Veiling and Lipstick in the City: Being Female, Young and Muslim in Urban Mindanao

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Abstract

Framing young female Muslim students as figures of modernity "who loom larger than life because they alternately express and challenge conventional understandings of social types" (Baker, Harms & Lindquist, 2014), this paper reflects on the young women's everyday beauty practices as a way to apprehend their notions of identity and beauty. Looking at the seemingly mundane but increasingly ubiquitous practice of cosmetics use, what does this tell us about the young women's modern condition? What emerge are contested figures of young Muslim women, often characterized by tropes of subservience and obedience, as active explorers of new trends and femininities, using new products to form new identities and reframe traditional notions of self and beauty. They straddle between assertions of individuality and belonging to a community; proud keepers of tradition at the same time espousing modern ethos.

Keywords: Beauty, cosmetics, veil, modernity, Maranao students

Maranaos comprise the majority of Muslims in Cagayan de Oro City, an urban center in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. A neighboring province and only a few hours away from Lanao del Sur and its capital Marawi, many young Maranaos from Lanao are sent to the city to study. "Away from the clan and the prying eyes of strict aunts and gossiping neighbors," my young interlocutor informs me. They come for the modern trappings of the city and to be exposed to a different way of life. Locals of the city claim it is insulated from the violence of its neighbors. Because the city is considered a playground, where everybody shops including the wives and children of warring political clans, it has become a consumerist peace zone.

It is the Filipino Muslim man who is visible. The female is often represented as a fuzzy oppressed figure by his side. The imagined Filipino Muslim is often a difficult and dangerous male. Colonial depictions of the Moros often employed terms such as *amok*[1] and *juramentado*[2] to describe acts of resistance—depictions intended to drive fear and distrust of the Moros and to rationalize often violent practices to subjugate them (Tarling, 1992; Taqueban, 2012). The terms were made synonymous to "pirate" and "brigand." The popular image is one of the Moros as troublemakers, "separatists"—essentialized characters to blame for the ills of society and particularly for the violence in Mindanao. In the post-September 11 era, the signifier "Moro" has received other ominous tags, that of "terrorists" and "extremist" (San Juan, 2006; Werbner, 2005) who endanger the order of the modern state. Of late, the Muslim woman has become more prominent, if not contested, figure. Elsewhere, she has become a central figure in contestations regarding modernity (Najmabadi, 2006).

The city is not a neutral space. Lefebvre (1991) argues that spatial orders are constituted in the production of space, creating class structures and spatial meanings and reproducing relations of domination that are continually reconfigured by peoples' changing practices and ideas. Most Maranaos are Muslim; when one is identified as a Maranao, one is identified as a Muslim. The name Maranao (also *Maranaw, Muranao, Mu'ranao* and *Meranao*) means "people of the lake," as Lake Lanao dominates the landscape of Lanao province. With its predominantly Muslim

population, it proudly calls itself the "Islamic Center" of the country. The young women I spoke with often began their stories with how different city life is from their hometowns—from the rhythm, the people, to the plentiful and varied products available in the malls. Whether it is interaction with others or with new habits, interests, and products, "these descriptions all posit concepts of shifting body/environment boundaries" (Solomon, 2016). As Maranaos, my interlocutors are a visible minority in the predominantly Christian city. While their embodied presence is a proud marker of their ethnic and religious identities, these, too, mark them as the proverbial "other" in the city.

Like other young people in cities students encounter new ways of doing things, new technologies, and new products that expose them to a different, more "modern world." Menin (2011) argues that dichotomized categories of being Muslim overshadow the "gendered dimension of the secular and non-secular discourses of modernity," that the "complexity of everyday life requires broadening the analysis beyond the dichotomies in which Muslims' 'engagement' with modernity have often been framed. "Looking at bodywork (Black, 2004; Edmonds, 2007; Hardon, Idrus & Hymans, 2013) and performative practices (Goffman, 1961 Butler, 1993; Morris, 1995) within their spatial contexts (Lefebvre, 1991, McDowell, 2009), I propose, enables us to better understand how young Muslim students in Cagayan de Oro appropriate and refurbish both tradition and modernity. This follows Davis' (1995) proposition of the body as taking on "a central role in the transgressive aesthetics of performance and display."

Borrowing from Baker, Harms and Lindquist (2014), I take the notion of *figures of modernity*, "people who loom larger than life because they alternately express and challenge conventional understandings of social type," as a way to apprehend the young women's notions of identity and beauty, and as telling of the flux of the times. In this paper, I reflect on young Maranao students' everyday beauty practices as part of their performances of self-making. What became salient in the course of our conversations is their prevalent use of cosmetics. Looking at the seemingly mundane but increasingly ubiquitous practice of cosmetics use, what does this tell us about the young

women's modern condition? By reflecting on the young women's beauty practices, we are invited to an understanding of the contestations in participating in modernity.

Intensified globalization has ushered in an era popularly characterized by the success of capitalist marketplaces and the embrace of structural adjustment through privatization and deregulation (Tsing, 2000). As international free trade and the opening of domestic economies rendered the production and distribution of manufactured consumer products global in scope, the rise of the global beauty industry transformed local notions of beauty and their attendant practices. The growing consumer culture around beauty, cultivated by the mass media and the increasing availability of manufactured cosmetics (Peiss, 1996, 1998), made looks and appearance central to female identity. This focus on body appearance has affected individuals and economies alike (McDowell, 2009).

