

# Unveiling Cultural Threads: An Exploration of Maguindanaon Marriage Practices in the Face of Contemporary Adaptations

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## ABSTRACT

Marriage is a cornerstone institution for the Maguindanaon people, deeply embedded in their historical and cultural fabric. This indigenous Muslim group primarily resides in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and SOCCSKSARGEN Province in the Philippines. The study examines the historical and cultural roots of traditional Maguindanaon marriage practices and explores the factors driving their adaptations amidst contemporary societal changes. Utilizing a Transcendental Phenomenological Design, the research involved ten Maguindanaon professionals, aged 25 to 40, to capture their lived experiences with these practices. Findings emphasize the syncretism of indigenous and Islamic traditions, where practices like pangëngërung and salangguni blend with Islamic marriage contracts. These ceremonies reinforce community bonds and cultural identity. However, tensions arise in reconciling traditional customs with Islamic teachings, especially regarding dowry expectations and ceremonial simplicity. Despite Islamic influences, pre-Islamic customs persist, showcasing the community's resilience in preserving their heritage. The study also features the socio-economic dimensions of Maguindanaon marriages, where negotiations and the involvement of community leaders play significant roles in maintaining social and economic stability. Contemporary adaptations, influenced by globalization, urbanization, and technological advancements, reflect the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity. These include incorporating Qur'an recitations and modest bridal attire into ceremonies. This research enriches our understanding of how the Maguindanaon community handles cultural continuity and change, balancing traditional values with evolving societal norms.

**Keywords:** Maguindanaon, marriage practices, syncretism, cultural adaptation, socio-economic dimensions

## INTRODUCTION

Maguindanao is renowned for its stunning flora and fauna and rich diversity, home to over forty ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. This diversity is shaped by each group's unique cultural elements, embodying a distinct identity expressed through their behaviors, lifestyles, economic activities, locations, languages and dialects, norms, moral values, beliefs, religions, and daily customs. The Maguindanaon people form the second-largest Muslim ethnic group in Mindanao (Menson, 2020).

Marriage is a cornerstone institution deeply rooted in the historical and cultural diversity of the Maguindanaon (pronounced as Ma-gin-da-non) people, reflecting their values, beliefs, and social structures. The Maguindanaon, an indigenous Muslim group in the Philippines, predominantly reside in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Maguindanao Province on the island of Mindanao (Magdalena,

2017). Understanding the historical and cultural foundations of their marriage practices is significant for comprehending the complexities of these traditions and their role in shaping individual identities and fostering community cohesion.

Islamic culture strongly influences Maguindanaon marriage traditions, as evidenced by Islamic symbols and customary laws. The integration of Islamic culture and religious practices has shaped the evolution of marriage customs, leading to diverse interpretations among indigenous peoples (Yusdani, Sanaky, Safitri, Machali, Juliansyahzen, 2019).

This study examines the historical and cultural roots of traditional Maguindanaon marriage practices and the factors influencing adaptations and modifications in response to contemporary societal shifts. By exploring these dynamics, we aim to emphasize the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity within the Maguindanaon community, featuring the resilience and adaptability of their marriage customs amidst evolving cultural landscapes.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed the Transcendental Phenomenological Design to explore the structures of consciousness of the Maguindanaon people about the contemporary adaptations in the marriage tradition. Transcendental Phenomenological Design is a qualitative research approach rooted in the philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl, focused on understanding human experiences as individuals perceive them. This research design aims to explore the essence of lived experiences, setting aside biases and preconceived notions (a process called "epoche") to reveal the purest form of the phenomenon being studied. In transcendental phenomenology, researchers emphasize the participants' subjective experiences and seek to describe the phenomenon in its most fundamental form, as it is consciously experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990, cited by Schreier, 2018; Palinkas, 2015).

The study involved ten Maguindanaon professionals aged 25 to 40 from the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, and South Cotabato. These individuals had direct experience with marriage practices through their marriages or witnessing marriages within their community. Ethical guidelines were adhered to, ensuring informed consent from all participants, who were fully aware of the study's nature, purpose, and potential impacts.

