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BETWEEN SHARIA AND CITIZENSHIP:
Political Thought of Muslim Minorities in the Contemporary Asia-Pacific

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the transformation of political thought among Muslim minority communities in the Asia-Pacific region since the early 2000s, particularly in relation to the interplay between religion (Sharia) and the state. Amid global currents of Islamophobia, exclusive nationalism, and accelerating globalization, Muslim minorities in countries such as India, the Philippines, Southern Thailand, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand have demonstrated a shift in orientation—from pursuing Islamic statehood to embracing inclusive citizenship strategies. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach with political discourse analysis and cross-national comparative methods, this study finds that Sharia is increasingly reinterpreted as a set of public ethical norms. Simultaneously, Muslim political engagement is directed more toward advocating civil rights, democratic participation, and collective identity recognition within secular state frameworks. The article argues that Muslim minorities are not merely objects of state policies but transformative agents who articulate an Islamic ethics of citizenship within pluralistic contexts. These findings enrich the field of Islamic political studies by offering perspectives from the margins that are contextually grounded, ethically nuanced, and relevant to the future of multicultural societies.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on the relationship between Islam and the state remains a dynamic intellectual debate within the field of Islamic political studies, both in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and in nations where Muslims constitute a minority population in the Asia-Pacific region (Kandiyoti, 2023; Nurdin, 2016). In Indonesia, the debate among integralist, symbiotic, and secularist paradigms has become the dominant framework for understanding how Islam plays a role in the postcolonial nation-state. However, beyond the majority context, the issue becomes more complex when Muslim communities live as minorities within secular or pluralistic state systems, where they face not only political limitations but also challenges related to identity, representation, and civil rights (Susanto et al., 2023; Zuhri, 2021).

Since the early 21st century, the global political landscape has undergone significant shifts, especially in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks. The intensification of Islamophobia, alongside the rise of ethnic nationalism and populism in various countries, has reshaped the socio-political realities for Muslims across the Asia-Pacific. In India, for instance, Muslims face significant structural and symbolic pressures (Zuhri, 2021). The implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which discriminates against Muslims, and the decline in

Muslim political representation under the Hindu nationalist regime of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), have generated anxiety within the community—prompting a shift in focus towards civil rights advocacy and legal protection rather than formalistic struggles for sharia implementation (Ranjan & Mittal, 2023; Roy, 2024).

In contrast, in Southern Thailand and Mindanao (Philippines), Muslim communities' approaches to the state have been more characterized by struggles for autonomy and the recognition of local identities. Groups such as *Maradeka* in the Philippines advocate for models of self-determination that emphasize social and cultural justice over ideological domination (Nasir, 2019). In Singapore, Muslims live within a secular state framework that adheres to the principle of "principled distance"—a neutral state stance towards religion that still permits limited religious expression in the public sphere. Here, Muslim community strategies have leaned more toward civic ethics and social integration than toward articulating a formal sharia agenda (Sudrajat, 2019).

In Australia and New Zealand, while Muslims continue to face challenges of discrimination and stigma in the post-9/11 era, they have also shown increasing participation in politics and civil society. Emerging Muslim elites are becoming key actors in discourses on multicultural policy, education, and human rights, signaling a shift from identity-based politics to active civic engagement (Labibatussolihah et al., 2020).

These phenomena demonstrate that the political thought of Muslim minorities in the Asia-Pacific has undergone a significant transformation since the early 21st century. There is a discernible trend away from the pursuit of an Islamic state toward strategies that prioritize civic participation, collective rights advocacy, and the development of a public ethic grounded in Islamic values within secular state frameworks. Nevertheless, scholarly engagement with the political ideas of Muslim minorities remains limited, particularly in the form of comparative studies that examine how concepts such as sharia and citizenship are negotiated across diverse national contexts (Nilhakim, 2021).