The discussion is based on eight months of fieldwork in 2016 to 2017, consisting mostly of in-depth interviews, conversations, and "hanging-out" with twenty female Muslim students aged 18-25. Five are married and most come from well-to-do families. I use pseudonyms in the presentation. When I thought it was prudent to protect their identities further, I used two pseudonyms for a single interlocutor. I spoke with Moro friends and academics to get a better sense of the tradition and religious practices of the Maranaos. NVivo was utilized as a qualitative data analysis tool to provide a preliminary handle on coding the conversations. The analysis is based on audio recordings of our conversations, later transcribed. Conversation analysis was used to unpack the themes and stories. It is used to primarily look into the orientations of my interlocutors, both in our conversations and how they presented themselves in our interactions, favoring what is hoped to be a bottom-up process of analysis (Wooffitt, 2008), and inviting reflection on the social conditions that may have brought about their practices and notions. This was conducted with alert attention to the possible themes underlying the young women's stories—what they implied of power relations, the possible political dimension of being young, female, and Marnao in a predominantly Christian city and country. In appreciating the stories of the young women,

I followed in the tradition of the phenomenological approach. "Knowing that there has always been flow, exchange, and mixture across social boundaries in human history" (Appadurai, 2010), the phenomenological approach allows us to capture the breadth of youth experiences in a particular setting in our contemporary global millennium and, perhaps, call attention to the often asymmetrical trajectories of young peoples' lives, the tensions between tradition and modernity, and the frictions and possibilities that this new epoch presents them.

In the beginning, I was an older stranger, Christian, did not wear any make-up, and a second-generation migrant in Mindanao. Allowed into their breaks from class and Saturday "gimmicks" at the mall, I became an Ate (older sister), distant enough that none of their stories would get back to the prying aunts back home and perceived to be "liberal" enough to listen to the giddiness and woes of young love and of young lives. I soon realized it was not my earnestness in the conduct of the research but rather their wish, even hope, of being known, understood, and seen, that they allowed me to be less of a stranger and less of an elder. We shared a common hope too for the big island we were all born in, sometimes lamenting, conflicted, always trying to understand. It is the venturing of the youth that disrupts old, constrained knowledge.

During this period, a constant hum is in the background, local and national news would often mention "Muslim" in conjunction with captured drug lords and to membership in terrorist groups. The government had just launched its "war on drugs" and many of those caught and killed in Mindanao were Muslims. Instead of *juramentado*, a contemporary Moro would be labeled as "ISIS" or "drug lord" in bitter jest. Many of the young women spoke of these events with anxiety, bringing them up in conversation as if speaking of them would banish a hovering specter. But mostly we spoke about their everyday - our conversations punctuated with eager discussions of the latest YouTube make-up tutorial, the bashful sharing of imaginaries of romantic love, and eager, at times trepid, anticipation of the future.

Old/new ways

"I don't have many Muslim friends," my friend, Celia, "born and bred" in the city confides, "I think they're much too conservative, veiling even in this weather. The austere—severe, really—manner they present themselves tends to put me off." How she perceives the visual cues of a Muslim woman in the city discloses the commonly held essentialized ideation of the Muslim woman—how the *kumbong* (veil) covering her hair and, the *abaya* or a *burqa* partly hiding her face symbolize not just her subordinate role but also whatever else that holds any Muslim suspect. The image, colonial and static (Mabro, 1996), petrifies Muslim women everywhere (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). The modernist imagination presupposes a particular "look" to being modern. To be modern means the opposite of what is perceived to being "conservative" or "austere" - without a veil, fashioned in the trends, embellished. It is the same idea that underlies Celia's impression. Najmabadi (2006) contends that the modernist narrative regarding the Muslim female emphasizes its arguments on the liberating effects of unveiling, "In the modernist imagination premodernity is that time when women were unseen and unheard; modernity was to transform the invisible and mute women into unveiled and vocal public presence." Muslim women in "contrast to this liberal subject are those who are seen as embedded within communities, that is, inherently illiberal, internally oppressive of individual choice and externally threatening to the liberal state." It also opens opposing understanding of tradition, one that understands it as descriptive and value-free, the modus vivendi of communities; and the other, reflecting a bias for Western Enlightenment, as the antithesis of progress and a distraction from rational modernity (Graham, 1993). It is the particularity of Muslims that while they are diverse in their local contexts and historical conditions, their shared traditions make them "recognizable across all regional divisions and histories" (p. 495). What we have is a situation where the power to decide Muslim women's participation in modernity, either of her belonging or being irregular, is not made by her but by the dominant secular augurs.[3]

In the case of Maranao women, what is hastily perceived is not always all there is. To use 18-year-old Aliyah's cosmetics

analogy, under the veil, there are "layers and contours" shaped by custom, history, and tradition.

By tradition, a Maranao girl is brought up by her set of female relations. Beauty practices are part of the bonds among females in the community.

> She has a whole set of grandmothers, aunts, and elderly ladies, who teach her what to do and how to do it, aside from her mother, whose sole responsibility is to transmit to her the unique customs and traditions that help make the Maranao girl what she ought to be: graceful, modest, polite, obedient…elegant (Reyes, Abdulmalic & Matanog, 2012, p. 53).

