



## The Moro Between Words and Worlds: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

*This study examined the representations of Moro in newspaper articles from MindaNews. This was done by identifying the collocates using Sketch Engine, a corpus manager and text analysis program. The top five collocates (front, people, leaders, group, and woman) were considered for the analysis. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participated in by the Muslim student leaders from three universities in the region was also done to know their perceptions about the collocates. Findings revealed that representations of Moro both in news articles and students' perceptions are seen as divided groups, sometimes violators and marginalized, yet they are also active participants and collaborators in achieving peace and security in the country. The term is also associated with people who have a strong desire for self-determination and who are known for preserving their cultural values and traditions.*

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## Introduction

The influence of the media on how people view their environment is a known fact (Mehraj, Bhat & Mehraj, 2014). Individual's perceptions of culture, politics, and identities are shaped by the information, opinions, and trends as a result of exposure to widely accessible media platforms (Rhinehart, 2022). However, media is not merely a product that is consumed but also a reflection of people's attitudes, prejudices, and thoughts.

In the past decades, studying the relationships between media representations of minorities and issues concerning nationality, race, multiculturalism, or identity politics has caught the interest of many scholars as shown by the extensive body of research available. Among the most studied minorities in the world are Muslims (Sumra, 2020). Faimau (2016) validated this stating that in the Western societies, Muslims have been labeled as a "minority group" (p.2). The term 'minority' has been 'dangerously' and constantly referred to Muslims (Wei, 2015).

An extensive body of research has examined how Muslims and Islams are portrayed in Western media contexts (Al-Zahrani, 1988; Mostafa, 2007; Brinson, 2010; Dar, 2010; Amari, 2012; el-Aswad, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Shawar, 2014; Vucetic, 2016; Aboualhuda, 2018; Allen, 2019; Rhinehart, 2022). Some of these portrayals are Muslim fundamentalists, Wahhabi zealots, Shia extremists, Sunni bombers, Islamic Jihad, Arab killers (Aboualhuda, 2018), "alien other" (Saeed, 2007, as cited in Shawar, 2014), "oppressive," "backward," and "dangerous" (Allen, 2019). As can be observed, the previous studies mentioned heavily anchored their analysis on four major post-colonial theories such as Orientalism, clash of civilizations, cultural racism, and Islamophobia.

In the Philippines, especially in the areas of Mindanao, Muslims are historically known as the *Moros*. While various studies about Muslims



are abundant, specific study of the representations of *Moro* is scarce. If ever the term *Moro* is mentioned, it is discussed alongside with the term Muslim.

Using the computer-assisted device, this study attempted to provide an understanding of the different representations of *Moro* in *MindaNews*, an online newspaper based in Mindanao. Owned by Mindanao News and Information Cooperative Center (MNICC), *MindaNews* is one of the first news outlets in the Philippines to make their presence felt online. They started by sending their stories and photographs to clients through email on May 25, 2001, a year before they established their own website, [www.mindanews.com](http://www.mindanews.com), as a weekly in early May 2002 and has dispatched online news daily since then (Rebollido, 2023).

### **The Moros in the Philippines**

The Moros have been the subject of extensive scholarly and public discourse, making them one of the most studied ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines (The Bangsamoro Struggle, n.d). The term Moro was originally used by Spanish Colonizers as a delegatory term for Muslim in the islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan who resisted Christianization. The Spaniards viewed Moros as "a degraded race of savages," "cruel," "treacherous," and "pirates" (Tan, 2010, as cited in Absari & Morados, 2021, p. 9-10).

However, in the American regime, Moros were viewed differently. The Moros were the subjects of their fascination due to their "fighting spirit, individual acts of bravery, and vibrant battle garb" as seen in St. Louis World's Fair of 1904 (Mckenna, 2022, p. 6). But, when Moros opposed the US plan of conquering their land, they were called "hostiles and renegades" and acted violently against the Moro people which caused *the Moro Wars* (p. 6). The superior of the Jesuit Order in the country, Fr. Pi, in his account which appeared in Gen. George W. Davis's 1903 annual report on the Philippines, described the Moros negatively as



“... arrogant, ungrateful, and treacherous despite being ‘poor, miserable, and needy” (p. 118).

This colonial stigma caused Muslims to “resent” the term *Moro*, and recognized the term *Muslim* as expressed by the delegates at the 1934 Constitutional Convention (Montiel, Rodil, & Guzman, 2012, p. 5). Despite this rejection of the colonial label, the term Moro was later reclaimed by Muslim Filipino groups as a symbol of unity and resistance aiming for self-determination.