Moreover, in-depth academic inquiries into the thoughts of Muslim minority intellectuals regarding the relationship between sharia and citizenship in the Asia-Pacific remain scarce. Existing literature tends to focus predominantly on issues such as conflict, radicalization, or Muslim marginalization, rather than exploring the evolving ideas and political discourses among minority Muslim intellectual and activist elites. This marks a critical research gap that this study aims to address: the lack of systematic exploration into how Muslim minority thinkers after the year 2000 have formulated the role of Islam in relation to the state—between Islamic identity and the construction of modern citizenship.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) Identify and analyze the political thought of Muslim minorities in the Asia-Pacific regarding the relationship between Islam and the state in the post-2000 period; (2) Investigate how the concept of sharia has been transformed within secular and pluralistic nation-state contexts; and (3) Offer a typological mapping of the strategies and discourses of Muslim minority citizenship amidst the challenges of globalization, secularism, and nationalism. Through historical and political discourse approaches, this paper seeks to contribute to the study of Islam-state relations from a rarely discussed perspective—that of the marginalized (minority) communities whose experiences may offer valuable insights for shaping models of political pluralism in the future.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To comprehend the dynamics of minority Muslim political thought in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the post-2000 context, a theoretical framework is required that can account for the complex interplay between religious identity (sharia), the structure of the nation-state, and the concept of citizenship. This study employs three primary theoretical lenses: (1) Sharia as an Ethical

Norm in the Public Sphere, (2) Inclusive Citizenship, and (3) Minority Politics in the Nation-State.

First, *Sharia as an Ethical Norm Rather Than a Political System*. In minority contexts, sharia is often not understood as a formal legal system to be enforced by the state, but rather as a normative ethical framework that serves as a moral compass for both individuals and communities. This idea resonates with the thought of Fazlur Rahman (1982), Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (1990), and Tariq Ramadan (2015), who reject the formalization of sharia within secular states while encouraging the internalization of Islamic values in the public sphere through ethical, dialogical, and participatory discourse. In this paradigm, sharia is not a tool of political dominance, but an *ethic of engagement*—a means through which values such as justice, public welfare (*maslahah*), and equality contribute to the construction of a pluralistic society. This enables minority Muslims to become moral agents without advocating for the hegemony of Islamic legal systems (Madjid et al., 2021).

Second, *Inclusive Citizenship and Political Multiculturalism*. The concept of inclusive citizenship, developed by scholars such as Will Kymlicka (Ejobowah & Kymlicka, 1997), Bhikhu Parekh (Spinner-Halev & Parekh, 2002), and Tariq Modood (2021), is essential for understanding how minority Muslims articulate their identity within non-religious nation-states. Citizenship, in this framework, is not merely a legal status but encompasses access to political representation, protection of cultural identity, and equal participation in the public sphere. This approach challenges the homogenizing model of citizenship that assumes state neutrality, instead advocating for the recognition of collective identities within public policy—without leading to segregation or sectarianism. Accordingly, minority Muslims negotiate their role as full citizens while maintaining the expression of Islam as a legitimate part of national pluralism.

Third, *Minority Politics in the Nation-State*. Drawing on the works of Charles Taylor (1994), James Tully (2014), and Rainer Bauböck (2022), the politics of minorities within modern nation-states is often characterized by a tension between integration and autonomy. Minorities, including Muslims, are not merely demanding to be "treated the same," but also to be "recognized as different." In the Asia-Pacific context, such demands take various forms: decentralization and autonomy as in Mindanao; religiously informed policy accommodations as in Singapore; and active engagement in civil rights discourse as in Australia and India. By positioning minorities as active subjects in the construction of the state, this theoretical approach reveals that minority Muslim political thought is not merely reactive, but also transformative in relation to state discourses.

Together, these three theoretical perspectives form the analytical toolkit for understanding how post-2000 minority Muslim political thought in the Asia-Pacific has shifted from a paradigm of domination (Islamic state) toward a paradigm of participation, public ethics, and negotiated citizenship.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach, focusing on the discourse and political thought of minority Muslim communities in the Asia-Pacific region (Herdiansyah, 2018). This approach is selected not to test hypotheses or quantify statistical data, but rather to understand in depth the construction of ideas and intellectual responses of Muslim minorities regarding the relationship between *sharia* and the state in various national contexts (Bungin, 2012).

