Article

Gender, Ethnicity, and Leadership in the Narratives of Meranao Women in the Philippines

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Abstract

The study focuses on site-specific narratives about leadership and how these narratives are influenced by gender and ethnicity. It explores the intersections of gender and ethnicity as a point of inquiry in the emerging roles of Meranao women in the field of leadership. Drawing on qualitative interviews with seven Meranao women leaders in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, in The Philippines, this paper examines the multilayered issues and challenges the women face in the field of leadership as they leap into higher decision-making positions. The study seeks to identify the factors that shape the leadership experiences of Meranao women leaders and their performative repertoire. The women choose these actions to create and maintain the commitment of the constituents around them. The study also seeks to examine how women leaders are able to perform their leadership roles given the opportunities and constraints. Finally, the study articulates the ways in which Meranao women are etching leadership in Meranao politics and development.

Results show that intersectional approaches to investigating leadership, taking into account the interconnected and overlapping factors of gender and ethnicity, can not only reveal the issues and challenges Meranao women leaders face, but also the individual agencies and strategies they use to overcome such constraints. The intersectionality approach challenges the essentialist framing of leadership and emphasizes the individual's social location, as reflected in the intersecting identities of these women. This intersectionality, as I reveal, allows for the emergence of a negotiated form of

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leadership among Meranao women, which requires a delicate balance between meeting social expectations as women and fulfilling their roles as leaders.

Keywords: *Leadership, Women Leaders, Meranao Women, Intersectionality, Performativity*

Introduction

The increasing diversity of global organizations has spurred a change in their leadership roles. To align with these altered roles, we would do well to strengthen our understandings of the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and leadership. As such, scholarship on leadership must expand, to incorporate the extensive ideological purpose of leadership and its performance (Chin and Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). Despite the stronghold and centralization of western ideologies on leadership, an attention to narratives can forge new intersectionalities among ethnicity, discourse, and gender, thus informing anthropological work.

Current scholarship on gender and leadership concedes on the fact that women experience more leadership struggles (Emmerik et al., 2010), despite current shifts in gender, domestic, professional, and social equality. More so, documentation in the domain of leadership is largely male-centric (Chin, 2011; Scott and Brown, 2006). This has become the case with women leaders in the Meranao society, a predominantly Muslim indigenous community in the Lanao province region of the island of Mindanao, in the Southern Philippines. Here, women leaders have over the past few decades, emerged as negotiators of their societal positions and cultural affordances, to produce a new wave of leadership.

In this study, I discuss to the ways through which, Meranao women have negotiated their power roles and have hence navigated through largely male-focused societies and filial communities (Eagly, 2007). Here, the women negotiated their subordinate roles to ultimately achieve prominence and audacity in their social and professional communities, and hence to draw on cultural opportunities to resolve otherwise debilitating lifestyles.

I argue that, despite a need to focus on gender during leadership knowledge production during, we must recognize the ethnic and societal experiences of women within cultural spaces, ultimately voicing and also authorizing the leadership requirements and voices of minority communities (Fitzgerald, 2003). Scholarship on these voices of intersectionality of gender and ethnicity can expose the realities of Meranao women, whose leadership is informed by wider discourses embedded in culture practices (Snaebjornsson et al., 2015). The current paper thus documents narrative reports of these women, in the Meranao community, and articulates their efforts to effectively perform their leadership roles both inside and outside of government organizations. As such, the paper identifies the perception, opportunities, and constraints that construct the experiences and performances of Meranao women as leaders in Meranao politics and development.

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The Meranao Women Leader Context

Lanao constitutes a political unit in the larger Moro province As presented in the 2007 Census, 35.9% of the larger population of 846,329 in Lanao del Norte is Islamic, whereas 55.7% is Roman Catholic. Here, the female and male populations are commensurate to each other (Lanao Del Norte Profile, 2017).

On Southern Lanao, the Meranaos ethnic group, constitute a majority (98.2%) of the population, at close to 100% (History of Lanao del Sur, 2017). Familial networks structure society within the community (Countries and their Cultures, 2001), where lineage overrides spatial and economic belonging.

Leadership positions of women elected to government do not necessarily translate into political influence, despite the rise of women elected to government posts (Ghosh 2015). The country has seen two female presidents, and emerged as 7th in the 2016 Global Gender Cap report (World Economic Forum, 2016), women's political involvement is impeded (Hega 2003). This lowered representation of women in leadership roles is not uncommon elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region, and globally (Women Board Directors of Asia report by Corporate Women Directors International, 2020).

