

# **Intermarriages between Muslim and Christian Filipinos in Mindanao, Southern Philippines**

**-The Dynamics of Religious/Ethnical Boundary-**

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Muslims constitute a minority (around 5%) of the Philippine population, which is more than 90% of the population is Christian. In the island of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, however Muslims constitute a majority in a number of regions. They used to be the biggest population during the colonial to the early post-colonial period, but since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, massive Christian migration have pushed Muslims to margins socially, economically and politically. In 1970s, Moro National Liberation Front (MNLFF) started and leded the separatism movement with armed struggles. Today it is still “at war” although it has also been engaged in peace talk in Manila. Because of the recent conflicts, hundred thousand internal refugees have been generated. The impact of the separatist war has been the subject of a good number of research, many of which report about the damage situation or analyze the interests of the various political and military groups involved. Others focus on the practices and narratives of communities that have been internally-displaced by the war or on the separatists themselves.<sup>1</sup>

In the Philippines, and Mindanao, the popular belief is that there exist major ethnic and religious difference between Muslims and Christians. This study will try to capture the bases of these differences as Muslims and Christians experience them in the dynamics of everyday life. But it also hopes to examine the commonalities between the two communities, and in the process probe deeper into the practices of Muslims and Christians as they construct their relationship with one another through family, kin and as neighbors.

Marriage between Muslim and Christian is regarded as “intermarriage” in the Philippines. Intermarriage is distinguished from other marriages when “one difference” in countless differences which a couple has is emphasized, and the difference can belong to the difference of “group”. In other words, in the Philippines, Muslim and Christian are regarded as different groups which have a boundary. Author stands the point that such a conscious has been gradually concreted/ constructed/ reinforced undergoing several events such as the colonial experience and separatism movement. The people relating intermarriage are trying to negotiate and reconcile with their surroundings while realizing the definite difference. It can be said that intermarriage between Muslim and Christian is a practice which vividly exhibit the difference of the groups, and furthermore, it may shake and reconstruct the religious/ethnical difference and boundary.

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<sup>1</sup> See Canuday2009, Ishi2002 and McKenna1998

[picture1: Farm village of North Cotabato. Christian settlers , Magindanao (ethnic group of Muslm) and Tboli (indigenous ethnic group) live in this area.]



[picture2: Magindanao woman cocking a chicken killed following Sumbari (special way to kill animals to make them eatable for Muslim)]



[Picture3: Wedding of Maranao (ethnic group of Muslim) family. Bridegroom is Muslim and Bride is Christian]