The methodology is grounded in two main frameworks. First, a political discourse analysis, which allows for the exploration of how concepts such as *sharia*, citizenship, pluralism, and identity are constructed within the narratives of minority Muslim thinkers as well as within state policies. Second, a cross-national comparative study, aimed at examining and contrasting the models of political thought and strategies employed by minority Muslim communities across several countries, in order to identify both common patterns and context-specific features.

The data used in this research are drawn from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reports from international think tanks, public statements by Muslim leaders in the media, state policy documents, and official publications of Islamic organizations in the relevant countries. The primary focus is on the post-2000 period, a time marked by major global transformations following 9/11, the rise of Islamophobia, and the resurgence of nationalist populism in many Asia-Pacific countries.

The units of analysis in this study are the political thoughts and citizenship strategies of Muslim minority actors as represented by individuals, organizations, or state policies that directly engage with Muslim communities. The study focuses on six national contexts: India, where the dynamics between Islamic identity politics and Hindu nationalist policies are particularly intense; Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines, where issues of autonomy and collective rights dominate the Muslim minority agenda; Singapore, a secular state that implements a tightly regulated model of religious neutrality; Australia and New Zealand, which offer instructive cases of how Islam is articulated as a public ethic within liberal democracies; and Indonesia, used as a point of contrast as a Muslim-majority nation, to reveal both resonances and divergences in minority Muslim political thought.

The analysis proceeds through tracing dominant narratives within each context, employing thematic coding techniques to identify recurring issues such as "sharia as ethical value," "political participation," and "minority citizenship." The study also considers the dimension of intertextuality, i.e., the interconnections between minority Muslim discourses in one country and broader global or regional narratives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sharia as Public Ethical Value: From Legal System to Social Morality

One of the main findings of this study is the shifting orientation of Islamic thought among Muslim minorities—from *sharia* as a legal system to *sharia* as a source of public ethics. In countries where Muslims are a minority, such as Australia, Singapore, and India, *sharia* is no longer viewed as a set of positive laws to be enforced by the state. Rather, it is seen as a reservoir of moral values that guide Muslim engagement in public life.

In Australia, for instance, figures like Waleed Aly—a scholar, journalist, and Muslim activist—articulate Islam as a source of justice, equality, and public virtue (D'Cruz, 2017). Through his book *People Like Us* and public programs on television, he emphasizes the importance of Muslim participation in liberal democracy without demanding the formal implementation of Islamic law. His view resonates with thinkers like Fazlur Rahman and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, who argue that *sharia* is best practiced as a cultural and moral ethic within civil society, not as state law.

In Singapore, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) has officially promoted the approach of "Islam in a plural society." Within a state that strictly regulates religion under a framework of secular neutrality, MUIS reframes *sharia* as a guide for personal and social ethics rather than as a universal legal code. This is a strategic adaptation of the Muslim community to the state's principle of "principled distance" from all religions (Hassan, 2020).

This discourse reveals a distinctive theological flexibility among minority Muslim communities, who, despite institutional limitations, maintain a vibrant Islamic identity (Setiawan & Stevanus, 2023). Their religious presence does not rely on formal recognition by the state or institutional dominance. Instead, they interpret and practice Islam contextually and adaptively. In this framework, *sharia* is not imposed as a legal system, but serves as a source of ethical inspiration that animates everyday life—particularly in domains such as democratic participation, education, environmental advocacy, and social justice.

For example, among Muslim minority communities in Northern Philippines such as Metro Manila, a study by Julkipli Wadi (2017) shows that, despite lacking an Islamic legal system like that in Mindanao, Muslims still practice *sharia* values through clean living, social solidarity, and children's education—without calling for formal *sharia* law. They emphasize maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law) as ethical principles that contribute to a pluralistic society (Taufiq, 2019).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Indonesia, particularly in regions where Muslims are a minority, such as Bali and Papua. In Bali, for instance, local Muslims adapt their religious practices to local wisdom and cultural rhythms without compromising their Islamic faith. A study by Muhamad Ali (UCR, 2016) reveals that formal *sharia* is not prioritized; rather, values such as honesty, mutual assistance, and peace are emphasized as manifestations of *sharia* in a multicultural society.