The positioning of gender is crucial to conceptualizing women's leadership roles in regions such as Meranao where cultural pressures significantly limit opportunities for development. Yet, in these contexts, women can and frequently do effectively draw on their cultural heritage to skillfully negotiate these societal limitations. Here, conflicting or overlapping identities motivate leadership (Ospina and Foldy, 2009), where women resolve long standing discrimination.

This becomes the case in the Meranao political context, where women largely come from royal societally important families, evident in many of the election wins throughout the country (Vera 2010). Lanao well evidences this phenomenon, such as in the dynasties Adiongs, Alontos, Balindongs, and Dimaporos. Not surprisingly, these ethnic and gender identity issues pervade the social and political contexts in the province, yet women have come to increasingly negotiate these impediments through strategic resolution of heritage. Yet women politicians in Meranao have maintained awareness of the fact that these roles still require that they succeed their male relatives who have completed their terms as politicians, and hand down the roles to their female companions, so as to keep the role in the family; Hega (2003) labels these women as benchwarmers.

Meranao women who enter such roles must evidence their bloodline, where, according to (Macaagir, 1991), only women of or high status can have sultanate positions. Similarly, Meranao society generally sees its good women in subordinate leadership roles as ideal female Filipino Muslims, in that they comply with men's requests (Lacar, 1996). Concurrently, Meranao society and its Islam advocates the domestication of these women, which opposes Meranaos' democratic ideals (Nolasco 2004). The introduction of a formal system altered traditional conceptions of Meranao leadership;

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social class, lineage, wealth, strength of character, and wisdom. As such, election patterns and motives have now restructured powerlines and have reconfigured traditional conceptions of authority, descent and regional ties, thus problematizing loyalty, and leadership-society cohesion, sporadically culminating in societal tension. This disequilibrium has not been without benefit. Meranao women have used this to their advantage, in decision making, and in self-development. The tensions that democracy and the awareness of this democracy have constructed include have afforded Meranao women have opened political and sociocultural spaces for the previously heavily domesticated women to increase their mobility, resulting in these women assisting to structure Meranaos' current socio-economic upliftment, through these newly found mobilities, that is, through the alleviation of previous domesticating constraints. As Nolasco (2004) describes, Meranao women now at least have powerful but informal power in decision-making processes.

Methodological Framework

Historically, work on leadership has not been qualitative. As such, academic attempts to describe and hence analyze leadership is lacking this qualitative direction. The current study recognizes this void and purports to expose research that is qualitative-descriptive and ethnographic, while exposing the lived experiences of Meranao women.

The data for this study comprises a long-term interaction with seven women leaders in Meranao, working in both government and non-government organizations. The data is in the form of thick description through long-term interactions with these women, as they gradually opened up to me and shared with me intimate information which ultimately assisted me to decipher the intricate conceptions and networks of these women in their social, religious, and political climates. I collected this data in both Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, as two provinces adjacent to each other in Northern Mindanao.

I arranged participants selectively, by searching for individuals who were firstly women leaders prominent in politics and non-government agencies through media presence in Lanao del Norte or Lanao del Sur Meranao, and who had led for more than three years. I also sought to find women who had a strong popularity, either through media or otherwise. I discussed the experiences of these participants during their roles as leaders thus eliciting their narratives over several months.

The seven women, Nur, Siti, Malia, Aini, Noraisah, Samia, and Johai all hold significant roles in their societies. Nur, as a mother and community worker, holds the role of an executive director of an organization of Muslim women. in Bangsamoro, and is not a political party representative. Siti, as a journalist, environmentalist, and activist, is now running an NGO addressing the Marawi crisis[1], following her work to popularize Islamic media and of Muslim Personal Law, after joining the Bangsamoro Transition Commission and the Regional Legislative Assembly for the Muslim Mindanao region.2 Malia, an educator, journalist-researcher, and mother, is the founder and executive director of

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a foundation advocating children's literacy in Marawi and Lanao del Sur, and editor-in-chief of a publication promoting peace for Meranaos. Ainie, originally an engineer and mother, previously held posts at a government-owned corporation. Ainie, originally an engineer and mother, previously held posts at a government-owned corporation. Belonging to a political clan in Lanao del Norte, she began in politics through her husband, who also works in politics, Ultimately, Ainie has worked as municipal councilor in Lanao del Norte for several years. Noraisah, the wife of a former mayor-sultan, studied Communication. As the first female mayor of a municipality in Lanao del Sur she now occupies an administrative position in an NGO. Samia, a Sharia3 counselor and mother has worked with women in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, co-founding the first female Sharia counselors' organization and managed a legal aid clinic in Iligan. She currently works on educating Meranao women. Finally, Johai, a mother from a political family in Lanao del Sur, became the first female mayor in a municipality in Lanao del Norte, following after her husband.

