

# The Arts of Everyday Peacebuilding: Cohabitation, Conversion, and Intermarriage of Muslims and Christians in the Southern Philippines

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While armed conflict has occurred since around 1970 in the Southern Philippines, ordinary people of different faiths have cohabited as neighbors, lovers, and families. Why are ordinary Muslims and Christians able to create and maintain everyday peace although they have suffered from the conflicts and the state's initiatives for peace have not yet been realized? After noting limitations of peacebuilding efforts by the state and nongovernment organizations, we analyze the arts of everyday peacebuilding practiced by ordinary people based on ethnographic research in Iligan City. First, Muslims and Christians have engaged in mutual assistance for everyday survival in the city where they live as diaspora or transients, who are relatively autonomous from their clan networks. Second, Muslim converts and many Christians regard those who practice other religions as companions who share the same "paths to happiness." Third, when a multireligious family is pressed to choose one religion for its children's faith or its ceremonial style, it avoids the rupture of family relationships by "implementing non-decision" to make the two religions obscurely coexist. Finally, even when Christian women married to Muslim men face polygamy without consent, they do not attribute the unfaithful behavior of their husbands to Islam but instead often blame the patriarchal culture of their ethnic group. Such a practice of "crossing divides" prevents religion from becoming an absolute point of conflict. Everyday peacebuilding of the ordinary can be a foundation of the state's official peacebuilding, although there exists a tension between them.

**Keywords:** religion, interfaith dialogue, intermarriage, Balik-Islam, everyday peace, Southern Philippines, peacebuilding, multiculturalism

## Introduction

This study aims to clarify the arts of cohabitation and everyday peacebuilding practiced by ordinary Muslims and Christians in the Southern Philippines. In the predominantly

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Christian Philippines, the armed struggle of Muslims for secession and autonomy has been ongoing since the 1970s. The state has tried to realize peace by granting autonomy to Muslims, while civil society organizations have promoted interfaith dialogue, but violence has not been eradicated. However, despite the prolonged conflict, ordinary Muslims and Christians have cohabited not only as neighbors and friends but also as lovers and family members. This reality propels us to ask the question: Why are ordinary Muslims and Christians able to create and maintain everyday peace although they have suffered from the conflicts and the state's initiatives for peace have not yet been realized?<sup>1)</sup>

Roger Mac Ginty (2014) highlights the concept of everyday peace to counteract the technocratic and top-down peacebuilding efforts employed by professionals, states, and international organizations that emphasize "control and order." He argues that ordinary locals have also contributed to peace, especially in informal areas where the technocratic approach is ineffective. Official peacebuilding is parasitic to everyday harmony despite the latter's subversive nature against the former. Mac Ginty maintains that fluidity, heterogeneity, and intra-group interactions among ordinary people are the foundations of everyday peace.<sup>2)</sup> However, his argument is limited to how people deal with others with opposing identities and does not explore cases in which people's identity itself becomes ambiguous. Thus, this paper aims to develop Mac Ginty's argument in a way that expands the focus on flexibility and ambiguity to people's identity.

In Southeast Asia, most scholars have identified local culture and identity shared by different religious groups, rather than flexibility and ambiguity, as an enabling factor of interreligious coexistence. Alexander Horstmann (2011) maintains that multi-religious ritual traditions in Southern Thailand facilitate the coexistence of Muslims and Buddhists. Albertus Bagus Laksana (2014) describes how an inclusive Javanese religio-cultural sensibility supports a religious pluralism among Javano-Catholics and Muslims. Hannah Neumann (2010) and Coline Cardeño (2019) assert that in the Southern Philippines, the construction of a shared local identity coupled with weakening of narrow clan and ethno-religious identities is the foundation of everyday peace. However, such shared local culture and identity are not always necessary for everyday peacebuilding. For instance, Kawada Makito (2010), in studying the religious communities worshipping the Virgin of

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1) This inquiry into everyday peace is partly inspired by Thomas McKenna (1998), who provided an alternative account of the armed separatism of the Southern Philippines through an ethnography of the everyday politics of rank-and-file Muslim rebels.

2) Mac Ginty identifies three premises of everyday peace: (1) fluidity of individuals, collectives, ideas, and practices; (2) heterogeneity of groups often seen as homogenous; and (3) environmental factors that shape inter- and intra-communal experience. More specifically, he highlights everyday peace activities such as avoidance of risky topics, people, and places; promotion of ambiguity to conceal signifiers of identity; avoiding "seeing" others, and so on.

Guadalupe in Cebu City, argues that conflicting practices and discourses over history coexist, which can be interpreted as a case of coexistence of plurals in diversified life under urbanity and globalization. We also claim that flexibility and ambiguity in everyday life can be a foundation of inter-faith cohabitation even without a shared local identity, and even with antagonism over religious differences, based on an ethnographic study in Iligan City, Province of Lanao del Norte.

Yoshizawa Asuna, one of the authors, conducted intensive fieldwork in the city while living with a Muslim family from February 2013 to June 2014. All the stories and narratives quoted in this paper are taken from her field notes. Iligan is known to be a place where Muslims and Christians have coexisted relatively peacefully. Yet, the “peace” experienced in Iligan is not inherent but is an outcome of the everyday efforts undertaken by ordinary people, even in instances when the city was surrounded and partially encroached by elements of violence. For instance, in 2000, when the Estrada administration waged an all-out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that resulted in over 900,000 refugees, the first clash occurred in a town close to Iligan. Many residents of Iligan witnessed the violence that accompanied it. The military used Christian militia in its operations against the MILF, which led to violence perpetrated by vigilante groups from both sides. In 2017 Marawi City, located just two hours from Iligan by car, was devastated by a five-month-long battle between the ISIS-inspired Maute group and the military.

According to the 2010 census, Iligan’s household population was 321,156, of which 89.7 percent was Christian (with 79.3 percent being Catholic), 9.5 percent Muslim, and 0.8 percent maintaining the animism of the indigenous tribes. Since Muslims make up 5.6 percent of the national population, statistically speaking, the proportion of Muslims in Iligan is only 4 percent higher than the national average. However, actually living in the city, one gets the sense that 30–40 percent of its inhabitants are Muslims. Perhaps this is because many Muslims from neighboring areas temporarily live in Iligan due to its opportunities for higher education and employment. Among the more than 10 Muslim ethnic groups in the Philippines, Maranaos are the majority in Iligan.<sup>3)</sup> There are also non-Muslim indigenous peoples who are generally known as Lumad, and while their representation and social inclusion are important issues, this paper’s coverage is limited to the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

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3) The Maranaos are the largest Muslim ethnic group in the country, with a population of more than one million. While most of them inhabit the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte, a significant number have been forced by poverty and conflict to migrate to Manila and other cities, where many of them engage in retailing businesses.

## I Living with Religious Minorities

Recently there has been a growing apprehension that liberal democracy, due to its principle of secularism, may be unable to represent religious minorities, thus worsening the social exclusion and fragmentation rather than promoting integration. In this sense, possible limitations of liberal democracy should be examined, not just the failures of the Philippine state as a cause of prolonged armed conflict in the Southern Philippines.

Separation of religion from politics was a prerequisite to the establishment of liberal democracies in the West. Modernization has been expected to entail privatization of religion and secularization of deliberation in the public sphere. However, there are a growing number of cases in which religions assert their values and norms in the public sphere. In the Middle East, Islamism has progressed against violent and corrupt secular regimes supported by Western countries since the end of the World War II, as seen in the Islamic Revolution in Iran at the end of the 1970s. Because Islamism calls for political reform based on the teachings of Islam, it is incompatible with the concept of separation of church and state. Christianity also played a major role in the struggles against dictatorships in the Philippines, South Korea, Eastern Europe, and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. In the United States, Christian fundamentalism that colludes with the new conservatism has exercised its political influence since the 2000s (e.g., in justifying the War on Terror).

José Casanova (1994) emphasizes that religion plays a public role in supporting liberal democracy and modern values in the era of post-secularism. While some examples mentioned above support his argument, others show that religion also threatens the values of liberal democracy. This ambiguity has activated debates over how liberal democracies should address religion in the public sphere. Secularists, on the one hand, insist that religious discourses should be excluded from the public sphere because they obstruct rational deliberation and consensus based on public reason. On the other hand, some scholars forward the view that religious discourses may be included in the public sphere under certain conditions. For instance, Jürgen Habermas argues that religious discourses entering the public sphere must be “translated” into “generally acceptable secular discourses” (Habermas 2011, 26).

