A Case Study on Pull Factors of the Meranaws' Migration to Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City

Sahira Tomawis Maruhom
University Training Center, Mindanao State University, Marawi City

Abstract

The push factors push people away to migrate, while the pull factors attract people to relocate to specific places, resulting in their migration. This research focuses on the pull factors causing the Meranaw people of Lanao del Sur to migrate to the centers of Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City, with a focus on the complex factors that drive it. The findings highlight that migration decisions are shaped by both structural challenges and personal aspirations. The Meranaw migrants leave their home provinces as a response to their difficult circumstances; meanwhile, they are motivated to improve their quality of life, well-being, and to seek opportunities for personal improvement. This research underscores the dual nature of Meranaw migration: it is both an escape from adversity and a proactive pursuit of a better future. In conclusion, the study offers policy recommendations aimed at improving their living conditions in both their origin and destination communities. These recommendations emphasize the need for inclusive governance, enhanced access to education, peacebuilding efforts, sustainable development strategies, and the institutionalization of migrant services. By addressing the root causes of migration and supporting the integration of Meranaw migrants, these measures can help reduce forced migration while empowering individuals and families to thrive in both their home regions and urban centers.

Corresponding Author:
maruhom.st10@s.msumain.edu.ph

Introduction

The Meranaw group is one of the thirteen Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. They are indigenous to Mindanao and predominantly native people of the Pat a Pangampong sa Ranao or Four Lake-Based Emirates, which is now known as the Lanao Sultanate in Lanao del Sur (Hadji Abdul Racman, 2020). The Meranaws' migration has been influenced by socio-political upheavals, economic challenges, social disparity, and severe poverty. Meanwhile, modern communications and faster modes of transportation facilitate people's mobility and migration. The post-colonial era further exacerbated migration trends due to armed conflicts, particularly the Mindanao conflict and the Marawi Siege of 2017. These events created an environment marked by insecurity, pushing many Meranaws to seek refuge and stability elsewhere (Camargo et al., 2020). In this regard, numerous unexplored factors compel them to leave their hometown in Lanao del Sur, Mindanao, to relocate elsewhere. These converging motivations are commonly categorized as the "push" and "pull" factors.

Some Meranaws leave their hometown for better living conditions. In contrast, others are forced to leave due to conflict or war. Kadil (1992) explained in his study that Muslim migration to Manila and the islands of Luzon and Visayas could be explained by various

factors, generally attributed to political as well as commercial influences, among other reasons (Nasir et al., 2022). Hence, regardless of the motivation behind the Meranaw migration, their journey is fraught with challenges that have a significant impact not only on the migrant but also on the hometown they left behind and the new community in which they are received. Settling into a new community demands adjustments by those who move into a place (Lacar & Lacar, 1989). Through this study, the researcher aims to explore the dynamics of Meranaw migration within select cities in the Philippines by examining the pull forces behind their migration. Furthermore, this study aims to pull forces at play that guide their journeys, and this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Meranaw migration phenomenon.

The Meranaws of Lake Lanao

The Meranaws' identity is intricately woven from threads of pre-Islamic traditions, Islamic faith, indigenous political structures, and responses to colonial and contemporary socio-political changes. Several historians and anthropologists trace the Meranaw origins to early migrations and settlements in Mindanao. According to Hadji Abdul Racman (2020), in the 13th century, Islam was brought to Mindanao by the Arab, Malay, and Islamized traders, who transformed the social, political, and religious contour of the Islamized people of Mindanao, including the Meranaws. The Meranaw leadership was originally a Datuship system, which was headed by numerous elders, and later, in the 17th century, it evolved into a Sultanate system known as Pat a Pangampong sa Ranao or Four Lake-Based Emirates headed by numerous sultans.