"My *Ome* (mother) wears make-up. My aunts do, too. Ever since I was small, I'd see them putting on make-up," 17 year-old Habba informs, "Even when contouring was not yet a fad, they would *layer*. She's a good Muslim woman so this must be OK." Contouring, she explains, is using makeup to enhance facial structure; layering makeup to achieve a more striking look often does this. Habba has yet to acquire the "eyeliner, eye shadow blends, foundation, blush on, and lipstick" regimen of her older female relations but had already taken to wearing "lighter make up," "easy to reapply and youthful." Twenty year-old Maima's initiation to cosmetics is through her mother. "It's our mother-daughter thing," she says, "We shop together and she gets me what I use." On weekends at the shopping malls, one will see middle-aged, mostly upper-class Muslim women, identifiable by their veils, fully made up and bejeweled, with expensive designer bags under their arms. "They are mostly weekend visitors from Marawi, rich Maranaos," an attendant at a beauty clinic informs me. "They come for shopping and facial."

For as long as Aliyah can remember, her mother is always "put together" and "made up." She recalls how her mother and aunts would have their veils sewn out of colorful cloths that often match their dresses, "and their eye shadows too." The *padian* (market) is the heart of Marawi commerce and, arguably, cultural life. It is where one can get the complete ensemble, Aliyah informs me. "The colors can overwhelm you,"

Sitti, a twenty-year old "aspiring farmer-fashionista," warns me with a smile, "everything is there, *malong, langkit, kumbong*, food, make-up. It's a one-stop shop." She tells me that on any given day the *padian* will be crowded, "All Maranaos go there for our everyday things. See, for us it's not costume," referring to the multi-colored *malong*, a tubular skirt, and the langkit, a colorful embroidered fabric to accessorize the *malong*, traditionally worn by Maranao women, "it's everyday wear, clashing colors - that's what my Ina (grandmother) likes."

Beauty practices are part of the way to observe a sense of *malu* (propriety) and *maratabat* (honor, pride). Just as Maranao women are instructed to control their behavior and feelings, "to stand upwind of men… lest they are not able to hold their emotions and fall in love" (Hilsdon, 2003), they are also instructed to be beautiful, "always well-groomed, elegant, gifted with the social graces, and generally charming" (Reyes, Abdulmalic & Matanog, 2012). It has been said of Maranao women, "*Bahala mag-palapa* (common local food preparation made from pepper, onion and other spices) *basta gwapa*" (They will be content with simple food as long as they can afford to be beautiful). In Maranao folktales the women are depicted as "well-groomed and graceful even in the worst situation" and beauty implements are objects to be desired—in the folktale of *Tingting a Bolawan*, the women desires the *salday* and *surod a bolawan* because these objects can make her more beautiful.

According to folklorist R. Esteban (personal communication, June 12, 2016), Maranaos have a distinct notion of beauty. Predating Islam, privileged young women's instruction in the *lamins* (house towers) included enhancing their beauty. They "wore their hair long, were meticulously groomed, and walked with movements (*kini kini*), swaying their hips like the waves of Lake Lanao" (Hilsdon, 2003). Esteban states that this notion of beauty is discernable from the Maranao epic *Darangen,* extolling the adventures of their origins and mythical heroes. The epic instructs on customary law, social standards, behavior and aesthetics: "You are beautiful if you have a face like the moon's. In fact, the description of the moon is that it is very bright, radiant, white. The notion of beauty is 'white is beautiful.' This radiance,

'whiteness,' distinguishes rich, upper class women—daughters of the *datus* kept in the *lamin*, hidden from the sun and from others until they are marriageable. This notion of beauty as "whiteness" differs from the western conception of "whiteness" or race. Rather, whiteness is beautiful because it accentuates and differentiates the classes—only the rich can afford to have *lamins* while the working class needs to work the fields exposed to the sun. This traditional notion of beauty finds iterations in contemporary Filipino preference for fair skin where most beauty products advertise whitening ingredients. Twenty-one year-old Raissa shows me the tube of Olay face cream she keeps handy in her bag. The product promises "natural white," "all in one fairness day cream," and "UV protection." Arfa's face powder promises "illuminating radiance."

For the contemporary young Maranao women, the notion of beauty not only depicts wealth but also health, an increasingly cosmopolitan trait. "I need to study hard so I feel stressed. I don't want to look stressed, I use lipstick to brighten up," Asleah, 22 year-old law student explains. "I want to achieve a pinkish glow, not pale. Pale makes me look unhealthy. I already lack sleep as it is," says Aissa. In her third year of medical school, Aissa tells me she barely has time to rest. A quick application of facial tint and red lipstick keeps her "looking and feeling fresh… I sound like an ad for my lipstick!" With cosmetics, she is able to project that she's got it together even when she's exhausted. Her cosmopolitan projection is that of a calm, put-together, and achieving young woman, able to "handle it all," much like the women in the folktales.

Many of the young women do not differentiate their purchase and use of cosmetics from their non-Muslim peers. "Most girls in school do it," 18-year-old Arfa enthused, "You get older, you meet more people, you naturally want to look good." Raisssa, twenty-one year old, tells me of her four sisters, "We love to wear make-up. My sisters can't leave the house without anything on their faces! My poor father raising five girls!" "I've become obsessed with make-up tutorials," Raissa sheepishly confesses as she turns on her phone to show me the websites she's bookmarked, most of them are American and one features a young Maranao from Marawi. "I've actually done most of their

techniques."

As Muslims and no longer visibly wearing their hair long, the young women who wear *kumbong* have their faces to radiate beauty. While Islam discourages women from showing hair, the face is a part of themselves that they can show, and to some extent, showcase. Nerissa, 23 year-old, explains:

> "You cover the hair because it's supposed to lead men to temptation according to Islam. It's haraam. But covering one's face is up to you. Women who cover are usually the ones who have gone on hadj. My mother has gone on hajj but she doesn't cover her face. It's too hot, she said! If you show your face, you might as well show it well."

