

***Mëranao* Swear Words: Gender and Cultural Identity in Profanity**

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Abstract

This ethnographic study investigates the *Mëranao* swear words used by men, women, and homosexuals in Marawi City. Data from ten informants were analyzed employing critical discourse analysis. It identifies and examines the many aspects of *Mëranao* cursing, including the emotions and reasons behind them. Swear words vary among *Mëranao* men, women, and homosexuals. Firstly, it was revealed that swear words such as: *myabuno ka* (may you get killed) and *kiniyowan ka si ina ka* (fuck your own mother) are the harshest curses for men since the former touches the killing issue in the *Mëranao* society and the latter shows disrespect to their mothers. Secondly, women loathe swear words such as: *myawit ka kambawata* (may you die during childbirth), *datla* (flirt), “*takyo*” (whore), and *darwaka* (immoral) since they question their chastity and femininity. Thirdly, homosexuals find *kyamorkaan ka o Allah* (May God punish you) discriminating as it makes them feel sinful and unaccepted in the society. Repetition of the swear word or phrase, such as *tingga-tinggas* and *myabuno-buno* instead of *tinggas* and *myatinggas* double the severity of cursing. Homosexual slangs such as *shundu* and *myatirifud* and other euphemisms are becoming more prevalent among *Mëranaos* including men and women since they find it non-offensive, particularly when they use swear words for stylistic expression. From these, it can be said that notions of swearing are shaped by the gender of the participants. Contextualizing profanity also entails the understanding of culture and religion which both play a major part in the identity of the *Mëranaos*.

Keywords: *Mëranao*, swear word, swear lexicon, curse, gay curse words, euphemism

Suggested Citation:

Regaro, J. and N. Balgoa (2023). *Mëranao Swear Words: Gender and Cultural Identity in Profanity*. *Langkit: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 12, 15-32.

Introduction

Swearing or cursing is a kind of linguistic activity that uses taboo words to communicate extreme emotions (Vingerhoets, 2013). According to Dalvie (2018) swearing is often a statement of frustration, indignation, powerlessness, and anger. Rarely, it is also a manifestation of several neurological illnesses caused by damage to the region of the brain that regulates aggressiveness (such as Tourette's syndrome), in which some victims either yell or sign profanities. In other words, there are several aspects to consider while attempting to comprehend the use of profanity by diverse communities.

One such community is the *Mëranaos*, one of the several major Muslim groups in the Philippines. According to Lobel and Riwarung (2009), the *Mëranaos* are indigenous group located in the southern part of Mindanao. They are also called the “*people of the lake*” and are culturally and linguistically linked to other Muslim groups in the Philippines like the *Iranuns* and *Maguindanaons*, since their languages are all under the Danao language family. Moreover, *Mëranaos* are known for their artwork, weaving, wood, and metal crafts and the epic literature called *Darangen* (Tan, 1999). As emphasized by Limpao, quoted by Custodio (2019), *Mëranaos* are a proud people since they have been inculcated with the belief that they are members of royal families.

Like other cultural groups in the Philippines, the *Mëranaos* also employ powerful, specific profanities in the conduct of their daily lives. This should be interrogated since majority of the *Mëranaos* are Muslims, and profanity is considered “*haram*” or prohibited in the Islamic Jurisprudential doctrine (Jubilado et al., 2015). The discourse created by this conflicting notions between cultural practice and religion needs to be investigated since it shapes the identity of the *Mëranao* as a people. Moreover, the inclusion of gender in the analysis gives a new dimension to the discourse on swearing and profanity and how this constitutes the *Mëranao* identity.

In order to achieve this main objective, this paper will specifically answer the following questions.

1. What are the *Mëranao* swear words utilized by various genders in Marawi City?
2. What are the causes of swearing among *Mëranaos*?
3. What does swearing reveal about *Mëranao* culture and identity?