Qualitative data was analyzed thematically, identifying key themes and patterns related to Maguindanaon marriage practices and adaptation. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within the data. It organizes and describes all data in detail.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Historical and Cultural Foundations of Traditional Maguindanaon Marriage Practices

#### Syncretism of Marriage Practices

The syncretism of indigenous and Islamic traditions in Maguindanaon marriage practices represents a fascinating interplay between cultural heritage and religious influence. This phenomenon reflects centuries of interaction between animist beliefs and Islamic teachings. Maguindanaon marriage ceremonies often incorporate elements from both traditions, such as the performance of *pangëngërun/pangëngëdung* rituals (a significant ritual wherein the groom's family formally informs the bride's family of the groom's intention to marry their daughter), and *salangguni* (a traditional practice among the Maguindanaon people, where both the groom's and the bride's families come together to discuss and negotiate the terms of the marriage. During this

gathering, they agree on the amount of dowry the groom will offer and other necessary provisions the groom should provide and set a date for the wedding. This process ensures that both families are aligned on the expectations and arrangements, fostering a sense of mutual respect and understanding) alongside the recitation of Islamic marriage contracts or *nikkah* (an Islamic marriage ceremony where a contract is signed by the bride and groom in the presence of witnesses, officially making them husband and wife. It includes the recitation of specific prayers and the stipulation of a dowry (*mahr*) that the groom offers to the bride).

Integrating indigenous customs with Islamic traditions in Maguindanaon marriage practices highlights a unique form of cultural continuity and adaptation. While Islam plays a significant role in shaping the spiritual and moral aspects of marriage, many pre-Islamic customs remain preserved, demonstrating the community's respect for its ancestral heritage. For instance, the *pangëngërung/pangëngëdung* ritual symbolizes not only the formal declaration of intent but also the enduring value placed on family and social bonds, which existed long before Islamic influence. This blend of tradition is evident in how Maguindanaons retain rituals like *salangguni* to ensure community and familial involvement in the marriage process, emphasizing collective responsibility and mutual respect. Blending these two traditions shows the Maguindanaon people's capacity to harmonize new religious values with long-standing cultural practices.

The Islamic element in Maguindanaon marriages, particularly through the *nikkah* ceremony, provides a structured religious framework that complements and elevates the indigenous customs. The recitation of Islamic prayers and the signing of the marriage contract mark the spiritual legitimacy of the union under Islamic law. However, the underlying principles of mutual respect, family involvement, and negotiation present in both *salangguni* and *nikkah* indicate shared values between the two systems. This syncretism showcases how the Maguindanaon people have successfully merged their indigenous worldview with Islamic beliefs, creating a marriage tradition that is both rooted in their cultural past and in harmony with their religious identity. The result is a marriage practice that reflects the community's ability to evolve while maintaining a strong sense of identity and heritage.

### Rituals and Community Involvement

Maguindanaon marriage rituals serve as essential rites of passage, symbolizing the transition from individual to married life and reinforcing social bonds within the community. These ceremonies are characterized by elaborate rituals involving extended family members, neighbors, and community leaders, emphasizing the significance of community involvement in preserving cultural identity and social cohesion. During *salangguni* among the Maguindanaon people, some rituals involve discussing the bride and groom's ancestral roots, particularly tracing lineage back to the Sultanate Royal House. This is done to determine the prestige and status of each family, which influences the negotiations regarding the dowry that the groom will provide. The amount of dowry often reflects not only the economic means of the groom but also the historical and social standing of both families within the community. This ritual indicates the importance of lineage and tradition in Maguindanaon culture, ensuring that marriages are not just personal unions but also uphold broader familial and societal ties.

The significance of lineage in Maguindanaon marriage practices reflects the deep connection between family history and social structure within the community. Families emphasize their historical standing and prestige by tracing ancestral roots, especially linking to the Sultanate Royal House. This focus on lineage during *salangguni* serves as more than just a formal acknowledgment of heritage; it is a key factor in determining the terms of the marriage, particularly the dowry. The dowry, or *mahr*, in Maguindanaon culture, is not solely a financial transaction but a symbolic gesture that reflects the groom's ability to provide for and honors the bride's family. The value of the dowry often mirrors the social reputation and ancestral legacy of both families, ensuring that the marriage is a reflection of mutual respect and social equality. In this way, *salangguni* becomes an opportunity for families to reaffirm their position within the community's social hierarchy, balancing economic considerations with cultural pride.

