

Echoes of Kinship: The Untold Meranaw and Higaonon Connections in Lanao and Mindanao

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Abstract

This study focuses on the genealogical as well as the sociocultural connections between the Meranaw, a prominent Moro group residing around Lake Lanao, and the Higaonon, a non-Moro Lumad group traditionally inhabiting the upland regions of Northern Mindanao. This aims to address the significant lack of discussion regarding the relationship between these two closely situated tribes. Drawing on oral histories, ethnographic records, and local genealogies, the research uncovers interlinkages that challenge rigid identity boundaries. In particular, it highlights intermarriages and kinship ties that developed through peaceful exchanges, alliances during earlier periods, and negotiated coexistence in overlapping territories. These genealogical ties reveal a fluidity of identity and belonging, often obscured by current ethno-political divisions. The study also examines how these relations are remembered and mobilized by communities today, either as foundations for solidarity in Indigenous struggles or, conversely, as contested memories in the context of resource disputes or in contribution to writing their history. It found out the two groups shared the same Apo in Sharief Alawi, an early Muslim missionary in north Mindanao, and co-existed in the Tagoloan Aklim and is tied with the history of the Meranaw who recognized this shared ancestry.

By focusing on Meranaw-Higaonon genealogical relations, the paper contributes to a broader rethinking of Moro-Lumad relations, not as static or antagonistic, but as dynamic and historically rooted in shared lived experiences. Understanding these interwoven ancestries offers an opportunity to foster dialogue and bridge-building in the pursuit of peace, cultural preservation, and Indigenous rights in Mindanao.

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1. Introduction

The Philippines is home to over a hundred Indigenous Peoples (IPs), forming what may be described as a nation of many nations. Each ethnolinguistic group possesses its own language or dialect, which serves as a marker of identity [1]. As Bulatao notes, most Philippine ethnic groups are distinguished primarily by their language or dialect. These linguistic distinctions reflect deeper cultural, historical, and genealogical roots that have shaped community identities for generations [2].

According to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), there are more than a hundred recognized IP groups across the archipelago. However, the actual number remains debated due to overlapping identities, inconsistent classifications, and underreporting [3]. It is important to note that the Moro people are not officially categorized as IPs. As Paredes explains, the Moros assert a distinct political and cultural identity, shaped by their long history of colonial resistance and autonomous governance. [4]

This research seeks to contribute to the limited body of literature exploring genealogical relationships among Indigenous communities in Mindanao by focusing on two specific groups: the Meranaw and the Higaonon in Lanao. While many studies have examined Mindanao's tri-people dynamics, few have offered detailed insights into the ancestral ties and intergroup relations between Moro and non-Moro IPs. Virtually no written work exists on the genealogical connections between the Meranaw and the Higaonon. This study addresses that gap by exploring their shared histories, intermarriages, kinship ties, and cultural interactions. Understanding these relationships not only enriches the ethnohistorical narrative of Lanao but also highlights the interconnectedness and complexity of identity in Mindanao. It is essential that this inquiry be conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, recognizing the unique contributions of each group to the region's rich social fabric.

The Meranaw are one of the major Moro ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao, primarily residing around Lake Lanao, from which their name is derived—"Meranaw" meaning "people of the lake" [5]. In their own dialect, they refer to themselves as Iranaon. Their strong Islamic identity and historical resistance to colonization, particularly during the Martial Law period, have contributed to a strong cultural and political consciousness [6]. They remain among the most traditional Moro groups and were among the last to submit to American rule, preferring to live in the mountainous areas surrounding the lake [7].

In contrast, the Higaonon are a non-Moro Indigenous group concentrated in the highland areas of Northern Mindanao, including parts of Lanao. Their name is derived from the words "higa" (to live), "gaon" (mountain), and "onon" (people), reflecting their deep-rooted connection to mountainous regions [8]. Traditionally practicing swidden agriculture, hunting, and gathering, they have faced pressures from migration, land dispossession, and modern development [9]. Despite religious shifts due to Christian missionary efforts, many Higaonon still retain animist beliefs and practices [10]. Their traditional justice system, known as *bungkatol ha bulawan*, emphasizes restorative peace-making and is facilitated by community elders [11].

While both groups are often treated as distinct—Moro and non-Moro—their historical interactions, territorial proximities, and potential genealogical connections in Lanao remain underexplored. This study aims to examine

these ancestral ties, contributing to the broader ethnohistorical and genealogical understanding of Mindanao's diverse peoples.

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a historical, unobtrusive research design, using oral narratives and archival materials to explore Moro and Non-Moro relations. The qualitative design is ideal for examining past events and cultural dynamics without direct intervention. A Qualitative inquiry employs different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis [12].

Research Locale

The research focused on areas in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, particularly around Lake Lanao like Kapai, Tagoloan II, Marawi and Ama-I Manabilang, where Meranaw and Higaonon respondents shared insights into their region's rich political and cultural history.

Research Participants

A snowball sampling method was used to identify participants, especially Meranaw genealogists, as knowledgeable informants are difficult to locate. The study would not be possible without the identification and contribution of the participants of the study. They are the provider of information which would be the core of the research.

The Sampling design that was helpful in this research was particularly the Snowball sampling procedure. It was a non-probability sampling method popular in qualitative research; the procedure was "research participants recruit other participants for a test or study. It was used where potential participants are hard to find. It's called snowball sampling because in theory once you have the ball rolling; it picks up more "snow" along the way and becomes larger and larger [13]. In other words, "snowball sampling method is based on referrals from initial subjects. Therefore, when applying this sampling method members of the sample group are recruited via chain referral.

Research Instrument

In order to gather the necessary data for the completion of this study, the researcher first prepared a formal request letter. This letter was designed to inform the local community about the purpose and scope of the research, as well as to provide details regarding the researcher's affiliation and background. This initial communication ensured transparency and built trust with the participants, allowing them to understand the objectives of the study and the researcher's intentions in engaging with them.

To further deepen the data collection process, the researcher conducted interviews with key informants who

possess significant knowledge or experience relevant to the study's focus. For these interviews, an open-ended questionnaire was developed, enabling the researcher to explore the difficulty of the subject matter. Open-ended questions are particularly useful in qualitative research as they allow respondents to provide rich, detailed, and personal insights that may not be captured through closed-ended questions. The research was conducted using both oral interviews and questionnaires, with the goal of ensuring a thorough and comprehensive documentation of the information gathered.

Data Gathering Procedure

This paper draws on both primary and secondary sources. Given its focus on genealogy, the researcher primarily conducted interviews with Meranaw genealogists and learned individuals. Library research was the initial step, with visits to several libraries including the MSU Main Library, CSSH Library, Graduate Studies Library, Dansalan College Research Center, and the MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology libraries. In these, the researcher consulted books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and electronic resources.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined narrative, thematic, and content analysis—an approach known as triangulation. This multi-method strategy enhances the study's credibility and depth by verifying findings through different analytical lenses [14]. Narrative analysis was crucial in addressing the first statement of the problem, as many interviews yielded long, complex accounts—particularly on Meranaw genealogy—which often included archaic terms and culturally nuanced expressions. This method allowed the researcher to interpret these intricate narratives critically, focusing on how participants structured their stories and identifying recurring patterns. Thematic analysis was applied to both oral and written data from Moro and non-Moro Indigenous Peoples (IP). Through coding and theme development [15], the researcher identified key themes such as identity, coexistence, cultural boundaries, genealogy, and mutual perceptions [16]. Finally, content analysis was used to examine the frequency and context of recurring concepts across interviews and documents [17]. This method helped uncover patterns and shared concerns reflecting the broader social and cultural dynamics between Moro and non-Moro IP communities.

3. Discussion

In life, where change is both inevitable and constant, it becomes essential to understand one's roots and uncover the connections that shape identity. Perhaps this is why certain sayings are passed down through generations—to remind us not to forget who we are, no matter how much the world around us changes. As Marcus Garvey wisely said, “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” Just as roots are vital for a tree's growth and survival, so too is a strong connection to one's heritage essential for a people to thrive. Without roots, a tree will wither and be forgotten.

In these challenging times in the Bangsamoro, where discussions surrounding Moro and Indigenous Peoples (IP) relations are increasingly prevalent, studies like this one are both necessary and timely. Mindanao is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, and too often, we focus on our differences while overlooking our shared

similarities. This study aims to explore these commonalities, hoping to foster a deeper understanding among the people of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). One of the key similarities to explore is the genealogical connections among these groups. As Heraclitus once said, “A hidden connection is stronger than an obvious one.” What could be even stronger is the realization that the Moros and Non-Moros share the same roots and origins. It is this shared heritage that binds them together as people of Mindanao, and, on a larger scale, as people of the Philippines.

Even the Spaniards commented on Mindanao natives and said, “No other origin to these people can be conjectured than one general to these islands- whose language, since its structure is founded on Malayan roots, shows by its origin the origin of its natives.” [18] In a religious context, all humans, as creations of God, are children of Adam. Therefore, it is time to consistently remind ourselves of these truths and begin celebrating both our differences and our shared similarities and connections. If we embrace this perspective, a brighter future awaits, especially for the Bangsamoro.