The Maranaws During the Marawi Siege

One of the main factors that pushed the Maranaos to migrate is the 2017 Marawi Siege. On May 23, 2017, a terrorist group called Maute, which claimed to be affiliated with ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), took over Marawi City in broad daylight. A battle transpired between the terrorist group and the government of the Philippines that resulted in the displacement of at least 390,000 residents who were forced to migrate temporarily to the nearby cities and municipalities for their safety. The battle lasted for five months and resulted in the mass displacement of civilians, the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the loss of civilian lives.

The Marawi Siege of 2017 marked a turning point for the Meranaw people, deeply affecting their socio-cultural fabric, livelihoods, and sense of identity. The conflict, waged between government forces and ISIS-inspired groups, led to massive displacement, destruction of heritage sites, and significant psychological trauma. This review explores scholarly and institutional literature examining the siege's impact on the Meranaws, focusing on displacement, cultural heritage, socio-economic challenges, gender dynamics, and ongoing rehabilitation efforts.

The Marawi Siege displaced over 390,000 Meranaw individuals. As observed, many evacuees lived in cramped evacuation centers or with relatives, facing challenges of overcrowding, lack of privacy, inadequate sanitation, and food insecurity. This displacement disrupted the Meranaws' traditional kinship networks (kapamagawida), essential for social support (Veloso, 2022).

A study by Bürgin et al. (2022) indicates that the protracted displacement of the Maranao community in the aftermath of the Siege of Marawi has entrenched long-term poverty, disrupted the schooling of children and youth, and led to widespread mental-health difficulties. Years following the events, many displaced people continue to experience psychological distress issues—including trauma, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders—that are exacerbated by their economic precarity and interrupted education.

According to official figures, 920 militants, 165 soldiers, and 47 civilians were killed in the fighting, and more than 1,780 hostages were rescued from the ISIS-linked militants. However, restrictions on access to Marawi during the conflict have precluded any independent corroboration of these numbers (Amnesty International, 2017). In the first few months of the battle, the internally displaced Meranaws faced significant challenges. They struggled to survive since most lived in evacuation centers or temporary shelters in nearby cities like Iligan; some sought refuge in spacious junk shops, while some were fortunate enough to stay in their relatives' homes outside Marawi. Most of the Meranaws during that time, if not all, were faced with fears concerning their lives. They only relied on relief goods and help from family or friends for survival. Hence, it took a heavy toll on them.

When Marawi City was declared free on October 17 of the same year, Marawi's residents hoped they could return to their homes. However, the number of deaths and massive destruction in the so-called ground zero of the city showed no chance of returning home soon. It forced some Maranaos to go farther from Marawi or their evacuation centers and make a living for their families' survival. Some opted to search for opportunities in highly urbanized regions like Metro Manila, some in Visayas like Cebu, and some preferred to stay within the areas of Davao City. Concerning their struggles, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) inevitably face marginalization, discrimination, harassment, and other forms of stigmatization with their mere presence within a neighborhood or area they hoped would offer a haven (Global Protection Cluster Working Group, 2006). It was true for both IDPs who stayed in the evacuation centers and IDPs who opted to migrate either permanently or temporarily following the crisis they faced.

It is worth mentioning that the predicaments of the Muslims in Mindanao did not just become apparent during the Marawi siege, nor when the Mindanao conflict started to escalate. The unprecedented interdependent predicaments of Muslims in the Philippines began as early as the 16th century when the Europeans first stepped on Philippine soil (Majul, 1999). This continues today due to an unequal relations system between the colonizers and the central government (Marohomsalic, 1995). As a result of the chain of colonization processes, people regarded as 'aboriginal' were forced to assert their rights and preserve their identity throughout history (Cayamodin, 2013). The Muslims, as a result of continuous intrusions by external and internal powers on their communities, were forced to defend themselves and their socio-economic and political institutions from waves of opponents by forming revolutionary movements to maintain the social order corresponding to their religio-cultural and political identities (Mastura, 2012; Lingga, 2004).