The researcher believes that there are various factors which contribute to the use of profanity of various genders in Marawi City. Hence, the researcher deems it essential to investigate the *Mëranao* swear words, causes, and relationship of culture to swearing. It is crucial to comprehend the emotion that governs the profanity to assess the *Mëranao* identity in general. This study explores not only the offensive swear words used for hate speech, but also how *Mëranao* uses swearing for practical and utilitarian purposes.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the diversity in personalities and viewpoints, the researcher employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how different genders in Marawi City perceive and deploy profanity. By evaluating swear words based on the experiences of male, female, and homosexual respondents, the researcher would be able to identify if there is power abuse, dominance, or discrimination embedded in the employment of swear words which make them offensive. As indicated by Rogers (2004), CDA provides not just a description and interpretation of speech in context, but also an explanation of why and how discourse functions. Thus, the researcher utilized this approach to examine comprehensively how *Mëranaos* enforce profanity in matters involving diverse social issues. Through CDA, the researcher would be able to examine how different curse words affect men, women, and gays emotionally. As Wodak and Meyer (2015) noted, "*critical*" in critical discourse analysis refers to not taking things for granted, opening up complexity, challenging reductionism, dogmatism and dichotomies, being self-reflexive in one's research, and revealing opaque structures of power relations and ideologies.

Review of Related Literature

It is believed that humans have been using swear words since the beginning of language (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). In fact, Ljung (2011) argues that ancient communication included profanity. Byrne (2017) shows that swearing, oaths, and curses were forbidden because they were considered magical, and they may cause tragedies. In relation to this belief, Caldwell-Harris et al. (2011), asserted that swear words are increasingly being found to create physiological and cognitive stress. As a result, Stapleton (2010) affirmed that swearing is connected to emotional expression and stimulation. This is why Allan (2018) defines swearing as "*the strongly emotive use of taboo terms*" and Jay (2018a) goes on to say that curse words have emotional intensity and negative valence.

Emotional swearing is often an automatic response to irritation or high level of stress, such as when pain is caused or when a strong reaction of wrath or disappointment (Montagu, 1967). In certain circumstances, it has been shown that cursing may reduce tension, alleviate pain and can even be therapeutic (Jay, 2009; Crystal, 2003). Similarly, Popusoi et al. (2018) report that drivers use profanity both to communicate verbal aggressiveness and as a type of catharsis that helped them deal with anger in stressful driving scenarios. Evidently,

In other instances, some speakers do not solely swear on impulse but use it as strategy for self-control. According to several studies, swearing is used not only as "*fighting words*," but also to express dissatisfaction, solidarity, or humor and this may lead to stronger ties and a more peaceful atmosphere if used effectively (Bryne, 2017; Ljung, 2011; Dewaele, 2006). In particular, Jdetawy (2019) contends that swear words are terms that individuals may use when they are upset or fooling around, but sometimes people feel offended and furious upon hearing profane language. Likewise, Permadi (2017) also noted that people's moods may quickly change from amusement to anger at the sound of profanity.

People of different nationalities, statures, and educational backgrounds express their feelings via fighting, reprimanding, and conversations (Cliff, 2015). Swearing is an excellent indicator of how close someone feels to the swearer and membership to an intimate social circle (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008; Winters, 2001). Finn (2017) likens this effect to youngsters work together to steal from the cookie jar or when adults gossip, which has been shown to strengthen connections.

Understanding that curse words have varying degrees of offensiveness is crucial for identifying verbal violence (Dewaele, 2006). As explained by Jay (2009), swearing can be used to create both good and bad effects on people. Positive social results may be reached when profanity is used for comedy, storytelling, or sex talk, but it can be detrimental when it is used to injure another person, as in name-calling and sexual insults. Without realizing it, many ESL students have already been exposed to profanity. Words like gosh, jeez, and heck are considered curse words (Fägersten, 2012).

Pinker (2017) classified swearing as propositional or non-propositional. Examples of propositional swearing are: dyphemistic swearing which utilizes banned terms instead of neutral language; euphemism uses mild or indirect communication to avoid upsetting listeners; abusive swearing is rude and used to intimidate and acquire control. Statements like "You dress like a slut!" or "Why don't you fuck yourself?" might scare someone (Vingerhoets et al., 2013). Idiomatic swearing is employed to sound manly and attract attention "You're such a pain in the ass!" (Vingerhoets, 2013) while emphatic swearing, e.g., "Fucking cool!" is used to compliment something (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). On the other hand, non-propositional, cathartic swearing is used to relieve tension, increase pain tolerance, or intimidate an aggressor, which is neither courteous nor polite (MacKay & Ahmetzanov, 2005). Publicly expressing powerful emotions may be therapeutic rather than impolite (Jay, 2006).