Conscious not to commit *fitna*, the young women blush at the implication of beautification for allure. They mostly consider being able to use cosmetics as heralding a rite of passage, "*Dalaga ka na* (You're now a young woman), you want to look the part. College *na*." Part of this rite of passage is moving to the city where perceived urban mannerisms require looking a certain way. Everyone uses some kind of make-up. Lipstick mostly. Blush-on, tint." Their beauty practices are contextual and about positioning. The extent to which they can practice their cosmetics regime is expressed depending on where they are and to the degree that it is acceptable, "It's normal *lang* (It's just normal), but when I'm home, I try to tone it down, not too much make-up, not too much *kilay* (eyebrow work). Just enough so it's appropriate for my age."

For young Maranao women, to be beautiful is a way to observe tradition. It is a tradition steeped in colors and of women cultivating beauty practices. The young women use cosmetics to convey non-verbal cues of value, class and prestige (Fabricant & Gould, 1993). Their beauty and comportment are sources of family pride. Looking good is one way to ensure that their status is embodied. Beauty is valued and given cultural emphasis, forming an important part of their aesthetic practice.

And yet in the city, it is their veils that make them recognizable, their being Muslim remains their primary signifier.

The colors of their rich tradition are dulled by dangerous reduction and simplistic interpretations attached to the veil. Perceived as austere and suspect despite their participation in the trends reveal the multiple cultural fissures that continue to burden Maranao Muslim women.

Branding "modern": global and networked

Tarlo's (2010) study of the rise of Islamic cyber commerce highlights how young Muslim women access what were usually perceived to be traditional and religious products. Citing a popular website, she notes that the *hijab* is presented as "modern, fashionable, fun, versatile and affordable" and promoting images of young Muslim women who are "active and fun-loving" and live "a modern western lifestyle while wearing a hijab." In the Philippines, the *kumbong* is similarly sold online. Enterprising vendors advertise on Facebook, *Hijab Philippines* describes its products as "A Collection of Fashionable, Elegant, and Trendy Hijab for the Modern-Day Muslim Woman." They advertise their goods not simply as implements of faith but as fashion and lifestyle items. It is this notion of Islamic modernism that young Maranao women are appropriating.

This "fashion" movement is both an update and a revival, with the young women as well as their mothers and aunts having grown up during a global Islamic revival where veiling is promoted as a personal choice (Moors, 2009). The modernist Muslim was no longer just "those who sought disaffiliation from an Islamic past" by advocating the removal of the veil, but also those who "who sought a reconfiguration of the past" (Najmabadi, 2006) by embracing the significance of the veil. Emerging in the 1970s, it manifested in an "increase in attendance at mosques by both women and men, and in marked displays of religious sociability... including the adoption of the veil" (Mahmood, 2005). Coupled with social media, the renewal saw a "redistribution of power" and "religious framing" where "the youth were encouraged with representative and interpretative roles" (Minganti & Osterlind, 2016) resulting in "a more individualized and fragmented reformist trend with identities increasingly produced through consumption" (Moors, 2009;

Moors, 2007). These global changes, Minganti and Österlind (2016) argue, give young women "opportunities to become inspiring faces of modern Islam and entrepreneurs in the market of Islamic fashion."

"Allah has gifted us our faces. Putting on make-up is part of taking care of this gift," Habba explains. "It's what you do with the beauty, if you lead others to *fitna* (cause trouble) that is *haram* (forbidden). But taking care of yourself, the use of make-up for example, is respecting the gift that is given to you," says Aiza, a 20 year-old business major.

Now comprising 43% of the global Muslim population and 11% of the world's youth (Young, 2010), many young Muslims are heavy users of new technologies, their access to the internet and social media exposing them to global trends and brands. According to Pew Research (2013), Muslim populations account for an estimated two billion persons around the world. Growing media exposure and economic clout has generated interest in and spending on beauty and personal care products (Swidi, Wie, Hassan, Al-Hosam & Mohd, 2010 in Mohezar et al., 2016). Izberk-Bilgin and Nakata (2016) contend that young Muslims are better educated, have broader networks, and are more affluent than their parents and preceding generations:

> From the streets of Paris to Istanbul, this rising class of Muslims pursues a lifestyle that mimics Western consumption habits with an Islamic twist: they buy Hermes headscarves and Dior *abayas* (i.e., loose black robes that envelop the whole body); stay at luxurious gender-segregated *halal* resorts; sunbathe in burqinis (i.e., Islamic full-length bathing suits); and use Sharia-compliant credit cards. The challenge for this group, dubbed YUMMIES or young upwardly mobile Muslims, is finding consumer goods that are compatible with their faith. Modern products and services are rarely developed with Muslim practices and norms in mind (p. 286).

It is in cities that this pursuit of a particular modern

lifestyle intensifies. As spatial orders within it are constituted in the production of space, so too the city creates meanings and reproduces relations among its residents, while at the same time being recreated by their changing practices and ideas (Lefebvre, 1991). In the city, the internet is faster, the malls provide innumerable products, the young women interact with a greater diversity of new peers. Being away from the clan and prying eyes of strict aunts and gossiping neighbors allows them to both recreate and assert their identity, and participate in the urban mod of youth culture. They are at times compelled to fit in, needing to "soften" the perceived "severity" of being Muslim while at the same time maintain fashionable piety resulting in a dynamic and complex, often negotiated, modern young figure.