Although Bangsamoro is often used colloquially only for the Moros, the MILF has chosen at various points in the peace process to define ‘Bangsamoro’ to include Lumads and even Christians who support their cause. As counted in various books on Mindanao, there are thirteen (13) Moro groups, in addition to eighteen (18) indigenous groups [19]. However, there are probably about 25 or more in Mindanao mainland. Owing to the isolation of these groups, the Philippine census has never been consistent. The indigenous people are famously identified by many authors as the Lumads.

These Lumads included the Subanen of Zamboanga, and the Manobo, Higaonon and Talaandig of Northern Mindanao, whereas Davao region is home to at least fifteen (15) indigenous tribes which included the Mandaya and Bagobo. There are many indigenous groups across Mindanao, and in the BARMM, you can also find indigenous groups like the Teduray, Lambangian, Iruumanen Manobo and Higaonon. And so, it has been intriguing to know how was the relationship between the Moros and their closest non-Moro indigenous people neighbors. One of the participants to the study believed that, “We have two kinds of relationship. First, the Moro who are closer to them have established relations but we who are in the hinterland, in the city and urban areas, we don’t have good and close relationships with them. We just hear something about them, but, we also know that we and they belong to these community and these are the people. Some of us don’t even know that there are Higaonon, etc. etc. So it has something to do with who is near.” He even adds that the word relations could mean genealogical and interactive.

Historically, it seemed that the Moro and the non-Moro indigenous people had a troubled relationship in Mindanao. But it seemed to be a natural condition in those challenging times. Like other early cultures and societies, the Philippines had a long history of warfare and tribal warfare, these could pre-date the years of Spanish conquest. This was one evidence why scholars believed that there was a civilization not just simple culture in the Philippines. And leading Filipino anthropologist, Jocano stated that feuding barangays often raided each other’s territory since pre-conquered times. [20]

In addition, affront or insult, loss of face, aggression or rectification of wrong, piracy and plunder and initiation

of warriors also caused war. It was also described by eyewitness accounts of early Spanish discovery of the islands and its people that;

In fairness, or at least for the sake of completeness, it must be said that there were fear and wrongdoing in the primitive settlements before the arrival of the Spaniards or Portuguese. In the Villalobos report we met a man from Sarangani, -who knew Mindanao well, saying that the coastal areas of the island were then rather depopulated "because of the people's wars." We heard about slave trading at Butuan in the relation of Villalobos as well as in those of Legazpi. Presumably, those slaves had not been bought or caught in China! [21]

Even though this statement showed a defensive argument in favor of the Spanish intruders, this can still give ideas to play in readers' minds in explaining why there were mountain people who chose to live in the deepest part of the mountains, probably for safety and peace of their minds.

3.1 The Genealogical Relations of the Moro and the Non-Moro IP in BARMM

The Moros and non-Moro IP undeniably made partnerships in the past. One of these partnerships can be seen in the form of intermarriages, which brought political alliances Specially in the Maguindanao sphere of influence. While they retain their own identities, non-Moros routinely intermarried with Moros, converted to, and otherwise have accommodated the Moro dominant culture just as they intermarry, convert, or otherwise accommodate mainstream Filipino culture from settlers or other people of Mindanao [22]. While others opined that a union between Muslim Moro, Christian settlers and the non-Moro are rare events in Mindanao. [23] Whether intermarriage is rare or numerous, it happens. And Paredes had the impression that due to intermarriage between the two, it blurs ethnic boundaries. There are non-Moros who become Muslims and speak like Moros and live and fought alongside them. [24]

They also co-exist with one another since time immemorial and made trading relationships with one another. However, given the conditions of pre-colonial and colonial times, and the Moros reigning strong and in need of slaves, many non-Moro eventually became subject to their habitual raidings, which was a part of life and economy, even in pre-Spanish times. Which All the more intensified when Spain made its entry in the whole country and introduced a new religion all over.

3.2 Echoes of a Common and Shared Past: The Tagoloan Aklim

The Meranaw-Higaonon relations can be traced as far back as early times, and definitely even before the Spanish advent. For some Meranaw, the two co exist in Mindanao lands, and they are different as tribal groups. But many believed them to have been closely related, there was a genealogical relations between the two. As one participant mentioned: "So mga Higaonon na pud anan ko Bangsa tano, sa salsila tano ko Pat a Pengampong sa Ranao." Translation: The Higaonon is part of the people and genealogy of the Four Principal State of Lanao.

Whereas another participant mentioned that, "Only Meranaws who intermarried with Higaonon had relations, particularly good relations with them, often times, the two are even enemies." However, in specific parts of Lanao, one could see a better and deeper relations. In theory, in fact, the two could have come from the same

origin. They are closer to each other also geographically, undoubtedly. Most likely, many Higaonon eventually became Meranaw or some Meranaw are Higaonon descendants through a long process or a series of intermarriages. This is specially true in the borderlands of what is now Lanao Del Sur. Like in the borders of Tagoloan II, and Iligan, where there is a mixed population of Higaonon and Meranaw, alongside the Christian settlers. One evidence to link to this theory can be seen in the long discussion of the History of Iligan City, in Lanao del Norte. Accordingly, it is believed by local historians that one of the earliest inhabitants of this city were the Higaonon. To Caluen, “the earliest people of Bayug probably were the ancestors of the Higaonon in Rogongon of Iligan, formerly Yligan or pag-ilidan to the Meranaw.”[25] It is explained that, “Bayug (an island sitio of Barangay Hinaplanon, 3.7 km. Northeast of Poblacion) is traditionally considered the first settlement in iligan in pre-Islamic times. The first settlers according to oral and textual accounts point to either the Lumads (the ancestors of Higaonon of Barangay Rogongon, this city) or the Meranaw.”

Additionally, there is the Tagoloan Aklim or the ancient “Tagoloan” where the ancestors of both the Higaonon and Meranaw also settled and lived together in peace and harmony. As explicitly discussed in a National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) sponsored documentation:

Tagoloan is considered one of the peaceful towns of Misamis Oriental, regardless of the different beliefs and culture of our people in Tagoloan. There are maybe three theories about the origin or etymology of the word, theories because it is still contested. Number 1, Fr. Jaeme Neri published a document which states that Tagoloan is in local language is translated into, lugar na Tapukanan or meeting place. Which, perhaps is correct because this is a place where the people meet. This was where they used to trade, do commerce, wash clothes, and take baths. Secondly, there is the term, ‘tago-uluhan, or in Tagalog, where the head is hidden. And the third one, which is very, and most probable, is Taga- uluhan, which refers to the people from the ulo, ulo is the Tagoloan river, it served as the major location of where rivers are connected, and in local tongue there is ‘taga asa ka man? Taga saan ka? Ah taga-uluhan, meaning, you are from the main entry of the river. Which connects to how other places are named. Taga-ilog, Tagalog, Tagaka-ulo in Davao, we also have Maranaw, people of the lake. Tausug, people of the current, so taga-uluhan (Tagoloan) or people living in the ulo, or the head of the Tagoloan river. [26]

From the above statement, the readers can be informed that there was an old place called Tagoloan, which is home to both the Meranaw and Higaonon even before the Spanish times. It was a coastal area. And it is named after a body of water, Uluhan, hence, its people are called Taga-Uluhan or Tagoloan. Not many old documents talked about the existence of Tagoloan, or if it was a prosperous kingdom. In fact, no Tagoloan was mentioned in Spanish documents. Until in 1823, when they re-used or made Tagoloan as the center and where the city government was found. There was a transfer of the ruling Spaniards from Pinagyan, to Tagoloan, one reason was the Spanish missionary was almost murdered by the indigenous inhabitants. Since then, the center was from Pinagyan to Tagoloan in 1823 and the rest is history [27]. But in the mid-19th century writings of Spanish missionaries, Pablo Pastells reports about its strategic location; He describes his thought of the great benefit the Tagoloan river will bring to the religion and fatherland if it will be explored. Among the initial observation were as follows: The Pulangi, or the Rio Grande de Mindanao, is three days away southwards from Tagoloan. The Tagoloan river valley is between two mountain ranges lying north to south, Kimankil on the east, and

kitanlad on the west [28]. This Tagoloan is part of the Salsila of Ranao, and of the Meranaw.

In the word of a research participant, who is a Meranaw genealogists;

“So Apo tano a mga Sharief na magare are, pito siran kon man, madiyang siran man, miyakawma siran saya, so esa na minibayog a undo sa tampar sa Pulangi, gyoto so Sharief Kabungsuan, na so Sharief Alawi na sa Tagoloan. Translation: Our ancestors the Shariefs are siblings, there are seven of them, some even said, there are dozens of them, when they arrived here, one was flown by the wind going to the Pulangi, that is Sharief Kabungsuan, while Sharief Alawi stayed in Tagoloan”

It is still unclear, if the Shariefs were truly brothers but the oral tradition claims them so, there might had been a relation. In pre-Spanish times, people specially rulers are related, as Scott noted, “the rulers of Butuan, Limasawaa, Cebu, and Maktan in Magellan’s day were all related.” [29]

Most importantly, this research finds it interesting that the Tagoloan river, which might be the starting location of the so called Tagoloan Aklim in Meranaw Salsila is just three days away from Pulangi. Meaning to say, its close connection to the Pulangi seemed very convincing that the Shariefs arrived in the place and Sharief Alawi stayed there and the other Shariefs went the other ways and Sharief Kabungsuan spread Islam in the Pulangi. Or the Sharief Alawi arrived in Cotabato and navigated towards Tagoloan.