However, due to diverse ideologies and alliances, factionalism among the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), other splinter factions such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Abu Sayyaf, and Maute-ISIS, the desire for Moro autonomy proved to be elusive (Caballero & Tawagon, 2022; Galang, 1969; George, 1980, as cited in Caballero & Tawagon, 2022). Though many theories attempted to explain factionalism among the Moro groups, Majul (1985) explained that these divisions arise not only from ideological differences but from “personalized and personality-based loyalty” among leaders and ethnic groups—The members of the different factions are just being loyal to their own kind. Nur Misuari is supported by the Tausug and Sama people of Sulu; the Maguindawons are loyal and supporters of Ustadz Hashim Salamat who is also a Maguindanawon. Those who followed Dimasangcay Pundato are also Maranaws like him. This only shows that “personalized-based loyalty” could impose a great challenge to overcome should a Bangsamoro Nation be realized (Caballero & Tawagon, 2022, p. 53).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to describe the representations of *Moro* in a Mindanaon digital newspaper using the Corpus-Assisted discourse analysis approach. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most common collocates of *Moro* in *MindaNews* corpus?
2. Based on these collocates, what representations of Moro are revealed in *MindaNews*?



3. How do Muslim student leaders perceive these most common collocates?

## Method

### Research Design

This research was done with the aid of corpus-based approach in exploring the representations of *Moro* in *MindaNews* digital newspaper. Using the said approach to investigate this topic is beneficial for several reasons: 1) quantitative detection of authentic linguistic occurrences documented in corpora, 2) coding of these occurrences (allowing for more efficient and more accurate study), and 3) ability to observe repetitive patterns associated with these occurrences (Rhineheart, 2022). Moreover, the study involved two phases: first, the researcher built the corpus of purposively selected articles posted on *MindaNews* using Sketch Engine; and second, the researcher analyzed the representations of the term *Moro* using Sketch Engine.

With the facilitation of the moderators, Muslim student leaders of the three higher education institutions were invited for a focus group discussion. They were presented with a list of collocates extracted from the corpus. The FGD aimed to gather their thoughts and feelings on the collocates of the term being investigated. It also aimed to provide in-depth data of their representations of *Moro*. Their answers were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. After identifying the different themes, validation of the result was done by the three inter-raters who were candidates for Ph.D. in Language Studies. From the analysis, their representations of *Moro* were culled and discussed using Hall's Theory of Representation.

### Data Corpus

For the corpus, the researcher purposively selected the articles featured in the *Top Stories*, *Mindaviews*, *Peace Process*, and *Governance* of the *MindaNews* digital newspaper from 2001 up to 2021. The articles were retrieved from <https://www.mindanews.com>. The articles were extracted and converted to suit the features of the Sketch Engine software. From the corpus, frequent collocates of the term *Moro* were generated.



## Participants and Sampling Design

For the Focus Group Discussion, purposive sampling was employed in the selection of the participants. The following criteria were observed: 1) they must identify themselves as Muslims and followers of Islam; 2) they are elected student leaders by members of Muslim Student Association of any of the three identified universities in Zamboanga City. Two key informants were also interviewed to add insights regarding the collocates surrounding collocates. The chosen informants are professors in one university teaching Islamic Studies for at least ten years.

## Instruments

This study used Sketch Engine both for the creation of the corpus and for the determination of the frequencies of the target term. Developed by Lexical Computing CZ s.r.o. in 2003, Sketch Engine is a corpus manager and text analysis program. Its goal is to make it possible for lexicographers, corpus linguistics researchers, translators, language learners or anyone interested in the behavior of language to search through massive text collections using sophisticated, linguistically motivated queries. At the moment, it supports and delivers corpora in more than 90 languages (Sketch Engine, n.d.).

## Data Gathering Procedure

There are two parts of the data gathering. The first one was the creation of the corpus. This was followed by the focus group discussion involving the selected participants from the three higher education institutions in Zamboanga City.

### Part I. Creation of the Corpus

In creating the corpus, the following steps were followed:

**Step 1. Purchasing the software.** The researcher purchased the Sketch Engine software as the free version does not include all necessary features for the creation of the corpus.



**Step 2. Identifying the articles for inclusion in the corpus.** The researcher visited the *MindaNews* website and downloaded all articles under the section *Top Stories, Mindaviews, Peace Process, and Governance* and transferred the article one by one to the Sketch Engine software, where articles are automatically compiled and stored.