In this study, I work to reconstruct these leadership roles and performances by analyzing the ideologies of these cultural insiders, who speak on leadership and the community's perceptions of their performance. I employ a framework of Leadership and Agency, to delineate the agencies of the participants, while drawing on agentic dominance and agentic competence (Ma, Rosette, Koval, and Livingston, 2016). Agentic competence suggests task functioning, skill, and good performance (Abele and Wojciszke, 2014) by the agent, while agentic dominance suggests the dominant and controlling behavior with a competitive functioning (Carrier, et. Al, 2014; Rudman et al., 2012). Within these two constructs, I include two subcomponents, agentic deficiency, as the stereotyped notion that women have limited agency with which to lead and agentic penalty, the backlash women face for their leadership roles.

Through a framework of intersectionality, I argue that the spheres of ethnicity, gender, and social class intersect to shape social realities (Stanley, 2009), Bloom and Erlandson (2003) support this notion, suggesting that individuals view the world through their discrete perspectives of social positions, and through their positionality in their social structures.

Presenting the Narratives

From the data and discussions, I elicit motifs of women's leadership, opportunities, and constraints and strategies in performing leadership. These motifs describe the intentions and experiences of these women, who have long attempted to resolve issues arising from the intersections of women's involvement.

Leadership Ideologies

According to Den Hartog and Dickson (2004), a culture requires that leaders to adopt approaches unique to that culture. Having occupied leadership positions for at least three years, all the women in

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my corpus, did express that they have attempted to, or have needed to, adopt leadership practices that uniquely address their specific cultural context. To construct these unique leadership practices, the women described leadership as personal in that it is predicated on the leader's values, and inclusive of and relational to their particular community, where the development of the community must become a hugely democratic process. All of the participants in this study emphasized the drawing from personal values when exercising and developing leadership, at which point, and an ability to understand their own values. Samia, in 2018, shared that she grounds her decisions in her values as a woman and as a Muslim, noting that "You decide [on best leadership practices] based on your accountability, transparency, doing your best being a woman, being a Muslim. That's why I believe that leadership should be the character [of the leader]."

All of the participants described the significance of aligning their ethics with their practices during communication, while their decision-making processes require that they periodically draw on their ethics. The participants all expressed that they see themselves as strong leaders, owing to their ethical practices. Noraisah suggested that the competence in judging is constantly tested, that is, during each decision, yet to minimize this instability, she draws on her values. These values contribute to the building of a clear moral compass and religious faith. She put it as that a leader must "Go back to 'who you are as a leader' Accountability—you need to handle the money of the government well. You are answerable to Allah 4(swt)." Ethical and righteous actions become anchored in religious doctrine and the adherence to that doctrine. As an example, one mayor challenged her husband to run against him in an election, after she disagreed with his mismanaging of economic issues, adhering to conventions of righteousness and social good. By doing this, she violated the family's honor, and their requests. As such, she saw it as vital that these decisions align with her leadership values and thus drawing on her religious ethical principles to structure her decision-making processes.

Most women prioritized inclusion of the whole community in effective leadership. These diverse communities must more effectively engage in collective problem solving and action, which Lambert et al. (1995) argue that effective leadership requires reciprocal processes and shared responsibility between society and leader characterized by agreed values and hopes, that enable communities to co-construct meanings that summon a common purpose. Ainie discussed the significance this co-leadership with society as a whole suggesting that, "that's how I engage, inclusive… immersed, I'm one with them, and do not detach myself from the elders, local leaders, they are your co-leaders eh, I call them my co-leaders. and I cannot do it alone."

