

Beyond Colonization: The Impact of History in Philippine Interreligious Dialogue

Pablito A. Baybado, Jr.

The perception of history plays a key role in interreligious dialogue. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate historical narratives as the context of, and a fundamental challenge to, interreligious dialogue in the Philippines. Different historical narratives have enduring impact on Muslim-Christian relations. Islam and Christianity arrived in the Philippines at different times and in different contexts. It has led to the formation of two distinct nationalities, namely, the Christian Filipinos and the Muslims, living in the Philippines. The concept of colonization dominates their historical relations. Colonization is Christianization for the Christians and de-Islamization for the Muslims. As a result, there exists an “invisible wall” that divides the Muslims and the Christians. This division, under the discourse of colonization, permeates every stratum of relations from socio-cultural and economic to the political and others. Colonization, as the historical context of ethno-religious identities, creates difficulties, challenges, and opportunities in interreligious dialogue. The basic argument of this paper is that history remains an enduring discourse in interreligious dialogue. History cannot be changed. Historical understanding and acceptance are the ways forward; re-reading and forgetting as ways out to improve Muslim and Christian relations is no longer historical. Interreligious dialogue addresses this issue by creating a new landscape of relations based on harmony and diversity, which aims at gradually removing historical biases and division.

Introduction

The perception of history influences the understanding and practice of interreligious dialogue.¹ The historical context of religion creates difficulties, challenges, and opportunities in interreligious dialogue.² Swidler claims “that only if the truth statements were placed in their historical situation, their historical *Sitz im Leben*, could they be properly understood.”³ The relevance of history brings context and time as key elements of interreligious dialogue analysis. While Swidler tends to apply this notion of history in de-absolutizing truth-claims in religious beliefs, dialogue between and among religions should also be situated as the relations of peoples of different religions in time and in a historical context.

History functions as the formation of narratives. “It is in recognition of this role that the mediating role of narratives in the relations between different religious traditions becomes an important resource for interreligious dialogue.”⁴ It is because, in the words of Lambino, “[B]efore any word is spoken the predispositions of the partners in dialogue have long been exercising

¹ William LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace: The Local Church of Mindanao-Sulu Journeying in Dialogue with the Muslim Community* (1965–2000) (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001), 415; Leonardo N. Mercado and Maxwell Felicilda, *Philippine Muslim-Christian Dialogue* (Manila: Divine Word, 1992); Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inter-religious Explorations: The Challenge and Rewards of Inter-religious Dialogue* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2004).

² David B. Burrell, “Some Requisites for Interfaith Dialogue,” *New Blackfriars* 89 (May 2008): 300–310.

³ Leonard Swidler, “The History of Inter-religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 11.

⁴ Jose Mario C. Francisco, “The Mediating Role of Narrative in Interreligious Dialogue: Implications and Illustrations from the Philippine Context,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 41, no. 2 (2004): 165.

tremendous influence on the directions and possibilities of the whole process.”⁵ “History continues to be an important factor and influence in the contemporary reality of Muslim-Christian relations in Mindanao. What is perceived to be true becomes more important than what is an actual fact.”⁶

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate history as the context of, and a fundamental challenge to, interreligious dialogue in the Philippines. In his book *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, William LaRousse argues that the “issue of history will remain a topic in Muslim-Christian relations.”⁷ The root cause of the absence of peace in Mindanao, according to Konsult Mindanaw, is the “lack of understanding of historical crimes and insensitivity to other people’s identities, cultures and traditions.”⁸ While acknowledging that there is a common identity and shared culture before the arrival of Islam, “these commonalities slowly eroded with the historical experience. The enmity between the Muslims and the Christians has been the product of historical factors.”⁹ The Spanish colonization is considered a crucial factor in understanding Christian-Muslim relations, and “the present-day relations and tensions are a direct result of this particular period of history.”¹⁰

The basic argument of this paper is that history remains an enduring discourse in interreligious dialogue. Historical understanding and acceptance are the ways forward; re-reading and forgetting as a way out to improve Muslim and Christian relations is no longer historical. What is needed is to create a new landscape that will gradually remove historical biases and division. But how can new structures of relations be established outside the historical presupposition? In interreligious dialogue as a “meeting of people of differing religions, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness,”¹¹ history in Muslim-Christian relations is a gigantic challenge towards authentic listening to, and collaborating with, one another. Finally, the paper indicates the problems and issues arising from the historical analysis of interreligious dialogue by looking into some of the dominant approaches of addressing the historical assumptions of the relationship.

The inescapability of historical discourse in interreligious dialogue arises from the “historical constants” in Christian-Muslim relations in the Philippines. These historical constants serve as key posts in understanding Christians and Muslims. Moreover, they are considered the ultimate basis and framework of succeeding encounters between Muslims and Christians at various levels.

⁵ Antonio Lambino, “Dialogue, Discernment, Deeds: An Approach to Asian Challenges Today,” *Landas* 4, no. 2(1990): 149.