There are also circumstances when swearing is considered a debauchery and an immoral act. Jay (2009) elaborated that persons who use profanity in improper contexts or who do not understand their connections with their listeners are generally seen as rebellious, unintelligent, unstable, and disrespectful. Thus, Winters, as cited by Finn (2017) advised to avoid swearing in public around high-status people, overly sensitive people, and children. Of a more particular example is the Islamic culture wherein it is considered slanderous, obscene and abusive to curse. Drawing from the Philippine context, Ingilan (2016) affirms this observation by conducting a qualitative study on the lexilication of profanity of the Tausug and the Kagan languages, the languages spoken by two of the Muslim groups in the country. The study finds out that Islam is not only an identity marker for the two ethnolinguistic groups but also plays an important role in the lexicalization of a number of profanities in these languages. This influence is reflected in the incorporation of loan words from the Arabic language. Moreover, they consider profanity as immoral and is not only an insult to sex and religion but also an assault to "face", a very important psychosocial concept for the Tausug and Kagan communities. Jubilado et al's (2015) study reinforces this idea and further elaborates that the Tausug language usually expresses profanity related to death and destruction such as *Miyatay kaw* (May you die) and its derivatives. The study also reiterates that Islam considers swearing as haram and therefore punishable.

A more detailed study on swearing and religious expressions of the different ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao is conducted by Billones (2019). Using qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, Billones delved into the morphological process, lexical relationships and the social, cultural and psychological circumstances that cause members of the *Cebuano*, *Ilonggo*, *Maguindanaon*, and *Teduray* communities to swear and use profanities. Like the studies of Ingilan (2016) and Jubilado et al (2015), Billones (2019) also found out that morphological processes in cuss words include affixation, reduplication, borrowing, coinage, dissimulation and acronymy. Derivation and synonymy are also common from the lexical perspective. In social and cultural aspects, for speakers of these groups, curses are considered to be substitutes for physical harm; they are used to express anger, surprise, intense emotions or in some cases, without meaning at all for the speakers.

These studies have shown that the social and cultural aspects of swearing and profanity of different ethnolinguistic groups are always grounded on the linguistic aspects of their languages. Morphology and the study of lexicon can explain how swearing can employ language strategies in order to express its purposes. The current study expounds further the implications of swearing, particularly among the *Mëranao*s in Marawi, by considering gender thereby giving a new dimension to the notion of identity in relation to swearing and profanity.

Methodology

Data Gathering Procedures

This study is framed along the qualitative design of research and utilizes in-depth interviews as data gathering procedure. The data were gathered by interviewing ten (10) *Mëranao* respondents and the interviews were conducted in Marawi City, which is located on the shores of Lake Lanao and is home to a large *Mëranao* population. The interview was conducted both in-person and over the Messenger app's chat feature from the period of April-June 2023. Six (6) respondents were interviewed face-to-face, while the other four (4) were interviewed online. Before the interview began, the researcher informed the respondents that it would be documented through voice recording, and the respondents consented.

Questions pertaining to the informants' use of swear words and their reasons for using such words were asked from the respondents. Interviews lasted from 20-30 minutes.

Since the researchers have deep familiarity with the *Mëranao* culture, they already have a notion of the swear words used in Marawi City; nonetheless, to corroborate these, observation of friends, neighbors, and random *Mëranao* individuals on the street prior to the interview was conducted. A list of the swear words was then collected. Information from the respondents regarding the usage and/or exposure to swearing in the *Mëranao* language was then obtained. Also collected were the respondents' motivations and strategies for avoiding the use of profanity to learn more about their upbringing, attitudes, emotion, and perspectives.

Just before the interview, respondents requested to use the *Mëranao* language. However, respondents code-mixed in English, Tagalog, and *Mëranao* in the course of the interview. The recordings were then transcribed and translated to English.

For purposes of brevity and cohesiveness, only the English translations of excerpts from the interviews were cited in the results and discussion section.

Profiles of the Respondents

The respondents are randomly chosen among the residents of Marawi City. All respondents lived in Marawi City and three are males, four are females and three are male homosexuals. Their ages range from 24 -32 years old. Two are college students and the rest are teachers in elementary and high schools in Marawi City. All of them profess to practice Islam as their religion.

Results and Discussion

Swear Words Utilized by Various Genders in Marawi City

Table 1 displays the curse words employed by *Mëranao* respondents to convey contempt towards other people. According to the collected responses, the bulk of the swear words used by *Mëranaos* express hatred or signify disease, misfortune, or death for the person addressed.

According to *Mëranao* respondents, every profanity in Table 1 was meant to disparage an opponent which indicates that *Mëranaos* employ a propositional abusive swearing that is disrespectful and used to frighten or intimidate another person. As Vingerhoets et al., (2013) noted, the end goal of this type of swearing is to bully or gain power.