The increasing economic power of Muslim populations around the world makes them prime markets for multinational corporations (Mohezar et al., 2016). Recent trends in advertising are taking cognizance of this and are moving towards the faith-based marketing of products (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). The demand for products has also spread with the Muslim diaspora (Masci, 2005; Pew Research, 2011). The potential market for *halal*[4] cosmetics is estimated to be between $5billion and $14billion annual sales with a growth rate of about 20% per year. To tap into this market, the advertising giant Ogilvy has created a special team, Ogilvy Noor, to target the Muslim consumer they dub as the "cutting edge of Muslim Futurists." A Muslim Futurist is "a woman: educated, tech-savvy, worldly, intent on defining her own future, brand loyal and conscious that her consumption says something important about who she is and how she chooses to live her life" (Ogilvy.co.uk, n.d.). By 2019, Muslim consumers globally are projected to spend $73 billion on cosmetics each year (Janmohamed, 2016). Ogilvy's website claims that the Muslim lifestyle market is worth $2.6 trillion. An article in the Financial Times from Dubai announces, "*Halal* cosmetics allow Muslim women to enjoy beauty and duty." The article recounts how the Polish company Inglot has developed a permeable polish that allows water to reach the skin, and how "many women seized on the product as a means to marry their religious obligations and grooming routine" (Kerr, 2013). The article hails the nail polish as "a huge craze" that underlines growing demand among young

Muslims.[5] In western markets, growing concerns over health hazards often associated with particle and synthetic ingredients has generated demand for *halal* personal care and cosmetics (Kamaruzaman, 2009 in Mohezar et al., 2016). *Halal* has become an important marketing narrative for product assurance of being clean, safe, and natural.

The success of the global beauty industry is founded on its expansion of markets and its particular targeting of consumers, aspired-for identities packaged in commodities that are made ever more accessible, creating trends and ideas that raise the influence of the industry's cultural hegemony. Against the backdrop of this growing global project is the mounting tension between the use of cosmetics and Islamic practices. Some contend that *halal* cosmetics contradict the very tenet of Islam's requirements for modesty and simplicity.

"I follow style blogs and when I'm in the mood do OOTDs (outfit of the day). It's fun! It doesn't mean that when I put on nail polish or not put on a veil that I am not a good Muslim," Farida tells me. Aware that her "badass" nail polish is bad in two ways—"bad as in cool" and "bad because it's considered *haram*." Still, she sometimes applies her favorite polish, "On my toes so it's not so visible."

Young Maranao women in the city are weaving tradition, religion, and urbanity, balanced between religious obedience and fashioning a modern lifestyle, a project of claiming a youthful Maranao identity.[6] The ways they mesh religious prescription with urban pop culture, "updating" the veil and deploying beauty products, manifest how they manage the tensions between being urbanites and their religious practice in order to express individual selves in "a simultaneous expression of religious piety and secular cool" (O'Brien, 2013) Conscious that who they are is visible on their bodies, hey fashion "cool piety," a kind of symbolic visibility that asserts and brands their identity as modernized. As the young women navigate between following tradition and living modern lives, they develop styles—habitual actions of negotiation and utilizing symbols to their advantage (Bourdieu, 1984). They perceive the veil as an instrument for keeping and updating old traditions,

valued, and at the same time, reworked. The figure of the young Maranao woman in the city is one that conflates compliance and agency, one of asserting tradition and beliefs accessorized with a trendy fashion sense.

Frictions

"It's true! I know her. I grew up hearing about her. They're really quite powerful and she's the queen of them all! If you mess with her you can get killed." Noor, in hushed tones, was referring to the latest news gripping the city: the "mastermind" of one of the largest drug syndicates in Mindanao had been arrested in one of the city's suburbs. Local radio shows had a field day commenting on the event, which was also covered in the national newspapers (Jerusalem, 2016). Commentators highlighted two things: that the mastermind was from Lanao del Sur, and that she was female. "Who would've thought the most powerful drug lord in Mindanao is not a lord but a lady!" one announcer blurted on his early morning show. "I don't want to say it, but she's from Lanao, a sister Muslim," said another. These two points captured the public imagination, validating the belief that Muslims are villains but also turning upside-down the impression that female Maranao are timid and subservient.

The veiled Muslim woman whose family arranges her marriage reinforces the image of Muslims as backwards and uncivilized, reifying colonial discourses on traditions and religions used to justify modernizing projects, the reform, and "saving" of Islamic societies (Abu-Lughod, 1998, 2002). In stark contrast, my conversations with young Muslim women in the city revealed that their desires, aspirations, and opinions are anything but uniform. Articulating varying images of being Muslim, of being Maranao and of femininity, they confront the demands of tradition with pragmatism and perturbation, of engaging modernity with absorption and distance. They treat the frictions of living in the city with enjoyment and also ambivalence, developing new tactics to persist and flourish. Instead of needing to be saved, they invite understanding.

