



Exploring relations between Muslim women traders and  
Non-Muslim clients in Bukidnon: *Discerning Strategies for Peace Harmony*

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ABSTRACT

While deliberately formulated initiatives on achieving peace in Mindanao are recognized, there may also be latent, unintentional mechanisms that could be derived from mundane, casual social relations. Thus, this study explored the experiences of Mëranao women traders in relating with their non-Muslim clients in two selected non-Muslim cities in Bukidnon. As an exploratory study, it employed In-depth Interviews among selected Mëranao women traders. Their diaspora in these communities are brought about by economic, socio-political, and climatic factors. They both have negative and positive experiences in relating to their non-Muslim clients. They may have negative responses to the unpleasant treatment by some non-Muslims, but generally, their responses demonstrate both a potential for a multicultural ethnic relation and a sense of agency despite their subordinated position as women, small-scale traders, and ethnic minority. There is also a need for their host communities to raise their level of cultural sensitivity to eliminate prejudices towards Muslims. The study recommends for the LGUs concerned to conduct socio-cultural activities bringing Muslims and non-Muslims together, and ask the big companies to consider advertisement that promote cultural understanding, and to sponsor IECs fostering multi-culturalism. Likewise, curricular program planners are encouraged to embed cultural sensitivity in the curriculum.

*Keywords:* inter-ethnic relations, Muslim-Christian relations, trading, women

INTRODUCTION

Achieving peace has been a long-time concern in Mindanao. While there are various efforts to attain it, armed conflict still persists at least in some localities of this second-largest island of the country. Some sectors are hopeful that the Bangsa Moro Law (BBL), which has just been enacted, could be a mechanism for addressing this Mindanao conflict. Others, however, have a critical view on it.

There is a contention that poverty is one of the major causes of such conflict. This could be supported by the fact that many provinces in this island are at the bottom poor cluster based on the 2012 Official Provincial Poverty Statistics Report by the National Statistics Coordination Board (2013). Ironically, vast natural resources, e.g., agricultural lands, mineral, aquatic, are found in this part of the country. Buendia (2015:2) may be right when he contended that the conflict is caused by a "combination of the state's centralism that effectively restricts Muslim self-governance, the long-drawn socio-economic deprivation of Mindanao, especially the Muslim areas, and the historical biases and prejudices between Muslims and Christians that have not been completely expunged."

While deliberately formulated initiatives on promoting peace are to be recognized, there may also be latent, unintentional mechanisms that could be derived from mundane, casual social relations. Such argument, however, needs to be further explored. Thus, this research attempts to examine possible connection between the trading activity of Muslim women and promoting relatively peaceful inter-ethnic relations.

It focuses on women because for one, many of the Muslim entrepreneurs/traders in many cities in the

Philippines are observed to be women. This may be a contrast to the experiences in other Muslim countries where women are less visible in the economic space (Zakaria, 2001; Roomi and Parrott, 2008). There are however, few countries where women play significant economic roles, just like India. In a study conducted considering 50 samples, the study of Laxmidevi, et.al (2018) tried to understand the social status of Muslim women who are street vendors. The study revealed that though Indian Muslim women do not enjoy equal status with men because of religion and socio-cultural practices, they are good in finances and economy. Though most of them are illiterates, they know how to run business like vending, and they know how to calculate and gain profit. Likewise, Azmi (2017) emphasized that Islam does not restrict Muslim women to engage in business. Infact, women's participation in economic enterprise can be traced back during Prophet's (PBUH) time where his wife SayiditinaKhadijah was a successful businesswoman.

Thus, it could explore the changing and potential role of women in a country's economic development. More so, many studies presented the critical role of women in promoting peace. It may be stereotypical to argue that women are often less involved in armed conflict, though this could also be due to assigning 'military' roles mostly to men. However, empirical data support to this contention that women are actively involved in peace negotiations (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Hunt & Posa, 2001; Karam, 2000). Hence, when such potential of women be maximized, they could be assets for both an economically progressive and peaceful community. Thus this research was aimed

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at assessing the possible relation between Muslim women’s activity and relatively peaceful ethnic relations. Generally, it tried to explore the relations of Muslim women entrepreneurs and their non-Muslim clients. Specifically, the research wanted to identify “PUSH”-“PULL” factors relating to Muslim women’s migration to non-Muslim communities; describe their positive and negative experiences in relating with non-Muslim clients; and explore on their corresponding responses to such experiences with their non-Muslim clients.

