

The Meranaws of Lanao del Sur, Mindanao, Their Migration to Metro Manila, Cebu City and Davao City: A Study on Push Factors

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Abstract

This study explores the migration experiences of Meranaw individuals who have moved to the urban centers of Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City, with a focus on the complex factors that drive their decisions. By combining survey responses from 350 participants with insights gathered through focus group discussions, the research reveals that economic hardship, unemployment, insecurity, cultural pressures, and maratabat (family honor) are major push factors. The findings highlight that migration decisions are shaped by both structural challenges and personal aspirations. For many Meranaw migrants, the decision to leave their home provinces is not just a response to difficult circumstances but a deliberate choice motivated by the desire for improved quality of life, the well-being of their families, and opportunities for personal empowerment. The study 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 conditions in both the 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.

Keywords

Meranaw, migration, Lanao del Sur, Meranaw migration, push factors

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Introduction

As a Meranaw, originally from Lanao del Sur, who once migrated to the capital of the Philippines, Manila, for educational and professional endeavors, the researcher shares the sentiments of other Meranaw migrants regarding the challenges associated with migration. Meranaw migration has evolved through various historical epochs, notably influenced by colonial interventions, socio-political upheavals, economic challenges, modern communications, and faster modes of transportation that facilitate the mobility of people. 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. Meanwhile, numerous unexplored factors compel them to leave their hometown

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in Lanao del Sur, Mindanao to relocate elsewhere. These converging motivations are commonly categorized as the “push” and “pull” factors.

The push factors repel people, causing them to migrate, while the pull factors attract people to move to specific places (Matuan, [1985](#)). Some Meranaws leave their hometown for better living conditions. In contrast, others are forced to leave due to conflict or war. Kadil said in his study entitled “The Muslim Migration and Resettlement in the Visayas and Luzon” that Muslim migration to Manila and the island of Luzon and the Visayas could be explained by various factors, generally attributed to political as well as commercial influences coupled with missionary efforts (Kadil, [2002](#); Kadil, [1992](#)). 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. Even where the new place’s culture is similar to the migrant’s, some adjustments still need to be made (Lacar & Lacar, [1989](#)). Through this study, the researcher aims to explore the complexities and dynamics of Meranaw migration within select cities in the Philippines by examining the push forces behind their migration. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate the migration theory that best explains the Meranaw migration. By examining the push forces at play that guide their journeys, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Meranaw migration phenomenon.

The Meranaws of Lake Lanao

The Meranaws, one of the largest Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, are predominantly based in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte in Mindanao. Their 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 Meranaw origins to early migrations and settlements in Mindanao. According to Hadji Abdul Racman ([2020](#)), early Islamic influence entered Mindanao through Arab, Malay, and Islamized traders, transforming the social and religious landscape of the Lanao region, Mindanao. Majul ([1973](#)) underscores that by the 16th century, Islam was firmly established among the Meranaws, shaping their governance and legal systems through the sultanate structure.

The Meranaws During the Marawi Siege

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 350,000 individuals, the majority of whom were Meranaws. As observed, many evacuees lived in cramped evacuation centers or with relatives, facing challenges of overcrowding, lack of privacy, inadequate sanitation, and food insecurity. Gonzalez ([2019](#)) highlights that displacement disrupted the Meranaws’ traditional kinship networks (kapamagawida) essential for social support. This severing of ties has led to heightened vulnerability, especially among women, children, and elderly populations (Veloso, [2022](#)). Study by B r gin et al. ([2022](#)) indicate 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.

This research study was anchored in Everett 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. 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, and (4) Personal factors.

This research focuses only on the push factors behind the migration of the Meranaws. In the future, this research will be exploring the pull factors behind the migration of the Meranaws. This study aimed to uncover the migration patterns of Meranaw migrants. It examined the push 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 the unique migration patterns that have evolved within the country. In particular, the study sought to answer this question: What are the push factors influencing the Meranaws' decision to migrate into Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City?