⁶ William LaRousse, “Is Dialogue Possible? Muslims and Christians in Mindanao,” *Landas* 16, no. 2 (2002): 287.

⁷ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 416.

⁸ Bishops-Ulama Conference, *Konsult Mindanaw. Visions, Voices and Values: Peoples Platform for Peace in Mindanao*. A Project of the National Ulama Conference (Iligan City, Philippines: Bishops-Ulama Conference, 2010), 12.

⁹ Fernando Capalla, “Philippine Contextual Theology and Interreligious Dialogue,” *Philippiniana Sacra* 39, no. 116 (2004): 350.

¹⁰ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 39.

¹¹ Francis Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers: The Risks and Rewards of Interreligious Dialogue* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, Fowler Wright Books, 1997), 5.

Historical Constants

Orlando Quevedo argues that studying history is indispensable in improving relations between Muslims, Lumads (indigenous peoples in Mindanao), and the Christians. Dialogue must therefore start with what he calls the “indisputable recorded history of our historical consciousness.”¹² These are the historical constants that determine the broad trends of relation, which affects such relations until today.¹³ They provide the historical posts from which relations originate and to which all discussions about such relations return from time to time. In a sense, the historical constants are the center of gravity through which the pendulum of relations keeps on returning. The historical constants are the key references of the history of a people. These are the historical foundations that dominate the collective consciousness of a particular community or group of people. In general, scholars dealing with Muslim-Christian relations would consider the following as historical constants.

Islam’s “advent in the Philippines [is] a function of the general expansion of Islam in Malaysia.”¹⁴ It arrived in 1380 when the guru and sufi missionary Karim Al-Makhdum arrived in Simunul, Tawi-Tawi. Since then, the archipelago—as there is no *de jure* or even *de facto* name yet for the entire archipelago—has been dominated by Islam for almost the next three centuries. During this period, Islam has spread not only within the islands of Mindanao and Sulu, but it reaches to other islands as far as Mindoro and Manila.

During this period, sultanates were established in Mindanao. Sultanate is a form of governance that is based entirely on Islam. Under the Sultans, Islam is the way of life as it defines the political, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of the communities. Two Islamic sultanates responsible for the spread of Islam in the Philippines are the Muslim Sultanate founded among the Tausugs at Buansa (Jolo) and the Maguindanao Sultanate established by Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan. The Sharif Ul-Hashim, the founder of the Sultanate of Jolo and Sharif Kabungsuwan, the founder of the Maguindanao sultanate, are missionaries from Johore, Malaysia.

In 1521, Christianity arrived in the archipelago with the coming of the Spaniards by the Portuguese navigator and explorer Ferdinand Magellan in search of the Spice Islands. It was the general policy of the Iberian colonizers to be accompanied by missionaries, as under the *Patronato Real*, the explorations in the new world were also the means of spreading Christianity. Officially, Christianity claims its birthdate on March 31, 1521 when the first Catholic mass was celebrated in the shore of a town islet named Limasawa at the tip of Southern Leyte. The naming of the archipelago as “Las Islas de Filipinas” by Villalobos in honor of King Philip, the son of Emperor Charles V and the heir to the Spanish throne, took place in 1542.¹⁵

¹² Orlando Quevedo, “Two Fundamental Postulates for Lasting Peace in Mindanao,” *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas* 85, no. 870 (January–February 2009): 52.

¹³ Edgar Javier considers the historical constants in Asia as crucial elements in determining the future directions of the relations among religions. He identifies tradition, boundaries, hierarchy and authority, and dynasty and elitism as the four megatrends or historical constants in Asia that interreligious dialogue has to face. Edgar Javier, “Interreligious Dialogue: Historical Constants and Challenges in Asia,” *Philippiniana Sacra* 42, no. 125 (2007): 240–48.

¹⁴ Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 2nd ed. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1973), 35.

¹⁵ D. G. E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 272; W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 21.

Various indigenous tribes inhabited the archipelago prior to Islamization and Christianization. The indigenous peoples today are those people of the islands in the archipelago who are independent communities or villages or clans and live a unique culture, tradition, and religion. They are the communities who were able to defend their territories and evade the colonizers, maintaining their relative independence while continuing to practice their own systems and ways of life.¹⁶ The indigenous peoples are defined as a “group of people or homogeneous societies . . . who have continually lived as organized communities on community-bounded and defined territory . . . since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos.”¹⁷

Dialogue and the Question of Origin

In the collective consciousness of the Moros, they take pride that Islam arrived and flourished in the archipelago prior to the coming of Christianity. The origin of the history of Muslims in the Philippines is the arrival of Islam in 1380. Moreover, the establishment of the Sultanates has provided them the experience of an Islamic way of governance, way of life, trade and commerce and culture.