### METHODOLOGY

Basically, this is a descriptive and exploratory study. It was conducted in two cities in Bukidnon namely, Malaybalay and Valencia. These cities in the region were purposely selected because of relatively higher number of Měranao women traders. It employed a qualitative method of data collection, particularly, In-depth interviews, to ensure more depth of information being generated. Thus, 26 Muslim women entrepreneurs were purposely selected.

The generated data were then transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis. Based on the respondents’ narratives, themes, and patterns were established.

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents is presented in table 1 below.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before exploring the relations of the Měranao women traders with their non-Muslim clients, it is important to first identify the factors or reasons for their migration in the selected non-Muslim communities. The “PUSH-PULL” theory is known for explaining migration. These “push” and “pull” factors are actually common to migrants in their decision to migrate as mentioned by an early theorist in Demography, Donald J. Bogue (1969 cited in Poston & Bouvier, 2010). “Push” factors refer to unfavorable conditions in the place of origin while “Pull” factors are the favorable conditions that encourage migrants to come to their place of destination. A combination of these factors

Table 1. Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents (n=26)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Level of Education		
College level-graduate	4	15.4
High school level-graduate	17	65.4
Elementary level- graduate	5	19.2
Marital Status		
Married	22	84.5
Single	2	7.7
Widow	2	7.7
Age		
15-19	3	11.5
20-29	7	26.9
30-39	6	23.1
40-49	8	30.8
50-59	2	7.7
Number of Children		
0-2	9	34.6
3-5	7	26.9
6-9+	10	38.5
Number of years in the community		
Below 10	5	19.2
10-20	8	30.8
Above 20	13	50.0
Number of years as vendor/ss trader		
Below 10	13	50.0
10-20	7	26.9
Above 20	6	23.1
Net daily income		
100 & below	11	42.3
101-300	8	30.8
400 & above	7	26.9

prompt migrants to transfer their place of residence.

### “PUSH”-“PULL” Factors of migration

The data in Table 2 show the reasons why the Měranao women respondents and their relatives have migrated from Marawi, their place of origin, and decided to reside presently in non-Muslim communities. While economic factors like unemployment, poverty, etc. are the primary consideration in most migration decisions (Poston and Bouvier, 2010), the above data demonstrate some socio-political and environmental/climatic condition. Aside from economic factors, the data show the problem of peace and order in Marawi. It could be noted that the data were generated before the siege in the area. However, the respondents revealed that conflict is present in their place of origin brought about by rebellion and the cultural practice of “rido.” Some of the respondents’ narratives relate to this situation, such as the following:

“...naa lagi nagahitabo nga mga gulo2...basta mga Muslim grabe na...” (there is conflict happening there...if the Muslims, it is terrible..)

“...kay gubot kaayu didto...kanang mga rebelde bitaw...” (...because there is really trouble/conflict there... due to the rebels...)

“...kana bitaw dili magkasinabtanay mag family...” (...when families do not understand each other...)

“o magpinatyanay...parti sa mga yuta...mga anak... pareha kanang imung anak awayon niya ang imung silingan nga anak unya molaban bitaw iyang ginikanan ana...usahay mga mananap... naay mawala nga mananap ikuan sa imuha unya walay ebidensya nga ikaw nagkuha ana...” (yes they kill each other...due to land...the children... just like if your child and that of your neighbor will quarrel, the parents will interfere...sometimes about animals, when they are lost/stolen...they will accuse you even if there is no evidence...)

Aside from rido, the armed struggle between the government and the secession rebel groups had been existing in Marawi (and other places like Lanao del Norte). The problem of peace and order in Mindanao is not something new, it has been there for scores, and has led to an increasing trend of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Unfortunately, peace negotiations and peace-talks stumble, and violence has remained uncured (IDMC

2008). The aforementioned factors compelled the Muslim women to seek refuge in neighboring provinces which they perceive to be relatively peaceful like Bukidnon. Infact, there is also a growing Muslim communities in Luzon. Watanabe (2018), stressed that migration peaked in 1970s and has continued to increase as years go by. Most of them are in Quiapo, Manila. The presence of mosques is a sign of the existence of Muslim communities.