For Respondent 1, who is a 26 year old male teacher, the most offensive and intolerable swearing is the phrase, “*Myabuno ka*” (May you be killed). As he explained:

The most common expletive used against men is “miyabuno ka”, which means “may you be killed”. In fact, the elders, prohibit such profanity directed towards males since it is possible that it may occur, particularly given that homicides are commonplace in our culture. Once you use such profanity against a guy, he maybe slain without warning.

What is noticeable from the response of the respondent is that swearing and the use of profanity is associated with the political situation of the locality coupled with invocation of coincidence and fate. Thus, the impact of swearing towards the addressee is magnified not only because of his beliefs but because the political climate of the locality increases the possibility that it will come to fruition. The idea of coincidence and fate in relation to swearing is reinforced by the experience of the respondent’s brother.

My brother's usual curse was "may your head break." After a few days, the incident occurred. They were playing with rocks. Suddenly, his friend threw a rock at him, which struck his head. His curse came true.

Table 1. Swear and curse words used by *Mëranaos* as collected from the respondents

	Swear Words	English Translation
1	Myabuno ka	May you be killed
2	Kiniyowan ka si ina ka	Fuck your own mother
3	Myasugat ka panglo	May you get hit by a bullet
4	Myatimbak ka	May you die with a gunshot
5	Myatinggas ka	May you get hit by something deadly
6	Myatay ka	May you die!/I hope you die
7	Mysokarang ka	May you be hit by a calamity
8	Myagapa ka	May you get killed/butchered/cut into pieces
9	Tyathad ka	May you get chopped
10	Myathupung ka	May you be cursed/ May you die young
11	Myathipud a omor ka	May your life be shortened
12	Kyababaan ka sa omor	
13	Myatibluk ka	May you incur a deadly sickness/plague
14	Myakowa ka tibelek	
15	Tyanaangka tibelek	
16	Tyanaan a do'ong	
17	Myawpak a olo nga	May your head breaks
18	Myaropt a olo nga	May your head breaks into pieces
19	Mimbto a olo ka	May your head explode
20	Mimbto a tyan ka	May your stomach explode
21	Mimbto ka	May you explode
22	Myawit ka kambawata	May you die while giving birth
23	Myagasta ka	May you be destroyed
24	Pimbtowan ka buduk	May a get a scalp psoriasis
25	Myapolang kano	May you all get extinguished
26	Pkakowa diyaman	Shameful
27	Gya ole ka	It's your vagina
28	Datla/Petelaan	Flirt
29	Takiyo	Whore

From the responses and explanations of respondent 1, it can be affirmed that the *Mëranaos* are superstitious by nature, which explains why they are bothered by profanity. As Byrne (2017) claims, swearing, oaths, and curses were forbidden because they were

considered magical and may cause tragedies.

As respondent 1 asserted, "*myabuno ka!*" (May you be murdered) is mostly directed at men, and they are certain that this hate speech bothers every man in Marawi City because they believe that this curse is likely to occur since men are usually the target of killings in the *Mēranao* community.

According to respondent 2, who is a 32-year old female high school teacher in Marawi, this suggests that men are more vulnerable to such curse given the high rate of killings in the *Mēranao* community due to clan feud also known as "*rido*". Furthermore, respondent 4, who is a 28 year old female teacher, reported the use of "*kiniyowan ka si ina ka*" (fuck your own mother) as another curse that enrages men entirely. This indicates that *Mēranao* men are sensitive to insults associating their mothers and wives. As Reyes et al. (2012) underlines, despite the overwhelmingly patriarchal structure of the *Mēranao* society, women are accorded appropriate prominence within the culture. Thus, even before the coming of Islam, *Mēranao* men give importance to *Mēranao* women. In other words, women are the Achilles' heel of *Mēranao* men. The *Mēranao* culture teaches men that women are born into this world to receive affection and to be cared for.

The worst is "fuck your own mother," which alludes to the mother. I heard this from men. Occasionally, you could hear this during road disputes. There are drivers who are foul mouther. I encountered it on the highway (referring to road arguments).

Respondent 4 indicates that such an incestuous remark could surely cause conflict among males. As she recalled, this curse among males occurs, for example, during traffic altercations such as when someone overtakes another car. This fairly indicates that the frequency of swearing in public is higher in males than females (Thelwall, 2008). Similarly, Popusoi et al. (2018) reported that drivers use profanity both to communicate verbal aggressiveness and as a type of catharsis that helped them deal with anger in stressful driving scenarios. Moreover, respondent 4 also contends that it is worse than "*motherfucker*" or "*putangina*" in Filipino. Thus, this explains why many *Mēranaos* are particularly sensitive to abusive language thrown against their loved ones especially when the curse is articulated in their own language.