Moreover, these marriage practices serve as a means to preserve and transmit cultural values across generations. The involvement of family elders, community leaders, and peers in the marriage process ensures that the younger generation is educated in the customs and traditions that have defined Maguindanaon society

for centuries. The focus on lineage and dowry negotiations during *salangguni* serves as a reminder of the historical continuity that marriage represents, linking the past, present, and future. This blend of economic, social, and cultural considerations reinforces the role of marriage as a foundational institution in Maguindanaon culture, not just for individuals but for the broader community. Through these marriage practices, Maguindanaons maintain the integrity of their heritage while adapting to evolving societal norms, ensuring that their traditions remain relevant and respected in a changing world.

### **Reconciliation of Cultural and Religious Practices Challenges**

Challenges in reconciling cultural and religious practices within Maguindanaon marriage ceremonies feature the complex interplay between indigenous customs and Islamic teachings. Islam teaches that the dowry (*mahr*) should be based on the means of the groom, ensuring it is affordable and reasonable for him to fulfill. However, traditionally among the Maguindanaon, the dowry amount often reflects the demands of the bride's family, which the groom is expected to meet, sometimes regardless of his financial capabilities. Additionally, *kalilang*, a grand gathering full of merry-making, contrasts with Islamic teachings emphasizing simplicity and solemnity in wedding ceremonies, without music or other unislamic practices. Efforts within the community to reinterpret and adapt indigenous practices to align with Islamic teachings aim to reconcile cultural and religious practices. However, tensions may arise between traditionalists and proponents of orthodox Islam.

The tension between indigenous customs and Islamic teachings in Maguindanaon marriage ceremonies underscores the challenges of maintaining cultural identity while adhering to religious principles. One of the central issues lies in the expectations surrounding the dowry (*mahr*). While Islamic teachings emphasize that the dowry should be modest and within the groom's financial capacity, the traditional Maguindanaon approach often places greater emphasis on the family's prestige and social standing. This can lead to higher dowry demands that may be financially burdensome for the groom, creating a conflict between cultural expectations and religious obligations. The pressure to meet these demands can sometimes overshadow the spiritual significance of the marriage, as families negotiate based on societal values rather than Islamic teachings. In some cases, this disparity between cultural and religious expectations may delay or complicate the marriage process as the groom struggles to meet the dowry expectations.

Another area of divergence is the celebration of *kalilang*, a grand festive gathering that is integral to Maguindanaon weddings but contrasts with the Islamic preference for simplicity and solemnity in wedding ceremonies. Traditional *kalilang* often includes music, dancing, and other forms of entertainment, which may be viewed as contrary to orthodox Islamic values. The challenge here is reconciling religious teachings with cultural celebrations and managing the differing opinions within the community. Traditionalists may argue for the preservation of these joyful, elaborate ceremonies as expressions of cultural identity, while those advocating for stricter adherence to Islamic principles may push for more restrained, religiously compliant weddings. Efforts to balance these two perspectives have led to reinterpretations of wedding practices, where some families incorporate elements of both, such as minimizing the scale of the celebration while retaining symbolic rituals. Nonetheless, the ongoing dialogue within the community reflects the complexity of integrating deeply rooted cultural practices with evolving religious interpretations as the Maguindanaon people navigate preserving their heritage in the context of Islamic principles.