Islam as a religion becomes the unifying bond of the various ethno-linguistic groups, not only in Mindanao but also to all areas that embraced Islam as their religion. During these times, they breathe the Islamic air, as the Islamic faith penetrates all aspects of their individual and social lives. It serves as the central tenet that guides a Muslim from birth to death to eternal life. And in this kind of system, the Sultanate is the embodiment of an Islamic political, socio-cultural, economic system. From the perspective of a Moro today, the period of the sultanate is the golden era of Islam in the Philippines as it presents Islam as the center of everything in their personal and social life, and is the basis of their diplomatic and trade relations with other countries. It is the ideal *ummah*.¹⁸

The arrival of the Spaniards is the origin of Christianity in the Philippines.¹⁹ This was due to the expansion of the territories of the Iberian powers (Spain and Portugal), and the spread of Christianity. The Spanish period is considered as the taking root of the Christian faith and the start of the historical process of Christianizing the Filipinos. Thus, by the end of the Spanish era in 1898, Christianity is no longer a foreign religion. Filipinos have embraced Christianity as their way of life, an integral foundation of their existence both as an individual and as a country. For this reason, it

¹⁶ Jacqueline K. Cariño, “Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues: Republic of the Philippines” (Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2012), 2, available at <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/0c348367-f9e9-42ec-89e9-3ddb5a14ac>.

¹⁷ Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), Chapter II, Section 3h (Republic Act No. 8371, Republic of the Philippines, approved Oct. 29, 1997).

¹⁸ “From an Islamic point of view, the fundamental concern of all such movement is to preserve, or to recover, or to restore as much as possible, the *umma*, the Islamic social community, in which the divinely prescribed faith-ideology, with its accrued doctrines, customs and laws, may find full expression.” Peter Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 201. And this *umma* in the collective memory of the Muslims in the Philippines is the sultanate prior to colonization.

¹⁹ LaRousse debunks the common knowledge that Christianity was imposed upon the natives. While he does not contradict the fact that conquest requires force and coercion, there are stories where conversion to Christianity is voluntary and the result of good missionary activities. William LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*.

becomes a national pride to mention that the “Philippines is the only Christian nation in Asia,” at least before the independence of Timor Leste in 1999.

For the Christians, the coming of the Spaniards is also a moment of grace. It may be due to colonization; the fact is that the arrival of Christianity is considered as the period of grace and salvation. The Pastoral Exhortation on New Evangelization describes this moment in the following: “The Lord of History, without any merits of our own, first gave the priceless gift of the Christian faith to our people and our land,—nearly 500 years ago.”²⁰ On the other hand, Muslims feel that “the coming of Islam to the Philippines, and hence their being Muslims, constitutes an instance of Allah’s mercy and graciousness.”²¹

The question of historical beginning is an irritation in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The “Muslims consider themselves as having entirely separate origins from the Christianized Filipinos, despite the fact that they are of the same race.”²² Before Islam and before Christianity are two distinct realities. Although the historical meaning of “before” can simply be regarded as the period of their common ancestry, the issue of “arrival” has somehow obliterated that common origin. Rather than looking at it as an intersection in the historical beginning, which can be seen as a space of expanding each other’s notion of origin, both Muslims and Christians have ratified their own understanding of separate “beginnings” as the landmark of what is meaningful, significant, and historical. Unintentionally, “prior to” either Islamization or Christianization is no longer important and considered even as inane and confined to banality.

The introductions of two new religions gave rise to two new identities, which will form two new histories in the archipelago. “As the introduction of Islam eventually brought into being a Muslim nationality in the Philippines, so the introduction of Christianity gave rise to a Christian Filipino nationality.”²³ It is interesting to note that Muslim is considered as a nationality who are in the Philippines, indicating the consciousness that being a Muslim and a Filipino are two distinct identities. The Christian Filipino nationality, on the other hand, demonstrates that being a Filipino is equated with being a Christian. From this framework, there are two nationalities that live in the Philippines. The first are those Muslim-nationals, and the second are Christian-Filipinos. The Christians are at home in the Philippines, while the Muslims feel that they are attached to the Philippines.

The question of beginning leads the discourse into the manner of introduction. It is generally known that Christianity is an integral part of the colonization process. For this reason, its manner of introduction is generally described as “coercive imposition.”²⁴ LaRousse, however, claims that this is not entirely true. He presents data on missionary works where conversion by the natives to Christianity results from the latter’s exemplary life and the attractiveness

²⁰ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Pastoral Exhortation on the Era of New Evangelization” (2012), <http://cbcwebsite.com/2010s/2012/newevangelizatio.html>, accessed March 15, 2017.

²¹ Cesar Adib Majul, “The Muslims in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective,” in *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*, ed. Peter Gowing and Robert McAmis (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 1; Peter Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 40-41.

²² Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 21.

