

# Manga Simoket: The Sequence of Conflict in the Meranaw Epic *Darangen*

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## ABSTRACT

*This study critically analyzes Volume 1 of the Meranaw epic Darangen as a narrative of peace woven through structured sequences of conflict. The epic is not just a literary artifact, but a reflection of a dynamic cultural construct based on Meranaw values like maratabat (honor), kinship, and leadership. Using critical discourse analysis, this study reveals that conflicts ranging from absent leadership and unmarried king to dishonesty and damaged reputation are not arbitrary but serve as moral elements on the journey of peace in the Meranaw community today. These conflicts are settled using traditional mechanisms that parallel modern Meranaw practices like totonganaya (kinship) and agama justice systems that shed light on an indigenous conflict resolution logic that is relevant to the Meranaw people today. This also fills a gap in Meranaw studies by focusing and analyzing the sequence of conflicts in relation to the current realities of the Meranaw people like rido and maratabat. The findings also show that the epic provides not only literary and cultural significance, but also frameworks for addressing conflicts in the Meranaw community today. Finally, this study repositions the epic as a living socio-cultural archive and a moral compass which demonstrates that within its verses exist essential means for peacebuilding, leadership, and cultural preservation despite the challenges of the present-day Meranaw community.*

## KEYWORDS

*Sequence; conflict; Meranaw; epic; Darangen.*

## INTRODUCTION

The *Darangen* is a pre-Islamic epic of the Meranaw people that serves as a significant literary legacy and a dynamic repository of Meranaw indigenous knowledge, values, and social constructs. This epic is considered as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity because it is in ancient Meranaw verse and transmitted through oral tradition that depicts the valiant deeds, intricate kinship structures, and vibrant cultural manifestations of the Meranaw people. The Volume 1 of the *Darangen* is replete with accounts of leadership, conflict, encompassing personal duels, inter-family conflicts which are not random but are systematically arranged to embody the rules, ideals, and ethical principles of a society where honor and kinship are interconnected. Furthermore, in an era where the Meranaw community endures contemporary challenges such as clan disputes (*rido*), and displacement due to urbanization and conflict, the epic *Darangen*'s thematic framework of conflict and resolution transcends mere historical narrative (Bartolome 2011, 12-111).

Despite an increasing study on the Meranaw culture, a substantial gap persists in interpreting the sequence of conflicts in the Volume 1 of the epic *Darangen* and its implications on the sociocultural psyche and lived experiences of the Meranaw people.

Current research has predominantly concentrated on the linguistic, poetic, or mythological aspects of the epic, while giving less consideration to the narrative structure of conflict. Furthermore, few have employed an intertextual and socio-anthropological work to analyze how these conflicts correspond with or differ from the contemporary realities of the Meranaw people. This study illuminates persistent ideas such as *maratabat* (honor) and the influence of kinship in both conflict and peacebuilding that continue to define Meranaw identity and decision-making today.

Moreover, there is a lack of academic research to correlate the epic's sequence of conflicts with present-day Meranaw community's conflict resolution, particularly for post-Marawi siege, intergenerational trauma, and cultural preservation. In the lack of such research, the Darangen is in risk of being reduced to a mere remnant of the past, rather than serving as a dynamic resource for collective understanding and recovery of the present-day Meranaw community.

This study aims to critically analyze the sequence of conflicts in Volume 1 of the epic Darangen while juxtaposing them with current conflict realities in the Meranaw community. This seeks to elucidate how the epic's narratives provide frameworks for addressing present challenges by examining both the literary structure and the cultural logic inherent in this sequence of conflicts. It aims to illustrate how the epic serves not only as a cultural heritage but also as a dynamic moral instrument that is capable of guiding peacebuilding and community resilience in the present-day landscape of the Meranaw community.

Finally, this research contributes to the discourse on indigenous Meranaw literature as a socio-cultural archive and moral guide especially within the Meranaw community. In doing so, it reestablishes the Darangen as not merely a relic of the past, but as a tool for guiding the present-day Meranaw community.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This literary research utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA), a component of the qualitative research methodology. A qualitative research method provides a comprehensive description of all the events and occurrences inside a certain activity or scenario. Since Bressler (2011) is the author of *"Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice"*, this reference deals with literary theory and critical approaches — making it suitable to support parts of your discussion about textual interpretation, symbolism, or meaning construction in your analysis of *Manga Simoket: The Sequence of Conflict*.