In a study conducted by Cayamodin and Durakoglu (2021) summarized the interdependent predicaments of Muslim-Filipinos, reflective of Said Nursi's triumvirate quandaries hypothesis and the views of Fethullah Gülen, were summarized into three main categories: 1) ineffective education system, 2) underdeveloped economy, and 3) internal schism.

Muslim Filipinos face problems in their one-dimensional educational system that is perceived to be ineffective because of the government's laxity in the integration of Muslim-Filipino traditional education with the national mainstream modern education system (Cayamodin & Durakoglu, 2021). This has been aggravated by the failure of the defunct Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Muslim provinces for not providing Muslim Filipinos with an integrated and holistic educational system suitable to their religio-cultural orientations (Cayamodin, 2013). As advanced by Cayamodin, an ineffective education system is not tantamount to uneducated Muslim Filipinos, but rather their level of education and the nature of their educational institutions are not congruent with their socio-cultural orientation, and have failed to address

the problems that their societies face for decades. The worst is that most of those who attained at least a quality education did not utilize their knowledge for the benefit of the Muslim community. Instead, they succumbed to the enticements of the corrupt system. Consequently, the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey showed that among the areas in the country, the former ARMM (now the BARMM) has the lowest statistics in both primary and functional literacy rates at 81.55% and 71.60%, respectively, when compared to other regions (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). This is why some Muslim Filipinos who are well-off send their children to high-end schools in Metro Manila or Cebu to attain quality education. This study delves into the case of these Muslim Filipino children who migrated to select areas in the Philippines for educational pursuit and their aspirations after completing their studies.

Another interdependent predicament of Muslim Filipinos is the underdeveloped economy in the Moroland regions. Marohomsalic (1995), in his study, explains that more than 300 years of the Spanish-Moro War stalled the development of Moro societies. Marohomsalic noted that although Sultanates have remained, all the efforts of the traditional leaders were directed at fighting and repelling intrusions by world powers. This was carried up to the post-independence era with the Moro leaders' subsequent quest for freedom (Cayamodin & Durakoglu, 2021). Cayamodin further stated that this condition led to the meager participation of Muslims in various economic activities, especially in the tertiary and quaternary sectors. In the 1990s, the ARMM (now the BARMM) registered the country's highest poverty headcount or highest indices of social stress (Mastura, 2012; Milligan, 2014). In 2015, there was at least 59% of the population in the BARMM lived below the poverty threshold, while Lanao del Sur, being one of the five Muslim-dominated provinces comprising BARMM, was dubbed the poorest province in the country with 74.3% of its population living below the poverty line (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015). In more recent years, the deepening poverty in Muslim communities has been further worsened by the anti-Muslim laws (Muslim, 2019), the mismanagement of Islamic economic institutions (Gamon & Tagoranao, 2018), and the lack of financial inclusion in Muslim communities. In the long run, this scenario has resulted in various social ills, such as massive corruption in the bureaucracy and the proliferation of vote-buying and bribery that resulted in weak political institutions (Ampa, 2017; Cayamodin, 2013; Muslim, 2019; Panda, 1993).

The data collected by Cayamodin implies that although there are existing political institutions in the Moro region that are expected to address economic issues, these institutions have met little to no expectations from both the national government and the Moro people, resulting in an increasing rate of poverty that pushes Muslim Filipinos to migrate to cities that have a lucrative economy.