**Step 3. Testing the corpus.** Before running the actual analysis, the researcher tried running an analysis of the terms.

**Step 4. Running the corpus.** The researcher inputted the target words into the software to determine the top five collocates of each target word.

### *Part II. Focus Group Discussion*

In conducting the focus group discussion, the following steps were followed:

**Step 1. Meeting with the moderators of the selected Muslim Student Associations (MSA).** The researcher wrote letters to the moderators of MSAs of the three universities.

**Step 2. Inviting the selected participants.** The researcher, with the help of the moderators, sent a letter of invitation to each participant who met the criteria. Those who agreed to participate met with the researcher at a designated place, date, and time for the Focus Group Discussion.

**Step 3. Conducting the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).** Informed consent form was given and accomplished by the participants. Permission to record the interview for the recording and transcribing was sought and were assured of its confidentiality. Furthermore, this paper underwent the ethics review board of the institution.

### **Data Analysis**



To answer research question number one, collocates of the term *Moro* were identified and examined from the corpus. Ten random sample of excerpts chosen through the Sketch Engine sampling feature were subject to in-depth analysis employing the Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) which was first introduced by Partington in 2004. CADS uses the techniques of Corpus Linguistics (CL) and qualitative discourse analysis which considers and examines the social, political, and historical context of the text (Jaworska, 2016).

Using such method was further inspired by Hunston (2002, as cited in Evison, 2019) who explained that a corpus does not introduce novel information about language; however, the software enables researchers to view familiar language patterns in a new angle. He further added that it is the subsequent analysis, which can be both quantitative and qualitative, that offers valuable insights. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a thorough examination of the statements in the news article sourced from [MindaNews](#) to understand how writers from [Mindanao](#) utilize the noun collocate of *Moro* within context. After which, the most frequent collocations (Top 5) were presented to the respondents during the FGD and were asked about their perceptions on the collocates of the term *Moro*.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The following 6-phase coding framework for thematic analysis was used to identify themes and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, as cited in Applied Doctoral Center, 2015).

**Step 1. Familiarization of data.** Becoming familiar with data means data immersion and repetitive cycles of reading, which generates more insights.

**Step 2. Generation of codes.** Generating codes refers to coding for as many topics as possible and applying the code to a contextual segment.

**Step 3. Combining codes into themes.** Generating themes is sorting the codes into higher-level topics. Tables, mind maps, or theme piles to cluster topics into these broader groupings can be utilized. This phase ends with “candidate themes” and subthemes.



**Step 4. Reviewing themes.** Reviewing the themes refers to further examination of the candidate themes by revisiting the data coded to the component codes. Renaming the theme or making it a sub-theme of a bigger construct may be expected in this phase.

**Step 5. Determining significance of theme.** The next phase is refining the names of themes and ensuring that they occupy the same semantic plane. Moreover, to increase validity of the findings, three inter-raters who were Ph.D. students in the field of Language Studies were asked to validate the generated themes using the Inter-Rater Validation Form (See Appendix E).

**Step 6. Reporting of findings.** Producing the report means telling the story of the themes, describing the meaning within each theme, with illustrative examples. The report must be generic, concise, relevant, and exciting.

## Results and Discussion

The data shows the most frequent collocate of *Moro* found in *MindaNews* is **Front** with 1512 times or 78.55%. This is followed by the term **people** with 215 times or 11.17%. Next in rank is the term **leaders** with 107 times or 5.55% of the total corpus. The collocate **groups** comes next which appears 50 times or 2.59% in the total frequency counts in the corpus. The least frequent collocate of *Moro* is **woman/women** with 41 times or only 2.13% of the total counts.

A corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the excerpts from *MindaNews* reveal interesting results.

### Moro Fronts

A corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the excerpts from *MindaNews* reveal interesting results. Moro fronts are represented as:

**1. Factionalized rebel groups.** This is reflected in the sample excerpt:

Excerpt 1:

*"The decades-old armed rebellion in Mindanao waged by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) put the island in the headlines." (MindaNews, August 7, 2021)*



passage reveals the long-standing tension between the two major factions concerning land or territorial disputes. The excerpts also highlight the potential for more local conflicts and clashes between these two although some group efforts on both ends are made to manage these conflicts. But due to differences in interests and beliefs, maintaining unity between and among these groups is still a challenge to be solved.