Likewise, the above data demonstrate the Měranao’s ‘clannish’ practice. Some of them came to their communities of destination because of the presence of their relatives (who came first) although ironically, they also left some of their relatives in Marawi. However, they revealed that they regularly visit the latter if their resources permit. The relatively cool climate in Bukidnon likewise enticed them to stay in the province.

### Měranao women traders’ experiences with non-Muslim clients

After identifying the factors that affect the respondents’ decisions to migrate to non-Muslim communities, their experiences (as women traders) in their present place of residence which is predominantly non-Muslims are worth noting. Their narratives revealing their experiences may be analyzed within the perspective of ethnic pluralism or multiculturalism.

Based on the respondents’ narratives, two major themes emerged: their positive or pleasant experiences, and their negative or unpleasant experiences, with their non-Muslim clients.

### Positive or pleasant experiences

The Měranao women respondents shared their positive experiences with their non-Muslim clients. Based on their narratives, they considered some of their non-Muslim clients as loyal, friendly, and understanding. One of the respondents shared that “kung wala among stock ila jud nang hulatan...mangutana sila, ngano diay Gang layo? Doul ra man...sige maghulat na lang ko kay pang buena mano man kaha...” (If we don’t have stock, they would really wait...they would ask, why is it far Dear? It is just near...ok I will just wait because as you said, it is for Buena Mano (first buy)...”).

A worth noting relation established by the Měranao women vendors with their non-Muslim clients is “suki.” A “suki” may have its origin from the Chinese word

Table Summary of factors relating to migration

<b>“PUSH” Factors</b>
Limited economic opportunities
Presence of conflict
<b>“PULL” Factors</b>
Available means of livelihood
Relatively peaceful
Presence of relatives
Good climate

and directly translated as a "special customer." It may be "applied to any person or role relationship in the trade network..." (Davis,1973). While a *suki* is simply a common term associated with the clients by the M'ranao traders and vice versa, when it is treated as a social relation, it has a deeper meaning. This could be illustrated by the following narratives of the respondents.

A respondent shared her experience with her "suki" and related that, "...*ang tinuod nako nga suki kay bisan wala ko sakong baligya hulatan ko nila...*" (My real "suki" would wait for me when I am not yet at my stall...). Another respondent also revealed that, "...*Ang among suki kay magbalikbalik kay tungod na amigo/amiga na namo sila...*" (Our suki keeps on coming back because we have become friends already).

These narratives demonstrate friendly relations between the M'ranao women vendors and their non-Muslim clients. These relations may show that ethnic pluralism could be evident in Mindanao. Thus, behind the 'sensationalized' conflicting relations between the Muslims and non-Muslims, there are relations that show accommodation, acceptance, and respect by both groups. The next section, however, also shows negative or unpleasant experiences of the respondents.

### Negative or unpleasant experiences

While the M'ranao women vendors have positive experiences with their non-Muslim clients, they also have negative encounters with the latter. In fact, many of their responses demonstrate a relatively negative impression for non-Muslim clients.

First, the respondents described some of their non-Muslim clients as overly meticulous and difficult to understand. According to one of the respondents, "...*Dili masabtan...pangutan on nimo, dili mutubag biyaan ra kag kalit...*" (Cannot be understood...if you ask them, they won't answer, or they would just leave you...). Another respondent said, "...*naa pajuy customer ba nga sigeg pa testing unya dili diay mupalit...*" (there are customers who just keep on "testing" your product, but they do not buy...). Other respondents also said "...*usahay kanang mag bungkag lang silag baligya unya pag ihatag nimu sa iyaha muingon nga ay! Kanang lahi nga color, unya muingon lahi napud pagkuhuman pagkuan sa iyang ginapangita muingon dayun siya nga, ahh balik lang ko...*"(sometimes, they only disarrange your products then if you offer one, they would say another color, then another color again, and then eventually, they would say, I will just come back...).

Second, the respondents revealed that their clients seem to be insensitive in disorganizing/dismantling the arrangement of their products without thinking of their effort in arranging them. They related that:

"...*naa poy uban nga igo ra mangukay...unya ilang daot daoton...dili mupalit...*" (There are some who are just fond of disorganizing/ dismantling (their products)...and yet they do not buy...)

"...*Mamungkag ug baligya unya dili gihapon*

*mupalit...*" (...they disorganize/dismantle our product, and yet they do not buy...)

"...*kanang mangukay ba unya dili diay magpalit ingon rag balikan na lang namu unya dili diay mubalik...*" (...those that disarrange your products, but they do not buy, they will say they will come back, but they do not actually come back...")