Lastly, internal schism, as an interdependent predicament of Muslim Filipinos, plays a significant role in Meranaw migration. Internal schism, comprised of feud-related clan classes (rido), inter-ethnic conflicts, religious unity within diversity, and rebellion by Muslims against the government, is one of the significant problems in the Muslim communities that derail various development programs because of fear of being caught in both minor and major conflicts (Mastura, 2012). Rixhon (2014) underlined that the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey on the participation of women in peace, conflict resolution, governance, and development found that the BARMM has a much higher percentage of incidents of clan feuds at 28 percent, as compared to the country's 16% (Cayamodin & Durakoglu, 2021). The proliferation of rido in the Philippines, particularly among Muslims in Mindanao, is mainly caused by, among others, political rivalry, petty crime, land disputes, retaliation, accident, illegal drugs, and elopement, which are precipitated by customary practices such as maratabat (pride) and the lack of state control and authority (Abbas, 2008;

Durante et al., 2014; Matuan, 2014). This has led thousands of Muslim Filipinos, specifically Maranaws, to leave their hometown and start a new life elsewhere.

Aspirations

Since the predicaments of Muslims in the Philippines, which are caused partly by ineffective Local Government Units in many Muslim areas, have become very intricate and have led to an apathetic attitude, the effects of the predicaments have become endemic. Thus, any attempt to resolve the predicaments should be multifaceted, have a holistic grasp, and warrant sustainability to avoid repeating tedious solutions attempted in the past. Also, researchers believe that the newly instituted BARMM government will usher in the proposed remedies (Cayamodin & Durakoglu, 2021). For example, the Meranaw women are dissatisfied with the government's response to the siege. The women interviewed by the United Nations (2022) make clear that returning to their homes and regaining their sense of belonging and community is paramount, in addition to economic relief. Further, the women's reflections on the early warning signs of the conflict and the unaddressed grievances following their displacement are invaluable in understanding how to prevent the recurrence of violent extremism in the region. Policy and programming initiatives should be encouraged to act on the recommendations of the women IDPs and ensure that women play a vital role in leading efforts for both recovery and the prevention of future violent extremist activity. The women can not only regain their lost identities and homes but, moving forward, can serve as preventers of violent extremism in their communities (United Nations Women, 2019).

In addition, Meranaw women aspire for an inclusive engagement with religious institutions, including programs that emphasize moderate, peaceful Islamic education, engagement with academic institutions, including the importance of promoting peace education, creation of platforms for women to engage in peace discussions to contribute their ideas of how to promote peaceful societies and institutional reforms aimed at protecting villages from violent extremism.

Furthermore, the Meranaws strongly value their cultural identity, which includes their respect for traditional leaders such as Sultans and Datus (traditional leaders). The American government's attempt to abolish the Sultanate and traditional leaders was met with resistance, as these leaders were seen as essential for maintaining peace and order in their communities. Despite the incorporation of Lanao into the Philippine state system, the authority of Sultans and Datus is still respected and acknowledged by the people, even above the appointed government officials (Tacata, 2023). However, these traditional leaders only hold ceremonial roles and have no official authority. Hence, these traditional leaders aspire for an inclusive local government unit to be part of their communities' program planning and implementation. Once they feel they have roles to portray in their hometowns, they are less attracted to migrate to other cities.

This research study was anchored in Everette Lee's Theory of Migration, also known as "Push-Pull Theory." Lee's theory defined migration as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. Lee's Push-Pull Theory suggests that the reasons why people migrate are determined by push and pull factors, which are forces that either induce people to move to a new location or oblige them to leave their old residences. The factors could include economic, political, cultural, and environmental aspects. According to the push factor theory, conditions force people to leave their hometowns, including insufficient livelihood opportunities, poor living conditions, war or conflict, inadequate healthcare, loss of wealth, and natural disasters. Meanwhile, the pull factor theory suggests that migration is not driven by the adverse circumstances people are living with, but instead by the positive message that specific locations or places attract people to migrate. Examples of pull factors for a place

include more job opportunities, better living conditions, easy access to land for settling and agriculture, political and or religious freedom, superior education and welfare systems, improved transportation and communication facilities, a better healthcare system, a stress-free environment, and security.

In the context of Meranaw migration, push and pull factors highlight the specific reasons for their movement. These factors reveal the influences shaping the Meranaw people's decisions to migrate. Everett Lee conceptualized these factors that are associated with the decision to relocate into four categories:

1. Factors associated with the area of origin
2. Factors associated with the area of destination
3. Intervening obstacles
4. Personal factors.