Thus, *sharia* becomes a norm of public ethics—not a claim to absolute truth or legal hegemony, but a moral contribution to shared civic spaces. This represents a progressive interpretation of Islam that is neither defensive nor exclusivist, but open to universal principles such as justice, freedom, and sustainability. In this discourse, *sharia* is not a political instrument of domination, but a spiritual foundation that shapes ethical citizenship.

Furthermore, this approach illustrates how Muslim minorities can be active agents in realizing Islam as a mercy to all creation (raḥmatan lil-'ālamīn)—not by dominating the system, but by illuminating it through Islamic ethics. This vision is aligned with Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im's concept of internal secularism in Islam, which holds that Islamic law can serve as a moral inspiration for individuals and communities without necessarily being codified into state law.

Inclusive Citizenship and Identity Negotiation Strategies

Another significant finding of this study is the growing emphasis within Muslim minority communities on pursuing *inclusive citizenship*—a form of civic engagement within the state that does not entail the loss of religious identity. This dynamic is especially evident in the contexts of India and Mindanao (Philippines).

In India, Muslim communities have faced increasing structural pressures since the rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP regime. The implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) represents a systematic form of exclusion targeting Muslim citizens. Political figures such as Asaduddin Owaisi, leader of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), have responded through parliamentary strategies that frame Islamic political struggle not in religious terms but on constitutionalism and equality. Owaisi rejects the notion of an Islamic state, instead advocating for the political recognition of Muslims within the framework of secular democracy.

A similar strategy can be observed among Muslims in Southern Philippines through the Bangsamoro Organic Law peace agreement. Movements such as *Maradeka* emphasize regional autonomy while remaining within the republican state structure. Islam, in this context, is not promoted as a state ideology but as a cultural identity that deserves recognition within a decentralized political system. This struggle exemplifies what Will Kymlicka refers to as *politics of collective citizenship*—the recognition of community rights within the framework of the nation-state.

Both cases reveal a significant shift in how Muslim minority communities position themselves—not merely as "oppressed ummah" subjected to state policy or as advocates for an Islamic state as the sole political solution. Instead, they increasingly present themselves as *active citizens*, strategically navigating legal, political, and public spheres to preserve collective identity, promote Islamic values, and claim civil rights on equal footing within the nation-state paradigm.

This transformation marks a paradigmatic shift from identity politics centered on demands

for domination, toward a model of inclusive civic participation. It underscores the relevance of *inclusive citizenship theory*—as developed by Niraja Gopal Jayal (2005) and expanded by Engin F. Isin (2009)—which conceptualizes citizenship not merely as a legal-formal status but as an active practice of claiming rights and fostering cross-identity solidarities.

A concrete example of this inclusive turn can be found among the Patani Muslim communities in Southern Thailand. Despite a backdrop of separatist conflict and state militarism, a growing number of local Muslims have moved away from demands for formal sharia implementation or territorial separation, opting instead for participatory strategies via educational institutions, local elections, and interreligious dialogue. Duncan McCargo's (2008) research highlights the emergence of "network monarchy" and young Muslim activists who prefer nonviolent means to advocate for their cultural and religious rights within the Thai state framework.

In Indonesia, similar approaches are evident among Muslim minorities in provinces such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) and Papua. These communities have built constructive relationships with local governments and interfaith leaders to secure access to Islamic education, mosque construction, and religious celebrations—without provoking conflict with majority communities. Research by Rumadi Ahmad (2021) demonstrates that Muslim identity in these regions is maintained through deliberative approaches—such as interfaith forums and participation in village-level development planning (Musrenbang)—rather than through confrontation or symbolic demands.

In short, Muslim minorities are not rejecting the nation-state; instead, they are redefining their role within it. They are no longer merely a sectarian and defensive *ummah*, but rather a form of *religious citizenship* rooted in democratic values, pluralism, and social justice. This represents a more mature form of Islamic politics: not by seeking state power, but by embedding themselves in society as equal and dignified citizens.