However, it is unjust to impose the obligation of secular translation on religious citizens while not demanding a fundamental change on the part of liberal democracy and secular citizens. Charles Taylor (2011) contends that secularism is by no means neutral, as it excludes religious discourses from the public sphere while making itself absolute. Thus, he advocates neutrality between secular and religious discourses. Talal Asad (2003) further argues that the secular-religious dichotomy is fictional. According to him,

secularism is a religious product rooted in Western Christianity because it was created and upheld in the process through which liberal democracy defeated the theory of the divine right of kings in Western modernity. Saba Mahmood (2009), addressing the controversy over cartoons depicting Muhammad that caused disputes and violence in Europe in the mid-2000s, contends that the legal framework of liberal democracy rejected representing the subjective injuries of Muslims. According to these arguments, liberal democracy fails to represent religious minority Muslims because secularism imposes its systems and norms on them while denying its Christian background and biases, not because religion makes rational deliberation impossible.

Despite the limitations, some would argue that multiculturalism has enabled progress toward realizing the rights of religious minorities in Western liberal democracies since the 1970s. However, it is the state, not the minorities, that has broad discretion over which aspects and to what extent claims for religious minorities' rights can be accepted. This state-sponsored, official multiculturalism presupposes management by the majority, and its group-based approach carries the risk of entrenching social cleavages. Moreover, as neoliberalism has become hegemonic since the 1980s, official multiculturalism has reduced its welfare function, thereby favoring highly skilled migrant workers while excluding unskilled laborers. In these circumstances, scholars see possibilities in "everyday multiculturalism" wherein diverse people experience and negotiate cultural variety in ordinary settings such as neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, and in the process shape and reshape their social relations and identities.<sup>4)</sup>

Some proponents of deliberative democracy, as Monique Deveaux (2017) notes, also highlight the potential of informal public spheres for opening up additional pathways for democratic participation by the minorities, thereby contributing to everyday multiculturalism. Deliberative democracy places hope on the possibility that deliberation with others leads to transformation of people's preferences. However, there is a growing belief among critical scholars that the formal Habermasian public sphere, which upholds normative procedure, rationality based on public reason, and moral consensus, practically excludes marginalized groups' discourses and interests. Thus, they advocate incorporating a broader variety of discourses into deliberative democracy, such as rhetoric, narrative, testimony, storytelling, myth, and oral histories, as well as wider forms of communication such as bargaining, negotiation, and compromise among different self-interests. They argue that the outcome of deliberation contributing to cultural pluralism is more important than the idealized procedures and moral requirements of deliberation (Deveaux 2017). Yet, granted that informal deliberation is more friendly to religious

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4) For instance, see Harris (2013).

discourses and would facilitate interfaith coexistence, various forms of hierarchy and emotional conflicts in everyday settings may obstruct the possibility. Also, pressing necessities of everyday events may not allow enough time for deliberation.

Judith Butler (2011) advocates the ideal of “cohabitation” with others with whom deliberation is difficult or even impossible, as a more radical vision of a plural society. According to her, cohabitation is a Jewish value based on the tradition of diaspora. Thus, violent return to the land by the Israeli state is an attack not only on Palestinians but also on the same Jewish value. She reminds us that “those with whom we cohabit the earth are given to us, prior to choice, and so prior to any social or political contracts we might enter through deliberate volition” (Butler 2011, 83). This is an ontological condition in which we are bound with strangers, and “to destroy the other is to destroy my life” (Butler 2011, 88). Thus, Butler claims that cohabitation with neighboring others is a universal right and obligation. She further suggests that cohabitation might be achieved when opposing groups’ unique memories of dispossessions—experiences of being exiled from places or groups that they originally belonged to—flash up during moments of emergency. This means that remembering one’s exile may prompt concern regarding the dispossession of another, since while the suffering of each dispossession is unique, it is also a universality that ties together opposing groups (Butler 2011).

## II Conflict and Cohabitation in the Southern Philippines

### *Reexamining Social History*

The idea of cohabitation helps us to reinterpret the social history of the Southern Philippines as an encounter, cohabitation, and everyday peacebuilding by ordinary people who embrace not only the different faiths but also their unique experiences of dispossession. This historical landscape is affirmed by Patricio Abinales (2016), who criticizes an “orthodoxy” of the history and cause of conflict in the region which is commonly shared by state officials, Muslim separatists, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and development experts.

First, the orthodoxy identifies religion as a primary source of conflict in the South and attributes its origin to the Spanish era, which began in the sixteenth century. Certainly, Spaniards attacked Muslim communities with Christianized local soldiers. They called the Muslims Moro, naming them after, and projecting their hostility toward, the Muslim Moors in North Africa who conquered the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century. For the Spanish, the Moro represented a common Christian enemy with whom dialogue was impossible. Christianized Filipinos also antagonized the Moro, who in retaliation to

the Spanish invasion attacked Christian villages and kidnapped villagers to procure labor. However, the simplistic view that reduces roots of conflict to religion cannot explain the times when relative peace was maintained, such as the 1930s to 1960s, and why so many Muslims and Christians have cohabited.

Second, the orthodoxy offers the socioeconomic deprivation of Muslims as a root cause of the conflict, emphasizing how Muslims' lands were legally and illegally seized by Christian settlers who migrated from the highly populated north-central regions. In the early twentieth century, a resettlement program was undertaken by the American colonial state to resolve the food crisis. This was continued by the post-independence state to prevent expansion of Communism and unrest in the north-central regions. These events led to Muslims becoming a minority in Mindanao by the 1970s. Moreover, international corporate capital investments in plantation and mining businesses impoverished Muslims through land grabbing and environmental devastation. Nowadays, in the Muslim-majority provinces the poverty incidence is the highest in the country, while the human development index, average life expectancy, and family income are the lowest.<sup>5)</sup> The sense of dispossession experienced by Muslims, despite their residing in a habitat rich in resources, has led to their desire to reclaim their land and rights and has bolstered separatist movements engaging in armed conflict.

However, this explanation of the factors behind the socioeconomic marginalization of Muslims needs to be qualified. Abinales claims that land grabbing was not systematically promoted by an efficient state. Both colonial and autonomous states were too underbudgeted, corrupt, and inefficient to implement the resettlement program. The law to supervise and regulate land acquisition was not appropriately implemented, thus making the claim of "legal" land grabbing invalid. Due to the state's failure, Christian settlers also suffered from hunger and famine, which was worsened by widespread and recurrent rodent infestation.<sup>6)</sup> Certainly, despite the absence of the state's support and the hardships suffered by the people in the frontier, spontaneous migration continued even after independence had been achieved. Approximately 1.2 million people migrated to Mindanao after independence until the shortage of frontier land became a serious issue in the mid-1960s. However, this vast migration did not immediately lead to clashes with Muslims. Christian migrants avoided Muslim-majority areas, and they, as well as Muslim elites, occupied new lands by clearing forests. Abinales notes the following:

Muslim, Lumad, and settlers shared the same resentment toward an apathetic national state, and at the ground level de facto plural societies thrived, with "tri-people" contacts limited to small

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5) See Philippine Statistics Authority (2019).

6) See Abinales (2012) for detailed accounts.

marketplaces in towns or in between these communities where goods and harvests were traded and sold. “Peace” was, in turn, ensured by the Muslim elites themselves who saw the settlement zones as new constituents in their patronage games with national elites . . . (Abinales 2016, 52)

This account illustrates the dispossession of Christian settlers who escaped from impoverishment under feudal landownership in the north-central regions to the frontiers in the South, where they were met with strained circumstances. It also indicates that Muslims and Christians spontaneously began cohabiting based on their unique but shared experience of dispossessions.

Abinales further explains that the conflict between Muslims and Christians became serious in the beginning of the 1970s, when land became scarce for new settlers and Christian elites emerged and started challenging the authority of the existing Muslim elites. This competition promoted the militarization of local elites and the organization of private armies. The timing coincided with the declaration of martial law in 1972 by President Ferdinand Marcos, who mobilized massive international capital to develop the region and deployed military power to suppress dissent. Marcos also intervened in regional politics, giving preferential treatment to allied local elites to consolidate their support, which intensified the rivalry among local elites. In summary, heightened competition among local elites over lands and access to state resources through patronage with national elites came to erode cohabitation at the ground level (Abinales 2016, 49–52).