This research focuses only on the pull factors behind the migration of the Meranaws. In the future, this research will explore the push factors behind the migration of the Meranaws. This study aimed to uncover the migration patterns of Meranaw migrants. It examined the pull factors influencing the Meranaw migrants' decision to leave, attracting them to specific cities in the Philippines.

Problem Statement
This study examined the Meranaw migration experiences, focusing on their unique migration patterns, which are triggered by the pull factors. In particular, the study sought to answer this research question: What are the pull factors influencing the Meranaws' decision to migrate to Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City?

Objectives of the Study
To identify the pull factors influencing the Meranaws' decision to migrate to Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City.

Scope and Limitations of the Study
This study explores the complex circumstances surrounding the migration experiences of Meranaw individuals, with a particular focus on the pull factors that influence their decisions to migrate. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Meranaw internal migration by examining socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental drivers and the lived realities of migrants in urban destinations.

The scope of the research is limited to three major metropolitan areas in the Philippines: Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City. These locations were selected due to their status as prominent destinations for Meranaw migrants and their diverse urban contexts, which offer rich insights into varying migration experiences. A total of 350 respondents participated in the quantitative phase of the study: 150 in Metro Manila, 100 in Cebu City, and 100 in Davao City. All participants were selected regardless of marital status, educational attainment, or economic condition, and they were at least eighteen (18) years old at the time of their migration and had continuously resided in their respective cities for a minimum of two years.

Significance of the Study
The results of this study on unraveling the pull factors of Meranaw migration in select cities in the Philippines, and the theory of migration that elucidates the migration patterns of Meranaw migrants, are hoped to benefit the government and non-government agencies that provide social services concerning human movement within the Philippines.

Methodology

Unraveling the pull factors of Meranaw migrations offers a comprehensive view of the social, political, and economic landscape. Understanding the pull forces that shape migration decisions, the aspirations that drive these movements, and the phenomenon's characteristics requires a thorough mixed-method approach.

Research Design

The current study adopts a mixture of Thematic Qualitative and Descriptive Quantitative research designs. This mixed approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and aspirations of Meranaw migrants who relocated to select cities in the Philippines, particularly Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City, while methodically describing Meranaw migration as a phenomenon. Qualitative and quantitative research are particularly suited for this study as they allow for a nuanced understanding of the pull factors influencing migration decisions and the social, economic, and political dynamics shaping the aspirations of Meranaw migrants while statistically analyzing the population sample. By employing both research designs, the study aims to uncover deep insights and thematic patterns that will contribute to a better understanding of the pull factors that either force or attract the Meranaws to migrate.

Sampling

The sampling strategy employed in this study is purposive, aiming to select 150 Meranaw respondents who migrated to Metro Manila, 100 to Cebu City, and 100 to Davao City. The sample population of this study was drawn from the following locations: 1) select cities in Metro Manila, such as Makati, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Parañaque, Pasig, Quezon City, San Juan, Taguig, and Valenzuela. 2) select Barangays in Cebu City such as Dulho-Fatima, Ermita, Guadalupe, Basak Pardo, Kalubihan, Kamputhaw, Lahug, Labangon, Mambaling, Pahina Central, Pardo, Sambag, San Nicholas, and select streets in Cebu City such as Borromeo, Colon, Leon Kilat, Sanchianko and lastly, 3) select barangays in Davao City such as 21-C, 24-C, 34-D, 31-D, 39-D, 16-B, 29-C, 23-C of Poblacion District, and select streets in Buhangin District of Davao City such as Sasa, Cabantian, and Buhangin. This mixed method is chosen to ensure a diverse representation of Meranaw individuals with different migration motives, socio-economic backgrounds, and demographic characteristics that will seek to capture a comprehensive understanding of Meranaw migration experiences within urban contexts. Moreover, corroborating data from both methods allows for a more thorough and nuanced understanding of Meranaw migration as a phenomenon.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study involves conducting a mixed-methods study of semi-structured survey questionnaires to 150 Meranaw migrants who relocated to Metro Manila, 100 to Cebu City, and 100 to Davao City.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the well-being and privacy of the participants. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before data collection. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of informants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