Third, the respondents considered some of their clients as fond of haggling. One respondent related that, "...*Ai kanang kusog kaayo muhangyo...kanang capital hangyoun pa...pila ra among ginansya...*" (...one who is so fond of haggling...even the capital they haggle... we only have very low profit...). Another respondent also commented, "...*kanang customer bitaw nga lain kay mga barat kayo grabe makahangyo halos kuan wala nay maginansya...*" (...a customer who haggles too much even to the point that we do not have anymore profit...). Still another respondent shared that, "...*Kasagara sa manghangyo sila usahay nga kanang wala jud sa capital...*" (...those who usually haggle lower than our capital...).

Fourth, the respondents mentioned that some of the non-Muslim clients are strict and naughty. Two respondents have these narratives, "...*naay uban kanang imong tawagon dili motubag murag dili makadungog sa imuha, naa poy uban nga estrikta... naay mag mug ot...*" (...there are those that do not answer you, it seems that they do not hear you...others are strict...there are those that frown...).

One respondent also related her experience of having a quarrel with her non-Muslim client. She said that the client came back to her to return the radio that she bought because accordingly, it is damaged. The client arrived at her stall very angry and dropped the radio in front of her and said, "...*isumbong ta ka sa taas...*" (...I will report you to the "top", which means to the authorities...).

Fifth, some customers throw malicious jokes to the respondents especially to the younger ones, as revealed by them. According to one of the respondents, "...*Gajoke kay naay customer nga bastos...magbinuang usually mga lalaki...*" (...They throw jokes, some customers throw malicious jokes, usually the males...).

Last, there are respondents who revealed that they are prejudiced by some of their clients. One respondent shared that, "...*dili daw sila mamalit sa amoa kay mga isog daw mi...*" (They don't buy from us because they thought that we are threatening). Another respondent mentioned what their clients said, "...*kani mang naa sa sidewalk kay dali raman mangadaot*" (...that these sidewalk vendors sell low quality (easily broken) products...). There is also a respondent who revealed that, "...*usahay mahadlok sila mupalit sa amoa... mahadlok sila kay mga Muslim daw mi...*" (...sometimes they are afraid to buy from us...they are afraid because we are Muslims...). They are also perceived to be selling products with 100% mark up/profit, thus, their clients haggle a lot. One of the respondents said, "...*makaingon man sila mga Muslim daw kasagara daw magginansya sila ug tinunga...*" (...they say/perceive that

Muslims are gaining 100% profit...”).

The above narratives reveal a lot of realities in the context of inter-ethnic relations. The first three experiences may be viewed as rational actions of a customer such as being haggler, choosy, and meticulous. Any customer may do the same just to have the ‘best’ buy.

However, the last three experiences manifest the subordinated position of the respondents, simultaneously as Měranaos, as poor, and as women. Thus, there seems to be an evidence of an intersection of subordination experienced by the respondents. The theory of Intersectionality argues that while women experience oppression based on gender, they are “differentially oppressed by varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality” (Ritzer, 2011).

It can be inferred in the above narratives that as Měranaos, they suffered from negative perception or prejudice. As small-scale traders, they are labeled to be selling products that are of low quality, and having subordinated and being victimized by global capitalism. As women, they are shaped by gender stereotypes and experienced harassment (though subtle) in the market place.

These experiences are threats to ethnic pluralism. There can be no parity when any of the groups in a society or community are prejudiced and discriminated. The last experience, in particular, signals an offshoot of the historically rooted prejudices of non-Muslims to the Muslims. This is supported by the studies on Muslim-Christian relations presented by Manacsa (2002), which showed that Christians have more negative perception towards the Muslims than the other way around. In fact, Manacsa (2002) challenged such an attitude of the Christians for they could be a hindrance to solving Mindanao problem.

In the case of this study, the Měranao women have varied responses to such experiences as presented in the next section.

#### 4.5 Měranao women’s responses to their experiences with non-Muslim clients

The narratives on how Měranao women traders respond to the pleasant and unpleasant experiences with

their non-Muslim clients suggest some interpersonal dynamics that could also be analyzed within the frameworks of Ethnic Pluralism and Agency. Based on their narratives, four patterns of responses are established, namely: assert, negotiate and explain, compromise, and establish a “suki” relation, as shown in Figure 2. It is presented in a manner of progression from less positive to more positive responses, in the context of ethnic pluralism. However, each response demonstrates a unique potential of the respondents as agency both in promoting peaceful relations and in contributing to the economy.