Ainie described her leadership, and all leadership, should grow from inclusivity of all, reinforcing notions of democracy. The successful and sustainable elements of development emerge at times when people collectively work together, to motivate significant change in society. This approach invites further involvement in community. In Noraisah's view, leaders should assign agency to members of a community to significantly contribute to its development and to engagement within that community. Leader must make sense of their participation in communal development, to both themselves and to

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the community as a whole, once again reinforcing ideologies of participation by the whole community. This, according to most of the leaders, grounds sustainability of leadership and community, and assists the leaders to transcend the constraints.

Pathways to Effecting Leadership

Two categories of agentic bias towards women have emerged as salient in my data collection, pronounced when considering role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2012). These categories are the perception of women having agentic deficiency, that is, that women have insufficient agency to occupy leadership roles, and that women should experience agentic penalty as a social backlash for their actions and attitudes incongruent with their prescribed gender roles. My interest is on the ways in which women leaders fulfill these agentic requirements while mitigating these penalties when violating gender norms.

The discussions with these women foreground the fact that their competences, their functionalities, and performance mediate opportunities for women leaders to influence and lead the community, despite ideologies of women leaders as incompetent in these roles. Despite that these women leaders' dominant and controlling attitudes negate their congruence with cultural heritage and family, and summon backlash for subverting prescribed roles, these women challenge and question perceived stereotypes.

In their attempts to obtain increasingly stronger leadership positions, Meranao women must exercise agentic competence. In the process, these women develop a leadership capital, that is, an affordance that leaders convey by combining competence, integrity, and capacity for leadership (Renton, 2000). The capital that these Meranao leaders convey also includes the ascribed ownership they have of their leadership, through lineage and the like, the skills they have developed through their communal and formal training, their recourse to religious doctrine, that is, their Islamic faith, which serves as a moral compass, and the leadership networks.

Despite this extensive leadership capital and the affordances of competence that these women exhibit, a larger part of the community still sees these women as incompetent or as having agentic deficiency to materialize leadership skills (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1983). The women leaders' narratives evidence this underrepresentation, and more so, the fact that community contradictorily portrays the women as deficient, despite their agencies as competent. This contradiction does become detrimental to leadership as it requires these women to attain standards not required of men in the same roles. The informants described that Meranao society largely portrays these women as either soft and ineffective in their roles, or as domineering and manipulative of society. Siti repeated this, in discussing challenges throughout her career, expressing her frustration with the parochial mindset in their community. This mindset holds that women cannot enter public service. To counter this Siti notes the need to implement programs that translate women empowerment policies at the

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grassroots level. Siti question the methods with which to alter mindset, as she sees that this patriarchy continues to propagate itself. "You would need to craft legislation, yet who would make it happen on the ground?"

Reiterating her leadership over the years, Johai described this Meranao normative ordering of family members who run for political office as father, husband, daughter, or wife. Such prescribed norm increases male dominance, and reduces the agency of women to run for political office. Johai notes that "the norm in running for the political position is first the father, then the husband before the daughters and wife can be an option. That is one of the reasons why the LGU5 of Lanao is male dominated." She continues on to indicate that "those who are very religious will intimidate you, and they will not 'look' at you directly. You cannot influence them. They don't think that you can be a leader for them."

The discussions included the sectors they find challenging to influence, and which sectors disagree strongly with their leadership as women; These opponents to women's leadership, they informed, were commonly religious leaders. This notion aligns with Nur (2018), in that a significant male consensus believes that women cannot successfully accomplish roles of leadership. Johai reaffirms that "they don't value what you think. They don't value your contribution. These religious leaders don't think you can be leader." Furthermore, a portion of these women's networks attempt to undermine their capacity, and hence, confronting this resistance in a family-oriented community becomes challenging. Johai adds, "I often hear 'She is just a wife.' Most of my husband's sisters oppose that I run for the position." Ainie also supports this by explaining that "In meeting about peace and security, most of the councilors would prefer to listen to men leaders." Additional limitations enforced by the community include a lack of mobility, through the stoppage of women's participation in public engagements owing to theocultural constraints and pervasive segregation between the sexes.

These above factors all contribute to the perception of agentic deficiency towards women, reauthorizing traditional gender roles. The cultural build up, and the cultural lineage inherent in Meranao Islamic society, has created a solid grid within which women find it arduous to shift away from their roles, thus removing much of their agency in performing roles devoid of their normative functioning. Male leaders transfer these cultural and traditional ideologies into expectations and practices, so as to position these women against these ideologies. As these women identify with these communities as advocate of communal needs and consensus, these women have difficulty in shifting away from normative roles of women. Hence, women's agencies to counter normative expectations become misaligning with societal convention, or finding strategic ways to negotiate these societal norms to become women leaders.

