

MARRYING IN A FOREIGN LAND? A CASE STUDY OF A MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN MANILA, PHILIPPINES

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This paper explores marriage practices among Muslims in Manila's metropolitan area against the backdrop of the changing politico-economic situation in the Philippines. Philippine Muslims historically inhabited Mindanao and Sulu, and included 13 ethno-linguistic groups. Among this population, marriage was traditionally arranged by parents. It could take as long as a month to complete wedding formalities and ceremonies, which were attended by the entire interrelated community. However, this situation has now changed. Since the late 1960s, the Muslim population has widely dispersed, and high numbers of Muslims have established enclaves in Manila's metropolitan area. With an urban population of more than 120 thousand, Muslim migrants in Manila live side-by-side with people they do not know. Under these conditions, there are now more cases of marriages taking place in Manila, a phenomenon that, in the past, had only occurred when Muslims intermarried with Christians.

This phenomenon may be understood by examining chronological, demographic characteristics of Muslims in Manila, in conjunction with the politico-economic situation in the Philippines. In the 1950s and 1960s, Manila's Muslim population was predominantly male, single and married; this population stayed in Manila to take advantage of seasonal business opportunities. In the late 1960s, the outbreak of conflict in Mindanao and Sulu, initiated by the Muslim secessionist movement, led many families to flee to Manila, adding women and children to the formerly male-dominated population. Today, stagnating economies in their home provinces and the national phenomenon of overseas employment, particularly for women, continues to draw young singles of both sexes to Manila, thereby increasing the chances that they will encounter their future spouses and settle down in that vicinity.

What are the implications and consequences of "marrying in Manila"? By analyzing quantitative data from a survey of nearly 500 households and 75 intensive interviews, conducted in one of Manila's three largest Muslim communities, this study aims to describe the current status of Muslims' marriage practices; to elucidate their perspectives on marriage as related to social and economic factors, including kinship and socio-spatial orders; and to examine worldview changes that appear to be encapsulated by the word "praktikal" – an adaptation of the English word "practical." By so doing, this study seeks to explore one of the ways in which Muslims settle down in Manila, thereby rendering a foreign land familiar.

Keywords: Manila, Marriage, Migration, Muslim, "Praktikal"