

# • M'ranao Folk Concept of Naming

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**B**efore the invention of writing around 3200 B.C., all human knowledge and achievement, including spoken language, were stored in human conscious knowledge, which is part of folklore (Boswell, 1962:48). The giving of names is one product of human invention in which every society has adopted its own cultural way of labeling human and other beings, things and places. As the society of man evolved and became more complex, language, for its part, became even more so because of the many concepts and nuances of meaning it must express. As a sort of spoken language, the business of making names, of course, has become as complex as its cultural matrix, but what may be even more remarkable is that it itself creates cultural change, as will be shown in this paper. The matter of surnames, given names, nicknames, honorific names, taboo, and secret language will be the main focus of this paper.

## **Surname**

A surname is defined by Webster's *Third International Dictionary* as a "name added onto an original or baptismal name from some pertinent or accidental circumstances." Boswell (1962:49) writes:

The story of the origin of surnames, especially among English-speaking peoples, holds a very great fascination and variety. Almost without exception surnames take us back into medieval history. Prior to Anglo-Norman times English nicknames served the purpose of identity beyond a simple Christian name. . . True surnames, of which there are four classes, seem to date from about 1100-1300. The largest class of surnames derives from place names – second largest is patronymic – third largest are occupational – the fourth group are all other sources.

The M'ranao customarily do not use a surname; a person is known only by his birthname. Macaraya writes: "The basic pattern invented by the M'ranao in his original system of naming was by way of mono-nomenclature. A single name was given to a M'ranao child at a proper time after birth." However, such given name changes from various considerations.

The M'ranao began using surnames at the introduction of Western education by the Americans. In fact, there is no equivalent M'ranao term for the word "surname," although "apilido," a borrowed and corrupted term from the Spanish, is being used at present by the M'ranaos and other Filipinos. Until fairly recently, when school children were asked their *apilido* or surnames by teachers at enrolment, they did not understand the term. The teachers, therefore, translated the term "*apilido*" into "father's name." The translation complicated the children's problem, in view of the M'ranao traditional belief and practice not to mention one's father's name. Folk belief had it that should a child did so he would fall on his own waste matter.

As teachers insisted on the surname as a basic requirement for enrolment, the schoolchildren gave the names of their close kin such as their brothers, uncles and other influential relatives. Traditional titles or rank of parents, brothers, uncles were also used as surnames in lieu of the real name of the father. Religious titles, like Hadji or Casi/Kadi, Imam, Cali, Catib, Bilal, Shiek, Sharief, Alim, Guro and others were used as surnames, too. Thus, today, it is not a surprise to find M'ranao brothers and sisters bearing different family names.

At the very present time, the surname among the M'ranao plays a vital role in defining a person's economic and political identity. Now, surnames of influential distant relatives are even used by less familiar families. This practice is evident in streamers, billboards, and invitation programs of important occasions where both the maternal and paternal sides of the individual concerned are being indicated and emphasized.

### **Given Name**

Giving a name to an individual for the purpose of distinguishing his identity from others is a universal practice. The system of this practice varies, however. The natives of Brazil and other parts of South America, for instance, ask the priest to interpret their dreams before choosing names. In New Guinea and in the Congo, the name is chosen based on the reaction or behavior of the child when the child sees possessions of its dead ancestors. In New Zealand, the child is named according to his or her act of interrupting the recitation of the names of ancestors by a cry, sneeze, or other gesture (Funk and Wagnals, 1972:782).

In the Philippines, different ethnolinguistic groups adopt various ways of naming. The majority population, the Christians, for instance, use name of the saints during baptismal, as introduced by the Christian Spanish colonizer. The cultural minority groups have their own various systems. The Muslims of the south use arabian names, an islamic influence. But some of these names are corrupted, especially when used in school, where they sound strange to non-Muslim teachers. Following are a few examples: Mocamad (Mohammad); Acimad (Ahmad); Macmod (Mahmoud); Casan (Hassan); Cosain (Hussein); Casim (Hassim), etc. As Islam flourished and more M'ranao got educated in Arabic schools locally and abroad, Muslim names derived from the Holy Qur'an became more prominent, in compliance with the islamic religion. However, despite these modernities, influences of traditional practices still persist. The M'ranao, as our subject of study, derive their names from place names, natural objects and phenomena, including the sun, moon, plants, trees, birds, insects and animals, cultural

objects, adjectival words, folkloric characters, national and international historical figure, and through local and foreign contact.