As Meranao women leaders confront these challenges and are perceived as incapable by society, the informants explained that they communicate their agentic dominance when asserting themselves. This dominance signifies women's suggested competitive controlling behavior vis-a-vis a as they

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perform leadership (Carrier et al., 2014; Rudman et al., 2012), a behavior further intensified at times when these women become disenfranchised through societal ideologies, and when they hence voice their ideologies. For instance, all participants note that they assert themselves in ways stereotypical to this society, that is, lacking directness, formality, and submissive to men's requests for dominance and control. Here, Noraisah suggests that when the state or local council disagrees with her, she succeeds in defending her stance by beginning with personal informal issues not related to work. As Noraisah indicated, "I do insist. They answer anyway. I then try to start an informal conversation but not about politics." This reversion to trivial narratives thus becomes an effective strategy with which to effect this agentic dominance.

The informants also explained that they exhibit this agentic dominance at times when they refuse to comply with societal constraints within their communities, suggesting that they have no choice but to create an alternative reality for themselves. One such alternative reality, as one participant revealed, is to develop herself by continuing her studies and hence to avoid confinement to the home and domestication. The informants thus suggested various tactics with which to challenge the norm. One informant shared that her educative development has well prepared her to voice her intentions and to draw on whichever platform facilitates the maintenance of her professional and societal prominence. Despite the danger in voicing her opinion, the woman suggested that she relentlessly vocalizes her concerns. However, this stance may also motivate the intensification of negative stereotypes of women, by romanticizing a victim story, and framing these women as man-hating powermongers, thus alienating supporters. Despite these potential pitfalls and societal ostracizings, these women persist in risking their status so as to effect change in society. As Noraisah shares, "I was very clear with my intentions, I don't care if they get angry at me, so long as I am doing the right thing."

These women also expressed their awareness of their own salient personalities, a trait which contributes to their being heard. Ainie explains that, "I have that strong personality when I debate, whether I am wrong or not, I will stand with my decision. I want my voice to be heard." This firmness with decisions has contributed to shaping these women's professional and societal circles. Noraisah shared that she sways her own clan, particularly at times when attempting to afford women freedom of choice. As a leader, Noraisah has realized the urgency in altering women 's engagement in society, suggesting the following, "I was trying my best to change the rules of engagement, they have been in the position for years but still, there's too much to be done … although I was aware that I could not do it all by myself."

Through their positionalities, the informants have the capacity to counter the agentic deficiency others in their communities attempt to impose upon them through a certain stigmatization of women. Consequently, the women experience social backlash for attempting to counter their prescribed gender roles, and thus experience an agentic penalty (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2008; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Rudman and Phelan, 2008). In the Meranao context, ethnicity embodies prescribed gender roles, and the women experience an agentic penalty for violating normative gender rules. This agentic penalty

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experience is grounded on from both prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes of the women, which the informants discuss in their narratives. Siti describes being "boxed in" by Meranao culture, where she desires freedom from cultural limitations such as limitations on visibility by staying home.

Meranao thus sees its women leaders as a sociocultural inconsistency, which Noraisah acknowledges by commenting on this anomaly. "As Meranao [leaders, women] are torn between doing what is right and being submissive and doing nothing." Noraisah holds the record of being the first female occupying the highest position in her male-dominated local government, despite strong resistance to this role. These women leaders continuously experience a dilemma in that they must select among several options, including their subservience to the expectations of the community, to gain approval by the community, and to operate selflessly, all while subverting the traditional roles of women. Public opinion for these women is central to their maintaining their reputation, where reputation parallels and grounds their success as leaders. This dilemma between intention and compliance positions Meranao women leaders in a compromising position.

The informants generally all agreed on the fact that men in Meranao communities disagree with women occupying decision-making positions. This consensus becomes significant owing to the overarching transcendental influence men have over leadership and their propensity to define women leaders' trajectories. To this, Siti acknowledges the significance in realizing this injustice, while acting against this injustice at the appropriate times. Siti suggests that "there are other men who will not look at it kindly that you are there—especially the religious groups. I'd rather be in the background. You create your own timing [to fit in] somehow."