## 2. Groups or organizations engaging in peace talks with the government.

Although Moro fronts are seen as divided, they are nevertheless given good representation when they are represented as such. This representation is shown in the sample excerpt below:

Excerpt 2:

*"President Benigno Simeon Aquino III announced that the peace panels of the government and the **Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)** had reached a framework agreement that would give birth to a new autonomous political entity whose name 'symbolizes and honors the struggles of our forebears in Mindanao' and 'celebrates the history and character of that part of our nation.'" (MindaNews, June 25, 2021)*

The large number of recurrences of the term *Front* (78.55%) in the corpus indicate the extensive presence of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in *MindaNews*, which only implies their deep-rooted history. Nur Misuari led the MNLF's establishment in 1969, and eight years later, Hashim Salamat formed a splinter group. Both groups came into existence with the aim of achieving self-determination. Despite the formal inauguration of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) as part of a peace agreement, the overall progress and challenges in achieving complete self-determination remain uncertain. As a result, the Moro struggle has persisted for over five decades now.

## 3. Violators

One of the ten sample excerpts portrayed Moro *fronts* as violators. This is evident in the sample excerpt:

Excerpt 3:

*The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) admitted that their platoon-size members, who were recently apprehended along with their high-powered weapons*



*at a checkpoint in Maguindanao, violated the ceasefire agreement, a top official said Thursday.” (MindaNews, November 4, 2021).*

The excerpt talks about a specific event that occurred when high-powered firearms apprehended Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) members at a Maguindanao checkpoint who confessed to have breached the ceasefire agreement. This incident underscores the difficulties and intricacies that Moro rebel groups experience in terms of adhering to peace agreements and maintaining discipline within their ranks, which can be very important for peace building initiatives in the area.

### **Moro people**

A thorough investigation of the collocate in context reveals more representations of the collocate Moro people.

#### **1. Historically marginalized individuals**

This can be inferred in excerpt 4:

Excerpt 4:

*“Quevedo explained that RA 11054 is a ‘win-win proposition’ as it addresses historical injustices committed against the Moro people and recognizes their historic aspiration for self-determination in their territory.” (MindaNews, December 3, 2018)*

The legislative measure also known as RA 11054, which aims to correct the historical injustices experienced by the Moro people is clearly emphasized in the above excerpt. By acknowledging the past struggles and by being aware of Moro people’s aspiration for self-determination, this law signals a small step through addressing the systemic marginalization and empowering Moro community to make their own future within their territory.

**2. continuously marginalized in the society.** This is reflected in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 5:

*“She said that only a few people and restaurants offer Halal-certified goods and services, leaving the Moro people who are living in the province with limited options.” (MindaNews, October 8, 2020)*



The above excerpt only shows that Moro people are still seen marginalized in many aspects of their lives such as limited access to Halal-certified goods and services.

**3. constantly aspire for self-determination.** Below is a sample excerpt that shows this representation.

Excerpt 6:

*"He stressed that the issue of the Moro people is the right to self-determination, including the right to natural resources which is hampered by the Regalian Doctrine." (MindaNews, March 7, 2017)*

The excerpts above only show that Moro people are actively advocating for their right to self-determination, placing a high priority on securing sovereignty over resources and choosing the forms of governance that best align with their goals.

### **Moro leaders**

A discourse analysis reveals that *Moro leaders* are seen as 1. **collaborators** for peace resolution, but they are also **divided factions themselves**. This can be implied in the sample excerpt.

Excerpt 7:

*"Cardinal, Deputy Speaker urge Moro leaders to come up with 'single, harmonized' draft Bangsamoro law." (MindaNews, May 14, 2017)*

As can be gleaned from the above excerpt, Moro leaders are facing the challenge of overcoming disunity and division among themselves in the creation of Bangsamoro law. This finding corroborates Majul's (1985) contention that rivalry among leaders is evident due to the desire of some Muslim traditional leaders and old-style politicians to be recognized as leaders of the armed struggle in Mindanao. However, Caballero and Tanagon (2022) believed that it is not really much of the issue of diversity and greed for power that encourage factionalism but of the "personalized and personality-based loyalty" (p. 46) among the members of the community. This can also be explained through the idea of Rousseau on pride and honor. He stated that in a democratic society, people "do care very much what others think" (p. 46) and that pride and honor only become issues when they start to control or dominate others, leading to divisions and reliance on others and ultimately corruption.

### **Moro groups**



An analysis reveals that in the earlier years, Moro groups were considered a

1. **separatist/militant groups.** These can be gleaned from the excerpt below.