Objectives of the Study

To identify the push factors influencing the Meranaws' decision to migrate into 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 push 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 city for a minimum of two years.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study on unraveling the push 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 push factors of Meranaw migrations offers a comprehensive view of the social, political, and economic landscape. Understanding the push 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 push 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 push 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, 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.

Push Factors of Migration

Migration among the Meranaw community, like many migrant groups worldwide, is significantly influenced by a range of push factors that compel individuals and families to leave their places of origin in search of better opportunities and safer living conditions. These push factors encompass economic hardships, social instability, environmental challenges, and gaps in essential services, which collectively shape decisions to migrate.

Push Factors of Migration

Table 1. Push Factors Influencing the Migration of Meranaw Respondents

Push Factors	Metro Manila (150 respondents)	Davao City (100 respondents)	Cebu City (100 respondents)	Total (Average)
Lack of Job Opportunities	92.70%	81.00%	78.00%	83.90%
Economic Factors	92.00%	77.00%	75.00%	81.30%
Family Factors	72.00%	49.00%	63.00%	61.30%
Social Conflict	56.00%	74.00%	49.00%	59.70%
Educational Quality	53.30%	48.00%	48.00%	49.80%
Educational Services	38.70%	51.00%	59.00%	49.60%
Environmental Factors	57.30%	46.00%	45.30%	49.50%
Political Conflict	22.70%	44.00%	32.00%	32.90%
Healthcare Services	10.00%	21.00%	22.00%	17.70%
Health Factors	2.00%	8.00%	30.00%	13.30%
Most Predominant Push Factor	56.00%Lack of Job Opportunities	39.00%Social Conflict	28.00%Educational Services	—

Table 1 summarizes the specific push factors identified by Meranaw respondents across three urban destinations—Metro Manila, Davao City, and Cebu City. The data reveals high percentages reporting a lack of employment and broader economic difficulties as primary drivers of migration. Also featured prominently are factors such as family-related reasons where the participants elaborated it as their desire to provide for their loved ones, desire to send siblings or children to school, and their deep yearning to send their parents to pilgrimage in Mecca, social conflict which they described on two levels, personal and community. Participants who, on a personal level, they have experienced social conflict through land disagreements with family members or relatives. At the community level, they mentioned tensions arising from differences in values or practices that do not always align with the traditions of Meranaw society that pushed them to migrate. Moreover, factors such as concerns over educational quality and services are also key factors, reflecting how intertwined personal, social, and structural challenges influence the decision to relocate.

Additionally, environmental issues and political conflicts remain significant, albeit with varying degrees of importance across locations. Lower percentages of respondents identified healthcare services and personal health as major push factors. However, these still contribute to the broader migration landscape, especially in contexts of prolonged conflict and displacement.

Table 1 outlines the push factors influencing migration among the respondents. Lack of job opportunities was the most common factor, cited by 83.9% of respondents, with Metro Manila having the highest percentage at 92.7%. Economic factors were also significant, reported by 81.3%, particularly in Metro Manila (92.0%). Family-related concerns were cited by 61.3%, with Metro Manila showing the highest proportion (72.0%). Social conflict affected 59.7%, most notably Davao (74.0%). Educational service limitations were reported by 49.6%, especially in Cebu (59.0%). Political conflict was cited by 32.9%, with Davao having the highest proportion (44.0%). Health-related factors were reported by 13.3%, particularly in Cebu (30.0%). When asked about the most significant factors, the lack of job opportunities ranked highest in Metro Manila, social conflict in Davao, and educational services in Cebu.

Table 1 shows the complex forces driving migration among Meranaw respondents across major Philippine urban centers. Each identified push factor carries significant implications for policy design, service provision, and community development initiatives.