**Place names.** A place name is used for a child to suggest that he belongs to a big and influential family or comes from a famous place after which he is named. Examples of common place names used among the M'ranao are: Sulog (Sulu), Cotawato (Cotabato), Mindanao, Masiu, Bayabao, and Bumbaran (home province of Bantogan, hero of the M'ranao epic "Darangen").

**Natural objects and phenomena.** Palao (mountain), Lacongan (huge rock), and Bagel (wave) are common M'ranao names. These natural objects are known for their strength, solidarity, and power.

Alongan (Sun) and Olan (moon) are two names based on prominently powerful celestial phenomena. Alongan is a name given to a man and Olan to woman. Name of trees, plants, birds, and mammals are also used as personal names, e.g., Barimbingan (ebony), Maramanai (sunflower), Banog, Garoda (eagle), Naga (dragon) and Arimao (lion). At any rate, it is the quality expressed in the name that is intended to suggest the quality in the person named. Other M'ranao names derived from other natural phenomena may indicate that the child was born when that particular event occurred, or with the hope that he may develop to possess such power and/or strength of the phenomenon. Examples are Linog (earthquake), Sobosobo (typhoon). Mama sa Gira (man of war).

**Material culture.** The M'ranao is very rich in material culture when compared to other Filipino ethnolinguistic groups. Their art works are shown in the architectural design of buildings, construction, household implements, musical instruments, farming and fishing gears, metalworks, cloth weaving and many others. Many names are derived from this material culture.

**Adjectival words.** Names derived after adjectival words is a universal practice. Mala (big), Magarang (sharp), Madakel (many) and Malano (fragrant) are few examples of adjectival names.

**Folkloric characters.** With their richness in folklore, the M'ranao also give their children names from folkloric characters. Examples are names from the M'ranao epic "Darangen," like Bantogen and Lawanen, major characters of the epic. From legendary characters, the names Omacan and Macaanga (both giants) are also used.

**National and international figures.** As society developed, M'ranaos became aware of political and other leaders. The popularity of such leaders attract some parents to name their newly born babies after these personages, perhaps because the birth of the child is contemporaneous with the prominence of the leader or perhaps because of the hope that the child may grow up to be a leader someday, or perhaps simply because of the trend of modernization. Examples of these names are: Rizal, Quezon, Roxas, Osmeña, Magsaysay, Marcos, Aquino, Ramos, Alexander, Napoleon, Mc Arthur, Eisenhower, etc.

**Foreign contact.** Transport technology has greatly developed to facilitate the ease and speed of travel at the turn of the century. As early as 1905, the M'ranaos have been able to travel as far as the Middle East for pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca. This contact with the arabian people has increased and M'ranao practice of naming

children with Arab names. In fact M'ranos who reach Mecca on the Hadj always come home with new Arabic names as part of the pilgrimage ritual. In addition, the word "Hadji" (or Kodi) is used as a title and added to a new given name of the returned pilgrim. Examples of these are names like Hadji Abdul Hamid, Hadji Yusoph, Hadji Ahmad, Hadja Mariam, Hadja Aisah. Usually the above-mentioned title is used to call an individual person in lieu of his given name.

The most recent development of M'ranos naming through contact is the adoption of the western patronymical system which adds the word "junior" or "the Second" to a given name. Another is the M'ranos penchant for joining two different ethnolinguistical names together to name a child, such as Ibno-Roy, Elir-Ali, Ali-Luis. Also the coining of syllabified paternal and maternal names, or vice-versa, as Salimar from Salipada-Marilyn, Alimar from Alex-Marlyn, Natali from Natividad-Ali has become a common practice.

With the few examples given above, it may be inferred that, practically, the M'ranos traditional methods of naming are derived from all sources in the cultural environment.

Choosing of names may be equated to or motivated by the social, economic, and political standing of the family, along with the name's folkloristic virtue. Noble families, for instance, often use names that symbolize power, prestige, and strength. Some give names in the hope and prayer (*arati*) that the child will develop qualities that the name bears or suggests. In sum, names are given on the basis of indirect meaning (*padail* or *ilat*), popularity (*kambantogan*), bravery (*kawarao*), capability (*kapasang*), and of many other reasons.