Excerpt 8:

*"The police official noted that the armed MILF members were violating the agreement between the **Moro group** and the government when they passed through main thoroughfares without coordinating with authorities."* (MindaNews, November 2, 2021)

The excerpt implies an unstable relationship between the Moro groups and the government. It should be noted that Moro groups such as the MNLF originally planned for a separate state which is composed of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Because of this, the MNLF was labeled as a separatist movement (Galang, 1969; George, 1980, as cited in Caballero & Tanagon, 2022). Thus, it is not surprising that at one point, the two parties are seen working harmoniously for peace resolution, but the next day they could be the best of enemies.

2. **stakeholders in the peace negotiation process.** This representation is reflected in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 9:

*"Dureza said that President Rodrigo R. Duterte has committed to implement all signed agreements between the MNLF and the MILF, as the negotiation phase with both Moro groups is over and should be in the implementation process."* (MindaNews, August 10, 2016)

This excerpt illustrates the ongoing efforts to involve Moro groups as stakeholders in the peace process in the Philippines. The government's engagement with the MNLF and the MILF, as well as the enactment of key legislation like the BBL, are crucial steps towards addressing the grievances of the Moro people and achieving sustainable peace in the region.

3. **disheartened individuals.** This characterizes a sense of sadness, disillusionment, and discouragement when their expectations are not met or when they experience a letdown in a particular situation. Such description is evident in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 10:

*"Drieza Lininding, chair of the Marawi City-based **Moro Consensus group** told MindaNews that Duterte 'used to be our champion in advancing the Moro Cause*



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and  
in

*addressing historical injustices committed against us, but in his last SONA, he is just like his predecessors who failed us.” (MindaNews, July 28, 2021)*

This excerpt conveys a sense of disillusionment and betrayal felt by the Moro Consensus group towards President Duterte, who was perceived as a champion for the Moro cause but was criticized for not living up to expectations in addressing historical injustices. The disappointment expressed by Drieza Lininding reflects the emotional toll of unmet promises and the perceived lack of progress in addressing the grievances and aspirations of the Moro community, underscoring the complexities and challenges of advancing peace and justice for marginalized groups.

Excerpt 11:

*“The One Bangsamoro Movement, Inc. (1Bangsa), which counts at least 60 Moro groups as members, also expressed frustration that Duterte failed to ask Congress during the SONA to prioritize the extension of the transition period in the BARMM.” (MindaNews, July 27, 2021)*

This excerpt highlights the frustration expressed by the One Bangsamoro Movement over the perceived lack of advocacy by President Duterte for the extension of the transition period in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The disappointment at the perceived oversight in prioritizing key issues for the BARMM reflects a sense of disheartenment and disillusionment among Moro groups who had hoped for stronger support and recognition of their autonomy and development needs. The expression of frustration underscores the challenges of navigating political processes and advocating for the rights and interests of the Moro community within the evolving peace landscape.

Excerpt 12:

*“National media reports point to Duterte’s pessimism supposedly over forging a peace deal with the Moro groups.” (MindaNews, May 7, 2017)*

This excerpt suggests a sense of pessimism and disillusionment surrounding President Duterte's stance on forging a peace deal with Moro groups, indicating a perceived lack of progress or commitment towards resolving conflicts and addressing the aspirations of the Moro community. The portrayal of pessimism in peace negotiations reflects a climate of uncertainty and disappointment among Moro groups who may feel disheartened by the challenges and setbacks in advancing peace processes and securing meaningful outcomes that address their historical grievances and aspirations for self-determination.



### ***Moro women***

Discourse analysis reveals that Moro women are represented as

1. **struggling individuals due to stereotypes.** This representation is shown in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 13:

*“As a young Moro woman, she admits it was initially very hard to lobby for her advocacies ‘because some of our elders did not want to recognize our capacity and potential to help them.’ (MindaNews, March 24, 2019)*

The excerpt above talks about the struggles Moro women encounter which only reflects the kind of society they belong to. This society that limits Moro women in domestic roles by prioritizing homemaking perpetuates stereotypes that devalue their abilities and potentials for leadership roles and active involvement in the public sphere. In the article *Gender Profile of the Philippines*, it states that Moro women are considered the “poorest and most disadvantaged” among the Mindanao population, considering them as “minorities within minorities” (para 25). **2. empowered individuals in the society.**

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, Moro women manage to rise above those challenges. The following excerpts prove this:

Excerpt 14:

*“‘But we have shown that Moro women are capable of becoming productive, successful and can contribute to the community in terms of fostering peace and development,’ she said.” (MindaNews, April 24, 2021)*

The excerpt showcases the empowerment and achievements of Moro women in rising above challenges, embracing cultural heritage, advocating for equality, fostering peace and development, and holding positions of influence demonstrates their resilience, capabilities, and contributions to society.