### **Pre-Islamic Customs and Local Traditions Resiliency**

The resilience of pre-Islamic customs in Maguindanaon marriage rituals showcases the enduring strength of indigenous cultural practices that coexist with Islamic teachings. Despite the deep integration of Islam into the daily lives of the Maguindanaon people, customs such as *Bëtað/Sigkil sa Igan*, where the groom's family sends a symbolic bed set to the bride's house, continue to hold great significance. This practice represents the groom's family's readiness to accept the bride and emphasizes the importance of familial bonds and hospitality in Maguindanaon culture. Likewise, *Limbunan*, where the groom's family must correctly identify the bride among *malong* veiled women, serves as a playful yet important tradition that reinforces the value of respect and recognition between the bride and groom's families. These rituals provide a tangible link to the past, blending traditional values of honor, respect, and family ties with the spiritual framework of Islam.

In addition, customs like *Kagkuyog* and *Kandamak* further emphasize the communal and celebratory nature of Maguindanaon marriage rituals. The *Kagkuyog* ceremony, where the groom presents an entrance fee before entering the bride's home, demonstrates his commitment and respect for the bride's family, symbolizing that marriage is not just a union between two individuals but a merging of families and communities. *Kandamak*, a procession of food offerings, highlights the importance of generosity and festivity, while *Kapagabay*, the selection of bridesmaids and groomsmen, emphasizes the role of community support in marriage. These enduring customs enrich the cultural landscape of Maguindanaon marriages and offer a sense of continuity and identity that reinforces communal ties. By preserving these traditions alongside Islamic practices, the Maguindanaon people maintain a unique cultural heritage that honors both their ancestors and their faith.

### **Socio-economic Dimensions, Alliances, and Exchanges**

In Maguindanaon marriage ceremonies, the involvement of identified *datu* (chiefs) and *bai* (noblewomen) and public officials from both families adds a significant socio-political dimension. These individuals play prominent roles in upholding traditional values and ensuring the ceremonial proceedings align with cultural protocols. Their presence captions the community's adherence to hierarchical structures and the preservation of ancestral authority. Moreover, Maguindanaon marriage practices are intricately woven into socio-economic dimensions. Negotiations between families, often facilitated by these respected figures, emphasize the importance of alliances and exchanges. These negotiations solidify familial ties and contribute to establishing broader social networks and securing economic stability within the community. Thus, marriage ceremonies are more than personal unions; they reinforce cultural identity and historical continuity among the Maguindanaon people.

Furthermore, the economic dimension of these negotiations is not limited to dowries or material exchanges but also includes the pooling of resources and the long-term economic benefits that come from forging alliances between influential families. The presence of *datu* and *bai* during these negotiations often adds weight to the economic terms agreed upon, as their involvement ensures that the agreements are respected and aligned with the community's social and economic values. In this way, Maguindanaon marriage practices function as a complex system that weaves together social, political, and economic strands, ensuring that marriages are not just personal unions but pivotal events that contribute to the broader continuity and stability of the community.

### **Adaptation and Evolution of Maguindanaon Marriage Customs**

In contemporary Maguindanaon marriage customs, the inclusion of *Qur'an* recitations and *muhadarah* (Islamic preaching) in the *kalilang* program before the wedding ceremony represents a significant shift toward religious observance, reflecting the community's growing emphasis on aligning celebrations with Islamic principles. This adaptation signifies a conscious effort to infuse spirituality into what was once predominantly a cultural celebration marked by music and performances, such as the *dayunday*. The integration of Islamic preaching serves not only as a reminder of the religious sanctity of marriage but also as a means to educate and inspire the attendees, reinforcing the spiritual foundation of the union. This shift illustrates the Maguindanaon people's evolving approach to balancing religious duties with their cultural heritage, ensuring that even in festive settings, the teachings of Islam are at the forefront of their customs.

Similarly, adapting the bridal gown to reflect both traditional and religious values highlights the dynamic nature of Maguindanaon marriage practices. By incorporating *inaul*, the traditional Maguindanaon woven fabric, into modern bridal gown designs, the community preserves an important aspect of their cultural identity while ensuring that the attire adheres to Islamic guidelines for modesty. The effort to maintain modesty, particularly in avoiding the exposure of *awrat* (intimate body parts), underscores the community's respect for Islamic principles, even as they navigate modern wedding trends. These changes reflect a broader cultural shift in which traditional practices are reinterpreted and refined to suit contemporary contexts while upholding the Maguindanaon identity's core values. Through these adaptations, the Maguindanaon people continue to honor their cultural roots and religious beliefs, demonstrating resilience and flexibility in the face of historical and cultural transitions.