##### 4.5.1 Assert

Few Maranao women traders assert and talkback argumentatively when they have unfavorable encounter with their non-Muslim clients. The following lines by some respondents demonstrate such assertiveness:

*“...unsa man ka kuya kung dili ka ganahan ana akong mga benta hindi naman kita pinipilit na bumili eh ...”* (...what is wrong with you brother, if you do not like my product, I am not forcing you to buy it...)

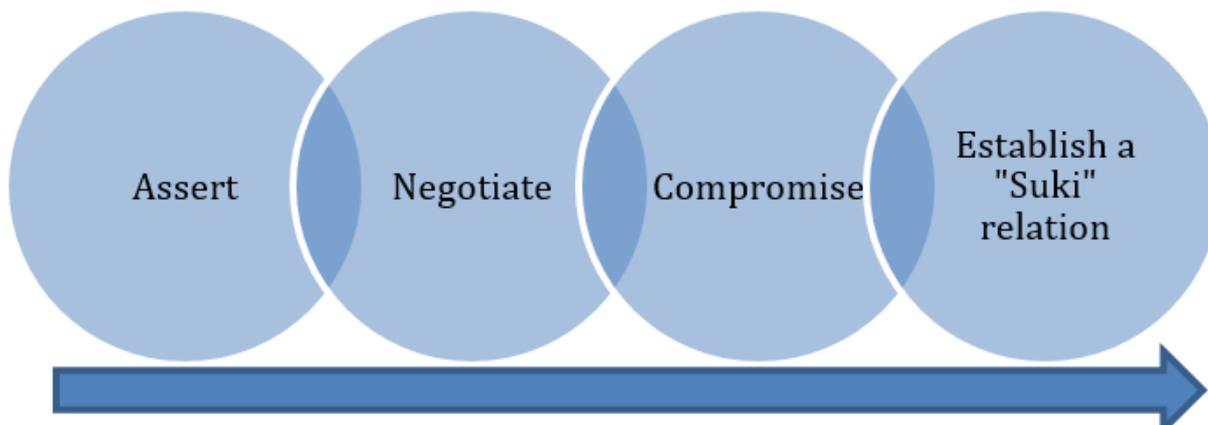
*“...grabe sad ka makahangyo ana...”* (...you haggle too much on that...)

*“...usahay masuko jud ko kay muingon sa akong baligya nga, pangit mani, motubag jud ko nga ayaw sad anaa akong baligya kung dili ka mupalit, ayaw, kay ikaw naa diay kay baligya nga ingon ani? Kung lainan ka nganong mo gunit man ka?”* (...sometimes I get mad because they say that my product is ugly or of low quality, so I would answer, do not say like that to my product, if you do not want to buy then don’t! Do you have a product to sell like this? If you do not like it, then why are you holding it?)

*“...nagtuopod mo nga nagtinunga mig ginanasya diri? ...makalagot man gud usahay ...”* (...you thought that we have 100% profit?...it is really annoying sometimes...)

Among the four established patterns of responses, it has the most negative implication particularly in the context of peace and a pluralist interethnic relation. It may manifest a “natural” response of one who receives

Figure 2. Maranao Women’s Response



an unpleasant stimulus as argued by the Behaviorists (Watson, 2013; Pierce & Cheney, 2013). This response may also demonstrate the "*maratabat*" or the sense of pride of the Měranaos.

While such responses may have negative implication on promoting peaceful relations, these may also show the empowering potential of the Měranao women. In other words, these women are less likely to be oppressed and dominated. Thus, such response indicates a particular manner through which the Měranao women, as agents, manage their social context.

As the above response denotes propensity towards conflicting relations, the following responses may have potentials to achieving and sustaining ethnic pluralism.

#### 4.5.2 Negotiate and explain

Many of the respondents negotiate with their non-Muslim clients when they are not treated well or when the latter haggle too much. They would explain the reason why such is the price of their products. One respondent said, "...*estoryahon lang ug tarong... ayo-ayohon para walay samok...*" (...we will just explain to them nicely...be nice to them so that there is no conflict...). Another respondent also said that, "...*estoryahon nga ayaw pag abusado kay dili man mi abusado ...*" (...tell them not to be abusive because we are not abusive...).