The main source of data is from Volume 1 of the Meranaw epic Darangen which is originally written in Meranaw language and is translated in English by Dr. Ma. Delia Coronel (former Chairman of the Folklore Division of the Mindanao State University-Marawi City). The Volume 1 (Books 1,2,3) has 233 pages that contains 645 verses in both Meranaw language and English language. The Darangen is translated, compiled, and published in 1986 with eight (8) volumes by the Folklore Division of Mindanao State University Research Center (now the Mamitua Saber Research and Technology Center) in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur, Philippines under the sponsorship of the Toyota Foundation. The Darangen does not have a (living) single author but is rather a collection of tales which are passed down orally from generation to generation. Other main sources include interviews with key informants from the social, religious, economic, political, and academic sectors of the Meranaw community (Casan 2024, 61-68).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below illustrates the sequence of conflicts that are arranged according to the chronology of events in the epic that further reveal the journey of peace in the Darangen.

One way to look at the characters' journey of peace in the Meranaw epic Darangen is through the conflicts they face. In the Darangen, the absence of a leader has left the people unsettled, hence, he is the arbiter of peace.

**Table 1.** The Sequence of Conflicts in the *Darangen*

Sequence of Conflicts	Book No.	Journey of Peace in the <i>Darangen</i>
absent leader	Book 1	A leader is the arbiter of peace.
unmarried king	Book 1	Marriage fosters peace.
speaking ill	Book 2	Words expressed must promote peace.
disputes	Book 2	Justice has no kin.
loss of reputation	Book 3	Preserving honor is a peaceful deed.
dishonesty	Book 3	Integrity is fundamental to peace.

In Iliyan a Bembaran, a picturesque kingdom, is portrayed as deserted at the start of the epic. A small population of ten families settle there because there is an *absent leader*. This means that no ruler or hero ever rose to prominence to have his actions praised. Since it is so dreadful, no one comes to Iliyan a Bembaran. It is indeed a period of great darkness and confusion for the people of Iliyan a Bembaran kingdom. This is mentioned in the following verses of the epic:

*verses 1-8: In these our dark and confused times  
 Well-informed men are hard to find,  
 For very few would know all things  
 Good and bad or just anything  
 Now let us change this condition;  
 As in darkening neutral pink  
 To make a pleasing violet  
 So let us hope to make a change.*

Saber (1991, 127) argues that an ideal leader among the Meranaw people is not only a traditional datu or an ordinary educated individual, but rather a combination of both in terms of his character and responsibilities as an educated datu. This kind of leader is well-suited to meet the demands of both the traditional institution of the Meranaw community and the modern society. Furthermore, the need for well-informed leaders does not imply only choosing individuals with a moderate level of literacy to manage bureaucratic affairs. Leadership within the Meranaw community would be more impactful if it prioritizes the welfare of the majority. From this, it can be inferred that the Meranaw community, both in the past and today, need a leader that has qualities such as honesty, integrity, and an unrelenting desire for leadership to create a harmonious community. Therefore, it is evident that the first step towards achieving peace is to have a well-informed *leader who is an arbiter of peace*.

Moreover, in the Darangen, the first ruler of Iliyan a Bembaran, Diwata Ndaw Gibon, has finally ascended to the throne, however he is bereft of a queen to support his reign and assist him in ruling the kingdom. The epic illustrates that the kingdom is left barren with an unmarried king. An *unmarried king* brings conflict to the entire kingdom because he becomes incomplete as a leader without a wife who becomes his partner in governance. To resolve this conflict within the community, a group of notable datus from Iliyan a Bembaran gathered at the royal torogan. These are poetically portrayed in the following verses:

*verses 23-29: ...His kingdom is once vacant space  
 Because he had as yet no wife,  
 No fair partner to grace his throne*

*And help him organize the place.  
Nor are there any settlements,  
No subjects to people a town  
For this lord is indeed alone.*

*verses 107-: It is thus proper at that time  
To assemble in one small group  
All of the prominent datus  
And all the people of the place  
At the royal torogan there  
And bring them to a discussion  
About the present situation  
And the problem that now confronts  
Their king, Diwata Ndaw Gibon*