## Factors Driving Adaptations and Modifications in Maguindanaon Marriage Customs

### Globalization and Cultural Exposure

Globalization has exposed the Maguindanaon community to diverse cultures and ideas, leading to a re-evaluation of traditional norms and practices. This exposure has opened the door for younger generations to adopt new perspectives on relationships and marriage, reflecting the dynamic nature of cultural change within the community.

One of the notable shifts is in wedding attire. While traditional Maguindanaon garments remain significant in weddings, many couples have started to wear wedding suits inspired by other nations, such as India, Indonesia, or Arabian countries. This trend symbolizes how younger Maguindanaons blend their cultural heritage with global influences, showcasing a fusion of styles that honors both their traditions and their connection to the broader world. For instance, some couples opt for the vibrant, ornate saris and sherwanis typical of Indian weddings, or the modest, flowing dresses associated with Arabian and Indonesian nuptial customs.

This blending of cultural influences goes beyond attire. Prenuptial photoshoots, inspired by social media trends, often feature the couple wearing these international-inspired outfits, further highlighting the global reach of their wedding experience. As with many modern weddings, the ceremonies are increasingly shared through Facebook Live, allowing couples to connect with distant relatives and friends, and turning the event into a more inclusive, globally visible celebration.

These changes demonstrate how globalization has not only introduced new aesthetics to Maguindanaon weddings but also encouraged younger couples to rethink the roles of tradition and modernity. While many remain grounded in their cultural roots, they also embrace the flexibility to incorporate global practices, illustrating the ongoing transformation of marriage customs in the Maguindanaon community.

### Economic Shifts and Urbanization

The elegance and grandeur of a Maguindanaon wedding often depend significantly on the economic status of the couple and their families. Weddings symbolize social standing within the community, with wealthier families able to host more elaborate celebrations, featuring luxurious venues, intricate traditional attire, and lavish feasts. Economic opportunities and urbanization have influenced Maguindanaon marriage customs, shaping the aspirations and behaviors of Maguindanaon youth as they navigate the balance between tradition and modernity.

One key aspect influenced by these changes is the dowry, *mahr* or *sunggudan*, which is closely tied to the social status of the bride and her family. Traditionally, the dowry represents the groom's ability to provide for the bride, but in contemporary Maguindanaon society, it is increasingly linked to the bride's educational and professional achievements. For instance, if the bride holds a degree and is employed, a higher dowry is often expected, reflecting her family's elevated status and her own socio-economic contributions. Conversely, brides from less affluent backgrounds may command lower dowries, yet the custom remains an important part of the family negotiation process.

Economic advancement and urbanization have heightened the emphasis on financial arrangements and transformed partner selection criteria. Many Maguindanaon youth now consider factors such as education, career prospects, and financial stability when choosing a spouse, alongside traditional considerations like family background and religious values. These criteria reflect the evolving nature of marriage, where cultural traditions remain strong but are increasingly interwoven with the realities of modern life.

As a result, marriage customs among Maguindanaons adapt to the interplay between socio-economic transformations and cultural traditions. While the essence of these traditions endures, younger generations' aspirations and financial realities shape new expectations and behaviors around weddings, dowry negotiations, and partner selection. This dynamic shift highlights how Maguindanaon youth redefine marriage in a rapidly changing world.

## Generational Shifts and Social Expectations

In recent years, generational shifts and changing societal norms have significantly influenced the trajectory of Maguindanaon marriage customs. There has been a notable departure from some traditional practices among the younger generations, as they increasingly embrace modern elements such as prenuptial photoshoots and social media to broadcast their weddings.

The practice of prenuptial photoshoots, once rare or non-existent in traditional Maguindanaon culture, has become popular, mirroring global trends. Many young couples now document their love story through elaborate photoshoots featuring various locations, outfits, and themes, often showcasing both their cultural heritage and modern lifestyles. This practice is heavily influenced by social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where couples share their pre-wedding photos to generate excitement among friends and family.