The frustration of impoverished Muslims invited the emergence of young Muslim leaders who, through scholarships, either obtained higher education in Manila or received religious instruction in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These young leaders reconceptualized the derogatory term Moro into the shared identity of the proud Bangsa Moro (Moro state, nation, or people) and established the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1972 with the aim to reclaim their ancestral domain and resources.<sup>7)</sup> Threatened by the rise of local Christian elites, local Muslim elites also supported the struggle. To appease the MNLF, President Marcos enacted the Code of Muslim Personal Law in 1977 to promote recognition of their faith and culture, but economic marginalization persisted. Meanwhile, the MILF, a splinter group of the MNLF, became the country’s largest anti-government Islamic force providing policing, welfare, and religious programs in places where the state failed to function.

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7) The trigger was the Jabidah massacre of 1968, in which young Muslims recruited for covert military operations were murdered by soldiers during training to silence them regarding military secrets.



*Peacebuilding by the State*

The Philippine state utilized two institutions of liberal democracy to integrate Muslims into the nation and build peace. However, paradoxically, both invited a division of Muslims into those who worked within secular institutions and those who did not or could not, as well as conflicts between Muslims and Christians.

First, the installment of electoral democracy in the South in 1958 did not alleviate impoverishment of ordinary Muslims while it helped local Muslim elites to entrench their power by holding elected office through clientelist politics with economically disadvantaged constituents.<sup>8)</sup> Muslim elites also developed patronage with Christian presidents and senates to gain privileged access to state resources and rent seeking. This system integrated local Muslim elites into national politics, which explains the absence of large-scale resistance directed by them until the end of the 1960s. By the early 1960s, Muslim congressmen succeeded in having legislations passed for Muslims' rights such as increasing educational opportunities and facilitating development by the Mindanao Development Authority. However, the issue of land redistribution remained untouched because it could affect their power base. Amid persistent poverty, ordinary Muslims disillusioned with electoral democracy found hope for a better life in the armed struggles of the MNLF in the 1970s. After the interval of dictatorship from 1972 to 1986, the electoral system was reinstalled, but it again failed to channel the leadership of armed rebels into representative democracy. It also intensified conflicts among local elites for electoral posts, as vividly shown by the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, in which 58 people were killed.

Electoral democracy also triggered conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the 1970s. This was because Muslim local elites and emerging Christian local elites started competing with each other for electoral positions, and ordinary people whose welfare was dependent on their leaders' electoral outcome also passionately joined the contest. Elites on both sides organized private armies or allied with paramilitary groups that frequently committed violence against people of a different faith. For instance, Ilaga ("rat" in the Cebuano language), a fanatic Christian paramilitary group, massacred more than five hundred Muslims in the early 1970s, while the Barracudas, an alleged private army of Muslim Congressman Sultan Mohamad Ali Dimaporo, had an encounter with the Ilaga in Lanao del Norte in 1971, which led to hundreds of deaths on both sides. These incidents seriously worsened interreligious relationships in the region.

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8) Americans imposed direct military rule on the South, considering self-government impossible for Muslims, or the "un-civilized race," in contrast to the Christian-majority north-central areas where they gradually expanded local election.

Second, successive administrations engaged in peace talks with antigovernment forces to establish an autonomous region.<sup>9)</sup> However, these negotiations led to conflict between those who supported the conditions of an autonomous region and those who opposed it, not only among Muslim forces but also among ordinary people. Muslim rebel leaders competed for which group would become a participant in peace talks with the government and enjoy access to rights and resources granted to an autonomous region. Every time the state tried to advance peace talks with an antigovernment force, disgruntled factions resorted to violence to demand representation.

The 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Marcos administration and the MNLF led to the splitting away of Salamat Hashim's faction, which established the MILF in 1984.<sup>10)</sup> After the Fidel Ramos administration and the MNLF signed the 1996 peace agreement, MNLF leader Nur Misuari became the governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.<sup>11)</sup> However, when he lost the post in 2001 due to internal conflict, his faction attacked the military headquarters in Jolo, Sulu, to disrupt the gubernatorial election. The 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the Benigno Aquino III administration and MILF provoked the Sulu-based Islamic forces. In 2013 a self-proclaimed descendant of Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram III sent one hundred armed men to Sabah, Malaysia, insisting on territorial claim to the land, which led to an encounter with Malaysian armed forces. Kiram reportedly protested the exclusion of the issue of territorial dispute over Sabah in the peace talks between the MILF and the government.<sup>12)</sup> Seven months after the event, Misuari's MNLF faction, which had also been excluded from the peace talks, laid siege to Zamboanga City, reportedly to appeal its inclusion, triggering a battle with the government forces.

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9) International mediators such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Japan played an important role in promoting the peace talks.

10) Rivalry among Muslim ethnic groups also contributed to the split. While the MNLF is composed largely of Tausug and Sama from Sulu, most MILF members are Maguindanao and Maranao. The MNLF also resumed the armed struggle when Marcos watered down the original agreement that granted autonomy to 13 provinces.

11) In 1990 the Corazon Aquino administration established the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, but both the MNLF and MILF refused to participate.

12) The Sultanate of Sulu thrived through the intermediate trade among the Middle East, Europe, and Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1878 the declining sultanate signed an agreement with the British North Borneo Company, which allowed the latter to occupy Sabah upon regular payment to the sultanate. However, the interpretation of the term *pajakan* in the agreement has been contested. While the British colonial government succeeded the company, and then the Malaysian government claimed that Sabah was "ceded" in return for payment of 5,000 Malayan dollars per year, the Sultanate of Sulu argued that the land was only "leased." The Philippine government, representing the sultanate, negotiated with Malaysia over the territorial dispute until 1977 but has dropped the issue from its diplomatic agenda.

Such division among Muslim forces was driven not only by interests but also by ideological differences. While mainstream Muslim organizations have accepted the secular framework of an autonomous region under the Philippine state, more radical Islamists have tried to disrupt it in favor of an independent *ummah* (Islamic community). The MILF appealed to establish an Islamic system when it split from the MNLF, criticizing the latter's secular and communistic struggle. Yet after the 2003 death of Hashim, who had been a student of Islamic studies in the Middle East, the MILF has increasingly emphasized secular demands, appealing to the right of national self-determination while calling for jihad (religious struggle) to establish an autonomous region where sharia law would be implemented.<sup>13)</sup> In contrast to the "secularization" of the two forces, spin-off hard-liners have emerged.<sup>14)</sup> In the 1990s, the Abu Sayyaf Group was formed by defecting members of the MNLF. In 2011, a commander who had split from the MILF formed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. In 2017 the Maute group, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, entrenched itself in Marawi and fought for five months.

The rise of Islamist armed groups was facilitated by the worldwide Islamic revival and international networking among Muslim activists. However, it would not have gained ground without locals believing that armed struggle for an independent Islamic community was more attractive than the MILF's technical and practical negotiation with the government for an autonomous government. Since the prolonged conflicts and massive resettlements destroyed the vernacular social system that sustained ordinary Muslims' lives, an increasing number of Muslims found a vision of an alternative system that would emancipate them in radical Islamism. In particular, youths who could not relate to aging organizations became targets of recruitment by extremists resorting to terrorism.

The initiatives for establishing an autonomous region also paradoxically destabilized the everyday cohabitation of ordinary Muslims and Christians. This was because the initiatives evoked suspicion and fear among Christians that they may become the minority and be treated unjustly in a new territory. The MNLF and MILF claimed that the territory should include the vast extent of the South where many Christian-majority and mixed communities existed. In order to justify the claim, they tried to (re)define the concept

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13) The Bangsamoro Organic Law of 2018 stipulates that "Shari'ah shall apply exclusively to cases involving Muslims. When a case involves a non-Muslim, Shari'ah law may apply only if the non-Muslim voluntarily submits to the jurisdiction of the Shari'ah court" in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (Section 1, Article X).