Used to living with relative privilege among kin and the

familiar, stigma is something the young students know of as an extract. It is often someone else's story. It is in coming to the city that the story becomes their own. "No, I don't feel discriminated here, veil and all," many of them assure me. Cagayan de Oro, after all, is known as the City of Golden Friendship. "School is great. My classmates, the boys, they adjust—we don't hold hands during dancing sessions in PE (Physical Education), or no study groups when there are more boys than girls," explains Raissa, "during parties, they consider my dietary requirements." Initial politeness forces them to talk in niceties, compelled to adopt a generous view of their adopted home. But as they become more comfortable over shared coffee, they begin to tell stories of fissures:

> "I tried to get a room in one of the dorms near the university. On the phone, they said there were available rooms and I could be accommodated. But when I went the next day, wearing this (pointing to her veil) and identified myself, they told me there were no more rooms. I tried to assure them that I'm a good person, a peaceful person. I'm a med student, I study all the time. But no, they still turned me down. I cried, you know."

It was the first time Normina had experienced discrimination. Her face was exposed, her make-up, glow of health and beauty, however, were reduced by the sight of her veil. Her family name and wealth were not enough to assure others that she is an honorable young woman. "Muslims find many restaurants in Cagayan de Oro unfriendly," a local news item reported (Salic & Ilupta, 2012). In reality, the city does not adjust to its minorities. Young Muslims merely learn to adapt and find their place.

Aliyah is always conscious of her veil. For her, veiling signifies "insideness" and carries with it connotations of moral behavior. All the women in her family have worn the veil in the same manner she has always worn hers. In the city, she wears it partly to serve as a "warning." Aware of the "bias against us," she turns it to her advantage. By wearing her veil, she actively makes use of her religious, if not political, visibility, to serve as her shield:

> "Sometimes, here in the city, the veil is good for protection. People don't mess with you as much. They think, 'She's a Maranao, she'll go berserk or her whole clan will run after you if you mess with her.' I get the feeling people are wary of us. Maybe they think my father could be a kidnapper or a drug lord! He's just an accountant. Strict, loving, and mostly boring."

Moors (2007) observes that "wearing certain styles of dress and fashion functions as a means of communication with others and, at the same time, also has an effect on the physical body and the spiritual self." Aware of how their presence affects others, wearing the veil in the city is not simply in observance of piety, in trying times when the young women feel who they are is assailed, it serves as an assertion. Aliyah's words remind of the hegemonic discourses constructed around the signifier "Muslim." The symbol of the veil conveys two opposing meanings: as a feminine symbol, that she is docile; as a Muslim symbol, that she is violent. Aliyah seeks to reconfigure the meaning of her veil and draws on its symbol to show that identity can be a site of varying subject positions (Moore, 1994). Choosing a meaning of the veil for herself, she turns its symbol of marginality into that of a figure to be feared, a stubborn sign resisting domination.

Those who choose not to wear the veil take on a modulated Muslim identity but refuse to feel any less Muslim; they navigate the limits of what is deemed proper while exploring how to express their selves. It is also about readiness, 20-year-old Fatima tells me, working towards a "commitment," of deciding and finally keeping to a "lifelong resolution."

> "I've heard them (Maranao peers) speak about me. How I'm this and that because of the clothes I wear. I don't wear the veil. My shirt is too tight, my jeans are too tight. My hair loose. My lipstick too red. They say I'm loose, not proper. They're worse than my aunts. They don't know me, I don't know them. But they judge! It shouldn't matter how I look, but what's inside me. Allah knows all. I'm young, part of me still

> wants to be carefree. Someday, when I'm ready, I'll wear the veil."

Raissa declares herself a purveyor of hip-hop, deemed improper for being either too masculine or too suggestive. She can gyrate with the best, she tells me:

> "We formed a group, girls and boys, and my tomboy sister too! When I first danced for a school program, my teacher asked me, 'Is it allowed for a Maranao to dance? You were strutting earlier. What would other Maranaos say?' I told him, 'I don't care about that; I want to dance!' He was really worried the others would do something to me. I told him nobody has died for dancing. Not yet!"

Raissa tells me that a hip-hop dancer doesn't fit the image of a proper Maranao young woman; it isn't considered as observing *malu* (or propriety). Every time she expresses her desire to dance, she's met with doubt and anxiety, "People, even Christians, think I'm breaking a protocol. When I was in high school, I wore a short skirt for cheer dancing. My classmates were like, 'Can you do that?!' I told them I'd look stupid if I wore pants."

Farida explains that her not wearing the veil is frowned upon "back home," "but it doesn't mean I don't try to be regular in my prayers." She spoke strongly against the growing number of youth who impose a kind of "overzealous" Islamic piety. "There are some very ultra-religious youth in my hometown. When you're not in proper attire, they spray you! That's not right." She recounted how, during a visit to Lanao, while walking without a veil, a group of young men began harassing her, wielding scissors to cut her hair. It was the older women, she said, seeing what was happening, gathered around her and warded the young men off, berating them for their "bad behavior."

The young women's struggle for authenticity—even visibility—pushes them to assert themselves within contending discourses of femininity as well as of being Muslim. Maranao women often face a dual challenge: discrimination within their

communities, and the stereotypes they encounter when they venture outside of their family and communities (Reyes et al., 2012). They contests how others define them, insisting on their own agency to practice their faith and to be true to themselves.

