

Amalgamation Practices Among Moro Tribes in Bangsamoro Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the practices and challenges of intermarriage among Moro tribes in Poblacion Balabagan, Lanao del Sur, and Bayanga Norte, Matanog, Maguindanao del Sur, where intermarriage is prevalent. The research explores the motivations for intermarriage, how couples navigate cultural differences, and the practices involved in their marriages. Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through interviews with intermarried individuals knowledgeable about intermarriage practices. Findings indicate that while intermarriage is common, the specific customs and rituals vary by tribe, with all couples ensuring adherence to Islamic traditions. Notable differences include traditional wedding ceremonies, such as the performance of the kulintang at Maguindanaon weddings. The study highlights the role of social workers in supporting intermarried couples, particularly through counseling, as they navigate cultural and familial challenges. This research provides valuable insights for social work professionals addressing family dynamics in the context of growing intermarriage rates.

KEYWORDS

Intermarriage; Moro tribes; cultural differences; Islamic traditions; social workers.

INTRODUCTION

Intermarriage, once rare and socially discouraged, has become increasingly common in various parts of the world. While couples in earlier generations faced social isolation and ridicule for marrying outside their race or religion, shifting societal norms in places like the United States have seen the rates of intermarriage rise significantly. For example, about 15% of all marriages in the U.S. in 2010 were between individuals of different racial or ethnic backgrounds, a significant increase from around 7% in 1980 (Wang, 2012). Despite this trend, intermarriage remains controversial in many regions, where it is often met with resistance due to cultural, social, or religious differences (Davidson, 2002).

Sociological studies have shown that people tend to marry within their social groups—a phenomenon known as endogamy or homogamy. Race, religion, and socioeconomic status play important roles in shaping marriage choices, with intermarriage often viewed as an indicator of social integration (Nottmeyer, 2014). However, intermarriage can also bring challenges as couples navigate differing cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs. These challenges can sometimes lead to tension within the marriage and the wider community.

In the Philippines, where more than 90% of the population is Christian and Muslims represent a small minority, marriage between Muslims and Christians is considered "intermarriage" (Smith, 2001). This distinction reflects a broader perception of the two groups as separate communities with distinct boundaries. In the southern region of

Mindanao, where Muslims form a majority in some areas, intermarriage between Muslims and Christians often highlights and reinforces these religious and ethnic divisions (Yoshizawa & Kusaka, 2020). These couples face unique challenges in navigating both communities' cultural, social, and religious expectations.

This study aims to explore the experiences of intermarried couples in the Philippines, focusing on marriages between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao. The study seeks to identify common practices that bridge the gap between the two religious groups by examining how these couples build relationships through family, kinship, and community. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to understanding how intermarriage can challenge and reshape traditional group boundaries in the region.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design based on phenomenology, a methodological approach that focuses on exploring the lived experiences of individuals. As a philosophical and methodological approach, phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of phenomena by investigating experiences from the perspective of those who live them (Sinfield, Goldspink, & Wilson, 2023). It enables the researcher to capture participants' subjective experiences and describe how they interpret and make sense of a specific phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon is the practices and experiences of intermarried couples among the Moro tribes in the Bangsamoro region.

According to Smith et al. (2018), phenomenology concerns the structures of consciousness experienced from the first-person point of view. A key aspect of this method is intentionality, which refers to the idea that experiences are always about something, directed towards an object or meaning, shaped by context and conditions. By applying this approach, the study aims to understand the participants' aspirations, challenges, and cultural practices within their specific sociocultural context.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, specifically in Poblacion Balabagan, Lanao Del Sur, and Bayanga Norte, Matanog, and Maguindanao. These areas were chosen due to the high prevalence of intermarriage among Moro tribes, making them relevant contexts for the study. The region is home to various Moro ethnic groups, including the Iranun, Maranao, and Maguindanaon, with distinct cultural traditions, including marriage-related ones.

Research Participants

The participants in this study comprised five individuals involved in intermarriages, selected for their direct knowledge of the marriage practices of the Moro tribes. The group included two women and three men, each belonging to different Moro tribes, namely the Iranun, Maranao, and Maguindanaon. These participants were identified through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants with specific knowledge, experiences, or insights relevant to the study.

Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate as the research required participants with a specialized understanding of intermarriage practices within their communities. The criteria for selection included individuals who had experienced intermarriage and were knowledgeable about the cultural practices of their respective tribes when marrying outside their group. The researchers selected participants based on their accessibility, willingness to participate, and their ability to provide rich, contextually grounded data.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a self-constructed interview guide, which consisted of open-ended questions designed to facilitate in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and reviewed by experts in the field to ensure validity and relevance. The questions were designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the participants' backgrounds, their experiences with intermarriage, and the specific cultural practices they encountered when marrying outside their tribes. The open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, providing rich, nuanced data for analysis. The guide covered key areas such as the participants' marital practices, adjustments in intermarital relationships, and their perceptions of cultural differences between tribes.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, a method aligned with the phenomenological approach's emphasis on capturing participants' lived experiences. Before the interviews, the researchers obtained permission from relevant local authorities, including the Barangay Chairman, and informed participants about the study's objectives, ensuring transparency and ethical compliance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, consistent with phenomenological research. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers transcribed the interview audio recordings and closely reviewed the transcripts to identify recurring themes related to intermarriage practices, aspirations, and cultural negotiations among participants.

Thematic analysis was employed to organize the data according to the key research questions, allowing the researchers to extract meaningful insights about the experiences of intermarried individuals in the Bangsamoro region. The identified themes were categorized and interpreted in light of the study's objectives. This approach helped capture the nuanced experiences of the participants, providing a deeper understanding of how intermarriage impacts cultural practices and social interactions within the Moro tribes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they voluntarily participated and understood the nature of the study. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study without penalty. The researchers ensured confidentiality and anonymity by using pseudonyms and safeguarding personal data by ethical standards (Fouka, 2011). Care was taken to respect the participants' cultural sensitivities, especially given the personal nature of the subject matter. Despite some participants feeling hesitant to fully elaborate on their experiences due to the sensitive nature of intermarriage, efforts were made to create a safe, non-judgmental space for them to share their insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intermarriage Practices

The condition of the dowry (Mahr), Islamic marriage ceremony, and Traditional tribe marriage ceremony are three fundamental themes that emerged from the data analysis for research question number one.

Condition and the Dowry (Mahr)

The first major theme is the Condition and the dowry (Mahr), one of the practices of intermarriage. As the researchers investigate the practices of intermarriage, they discover that, like a normal way of Muslim marriage, one of their practices is the provision of dowry (Mah'r) to be given to the bride. Abed said:

“Like the normal Islamic marriage ceremony, we married in the Islamic way. Our differences in terms of tribe are not a hindrance to normal Islamic marriage. The wedding was held after the “Salanguni” to fix the dowry.”

Various endogenous factors (e.g., education, family wealth level, etc.) determine the relationship between Mahr and marriage (Chowdhury et al., 2017). By exogenously restricting Mahr, the new policy provides a natural experiment for observing how Mahr value affects couples' bargaining power within intrahousehold relationships and in divorce cases. Parental intervention is always present at a wedding; both the bride's and groom's parents and the relatives of both sides decide on the amount of the dowry. The dowry is only for the bride and is kept safe by her parents. It was also planned and delivered before the wedding.

According to Bok,

“The dowry is cash for the bride. After both parties discussed the dowry, it was given to the bride's side and the wedding set.”

Based on the participants, the dowry of the Iranun and Maranao tribe is larger than that of the other tribe. But the dowry of the Iranun and Maranao is larger than that of the other tribe because all the expenses of the wedding are included, including the venue, dress, and all the expenses. Not like in the Magauindanaon, where the one who pays all the expenses is the groom.

It is often believed that *mahr* (the obligatory marital gift that the husband gives his bride) is a *rukn* of the marriage contract or is required for the validity of the marriage. In their attempt to protect women and children in marriages where husbands fail to deliver the *mahr*, jurists predominantly have refused to consider the *mahr* a requirement for the validity of the marriage. Instead, they have considered it a senior debt against the husband and have instructed him to pay it. Where no *mahr* is specified in the marriage contract, the judge assigns to the wife a *mahr* that a woman of the bride's qualification and status would expect (Ahmad, 2000).

Islamic Marriage Ceremony

The researchers' data show that intermarriage practices are the same as Islamic marriage practices. However, differences in traditions like the *Kulintang*, *Sagayan*, and *Damak* before the wedding in Maguindanaon and after the wedding is the “Pundotan” *Kanduli sa dulang*, and for the Iranun and Maranao have the tradition after the wedding called “Kanduli” it's like “Pundotan in Maguindanaon.” Mus said,

“Actually, the marriage practices of the Iranun, Maranao, and Maguindanaon are the same; they differ in terms of the traditions that they perform during and after the wedding. Even in the “Kitab,” any kind of tribe, at least you are Islam; the process of marriage is the same as Islam.”