14) Loosely organized by diverse clan leaders and commanders, the MNLF and MILF are both prone to defections.

of Bangsa Moro or Bangsamoro people as not limited to Muslims but including non-Muslims as well.<sup>15)</sup> However, this inclusivity was not readily accepted by the people because the Islamic symbols and discourses had been associated with the concept since the 1970s. Both Christians and non-Muslim indigenous people believe that the Bangsamoro movement has been just for Muslims. This discrepancy between the idealized collective identity and people's everyday perception contributed to confusion and misunderstanding about contents of peace talks among non-Muslims, which eventually led to a big protest movement against the peace process in 2008.

In confidentiality, the Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo administration and MILF negotiated the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) and were scheduled to sign it in Malaysia in August 2008. Stipulated in the MOA-AD were the establishment of the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the six municipalities adjacent to the region, and the conduct of a plebiscite on the participation in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity of the additional 735 *barangays* (smallest local government unit) within 12 months, and 1,459 *barangays* not earlier than 25 years. When these stipulations were made public, Christian local elites with vested interests in the existing system launched a fierce opposition campaign that rapidly expanded. This was because the secret negotiation adopted to prevent Christian politicians and other Muslim groups from hindering the peace process unintentionally escalated Christians' fear. The erroneous assertion also spread that Christian lands would be grabbed by Muslims. One Christian staff member of an NGO recalled in a personal conversation with Yoshizawa, "I participated in the opposition movement out of anxiety and fear without deep understanding of the MOA-AD. Such shared feeling of anxiety surely increased the tension between Muslims and Christians even in Iligan." Several local politicians, including the mayor of Iligan City, claimed that the MOA-AD was unconstitutional, which the Supreme Court affirmed. In response to the setback with the MOA-AD, the MILF collided with government forces.

As discussed, electoral democracy and initiatives for autonomous government worsened intra-Muslim as well as interreligious divisions. The division of the former could have been due to the secular bias of liberal democracy against Muslims, considering not

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15) The MNLF officially declared in its newsletter in 1974 that "even those of other faith[s] who have long established residence in the *Bangsa Moro* homeland and whose good-will and sympathy are with the *Bangsa Moro* Revolution shall, for purposes of national identification, be considered Moros" (Noble 1976, 418). The initial formulation of Bangsa Moro as a different nation from the Filipinos was also diluted into Bangsamoro as an ethnicity within the Filipinos in the course of peace talks for establishing an autonomous region between the MILF and the government. This was because it was more acceptable not only to the state and the majority of Christians, but also to non-secessionist Muslims in the South (see Kawashima 2014).

a few Muslim forces rejected the secular institutions.<sup>16)</sup> As for the interreligious relationship, however, the secular institutions do not always keep on worsening it. First, the interreligious conflicts escalated by electoral democracy have been under control in Lanao del Norte since the mid-1970s, when rival powerful elite families from both sides made an alliance. Abdullah, a son of Mohamad Ali Dimaporo, and Imelda Quibranza, a daughter of a Christian elite, even married in the 1980s and formed a strong and inter-religious political foundation in the area. This could be viewed not merely as a strategic marriage but also as a case in which interfaith cohabitation at the grassroots encouraged the elites to overcome their political rivalry along with religious groups. Second, the initiatives for an autonomous region made significant progress in the 2010s. One factor that disrupted the peace talks was the discrepancy between the state's institutions governing the population based on ideally compartmentalized "we/they" relationships, and everyday cohabitation built on complexly interwoven social relations among the people. In the 2010s, however, the government and MILF tried to mediate the gap by adjusting the former to the latter, which contributed to the establishment of the autonomous region. This argument will be elaborated in the conclusion section.

### *Interfaith Dialogue in Civil Society*

Associations in civil society have also worked toward peacebuilding, not only through advocacy and social development but through interfaith dialogue.<sup>17)</sup> For instance, the Bishop-Ulama Conference, sponsored by the state, organizes public debates among religious leaders, and their outcomes are disseminated through the media. It also invites policy makers, antigovernment forces, and NGOs to improve state policies. Reina Neufeldt (2011) praises the dialogue as a successful case, but Steven Rood (2005) claims that it failed to make an impact on ordinary Muslims, as the *ulamas* involved in the initiative did not represent the diverse Muslim communities. Meanwhile, Jayeel Cornelio and Andrew Salera (2012), who examined the impact of interfaith dialogue among the youth in Manila, assert it is personal communication, friendship, and collective participation in communities rather than theological discussion which can break down stereotypes and

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16) Although the constitution stipulates the separation of church and state, prohibition of official religion, and freedom and equality of religions, the Philippine state is characterized by "loose secularism," in which religious ceremonies are integrated into state events such as presidential inaugurations (Kawashima 2012: 25–28).

17) NGOs have tried to represent the interests of marginalized sectors in peace talks through advocacy, but Steven Rood (2005) claims they have had little effect due to inaccessibility to back-channel negotiations among anti-government forces, the government, and local elites. A rare but noteworthy success for NGOs is that they were able to have representation of indigenous people in the peace talks (Rood 2005, 26–27).

humanize religious others. However, such communication may not be feasible in situations where religious antagonism is prevalent.

In Iligan's civil society, interfaith dialogue, among other activities, is conducted by the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao (IPDM), an academic institution affiliated with Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology.<sup>18)</sup> Deep-rooted prejudice of Christians against Muslims as being generally "uneducated," "undeveloped," "violent," and "dangerous" has made such initiatives pressing tasks. The prejudice also delegitimizes the struggle of Muslims, because the more they object against historical injustice and marginalization, the more the negative stereotypes are strengthened. In a private conversation, a Maranao university lecturer noted that media coverage also reinforces this prejudice when news about Muslims emphasizes their religious affiliation, which is not the case when Christians are involved. It is not rare to hear such malicious jokes as "The only good Muslims are dead Muslims" and "Islam teaches that the only way to reach Heaven is to kill Christians."

To debunk such stereotypes, IPDM organizes workshops among Muslim and Christian students. The methodology includes participants expressing their sentiments through drawing pictures and creating videos on peacebuilding in Mindanao. Many of these videos challenge traditional social norms (e.g., telling stories of romance that transcend religious barriers), but they do not necessarily have a happy ending, which reflects actual social constraints. IPDM notes that educating students on Mindanao history provides them with a foundation for interfaith activities. Part of their mandate, therefore, is to train young educators in order to develop their ability to facilitate discussion about sensitive topics. Otherwise, according to a staff member of IPDM, classrooms can become a space for conflicting and hostile ideas instead of promoting peace.

In an IPDM workshop, Yoshizawa observed how Muslim and Christian students developed trust through listening to each other's voices. Such activities are surely an important process in assuaging mistrust between the two groups. However, although the workshop envisioned an ideal society where "good Christians" and "good Muslims" harmoniously coexisted, it seemed to be divorced from everyday life on the ground where tensions over differences and actions that deviated from norms were common. This vision of coexistence seems to have a similarity with the state's peacebuilding in drawing clear boundaries on the complexly intertwined diverse people. Staff members of IPDM are not unaware of such limitations of idealistic interfaith dialogue in realizing peace. Nevertheless, IPDM keeps on encouraging students to engage in the activity perhaps out of the expectation that they would become future local leaders of peacebuilding who

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18) For detailed information about their activities, see Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao (n.d.).

have the ability to articulate experiences and practices of interfaith coexistence in a universal language.

Another organization in Iligan which promotes interfaith dialogue is Kapamagogopa, Incorporated. The NGO is known for having won the Intercultural Innovation Award from the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the BMW Group in 2013. Organized by Maranaos, Kapamagogopa provides young Muslim university graduates with opportunities to work as social workers in other NGOs. This is to reduce employment discrimination against them. When searching for jobs in large enterprises and government organizations, many Muslim youths are unreasonably denied interviews or given lower priority than Christian applicants. The more capable a Muslim graduate is, the greater the frustration they face when being deprived of opportunities to exercise their skill and knowledge and build careers in positions with high social status. A female co-founder of Kapamagogopa said that when she underwent the National Steel Corporation's final selection process for three new hires, she, the only Muslim among the finalists who all graduated from Mindanao State University-Marawi School, was turned down although her score was the third highest. She believed the rejection was due to religious discrimination.