Saleeby recorded that, “both the traditions of Magindanao and its written history said that Kabungsuan was preceded by other pioneers like Sharief Awliya, who was also called by other as Alawi. Awliya is regarded as a relative and predecessor of Kabungsuan. His history is wrapped in Myths.” [30]

Accordingly, the sultanate of Tagoloan was establish in 1515 by Sharief Alawi, brother of Kabungsuan, and it is independent and separate from the Pengampong sa Ranao [31]. As the previous explanation stated, Tagoloan may strongly meant Taga- uluhan, which refers to the people from the ulo, ulo is the Tagoloan river, because it is where one will see the head of the river from where it is connected to other rivers, it denotes a place of origin and where people originally lived near bodies of water. Like the Tausug, who are people of the current, there was taga-uluhan (Tagoloan) or people living in the ulo, or the head of the Tagoloan river. [32]

In the Meranaw understanding, Tagoloan also meant “the place of the chief”. Tago meaning ‘a place’, similarly the Meranaw has a slang ‘Tag-a’ meaning, “came from” when pointing to a place of origin. While ‘oloan’ meant “head, chief or leader” other than the head of the river. Oloan in Meranaw also meant exactly the same, another proof that the Meranaw probably were one of the original settlers of Tagoloan. And neighbor to the Higaonon in all boundaries.

Furthermore, an author noted:

“It is interesting to note that the town of Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental is traditionally held to have been a Muslim settlement in the pre-Spanish period. Tradition has it that for some urgent reasons, Tagoloan was suddenly abandoned during a mass exodus to northeastern Lanao. The probably cause of the exodus was the unusually

violent eruption of Hibok-Hibok volcano in Camiguin island. The eruption must have been a major one accompanied by killer tidal waves, forcing the Tagoloan folks to abandon the sea in their panic. It is significant that as late as the 1950's Hibok-Hibok volcano again erupted. My theory is that the Tagoloans journeyed well into the hinterlands until they reached the area around Balo-i, in what is now Lanao del Norte, where the abundance and the easy accessibility of fresh water for their daily religious ablutions made them stay permanently. The rugged mountains and gorges of Bukidnon were not hospitable, though nearer to Tagoloan, because water in its steep river gorges is hard to get.

The tradition about Tagoloan to my thinking has factual basis. The jigsaw puzzle about the pre-Spanish origins of the Lanao Norte Muslims (I call them Tagoloans) falls into place neatly of the assumptions that they came from Tagoloan is accepted. Just one piece of evidence in support of the theory is the fact that there exists a town called Tagoloan, northeast of Balo-i, in the precise direction of Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, I surmise that in the old days, after the passing of the generation that made the exodus from Tagoloan, that place became more and more and more vague, hazy memory, and the nearby are in its general direction (northeast) became Tagoloan to the later day Meranaw. The Sultanate of Tagoloan is acknowledged by the lake Muslims as a legitimate sultanate, not part of the traditional "pat a pengampong". It has its own oral traditions. [33]

Given that early civilizations worldwide first formed in coastal and riverine places, the location of Tagoloan in Misamis Oriental makes it a possible cradle of an early civilization in Mindanao. And a strong indication that the original Tagoloan aklim, in Meranaw Salsila and oral tradition, is located originally. It could have been one of the earliest thriving settlement in the distant past of Mindanao and one of the place the Meranaw also lived, or where the ancestors of the Meranaw or early Meranaw lived. This is evidenced by the presence of the Meranaw at the place since early times.

Probably, when Tagoloan Aklim ceased to exist by the times of the early Spanish missionaries in northern Mindanao, or maybe became a speck of the past, the Meranaw helped to preserve its memory when they also called communities in Lanao as Tagoloan. They carried the name of their place of origin to where they could have resettled. This denote that a relocation took place at one point in history, of a group of people or Meranaw from what is now northern Mindanao and down south to Lanao. Hence, the knowledge and history about the Tagoloan Aklim was never forgotten and was later on used again in northern Mindanao by the Spanish missionaries themselves. Another given idea is, Tagoloan Aklim covered a broad territory which included what is now Misamis oriental, Bukidnon, and Caraga.

This statement, "Tagoloan was suddenly abandoned during a mass exodus to northeastern Lanao. The probably cause of the exodus was the unusually violent eruption of Hibok-Hibok volcano in Camiguin island," [34]. Moreover, this can help explain why two (2) Tagoloan exist in the Lanao areas, one near Baloi, Lanao del Norte, and another Tagoloan, officially Tagoloan II, can be found in Lanao del Sur. And it is where one can find also very rich remnants of Meranaw-Higaonon relations.

3.3 Genealogical Convergence: Meranaw- Higaonon Lineages and the Legacy of Sharief Alawi

The tradition on the so called Tagoloan Aklim can help understand why some Meranaw families had Higaonon ancestry in their family lineage which can be seen from their Salsila. In the past, Meranaw and Higaonon share a common origin in the Tagoloan Aklim. Either as neighbors or the same people, eventually, intermarriage between the two tribes had been common in Tagoloan Aklim. Or in the ancient Tagoloan, where the two are closer inhabitants and most likely follow the same chief of the kingdom, their descendants carried that Meranaw and Higaonon lineage. An example of this was the roots of Dr. Ali, a Meranaw scholar, leader and Datu. He was an Exceptional Meranaw given his track record and his royal bloodline. He was both a descendant of Sharief Kabungsuhan and Sharief Alawi, brothers from whom the Meranaw royal families traced their royal origins and traditional titles. And it is from his lineage in Tagoloan Aklim that we would see his Higaonon ancestor, when Sharief Alawi married Adsinalong or Ashinalong, a native higaonon princess. This knowledge made him so proud of himself as a true blue Mindanaon. He said:

I discovered that one of my ancestors was a native of an Indigenous People (IP) community, making me a part of it. My lineage traces back to the Shariefs, originally from Johore, specifically Sharief Kabungsuhan, from whom the Meranaw royalty descends. I also trace my roots to Sharief Alawi through the ancient kingdom of Aklim—now known as the old Kingdom of Tagoloan—not the present-day municipalities or barangays of the same name. Historically, this kingdom spanned from northern Davao to Surigao, Agusan, and Zamboanga, excluding Maguindanao, Lanao, and the mainland.

The researcher believes that Meranaws with Higaonon roots illustrate a Meranaw-Higaonon genealogical link dating back to the time of Sharief Alawi. This connection is significant, as Sharief Alawi is an ancestor of many Meranaws of the *Pengampong* and played a key role in the *Salsila* of the Ranao *bangsa*. He is directly linked to notable figures in the Meranaw *Salsila*, including Camayongan, Bato Lakongan, Gomisa of Marawi, and others from Bayabao.

When Sharief Alawi married native women, it must be noted that these native women were also of Royal bloods, as the native women who was married to the Shariefs were claimed to be a bae or Princess and of noble birth. For participant 1, Bae Adsinalong or Ashinalong is a Higaonon princess. And so, he had non-Moro roots, and he is proud of it. So unlike other Meranaw, who greatly denied any relations to any non-Moro, only to show a characteristic an author observed about the Meranaw, that “to them, no other bangsa is as good as a Meranaw. And other tribes are not Muslims and so, they are not highly regarded by the Moros like the Meranaw. [35]

According to oral traditions and genealogical records, when Sharief Alawi married Bae Adsinalong, they had a son named Landa, who begot Lembobongan. Lembobongan had at least seven children: Bantacutan, Hampesun, Panagsohon, Mangawan, Mambutangan, Camayongan, and Eya-Eya. Research by Logronio and Salvejo on Higaonon ancestry in Iligan City confirms the presence of the same *salsila* in relation to Lembobongan’s descendants (see Figures 1 and 6). [36]

Among these children, Camayongan and Mangawan are considered key ancestors of many Meranaws in the *Pat a Pengampong sa Ranao*. Mangawan begot Kunumun, whose descendants, according to Meranaw genealogists like Participant 17, settled in Wato and Bayabao. Other descendants of Kunumun migrated to areas like Iligan, Panoroganan, and Rogongon, and are identified as Higaonon-Meranaw or *Kalibugan* [37]. Camayongan, another child of Lembobongan, is believed to be a grandson or great-grandson of Sharief Alawi. She became known as *Kamayongan sa Baloi* after marrying Bato Lakongan, a significant figure in Baloi, who lived around the 17th century—the same era as Balindong Bzar, the founder of the Sultanate of Lanao and Sultan of the Pengampong sa Masiu. Their descendants spread throughout Lanao, including the areas of Piagapo and Baloi. A participant noted that Camayongan had a son, who in turn bore a son named Bato—reportedly named after his grandfather, Bato Lakongan. This younger Bato married Didaolan, believed to be related to the *Saber sa Radapan* of Piagapo, and became an ancestor of some royal families in Marawi.