Minorities as Transformative Political Subjects

Interestingly, in all the national contexts studied, Muslim minorities do not merely appear as objects of state policy or victims of discrimination. Rather, they emerge as transformative political subjects. This reflects the success of minority Muslim communities in articulating their Islamic identity within the frameworks of civic discourse, civil ethics, and political pluralism.

In Singapore, young Muslims actively participate in interfaith initiatives, environmental movements, and digital literacy campaigns inspired by Islamic values. In Australia, many Muslim organizations are involved in agendas related to multiculturalism and human rights, not solely for the benefit of Muslims, but for all minority groups. Meanwhile, in India—despite facing marginalization—Muslim movements have formed coalitions with Dalit communities and progressive groups to advocate for broader social justice.

This reality deconstructs long-standing assumptions that tend to view Muslim minorities as merely reactive and defensive toward state pressure or majority domination. Such assumptions stem from identity politics paradigms that overly emphasize conflict and resistance, thereby overlooking the internal dynamics and productive strategies developed by Muslim minority communities across diverse socio-political settings.

On the contrary, in contemporary practice, many Muslim minority communities are creatively and strategically utilizing limited civic spaces to present Islam not as an exclusive and hegemonic force, but as a constructive and progressive civic power. They articulate Islamic values not to separate themselves from public life, but to contribute positively to shared social order—through education, peacebuilding, environmental advocacy, and social justice movements.

This idea aligns with Tariq Ramadan's thought in *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (2009), where he proposes that Islamic ethics should manifest as a moral commitment to the common good, rather than as a legalistic instrument or identity symbol. Ramadan emphasizes the

importance of transformative ethics—how Islamic values are translated into contexts of pluralism and active citizenship.

Similarly, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im in *Islam and the Secular State* (2015) asserts that sharia should function as a source of moral inspiration, voluntarily adopted by individuals and communities, not imposed by the state. From his perspective, it is precisely in their minority position—where there is no pressure to establish Islam as state law—that Muslims have greater opportunities to express the ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions of Islam authentically, without the burden of politicization (Mahdavi, 2013).

A concrete example of this notion can be seen in the African-American Muslim community in the United States, such as the Warith Deen Mohammed community (Berg, 2005; Finley, 2022), which has utilized Islamic narratives to fight for racial justice, education, and economic equality—instead of being trapped in confrontational or exclusivist religious discourses. They are active in civil society organizations, engaged in social advocacy, and build mosques as multicultural dialogue spaces rather than secluded places of worship.

Thus, Muslim minority communities offer a model of Islam as civic praxis—not merely a symbol or dogma. They demonstrate that Islam can be present in the public sphere actively and solution-oriented, while upholding values of pluralism, deliberation, and participation. This represents a new form of religiosity rooted in tradition yet open to contemporary challenges and dynamics.

Additionally, amid such transformations in political thought and citizenship, Muslim minority communities in the Asia-Pacific region also face serious challenges in the form of structural and cultural Islamophobia. This phenomenon intensified especially after 9/11 and has been further accelerated by various global and local acts of terrorism, often directly associated with Muslims (Moordiningsih, 2015).

In India, Islamophobic narratives are institutionalized through Hindu nationalist political rhetoric. The media, state apparatus, and policies such as hijab bans in certain states, along with the stigmatization of Muslims as "anti-national," create a persistent climate of fear. These circumstances have compelled Muslim communities to adopt cultural resistance strategies—through art, education, and social media—to maintain their existence as a legitimate part of the Indian republic (Almalik, 2022).

In Australia, despite the country's official commitment to multiculturalism, Muslims remain prime targets in national security policies and right-wing political rhetoric. The Christchurch incident in New Zealand in 2019 marked a critical turning point, demonstrating that Islamophobia is not just discourse, but can manifest as real violence against Muslim communities. Responses from Muslim leaders and institutions—such as interfaith solidarity statements and peaceful actions—show that Muslim minority strategies are not merely defensive, but morally transformative (Labibatussolihah et al., 2020).