This part presents the study's findings on Meranaw migration from Lanao del Sur to the urban centers of Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City. The data is drawn from quantitative and qualitative sources, offering a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' demographic backgrounds, where they migrated to, and the factors influencing their migration decisions.

Pull Factors of Migration

Table 1:

Pull Factors Influencing the Migration of Meranaw Respondents

Pull Factors	Metro Manila (150 Respondents)	Davao City (100 Respondents)	Cebu City (100 Respondents)	Total (Average)
Availability of job opportunities	84.70%	75.00%	71.30%	77.00%
Economic factors	70.50%	63.00%	54.70%	62.70%
Social stability	48.70%	77.00%	52.00%	59.20%
Better educational services	42.00%	68.00%	60.70%	56.90%
Convinced by a family member	51.30%	37.00%	62.00%	50.10%
Strong career growth potential	50.00%	24.00%	45.30%	39.80%
Flourishing economy	55.30%	29.00%	28.00%	37.40%
Strong personal growth potential	39.30%	27.00%	41.30%	35.90%
Environmental factors	30.00%	32.00%	30.70%	30.90%
Political stability	14.70%	47.00%	22.00%	27.90%
Better healthcare services	12.70%	21.00%	28.00%	20.60%
Others	1.33%	1.00%	1.00%	1.14%
	49.3%	**37.3%**	**34.4%**	
Most predominant	**Availability of Job Opportunities**	**Social Stability**	**Better Educational Services**	

The data in Table 1 suggest that Meranaw migration is driven by a multi-dimensional set of aspirations, encompassing economic advancement, social security, educational improvement, and personal development. Understanding these diverse pull factors is essential for formulating effective policies and programs that support the integration, well-being, and long-term stability of the Meranaw migrant community.

Table 1 presents the factors influencing the Meranaw respondents' migration decisions. The availability of job opportunities was the most frequently cited factor, reported by 77.0% of all respondents, with Metro Manila having the highest percentage (84.7%). Economic factors were also significant, cited by 62.7%, with Metro Manila again showing the highest proportion (70.5%). The flourishing economy was identified by 37.4%, especially in Metro Manila (55.3%). Social stability was reported by 59.2%, with the highest percentage in Davao (77.0%). Political stability was mentioned by 27.9%, most notably in Davao (47.0%). Better educational services attracted 56.9%, especially in Cebu (60.7%) and Davao (68.0%). Better healthcare services were cited by 20.6%, particularly in Cebu (28.0%). Strong career growth potential was reported by 39.8%, with Metro Manila having the highest proportion (50.0%). Strong personal growth potential was noted by 35.9%, with Cebu leading (41.3%). Environmental factors were mentioned by 30.9%, with similar responses across locations. The influence of family members was also significant, with 50.1% citing this factor, particularly in Cebu (62.0%). When asked to identify the most important pull factor, availability of job opportunities was the top choice for Metro Manila respondents, social stability for Davao respondents, and better educational services for Cebu respondents.

The findings presented in Table 1 carry important implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders involved in supporting the Meranaw migrant community and other internally displaced populations. The high percentage of respondents identifying the availability of job opportunities (77.0%) as a key pull factor underscores the

central role of economic prospects in shaping migration decisions. This highlights the need for host cities like Metro Manila, Davao City, and Cebu City to design inclusive employment policies that not only create jobs but also provide culturally sensitive support for Meranaw migrants seeking to enter diverse labor markets. Skills development programs, entrepreneurship training, and partnerships with private businesses could help bridge gaps in employment access, particularly for Meranaws who possess entrepreneurial backgrounds or informal trading experience (Paredes, 2013).