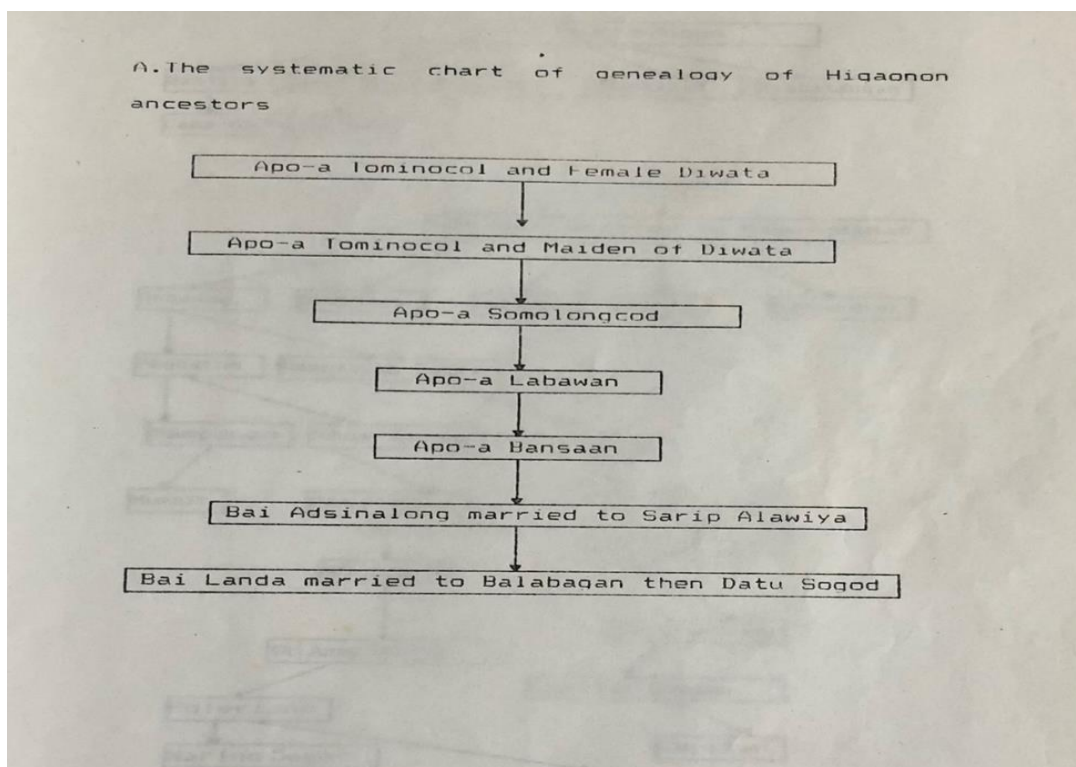


Figure 1: The Higaonon of Kalubihon, Dalipuga, Iligan City.

Source: Logronio, R. and Salvejo, R. (2019)/ see also Paulo, G. et al

Furthermore, a Meranaw scholar has a record on the Salsila Aklim (Ancient Kingdom) of Tagoloan. His source was Datu Cali sa Bayabao Katib of Tampoda who was entrusted to take custody of the Tripartite covenant of Lanao represented by Sultan Alawia Alonto, Bato sa Kisulon representing the Higaonon and Datu sa Manili representing the Maguindanao under an old Durian Tree in Banisilen. This salsila was recovered from the Kampilo of Watamama sa Bayabao, the first Imam of Marawi and his son Imam Maurag of the *Lima ka Amaan* sa Marawi. Same document -Salsila was found among the Kitab left by Imam Monte of Buadi Sacayo at the old masget sa Buadi Sacayo. From these we learn that there are four (4) ancient Pat a Inged a Mala Aklim a

Tagoloan and there were: 1. IRIGAN-PAGILIDAN SA SEDEPAN- Capitol Iligan. 2. LEMBAK A LOPA A TAGOLOAN-DULAG-WAO, 3. UTARA TAGOLOAN- AGUSAN-SURIGAO and 4. SEBANGAN TAGOLOAN- MALAYBALAY.

As of the writing of this research, no enough knowledge can help expound who the people found in the proceeding list or what stories do they tell, except that of the salsila showing the ancestry of the research participant. The other 3 salsila found in his records could be out of the covered discussion of the researcher of this study, but the bearer claimed it to be among the preserved memory or salsila that can be of use to interested people across Bukidnon and beyond it. The author of the study decided to include it in this paper simply for documentation or compilation for oral tradition's sake. However, it can be used as a possible evidence to the legacy of Sharief Alawi who is also responsible in introducing Islam as far as Bukidnon or northern Mindanao. But Islam was refused by the people or tribes of northern Mindanao. As explained by Scheurs(1961), circumcision, prohibition of eating pork and the love of alcohol may have discouraged them to Islam.

In addition, this coming salsilas in the succeeding pages would help to support the idea given by one of the respondents of the study who mentioned that, "So mga pud man a tao sa liyo a ranao na miyag-apo apo siran mambo ko Apo tano. Translation: The other people and tribes outside Lanao (like Agusan, Davao, Surigao, Bukidnon) also shared the same Apo with the people of Lanao." This means that, the so called Apo, we are talking about started with Sharief Alawi himself. And another respondent claimed that; "Soman so Sharief Alawi na madakul a miyapangaroma neyan, pat kon man oto. Translation; Accordingly, the Sharief Alawi had married many, i heard he had four." This research thinks that the said Sharief may had married a so called Bae Ashinalong, also spelled Adsinalong, probably in northern Mindanao and a certain Bae Salilangen, who is from north-western Mindanao.

The following pages contained diagrams showing the SALSILA of the four parts of the Ancient kingdom of Tagoloan which covered what is now Iligan, Wao, Bukidnon, Surigao and Agusan.

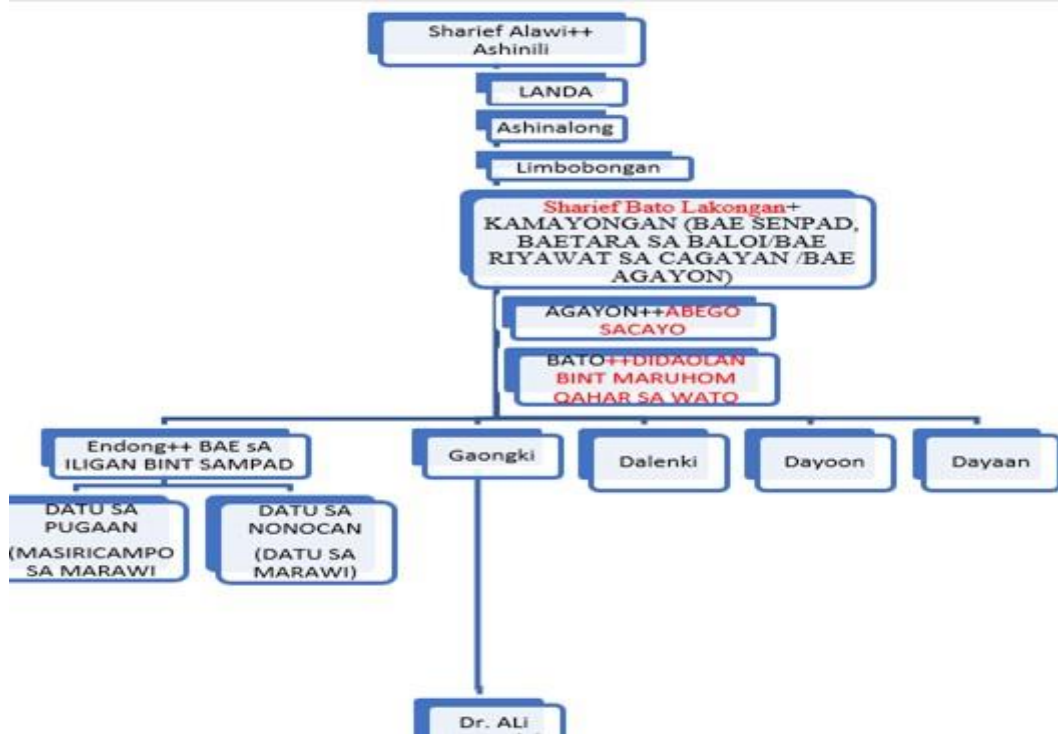


Figure 2: SALSILA A: ILIGAN -PAGILIDAN. Where a Meranaw scholar traced his lineage.