The challenge of Islamophobia further accentuates the position of Muslim minorities as communities struggling within ambiguous and paradoxical situations. On the one hand, they are constantly expected to prove their loyalty as citizens—through legal compliance, social contribution, and overt declarations of patriotism. On the other hand, they continue to be viewed with suspicion, subordinated, and culturally alienated—via media stereotypes, discriminatory regulations, and marginalizing social treatment (Amin, 2010; Islamy & Andriyani, 2021).

This situation gives rise to what Lila Abu-Lughod (2015) refers to as "the politics of suspicion"—where Islamic identity is never perceived as neutral, but always seen through the lens of threat, especially in the aftermath of global events such as 9/11, the London bombings, or the Paris attacks. It is in this context that the struggle of Muslim minorities to gain recognition as full and dignified

citizens becomes a dual battle: first, to resist exclusion and discrimination by the state; and second, to defend their cultural and religious identity from stigmatization and social delegitimization (Abu-Lughod, 1993).

This phenomenon is clearly reflected, for example, in France's *laïcité* (secularism) policy, which bans religious symbols such as the hijab in public spaces. Instead of fostering neutrality, such policies reinforce a sense of alienation among Muslims—especially Muslim women—who are marginalized not only socially but also legally. Joan Wallach Scott's research in *The Politics of the Veil* (2009) demonstrates that the hijab ban constitutes a form of symbolic and political exclusion of Islamic identity, implicitly equating Islam with backwardness and non-compliance with European values.

In the United States, although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, Muslims continue to face racial profiling, mosque surveillance by security agencies, and media narratives associating Islam with violence (Amin, 2010; Rafidah, 2021). In this context, as Sahar Aziz notes in *The Racial Muslim: When Racism Quashes Religious Freedom* (2021), Muslims in America undergo a process of "racialization," wherein Islam is treated as a foreign race that must be subdued and controlled.

The struggle of Muslim minorities amidst Islamophobia is not just about demanding basic civil rights such as religious freedom or anti-discrimination measures. It is also about restoring their cultural and spiritual dignity, which is continually undermined by negative labels. In this regard, citizenship is not merely a legal status, but becomes an ethical and symbolic arena—a battleground to redefine who is rightfully considered a "legitimate" citizen in a democratic state (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Turner, 2012; Turner et al., 2011).

Accordingly, for Muslim minorities, citizenship is not something automatically granted by the state, but rather something that must be constantly negotiated and actively fought for. This reflects the concept of "citizenship from below" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), wherein marginalized citizens use various means to challenge state domination and create new representational spaces for their identities (Closs Stephens, 2010; Morgan et al., 2020).

Movement Reorientation: From the Islamic State Project to Civic Politics

One of the most significant findings of this research is the discovery of a reorientation pattern in the thought and political strategies of Muslim minorities—from advocating for an Islamic state project toward engaging in deliberative civic politics. This shift is evident both in praxis and in conceptual framing. Historically, the discourse of an Islamic state served as the primary framework for Muslim political struggle—manifested either in normative aspirations or in concrete political movements. However, in the context of Muslim minorities in the Asia-Pacific region, this idea has been repositioned. Muslim minorities have come to realize that the project of establishing an Islamic state is unrealistic, contextually inappropriate, and even counterproductive in nations that uphold secularism or ethnic nationalism.

Instead, numerous Muslim leaders and organizations have adopted an approach that sees Islam as an ethical and social force, driving active participation in democratic processes, public policy, and civic life. In the Philippines, the Bangsamoro peace agreement and the establishment of an autonomous government demonstrate that political compromise proves more effective than ideological confrontation. In India and Singapore, Muslims have engaged with the political system by advocating for justice, equality, and recognition of their identities—without necessarily demanding the formalization of Islamic law.

The rise of Islamophobia has further emphasized the ambivalent and paradoxical position of Muslim minority communities. On one hand, they are continually expected to prove their loyalty as citizens—through legal compliance, social contributions, and explicit affirmations of national allegiance. Yet on the other hand, they remain subjected to suspicion, subordination, and cultural

alienation—through media stereotyping, discriminatory regulations, and marginalizing social practices (Rubin, 2019).