Pull factors reflect the various aspirations and needs that drive people to migrate. The availability of job opportunities, especially in Metro Manila, is a primary motivator, while economic factors and career growth potential emphasize the desire for financial security and advancement. Social and political stability, particularly in Davao, highlights the importance of a peaceful environment for individuals and families. The pursuit of better educational and healthcare services, particularly in Cebu, underscores the importance of quality services for personal and family development. Family influence is another key factor, showing the family's strong role in migration decisions.

The significance of social stability (59.2%), particularly pronounced in Davao City, reflects how safety and peace are major considerations for Meranaw migrants, many of whom have experienced conflict or displacement. This suggests that host cities must prioritize social cohesion initiatives and community integration programs to mitigate discrimination, build trust, and create safe spaces where Meranaw cultural identity can be maintained. Peace education, interfaith dialogues, and anti-discrimination campaigns could be key strategies to enhance social stability for migrants.

The prominence of better educational services (56.9%) as a pull factor, especially in Cebu City, indicates the Meranaw community's strong aspiration for quality education for themselves and their children. Policymakers should ensure that educational services in host cities are accessible, culturally relevant, and equipped to support displaced learners. Programs should consider integrating Islamic education with secular curricula to address the Meranaws' dual educational priorities, as highlighted by Solaiman (2021).

Other factors, such as being convinced by family members (50.1%), reflect the enduring role of family networks in shaping migration choices. This emphasizes the importance of family-centered interventions and support services that consider both the practical and emotional aspects of migration.

Meanwhile, lower percentages for factors like political stability (27.9%) and better healthcare services (20.6%) still carry significant policy weight. These indicate areas where improvements in governance, public health infrastructure, and equitable service provision can enhance urban areas' attractiveness to migrants while promoting broader social welfare.

In sum, these implications underscore that Meranaw migration is not driven by a single factor but rather by a complex interplay of economic opportunities, social safety, educational aspirations, and family influences. Policies and interventions must therefore adopt a multi-dimensional, culturally sensitive approach tailored to the specific contexts of different urban areas. Recognizing and responding to these pull factors is essential for fostering sustainable integration, promoting social stability, and ensuring the overall well-being of Meranaw migrants in their chosen destinations.

The pull factors represent the hope for improvement and fulfillment in a new environment. Job opportunities and career growth symbolize the pursuit of economic success and stability, while social and political stability represent the search for security and peace. Educational and healthcare improvements symbolize the desire for better personal development and well-

being opportunities. Family influence reflects the deep-rooted importance of community and familial support in shaping life decisions. Environmental factors suggest that people seek a more favorable physical or social environment for growth and peace.

This survey highlighted the key pull factors that helped us uncover the personal and social realities that influenced Meranaw migration, which reveals that Meranaw migrants were driven by what they left behind and what awaited them in their chosen destinations. Perceived improvements in livelihood, access to education, peace and order, responsive governance, and cultural acceptance shape these pull factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that Meranaw migration from Lanao del Sur to key urban centers—Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City—is not merely a product of displacement, but rather a dynamic and transformative journey. A complex interplay of structural constraints, personal agency, and collective aspirations shapes this migration. As the study has shown, a convergence of adverse conditions in the place of origin, such as lack of job opportunities, economic instability, political insecurity, and cultural pressures, informs the decision to migrate. However, equally influential are the perceived benefits in the place of destination—opportunities that promise not only safety and livelihood, but also dignity, education, inclusion, and long-term personal fulfillment.