Kapamagogopa dispatches young Muslims who have completed their training programs to other NGOs as trainees. They receive payment for their living expenses, and if they get good evaluations they can become regular staff. Jobs at NGOs financed by international donors are attractive for them because they can promote peace and development in the region while receiving respect and a good salary. Thus, there are around a hundred applicants for the annual recruitment of 10 trainees. Approximately 80 percent of applicants are women, and the recruitment ratio is comparable. The reason for the large number of female applicants is that many Muslim families hope that their university-educated daughters will get stable jobs, such as schoolteachers, NGO staff members, and professional workers abroad. Also, for Maranao women, employment at NGOs enables them to distance themselves from their clan groups and conservative social norms. This allows them to enjoy freedom of movement and friendship. Even though there are relatives who oppose the idea of women living away from their parents, they can be persuaded if the women work at NGOs.

Kapamagogopa's training programs include learning about the general conduct expected of workers as well as tolerance of different faiths and cultures to broaden their perspectives. Trainees also learn skills necessary for social workers such as community development, project planning and management, and advocacy. Through acquiring such values and skills, trainees are expected to work in Christian-dominant societies as "good Muslims" and contribute to eliminating the prejudice against them. In fact, many trainees have acquired the reputation of being good Muslims, overcoming daily prejudice,

learning Cebuano, the language of Christians in the South, and adapting to unfamiliar environments.

Within the context of these activities, it seems that being a “good Muslim” means acquiring secular knowledge and skills, becoming tolerant of other cultures, engaging in secular deliberation, and working with Christians, while maintaining their faith, all in order to eliminate the prejudices against them. It seems Kapamagogopa believes that young Muslim university graduates have more potential and flexibility to undergo such subjective transformation than uneducated or older Muslims. From the perspective of Habermasian theory, young Muslims are trained to translate religious discourses into a “universally accessible language.” It seems, however, that the emphasis on creating “good Muslims” risks marginalizing those who fail to fit into this mold as “bad Muslims.” Also, it is unfair to demand that Muslims alone shoulder the burden of subjective transformation for the sake of interfaith dialogue with Christians. This asymmetric relationship reflects the extent to which Muslims are marginalized, not the biases of the NGO.

### III The Arts of Everyday Peacebuilding

#### *Mutuality to Cope with Dispossession*

In contrast to the state and civil society’s tendency to call for ideal subjects compartmentalized according to clear boundaries for peacebuilding, ordinary people in Iligan have built everyday cohabitation by blurring the boundaries of differences while simultaneously harboring prejudice and antagonism. The most common practice of interfaith cohabitation is mutual cooperation among the poor for everyday survival.

Nafie, a Maranao Muslim woman, and her family moved to a depressed community where they found a new house for rent. In the neighborhood, they regularly bought vegetables and condiments at a *sarisari* (sundry) store run by an elderly Christian woman named Gusina. Initially, Gusina was alarmed by the Muslim family and did not even talk to Nafie when she came to shop. Gusina was very surprised to learn that Yoshizawa was living with the family, and her daughter asked in a hushed tone, “Do they treat you well? Don’t trust the Maranaos.” However, when Nafie’s family had to leave their rented house due to their landlord’s circumstances, Gusina’s attitude changed. Since the landlord needed to have his leg amputated due to diabetes, he hoped to pawn the house to Nafie or someone else to get the money to cover the expense of the operation. Nafie struggled to raise money while searching for other houses to rent. Perhaps out of sympathy, Gusina began showing her concern and listened to Nafie’s complaints about the situation. When Nafie’s small child became sleepy and started to fret as they stood chatting, Gusina laid



him on a couch in the shop, saying, “Take a nap here, boy.” Nafie’s problem made her closer and more intimate with Gusina.

Nafie also helped Rachel, the Christian woman who lived next door. Rachel had been separated from her husband for several years and was living with her two little girls and her partner, with whom Rachel constantly quarreled over financial troubles. Nafie said, “We Maranaos help our relatives when they are in need. Christians are heartless; they don’t help their relatives even when they have problems.” Though she made this kind of dismissive remark, she was concerned about Rachel’s plight. Rachel’s daughter was to enter elementary school, and she needed money for her school uniform and supplies. Nafie and her neighbors offered to lend Rachel money, using as collateral Rachel’s household goods such as an electric fan. In such an arrangement with friends, one can redeem the item after an extended period of time, unlike when one pawns it at a pawnshop. This practice is possible even when the parties involved have only transient relationships and do not completely trust each other.

As shown by the above examples, when Muslims and Christians encounter each other, their sense of mistrust mixes with the feeling that not all people of different faiths are bad. While they remain cautious and may gossip about each other, their everyday needs can trigger a small exchange that soon develops into friendship and mutual assistance. In Iligan, it is common to find such mutual cooperation among the poor despite differences in faith. Even ordinary Christians living in communities without Muslim neighbors would not be surprised to hear these stories, since they believe that they can also mutually engage with Muslims when necessary. Since the state and the market do not guarantee subsistence and opportunities, mutuality is the most important resource for ordinary people in a small city like Iligan. This suggests that rich people need not develop such mutuality. In fact, a well-to-do Maranao family living in a two-story concrete house in the same depressed community did not interact even with their Maranao neighbors. They just went out and back in their private car.

However, one cannot generalize that impoverished neighbors of different faiths always help one another. There have been many cases when cohabitation of people of different faiths turned into violence.<sup>19)</sup> Why is it possible for people in Iligan to develop relationships of mutual assistance despite their religious differences and the conflicts around them?

First, the city has the characteristic of a community of diaspora and transients with experiences of dispossession. Many Maranaos in Iligan have escaped from problems in

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19) For instance, cohabitation of Rohingya Muslims and Myanmar’s Buddhists collapsed when the latter began persecuting the former.

their hometowns such as poverty, conflict, lack of agricultural land, and restrictive family relationships. They usually find vacant houses in various communities in Iligan without forming segregated Muslim communities, which creates opportunities for everyday interaction with Christians. The Christians, on the other hand, are descendants of settlers who migrated to Mindanao in search of land and a better life. Many Christians born in neighboring areas also come to Iligan for education and work. Considerable number of both Muslims and Christians do not consider Iligan as their final home and continue to move around in search of better opportunities. Particularly in deprived communities, it is common for people to briefly stay at their relatives' rented houses, be evicted from their houses when the rent money runs out, and be forced to evacuate by natural disasters. In such contexts, Muslims and Christians find it relatively easier to have interfaith interactions than in their rural hometowns where relations are often strained over agricultural land and political power.

Second, from the Maranaos' perspective, there is a sense that in Iligan Christians can be trusted as neighbors more than unknown Muslims. Within Maranaos' close clan network, one can trust others because proper behavior is strictly expected and those who break this norm are sanctioned. However, most Maranaos whom they meet in Iligan are outside of their network, thereby inviting distrust. Moreover, together with media discourses highlighting violent events related to Muslims, it seems self-representations of Maranao men, which typically portray them as fearless "tough guys," also increase their sense of distrust of unknown Maranaos. They often boast about the way they engaged in fights, got involved in *rido* (violent feuds between clans) and other crimes, or participated in armed groups. Rich men, usually successful businessmen or high-ranking military or police officers, ride around ostentatiously in rugged vehicles such as American Hummers. Perhaps they represent themselves as such because of their upbringing, surrounded by violence and conflicts as well as foreboding that something unjust that cannot be dealt with by the law can happen any time.<sup>20)</sup>

### *Religious Differences as "Paths to Happiness"*

How do ordinary people address differences and antagonism based on faith, which is much more difficult than developing relationships of everyday mutual assistance? We identify everyday practices that intertwine religious differences to create and maintain multi-faith cohabitation.

We firstly focus on the religious practice of conversion, which erodes the bound-

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20) Maranao gender norms seem to reflect a value system in which there are two ways of navigating an unstable situation: the official (female) and the unofficial (male).

aries between Christians and Muslims and neutralizes the sense of otherness. In the Southern Philippines, since the 1970s there have been an increasing number of Christians who develop doubts about their own Catholicism and convert to Islam.<sup>21)</sup> They call themselves Balik-Islam, which means “returning to Islam.” There are four Balik-Islam organizations in Iligan City. Importantly, converts (and many Christians) recognize the differences between the two religions not as an exclusive dichotomy, but as connected “paths to happiness” down which they walk in pursuit of a better life and death. Missionary activities by various religious groups have helped people in search of “more correct” religious practices to recognize the hidden connectedness of the two faiths.