These ideologies resonate with Malia's experience, who announces her frustration of being tagged as a nagger, at times when she suggests a project to others. Malia also informed that at times, she asks her male peers for approval, simply to silence the peers. As Malia explains, "The struggle, as a woman, is to be heard, to be relevant. We are not taken seriously. It was approved for the sake of accepting it (referring to proposed programs)." These agentic penalties include the misalignment of position and workload. At times, women are penalized, whereas at other times, women are not recognized correctly despite their prominent roles and effectively accomplishing these roles. To reaffirm this paradox, Noraisah agrees that her peers and society does not acknowledge her effectively, more so in gatherings

At times of risk, Meranao women leaders must back down, and yet are constantly challenged to reaffirm their leadership, expected to submit to men, as Noraisah shares: "It is hard to be a Meranao woman leader, they expect you to be submissive." Women defying others' expectations, frame their male peers as victims of the women's capriciousness. Noraisah noted that as her husband filed for divorce during her battle like candidacy against him, where she was seen as the community culprit.

Meranao women leaders also find it arduous to garner support from peers and family in which Ainie indicates when describing that her family have advised her that politics is the wrong path: As Ainie states, "There was no support from the family yet, since it's different because I am a woman, I

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am an engineer with a good job in a corporation, but I still choose this other path because of that bigger passion to help my community." Moreover, in decision-making processes, Ainie reinforces that the participants confirm the existence of the stereotypical notion of men having more authority: "I can still feel that sometimes men have more authority, especially in settling disputes."

The informants expressed that they generally women experienced exaggerated conceptions of guilt for their inability to enact traditional gender, instilling in them conceptions that they failed to fulfil their responsibilities. In the family, this inability invites conflict, where, as Ainie notes, the husband expects the woman to prioritize her domestic duties, "My husband was thinking that I have more time with them, and I can attend to their needs immediately. But … even if I am here, I take lunch in the office, more or less, I am not satisfied because I have not fulfilled my role as a mother." Ainie experienced guilt and remorse for her inability to attend her children's events, as an executive director who has received criticism for pursuing such a career.

In discussions of extent to which the informants' networks become involved in the careers of the informants, Siti shared the fact that her family is a prominent one in politics naturally rendered her as a political figure. However, her father passed away prior to her finding a marriage partner, and this responsibility was assigned to her family at a very young age. Meranao adat (customary law), and Islamic law has it that the parents select this marriage partner for a woman. Malia also married early, though her marriage remained active for only several years, after which she was separated. Both of these women were married early in life, and were thus required to become domesticated and hence to renounce or at least delay professional aspirations, even to the extent where they leave their studies, such as in the case of Samia.

The informants all conveyed that they attempt to change social structures which they believe disadvantage particular groups. For this, the informants expose dominant behaviors that unjustly violate social roles. However, in the process, their communities tend to see these women negatively, and move to de-agentify these women through accusations of weak potential to accomplish leadership. Agentic deficiency is thus linked to weakened leadership potential in these communities. Communities surrounding these women devalue their agentic competence through accusations that their gender devalues their agentic competence: These accusations are mostly implicit, and become motivated by the fact that these women behave dominantly and thus violate communal social roles, and threaten to subvert established social hierarchies. Their communities negatively evaluate these women when attempting to alter social structure and hierarchies, as motives to maintain existing social hierarchies are usually strong (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).

Leadership Strategies

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In the previous section, I discussed that women are confronted with tensions within the constructs agentic competence and deficiency, and agentic dominance and penalty. These positionalities create pathways within which women must select between work and domestic life, which at times become quite drawing on these women's affective states. In the process of professional development, the women encounter criticism for prioritizing their career over domestic responsibilities, yet, as they progress as professionals, Meranao women leaders become aware that prioritizing their career requires a significant amount of deliberation.

In transcending their constraints, the Meranao women leaders managed to transcend agentic deficiency and penalty, to perform leadership through role-acceptance, self-development, and self-management. Validating this role-acceptance includes the recognition of leadership potential and the learning to cope with expectations of the community as a whole. Overcoming confidence barriers and challenges both emerged as key constructs to role-acceptance, as some of the informants advised in the many discussions and observations.