### **Respondents Perceptions to the Moro collocates**

#### ***Moro Front***

For the collocate *front*, different viewpoints emerged. First, Moro Fronts are perceived as a group of people who are championing the rights of the



Muslim people. This perception is stated when all respondents said “yes” to the clarification made by the facilitator in the statement “But in your understanding ang MILF are the people who are fighting for the rights of the Muslim.” The same understanding is expressed by a respondent who stated, “They are fighting for the justice” (G-C, R-2, line 217). Another view also indicated that these groups such as MILF are misunderstood by those who lack knowledge regarding the history of the armed struggles. As one respondent said, “So, yung Moro Islamic Liberation Front po, hindi po kasi lahat aware na sa historically kung gaano sila ka laking influence sa Islamic Community. So, para sa akin po worrying siya in a way kasi iisipin nila agad, since Moro Islamic Liberation Front, terrorist po agad” [Not everyone is aware, historically, how influential the Moro Islamic Liberation Front was to the Islamic community. This is alarming since people might immediately see this group as terrorist] (G-A, R-5 lines 525-528).

However, they also acknowledged that some of these armed groups deviate from the true mission and use the Moros’ flight to their advantage. This is evident in the statement of one respondent: “Meron po kasi yung tinatawag na Jihad na parang they're fighting for our religion pero sometimes po kasi kapag hindi na po sila nags-stick sa kung ano talaga yung mission nila Islamically, parang minasan nagiging greed na din po siya at nakaka-affect na sa ibang tao” [There is this term called Jihad. which really fights for our religion but sometimes they no longer stick to the true mission according to the Islamic teaching, that sometimes it turns to greed and eventually affects other people] (G-A, R-5, line 552-555).

It also appeared that some of the groups and members are only using the name of a certain armed group to do violent activities. This is evident in the statement, “Pero may iba talaga Ma’am like Abu Sayyaf may grupo sila. Yung isa ginamit lang ng pangalan Abu Sayyaf para magkaroon ng krimen like holdaping tapos magkuha sila ng ransom. Tapos may isa na grupo eto talaga yung totoong Abu Sayyaf kumbaga parang MNLF na lumalaban din sila sa rights for the muslim people” [But there are really those who take advantage of the situation like using the name Abu Sayyaf. There are different groups under its name. One group uses the name Abu Sayyaf to do some crimes such as kidnap for ransom activities. But there is one group which is the real Abu Sayyaf group that fights for the Muslim rights] (G-C, R-MX, line 218-221).



### *Moro People*

For the collocate *people*, respondents perceived this collocate with people who could be easily influenced by the idea of radicalism. As one respondent said, “There are radicalist that go out of control and the Moro people are not different from them” (G-A, R-6 lines 665-666). This action could be attributed to their intense desire to fight for what they believe in without following the Islamic way. This is indicated in the statement of one respondent: “... siguro din may mga group of people, certain people na pinaglalaman nila yung ideology nila [Maybe there are really certain groups of people who fight for their ideology] and that are not abiding sa Islam, sa Islamic way and on that people tend to call them as Moro” (G-A, R-6 lines 665-666).

Further, this perception of Moro people regarding the actions of some misguided groups contributed for Moro people to be stereotyped and eventually discriminated against in the society. One stereotype of Moro people is being uneducated. This is validated by the observation of one respondent who stated that “Kasi ma’am para sa kanila siguro pag tinawag kang Moro parang di ka nakapag aral” [Maybe because for some, when you are labeled as Moro, it seems that you are uneducated] (G-B, R-2, line 95-96). This stereotype of being uneducated led to the perception of Moro being evil and dirty. Taken from the experience of one respondent, Moro people were also seen as violent. In his/her statement, “... perception siguro ng grandmother niya na is violent yung mga Moro” [Maybe his/her grandmother perceives that a Moro is violent] (G-B, R-5, line 373).

Such representations were similar to Tomawis (2005) which claimed that in history, the Moros were generally seen as “outlaws, pirates, assassins, murderers, troublemakers and the like” (p. 11). Thus, a slogan which was originally phrased as “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” became “the only good Moro, is the dead Moro” (Orosa, 1985, as cited in Absari and Morados, 2020, p.14).