Missionary seminars conducted by Balik-Islam groups emphasize the shared worldviews of Christianity and Islam (i.e., one God, Heaven, and Hell) while conveying the superiority of Islam with referencing Christ and the Bible. For example, a Balik-Islam group explained that it was inconsistent for monotheistic Christianity to advocate the theory of the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore Islam, in which one prayed only to Allah, was more correct. When one of the attendees questioned the explanation and said that a Catholic priest had told them the teaching of the Trinity was correct, a Muslim convert who had been a Christian pastor answered that the Bible did not contain the teachings of the Trinity. The Balik-Islam also explained that the practices of Muslims were closer than those of Christians to the practices of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Examples of such practices were Christ’s 40-day fast and Mary’s wearing of a veil. Christians who have more knowledge of the Bible’s teachings are more likely to be interested in Islam and therefore likely to convert.

The missionary activities of other religious groups also emphasize connectedness among different faiths to attract new followers by lowering the psychological barriers to conversion. In a seminar of a Catholic youth group, a lecturer explained that indigenous people’s animism was not different from that of Catholics: “They pray to God through worshipping natural beings such as mountains and stones which have the spirit of God.” Various Protestant groups insist that they are more faithful to the Bible than Catholics who share a common worldview as Christians. Although each group maintains the supremacy of its own faith, such discourses connecting religions have been so aggressively produced by missionary activities as to erode the religious boundaries. Therefore, it is not surprising that Christians who previously considered Muslims as “absolute others” came to realize that Islam was a possible option for conversion.

More specifically, competition among the various Protestant groups unintentionally

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21) Luis Lacar (2001) explains that the intensification of civil war and deterioration of public order in the 1970s gave an incentive to Christians in Muslim-majority areas to convert to Islam for the sake of their livelihoods and security. However, he does not explore spiritual reasons for conversion.

led Catholics who doubted their church's teachings to convert to Islam.<sup>22)</sup> A man named Rasel was originally a faithful Catholic but converted to Jehovah's Witnesses, whose teachings he thought were more faithful to the Bible. However, when he became seriously ill due to a heavy drinking habit, he received prayers from a Born Again Christian group and recovered. Then, he joined the group and contributed to the congregation's worship services, using his singing talent. Subsequently, while deeply studying the Bible, he moved toward Judaism and then eventually discovered Islam. Rasel is not an unusual case in Iligan. Yoshizawa has met more than a few former Catholics who finally settled for Islam after successively converting to other religions. The more they study the Bible, the more they feel unconvinced worshipping statues of Christ and Mary. They also complain about the authoritative Catholic Church and its priests. Their deep wish is to interpret the teachings of the Bible in an equal position with religious leaders and to conduct correct religious practices accordingly. Those who have such sentiments are attracted to Muslim groups' assertion of being the true adherents of the Bible and the most effective in achieving equality before God.

In addition to those who question Catholic teachings, there are also people who convert to Islam without much concern for religious doctrine and practice. One day, some elderly people gathered at the Balik-Islam missionary seminar. While they were being taught the obligations of Muslims, such as fasting and *zakat* (giving to charity), one of them impatiently grumbled, "That's all well and good, but we are too old now; all we can do is pray. I know that if I become a Muslim I can go to Heaven, so I want to hurry up and convert." Another elderly woman wanted to convert after listening to her eldest son, who had converted to Islam while working in the Middle East. After *shahada* (the confession of faith), she said with a radiant face, "I cannot fast because of my age, but now I am finally free, right?" She seemed to be convinced that she had finally reached the path to happiness both in life and in the afterlife.

Reaching the path to happiness is a common wish regardless of people's religions and concerns about doctrines. Nevertheless, nobody knows whether they are on the right path that leads to happiness or not. This persistent uncertainty makes people keep on being curious about different teachings, which weakens the otherness of different faiths. Even Balik-Islam who seem to have made a final choice retain an interest in Christianity and ardently ask persons with a deep knowledge of Christianity about "true teachings." If convinced, they even stop practicing Islam and go back to Christianity. They are called "Balik-Christian."

It is natural for people in Iligan to develop the idea that different faiths are linked

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22) According to Lacar (2001), among the 322 Balik-Islam informants, 67 percent of them converted from Catholicism to various Christian groups before deciding on Islam.

paths for happiness because religious differences do not fall into the false secular-religious dichotomy. As Asad and Mahmood assert, in Christian-dominated societies that advocate “secularism” secretly anchored in the Christian culture, Muslims’ voices are not heard. In Iligan, however, most Christians do not support secularism, and the pursuit of happiness through religion is a common concern among the people. This guarantees a space for open discussion where people ask about others’ faiths without hesitation and talk about various religious issues in their workplaces and on street corners. Although there are often prejudices and misunderstandings in these everyday conversations, and some people just deny others with a belief that their own faith is absolutely right, the fact remains that any normative discourses on religion are not hegemonic. Such contested spaces create enough room for ordinary people to deliberate freely over what would be the “true religion” for happiness. Because religion is a common interest, the Muslim minority can have channels for dialogues with Christians without being silenced by the pressure of secularism.

In small cities like Iligan, where the state and market do not guarantee happiness—failing to provide people with stable life or career opportunities—religions can become bonds that create social ties. Amid this precariousness, people endeavor to seek “good lives and afterlives” through cultivating mutuality and sharing their wish for happiness even with people of different faiths.

However, people do not necessarily respect different groups equally. For instance, even Balik-Islam who have transcended religious boundaries construct a hierarchy among groups. They consider Muslims to be “brothers and sisters who know the religion of truth” while pitying Christians as “those who do not yet know the truth.” Their attitudes toward Maranaos, usually born Muslims, are complex. While Balik-Islam admire devout Maranaos with their in-depth knowledge of Islam and the Arabic language as “good Muslims,” they criticize “Muslims only by name” who lack a sincere study and practice of the Islamic teachings. Armed conflicts have also exacerbated Balik-Islam’s othering of Maranaos. In a meeting held after the armed encounter between the MNLF and the army in Zamboanga in September 2013, a woman said that her new landlord had not allowed her to move in due to his mistrust of Muslims. This propelled other participants to share their stories of discrimination by Christians. Interestingly, they blamed Maranaos more than Christians, exchanging such opinions as “We are affected by Maranaos who ruin the reputation of our religion by perpetuating violence and crimes” and “I can’t stand being mistaken for a Maranao just because I wear the hijab.” They further criticized some Maranao customs as un-Islamic, saying, “Maranaos are totally different from us because they have a tradition like *rido* which is against Islam, a religion of peace.”

In this way, Balik-Islam construct a hierarchy based on proximity to “true religion,”

piety, and ethnicity. Yet this hierarchy by no means represents a fixed “friend/enemy” antagonism over religious differences. It is easily challenged by persistent uncertainty and curiosity regarding “true religion.”

*“Implementing Non-decision” in Multi-religious Families*

We next examine a practice that allows different religions to coexist in a family. Multi-religious families are created either by conversion or by interfaith marriage. Both practices are acts of transcending religious boundaries, but they in turn create new boundaries within the family. Not only conversion to Islam, but also love and marriage between people of different faiths are not unusual in Iligan City. However, most interfaith marriages are between Christian women and Muslim men. Muslim men can marry Christian and Jewish women who are considered “people of the Book.” Among the 19 interfaith married couples that were interviewed, 9 women converted to Islam while the other 10 remained Christians.<sup>23)</sup> Meanwhile, based on Islamic law, Muslim women can marry only Muslim men. In theory, Christian men can marry Muslim women if they convert to Islam, but in Iligan, family relationships and the norms of the Maranaos rarely permit it.

While many multi-religious families maintain multiple faiths, special occasions such as funerals and decisions on the children’s religion bring forth the tough question of which religious practice to follow. Although consensus is almost impossible, couples must somehow conduct family events. In an act of desperation, family members on both sides often discreetly try to influence the way events are carried out, or attempt to avoid making a definitive decision as far as possible. We like to conceptualize such a practice as “implementing non-decision,” which helps families manage their dilemma and retain coexistence of the two faiths. The following cases illustrate this concept.