The informants repeatedly discussed that to aid self-development gaining confidence, creating personal support networks, and expansion of these networks significantly contributed to their goals. In addition to this, the informants discussed the significance of guidance from more accomplished people who acted as mentors, a service which the informants, as Meranao women leaders were happy to pass on to the community and hence to those in need of the same assistance. Through strategies of self-management, these women describe that they generally focus on learning to manage their careers. The leaders are distinctly knowledgeable of the fact that women's personal demeanor can have marked ramifications in their communities, as a delicate balance between acceptance by and exclusion from community, in their efforts to become leaders. To receive acceptance, these women noted that it is significant to exhibit tough characteristics and to negotiate stereotypical attitudes and habits. In terms of contextual influences, their trajectory included learning skills and behaviors, thus assisting them to regulate or sharpen their decision-making.

Progressing as Meranao Women Leaders

The narratives by the Meranao women leaders as informants to this study have revealed several significant factors. Meranao society does not exclude nor deny these women leadership positions, but rather, alters the characteristics of their inclusion to the extent where the women must draw on the support of male peers and family. While males do not find it necessary to develop their educational and professional training in order to achieve these leadership roles, this training is vital for women to vindicate themselves from accusations of wrongdoing and incapacity to effectively perform their leadership roles. Similarly, these women find themselves continuously needing to negotiate tensions between applying modern leadership and reappropriating cultural and religious traditions.

The narratives elicited in this study expose the impediments these women experience that when

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entering into leadership roles. An increasing number of women have effectively negotiated their success, yet this becomes a continuous struggle for liberation from their positionalities as subjugated to men. However, the spaces afforded to Meranao women to negotiate these patriarchal constraints are adequate for social change, and hence to expand their agencies as effective leaders. Kandiyoti (1999) discusses the patriarchal bargain, which in the case of the Meranao women leaders, can be appropriated to influence women's identities. These women's agentic strategies intend to counter agentic deficiency and penalty through such patriarchal bargaining, while employing strategies such as self-acceptance, self-development, self-management.

Meranao women have found themselves in an interstice between the principles of formal institutions and the traditional Meranao government. The formal institution in governance, which emerged in the global north, , creates a disequilibrium in that it largely ignores Meranao religion, kinship, and community values, as Nolasco (2004) notes. Meranao leaders are traditionally chosen through their social class, lineage, wealth, strength, wisdom, and character, yet their power is contingent on the size of the communities they govern. With the introduction of the foreign formal system, leaders patterns began to change, the standards for which, shifted from the Qur'an to democratic ideals. This shift has required the restructuring of power lineages and authority, a process which in largely ignores descent group and regional relationships, thus producing a disequilibrium. This ignoring thus culminates in divided loyalty and yet the allegiance of Meranao leaders and individuals, bringing about conflicts, which at times summon violence.

For Meranao women leaders, this disequilibrium however, has motivated the development of favorable outcomes, particularly in the decision-making process of these leaders. At present, Meranao women contribute substantially to the development of Meranao socio-economic climates. For example, an increasing number of Meranao women are now working in non-domestic commitments. Meranao women have achieved "powerful but informal power in decision-making processes" (Nolasco, 2004), indicating that leadership for these Meranao women no longer constitutes a glass ceiling, as Eagly (2007) describes for other contexts. Women's subordinate roles do not need to silence them in their efforts to pursue active roles in their community. Rather, culture-specific platforms and circumstances, though not necessarily favorable, provide opportunities to lead, when effectively negotiated and drawn on.

The study indicates that the educational and networking affordances developed by these women have become central to their leadership. Their political networks, the religious doctrines to which they adhere, and their filial ties all become crucial when understanding their development, as women leaders in Meranao. Two pivotal social units support the leadership roles that these women pursue. These are kinship and community, thus validating the traditional local governance system, within which, kin and community constitute the building blocks. Education and professional background assist these women to develop their credibility and to warrant the endorsement of others, such as elders and males.

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The incongruities affecting Meranao women leaders are largely a product of the incongruities of their socially prescribed ethnic and gender roles and leadership roles. Within these incongruities women are often praised for having leadership skills yet can be viewed as powerless and indecisive (Eagly, 2007).