For respondent 1, cursing is a normal response. This implies that swearing can be a reaction to any stressful situation and this is noted by Crystal (2013) who claims that emotional swearing is often an automatic response to irritation or stress, such as when pain is caused or when a strong reaction of wrath or disappointment is produced. This non-propositional swearing is also known as cathartic swearing which is used to relieve tension, increase pain tolerance, or intimidate an aggressor, which is neither courteous nor polite (MacKay & Ahmetzanov, 2005). Thus, publicly expressing powerful emotions may be therapeutic rather than impolite (Jay et al. 2006).

The respondents also cited the profanity that they consider derogatory for women. Respondents 1 and 2 concurred that "*Myawit ka a kambawati*" (may you die in childbirth) is

a curse for women that is too negative and destructive and very difficult to tolerate. For respondent 2, this curse has a significant effect on her, and she forbids others from using it against her. In *Mēranao* literature, a woman's capacity to conceive, bear, and rear a child—something a male cannot do—is a key proof of her worth to the community (Reyes et. al., 2012). The fact that a mother would put her own life at risk to protect her child makes the use of this curse particularly painful for a *Mēranao* woman. With this, the female respondents pointed out that women are valuable and that, as mothers, hearing such a curse against them means animosity towards them, and they fear that if they continue to allow such abusive language, they may suffer a similar fate.

They also regard the curse words "*datla*" (flirt), "*takyo*" (whore), and "*darwaka*" (immoral) to be unacceptable. For the female respondents, respect is vital for every woman; and these words are an affront to their femininity and chastity. For the *Mēranaos*, this treatment of women is grounded on traditions and customs. The women characters in *Mēranao* folktales for example are always reminded to be good daughters; goodness in this sense is not to bring dishonor to the family (Reyes et al.; 2012). Moreover, the characters in these folktales demonstrate that *Mēranao* women are expected to be cautious of their image and social worth. It is also emphasized by the respondents that *Mēranao* women are conservative and place a premium on modesty as such, it is disrespectful to characterize them as flirt, whore, or immoral. As stated by respondent 4: "As a girl, I don't like being labeled as flirt. I really hate being trampled on as a woman".

This indicated that swear words or curses have a significant influence on a person if they disparage their own gender. As Spears (2021) explained, to be branded a "slut" is sexually harassing and should not be ignored.

For the homosexual respondents, cursing and profanity can be more complex. In a manifesto released by the Australian National Imams Council following a controversial claim by one imam that there is nothing in the Quran that prohibits homosexuality, the Council reiterated that homosexuality is a sin in Islam and cited the verse: "Verily, you practice your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds (by committing great sins)" [al-A'raaf 7:80-81]" to justify this claim. Seen from this perspective, profanities directed to homosexuals can have multiple implications.

For respondents 3,6 and 9 who all claim to be homosexuals, the curse which they dislike the most is *Kyamorkaan o Allah (May God punish you)*. The curse, according to them, makes them feel wicked and unaccepted in the society because it invokes God and brings with it divine punishment. According to them, many *Mēranaos* condemn and do not approve of homosexuality and they feel that the curse is not only a personal attack but also an expression of disapproval or abhorrence to their sexuality. The line below further explains the respondents' reasons why they abhor this particular curse.

Given my gender, I suppose the worst curse I do not like to hear is "may God punish you." Though I've never been afflicted with this curse, I find it offensive when others generalize it, particularly among LGBTQ+ individuals.

Respondent 6, who is a 26-year old gay teacher, said that since swearing is regarded seriously by *Mëranaos*, it should not be done or said carelessly or without a cause. When homosexuals receive curses then, it is because the person swearing believes that they must have violated something significant which angers the person so much. This violation can pertain to their gender and their being homosexuals.

Swear words pertaining to life and health are also considered distasteful and sickening. Respondent 7, a 24-year old college student, feels wounded by the curse "*Kiyababaan ka sa omor*" (May your life be shortened) particularly when said by a parent. For him, a person's life is unpredictable; thus, it should never be used as a jest or in profanity. He believes that no one has the right to wish for someone's death. For respondents 8 and 10 who are both teachers in their late 20s, "*Myapolang kano*" or "*Myapolang kano an isa ka pamilya,*" which both mean may you all perish, is excruciatingly painful since it is not easy to lose a family member. Moreover, respondent 10 dislikes curses such as "*Myabuno ka*" (May you die) and "*Miya teblek ka*" (May you get ill). With the fear of being cursed, the respondents display that swear words or curses create physiological and cognitive stress (Caldwell-Harris et al., 2011). Likewise, Jay (2018) contemplates that curse words have emotional intensity and negative valence and are also connected to emotional expression and stimulation (Stapleton, 2010).