²³ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

of the Christian faith.²⁵ But what makes it interesting is that while there are critical remarks on colonization, there are few Filipino Christians who lament and even criticize the manner of introduction. In the case of the Muslims, Majul's reconstruction and improvements of Saleeby's work on the history of Islam indicate that the introduction of Islam is "not entirely unaccompanied by some tension."²⁶ But in general, the following, according to Majul, is the process of Islamization:

The initial existence of a foreign Muslim settlement, members of this colony exercising some political power or the rulers of the principality becoming Muslims, the coming of the missionaries strengthening Islam among other older Muslims and effecting some conversions, the introduction of additional Muslim institutions, and increasing contacts with other Muslim kingdoms and principalities, thereby heightening Islamic consciousness at home.²⁷

In a sense, the manner of introduction reinforces the already prevailing separation of origins and disparity of identities. It strengthens the prejudice that Christian Filipinos are invasive and imposing, which concretizes the "spirit of crusade in Christian-Muslim relations. . . . Not surprisingly this posture provoked the Muslims into negative responses of defensiveness, opposition and, from time to time, jihad (holy war)."²⁸

In the tri-people relations—that is between the Muslims, the Christians, and the Lumads—the question of beginning favors the historical discourse of the indigenous peoples. Both Christians and Muslims acknowledge the indigenous group as their common ancestry and the original inhabitants of the archipelago. The irritation of history in the tripartite relations is due to the timeline of the beginning of history. Fr. Alejo argues that there is a need for Christians and Muslims to expand their timelines.²⁹ This means that Christian history includes the Islamic era, and that the Islamic period came after indigenous peoples' age. The "prior-to" of both Muslims and Christians should be included as an integral part of one common history rather than as a break, or an insignificant part, of the entire Philippine history.

Colonization, Christianization, and De-Islamization

Colonization is a dominant historical narrative in Philippine history. It has led to the formation of separate identities and defined future relations of Muslims and Christians.³⁰ The era of Hispanicization as the period of colonization is an accepted description of both Christian and Muslim scholars. The Spanish conquest has made inevitable the meetings of Muslims and Christians. What differentiates them is that the period of colonization is Christianization on the part of the Christian Filipinos; Muslims, on the other hand, describe it as the "Moro Wars." The period of

²⁵ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 41–45; John Carroll, "From Limasawa to EDSA," *Human Society* 49 (1987): 1–27; Manuel Tawagon, "Spanish Perceptions of the Moros: A Historiographical Study," *Dansalan Quarterly* 18, nos. 3–4 (1989): 5–32.

²⁶ Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁸ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 41.

²⁹ Albert Alejo, "Building a Culture of Peace: Shaping the Vision, Living the Dream." A paper presented at the International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue: The Approach of Islam and Christianity Towards Religious Extremism and Violence, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, April 29–30, 2015.

³⁰ Francisco, "The Mediating Role of Narrative in Interreligious Dialogue," 160–75.

colonization is the start of the long protracted war between Muslims and Christians. Spain did not only come to colonize the archipelago and spread Christianity. Majul claims that there is a clear intention and policy on the part of the Spaniards to conquer Mindanao and Sulu (dominated by Muslims) and convert them as Christians.³¹

But Islam would not be conquered; for three centuries, bloody, cruel wars were fought between Spaniards and Moros in the effort. The Muslim Filipinos fought for home and country, for freedom to pursue their religion and way of life and for liberty to rove the seas which so ever they would. For three centuries they made a shambles of Spain’s Moro policy.³²

What is an entire period of laying the gift of faith both to the people and the land for the Christians is, as succinctly described by Jubair in the title of his 1997 book, *A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*³³ in the case of the Muslims. The 320-year (1578–1898) Spanish period is characterized as the conflict between the Spanish and the Muslims of Mindanao and Sulu, which is famously called the “Moro Wars.” There are many reasons and motivations behind the “Moro Wars,” such as protection of the populace and the shipping lanes from the pirates;³⁴ the fanatical hatred of the Spaniards against the Muslim, which was born of hundreds of years of struggle for independence from Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula;³⁵ and others. These violent encounters have come to be considered as wars between Muslims and Christians, thus inadvertently falling into a religious conflict.³⁶

The attempts to Hispanicize and Christianize the Muslims are considered as the most important factor and the very root of the fierce Muslim resistance to Spanish encroachment. “Moro Wars” is the historical expression of the Muslims to assert the Islamic faith as the foundation of their individual and communal life. According to Eric Casino, the fierce determination of the Muslims to defend their religion and culture against the Spanish attempts of Christianizing them is the predominant understanding in Philippine history. This understanding is deeply rooted in the popular opinion of both Christians and Muslims.³⁷

The “Moro Wars” is an aggression committed by the Spaniards against the people of Mindanao and Sulu. Yet, it resulted in an enmity and division between Muslims and Christian Filipinos that will have enduring repercussions. It cemented a strong conviction that Muslims and Christians belong to different races, and hence are of separate origins. In addition to coercion and economic benefits, the “Spanish deliberately fostered religious antagonism and a derogatory image

³¹ Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines*, 343.

³² Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 31.

³³ Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 2nd ed. (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Research Academy, 1997).

³⁴ F. Delos Angeles, “The Moro Wars,” in *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*, ed. Peter G. Gowing and Robert D. McAmis (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 27.

³⁵ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 30.

³⁶ Cesar Adib Majul, *The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1985), 18; T. S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), 44; Al-Rashid I. Cayongcat, *Bangsa Moro People in Search of Peace* (Manila: The Foundation for the Advancement of Islam in the Philippines, 1986), 20.