This situation gives rise to what Lila Abu-Lughod calls *"the politics of suspicion"*—where Muslim identity is never fully neutral but is constantly viewed through a lens of threat, particularly in the aftermath of global events such as 9/11, the London bombings, or the Paris terror attacks (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Bruck & Abu-Lughod, 1994). Within this context, the Muslim minority struggle for full and dignified citizenship becomes a dual endeavor: first, resisting exclusion and discrimination by the state; and second, defending their cultural and religious identity from social stigmatization and delegitimization.

This phenomenon is clearly illustrated, for instance, in France's policy of *laïcité* (secularism), which prohibits religious symbols such as the hijab in public spaces (Cohen-Almagor, 2022; Doomen, 2023). Rather than promoting neutrality, this policy deepens the sense of alienation among Muslims, particularly Muslim women, who are marginalized not only socially but also legally. Joan Wallach Scott's research in *The Politics of the Veil* (2009) argues that the hijab ban represents a form of symbolic and political exclusion of Islamic identity—implicitly equating Islam with backwardness and nonconformity to European values.

In the United States, despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, Muslims continue to face racial profiling, mosque surveillance by security agencies, and media narratives that associate Islam with violence. In this context, as noted by Sahar Aziz in *The Racial Muslim: When Racism Quashes Religious Freedom* (2021), Muslims in America experience a process of "racialization," in which Islam is treated as a foreign race that must be subdued and controlled (Aziz, 2021a).

The struggle of Muslim minorities amid Islamophobia is not merely about claiming basic civil rights such as religious freedom or anti-discrimination. It is also about restoring their cultural and spiritual dignity, which has been persistently undermined by negative labeling. In this context, citizenship is not merely a legal status, but also an ethical and symbolic arena—a field of struggle to redefine who is deemed a "legitimate" citizen in a democratic nation.

Thus, for Muslim minorities, citizenship is not something passively granted by the state, but rather something that must be continually negotiated and actively fought for. This reflects a form of *"citizenship from below"* (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), wherein marginalized citizens employ various strategies to challenge state dominance and create new spaces of representation for their identities.

CONCLUTION

This study demonstrates that, since the 2000s, the political thinking of Muslim minorities in the Asia-Pacific region has undergone a significant paradigmatic transformation. Amid a global context marked by rising Islamophobia, nationalist populism, and the consolidation of secular nation-states, Muslim minority communities no longer frame Islam as a project of state domination or the formalization of sharia. Instead, Islam is increasingly embraced as a source of ethical and moral values to advocate for just and equitable citizenship.

In various national contexts studied—India, the Philippines, Southern Thailand, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand—Muslim minorities exhibit a growing tendency to move away from the idea of an Islamic state as a political goal. Rather, they emphasize the importance of social integration, the recognition of collective identity, and active participation in existing political systems. Sharia is interpreted more as an ethical framework that inspires social action and the cultivation of public ethics, rather than a legal system to be institutionalized by the state.

Strategies such as constitutional advocacy, multicultural negotiation, engagement in civil society, and the formation of cross-identity coalitions represent concrete efforts by Muslim minority

communities to build a contextual and constructive model of Islamic citizenship. In doing so, they appear not merely as victims of exclusion, but as transformative agents within democratic and pluralistic spaces.

Theoretically, this research contributes to discourses on the relationship between Islam and the state by introducing a perspective from the margins—that of Muslim minorities—whose voices have often been marginalized in Islamic political studies. These findings affirm that Muslims are not only able to survive in minority contexts but can also creatively and progressively reinterpret the role of Islam within modern nation-state constructions.

Practically, the study offers important implications for public policy and political education: countries in the Asia-Pacific region need to develop more inclusive approaches to citizenship, recognizing identity pluralism and ensuring equal participation for all groups, including Muslims. For Muslim communities themselves, it is crucial to continue developing an Islamic discourse rooted in social justice, civic responsibility, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence within diversity.

Thus, the relationship between sharia and the state among Muslim minorities should not be understood as antagonistic or dualistic, but rather as a space of ongoing dialectics—between religious identity and political reality, between faith and citizenship, between particularism and universalism. It is within this dialectical space that the relevance and urgency of minority Islamic political thought lies in imagining a more ethical and humane future for plural societies.

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