Causes of Swearing among Mëranaos

Five (5) out of ten (10) respondents said that anger is the primary reason for swearing or cursing. In addition, respondent 1 contends that besides anger, cursing could be a mere expression or a reaction to a provocative comment from another person.

The respondents acknowledge that cathartic, non-propositional swearing is the result of anger and frustration. As Jubilado et al. (2015) claims, profanity can be affiliated to free speech, and as a reaction to other factors such as anger and excitement which cannot be predicted nor controlled. For respondent 2, swearing or cursing is common among the uneducated *Mëranaos*, especially those in remote areas thereby associating swearing to the level of education and urbanity of a person.

In more specific circumstances, respondent 3 shared that swearing could also be a result of people's annoying deceitfulness. He narrated this one incident wherein he was promised by the driver of a passenger jeepney that he would drive him until Balindong, another municipality near Marawi City. However, he was astonished when the driver did not keep his word. As a consequence, respondent 3 expressed his disgust with the phrase "*tinggatinggas ka.*" (May you be hit by something fatal). As Bryne (2017) claims, cursing doesn't necessarily signify aggressiveness or insult. Swearing is as likely to be used in frustration, unity, or amusement. Swearing and curses are also considered as "*fighting words,*". For this, Winters, as cited by Finn (2017), advised people to avoid swearing in public around high-status people, overly sensitive people, and children.

With the example given, it was found out that *Mëranaos* intensify profanity by repeating a portion of it. As shown by respondent 3, *tinggas* was repeated twice as *tingga* + "tinggas"

= *tinggatinggas* to heighten the amount of rage, which is like murdering someone twice. This repetition or "double kill" method may be applied to any *Mēranao* swear word and thus heightens also the offense and insult. As Dewaele (2006) highlighted, understanding that curse words have varying degrees of offensiveness is crucial for identifying verbal violence.

Besides the depth of rage, respondent 7 said that the use of profanity can also be influenced by the parents who reared the individual.

It's not merely a consequence of rage for me. It might also be the result of parental influence. According to the proverb, "whatever the fruit is, so is its fruit". It is possible that they are used to it, or that they have seen or heard it among the adults in the house. As a consequence, children develop it as they age.

Similarly, respondent 10, a 28-year old female teacher, agreed that a person's upbringing and family history might also be the reasons why many *Mēranaos* swear. Other than that, respondent 8 also claimed that certain prominent *Mēranao* families use profanity toward others to demonstrate their power and authority to others. As Vingerhoets et al. (2013) contends, people curse to look masculine or to attract attention which indicates that cursing can either demonstrate authority or to establish friendship.

People resort to swearing to prove their cruelty. You know how people flaunt their family influence. It's like scaring people that they're children of a mayor which enables them to wipe out their opponent with ease, or it's like telling people that they own the area.

Respondent 9 surmised that the swearing of the *Mēranaos* is due to the belief that it carries lighter punishment than killing a person. Jubilado et al. (2015) also highlighted this in their study when they claim that *Cebuanos* consider swearing as a venial offense in Christianity while Islam considers swearing as haram (prohibited) and carries a heavy punishment. But for other *Mēranaos*, swearing is cultural rather than based on Islam. As Islamweb.net (2004) explains, swearing is considered a debauchery and an immoral act in Islam. A Muslim is not a person who slanders, curses, speaks obscene words or is abusive.

Swearing in *Mēranao* Culture and Identity

The respondents consider swearing as a virulent and toxic aspect of the *Mēranao* culture, which in a way is a dimension of their identity and a reflection of their upbringing.

Three (3) out of ten (10) respondents acknowledge that *Mēranaos* have negative traits which always go back to "*maratabat*" (*self-pride*). As Limpao illustrated in Custodio (2019), "*Mēranaos are a proud race, it has been inculcated in their thinking that they belong to royal families or descendants of royal families and there is royal blood running in their veins.*" This belief indicates dominance which some of respondents perceive as a negative trait. Nonetheless, they clarify that toxicity can be found in all human beings as they also felt discriminated in areas outside their place.