³⁷ Eric Casino, “The Sulu Zone: ‘Guerras Piraticas’ Revisited: Religious vs. Economic Interpretation of Sulu History,” *Kinaadman* 8 (1986): 111–12.

of the Muslims in order to mobilize the Indios³⁸ to fight war against the Moros.”³⁹ As a result, it has strained the earlier harmonious relations between Moros and pagan tribes who later became Indios. And, finally, the Spanish introduced the large-scale migration of Christian Filipinos to Mindanao, which has led to the minoritization of the Muslim population. With the negative prejudice against the Muslims, the imposed neighborhood among the communities of Christians and Muslims deepened mistrust and led to sporadic violence.

The Moros made no distinction between the Spanish and the Hispanicized natives who were in colonial administration and military service. For all that, “the task of subjugating the Moros proved futile and not surprisingly, Moro cultural sub-national tendencies came to be centered on fear against alienation from Islam and not just on all forms of domination.”⁴⁰ Thus, the Spanish-Moro wars or Moro Raids, which has drawn the Indios into battles had “spawned what later became known as the Christian-Moro conflict. The deep scars in the collective consciousness and memory of both the Muslims and Christians can be traced to the violence of these wars.”⁴¹

From the Moro perspective, the start of Christianization is also the start of de-Islamization. As the Spaniards began to colonize the archipelago, they also instituted Christianity by converting natives from animism to Christianity. It is also very clear in the historical memory of a Moro that the golden era of the Sultanate, the ideal Islamic *ummah*, began to recede due to colonization. The arrival of Christianity through the Spanish colonization is marked as the start of a systematic de-Islamization in the entire archipelago.

Colonization is Christianization and de-Islamization at the same time. The “Moro Wars,” on the part of the Muslims, represent their prowess of historically proving their fidelity to the Islamic faith and their way of life, while on the part of the Christians they can be regarded as representing the fidelity of spreading the Christian faith towards building a Christian nation.

Colonization as the Pattern of Future Relation

Colonization, which carries with it both the weight of Christianization and de-Islamization, has an enduring effect on the relations of Christians and Muslims. The “Moro Wars” as the period of colonization, on the one hand, expresses the nostalgia of the Moros to re-establish the Sultanate era as the golden age of Islam as an *ummah*. They also prove the fidelity of the Moros to defend, at whatever cost, the Islamic faith as their way of life. This aspiration is expressed today as the Moros’ *right to self-determination*. Christians, on the other hand, consider the period of colonization as the establishment and fortification of the Christian faith. This variation of references of colonization will, time and again, appear as a reference in their future relations. Colonization as Christianization

³⁸ *Indio* is a term used by the Spanish that refers to the Malay natives in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial times.

³⁹ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 22–23.

⁴⁰ Michael Mastura, “Administrative Policies Towards the Muslims in the Philippines: A Study in Historical Continuity and Trends” (Occasional Research Papers #5—Dansalan Research Center) (Marawi City, Philippines: Dansalan Research Center of Dansalan College, 1976), 1–20.

⁴¹ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 68. See also Tawagon, “Spanish Perceptions of the Moros,” 21; Asiri J. Abubakar, “Muslim Philippines: With Reference to the Sulus, Muslim-Christian Contradictions, and the Mindanao Crisis,” *Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1973): 116; Cesar Adib Majul, “Muslims and Christians in the Philippines: A Study in Conflict and Efforts at Reconciliation,” in *The Vatican, Islam and the Middle East*, ed. Kail Ellis (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 310; Luis Camara Dery, *The Kris in Philippine History, A Study of the Impact of Moro Anti-Colonial Resistance, 1571–1896* (Manila: printed by author, 1997), 142.

and de-Islamization would occupy all future encounters between Christians and Muslims, whether in religious communities, in politics, cultural and socio-economic areas, or other types of encounters.

According to Peter Gowing, “[p]erhaps the most important legacy of the colonial experience, and certainly one which will prove lasting, is the Christian religion of the majority of the Filipinos.”⁴² The colonial period, in the collective consciousness of the Moros, is their endless experience of conflict and violence. Colonialism defined as the Moro Wars “shaped the character of the Muslim-Christian relations down to the present day.”⁴³ An invisible wall divides the Muslims and the Christians as a result of the colonization. Nagasura Madale argues that this is the result of the centuries-old conflict, an aftermath of the encounter between those who adhere to Islam and those who believe in Christianity.⁴⁴ LaRousse noted that “[M]any of the recorded and remembered meetings and relations are those that turned violent. The history of these violent encounters has a tremendous impact on the situation today for mutual relations, understanding, and dialogue.”⁴⁵ The colonial reading of Muslim-Christian relations dominates till today.