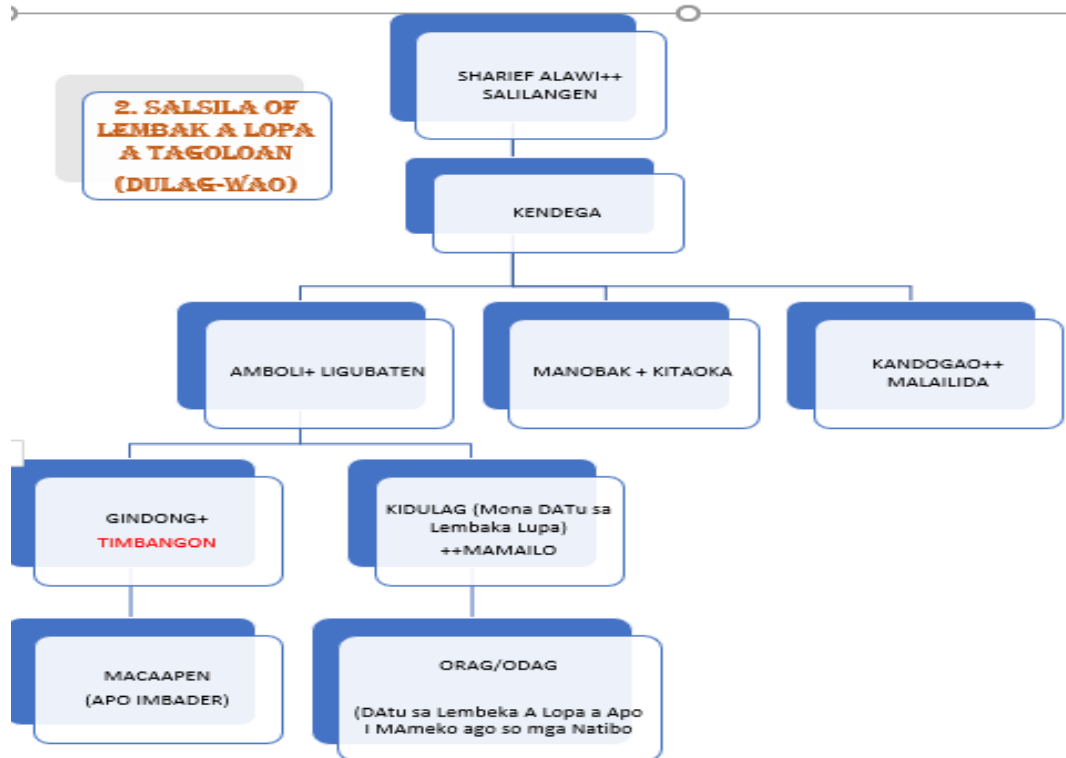


Figure 3: SALSILA SA LEMBAK A LOPA A TAGOLOAN

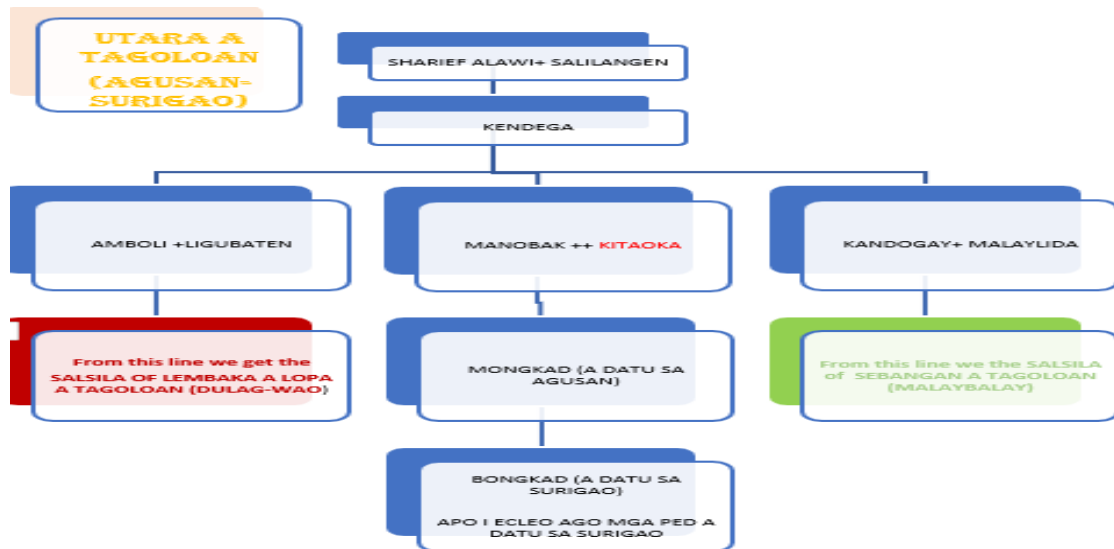


FIGURE 4: UTARA A TAGOLOAN (AGUSAN AND SURIGAO)

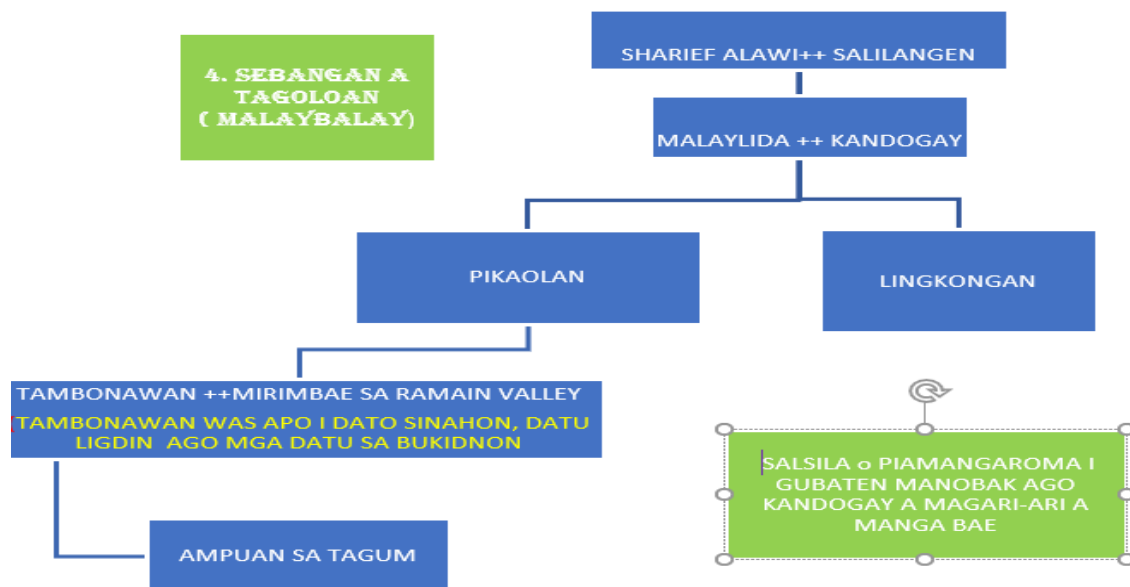


FIGURE 5: ALSILA OF SEBANGAN SA TAGOLOAN (MALAYBALAY)

From the genealogical diagrams, the researcher understands why many Meranaws intermarried with natives like the Higaonon in Bukidnon, and why a significant Meranaw population exists there today. The Meranaw are not foreign to northern Mindanao—some of their ancestors lived in areas like Tagoloan, Agusan, and Bukidnon. Inter-marriage between Meranaws and Higaonons dates back to pre-colonial and colonial times. This study suggests that some Higaonons embraced Islam and became Meranaw, or that some Meranaws have Higaonon ancestry. They may even share common ancestors through the ancient Tagoloan line, particularly through Bae Adzinalong and the multiple marriages of Sharief Alawi to native women. Interestingly, while Bae Adzinalong appears in the *salsila*, most Meranaw genealogists cannot identify her background—except one, who recognized

her as a non-Moro, likely from ancient Tagoloan. Surprisingly, in the Higaonon memory, they pointed to her as their ancestor. That she is a Higaonon princess and they have a preserved record on her Higaonon origins (see Figure 6 in the next pages). And the Higaonon in Lanao area agreed to this story of shared ancestry. That it is an undeniable reality to them. Probably, the failure of the Meranaw in preserving the story of Bae Adzinalong could have been intentional, as it is common practice that the Meranaw usually erases memories of any of their non-Moro ancestor as it will not be good in the reputation of not only one member of the family but the whole clan, in early times, having a different “bangsa” or identity other than Meranaw is not good, and will not be good to their Maratabat. If we follow the lineage going back to the marriage of Sharief Alawi and Bae Adzinalong, one will notice that they begot children, who eventually became the renowned ancestors of the many Meranaw all over Lanao. As a participant narrated, “Sharief Alawi and Bae Adzinalong married, and they begot Landa who married Balabagan and begot Adzinali, Adzinali then got married to Alumao, and begot Gindolongan, who got married to Bangsaan, and begot Limbobongan who married Payongan and begot Mangawan sa Kapai.”

