children were killed in Rakhine state, due to allegations against Rohingya who had supposedly killed Rakhine police (Arisman, 2017; Kadoe & Husein, 2015). In 2016, there was a brutal attack on Rohingya Muslims that resulted in the deaths of 150 people and the burning of three villages (Kurniawan, 2018). Many more acts of violence and intimidation were also perpetrated against the Rohingya Muslims.

The *Burmanization* policy has made the Rohingya people unrecognized and *stateless*. The violence and persecution against the Rohingya have forced them to flee to countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, causing them great discomfort (Siba&Qomari'ah, 2018). Despite condemnation from international organizations, the United Nations and ASEAN have issued a resolution urging the Myanmar government to cease inciting hatred against the Rohingya and other minority groups. Similarly, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has tried to mediate and resolve the conflict in the Rohingya crisis, but unfortunately, these efforts have not been successful so far. It's hard to picture Rohingya Muslims living in peace as long as the government remains steadfast in its ideology. Therefore, the only option for Rohingya Muslims seems to be fleeing, running, and seeking asylum in different countries.

The conflicts happening in several Southeast Asian countries with Muslim minority populations are a result of the government's neglect and discrimination against these minority groups. They face economic, social, cultural, and political marginalization, which leads to conflict and rebellion as their rights as citizens are not being fulfilled by the government. These conflicts and acts of violence become a concern for international organizations such as the UN, ASEAN, and the OIC. However, the efforts of these organizations to resolve the conflicts face obstacles and limitations due to the rules that govern them. For instance, the United Nations, as the largest international organization in the world, has the responsibility to promote peace but can only provide temporary assistance through the deployment of UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*). ASEAN, being a regional organization, has its own mechanism to resolve conflicts. This mechanism involves several stages. *Firstly,* there are institutional processes that include discussions, consultations, and

considerations regarding mutual interests and understanding. *Secondly,* there are informal efforts to reduce conflicts through diplomatic means, finding accommodations and reaching consensus through deliberation. These efforts also involve promoting mutual understanding of the culture and traditions of each country. *Thirdly,* another formal approach is through established institutions that aim to resolve conflicts (Rahmanto, 2017). However, this stage may not hold much significance since ASEAN members adhere to the principle of non-intervention in regional policies. This principle states that each country should solve its own problems without interference from external parties.

Similar to ASEAN, the OIC also faces obstacles in its efforts to resolve conflicts. Despite various attempts, the OIC's capacity is limited to being an initiator, facilitator, and mediator that provides recommendations for conflict resolution. It is not an arbitration institution or a body for settling cases.

This is the situation in Southeast Asian countries with Muslim minority populations. To achieve peace and harmony, it is important to have freedom of religion, mutual respect among different religions, no discrimination or oppression based on one's faith, and no imposition of a particular culture on any specific community. When these principles are upheld, it paves the way for peaceful coexistence between religious believers and the government in a particular region.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that Islam's growth in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, the Philippines, and Myanmar, is seen as a minority population. Consequently, the government holds a negative perception of the Muslim community. This negative attitude results in discrimination against the Muslim minority under non-Muslim governments, leading to conflicts between different groups. These conflicts often escalate into acts of intimidation, attacks, and even mass killings. In Thailand, the government aims to assimilate the culture, which creates strong resistance from the Muslim minority as it threatens their identity as Malays and Muslims. Similarly, in the Philippines, the situation is not much different. The government marginalizes the Muslim minority, resulting in less attention, discrimination, economic exploitation, and political alienation. These policies have a detrimental impact on the Muslim population. Likewise, in Myanmar,

the Muslim community is denied citizenship status and faces numerous obstacles in accessing schools and hospitals. They are even considered "migrants" in their own homeland.

The discrimination against the Muslim minority has been going on for a long time, and it's not just based on religious differences. Political and economic interests also play a role, leading to protests and resistance from Muslim groups. This has resulted in the emergence of separatist groups that oppose the government's policies, leading to conflicts and uprisings. These groups feel that their rights as citizens are not being fulfilled by the government. International organizations like UNHCR, ASEAN, and the OIC have made efforts to address this issue, but they face obstacles and limitations. These organizations can only act as initiators, facilitators, and mediators, and not as arbiters. With the freedom to practice religion, mutual respect, and the absence of coercive government policies that contradict the core principles and teachings of the prevailing religion, it is hoped that peace, harmony, and unity can be fostered between the Muslim minority population and the ruling government.

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