The American period (1898–1946), which is an aftermath of the defeat of the Spaniards by the Americans, is also described as a continuation of colonialism. The American policy of pacification and assimilation was considered to be the new form of colonization. Under the Treaty of Paris, Spain ceded the Philippines to the Americans, which included the Mindanao and Sulu. For the Moros, this inclusion is illegal and immoral; and they considered the American government along with their Christian collaborators as neo-colonizers, the continuity of the endless tyranny against the Moros.⁴⁶

During the American period, Muslim *datus* persisted to push for the separation of Mindanao and Sulu. According to American reports of Muslim sentiment in 1910, Muslims reacted favorably to this proposed separation. The Muslims preferred to be either under the Americans or to become an autonomous nation. They objected to being “given over to Christian Filipinos, whom they considered to be another people, foreigners. Muslim Filipinos are to be considered a different race and having a different religion.”⁴⁷ This reaction is definitely indicative of the impact of colonialism. Though Spain is no longer reigning, the reaction shows that Muslims still look at the Christian Filipinos as possessing the colonial attitude and mentality. For this reason, either the approaches imposed by the Filipino Christians are still based on the Spanish colonial practices, or it is simply that Muslims have cemented their negative prejudices against the Christian Filipinos as a result of the Spanish colonization. However, at this time, Manila and the entire archipelago are not governed by the Christian Filipinos. Just like the Spanish colonial era, Filipino elites have served as puppets to the Americans. Thus, following the pattern of the Spanish colonial era, the deepening of enmity between Muslim and Christian Filipinos is mainly due to the political, social, and economic maneuverings of the Americans. Despite the American control and

⁴² Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

⁴⁴ Nagasura Madale, *Possibilities for Peace in Southern Philippines: The Islamic Concept of Peace and Other Essays* (Zamboanga City, Philippines: Silsilah Publications, 1990), 15.

⁴⁵ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 48.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 75; Pute Rahimah Makol-Abdul, “Colonialism and Change: The Case of Muslims in the Philippines,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 17, no. 2 (1997): 316; Jubair, *A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 75.

⁴⁷ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 78; Peter Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of the Muslim Filipinos 1899–1920* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1983), 251–52.

policies of assimilation as causing both the “friendliness and hostilities” as to relations among Muslims and Christians, the over-all impact seems to be a deeper divide and animosity between the two.

The triangle of social relations among Moros, Americans and Filipinos . . . left unresolved the idea of two nations: one for Moros, another for Filipinos. The two-nation concept animated ethnicity, rekindled secessionism and became virtual generator of a conflict situation in another form.

... The attempt of some Americans and their Moro friends to revive American control over, or at the extreme to separate, Mindanao and Sulu, caused Moro-Filipino relations to deteriorate. Also the idea of separation between these two groups has repeatedly played in history, thereby widening rather than closing the differences and antagonism between Moros and Christian Filipinos.⁴⁸

The American period reinforces the discourse on the concept of Moro as a separate race and nationality from Filipinos, which is equated with Christians. This colonial hatred, which is directed more to the Christians than to the Americans, is again clear in the Moros’ reaction to the Filipinization of the government.

[G]radually some Moros began to complain that “Filipinization” meant “Christian Filipinization.” The majority of the Filipino office holders at provincial and Department levels were Christians . . . When Moro resentment mounted, it focused not on Americans but on the Christian Filipinos. The Moros believed that as Americans had “Filipinized” the administration of the Philippines, the Christian Filipinos should “Moroize” the administration of Moroland. The reluctance of Christian Filipinos in this regard was one major complaint.⁴⁹

Another clear example of the haunting impact of colonization as the framework of understanding historical events is the reaction of the Muslim communities in the first major violent incident after the declaration of martial law that occurred in Marawi, Lanao del Sur on October 21, 1972. A group of armed Muslims seized control of the bridge on the road to Iligan, the Philippine Constabulary headquarters in Marawi, and Mindanao State University with its radio station. By the use of inflammatory propaganda over the radio, they sought support from the Muslim Maranaos. “They contended that since the arrival of the Spanish, the government in the Philippines had always been against the Muslims. Therefore, they claimed it was necessary to overthrow the government so that there would be no restrictions in the practice of Islam. They called themselves the ‘Mindanao Revolutionary Council for Independence.’”⁵⁰ Militarization in Mindanao and Sulu is considered as an extension of and means of colonization.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Federico Magdalena, “Moro-American Relations in the Philippines,” *Philippine Studies* 44 (1996): 436–37.

⁴⁹ Gowing, *Mandate in Moroland*, 274; Magdalena, “Moro-American Relations in the Philippines,” 427–38.

⁵⁰ Robert McAmis, “Muslim Filipinos in the 1970’s,” *Solidarity* 8, no. 6 (1973): 12–13.

⁵¹ Madale, *Possibilities for Peace in Southern Philippines*, 21.