Mangawan sa Kapai is a major ancestor of many Meranaw-Higaonon descendants from Kapai in Lanao Sur, and Bayug and Panoroganan in Iligan, that is why, the members of a known family in Tagoloan-Kapai with whom the researcher was able to talk to, also can find their relatives in Bayug and Panoroganan like the Comonog. Mangawan sa Kapai was a sibling to Kamayongan of Baloi who got married to Bato Lakongan of Baloi, probably a contemporary of Balindong Bsar, if we are to follow this story, their timeline is estimated to around the 17th century according to Meranaw genealogists.

According to a research participant; “The story of Kamayongan and Bato Lakongan and their descendants is so wide, they can encompass the four principalities of Lanao.”

In Marawi, one of the descendants of Bato Lakongan of Baloi was Agayon, who then was accordingly related to the Gomisa sa Marawi (through the marriage of his grandson Ambego who also was the grandson of Balindong Bsar). And so, their descendants spread to Wato, Bayang, Ramain, Masiu, etc, even the famous Akadir Akobar also known as Ama-i Pakpak was accordingly a descendant.

Many royal families of Marawi traced their ancestry to the Gomisa sa Marawi. According to a participant:

The Gomisa sa Marawi begot the 5 forefathers; first is the Tobacan sa Bangon, second is the Makalilay sa Madaya, third was Boriongan sa Bacolod, fourth was Bae Timbang sa Guimba, and fifth was Saulangan sa Turos. The Tobacan sa Bangon begot Sacayo, the reason why Bangon in Marawi is called Buadi Sakayo, He then married Alayo, a child of Maruhom Hidayat who is a child of Balindong Bsar. Their union resulted to children 1. Si Alonso sa Kialdan, ago si Ambego. Then Ambego married Agayon, one of the Children of Bato Lakongan of the Kamayongan sa Baloi. They begot : 1. Datu Seri ayaden Si Bato Ambego. 2. Lokes a Dato (this explained why there is a Lokes a Dato place), 3. Dipatuan and 4. Umbai. And one of their children, Datu Ambego married Didaolan sa Wato and they begot Dayaan, Undong, Gaungki, Dalungkai, Dayoon. The first child, Dayaan married Datu sa Kalodan one of the children of Diwan sa Bayang with Abo sa Malaig and they begot 8 children which spread in Bayang, the eight children known as watamama sa Bayabao, his descendants

spread in Bangon go sa Bacolod Chico. The second, Undong became the father of Datu sa Pogaan ago si Datu sa Nunukan. The third, Gaungki married Maulana a child of Dangi sa Ramain and the datu Maas of Masiu and begot Alangadi. The fourth child known as “Si Dalungkay”, in this line can be found the lineage of Akadir, popularly known as Ama-i Pakpak. And then Dayoon. The second child of the Gomisa sa Marawi in Madaya became the Makalilay sa Lilod. Sibling of Tobacan sa Bangon, his children included Painog and Angongo, who in turn, begot: 1. Amago, 2. Ating, 3. Alokas, 4. Angkunug. So Angkunug Bonganga is Dipatuan sa Madaya who married Putri Linta a child of Dagit, sibling to Palawan of Poona Bayabao and they begot: : 1. Amai Aguam, 2. Datu sa Madaya, 3. Ogona sa Dalam a Guimba, 4. Udasan sa mayababad sa Dansalan ago sabala a Manao. And the fifth Radiamoda of Punud and begot children with Danding, a child of Maruhom Rahmatullah a child of Balindong Bsar, and they are: 1. Sarip Batua sa Madaya ago so 2. Datu Pitiilan. The Sarip Batua of Madaya became the forefather of these families: Pacasum, Manabilang and Pangarungan. The Datu Pitiilan of Madaya is one of our ancestor.

From this genealogical listing, the researcher interprets that the Meranaw who descended from the marriage of Sharief Alawi and Bae Adsinalong, and therefore who have Higaonon ancestry, since Adsinalong is claimed by many participants of the study to be a Higaonon princess, spread far and wide all over the four principalities of Lanao.

This genealogical links between the Higaonon and Meranaw continues to the present and is not limited only to the times of Sharief Alawi. In Kapai, it is in this specific location in Lanao del Sur that the theory also holds true. Perhaps because they are also very near to Higaonon territories. Beyond this municipality is the province of Bukidnon, which is home to the Higaonon. This is probably why one participant, who is a renowned resident of Kapai and Tagoloan, said that, “So Meranaw na ana rogo eyan a Higaonon, na so Higaonon na adun mambo a rogo eyan a Meranaw”. (Translation: A Meranaw has Higaonon blood, and a Higaonon also had Meranaw blood”)

In theory, intermarriage between Meranaw and Higaonon tribes took place centuries ago, especially among children of tribal chiefs. These is also true among other Moro and non-moros elsewhere, like in Maguindanao and their neighboring tribes, and the Meranaw were not exempted. As Paredes stated, “over the decades and centuries, there had been significant intermarriages such that in some cases, the ethnic boundaries between non-Moro and Moro is not clear.”[38] It was also narrated by another participant that, “ So mga Meranaw man a Datu gowane, na normal a adun a karuma eran a mga Higaonon ago Meranaw, ka esa ka dosena sa kawanang ago esa ka dosena sa diyawang, so mga Higaonon na pud sa kolambo. Translation, the Meranaw datu in the past normally had wives who are Higaonon and Meranaw, dozens on the right and dozens on the left. The Higaonon is part of the household or close family.” This claim holds weight, as it is asserted that "having many wives is a symbol and measurement of power among Datus." [39]

As evidenced by existing family trees, intermarriage between Meranaws and other groups like Higaonon began during the time of a Meranaw ancestor, likely in the early to mid-19th century, and continued into the early 20th century. One participant shared that his grandfather was crowned the first *Sulutan* of Talakag, Bukidnon. In line with Meranaw customs of strengthening lineage ties, one of his sons was married to a Meranaw bae from what

is now Kapai, Lanao del Sur. This location may have been chosen either due to its proximity to Talakag or because it was the origin of their Meranaw ancestry. A participant from Tagoloan II recalled, *"She was a princess of royal origins in Talakag. According to my mother, her wedding was so grand—she was adorned in gold and shimmered like royalty."* To this day, the family maintains close ties with their relatives in Talakag, frequently visiting them. The wealthiest members of the family have retained ownership of their *kawali* (lands) in the area. Moreover, in times of conflict between the Meranaw and Higaonon communities, one of the grandsons, a Meranaw, would often intervene and mediate successfully. He was widely respected in Talakag, known as the grandsons of the respected Meranaw Sultan.

Another contemporary evidence of the intermarriage between these two natives of Mindanao is the majority people of Rogongan, in Iligan City. They identify themselves as Higaonon, but they can speak fluent Meranaw. According to a study, they can speak like Meranaw because of their close proximity to the Meranaw speaking communities, and it is in Lanao, the place of the Meranaw. But it is revealed that they actually see themselves as *'Kolibugan'*, meaning 'mixed breed'. It shall not be confused with the Kolibugan indigenous tribe in Zamboanga and Palawan. "However, the concept of Kolibugan in the Higaonon community of Rogongan are those individual who are mixed of 2 tribes (Higaonon and Moro tribes, typically Maranaos) and they would use the term regardless of its technical/historical origin" [40]. Evidences of this intermarriages are family trees found in Lanao areas.

On study of genealogy, a participant and respondent to the study had this to say:

As a source, it is very difficult to study. Genealogy, it's a matter of enumerating names. you have to go deeper. It is like a telescoping genealogy, there is a selective action to erase or intentional action to not remember members of the ancestry who have undesirable background, like balbal, Chinese, non-Moro...in genealogy, they are not recognized, the Chinese and even non-Moro lineage are not used and exposed because among the Moros, we refuse connection to all this, but we only emphasize the Muslim and arab and south east Asian lineage, it is highly possible that the Meranaw are also a product of migrant and native intermarriages but this is not emphasized. It is not given attention. But whether you like it or not, Bukidnon legend is connected to Lanao. There is a story of the 3 or 4 brothers and one of them went to Lanao. In short, there is a connection, in terms of genealogical links. What is for sure is, in the Moro, specifically Meranaw perspectives, the important part is we can trace our Arabic/Islamic lineage, like in the case of Sharief Alawi and Ashinalong. What is emphasized is Islam, as it is brought by Sharief Alawi. The focus it to preserve that info, whereas, on who is Bae ashinalong, who is she remained a mystery as it is forgotten all together, as if it is not important at all. The Meranaw is only concerned with their Islamic heritage and lineage.

If the Ashinalong in the Meranaw and Higaonon salsila is the same, this implied that at the time of the arrival of the Sharief in northern Mindanao, the Meranaw and Higaonon are also the same group of people, are one. If not, the two lived closer amongst each other at one point in time. So most likely, the further deviation between the two took place when some embraced Islam and became among the Meranaw and others who refused remained the Higaonon or Igaonon, as they are called by the Meranaw.