The marital discussions also involved the agreement of the dowry after the “*pangengedung*” they had to do the “*sunggudan o salanguni*” to iron out every detail of the wedding, such as the venue, dresses, beddings, *damak*, and many more. Before a marriage takes place in Islamic law, there usually is an engagement period during which

the man and the woman determine their suitability to each other. The rules associated with this period reflect the importance of honoring one's commitments and preparing for a successful marriage. So, we first turn to the engagement process (Esposito, 2001).

Traditional Tribe Marriage Ceremony

Based on researchers' notes and interviews, the researchers have not been content with ascertaining the bare external facts but have, so far as possible, tried to discover the ideas underlying them in studying the wedding ceremonies. The statements of the participants are not always alike. This may be because the same ceremony has different sources or it is mixed because the participants have different tribes.

As the researchers investigated the practices of intermarriage, they found that the differences between intermarriages are the traditions performed during and after the wedding. First, the Iranun, Maranao, and Maguindanaon are the same in the traditional wedding "*Damak*," "*Kanduli*," and "*L'ka sa belik*." *Damak* is performed before or during the wedding day. It is a combination of cooked sweet foods delivered to the house of the bride from the groom. It was usually put ahead of the parade. *Kanduli* is performed after the wedding.

Iranun and Maranao are not the same in dowry. The dowry of Iranun and Maranao is larger than that of Maguindanaon, especially if the bride is a degree holder. In Iranun, they also have what they call "*Lantung*." During the wedding, when the groom fetches the bride, the bride's relative blocks the groom, and the groom needs to give a certain amount of money before he can get the bride. It usually happens when the wedding is held at the barangay.

Abed said:

"Because I am Muslim, I give a dowry to my wife, and because I am Maguindanaon and she is Iranun, the dowry is larger than ours, Maguindanaon. But the advantages are that all the wedding expenses are in the dowry."

Uno said:

"My wife is Maguindanaon, and because I am the groom, I did not experience 'lantung' for us Iranun because 'lantung' happens only when the bride is Iranun."

The Muslim weddings in the Philippines also vary depending on the culture and traditions they are accustomed to, but everything is done according to Islamic rituals. The importance of marriage in Islam is underscored in the Holy Qur'an as it is said in Surah Nur (24:32), "And marry those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace; and Allah is Ample giving, Knowing."

Aspirations of the Participants to Participate in Intermarriage Religious Person

The researchers gathered that one of the participants' aspirations is to marry a religious person who has faith in the Almighty. They were inspired to marry other tribes not because of their wives' tribe but because of their wives' faith. A religious marriage is not just about the ceremony but about the promises and expectations that come with it.

According to Mus,

"I marry my wife not because of the tribe that she has but because I am attracted by the faith that she has in almighty Allah."

According to Toelle and Harris, choosing a suitable partner when selecting a life

partner, values, beliefs, and other cultural and religious factors are evaluated in a filtering, stage-like process called Stimulus-Values-Roles or SRV. In the Stimulus stage, couples are attracted to each other. In the Values stage, couples analyze each other's values and beliefs, including cultural and religious traditions, to determine whether they are like or different from their own. In the final Roles stage, couples determine how various roles (e.g., childrearing, division of household chores, breadwinner, etc.) will be carried out in the relationship and whether the fulfillment of these roles can produce an enduring relationship (Toelle & Harris, 2018).

Love

When the researchers asked the participants about their aspirations and why they married outside their ethnic group, according to the triangular theory of love developed by psychologist Robert Sternberg, the three components of love are intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy encompasses feelings of attachment, closeness, connectedness, and bondedness. Passion encompasses drives connected to both limerence and sexual attraction.

According to Ana,

"He was the reason for all my smiles, joy, and laughter despite our struggle because we love each other."

According to Abed,

"I fell in love with my wife when we met because of who she is, not for any other reason."

Personality Attraction

Aside from love and religious attraction, participants shared what attracts them to marry outside their tribes: the personality of their partners. It is quite interesting that they are not interested in physical appearance.

Lillah said,

"I can say that my husband is a handsome man. He was that typical man that you can say has the face. However, I did not like him because of his physical appearance; because of his personality, he was like husband material, and I told myself that he was the one."