### **Nicknames**

Nicknames are formed in many ways. Weekly (1928:429) theorizes that nicknames are derived from animal names or adjectives, accompanied by a noun.

In the Philippines, nicknaming is a customary practice among various ethnolinguistic groups. Majority of the Christians of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao use Dodo, Dong, Dodong, Badong, Undo, To or Toto for boys and Day, Inday, Nene, Ne, Nening, for girls. Among the Tausugs, Oto and Inda are used for boys and girls, respectively.

The M'ranos, as compared to other ethnic groups, however, appear to have a unique practice in giving nicknames. For example, the sexual organ of both sexes is used as a petname: Otin, Otino, Kaotinan, Otinan, Orak, Orako, Mangorak, Taurak of the male organ are a few examples used for the male. Oli, Olingan, Paoli, Kaoli, Poki, Pokian, Pokidatan, Amoki, Apoki (the female organ) are used for the female. A husband may call his wife Oli, Pokia, Oki, Moki, but the wife never calls her husband such sexually derived names. The husband's practice is a sign of endearment, love, care, cherish and respect. On the other hand, utterance of the above-mentioned words or calling M'ranos woman such petname when she is not your wife or intimate is considered an offensive act. The offender may be subjected to both criminal and civil case. Aggravated incidents

of this nature may result in the killing of the offender by the immediate kin of the offended party.

On the other hand, proper use of the above terms is considered pleasing. As already mentioned, it expresses love, respect and endearment when applied to the youth. Use of these petnames is not limited to parents and immediate relatives but any elder can call a younger intimate without being considered malicious.

Today, this practice is fast disappearing due to the process of contact, diffusion, and assimilation through migration from the rural to the urban areas. The M'ranos are great traders. There is no single big city in the country where M'ranos are not found. They engage in various business for livelihood. Some bring along their families and some only their children who can assist in the business. In view of the strong force of "diffusion" of the majority on the minority or the process of cultural borrowing, nicknaming practices among other cultural groups have gained popularity among the young M'ranao generations.

As evidence of change the following non-Mranao nicknames have been adopted by some: Mike for Ismael, Malik, and Mamintal; Bobby for Abdul and Bashier; Tommy for Tamano Tominoray, and Tomanong; Roger for Ibra, Ibrahim; Barry for Ambor, Ombar, Baraocal; Rocky for Mangorac, Rakim, Rakiin; Mercy for Amer, and others.

For young ladies, the title "Miss" is commonly used and accepted. Some have names from movie stars, such as Alma, Nora, etc. Other nicknames are Sally for Saphia; Mary for Mariam and Somiringan; Nory for Inoray; Jade for Sodioda; Terry for Tiarde.

For couples, the non-M'ranao words like mahal, dear, darling, love are used and by children the terms dad, mom or nanay are used.

Sometimes, problems with these modernized nicknames result. When introduced at the hometown, a modern and non-traditional nickname may be mispronounced by elders due to its strangeness. Or the nickname may be the one used in the community and when someone is looking there for a friend whom he knew only by his nickname, he may not be able to find him.

### **Change of Name**

Among the M'ranos, change of name occurs depending on various considerations and instances. Firstly, when a child frequently gets sick, he is given a new name. The belief is that his present name does not suit his luck or fortune. Such practice is almost similar to the Chinese among whom a family that has lost a child may give an unattractive name to the next so that the second child may not be similarly attacked by evil spirits.

Secondly, when a couple begets a child, the parent is renamed after the child by affixing the word *AMA-I*, meaning "father of," or *INA-I*, which means "mother of," to the name of the child. For example, Amai Pak-pak (father of Pak-pak) or Inai Pak-pak (mother of Pak-pak). This method of techonymy is the contrast to the patronymical system of the Europeans.

Thirdly, when one is conferred a traditional title or rank, or achieves a religious title or has returned from the Holy City of Mecca, or is known to be an orator (*maongangen*) or bayok singer (see honorific name), he is made to assume a new or at least an added name.

### **Honorific Names**

The term honorific in this paper refers to appellations given to people with traditional rank/title, religious title, honorary titles, etc.

Before the coming of foreign colonizers, the M'ranao had their own system of government called the "Sultanate or Datuship" system. They constituted a society having a traditional pattern of social organization under the indigenous territorial organization of a "Pangampong" (the four-state confederation of the two Lanaos, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte). They had their common language, M'ranao; embraced one religion, Islam, and recognized a common authority system called the "Igma and Taritib," otherwise known as the "Adat Law" which was unwritten but binding.