There is a saying amongst them that “so Meranaw na may dugong higaonon and so higaonon na may dugong Meranaw.” Translation: A Meranaw has Higaonon blood, and a Higaonon has a Meranaw blood. This is especially true to those in the boundaries of Lanao and Cagayan and Bukidnon. Moreover, this saying is well-known among the Higaonon interviewed in the study, indicating that they have accepted the idea, at least to some extent. In contrast, many Meranaw remain unaware of it and are hesitant to accept it, holding firmly to their views. For the Meranaw, what holds more significance is their Arabic and Islamic lineage, often overlooking their indigenous roots. Regardless, the Meranaw cannot deny the connection.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Ashinalong is recognized by the Higaonon as one of their ancestors—the same Ashinalong who, according to the Meranaw salsila, was married to Sharief Alawi. This signifies that we share the same Apo (ancestor).

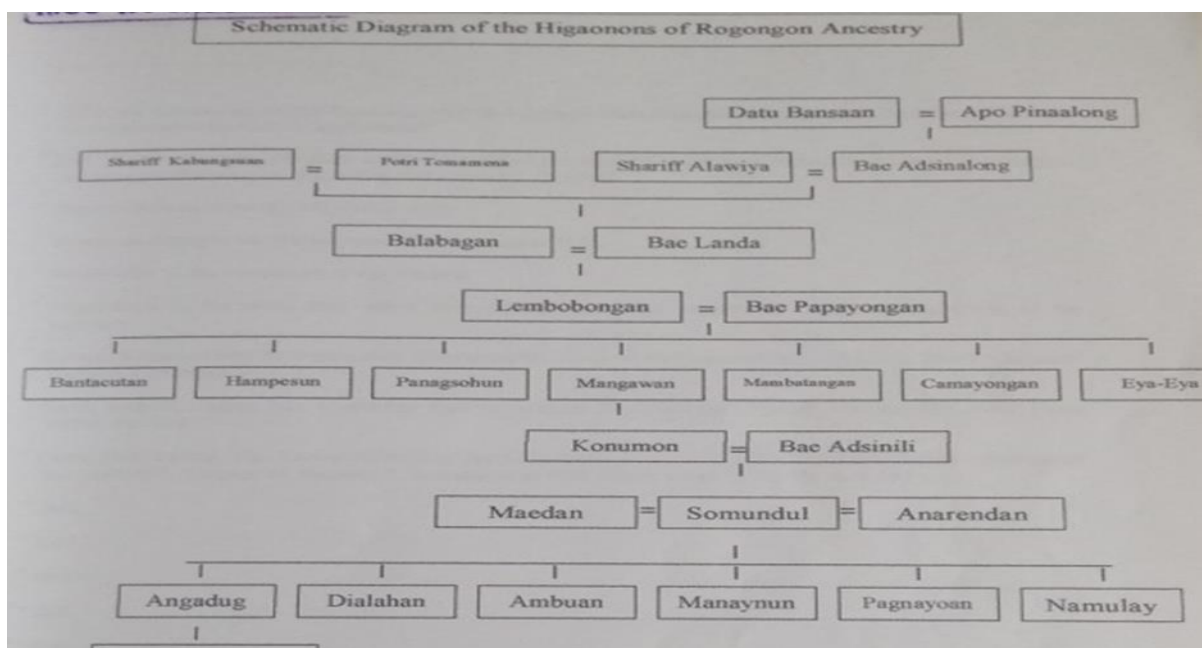


Figure 6: The History of Higaonon in Barangay Rogongon, Iligan. Source: Paulo, G. et al. (1998).

Figure 1 and 6 are connected genealogy showing the Higaonon ancestry from the descendants of Sharief Alawi and Ashinalong. When they begot lembobongan, he begot many Children, among them was Mangawan who begot Cunuman, who became the ancestor of those widely found in Rogongon, Iligan, Panoroganan, and Kapai. Notice that, from this line of descendants, one will see many who have preserved their Higaonon roots through intermarriage and continuous interaction with Higaonons and identify themselves as Kolibugan. On the otherhand, Camayongan is widely known as the ancestor of the many Meranaw in the Pengampong sa Ranao including Baloi, and then spread to Iligan, Marawi, and the whole Pangampong. Based on this genealogy, not only the Meranaw and Higaonon had genealogical links, even the Maguindanao are linked to the Higaonon through their ancestry from and through Sharief Kabungsuwan and Sharief Alawi.

On the Meranaw -Higaonon relations, another participant who is a sociologist has this to say:

I've been involved in many forums, including the Bishop-Ulama Forum and others, and based on those experiences, I can say this: if we go back to the early times, we were all natives—sharing the same culture and way of thinking. When Islam arrived, some of us converted and became Muslims, while others, like the Higaonon, did not. From what I've heard, there wasn't much conflict back then because peaceful relations were established between Muslims and non-Muslims. But things changed when the Spaniards came, aiming to claim territory in the name of Spain. They needed the cooperation—and control—of the people. The natives they managed to convert were used to fight against other natives, including those who would later be called Moros. The colonizers were few in number, so this strategy sparked what became a centuries-long cycle of conflict and division among the indigenous peoples. Peace, as we understand it today, was not a concept back then. There was no peace education. Many believe that the current conflict in Mindanao is a continuation of the crusades that once engulfed Europe and the Muslim world. Religion was used as a tool. In the minds of the Moros, Christians were often portrayed negatively—and vice versa. It is presumed that if go back to pre-islamic times, then, we don't have much difference with our non-Moro brothers. We have so much similarity than differences. When the Muslims came, they met the early rulers, that is the story of Mamalu and Tabunaway brothers. Tabunaway was the chief. Mamalo is the one who converted to Islam. In Lanao, there is a difference, Tabunaway becomes the one who converted to Islam and mamalo went up to live in the mountain and becomes the ancestor of the natives. Whichever, the story remained the same, they share the same idea of one ancestor converting to Islam and the other, becoming the ancestor of mountain people. From this statement, a reader would learn that it is not impossible to imagine that the earliest inhabitant of the place, like Ranao or Lanao, were indigenous people who are now identified like the Higaonon. It is not a hard truth to swallow among scholars. And it is not unacceptable that the Meranaw and Higaonon had a genealogical relation. And like the Mamalu and Tabunaway legend, many agree that what differentiated these two groups was the religion. And the Meranaw could be a product of the intermarriages between the migrants and natives who occupied Ranao. There are evidences of the Migrant origin of the Meranaw. As one theory given is the word Meranaw, which could have come from the idea of “Merana-ranaw” or someone who went to the big lake or something that denotes “going to the Lake”.

Moreover, a respondent analyzes and corroborates that: at one point during his research on farming and stargazing traditions, he encountered a story about a man whose farming tools moved on their own when he played a native flute. It felt magical—yet similar stories appeared in both Non-Moro and Lanao folklore. This convinced him that these groups, despite differences today, once shared a common culture.

He later saw old photos of early Moros in traditional dress that resembled non-Moro attire. It made him consider the possibility that groups like the Higaonon were the original inhabitants, later pushed into the hinterlands—like those in Kapai, Tagoloan, and Rogongon—when new settlers arrived.

The migrant ancestor of the Meranaw, he believed, must have migrated by land or sea. Some natives embraced them and converted to Islam, forming the Meranaw identity. While others, like the Higaonon, kept their traditions. This echoed the story of Mamalu and Tabunaway—brothers who took different paths with the arrival of Islam. He also discussed the word “Meranaw” with other Moro companions in Cotabato. They theorized it came from the phrase “*Me-ranaw ta?*”—meaning “Let's go to the lake,” much like “*Meragat ta?*” (“Let's go

to the sea”). Over time, it became a name and identity. For him, these stories and linguistic links showed that the peoples of Mindanao share deep, interconnected roots.

Another key aspect of their identity, he noted, was the linguistic connection. The Meranaw language, much like Iranon, is highly intelligible to Magindanaon—evidence of deeper historical and cultural links between these groups. For him, all these threads pointed to one conclusion: that the history of Mindanao is not simply a story of divisions, but of deep connections, layered identities, and shared roots—waiting to be remembered.

In addition, some scholars also observed that given the similarities in legend and same stories told by old Meranaw, Teduray, Higaonon, and same Salsila, it is probable that we have the same origin, due to the many similarities that we have in our folklore, linguistics, legends and practices as well as rituals. Moreover, many believed that what divided us was religion. One research participant also added that: “what made the Meranaw different from other indigenous people in Mindanao like the Higaonon is we have become a product of various ethnicity and cultures, come to think of it, the Meranaw has indigenous, Arabic, Chinese and Malay features, ancestry etc.” In the study of civilization, the greatest factor for social change is contact and intermarriage, and the Meranaw had that in their history and these made them different and somewhat capable compared to other tribes like the Higaonon who were secluded.

In addition, another research participant discussed that:

In general, these groups had been living together. They trade, they have contact with others even Chinese. Their relations started way before, for example, in Mindanao, in the times of Butuan, when it was at its peak as a trading center, everyone then was not yet Muslims or Moros or what. In my opinion, to say that we came from the same origin is interesting, it’s a good point. To people like us, as an advocate, I would have promoted this idea. But there are many antis who would go against this idea. They will not appreciate this idea for it could strengthen the Moro position, in a sense that, the Moros belong to the blood lineage or ethnic lineage of the natives, of the Manobo, or proto-Manobo.