Muslims, due to their anti-colonial mentality, would consider all actions, including those of the government, as showing a Christian policy and approach towards them. This is again expressed in their reaction due to their frustrations regarding the Jabidah Massacre. Even after all the investigations and hearings, no one was ever charged and imprisoned for this massacre. This indicated that the government, seen as Christian, was not really serious in seeking justice for the deaths of so many young Muslims. “[I]ts damaging effect on the psyche of the Muslims was something else. As no other incident had done since independence, Jabidah made all sections of Muslims—secular and religious, modern and backward alike—concerned about their future.”⁵²

The building of civic consciousness and national identity in education is also criticized with their overemphasis on Christian history and identity. This emphasis, which downplayed regional and ethnic differences, seemed to the Muslims to be aimed at doing away with their culture and religion. Muslims initially kept away from the public schools, which hindered them from participation in national life.⁵³

Even after a century, the central Philippine government in Manila is still called a Christian government. Rigoberto Tiglao, a noted columnist, described the Philippine government as the “Christians in imperial Manila” in his article in the *Manila Times* criticizing the Aquino administration’s peace deal with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front as insane.⁵⁴ At whatever stage after colonization in Philippine history, Manila is always the seat of political, economic, and military power. Time and again, Manila is always equated with Christians; hence government policies towards Mindanao and Sulu are always interpreted as Christian policies for the Moros. When these have negative implications, then it fans Muslim-Christian hatred, while positive efforts are suspected as political ploys to advance the interest of the Christian majority or the vested interest of the powerful politicians who are generally Christians. In any case, the central government’s policy towards the Muslims in Mindanao is generally perceived as the continuation of colonial policies. Colonialism dominates the perspective of the Moros in all the government policies and approaches towards them whether they are political, cultural, or economic; and whatever efforts are undertaken.

The nationwide focus-group discussion conducted by the Bishop-Ulama Conference shows that colonization is the lingering reason for the division among Muslims and Christians and that it continues to sow conflict between and among them. Konsult Mindanaw participants observed that the conflict in Mindanao is a result of a long history of colonization resulting in the present perceived or observed biases, prejudices, and intercultural discrimination.⁵⁵ “Muslims fighting in the southern Philippines understand themselves as struggling for deliverance from a tyrannical, oppressive Christian Filipino ‘colonialism.’”⁵⁶

The impact of colonialism is not only widespread but endemic to every aspect of Muslim and Christian relations including politics, land, governance, economics, and other areas of social and cultural life. It is seen as the continuing dominance of the Christians and the persistent structural

⁵² George, *Revolt in Mindanao*, 125–26.

⁵³ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 80–81.

⁵⁴ Rigoberto D. Tiglao, “Aquino’s BBL Fiasco will Lead to War in Maguindanao,” *Manila Times*, February 4, 2016, available at <http://www.manilatimes.net/aquinos-bbl-fiasco-will-lead-to-war-in-maguindanao/243169/>.

⁵⁵ Bishops-Ulama Conference, *Konsult Mindanaw. Visions, Voices and Values*.

⁵⁶ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon*, 201.

effort of preventing the Muslims from breathing Islam as their way of life. Colonialism as a framework of understanding Philippine history highlights religious identity as the fundamental motivation in all levels of relation.

Impact of History on Dialogue

Colonization is the dominant discourse in the historical relations of Muslims and Christians. This narrative has a mediating role in interreligious dialogue. Colonization provides the historical narrative that divides and continues to strain the relations of the Muslims and the Christians. It reinforces the historical constants as the basis of separation and the belief that Muslims and Christians are disparate national identities. Moreover, it serves as the lens for reading and interpreting events, policies, and programs for the Moros and anything that pertains to the relations of the two. This perception of history is a challenge in interreligious dialogue. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims must come to terms with their historical past. As a reference, colonialism will continue to irritate existing and future efforts of dialogue.

LaRousse recommends a re-interpretation of history that is not submerged in an “ideological presentation” or even a dominant ideology that “denigrates the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and languages.”⁵⁷ Colonization is an ideology that feeds the division of Muslims and Christians as different races. It advances unwittingly the persistent view that “generalizes the Muslim as perpetrators of conflicts and equating it with whatever is violent; the concept of development where majority referring to the Christians, while minority referred to the Moros as equivalent to underdevelopment or backwardness.”⁵⁸ Reducing history into a particular period is arresting history into ideology. Ideologies betray the fluidity of history and prevent communities from developing new forms of relations. For this reason, “history creates its own self-fulfilling attitudes and perpetuates conflict.”⁵⁹ Interreligious dialogue must be an effort to re-think colonization and create opportunities to liberate history that restricts the notion of diversity to ethnicity, cultures, and languages.

Casino’s “bipolar approach to diversity” as a solution to the historical divide is to emphasize the ideological differences between Christians and Muslims. Liberation from these ideological differences is creating opportunities for Christians and Muslims to go beyond their difference through a wider national identity without undermining the integrity of their respective ethno-religious identities. If national identity remains problematic, Casino proposes to elevate the “bipolar approach to diversity to the greater reality of internationalism.”⁶⁰ Moros in Mindanao are no longer a minority when connected internationally with the Muslims of Indonesia and Malaysia, while Christians in these countries would feel the same when they felt connected with the Christians in the Philippines.

History tends to focus heavily on the past. According to LaRousse, “*Nostra Aetate* pleads that the past be forgotten while it urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding.”⁶¹ Forgetting the past is very difficult, if not nearly impossible in the case of Muslims and Christians in

⁵⁷ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 416.