The Pangampong was composed of four traditional states or principalities, namely: Baloi, Bayabao, Masiu and Onayan. Each pangampong was composed of *sokos* (religious districts or divisions); a *soko*, in turn, is divided into *inged*s (townships) and each *inged* is composed of *agamas* (villages) (Saber, 1957).

Each *pangampong*, *soko*, *inged*, and *agama* is ruled by an authority system headed by a *solotan* with other persons of various nobility titles as members of the ruling house. All members of the house are practically descended from one ancestral lineage. In other words, they belong to one kinship or family tree.

The M'ranao nobility titles are: Solotan (highest rank), Cabugatan; Solotan a Cabogatan; Dato a Cabogatan; Radiamoda (prince); Solotan a Samporna; Solotan a Dimasangkay; Solotan a Gaos; Solotan a Adil; Solotan a Daromimbang; Solotan Maamor; Solotan Sarip; Panondiongan; Sangcopan; Pamlian; Ampoan; Osngan; Ayondato; Adapen; Aloyodan; Ina, Ama, etc.

For women the corresponding titles, from the highest, are: Bai a Labi; Solotan a Bai; Bai a Labi a Gaos; Potri a Cabogatan; Bai a Samporna; Bai a Dimasangkay; Bai a Adil; Bai a Pitailan; Bai a Romapenet; and Bai a Pangadapen. Women with titles are also members of the ruling house. They are concerned with the rights, privileges and welfare of the women within the community. Women activities are usually undertaken by this body.

The participation of women in this system of government shows the relative equality of women in all life activities, justice, and humanity.

When the nobility rank is conferred upon an individual, he is called by such title. His personal name is no longer used. Even when resigned, he carries the title, except with the prefix word "*miaona*" (ex-). An example is the name or title *Miaona Solotan* (Ex-Solotan) or *Minda sa grar* (resigned).

Besides traditional titles, religious and occupational titles are used as honorifics among the M'ranos. For religious titles, these are: Aleem; Imam; Cali; Shiek;

Hadji/Cadi (for persons who have gone to the Holy City of Mecca for pilgrimage), and guro (teacher) which is both occupational and religious title. Occupational titles associated with art are assigned to those famous and skilled performers of the *bayok* and *Darangen*, who are called *onor* ( or *pababayok*, or *padadarangen*); those who are skilled orators are called *patataro sa lalag* or *maongangen*. Another honorific title is the word *kaka-I*, which is added to meaningful names, such as Kaka-I Bantog a Ranao (pride of Ranao), or Kaka-I Monalangkap (the most famous).

### Name Taboo

Name taboo refers to the prohibition against speaking the name of God or other supernatural beings, the names of the dead, names of witches, the devil, etc., certain animals greatly revered or feared (Funk 782). Name taboo is a widespread if not universal practice. Traditionally, the M'ranaos do not mention the name of their parents. Usually, parents are addressed by the children as *ama*, *bapa* or *kaka mama* for the father and *ina*, *babo* or *kaka babai* for the mother. They are loved, revered, and respected, as required by the islamic faith. It is part of Maranao folk belief that mentioning the parent's name will cause bad luck on the speaker.

Names of the dead are also not mentioned. "*Domia-long a dato/bai*" (hidden himself/herself), "*lomialakao*" (on journey), or *tiyarima* or *mindod sa rahmat o Allah*" (returned unto Him – God) are the common terms substituted for the names of the deceased person.

Names of evil spirits and witches are not uttered for the reason that they may come and cause illness on any member of the family. However, a *pundarpaan* may invoke the *tonong* (good spirit) with their names in a plea to heal or help a sick person. Few M'ranaos have their own *tonongs*, whom they invoke for help in time of disgrace, stress or displeasure. Today, the practice is discouraged as unislamic.

