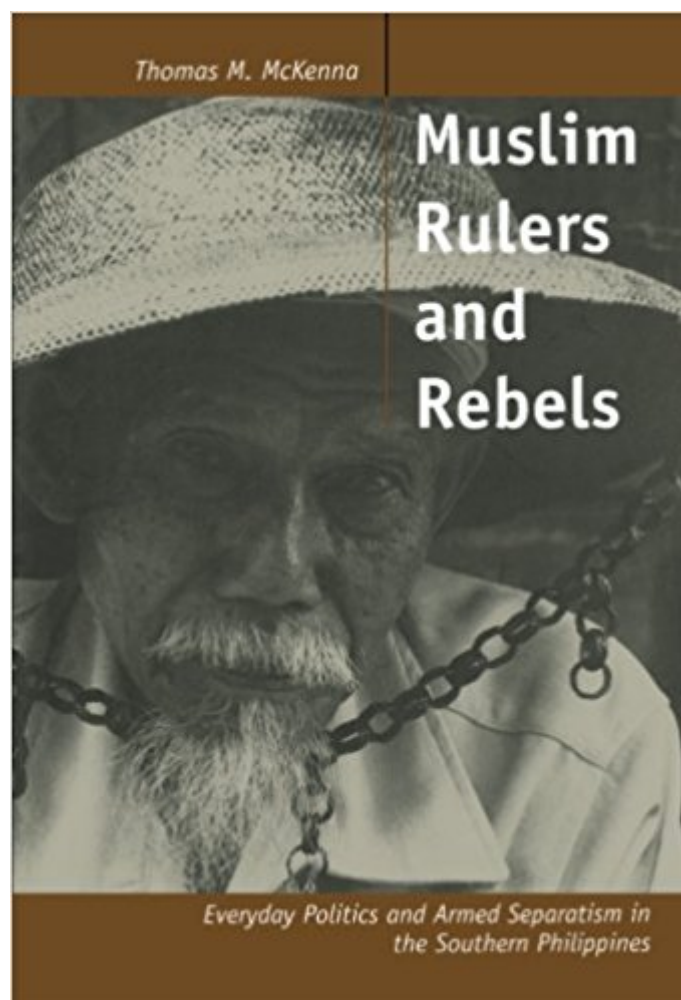


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Muslim Rulers And Rebels: Everyday Politics And Armed Separatism In The Southern Philippines (Comparative Studies On Muslim Societies)





Synopsis

In this first ground-level account of the Muslim separatist rebellion in the Philippines, Thomas McKenna challenges prevailing anthropological analyses of nationalism as well as their underlying assumptions about the interplay of culture and power. He examines Muslim separatism against a background of more than four hundred years of political relations among indigenous Muslim rulers, their subjects, and external powers seeking the subjugation of Philippine Muslims. He also explores the motivations of the ordinary men and women who fight in armed separatist struggles and investigates the formation of nationalist identities. A skillful meld of historical detail and ethnographic research, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* makes a compelling contribution to the study of protest, rebellion, and revolution worldwide.

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"Thomas McKenna has provided the first convincing explanation of a major insurgency that continued on its bloody course for nearly a quarter century. Given the enormous complexity of the revolt, the patchwork of ethnicities involved, and the opaque quality of the literature, McKenna's accomplishment is a considerable one."—Alfred W. McCoy, author of *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* "Superb as both ethnography and social history . . . offers significant new insights into the changing direction of Muslim politics in the Philippines and how to understand comparable movements elsewhere. It will be a basic reference for those interested in the dynamics of ethnoreligious political movements in general."—Dale Eickelman, author of *Knowledge and*

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Do read!