Cities invite a process of individualization and the young women, still mindful that they belong to a community, test the bounds where they can discover and express their individual selves. "I am a young Muslim who is fanatic about *anime* and *manga!*" "Hip hop forever!" Being badass" are just a few of the products of pop culture and urbanism that they acquire in the city. At times, they feel tension between their religious practices and the consumption of popular culture. While popular culture provides young people with "the esthetic means for expressing a stylistic individuality, demonstrating a measure of independence from adult norms, displaying cultural know-how to peers, and simply experiencing pleasure," it may also contain materials considered inappropriate by religious and traditional standards (O'Brien, 2013). Although the young women are aware of how others perceive this as a contradiction, they see it mostly as "folks are just not used to it." "K-pop fans among *kumbong* girls are not uncommon. I find the guys cute, too! I'm just a girl uy." "I've colored my hair a couple of times, under my veil I've been blonde and auburn," "*Contouring* is an art form." Generations change, they tell me. Their mothers who are educated and enjoy employment understand them better. The young women have grown up with a different confidence, one stemming from an informed pride in their identity, both collective and individual.

Many of the young women, while generally mindful of *maratabat*, questioned the petrified normativity of what it is to be Maranao by reflecting on global flows and understanding Islam. They want to "correct" and differentiate between tradition that retrogrades and "authentic" Islamic practices.

> "It's difficult to fight tradition. Some things are so imbedded in people's consciousness. *Rido* still happens. When our elders think honor is at stake, the men are ready to fight. This goes for politics, too. It doesn't solve anything. It's about pride. While, the Prophet teaches against it, it goes on and on… Arranged marriage,

> too. I still want to see the world! What can we do but work for something better, and have faith that Allah will enlighten the people. It is His will." Jamera, 23)

Arranged marriage remains a contentious practice. "Harder and harder in these days of women's rights and empowerment to present in a positive light," Raissa tells me. Aware that their marriage arrangements are not the kind they see in the romantic serials they follow, but rather function to resolve conflicts, consolidate clans, and political ties, the young women are pragmatic and insist that there is wisdom in the practice if they claim enough entitlements for themselves. Their relative privilege allows them room to maneuver. They insist one can be traditional and modern at the same time. For one, "you may not always marry the leading man but you can look and play the part of the leading lady," Jamera jests. Educated, bright, and opinionated, they are more likely to marry the man their parents pick for them. "Besides," Arfa says reassuringly, "If he turns out to be no good, I can always divorce him. Shame on his family!"

The fact that they are privileged is not lost among the young women. They regard themselves as being in a better situation than most. The circumstance of their underprivileged peers is something they know in the abstract but have never experienced. In the outskirts of the city is what is known among residents as a Moro ghetto. There, a charity group runs a day care center offering poor young Muslim women a place to leave their children while they tend to household chores. Lacking education and often unfamiliar with the city, the young women cannot find work and depend onlyon their husbands. Most of them were married young, arranged by their families, seen as a way to escape poverty, but only to end up exchanging one squalor for another.

At their core, the young students aspire to be good Muslims and good daughters who trust in their traditions and keep to their faith. They are unique, graceful, and contentious figures living in the flux of the time. They thread between uneasy empowerment and compliance, making individual choices and act according to often contradictory individual and structural processes.

Someday, home

On 23 May 2017, news broke out that the city of Marawi was under attack by a terrorist group. The President declared martial law over all of Mindanao. The siege of the city and fighting ensued over the next months. Thousands of residents evacuated to nearby cities, including Cagayan de Oro. Social media flooded with "#PrayForMarawi." But people were divided about the President's declaration. Remembering the almost two decades under the dictator Marcos, whose hold on power was ensured by his declaration of martial law, many protested. In the ensuing days, old differences were once again exposed. Supporters of the President questioned protesters about their geographic roots: if one was not from Mindanao, one had no right to speak. People were put in their places. The discourse became less about the violence inflicted upon Marawi but more about the contentions between the north and the south, between settlers and the children of the land. For many, the attack on Marawi merely validated suspicions. The dominant rhetoric was that people felt safer with Martial Law (Jennings, 2017). Aliyah tells me her *Abe* (father) is nervous about the President's declaration, "He remembers what my *Ama* (grandfather) said about Martial Law. It was a pretext to control the Moros and our land." The day Ramadan started, airstrikes began to rain on Marawi. Aliyah braces herself, all too aware that any mention of violence will feed into the image of the "terror Muslim" even as they are the ones caught in the crossfire. As more evacuees from Marawi entered the city, initially sympathetic locals began to whisper complains: "Traffic has doubled," "We'll soon be run over," "Drugs will increase."

While the young women's "present" in the city tends to look outward, their hoped-for futures turn inward, to going home,

> "I want to go home after graduation. It would be easy to stay here. I'm used to the city. There are bigger hospitals, more high tech. But I think it's better if I go home, open a clinic, maybe a pharmacy too. It's home. Islam teaches us to be charitable; whom do I serve first

but my own. They need me more." (Aissa)

Sittie's father grew in a farming village in Lanao; the few times that she had visited with him, he said nothing much had changed since he was young. "I took up agriculture because it's what our countryside needs. There are just so many poor Moro who till the land and get little return. Maybe, with a bit more knowledge, they can do better," she said. Perhaps this is the core of the modernist project, a reframing of young women's status, the target being education and expanding the space for their creative selves, rather than the veil (Najmabadi, 2006). Aware of their privilege, or perhaps made more so because of it, the young women aspire for a better Marawi, a better Lanao, a better home. They speak of the future with resolute purpose.