Respondent 4 also pointed out that it is unjust to categorize a society and its people as toxic solely on the poor behavior of a few since they also have good attributes worthy of praise. According to the respondents, the widespread belief that "*one bad apple spoils the whole barrel*" is a hasty generalization. Furthermore, respondent 5 emphasized that there is no ideal culture. They were outspoken about the flaws of their own people as well as their unpleasant experiences with people from other races and faiths, stating that every group has toxic members.

Respondents 7 and 8 imply that the toxic identity shown by certain *Mēranas* who use abusive swearing may have resulted from a lack of education, lack of Islamic knowledge, poor conduct stemming from poor parenting, and wrong social circle. When asked whether they agree with non-Muslims who label *Mēranas* as toxic or war freaks, the majority of respondents disagreed, believing it to be a hasty generalization saying that "even without Islam, *Mēranas* are conservative and peace-loving people.

Respondent 2 emphasized that despite the toxicity of certain community members, the beauty of *Mēranao* culture rests in the fact that it is conservative even before the coming of Islam. More importantly, it values the self-worth and sanctity of its people, especially women. For the *Tausug* people, another Muslim group in the Philippines, this is *adat or traditional law* (Jubilado et al, 2015). Respondent 6 emphasized that a *Mēranao* is different from a Muslim. A *Mēranao* according to the respondents can be proud, dominating, and narrow-minded on some matters which can be considered toxic while a Muslim is humble and would not injure his/her fellow Muslims. Religion then can be a decisive factor of how the respondents view profanity. A *Mēranao* may be susceptible to swearing but a Muslim must not swear and utter profanities.

For the respondents, this highlights the weaknesses of *Mēranao* as human beings. They asserted that they are not perfect, and like any other individuals, they have shortcomings and limitations that cause them to say unpleasant things. But they also emphasized the importance of Islam, both a mechanism and deterrent to cursing to avoid inflicting harm to others thereby overcoming these weaknesses. Understanding Islam's moral principles enable them to navigate these susceptibilities and prevent them from succumbing to the temptation of swearing. In particular, respondent 7 said that Islamic lectures encourage *Mēranas* to say positive things anytime they feel the impulse to curse because God personally accepts prayers and requests at particular times of the day. As the saying goes, "*be careful of what you wish for.*" With this, respondents 7, 8, and 10 alter their curses with positive ones like "*myakowa ka mapiya*" (May you succeed), "*myamaboway ka*" (May you live long), "*kyasokayan ka...*" (May you get paid) or "*Allahuakbar*" (God is awesome) and "*Subhanallah*" (Glory be to God), which they believe is more useful than cursing.

Euphemizing the offense of profanity through gay lingo is also one strategy which respondents 6 and 9 employ to lessen the insult or hurt which swearing may incur. By using expressions such as *myachuchu ka*, *miyatirifod*, *miyatifi*, *elmondo*, and "*was edukasyones*", they believe that a certain normalcy and peace is maintained and conceals the real feelings. Additionally, all the respondents pointed out that swearing does not mean that every *Mēranao* utilizes them to cause trouble. Sometimes, they employ it to communicate their deep bond

and mutual understanding with close pals or simply to express disappointments. Jay & Janschewitz (2008) reported that swearing is an excellent indication of how close someone is to the person who swears and of their belongingness to the same intimate circle. As such, respondent 1 suggests that one must be careful in swearing if it is meant as an expression. It must be uttered in an appropriate situation and with the right people, lest it will be misunderstood. According to Jay (2009), persons who use profanity in improper contexts or who do not understand their connections with their listeners are generally seen as being rebellious, unintelligent, unstable, and disrespectful.

Respondent 6 also clarified that they use swear words as expressions and do not mean them. This suggests that some speakers do not react solely on impulse but use some kind of self-control. Swearing, therefore, may include a wide variety of formulations, from emotional to stylistic expressions (Ljung, 2011).

From the responses, it was also revealed that the majority of *Mēranao* families avoid the use of swearing or cursing since *Mēranao* culture values *adat* or respect. This *adat* (respect) is further strengthened with the help of western education and the Islamic knowledge. As respondent 4 said:

It is my religion that stops me from swearing/cursing..I remind myself of my prayers, my good deeds..