According to Uno,

"I said a while ago that I like my wife because of who she is as a person, and that is why I love her, not because of the tribe that she has. One of the reasons for this is her personality towards the people around her. In short, she was family-oriented, and I told myself that was enough reason to keep her."

Personality is more important than looks. There is something called inner beauty and outer beauty. We can call personality inner beauty, which refers to the mindset and character of the person. In contrast, outer beauty is the physical appearance of the person and looks, for example. The participants said that one of the attractions they have towards their partners is because of their personality. So, it does not matter if you are good-looking; you must be well-behaved and possess inner beauty, and you will be good to everyone (Hatfield, Rapson, & Aumer-Ryan, 2008).

Insights on Dealing with the Differences Between Spouses

Respecting and Accepting

Respect is the cornerstone of a healthy relationship; respect means recognizing that your partner is a whole person and not just a way to get something you want. It means you know

your partner is different from you and accept that. Acceptance is more important because it creates the condition for love.

According to Sir Yunos,

“How can we handle our differences? It depends on how we love each other. Also, he added, we accept and respect each other's tribe.”

Being contented with what we have is a sign of acceptance, which means accepting one another's faith, flaws, and mistakes. Intermarrying does not matter if you love your partner with respect and Acceptance.

According to Sir Mus,

“We must be contented for what Almighty gives us.”

Research shows that men and women have similar romantic relationship preferences, such as partner traits like kindness, intelligence, attractiveness, honesty, and humor. Furthermore, both sexes share many of the same love and relationship beliefs and expectations, such as trust, self-disclosure, respect, and acceptance. (Miller et. al, 2018)

Mutual Understanding

Based on the data analysis, most participants said dealing with their differences and mutual understanding is the best solution. For an intermarriage couple, adjusting to each other can be very challenging. Marriage is a relationship, a status, and a responsibility that needs mutual understanding. Mutual understanding is defined as a relation of affinity or harmony between people. We, as individuals, provide others with information through our field of experience. Thus, we "construct" one another. The message or meaning is jointly created by both participants in the communication process.

Abed said,

“The most important things are respect and understanding with each other. Moreover, I realize that getting into intermarriage is not a big deal or a problem; rather, it allows you to know the tribe of your spouse.”

“We are from different tribes, so we must manage it well, always telling the truth. From the beginning, I told my wife that we should understand each tribe.”

Marriage is a social institution whereby a contract is made between a man and a woman. It is a commitment of the two parties to one another and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. A strong foundation of love should be established between the couple, which must never be shaken by incidents that happen between them (Herbert, 2011).

Listen to One Another

It is true that marriages called “intermarriage” can be more exposed to misunderstanding due to cultural or ethnic differences that may, at any moment, lead to marriage instability. However this concerns all marriages, but the most important thing is to have a common interest at the intellectual and spiritual level strengthened mainly by mutual respect because you listen to one another's perspectives (Sternberg, 2015). Despite all the differences and problems that may arise during a marital life, mutual respect will spread shared serenity and the harmony of love whose strength lies once again in the respect that one shows to the other's beliefs and traditions.

If you listen to one another, you can understand the problem, and listening to your partners can create positive communication that can lead to a better relationship. Understanding is important in any relationship for different reasons. The level of

understanding you share with your partner will go a long way toward determining the length and success of your relationship (Spice, 2016).

According to Ana,

“What makes our relationship strong is that we are open about everything. When we have problems, we communicate positively.”

Lillah also said,

“Constant communication is a must.”

“Consistency is a combination of behaviors that include dependability, trust, and a true desire to have a companion and form a serious relationship.” Catchings adds, “People who are more consistent with their interactions with one another, such as having predictable behaviors and good communication, have longer and stronger relationships (Collins & Carthy, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researchers identified key factors that influence intermarriage among ethnic groups. A major finding is the parents' significant role in encouraging intermarriage and deciding on the dowry. This highlights the influence of family and community traditions on marriage decisions. Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights into how cultural practices shape relationships. This study has practical implications for social workers, particularly in counseling and mediation. Social workers can use these insights to understand better the challenges intermarried families face and provide targeted support. By helping families communicate and resolve conflicts, social workers can assist in fostering stronger family relationships in the context of intermarriage. Future research could explore other factors that contribute to intermarriage, such as socioeconomic status or education level, and examine the long-term effects of intermarriage on families and communities.

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