After a consensus is made in the royal *torogan*, the assembled datus summoned the magic boat *Rinamentaw Mapalaw* and set sail across the picturesque seas in quest of a princess in the famed kingdom of Minango'aw a Rogong. They immediately open fire upon arrival, setting off the cannons on the shore to respond. They have made their request known to the King of Minango'aw a Rogong after the exchange of cannon shooting. The delighted acceptance of their marriage proposal follows shortly, and the familial ties that bind them are formed through their betrothal. Finally, Iliyan a Bembaran's darkness, confusion, and emptiness are resolved by the marriage of their King Diwata Ndaw Gibon. Both Islam and Meranaw traditions require marriage for both men and women. This condition is adhered to by everyone to the greatest extent possible. Meranaw males are expected to marry once they reach adulthood, and they must not have any valid reasons to avoid doing so. The institution of marriage is diligently maintained in its original form by the Meranaw community throughout history. The only distinction between previous and modern marriages is in the amount of monetary costs. In the past, a little amount of money is required, however in the present day, a Meranaw wedding incurs a substantial cash expense (Saber & Tamano 1961, 113).

In addition, Meranaw families often choose to consider all eligible young men and women who are of equal social status and possess a comparable level of wealth that they consider worthy for their daughters. Typically, the parents of the young man are responsible for making the choice, and their decision must be consulted to all the relatives (Alonto 1980, 70-71). This also means that, for a Meranaw man or leader to achieve peace for his community, it is imperative that he carefully choose a spouse from within his own social rank, who can effectively support him in governing. Hence, *marriage fosters peace*.

Furthermore, the relationship within the kinship group is a non-negotiable for the Meranaw community hence *speaking ill* about a fellow Meranaw injures *maratabat*, thus, words expressed must promote peace. During the said gathering, one of the original inhabitants of Iliyan a Bembaran, the revered and wise Dinaradiya Rogong, arrives and looks about at the datus gathered there, each one is dressed in the elegant *torogan* of their lord. He specifically targets the leader of the Samar people and inquired about any kingdoms that are fully established and fortunate enough to have a beautiful maiden who is suitable to marry King Diwata Ndaw Gibon. This is because they are willing to provide the Bembaran wealth in exchange for her marriage to their king. After bowing his head in respect to the lord, the chief of the Samars, a people who reside close to the sea, stood up and responded politely. He then begins to tell the story of Minango'aw a Rogong, and the beautiful princess Aya Paganay Ba'i. Furthermore, the chief of the Samar, having an honorary title within in the Meranaw nobility is appropriately addressed by the Meranaw datus in the royal *torogan* through the verses below:

*verses 120-141: He courteously turned to the left  
And smilingly regarded all  
The assembled chiefs in the room,  
All the reigning noble datus  
In their lord's royal torogan.  
He singled out and then looked straight  
At the leader of the samar;  
The sea people; addressing him  
In front of all, he began thus:  
"O leader of the samar, if  
It be right and agreeable  
With you to share us your knowledge,  
May I be allowed to ask you,  
For you would know, is there perhaps,  
Somewhere, some country or people  
Equal in beauty, wealth, power,  
A land, one completely settled  
And blessed with a lovely maid.  
Worthy to be wed with our lord,  
Our Diwata Ndaw Gibon  
Tell, us, for we are ready to  
Give the treasures of Bembaran.*

*verses 145-148: Up rose and spoke in kind reply  
The chief of the samars, sea people,  
Who first bowed his head to the lord  
And began to speak...*

The Meranaw people generally believe that if a Meranaw individual lacks *maratabat*, he cannot be considered a true Meranaw (Bartolome 2004, 41). In general, the Meranaw people are known for their peaceful nature. They are committed to proactively preventing any instances of violence using whatever available means. However, their tendency for violence becomes evident when their integrity, honor, reputation, or status are challenged, since these values are the very essence of their existence. Experiencing embarrassment, humiliation, or disgrace, particularly in the presence of the public, is considered more severe than death. Consequently, it may warrant a forceful action, if possible, such as taking a life, to completely restore one's honor. The Meranaw people continuously seek revenge when they experience harm, since they never feel comfortable otherwise. However, they consistently strive to stay out of situations that may cause embarrassment or disrespect and would prefer to avoid direct confrontation altogether. Therefore, a neutral third party is always engaged to help carry out the resolution of the conflict (Bartolome 2004, 73). Hence, in order to prevent conflicts within the Meranaw community, the epic informs that *words expressed must promote peace* and not encourage negative outcomes.