⁵⁸ Madale, *Possibilities for Peace in Southern Philippines*, 21.

⁵⁹ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 416.

⁶⁰ Eric Casino, “The Anthropology of Christianity and Islam in the Philippines: A Bipolar Approach to Diversity,” in *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippines*, ed. Peter G. Gowing (Quezon City: New Day Publishers).

⁶¹ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 417.

the Philippines. It is the cycle of violence and the continuing experience of injustice that keep the past alive in the collective memory of the people. For this reason, interreligious dialogue can only approach history by creating better history. “John Paul II expressed to the Muslims of Mindanao that there is no positive reason why that past should define today’s relations; rather, we should look back with pain in the past, in order to ensure the establishment of a better future.”⁶² Interreligious dialogue, while taking into consideration the lessons of the past, must be future oriented. Practices of interreligious dialogue should provide an opportunity to redefine history and a mechanism to liberate relations from the quagmire of past hurts and division.

Interreligious dialogue is the challenge of creating common narratives, in which all religions can share their good and meaningful memories. “And the most profound bonds of relationality and understanding come when individuals have become part of each other’s stories.”⁶³ Francisco challenges the members of different religious traditions to facilitate the encounter of people from various faith persuasions through concrete programs and activities leading towards the interweaving and sharing of personal and communal stories.⁶⁴

Another approach is to go beyond colonization as the timeline of the historical relations of Muslims and Christians. In this approach, the theory of beginning of both Islam and Christianity is extended to the beginning of the inhabitants in the archipelago. In this discourse, both Muslims and Christians will have to acknowledge their common roots to the pre-Islamic era, the indigenous peoples. In this historical reference, both Muslims and Christians can identify their “common origins” as one people. This point of commonality needs to be emphasized. The positive presentation of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines before the arrival of Islam and Christianity is important to appreciating the commonalities and seeing their history as not merely beginning with the arrival of these two world religions.”⁶⁵

Casino recommends that the best way to overcome the narrow and historically conditioned understanding of the relations of Muslims and Christians is to go back to their roots. “For beyond the peculiarities of their historical rituals, both religions are in essence based on faith in God and in the commandment to surrender oneself in obedience to Allah-God and his will.”⁶⁶ But this approach to historical divide is easier said than done. Such foundational understanding of their respective faiths must have been present among Muslims and Christians since the beginning of their encounter.

Faith is essentially rooted in experience. In the case of Muslim-Christian relations in Philippine history, the Islamic and Christian faiths were, and continue to be, wrapped within their respective colonial experiences. Interreligious dialogue should handle history in such a way that the foundational beliefs common to both Christians and Muslims can provide common experiences of friendship, cooperation, and even the beauty of unity in diversity. The knowledge of “common origin” may not provide that faith-experience that will reshape their perception of history. In the same manner, the knowledge that both religions are religions for peace may not have the force of the “historical faith experience” to motivate dialogue partners to rethink their perceptions and relations.

⁶² John Paul II, “To Representatives of Muslims of the Philippines,” Davao, February 20, 1981.

⁶³ Francisco, “The Mediating Role of Narrative in Interreligious Dialogue,” 166.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁵ LaRousse, *Walking Together Seeking Peace*, 418.

⁶⁶ Casino, “The Anthropology of Christianity and Islam in the Philippines,” 44.

It is also in the same vein that the concept of common humanity, that after all both Muslims and Christians are human beings, may not really be appealing in the formation of harmony. Common humanity is inoperative as it is an abstract concept. History tells us that many of the concepts such as Islamization, Christianization, Moro Wars, and Sultanate are operative concepts because they carry with them the weight of historical experiences. An introduction of concepts such as the common humanity, common origin, and even common values among religions that is bereft of any historical events to accompany it as part of the collective consciousness and culture will most likely fail to replace what is already a divisive and even suspicious mutual mistrust in the historical consciousness.

Finally, there is a need for historical healing. Forgetting the past may not be possible, but healing historical wounds is possible. Forgiveness is a religious value common to both Muslims and Christians; hence both religions can actually harness their own respective religious values to initiate forgiveness and historical healing. This is one of the recommendations reached by the Konsult Mindanao in its People's Platform for Peace in Mindanao, which undertook nationwide focus-group discussions among the tri-people in various sectors of society. It challenges religious leaders and communities to take the lead in promoting social cohesion and healing of memories by tapping into its spiritual energies from various religious traditions.⁶⁷ Through the healing of memories, interreligious dialogue may purge history from the ideology of colonization. But to do so, a new historical matrix must be created that will serve as a new fulcrum for all encounters today and in the future between Muslims, Christians, and indigenous peoples.

⁶⁷ Bishops-Ulama Conference, *Konsult Mindanaw. Visions, Voices and Values*, 18.

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Pablito A. Baybado, Jr. is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Religion, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines. He is also the Associate Secretary General of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace Asia, Deputy Secretary General of Religions for Peace Philippines, and the Coordinator of the Uni-Harmony Partners Manila.

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