Mariam is a Balik-Islam woman whose mother also converted with her encouragement. Mariam’s Christian brothers were angry that she had “stolen” their mother from them. When Mariam’s mother died, Mariam came into conflict with her brothers over which religion should be followed at the funeral. In Islam, burial must be done no later than a day after death; but in Christianity, burial can be held even a week after the funeral service. Without providing an opportunity for deliberation, Mariam’s brothers held a Christian funeral. At the wake, while the white Christian coffin was decorated with flowers and photographs, there were several ornaments with passages from the Qur’an on the walls of the room. While her brothers invited a priest to perform Mass on Sunday, Mariam asked her Balik-Islam group to hold an Islamic missionary seminar on another day. The death of a loved one heightens people’s wish to know the “true religion.” In

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23) Depending on the country and region, women may be required to convert.

such a spiritual atmosphere, these two religions were competing and coexisting.

On the way to the Christian cemetery, Mariam rode a different jeepney, murmuring, "Because my brothers are somewhat different . . ." After a while, she said she was hurting and held her hands tightly to her chest. When she arrived at the cemetery, Mariam stayed at the end of the line, and later she persuaded her brothers to allow a leader of the Balik-Islam group, who was a former pastor, to deliver a sermon. He preached, "Although there are conflicts between religions, Muslims and Christians are brothers under the same God, so we can live together." After the burial, Mariam repeatedly reminded the workers who were plastering the grave with concrete not to attach a symbol of the cross.

As in Mariam's case, in situations where compromise or consensus through deliberation is difficult to achieve due to differences in religious doctrines, multi-religious families somehow negotiate sensitively and make nuanced adjustments acceptable to both parties because they must continue living as a family.

Choosing a religion for the children is also a difficult and sensitive issue for inter-religious couples. There is no problem with husbands and wives retaining their original faiths and engaging in different religions while respecting each other. This is more easily understood and accepted by the people around them. Conflict arises, however, when grandparents and other relatives intervene in the decision of whether their children should be Muslim or Christian. The fact that both religions stipulate that it is the parents' responsibility to foster devout faith in their children strengthens the pressure from people around them.

Ali was a Catholic Christian when he got married, but he converted to Islam after his children were born while his wife remained a Christian. Their three children who were in elementary school were baptized as Christians, according to their grandparents' wishes. They attend Islamic prayers on Fridays and Mass on Sundays. Since Ali himself was raised a Christian and converted after becoming an adult and studying Islam, he wants to instill in his children the doctrines of both religions and allow them to choose based on their free will. He firmly believes that "when the children grow up and are able to understand, they will naturally come to Islam." This is the practice of delaying the decision on the children's faith and maintaining the ambiguity of their religious affiliation. It is stressful for Ali to deal with criticism from other Muslims, who often tell him things like "Your children should be Muslims. It is unbelievable that you let your wife and children go to church." Nevertheless, Ali states with conviction, "Faith is a relationship between you and God; it is not the place of other people to speak on this."

It is natural for children of multi-religious couples to be confused or indecisive about their own faith. Sahara is one of these children. When asked whether she was a Muslim or a Christian, Sahara responded that she did not know. Her Muslim father migrated to

Manila for work and met her Christian mother there. However, since her father left her mother and went back to Iligan with Sahara and her siblings, she has lived apart from her mother for almost 15 years. This has led Sahara to being ambivalent toward both faiths. Her father does not show much religiosity. Relatives on her father's side, whom Sahara often spends time with, always admonish her to wear the hijab and perform *salah* (daily prayer), but no one really taught her the ways of living as a Muslim, nor did they listen to her troubles. When she is with her mother's family in Manila, she feels that she is different from her Christian relatives. For example, she is the only one who does not eat pork. She speaks about her faith in this way:

I think there is no difference between Muslims and Christians apart from their ways of praying. Why did God divide the people into two? Of Heaven and Hell, there is one of each. There is one God. I pray when I want to pray every day. I reflect on my actions with gratitude to God and ask for better things to come. I wonder if this isn't enough.

Sahara's interpretation of faith comes from the painful experience of her family being torn apart by religious differences. In addition to the tension between her father and mother, her elder sister also has discord with her father. She had a Christian boyfriend who promised to marry her, but her Muslim father furiously forced her to end the relationship. Perhaps because of this painful experience, Sahara's sister left Iligan for Manila to live with their mother. Since then, her sister and father have stopped communicating with each other. Their religious differences have broken up the family, but Sahara still wishes for good family relationships. Perhaps because of this wish, she wants to make her religious affiliation as ambiguous as possible.

"Half" children in between different religions constantly face pressure from relatives on both sides and others to be more decisive about their religion. Sahara is often admonished by relatives on her father's side for wearing a T-shirt and shorts, but she maintains, "I do not want to change my clothes just because I am told to do so by others. I will wear the hijab when I am fully convinced to do so."

However, such efforts of "half" children to retain two faiths can meet with outright denial of even their identity. One day, a woman working at a fast food shop was asked about her religion by a Balik-Islam customer and she answered, "I am a half-Muslim blessed by both Christianity and Islam." She introduced herself as a "half-Muslim," not as a "half-Christian," perhaps to show an affinity to the customer. However, he rebuked her, saying, "It is impossible to be half a religion." For members of multi-religious families, keeping on "implementing non-decision" in the face of external pressures is a practice that they go through with agony in order to maintain good family relationships and the coexistence of multiple faiths.



*Polygamy and “Crossing Divides”*

Polygamy, however, which is one of the most sensitive issues for multi-religious families, does not allow space for “implementing non-decision” and may sometimes break down family relationships. Polygamy is one of the main negative preconceptions that Christians have of Muslims, almost equivalent to terrorism and armed conflict. For Christian families, this is also the main reason why it is unacceptable for their daughters to marry Muslim men.

According to the 1977 Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines, Muslim men can have four wives. In cases of inter-religious marriage, the Civil Code of the Philippines allows Muslim men to have only one wife. However, based on the Code of Muslim Personal Laws, they can still have other wives by registering these marriages in the sharia court. Moreover, registration is not necessary as long as the wedding ceremony is conducted in keeping with Islamic doctrines. Yet from the Islamic perspective, obtaining the first wife’s consent is imperative, and all wives and children must be treated equally in terms of support such as meals, clothes, education, time, and affection.

In Maranao society, the practical side of polygamy is often cited to rationalize the practice. If one has many wives, one can expand clan networks and strengthen mutual aid. Also, for Muslims in general, polygamy fulfills the role of economically supporting widows and orphans. Furthermore, if a man falls in love with another woman after marriage, it is possible for him to formally marry her without committing adultery. Polygamy also has religious value. If a man marries and cares for a widow as a second wife, and his first wife tolerates this, they can be rewarded and be blessed religiously.

Nevertheless, not all Maranaos support polygamy. For a poor man it is impractical to have more than one wife and more children to support. Some wealthy Maranaos flaunt many wives, but others frown at such a macho attitude, saying it is written in the Qur’an that it is preferable for a man to have a single wife. Most Maranao women, especially those who have direct experience with polygamy, also oppose the practice. Fatima has not forgiven her husband for taking a second wife and even tried to separate them. Her husband goes to the second wife’s house every Monday but returns home by 3 p.m. because of his fear of Fatima. Ishmael, a Maranao man, married another woman but has not yet notified the sharia court of his second marriage, even though he is a lawyer, for fear of being discovered by his first wife.

Polygamy usually causes conflict over differences in values regarding how a couple and family should be. Even for Christian women who have transcended the religious barrier by marrying a Muslim man and worked out other differences in everyday religious practices such as eating habits and worship, polygamy can easily lead to othering of spouses as someone with whom cohabitation is impossible. Linda married a Maranao

man who was her classmate in university, but she retained her Christian faith. Although she sometimes found it difficult to get along with her husband's relatives, her marriage was good. However, after her husband took a second wife without her consent, he became overtly cold to her and their children. Linda, who started divorce proceedings, stated, "It is terrible for him to marry another woman without even consulting me. His relatives say I should accept it, but it is unbearable." Despite her anger, Linda believed it was neither Islam nor her husband's personal character but the male-dominated Maranao culture which caused the marriage breakdown. The reason she did not blame Islam was perhaps due to dignity and respect for herself, since she had taken the decision to marry a Muslim.