Family background and child rearing may be factors which shape the respondents' notions of swearing. Respondents believe that not all *Mēranaos* particularly who are brought up in homes which prohibit profanity express their emotions through swearing. For respondent 3, swearing does not give a person peace of mind, and this is affirmed by respondent 2 when she said that she stopped swearing when she became a mother to set a good example for her children. This demonstrates that *Mēranaos* are aware that swearing is bad and should not be passed on to the younger generation. Respondent 5 further explained that using profanity would cause one to regret his/her actions, and as a woman, she believes that swearing would reduce a woman's worth. Notably, respondent 4 mentioned how she avoids the impulse to curse. She narrated that whenever she wants to curse, she reminds herself of the pain she may inflict to others. She explains this by saying, "*Sa isang culture na kapakapiya niyan na igira a myasogat a religion*" which means that a culture improves when it is dominated by religion.

Respondents 9 and 10 concluded that self-discipline and *sab'r* (steadfastness/patience) may always enhance a person's identity. Respondent 10 advised mothers not to swear or curse at their children since they would grow up with such habits. She also added that improving oneself requires self-control. As suggested by the respondent, everyone should learn to avoid negative traits that are not beneficial to the community. She has indeed displayed her religiosity by mentioning God in her concluding statement which shows that her being a Muslims predominates her being a *Mēranao*. In contrast, respondent 9, who is a homosexual, cites Catriona Gray, a Filipino Miss Universe winner, when epitomizing *sab'r*, and stressed that the world could become a better place if only people would try to understand one another. As he stated, if people would learn *sab'r* then "*negativity and chaos could not grow and*

foster.”

Although previous studies say that the *Mēranaos* are a product of their traditional culture (Reyes et al., 2012), the responses of the respondents on the issue of swear words indicates that in this current times, *Mēranao* identity has evolved: from a conservative, traditional and to a certain extent, closed people to a more accepting, humble and patient group of people. They are both able to strike a balance between the pride in themselves that comes from their culture and the humility that comes from their faith. They are aware of their inadequacies, and they make an effort to improve themselves by adhering to the principles of their religion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings demonstrate that recognizing the causes of swearing minimizes biases in assessing the identity of individuals. As Finn (2017) indicated, knowing why someone swears might help individuals distinguish between a dangerous situation and a typical discourse. Likewise, awareness of the function, form, and cause of swear words in certain group help individuals comprehend context and detect threats.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the major source of tension among *Mēranao* men, women, and homosexuals is their sensitivity to curse words in their own language which indicates that *Mēranaos* are highly emotional beings. It is also noteworthy to acknowledge that their sensitivity springs from social issues which involves honor and family, especially if these are articulated in their own language.

The curses of the *Mēranao* convey death and illness which makes it heavy to every *Mēranao* listener. Curse words for males often represent the killing issue in their society, such as “*Myabuno ka*” (May you be Killed), “*Tinimbak ka*” (May you die with a gunshot), “*Myasogat ka panglo*” (May you get hit by a bullet), and “*Myapolang kano*” (May you all get extinguished). On the other hand, curses against women concern delicate topics of childbirth and chastity, such as “*Myawit ka kambawata*” (May you die in childbirth), “*Datla/Petelaan*” (Flirt), “*Takiyo*” (Whore), and “*Darwaka*” (Immoral). While for homosexuals, it involves curses which associates religiosity such as “*Kyamorkaan ka o Allah*” (May you be punished by God).

From the findings, it can also be concluded that *Mēranao* men are sensitive to swear words, particularly when insulted about their mothers and spouses since women serve as Achilles’s heel for *Mēranao* men. As for women, swearing primarily affects them when it tarnishes their femininity while for gays, a swear word becomes relevant when it attacks their sexuality. Gays also tend to euphemize when swearing by resorting to gay lingo thereby lessening its effect. For the *Mēranaos*, gender thus shapes the person’s perspectives and behavior towards swearing. Its purpose and how it is received depends on the person’s sexual orientation. Ljung (2011), claims that swearing can range from emotional constructions to purely stylistic expressions but the respondents have shown that notions of swearing can be constructed along gender and religious lines also. Thus, it is crucial to understand the parameters of profanity in cultural communities.

Overall, it can be inferred that swearing, as a cultural practice in a way constructs the identity of the *Mēranaos*. This is because swearing is often associated with religion and gender which are crucial to the identity formation of the *Mēranaos*. The “goodness” and “badness” of swearing hinge on Islamic teachings and as shown by the respondents, there is a need to balance what is required by the situation (cultural and social) with what is required by Islam. This is captured by one respondent who said: “*Sa isang culture na kapakapiya niyan na igira a myasogat a religion,*” which means that *one culture becomes better when it is governed by religion*.

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