The quantitative data offered a broad overview of the patterns and motivations among the 350 Meranaw respondents, revealing the strong pull factors such as the availability of employment (77.0%) and social stability (59.2%) in the urban centers. These trends were brought to life through qualitative narratives that illuminated the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of the migration experience. Participants shared deeply personal accounts of being denied opportunities due to nepotism, of navigating fear and insecurity due to local violence and conflict, and of struggling to meet societal expectations in tightly knit communities.

More than just statistics, these stories captured the lived experiences of Meranaw individuals whose migration was driven by more than survival—an intentional pursuit of self-actualization. This underscores the study's crucial finding: migration is not solely reactive. It is equally proactive. The Meranaw migrants demonstrated agency, resilience, and hope. They were not merely fleeing poverty or conflict but actively seeking environments that would allow them to learn, grow, provide, and protect their families' futures.

The Focus Group Discussion reveals that the aspirations of the respondents—ranging from financial independence to higher education, from spiritual fulfillment to community leadership—add another layer of meaning to the migration process. These aspirations reframe migration as a forward-looking endeavor. For many Meranaws, leaving Lanao was not an end, but a beginning: a means to access possibilities that had been denied to them in their homeland. In this light, migration must be viewed—not simply as an economic or logistical shift, but as a personal transformation rooted in hope and the pursuit of meaning.

This study also reinforces the idea that urban centers, when inclusive and responsive, can serve as essential spaces for integration and empowerment. The positive experiences of Meranaws in cities like Davao City and Cebu City—where governance is more equitable, services are more accessible, and Muslim identity is more respected—demonstrate the importance of social structures in shaping the migration experience. These findings carry important implications for policymakers and local governments, emphasizing the need for

culturally sensitive and inclusive urban development programs that recognize and support the unique needs of Muslim migrants.

In interpreting these patterns, Lee's ([1966](#)) Push-Pull Theory of Migration provided a robust conceptual lens. The theory's emphasis on the balance between adverse conditions aligns well with the empirical findings of this study. However, the migration experiences of the Meranaws also highlighted the significance of internal motivations—aspirations that are not easily categorized under traditional structural models. These inner goals and dreams brought nuance to the migration process, suggesting the need for migration frameworks that include both external and internal forces in equal measure.

This study proposes that Meranaw migration follows a "survival-to-aspiration" trajectory—a pattern where movement begins as a necessary response to systemic hardship and evolves into a strategic act of growth and renewal. It is a movement that encapsulates pain and possibility, loss and agency. As Meranaw individuals navigate new spaces and build new lives, they are not simply changing geography; they are reshaping their futures, redefining their identities, and reclaiming the right to thrive.

This study has shown that many Meranaws leave their homeland not just because of conflict, poverty, or injustice, but also because they refuse to live in a way that dishonors their dignity. Whether it is fleeing a rido (clan feuds), facing corruption in local job markets, or simply wanting a better future for their families, the choice to move is deeply tied to the desire to live with respect and honor.

In the end, migration is not just about survival. For Meranaws, it is about standing tall in the face of struggle. It is about claiming a space where they can live with dignity, be recognized for their efforts, and carry the name of their family with pride—wherever life takes them.

In conclusion, Meranaw migration reflects a broader narrative about marginalized communities seeking opportunity and hope. It is a narrative that deserves continued scholarly attention, deeper public understanding, and informed policy responses. As this study has shown, migration is never just about moving from one place to another—it is about moving toward something better, motivated by a cultural value. Moreover, for the Meranaw people, that movement carries the weight of history, the urgency of the present, and the quiet, powerful hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proposed to address the key drivers and aspirations of Meranaw migration, as well as to support their well-being in both origin and destination areas: Enhance Local Employment and Business Opportunities in Lanao del Sur; Improve Peace and Order through Conflict Mediation and Law Enforcement; Promote Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Governance; Strengthen Access to Quality Education and Skills Training; Institutionalize Migrant Support Services in Host Cities; Encourage Interagency Collaboration for Sustainable Development in Lanao, and Support Migrants' Aspirations for Family Well-being and Personal Growth.

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