The expansion of women's rights may face resistance, from, for example, cultural and theocratic systems, giving emphasis, as. Susan Moller Okin (1999) does, to the debate between women's and religious rights. Yet the international community focusing on gender and development has evidenced its intention to sustain the memory and awareness of national religious particularities in various historical, cultural, and religious systems must be remembered. Aligning with this, Meranao women attempt to balance their conforming to religious normative values and practices while concomitantly subverting societal stereotypes. Despite propagating their gender egalitarian views, the narratives of the Meranao women expose that these women feel compelled to retreat from interactions in ethnic settings, consequently reinforcing the maintenance of rigid gender hierarchy. This confirms the arguments by Pyke and Johnson (2003), in that ethnic culture becomes a symbolic repository of patriarchy, which obscures or at least limits diversity in ethnic gender practices and equality.

Conclusion

Meranao women leaders draw on and negotiate the many tensions discussed throughout this paper to initiate their careers, to control their trajectories, and to execute their roles as leaders. Here, intersections of gender and ethnicity motivate the development of constraints and opportunity (Dill, 2002), while these intersections create a unique kind of identity (Shields, 2008) in that they allow a negotiated form of leadership.

This study has presented that late modernity has provided Meranao women with the impetus to occupy leadership positions that have long been culturally taboo for women. Modern conceptions of gender equality have directed women to increasingly engage with society, and to participate in the leadership landscape, despite that men, as evident in the narratives within this study, remain aloof to such notions. Now that the link between hierarchy and patriarchy has weakened, Meranao women have found new platforms with which to pursue their leadership careers. In performing these leadership roles, the Meranao women leaders stress their agency to improve as professionals and leaders, while confronting the challenges of the traditional Meranao leadership context. As kin and community serve as foundations of the Meranao governance system, women must have support from these two social units, to thus facilitate the process of Meranao women's acceptance and active ownership of the positions they are occupying.

The study has also shown that the Meranao notion of traditional leadership and expectations of community shape how women perform leadership roles, where women constantly negotiate their leadership positions and assume proactive roles in the construction of context.

Moreover, in the process of assuming their traditional and modern expectations as leaders, the data indicated that the Meranao women attempt to resolve patriarchy while seeking opportunities to explore, experiment, and focus on their development. Here, the leaders work collaboratively with the community. A negotiated form of leadership in this sense suggests being mindful of but not subservient to hierarchical boundaries.

Observing the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity in leadership assists in the articulation of the leadership realities of Meranao women, who are informed by wider discourses influenced and embedded in the Meranao culture. Multiple layers of identity, that is, gender and ethnicity, produce particular types of leadership, where ethnicity and gender influence the performance of leadership as does leadership performance influence expectations of gender and ethnicity (Ospina and Foldy, 2009). Meranao women are not passive recipients of their identity position, but rather practice aspects of identity.

The research affirms the use of an intersectionality framework in challenging essentialist framing in leadership, particularly in the Meranao context, where women live multiple identities and are members of multiple categories and social groups. This multiplicity assist Meranao women to articulate their own realities and to contest the prevailing notion of the universal female leader, and discourses of homogeneity, as coined by Fitzgerald (2003).

Moreover, the focus on the women leader's narratives shows how these narratives become instrumental in negotiating political cum social identities. These narratives can be inflected, nuanced, and reworked strategically, in order to negotiate group identity through shared interests and goals. Simultaneously, narratives are potentially contestable resources that are susceptible to recontextualization and translation across contexts. Such an intricate set of identities places Meranao Women in a trajectory of interactions as temporalized activities, as well as in networks of practices in which they participate, express themselves, and reflect.

In the case of Meranao women, it is evident that we lack literature that articulates the leadership repertoire of that Meranao women have developed as they embrace role-acceptance, as they strive for self-development, and as they gradually lead through self-management.

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Footnotes

[1] On May 23, 2017, armed clashes between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Islamic State-inspired extremists broke out in Marawi City in Lanao del Sur province, southern Philippines. The five-month-long armed conflict displaced more than 300,000 individuals.

[2] The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is located in the Southern part of the Philippines. The Late President Cory C. Aquino on August 1, 1989, created it by virtue of the Republic Act No. 6734, which was signed into Law. The plebiscite was conducted in the proposed area of ARMM on November 17, 1989. These were the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

[3] Sharīʿah, also spelled Sharia, the fundamental religious concept of Islam, namely its law, systematized during the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Muslim era (8th–9th centuries CE).

[4] In Arabic, "Subhanahu wa ta'ala" translates as "Glory to Him, the Exalted" or "Glorious and Exalted Is He." This indicates an act of reverence and devotion toward God.

[5] The Provincial Government Office of Lanao