This only means that majority of the Meranaw genealogists and scholars interviewed for this study agree to a strong genealogical relation between the Moros and Non-Moro indigenous people. On the other hand, few Meranaw genealogist are not sure who among our ancestors may had been a non-Moro IP but they are quick to generalize that, indeed, the Higaonon or Igaonun, are a part of the Salsila of the Pat a Pengampong sa Ranao. Given the vastness of the territorial coverage of the Pat a Pengampong sa Ranao, which accordingly included even parts of Bukidnon, there is truth in the statements given in these previous narratives.

3.4 Linguistic Connections between the Meranaw and the Higaonon Dialects

The Meranaw and Higaonon languages, both spoken in Mindanao, Philippines, share notable linguistic similarities due to their geographic proximity and common cultural heritage. As part of the wider Austronesian language family, both dialects exhibit similar phonological structures, including shared vowel sounds and consonant patterns. Additionally, their sentence construction and verb-based grammar reflect common linguistic traits found across other Philippine languages. These similarities suggest a historical connection between the

two groups, despite each language also having distinct features influenced by their unique cultural and religious practices. A closer examination of these shared characteristics can offer valuable insights into the relationship between the Meranaw and Higaonon people, as well as the broader linguistic landscape of Mindanao.

However, despite these similarities, the two languages also possess distinct features that set them apart. The Meranaw dialect is more influenced by Arabic due to the Islamic faith prevalent among its speakers, whereas the Higaonon language retains more indigenous elements. The researcher of this study speaks Meranaw and had the opportunity to converse with and listen to the Higaonon respondents. From this experience, the researcher of the study concluded that Higaonon is closer to the Bisaya language, possibly due to the greater influence of Bisaya in Mindanao. As Gallman states, "the evidence from lexicostatistical comparisons, analysis in terms of probabilities, phonological features, and lexical innovations support the establishment of Proto East Mindanao as a subgroup of the South Central Philippine language group in very close contact with the Visayan language." [41] This perspective suggests that Proto East Mindanao, which includes the northern Mindanao languages such as Mandaya, Caraga, and Kalagan, originated from the Visayan islands before settling in the northeastern tip of Mindanao. From there, this group dispersed southward, spreading across much of northeastern, east-central, and southeastern Mindanao. This aligns with the explanation given by one of the study participants, who stated:

"The origin of Higaonon is the early Manobos who came from Camiguin, migrated at some point to the coastal areas of Misamis Oriental, and eventually spread to other parts of Mindanao, including Bukidnon, such as Baungon Bukidnon, and beyond."

Regardless of the specific migration patterns, linguistic evidence of ancestry is evident. As language evolves over time, shared characteristics—such as cognates, or words with similar meanings and origins—can point to a common ancestor language or dialect. Additionally, dialects provide valuable insights into genealogical relations, as shared linguistic features like vocabulary, sound patterns, and word structures can indicate common ancestry among languages and the people who speak them.

In both the Meranaw and Higaonon dialects, certain similarities can be found, which have prompted several observers to comment on their shared characteristics. One participant of the study, for instance, stated:

"In one of the seminars I attended, where I was privileged to listen to a Higaonon speaker, I felt a strong similarity between our dialects. I thought that perhaps, in the distant past, the Meranaw and the Higaonon were very close, maybe even one."

To explore these similarities, the researcher of this study identified more than a dozen words common to both the Meranaw and Higaonon vocabularies. These included terms related to traditional titles and respect for elders, such as Bae and Datu; both groups refer to their ancestors as Apo and elder siblings as Kaka. Words related to farming also show similarity, such as Salimpokaw, meaning to awaken, Kambasok in Meranaw and pangimbasok and Pabasok in Higaonon, referring to the good spirit of the harvest. Both dialects use the word Gugud to describe the traditional way of narrating a story or sharing details and Gagaw, an affectionate term meaning love. Gold is called Bulawan in both languages, while necklaces are referred to as Salay. Body part

terms are also the same; ulo-head, barocan-shoulders, etc. The concept of multiple marriages is similarly expressed as Duwaya, and both groups use Torogan to refer to the traditional house of the rulers. Additionally, while the Meranaw call genealogy Salsila, the Higaonon term for it is Panud.

There are also cultural similarities, such as taboos against retelling the Salsila or Panud, emphasizing the importance and exclusivity of these genealogies. To the Higaonon, the Salsila is precious and should only be shared with trusted individuals, as revealing it may uncover unpleasant truths about one's lineage. Both groups engage in rituals involving spirit worship and animal sacrifices, such as the mandatory slaughter of chicken's blood to appease spirits whose wrath could fall upon those who violate cultural beliefs.

Marriage practices also show similarities, including bride service and the exchange of bride price to the bride's kin. As a research participant noted:

"Laged tano siran, the Higaonon, ka dodoo kiran so mga enandang a suwa suwa e o mga Meranaw. So mga inisapar o Agama na miyada rukitano a mga Meranaw. Na siran na daa, ago siran e mas mabagur ko mga katao a mga lokes lagged o kapamolong sa sakit ago so marata. So mga arate o mga lokes o miya una a mga Meranaw, sa kambasok, kambalay sa walay, mga andang a arate a Meranaw na kaylay nga kiran pun taman emanto, seko mga Meranaw na miyada, kiyagunukan. Psong kiran so mga Meranaw a pamomolong whenever problems arose."

Translation: "They are like us, the Higaonon, one can see in their rituals and practices the old Meranaw ways. These were the practices that were forbidden when Islam was introduced, and people converted to become devout Muslims. While they were able to retain some of these practices, they still hold strong knowledge of folk healing and spirit worship. The rituals of early Meranaws are very similar to those of the Higaonon, especially in farming, harvesting, and house construction. Meranaw folk healers even come to the Higaonon for guidance and help with folk healing."

While these similarities may seem small, they offer a valuable starting point for future studies on the relationship between the Meranaw and Higaonon peoples. These linguistic findings support oral traditions that hint at ancestral interactions or intermarriages between the groups. While language alone does not provide a complete genealogical map, it offers compelling evidence of long-standing relationships that predate colonial boundaries and religious distinctions.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence of a genealogical and cultural connection between the Meranaw and the Higaonon peoples in Mindanao. Based on both oral and written sources, it is clear that these groups share common ancestral roots, particularly through the figure of Sharief Alawi, a Muslim missionary believed to have arrived in northeastern Mindanao prior to Sharief Kabungsuwan. Oral traditions consistently point to intermarriages between Sharief Alawi and indigenous women—many of whom were likely Higaonon—resulting in descendants who would become key ancestors of the Meranaw.

This genealogical connection is further supported by interviews with Meranaw genealogists, including prominent figures, who affirm the existence of Higaonon ancestry within the Meranaw bloodline. Moreover, these links reportedly persisted well into the 19th and even the 21st centuries, particularly in regions or municipalities like Iligan, Kapai, and Tagoloan II—areas where the Higaonon and Meranaw peoples lived in close proximity. In some communities, such as Rogongon in Iligan City, residents openly identify as Higaonon while also fluently speaking Meranaw, highlighting the deep cultural integration and shared heritage between the two groups.

Beyond genealogical ties, linguistic and cultural similarities also point to a longstanding relationship. Shared terms of respect and social structure such as *Bae*, *Datu*, *Apo*, and *Kaka* reflect commonalities in kinship systems and leadership traditions. As both languages belong to the Austronesian family and developed in overlapping geographic areas, these linguistic parallels reinforce the argument for a shared cultural and ancestral past.

Despite these deep-rooted connections, contemporary Meranaw identity often emphasizes Islamic and Arabic lineage, sometimes at the expense of acknowledging indigenous roots. This selective memory may obscure the more complex reality of cultural and genealogical interweaving between the Meranaw and Higaonon. Nevertheless, the evidence presented in this study—ranging from oral genealogies and linguistic analysis to lived experiences in local communities—demonstrates that the boundary between Moro and Non-Moro Indigenous identities is more fluid than often recognized.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of revisiting historical narratives to acknowledge the interconnectedness of Indigenous groups in Mindanao. Recognizing these shared roots not only enriches our understanding of cultural identity in the region but also promotes a more inclusive view of heritage that transcends colonial and religious divisions.

5. Dedication

This research is dedicated to the Ranao genealogists, keepers of ancestral memory and custodians of a rich and intricate heritage. May this work serve as a humble contribution to your tireless efforts in preserving the genealogical traditions of Lanao. In an age when fewer young people express interest in their roots, this study seeks to honor and support the continuation of *ka-Salsila*, the sacred retelling of lineage, which once held a central place in ceremonies such as enthronements and weddings.

As the practice of genealogy in Ranao faces the risk of fading into obscurity, often overshadowed by modern influences and changing cultural priorities, this research aspires to help safeguard these invaluable traditions for future generations. To those who continue to protect, document, and share the stories of our ancestors, this work is for you.

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