### *Moro Leaders*

The collocate *leaders* is perceived by the respondents as leaders whose roles are more focused on the political, social, and cultural dimensions rather than the religious one. As one respondent stated, “Magkaiba yung tradition and yung religion. Parang yung nirerepresent Ma’am ng Moro is yung tradition yung Muslim nirerepresent is yung religion”



[Tradition and religion are two different things. The Moro represents the tradition while the Muslim represents the religion] (G-B, R-4, line 284-295). But according to one of the key informants, Moro leaders are still into religion, but they are just more concerned about the matter of the state. He stated that “Moro leaders are more into nation building.” Another key informant also argued that Moro leaders and Muslim leaders are the same. He said that “Generally speaking, there is no difference between the two. It’s just the name or title connected to it!” He further added that “They use the word Moro because it was the time wherein Muslims were fighting for self-identity. As the years passed by, leaders opted not to use the word Moro anymore. Perhaps to others they still find the word Moro to be derogative (A.Duran, personal communication, March 13, 2024). This is also supported by Montiel, Rodil, and Guzman (2012) that Filipino Muslims “resented” this term because it was originally given by the Spaniards who initiated and declared war on them for 333 years (p. 5).

### *Moro Group*

This collocate is perceived as people who are diverse because of multiple reasons. One is due to different beliefs. This is reflected in the statement of one respondent who said, “Unfortunately, Moro groups— dahil kasalanan na rin ng mga Muslim people, hindi dahil sa Islam pero dahil sa paniniwala nila as human. For example, doon sa Saudi, mga Tausug, Yakan, Maranao, lahat-lahat po yan nag-aaway na lang po doon sa amin sa Jeddah po specifically” [There are Moro groups not because of Islam but because of their different beliefs. For example, in Saudi, the Tausugs, Yakans, and the Maranaos, are fighting in Jeddah]. The respondent further added pride as one of the reasons when he said, “So, yun po, may pride po, each Moro group, each tribe— parang Yakan, Tausug, tapos hindi po sila magpapatalo doon sa amin sa Saudi” [each Moro group in Saudi is driven by pride—the Yakan, Tausug, they do not allow themselves to be defeated] (G-A, R-3, line 563 -567).

Such response resonates Majul (1985) who stated that “some Muslim traditional leaders and old-style politicians” had succumbed to that desire

to be recognized as the leaders of the armed struggle in the South (p. 85). Caballero and Tawagon (2022) called this “irreconcilably divergent” ideals and the desire for power among leaders of the front (p. 85). They further



theorized that factionalism exists not just because of diversity and power but of “personalized and personality-based loyalty” (p. 85). The members of the different factions are just being loyal to their own kind.

### ***Moro Women***

The *Moro women* are respected and valued in the community. They are valued as the precious gems, as one respondent described, “Moro Women or Muslim Women pinapahalagahan ng Islam yung mga kababaihan kagaya po ng pagpapahalaga natin sa mga diyamante or mga pearl. That’s why yung mga Muslim let’s say yung mga women na mag cover yung mga aura nila or yung mga sensitive na hindi pwede makita ng mga kalalakihan] (G-C, R-3, line 333-337). However, one respondent also mentioned that although Allah treats men and women equally, the difference still exists in the way they are treated; but this difference lies in the different responsibilities assigned to them. As one respondent clarified, “there’s different responsibilities [*sic*] for men and there’s also different responsibilities [*sic*] for women. So, men are assigned by Allah to become, like, to lead the household, to, like, take care of the women. That’s how the women are honored because they need to be protected, they are treasured, and they are mothers. “In Islam parang malaking honor yan siya na maging nanay ka talaga. So, equal kami in the eyes of God, equal yung good deeds namin; equal kami na parang we can rise up to the ranks ganyan in the eyes of Allah pero may different responsibilities lang [In Islam, motherhood is such an honor. We are equal in the eyes of Allah, but we have different responsibilities] (G-A,R-4, lines 613-620). The respondents view on Moro women contradicts the statement stated in the article *Gender Profile of the Philippines* where women are considered the “poorest and most disadvantaged” among the Mindanao population, considering them as “minorities within minorities” (para 25).