Additionally, *disputes* and bloodshed commence through hurtful words or aggressive behaviors that violate the traditional laws and values of the community members. This often reflects the concept of *justice has no kin*. The Meranaw justice system often includes negotiations, conciliation, arbitration, mediation, and the use of punitive or retributive actions against the responsible party. It aims to resolve issues related to marital strife, family disagreements, violations of chastity, violent confrontations ending in bloodshed, and matters of life and death. It places great importance on showing reverence towards symbols of traditional local administration, morals, and religion.

Also, the Meranaw community commonly practice the *totonganaya* and agama justice systems. The *totonganaya* primarily addresses conflicts and disagreements within kinship relationships, such as the rejection of a man's proposal to marry a lady from his own family, the lack of support and cooperation among members of the kinship group, failure to repay debts and fulfill other responsibilities to relatives, and nonadherence to traditional customs (*adat*). In contrast, the agama incorporates mediation and conflict resolution as part of its strategies for agama activities. However, there is a lack of cooperation among agama members when it comes to carrying out these activities. Additionally, there is operational disagreement among agama members due to differing political commitments. Conflict also arises among agama members within religious organizations (Nolasco 2004, 162-163).

The *totonganaya* employs a blood-related resolution mechanism called *kokoman o kambatabataa*. The *salsila* is used to trace the blood relationships between the opposing parties, sometimes with the help of a mediator or relatives of the parties involved. However, under the agama, the judicial system is regulated by the unwritten customary law known as *kokoman o taritib and igma* (order and consensus). This system is facilitated by the *sultan, datu, imam* (Islamic priest), *kali* (Islamic judge), political leaders, and other community leaders. Additionally, the agama judicial system resolves problems through the process of *kapangangawid*, which is a community-based system that determines both monetary and moral damages to be imposed on the person at fault (Nolasco 2004, 162- 163). The *agama* justice system is illustrated in the following verses of the epic:

*verses 1089-: Suppose it happens, like it can,  
That you, yourselves, are to face  
With an emergency, like as  
One of your men is killed fighting  
Among themselves, then act at once.  
Do not waste time by waiting for  
A delegation; you go to  
The place even when it rains and  
If this must happen at night, you  
Use torches to light your path so  
As to move as fast as you can  
To reach the troubled spot and go  
To the house of the one who had  
Killed in order to judge the case  
Now as soon as you arrive there;  
You take charge at once...*

*verses 1117-: Now, as the highest ruler of  
This land, the way to act in this  
Case is to be strictly neutral,  
Exercise justice, even if  
The other party is your own  
Relative; if he is guilty,  
Then pass sentence on him; in such  
Cases, we have no relatives.  
Even if it involved aliens  
From the sky, if they had the truth,  
Side with them, for here it is clear  
That these are your true relatives.*

Moreover, in cases of the *loss of reputation* through conflicts which are triggered by disrespect, transgression, death and retaliation, it is imperative for the Meranaw people to

deeply understand and embody that *preserving honor is a peaceful deed*. For instance, in the epic Darangen, Prince Madali arrives at Iliyan a Bembaran, which he notices is unusually deserted, in the first volume of the epic, Book 3 (Kapmadali). Since no one from the royal datus, including the chief, is there, Prince Madali suspects that an enemy attacked Iliyan a Bembaran and executed them all. Subsequently, Princess Lawanen confesses that the kingdom of Danalima'a Rogong captured all the royal datus in Bembaran within a massive stone mountain. This is because after a *tonong* carried Prince Paramata Bantogen away, all the royal datus embark on a broad search to find him.