Some disease and animals are not to be named also. The word *poko* (chicken pox), for instance, is not uttered for it would come very soon upon hearing its name. *Olag* (rheumatism) is called *gedamen a dato* (disease of a dato). The *nipay* (snake) and *layopan* (centipede) are not to be mentioned at nighttime, for they may come up the house. Instead, they are called *matas* (long), *waged* (vine), or *balagen* (rattan) for the former; *ginigidan* or *patpolo I kemer* (forty fingers) for the latter. The name taboo of animal is a worldwide practice, as shown by some examples given by Funk (783):

Ural-Altaic peoples of Siberia, for instance, never speak the name of the bear; they call him Little Old Man, Grandfather, dear Uncle or Wise One. Baltic peoples say to him Beautiful Honey-paw, Breadfoot, or Grandfather. North American Kiowa Indians say that unless you are named for the bear you must not say bear. Bear can drive you crazy just for saying their names. In Quebec the Tete de Boule Indians also call the bear Grandfather. In Sumatra the tiger is mentioned as He with the Striped Coat. In Java the crocodile is Grandfather or the Old One. The Bechuans refer to the lion as the boy with the beard. Among the Kols (a prividian group) the elephant is often spoken to as You with the Teeth. In parts of Africa and India no

snake is ever called a snake. The people say, "there lies a strap (string rope)," thereby believing that they make it lie still, for he who is called a snake is apt to behave like snake.

### Secret Language

The *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (1972: p. 782) writes:

Secret names, known only to the owner, have to do with belief in name-souls. In folktale, myth, and folk belief, the discovery of the secret name is given the discoverer power over the owner of the name. In many religions, the names of the gods are the secret property of the priests and may not be used by others. In witchcraft and diabolism the speaking of the names of devils and evil spirits materializes them or puts them under the power of the witch.

In M'ranao society, secret language may be classified into various ways. One of these may be the so-called *ilmo* (secret knowledge or name) which is only known to the owner. It is believed to be a name of God, signs, symbols, and/or personage that may appear before one who is at the moment of death. It is believed to lead a person to heaven after death when said *ilmo* is least spoken. Thus, when one is dying, an Olama *Imam* (religious leader) is called to teach him an *ilmo* (*Ndao*). The *imam* whispers the name in his right ear.

The search for the *ilmo* is considered a noble and sacred task among the M'ranos of the olden days. Time, effort, and other considerations are required in order to obtain the knowledge. One way to acquire such knowledge was the process of living in with the possessor of the *ilmo*. This method is called a "*kasombak* or *katontot sa ilmo*," which literary means being a "student of knowledge."

The *ilmo* is revealed by the teacher to the student at night when everyone is believed to be asleep. In order to avoid disturbance and be certain that other people could not hear, teacher and student stay inside a canopy (*kolambo*) during the impartation of the knowledge by the former to the latter.

Another way to gain *ilmo* was through the process of "*Kalobos*" (gift-giving). An individual gives money or something in kind to a person known to have the *ilmo*. When intimacy between the two is well established, the seeker would ask to be given the *ilmo*.

The last method was through formal adoption of brother/parents/children (*kabataw sa pagari/lokes/wata*). Being a brother, parent, or a son, one could not refuse the request of one party. This seemed effective because M'ranos give high regards to adoption, having sworn themselves on the Holy Qur'an.

Today, the practice is vanishing due to the development of Madaris schools, where Islam is taught.

Secret language is also used by the M'ranos in various customary practices, beliefs, and rituals besides the religious aspects. These custom are the *kapamolong* (folk

healing), *katonotonong/kapanambat* (invoking friendly spirits), *kapangata-o* (magical practices), *kapamantak* (sorcery/black magic), *kakebel* (ritual to acquire invulnerability), *kanggagamot* (magical poisoning), *kakambong* (compelling lover to come), *katitik* (preventing rain from coming), etc.

In *kapamolong* it is believed that some diseases have their own names. When discovered, the discoverer, said to be a *pamolong* (medicine man), gains power over the disease, thus becoming an efficient healer of such disease. The power is acquired through dreams given by immediate relatives.

In *katonotonong*, the *tonong* referred to a spirit who is either good or bad. Friendly spirits are the good ones. They have their own names, too. They help their human friends in many ways. It is believed that they can reach a friend at a second when called for. This is probably an influence from the M'ranao epic "Darangen" where Bantogen, the star character, got famous in all undertakings due to the aid of *tonongs*.

Magical practices like sorcery, magical poisoning and others may be classified under diabolism. It is strictly prohibited by Islam.

Other beliefs and rituals have their own secret language. It is known only to the performer, who may be a religious leader or *pananmbat* (invoking god or spirits).