Push Factors: Drivers and Implications of Meranaw Migration

Analyzing the findings of the survey questionnaires and the narratives from the focus group discussion came the following implications. Firstly, the extremely high prevalence of lack of employment (83.9%) and economic reasons (81.3%) as push factors underscores the urgent need for sustainable livelihood programs targeted specifically at displaced Meranaw populations. These findings are consistent with Paredes (2013), who observed that Meranaw migrants commonly turn to small-scale trading and entrepreneurship as adaptive strategies when access to formal employment is limited. Policymakers must consider tailored employment schemes, microfinance programs, and skills development initiatives that accommodate cultural practices and religious obligations, particularly for Meranaw women whose entrepreneurship has been noted as a significant adaptive strategy (Paredes, 2013). Local government units (LGUs) in host cities could partner with Islamic banking institutions to design Sharia-compliant financial products that support Meranaw businesses.

The prominence of family-related reasons (61.3%) indicates that migration among the Meranaw is not purely economic but is deeply embedded in kinship structures and collective survival strategies. This resonates with findings by Nasir et al. (2022), the dependence on family members by older Muslim Lebanese immigrants in Canada is a significant indicator that migration and settlement are far from economic processes. They depend mainly on kinship networks and reciprocal support systems. Therefore, social welfare programs should aim to strengthen multigenerational housing, support grandparent roles in cultural and family transmission, and promote community activities that enhance ethnic and local interdependence.

Social conflict (59.7%) emerges as a critical push factor, reflecting both the historical context of violence in Mindanao and the lingering consequences of the Marawi Siege. Camargo et al., (2020) found that conflict-induced displacement among the Meranaw has led to profound trauma and social fragmentation. Therefore, host cities should integrate peacebuilding and psychosocial support into services for Meranaw migrants. Peace education programs and

interfaith dialogues could also help reduce stigmatization and promote harmonious relations between Meranaw migrants and host communities.

The concerns around educational quality (49.8%) and educational services (49.6%) reveal gaps in both infrastructure and curriculum suitability for Meranaw learners. The dual pursuit of secular education and Islamic studies, as highlighted in Solaiman (2021), educational initiatives must go beyond simply expanding access and instead ensure cultural and religious relevance. Policies should back the modernization of Islamic schools while strengthening pathways for their graduates to enter higher education or vocational programs. Furthermore, scholarships tailored for displaced Meranaw students could help close educational gaps and build upward mobility.

While environmental factors (49.5%) appear moderate in average percentages, they remain significant, particularly in the context of climate change and conflict-related environmental degradation in Mindanao. Environmental displacement has been documented by Camargo et al. (2020), emphasizing the need for integrated disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies that address both immediate relief and long-term community resilience. Local government units in host cities should prepare for future migration influxes driven by climate impacts by ensuring adequate housing, infrastructure, and social services for climate-displaced populations.

Political conflict (32.9%) remains a notable push factor, highlighting ongoing governance challenges and perceived insecurity in the Meranaw homeland. This emphasizes the necessity of inclusive governance reforms and continued peace processes in Mindanao. Sustainable peace is crucial not only for reducing future migration pressures but also for encouraging voluntary return among displaced communities.

The lower but non-negligible responses around healthcare services (17.7%) and personal health (13.3%) indicate localized healthcare disparities. Interestingly, health concerns are considerably higher among Meranaws in Cebu (30%). This suggests that host cities must assess their health service capacities to cater to culturally specific health needs of Meranaw migrants. Public health campaigns and health insurance programs should consider language barriers, cultural sensitivities, and religious practices affecting healthcare access.

Taken together, these implications demonstrate that Meranaw migration is not driven by a single cause but by a complex interplay of economic, social, cultural, and political factors. Policies and interventions must therefore adopt a multi-sectoral approach that is both culturally sensitive and context-specific. Generic migration policies risk overlooking unique cultural and historical factors affecting Meranaw migrants. Collaborative efforts among national government agencies, Local Government Units, Non-Government Organizations, religious organizations, and the Meranaw community itself are essential to develop holistic solutions that promote sustainable integration, preserve cultural identity, and improve the quality of life for Meranaw migrants across the Philippines.