The following are other narratives that demonstrate their skill of negotiating and of promoting peaceful relations by explaining to their clients.

*"...dili lang me magminaldita, pero among gina hinay hinayan og storya aron mupalit lang..."* (...we do not have to be tough, but we talk to them explain to them clearly/slowly so that they will buy...)

*"...pagsabihan na kung may problema ka sa bahay, wag dalhin dito, iba ang problema sa bahay, iba din dito..."* (...we will tell them that if you have a problem in your house, do not bring it here, the situation in your house is different from here...)

*"...e-explain namin na kung mura masyado, wala na sa capital...utang pa naman namin ang capital..."* (...we will just explain that if it is so cheap, it is lower than the capital...and we just borrowed our capital)

Evidently, the above narratives demonstrate the Měranao women's potential as agents in promoting peaceful relations in a community. They can navigate from a relatively subordinated position (as poor, ethnic minority, women) to becoming agents of promoting peace. They spend time explaining to their clients just to avoid conflict and at the same, convince the latter to buy from their products. This response likewise supports ethnic pluralism with peaceful relation through respect, as a priority.

#### 4.5.3 Compromise

The respondents also make compromises with

the demands of some of their clients. They compromise so that conflict between them and their clients may be avoided. Also, they would give in to the haggled price, despite low (or even no) profit, so that they would have a sale for the day. The following are some of their narratives that demonstrate their tendency to compromise:

*"...usahay ilisan na lang namo bisag walay daut...kay kung maglalis dili man mahuman..."* (sometimes we would just replace (the product) even if it is not defective...because if we argue, it would not stop...)

*"...mulaylo na lang mi kay unsaon ta man customer is always right man jud..."* (...we would just mellow down because we cannot do anything, customer is always right...)

*"...magpahangyo man ta kay wala baya tay halin diri kung dili ta magpahangyo..."* (...we would just give in to their haggled price otherwise, we have no sale here...)

*"...Sir kung asa ka makakita ug barato, didto na lang ka palit..."* (...Sir just go to where you can buy a cheaper one...)

*"...sige lang suki, adto na lang sa uban naa moy ganahan, dili ta mag away para walay gubot..."* (it is fine "suki", you just go to others that have your preferred products, we do not have to argue so that there is no conflict...)

This third response exceeds with the second for it involves a sort of 'sacrifice' on the part of the respondents. Why do they compromise? First, they compromise in order to avoid conflict, as clearly shown in their narratives. Second, they give in to the demands of their clients so that at least, they could have a sale for the day. Such responses manifest again the potential of the Měranao women for a peaceful relation, even to the point of compromising their own benefit. Ethnic pluralism is more likely to take place if various groups are willing to compromise at the expense of their own benefit.

#### 4.5.4 Establish a "suki" relation

Among all the patterns of responses of the Meranao vendors, establishing "suki" relations demonstrates the most peaceful and friendly relations with their non-Muslim clients. A "suki" is one who regularly buys and goes back to the vendor or a "special customer" according to Davis (1973).

The respondents shared the reasons for establishing a "suki". First, they offer a special, lower price to their suki, even to the extent of having no profit. Second, they give presents (e.g., shoes, shirts, slippers) to their suki, especially during holiday seasons. Third, they believed that they are good at entertaining their "sukis." One respondent shared, "...*nakauyon sila sa akoo kay dili daw ko isog mag-entertain bisan maabog-abogan akong gbaligya....dili daw ko pareha sa uban nga masuko...*" (...they like me because I do not get mad when I entertain, even if my products get dirty (caused by the customer)...

unlike others who get mad...). Last, they have established friendly relations with their customers. According to one of the respondents, "...among suki kay magbalikbalik kay tungod na amigo/amiga na namo sila..." (...our suki keep on coming back to us because we have made them our friends already...). Another respondent revealed that "...maluoy ko sa ila...dayun kanang among gamit nga dili na namu gamiton akong ihatag sa ilaha, mga gamit sa akong mga anak, akong ihatag sa ila..." (...I feel pity for them... I give them hand-me-downs.....those of my children, I give to them...).