The next time I would see Aliyah would be almost a year after the declaration of martial law. I ask how she is, half expecting her to talk about her boyfriend or school. The last time we spoke, she was stressed about schoolwork and conflicted about her relationship. "We're *bakwits* now," she tells me, a term used to mean "evacuees." Well-to-do and well-connected, I imagined her family would be spared the full brunt of the military siege, "No one was spared. They bombed indiscriminately." "It's ok. We adjust meantime. But we all can't wait to go back home. We can rebuild, I think…," she trails off, reassuring but uncertain. She explains that most of her family had been forced to evacuate from Marawi. Her family home and those of most of her relatives' had been bombed in the military campaign, a tactical operation that the government said would last several weeks but which extended for months. Aliyah's family decided to come and live with a relative in the city. Aliyah was now no longer just another Maranao student in the city. Adding another tag, she is now also an evacuee, tolerated, sometimes pitied, often resented.

A friend who worked in the evacuation centers relayed that when they asked the women to list the things they need, many included lipstick. "We hope you can be part of this simple but meaningful gesture of solidarity by providing dignity through beauty," the news item on the effort had announced (Mateo, 2017; Dizon, 2017). In a flimsy attempt to lighten the mood, I asked Aliyah what she thought of it, lipstick and make-

up kits for evacuees. With her characteristic caustic humor, she replied, "Sure, you can lose everything, but dignity. Everyone should still look pretty picking up rubble."

Conclusion

The daughters of the rich Maranaos are no longer kept in *lamins* to be instructed on *adat*, the arts and refinements of being a lady. They are instead sent to universities in the city to acquire degrees as means to endow them with greater value, prestige, and worth that is all their own. Beauty and enhancing beauty—not altogether new among the Maranaos and learned from a tradition of refinement—are continued. Traditions of beauty are modified and updated in the city, turning old ways into the youthful cosmopolitanism that marks the urban girl. Far from being confined to the traditional and religious, the young women engage hegemonic discourses from multiple subject-positions, exploring and bridging often contrasting worlds. As they sojourn to the city, they acquire new habits. Asserting a proud heritage and using new products to form new identities, they reframe traditional notions of self and beauty.

For many of the young students, the further and longer they are away from their hometowns, the greater the latitude to both negotiate and elaborate tradition. The move to the city brings them closer to the global, in which they rapidly integrate. Their virtual connections and the global market economy de-territorialize them and connect them to varied cultural flows of Islamic symbols and youth culture from around the world. The phones constantly in their hands become the portable *lamins* that connect them to new ways.

Like many of their contemporaries who venture into the city, young Muslim women absorb its ways as, for better or worse, they are absorbed by it. They acquire tactics to navigate the tensions in their everyday lives (de Certeau, 1984). In their minds, modern items do not necessarily contradict their traditional and religious identities; instead, these items allow them to participate in contemporary flows. While some of the young women I spoke with follow religious discipline by wearing the prescribed

Islamic clothing and comportment, they also participate in the urban youth lifestyle, consumerism, and having fun in the city. They maintain and enhance the tradition of self-enhancement, employing cosmetics and fashion, while their immersion in the global flows of goods, images, and desires turn them into particularly modern subjects.

The figure of the young Muslim woman is by no means singular and my twenty interlocutors are not representative. Their everyday lives, however, offer glimpses into emergent realities—of being local and global, traditional and modern—and how these come together to reframe definitions of being young and female, and, possibly, new meanings of being Muslim and Maranao. Their stories also reveal the structures of authority that are prevalent in their lives. The young women develop notions of modernity that are lived and experienced as synthesis and frictions of tradition, religion and the urban, complexed by cultural and economic hegemonies. What emerge are modern individuals living in multiple, sometimes contradictory, cultural systems (Barth, 1989). They straddle between assertions of individuality and belonging to a community. Whereas the old figure of the Maranao woman was one who was sequestered, proper and covered, the young women present themselves no longer simply as Muslim, but as young, educated urbanites possessing modern ethos - Maranaos facing new frontiers.

Notes

1 According to Horowitz (2001), the idea of amok is often associated with "exclusively male violence" that "involves a person who kills with abandon" (p. 102). Particular to the Philippines, pre-Islamic *amok* became "fused with Islamic legitimation…Muslim rebellion against Spaniards, against the Americans, then against the Japanese, and more recently against the Philippine army and Christina settlers" (p.105).

2 Motadel (2014) traces the origins of the term *juramentado* to Islamic anti-colonial efforts against Spain. Moro warriors were known to launch suicide attacks against the Spanish soldiers, who feared the Moro warriors calling them *juramentados* (p. 23)

3 Engaging the 2004 French government ban on "conspicuous signs" of religious affiliations in public school, Scott (2007)

argued that the policy was indicative of the country's failure to assimilate all its subjects as full citizens. Contending further that positing particular secular liberalism as the sole standard for emancipation and individuality against the implied modesty of the veil rendered Muslims as un-French, aggravating the "clash of civilizations" and increasing racial and religious tensions in the country (pp. 176-182).

[4] For practicing Muslims, *halal* means permitted or allowed products for consumption and use. These products must not contain porcine and alcoholic products and by-products and must have undergone *halal* prescribed methods of preparation.

[5] The young women are not particular about the use of *halal* cosmetics. They purchase their cosmetics and personal care products from the malls—popular Korean shops and department and drug stores that carry popular international brands. "I'm not really sure if *halal* applies to make-up. I'm more particular about the food I eat," Aiza tells me. Whether a cosmetic product is *halal* or not has been found to be of low consideration among Muslim cosmetics consumers (Rajagopal et al., 2011 in Mohezar et al. 2016, p. 48).

[6] Lanuza's (2012) study of Muslim high school students in Metro Manila found Muslim culture became "hybridized" within the mainstream culture of public schools as Muslim students participated in different youth subcultures (p. 55).

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