From a personal perspective, the data highlights how economic struggles, safety concerns, and the desire for better opportunities drive migration. The lack of jobs, especially in Metro Manila, and social conflict in Davao suggest that people leave for stability. Family concerns in Metro Manila show the importance of support systems, while educational limitations in Cebu reflect the pursuit of better learning opportunities.

Push Factors: Redefining Drivers of Meranaw Migration

The survey revealed that the most dominant push factor was the lack of job opportunities (83.9%), followed closely by economic hardship (81.3%) and family-related concerns

(61.3%). These findings were substantiated by rich qualitative data, where participants spoke at length about being overqualified yet unemployed, the pervasiveness of nepotism, and the inability to grow businesses due to logistical and social constraints. This reflects Lee's (1966) push-pull theory, where adverse conditions in the place of origin, such as joblessness and insecurity, create strong motivations to leave.

The qualitative data provided context to the survey's statistical dominance of social conflict (59.7%) and political instability (32.9%). Participants shared personal stories of *rido* (clan feuds), limited government protection, and trauma from the Marawi Siege. These lived experiences mirror reports by International Organization for Migration (2018), who emphasized how violence and weak institutions in conflict-affected Mindanao fuel migration to safer regions. Moreover, the emotional toll of cultural scrutiny and societal pressure, highlighted in the theme of "Socio-Cultural," revealed a less tangible yet equally influential driver of migration, echoing the psychosocial findings of Salazar (2015) on community surveillance and individual autonomy among minority groups.

The combination of statistics and narratives from the participants provides deeper insights into the root causes of migration, particularly in the context of Meranaw migration. The specific value points of the push factors of Meranaw migration highlight a nuanced understanding of the movement, which reveals that it was not purely economic; rather, there is a complex interplay between political and social instability. Furthermore, the qualitative accounts, such as being overqualified but unemployed and the trauma from war or conflicts like the Marawi siege, provide a voice to real people that makes the data impactful and relatable. Lastly, the push factors of Meranaw migration revealed by this study validate the theory of Lee with context. Hence, the substantial value of the findings of this study, particularly on the push factors of migration, to the study of migration is that it shows the intersection of economic and non-economic factors, which is often underexplored, especially in Meranaw migration literature. In addition, it also contributes a case-based approach in validating the push factors of internal migration in the context of Filipino internal migration literature. Meanwhile, in the field of peace and conflict studies, the findings of this study offer data for understanding how local conflicts, such as *rido* and the Marawi siege in Meranaw context, affect the population movement. It also highlights institutional failure and weak governance as triggers or motives in migration, which are vital in post-conflict peacebuilding research programs. Lastly, in public policy and development, the findings of this study provide evidence-based basis for policymaking which can be used by policymakers in crafting a holistic solution, beyond job and business opportunities creation, to local or national community challenges. In summary, the data revealed by this study as to the push factors of Meranaw migration does not just present statistics but explains the "why" behind the movement, connecting local and lived realities with national and global theories. It provides a multi-disciplinary lens to researchers, educators, government leaders, and non-government humanitarian workers who are actively working for the development of their communities.

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 dominant push factors such as the scarcity of economic opportunities (83.9%) and the prevalence of social conflict (59.7%), as well as 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 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 Push-Pull Theory of Migration (1966) provided a robust conceptual lens. The theory's emphasis on the balance between adverse conditions (push factors) 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.

Author Contributions

Sahira Tomawis Maruhom: Conceptualization, methodology, research design, participant recruitment, investigation, survey administration, focus-group discussions, data collection, data curation, quantitative and qualitative analysis, interpretation of findings, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. The author read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no financial, professional, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Data Availability

The quantitative and qualitative data supporting the findings of this study were collected from Meranaw migrants residing in Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City. Because the dataset contains information obtained from human participants, it is not publicly available to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. De-identified data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical, confidentiality, and data-protection requirements.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, while confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research and reporting processes.

Use of Generative AI

The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to generate the scholarly content, collect or analyse the data, interpret the findings, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article.

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