Jinjin was devastated when she learned that her husband had married a woman about 20 years his junior. Her husband had talked about second marriage to his parents and relatives but not consulted Jinjin at all. However, because her brother tried to convince Jinjin to remain in her marriage, she started to learn the teachings of Islam in an attempt to somehow understand her husband's behavior. After a few months she converted to Islam, and now she wears the hijab. She said her husband's polygamy was a painful experience, but it brought positive changes. Both of them became devout Muslims, she explained. She now regularly attends an Islamic study group and focuses on religious activities together with her husband, while her husband has stopped drinking alcohol and staying out late at night. Rather than rejecting Islam, Jinjin embraced it, perhaps because she could not process her suffering in the context of Christian values, where polygamy simply represents the moral sin of a husband having another woman. In contrast, polygamy in Islam is seen as institutionally and morally correct. Thus, by converting to Islam and internalizing its values, Jinjin was able to see her pain with a new meaning: If she endured it as a "good Muslim wife," she would be given rewards and would gain respect and sympathy among Muslims.

As shown by these cases, polygamy forces a Christian wife to either reject her husband or internalize the values of Islam in order to accept him despite his seemingly unreasonable actions. Either way, polygamy can foreground religious differences and disrupt the coexistence of different faiths within a family. However, as Linda attributed the cause of her divorce not to Islam but to the male-dominated Maranao culture, even discourses constructing unacceptable "others" over polygamy are based not only on religion but also on gender and ethnicity.

Balik-Islam women, as devout believers, try to understand polygamy, but deep down they find it hard to accept. One day, to celebrate the construction of a new mosque, Mariam and other Balik-Islam women visited the house of a Maranao man who sponsored it. The man said he had three wives. His first wife was his age, and his second wife, who

looked a little younger, was serving food to the visitors. When the man left the Balik-Islam women to attend to other guests, they all voiced their opinions. One told Mariam, “This would be impossible for me; I’d be jealous. I would never allow it. How about you?” Mariam answered, “A true Muslim wife must help her husband. And if he marries a widow or a poor woman, his action has the value of charity, right?” Despite the words, she herself was unconvinced. She nervously added: “My husband is young, so he may take another woman and abandon me. If that happens, I will let the Islamic experts judge his actions.” The Balik-Islam women’s hope was the knowledge that Islam does not always allow polygamy.

These stories illustrate how people in Iligan have varying ideas and attitudes toward polygamy, depending on their class, religion, gender, ethnicity, and the degree to which it affects them. In other words, when people criticize or reject men engaging in polygamy, they focus on multiple social divisions as a reason of othering. This is a practice we call “crossing divides” through which people relativize the religious dichotomy and prevent it from becoming a single focal point that could lead to a critical rupture of cohabitation. It could also be argued that Iligan’s everyday cohabitation is created and maintained because people complexly cross multiple divides by frequently exchanging discourses over diverse others, including prejudiced and even hostile views.

## Conclusion

Ordinary Muslims and Christians in Iligan have built cohabitation into their everyday life despite antagonism rooted in religious differences and conflicts surrounding them. They have accepted people of different faiths as neighbors who help each other and as companions who seek to walk the “paths to happiness.” Even when there are conflicts caused by multiple faiths, people somehow manage to avoid relationship breakdowns by “implementing non-decision” and “crossing divides.”

Those who build interfaith everyday peace are by no means strong individuals who can endure differences indefinitely. Rather, they are people with vulnerabilities and weaknesses both in life and in faith. They generally embrace the sense that poverty and strife have deprived them of the wealth that is rightfully theirs. Also, in their religious life, Muslims are often forced to compromise their faith due to necessity; they have to contend with the system of education, employment, and politics of the dominant Christian society, which hampers them from attaining an ideal Islamic life. For Christians, the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church prevents ordinary followers’ desire to actively participate in the spiritual pursuit of truth.

Thus, each of them carries a unique suffering of dispossession, a feeling that external and unreasonable forces as well as internal weaknesses have disrupted an attainment of their desirable self and a good life.<sup>24)</sup> Importantly, this general sense of imperfection and aspiration for happiness leads to an openness and interaction with others, even those of different faiths. Hence, diverse people not only cultivate mutuality but also actively express, exchange, and contest different values in the hope of obtaining information on the “religion of truth” or avoiding ruptures of intimate relationships. It is upon these ordinary interactions among people with such vulnerabilities that everyday peace is built.

As discussed in the introduction, many studies note unifying local culture has enabled religious coexistence in Southeast Asia. However, the condition seems to have been eroded in many societies by urbanization, globalization, and neoliberalism that have increased diversity, fluidity, and division. Despite the general trend, Mac Ginty maintains fluidity, heterogeneity, and ambiguity can be foundations of everyday peace, but his focus is limited interactions among social groups with clear boundaries and not extended to individuals. In contrast to them, we claim that ordinary people have the agency to build cohabitation with religious others, even without shared local culture and even with prejudice and antagonism, based on their dispossession, vulnerability, and fluidity in life and faith. Given that our finding is applicable to other parts of the world, it is more important to analyze the disabling factors, rather than enabling factors, of everyday peacebuilding. Presumably cohabitation is likely to be disrupted when people’s experiences of dispossession come to be recognized as an outcome of “exploitation by different neighbors.” Thus, it is necessary to explore what conditions would foment such antagonism.

Another future task is further clarifying the interrelationship between peacebuilding by the state and everyday people. We argue that official peacebuilding by the state can destabilize everyday cohabitation due to its tendency to impose an institutionally and ideally compartmentalized “we/they” relationship on the complexities of social relations at the grassroots. When formal institutions demand that the intertwined population determine clear boundaries among themselves, everyday peace can be disrupted. Nonetheless, this danger is by no means inevitable. Rather, we hypothesize that peacebuilding by states can be more promising when state institutions are adapted to the reality of everyday cohabitation built by diverse people in mixed communities.

In fact, the setback by the anti-MOA-AD movement in 2008 provided an opportunity to mediate the discrepancies between the two. Since then, the government and MILF

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24) We like to expand the idea of dispossession (Butler 2011) as exile not only from original places and groups but also from original desirable states of self.

have addressed issues of mixed communities such as Christians' apprehension that they will become the marginalized minority in the autonomous region. They adopted a participatory governance system that facilitates representation not only of the "Bangsamoro people" but also of "settler communities" and of "non-Moro indigenous peoples" in the autonomous region.<sup>25)</sup> They also narrowed areas of plebiscite for the autonomous region and disseminated information that non-Muslims' rights were guaranteed by the autonomous government. These initiatives contributed to the progress of the peace process as seen in the case of Cotabato City, one of the biggest mixed communities, where people's attitude changed from rejecting the autonomous region to approving it in the 2019 plebiscite.

This development indicates that consideration for non-Muslims has not only weakened their opposition against the autonomous region but has also promoted further expansion of Muslims' rights in terms of economic benefits and cultural recognition. In other words, initiatives to protect non-Muslim minorities' rights within the autonomous region promoted the peace process. Like a nesting, this fact affirms Will Kymlicka's argument that liberal democracy can become compatible with collective rights of minorities (in this case, Muslims) when it guarantees minorities of "external protections" from the state and majority while encouraging minority groups to reduce "internal restrictions" (in this case, on non-Muslims) within their groups and territories (Kymlicka 2002, 340–341).

Nevertheless, there are still several challenges for the peace process. First, there is the dilemma that the more inclusive the peace process becomes, the more difficult it will be to reach a consensus. The second challenge is how to integrate Islamic groups that reject the autonomous region and resort to armed struggle. Third, even in the current framework of the autonomous region, there remains the coexistence model based on an institutionally and ideally categorized population, which is in conflict with everyday cohabitation. It will therefore be critical for the autonomous government to manage this conflict. Having flexibility in the implementation of institutions and policies will be important. NGOs will have an important role in mediating the discrepancy. Eventual stabilization and peace in the region depends on whether the formal peacebuilding pro-

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25) The Bangsamoro Organic Law of 2018 defines Bangsamoro people as follows:

(t)hose who, at the advent of the Spanish colonization, were considered natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago and its adjacent islands, whether of mixed or of full blood, shall have the right to identify themselves, their spouses and descendants, as Bangsamoro people.

Although the definition does not refer to religion, "Bangsamoro people" practically signifies indigenous Muslims such as Maranaos because non-Muslim indigenous people have not agreed to be included in the collective identity. For historical development of the concept, see note 15. In the same manner, "settler communities" largely refer to Christian inhabitants.

cess can address these challenges and realize social reforms that equitably benefit these intricately intertwined people.

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