Unfortunately, all the royal datus fall under Walain Pirimbangan's spell the moment they arrive at Danalima'a Rogong. Upon hearing this, Prince Madali's expression is abruptly changed, and his rage boils up. However, to protect Iliyan a Bembaran from an enemy assault, Princess Lawanen pleads with Prince Madali to remain in the kingdom for one more day. Nevertheless, the princess and her companions are reassured by Prince Madali that they are protected by the good *tonongs*. In his mission to restore Iliyan a Bembaran's honor, Prince Madali is bestowed with all necessary items by Princess Lawanen. In addition, Prince Madali has requested for the good *tonongs* to transport the magic chair where the princess and her companions are safe until he returns to Iliyan a Bembaran. It becomes clear from the following verses in the epic Darangen that the only journey of peace for a character to achieve inner peace is to restore either his own or his family's honor:

*verses 410-414: So I am leaving right away  
For Danalima'a Rogong  
In order to avenge the shame  
That has befallen our nation,  
Our people of Bembaran.*

Also, further conflicts arise when *dishonesty* is present because it mostly inflicts emotional pain to the offended party. It also means that *integrity is fundamental to peace*. The importance of integrity, which is integrally connected to every element of human existence, is repeatedly and vividly underlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Muslims (the Meranaw people in this case), among other essential values, qualities, and teachings. Many scholars in the fields of social and political science consider it an essential component of a peaceful society, political stability, and social concord. Hence, for any community to prosper, live in peace, and avoid conflicts, people must learn to trust and be honest with one another. This concept is known as "social trust and honesty" in contemporary sociology.

Moreover, honesty and trust are the bedrock of every cohesive community. They are the most valuable social assets. When it comes to social welfare, economic progress, and political stability, possessing social assets is very essential. Akhter and Rehman (2020, 1-10) state that trust and honesty have an extraordinary role in settling all matters of Muslim society, referring to how the Holy Qur'an of the Muslims presents this feature of integrity in a very clear way. Integrity and trustworthiness are cornerstones of any civilization; and when people are trustworthy and forthright with one another, it shows that a society has grown, evolved, and learned to be moderate. This is illustrated in the following verses of the epic Darangen:

*verses 200-210: "May I ask you to speak clearly,  
That you tell me straight what happened  
Do not hide anything from me,  
But tell me truly, tell me all  
What happened here to our people,  
Because if it are true indeed  
That our enemies had attacked*

*Our Iliyan a Bembaran,  
Then this tower would no longer  
Be here and both of you would be  
In some foreign or unknown sea.*

*Do not try to fool me, my friend,  
With your little tricks to confuse  
Me, myself, Madali', for may  
I be cursed to death if you shall  
Not go to the Land of the Dead!"*

Therefore, an absent leader, unmarried king, speaking ill, disputes, loss of reputation, and dishonesty are the sequence of conflicts in the epic *Darangen* which fully elucidates the characters' journey of peace. It may also be simply deduced that the pursuit of peace encompasses not only the social obligation of leaders and individuals towards others and the community, but also the need of resolving internal conflicts as a necessary condition for achieving profound peace.

## CONCLUSION

The research provides a deep understanding into both the *Darangen* literary structure and the Meranaw people's current sociocultural realities. Through a critical analysis of the sequence of conflicts in Volume 1 of the epic, this study repositions the epic as a dynamic moral compass profoundly based in indigenous Meranaw beliefs, rather than a creative or folklore representation. One can infer that the epic is more than just a relic, but it is also a lively, instructive framework that reflects the complexities of the present-day Meranaw community in terms of leadership, honor, kinship, and peace.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that any conflict whether caused by the absence of a leader, an unmarried ruler, dishonesty, or loss of reputation is not arbitrary, but rather part of a meaningful journey of peace. It also becomes apparent that peace in the Meranaw perspective is more than just the absence of conflict but it is a state based on relational ethics, social harmony, and individual integrity. This further implies that the epic's tradition has long ingrained an elaborate framework of values that are still critical for conflict resolution and community healing today.

Finally, this study demonstrates that indigenous literature, such as the Meranaw epic *Darangen*, provides blueprints for action rather than just cultural nostalgia. It urges scholars, educators, and community leaders to acknowledge the importance of oral traditions in shaping contemporary peacebuilding efforts. Through reviving and reinterpreting the epic's sequence of conflicts, this study enables present and future generations of Meranaw people to reclaim their epic not just as a source of pride, but also as an actual means of social repair, moral reflection, and communal resilience.

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