Additionally, live coverage of wedding ceremonies on platforms like Facebook has become more prevalent. Younger Maguindanaons, influenced by technology and social media's ability to connect people, often stream their weddings live to allow relatives and friends who cannot physically attend to witness the ceremony. This practice adds a layer of inclusivity and fosters a sense of community beyond physical boundaries, aligning with the Maguindanaon value of extended kinship and shared experiences.

These adaptations illustrate how exposure to modern trends and the desire to conform to contemporary standards have led younger generations to reinterpret traditional norms. However, these new practices also highlight the balancing act between preserving cultural identity and embracing modernity in the evolving landscape of Maguindanaon wedding customs.

## Adaptation to Islamic Practices

Islamic teachings significantly shape the rituals and practices associated with Maguindanaon marriages, deeply influencing key aspects such as the solemnization ceremony and adherence to Islamic legal requirements. This integration reflects a process of negotiation and adaptation between religious and cultural influences, creating a unique blend of Islamic traditions and Maguindanaon customs.

One essential requirement in Islamic marriages is the *mahr* (dowry), which the groom gives to the bride as part of the marriage contract. In addition, Islam mandates the presence of a *wali* (guardian of the bride) before the *nikah* can take place, ensuring the bride's consent is obtained. The *nikah* is the actual Muslim wedding ceremony, characterized by simplicity. The bride does not necessarily need to be present during the *nikah* as long as she sends two witnesses to confirm her agreement. The ceremony typically involves recitations from the Qur'an and the exchange of vows in front of witnesses from both parties. While no special religious official is required for the *nikah*, it is common for an *Imam* or *Ustadz* to officiate and deliver a brief sermon during the ceremony (Maqsood, 2009).

Islam also places a strong emphasis on the voluntary nature of marriage. It is forbidden in Islam for parents or others to force, coerce, or deceive youngsters into marriage (Maqsood, 2009), allowing individuals the freedom to choose their spouse as long as they practice Islam. This principle has led to an increasing number of Maguindanaon parents giving their children the freedom to choose their life partners, aligning with Islamic teachings while adapting to modern perspectives.

The interplay between Islamic teachings and Maguindanaon cultural practices highlights how religious obligations and cultural traditions coexist in shaping marriage customs. While the community remains committed to Islamic values, modern social dynamics, evolving perspectives on individual choice, and socio-economic factors have influenced how these marriages are solemnized today.

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive exploration of Maguindanaon marriage practices offers a window into the intangled processes of cultural continuity and adaptation that shape this indigenous community. Maguindanaon marriage

rituals, deeply rooted in both indigenous and Islamic traditions, reflect a delicate balance between preserving ancestral customs and embracing religious principles. The coexistence of pre-Islamic practices, such as *Limbanan* and *Kagkuyog*, alongside Islamic rites like the *nikkah* ceremony, exemplifies the community's ability to harmonize seemingly divergent elements into a cohesive cultural identity. This balancing act highlights the community's resilience in maintaining cultural integrity, even as external influences, such as the spread of Islam, have reshaped their practices over time. By blending tradition with modernity, the Maguindanaon people demonstrate a deep-seated commitment to preserving their rich heritage while remaining open to change.

This research provides valuable insights into how indigenous communities cross the complex balance between cultural preservation and the pressures of modernization. By contributing to the broader discourse, it highlights the challenges and strategies employed by these communities to maintain their cultural identity while adapting to a rapidly changing world. The adaptive strategies employed by the Maguindanaon, from integrating Qur'anic recitations into wedding celebrations to incorporating traditional *inaul* fabric into modern bridal gowns, showcase the dynamic nature of cultural survival. These evolving practices underscore the community's resourcefulness in safeguarding their identity while responding to contemporary social, religious, and economic shifts. Ultimately, the Maguindanaon approach to marriage serves as a powerful example of how indigenous societies can embrace change without sacrificing the core values that define their cultural and historical legacies. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper appreciation for the ways in which tradition and adaptation coexist, ensuring that cultural heritage remains a living, evolving force within the community.

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