### ***Representations of Moro***

A Moro in the Philippines is perceived as a member of a diverse community. This is made evident in the different themes emerged from *Moro front*, *Moro people*, *Moro leaders* and *Moro groups*. For the *Moro front*, two representations emerged here. On the one hand, they are seen as fighting for Muslim rights; on the other hand, they are perceived as damaging the Muslim image. Such divisions in understanding could be attributed to the different contexts where the respondents came from. First, as university students, they learned their history. They knew the struggles



that their ancestors experienced in the name of justice and self-determination. Second, some of the respondents knew some relatives or friends who are members or affiliated with the Moro fronts or groups actively involved and engaged in the peace resolutions with the government. While they acknowledged that struggles do exist, they were also aware that there are also some members or groups who take advantage of the conflicts and use this for self-interest. These respondents, guided by the education in Islamic teachings, understood the true value of self-determination and the ways to achieve this. They said that as taught to them by Islam, violence is never encouraged and that their aspirations to be heard can be realized peacefully.

The same thing is revealed for *Moro people*. Moro individuals are sometimes viewed through a lens of radicalism, with some being influenced by extremist ideologies. This perception can result in stereotypes and discrimination, portraying Moro people as uneducated, violent, or misunderstood by society. Despite facing challenges, Moro individuals are resilient and strive to uphold their beliefs and values in the face of adversity.

Additionally, *Moro leaders* play a pivotal role in the community, focusing on political, social, and cultural dimensions while navigating the complexities of tradition and religion. They are instrumental in nation-building efforts and may choose to identify as Muslim leaders to align with broader global terminology and avoid derogatory associations with the term "Moro." Within *Moro groups*, diversity is also prevalent. The varying beliefs and perspectives of the Moro groups have undoubtedly contributed to internal divisions and conflicts. Differences in education, pride, and access to information shape the dynamic landscape of Moro groups, highlighting the challenges of unity and cohesion within the community.

The representation of Moro women that emerged from the respondents' perceptions reflects a deep sense of respect and value within the community. Moro women are represented as precious gems, with Islam emphasizing the importance of women akin to valuing diamonds or pearls. The perception is that Muslim women who cover their aura or maintain modesty are regarded as sensitive and not to be seen by men. This perspective highlights the reverence and protection accorded to women within the community. Additionally, while acknowledging that Allah treats men and women equally, the perceptions also recognize differences



in responsibilities assigned to each gender. Men are tasked with leading the household and caring for women, reflecting a sense of honor and protection towards women. The role of motherhood is particularly emphasized as a significant honor within Islam, underscoring the importance placed on women as nurturers and caretakers. The understanding is that despite differences in responsibilities, both men and women are considered equal in the eyes of God, with the opportunity to earn good deeds and rise in ranks spiritually.

The analysis of the respondents' perceptions regarding the Moro collocates, including *Moro front*, *Moro people*, *Moro leader*, *Moro group*, and *Moro woman*, reveals a dual representation. Respondents presented both positive aspects and potential negative portrayals, influenced by variations in beliefs, education, and practices.

### Conclusion

The corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the term Moro in *Mindaneews* reveals some representations which have long been stigmatized in the history. The representations of Moro as divided factions corroborates with the discussion of Majul (1985) and Caballero and Tawagon (2022) who clearly explained personalized loyalties and divergent political goal within Moro factions as the main cause of tension among Moro groups. Representations such as violators and marginalized group may also be a negative contributory factor to the image of the Moro.

This unfavorable portrayal can be explained through Charles Taylor's *Politics of Recognition* (1992), which claims that recognition is important for identity formation and self-worth, while misrecognition leads to oppression. Historically viewed as "degraded race" and victims of colonial stereotypes, the Moro identity has often been mischaracterized in public sphere.

However, it is worth noting that *MindaNews*, as a Mindanaoan-based news outlet, increasingly adheres to the ideas of Taylor's framework. Compared to the other external media sources, *MindaNews* has shown more sensitivity and commitment to authentic recognition of Moro by creating a balanced narratives that showcase Moro efforts in peace-building, collaborators, and cultural resilience that conform to Taylor's idea of recognition rooted from respect and affirmation of group's distinct identities which significantly counter misrecognition.



Reyes (2025). The Moro between words and worlds: A corpus-assisted discourse analysis.

In totality, although traces of historical biases regarding the Moro still exist, efforts in recognizing them as collaborators and active participants in the governments' pursuit for peace and security in the nation are both evident in *MindaNews* articles and respondents' perceptions. *MindaNews* serves as an essential platform that reflects this politics of recognition by broadening its narratives to reflect diversity and resiliency of Moro identity that leads to more respectful and inclusive representations of the Moro community.

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