Based on the above narratives, it is apparent that the respondents were able to bridge the gaps of interethnic relations brought about by deep-rooted prejudice and discrimination. As shown in a "suki" relation, the M'ranao women could be agents of peaceful inter-ethnic relations and of a pluralistic society. Their day-to-day encounter with their non-Muslim clients, and their desire to have more sales have developed in them a strategy on how to win them. They are able to negotiate, compromise, and eventually establish a "suki" relation. "Suki" implies a good relationship, and it connotes trust. This means stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination attached to the two different cultures slowly melted down because of day-to-day casual interaction.

The study of Lois Ann Hall on "Gensan is halu-halo: A study of Muslim/Christian social relations in a regional city of the Southern Philippines" (2010) described and examined how the two distinct groups interact and relate with one another. The author considered in her interview various classes of individuals who are considered as ordinary citizens. By ordinary she meant those who were neither elite nor were holding religious or political functions and positions. She interviewed government employees, teachers, farmers, and vendors. She concluded in her study that Gensan is halu-halo, which means that though the label of Christians and Muslims have remained very distinct, the relationship of the two has a blurring boundaries. The two groups are able to live their day-to-day life in harmony and in peace. They celebrate some holidays together, and the neighbors are able to build friendship regardless of their religion. The author claims there is no apparent conflict between the two groups. Hence, she considered the Christian-Muslim conflict in Mindanao a skewed reality, pursued only by some groups who have extreme ideological leanings. But the majority of the Christians and Muslims are actually forging a harmonious relationship. Muslims perceive their Christian neighbors positively, and they said they get along well with them. As a proof to this, many intermarriages are happening in the city. Be it noted, that Gensan was basically inhabited by Muslims before. When the National Land Settlement Authority (NLSA) was undertaken in the 1970s, many Christians were brought by the Philippine government to Gensan, and they lived with the Muslims. Both camps, consider their relationship to have grown better with the passage of time, when they knew each other well and developed the sense of trust. Prejudice, slowly eradicated when they become friends and able to develop family ties through intermarriages. Likewise, both camps learnt to respect the doctrines and practice of the other's religion.

The situation of Bukidnon and Gensan are on similar

context. It talks about two distinct groups- the Muslims and the Christians. They may have different historical background however. Gensan was predominantly a Muslim area that accommodated the entrance of Christians who were seeking for a greener pasture, while Bukidnon is predominantly a Christian province accommodating Muslims who were seeking refuge from a war-torn Marawi.

## CONCLUSION

The M'ranao women's diaspora in non-Muslim communities reflects certain social realities not only in the areas of migration but also of inter-ethnic relations. Their movement is attributed by economic and socio-political conditions in both their places of origin and destination attesting the "push-pull" theory of migration. What may be distinct and novice in the case of the M'ranaos' movement are their experiences of conflict in their place of origin, and their economic marginalization brought about by global capitalism in both their places of origin and destination.

Most importantly, their diaspora in non-Muslim communities resulted in interesting inter-ethnic relations. Their involvement in the economic sphere as traders could be translated into spaces for promoting a pluralist inter-ethnic relation. While there are instances of negative responses due to negative stimuli/treatment (from their non-Muslim clients), they have shown positive actions and reactions that are potential for multiculturalism or ethnic pluralism. The casual vendor-client relationship between the Muslim and non-Muslims has developed into "suki" relationship, hence developing a sense of trust and good relationship between the two distinct groups. Likewise, they are far from known Muslim extremists and radicalists. Despite their subordinated position as an ethnic minority, poor (small-scale traders), and women, they are able to navigate and survive both for establishing relatively peaceful relations and for meeting their family needs.

Nevertheless, their demonstrated potential to assert when negative treatment is accorded to them implies that their non-Muslim clients also have to raise their level of cultural sensitivity. Respect is highly demanded to the point of erasing historically-rooted prejudices against each other.

It takes both groups to intentionally pursue a more pluralist community or society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be forged:

1. For the LGUs of Valencia and Malaybalay City to conduct activities bringing Muslims and non-Muslims together;
2. For the LGUs of Valencia and Malaybalay City to ask the big companies to consider advertisements that promote cultural understanding and to sponsor IECs fostering multi-culturalism;
3. Curriculum designers/planners and educators are encouraged to emphasize the integration of cultural sensitivity in curricular programs;

4. The non-Muslim customers are encouraged to visit and buy at Muslim's stalls as constant interaction between the two groups may contribute to a better understanding between non-Muslims/Christians and Muslims; and
5. Researchers may conduct related studies on Muslim women traders to validate and enhance the findings of this study for further utilization of research results.

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