I'd been flying to and from Cotabato City, the site of McKenna's research, almost every month for last few months. I'm a Catholic, but the fact is, if you are on business in Cotabato City, you talk to and deal with Muslims. The Muslims I met, Maguindanaons for the most part, were personable and likeable. They're nothing like the vagabond bad guys I heard about from my elders in the 70s, my growing up years and the years of the war in Mindanao. I also have Catholic relatives who've been there since the 1930s. In one of the early chapters of his book, McKenna wrote that many Christians in Cotabato City knew next to nothing about how Muslims really live and what Muslims really are because they choose not to know. I believe he's correct since what my Christian cousins and friends say, which is sometimes patronizing and not at all complimentary, do not seem to mesh with what I know of the Muslims I've met in the course of work. In my conversations with my Muslim associates, they eagerly welcome inquiries about what Islam is all about but they are not about to insist that you convert to Islam. But then again, my cousins and friends been living there for years on end so they should know what they're talking about, right? These days, Cotabato City is a city unlike any I've been to in the Philippines, even among the bigger cities in Mindanao. There is an almost equal number of Christians and Muslims and the physical features of the city reflect this. I have yet to test this theory, but I think McKenna's book might prove provocative to Muslims who espouse separatism or federalism (as a "softer" form of separatism). McKenna traces the beginnings of a separate Muslim identity to gentle tending by American educators of young Muslim minds who went on to become national leaders and local datus. I'll be sending a copy of the book to a conservative Muslim Maguindanaon who had some harsh words to say about the 1898 Treaty of Paris and the

Americans who governed Mindanao thereafter. It would be interesting to find out what he thinks after reading Mckenna, who wrote mostly of his people, the Maguindanaons. On another level, I believe this book should be required reading for all Filipinos. Our required history courses concentrate too much on Philippine history in Luzon and the Visayas. We Christian Filipinos hardly know anything about Mindanao except that our national hero, Jose Rizal, was exiled in Dapitan in Zamboanga. (Now, what we know is that Basilan, also in Western Mindanao is the site of the Balikatan activities of American and Filipino soldiers against the Abu Sayyaf, and that Zamboanga is the city center for the Americans.) The reasons for the rebellion of Christian Filipinos against Spanish and American rule are analyzed to death in our history books and even given symbolic parallels to the Passion of Christ. But no narration even of the Mindanao rebellion against colonial rule is part of our required reading in Philippine history. During one visit to Cotabato City, an old Maguindanaoan lady proudly told me, a Filipina Catholic from Luzon with a Spanish name and an American education, that her people had never been colonized unlike my forebears. I had nothing to say. But I would be honored if she considered me her countrywoman in spite of everything. Just the other night, I watched a documentary feature of a battle fought to the death by Maranaos, another Muslim group, against the Americans in 1902 in the town of Bayang in Lanao del Sur. After the battle, only five Maranao men were left alive. Even women and children were killed, their bodies dumped in the trenches. Around 10 American soldiers were killed. American sources tell the story that towards the end of the battle, a white flag was flown outside the fort in Bayang. Thus, they say, the Maranaos surrendered. Actually, among Muslims, a white flag is flown to indicate a death.

This volume gives us an interesting ethnography of an impoverished slum in Cotabato City called Campo Muslim. The author protracts his study of the slum to encompass anthropological contributions to understanding Gramscian hegemony, nationalism, colonial histories, formation of new, post-traditional elites, and subaltern resistance. Most useful in this book is the account of the construction of Muslim national identity and the account of the elections in the late 80s wherein the Muslim and Islamist participants made an unexpectedly poor showing giving most of the victories to Christian candidates. Parts of the book are uneven; however, the account is consistent to his methodology from the outside and he allows the information to lead him--always be circumspect that ideology or presuppositions don't lead his interpretations by the nose at least in matters of peasant politics. In other words, the peasant remains an autonomous political actor that doesn't merely parrot and conform to the requests of the socially more advantaged. The most glaring flaw in the book was what I personally found to be an over-identification with Muslim Filipinos over and

against Christian Filipinos. Armed separatist movements are portrayed sympathetically, whereas 'Christian' efforts, whether in terms of national integration, militant attempts to stop succession, and even charity are treated as all being pernicious acts directed against Muslims. One example was the characterization of Mother Theresa's charity for children in the city as being 'perverse' without any such acerbic criticisms for the vicious effects of separatism movement and the deaths it caused given. The same goes for foreign actors. In the work, American actions in the Philippines are sinister and undermine Philippine Muslim identity; whereas, Libyan, Saudi Arabian, and Egyptian interference are merely catalysts for social change.

I read this book as part of a research project that I'm doing. Mr. McKenna did an outstanding job of presenting historical facts, bibliographic material and his own opinions. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to further understand the Southern Philippines and the growing strength of the Muslim movement.

Dr. McKenna has obviously spent a great deal of time and study in the southern Philippines. His insights are thought-provoking. I highly recommend this book.

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