



Mixed marriages

A COMMITMENT By Tingting Cojuangco (The Philippine Star) Updated March 22, 2009 12:00 AM

Holy Week and days of relaxation and religiosity bring to mind Muslim and **Christian** marriages. It all began with the marriage of Shariff Kabungsuwan from Malacca in 1515 to Putri Tunina, **daughter** of the Manobo chieftain. He **married** a second time to another Manobo, Surabanon.

Legends say that Muslims who sailed in a *caldron* for the Philippines were either royalty, merchants or missionaries of Arab descent from South China, Indonesia, Borneo and the Malay Peninsula. They docked in Sulu, Central Mindanao, Palawan, southern Luzon and the Visayas. The titles of these early missionaries were *auliya*, *makhdumin*, *sayid*, and *shariff*, indicating that they were well-versed in the doctrines and laws of Islam. From them, the people of Sulu in 1380 and Mindanao in 1515 learned about Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah.

Spreading Christianity, on the other hand, was not necessarily a tool for colonialism. The Treaty of Tordesillas encouraged seafarers and discoverers to venture to faraway lands after Christopher Columbus returned from the new world. The world was then divided between Spain and Portugal: east of Cape Verde belonged to Portugal and west to Spain. The Christian missionaries were Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Recollects — they all came accompanying these adventurers in search of lands to conquer, to escape oppression or participate in abundant sea trading. From them we learned of our Holy Bible.

In both Christianity and Islam, there were certain traditions and customs that obviously could be tolerated, while others were incompatible and unacceptable to both. But, on this side of the world, no matter what indoctrination or approach were introduced with a new set of beliefs, there were certain native values that could not be uprooted. They were planted long before the introduction of these two religions.

The Muslim husband is allowed four wives. Kabungsuwan married three times. Being allowed to marry four times has always fascinated Christians because few know that the first wife and her **children** are able to accept the second wife, the succeeding ones and their children.

The first wife can be very assertive before and after her husband takes in another **wife**. And why not? Her permission is needed for the husband to do so. In the household hierarchy, the first wife takes the prime status with the second and succeeding wives taking on subordinate roles. The management of the household rests on her, with major housekeeping activities remaining within the sphere of her influence.

This is not to say that Moro women are not held in high esteem. They always have been respected — just read the 980 A.D. epic Darangen.

"The *Inoyanan* or Sultan called all the *datus* to an assembly. Anyone could present a problem, which was discussed in order to arrive at a common answer. This answer was presented to the *pameli'iyán* who approved or returned it for further discussion. After a decision was taken, it was presented to the *panabiya'an* who likewise approved or returned it for more discussion. If approved, it was presented to the *kasango'an a Adil* who approved or disapproved it. If disapproved, the question was now thrown to the ladies, whose decision the assembly had binded itself to accept."

The women had the final say in all those meetings!

Christians, especially women, wonder if the Muslim wife does not feel insecure, throws tantrums and delivers threats. They do, since their husbands may at anytime take in someone else to share her bed and responsibilities, rights and privileges.

My observation is that in the 21st century Moro men generally do not marry four times anymore. Braver and bolder women know about women's rights and liberation. Schooling has introduced modern values. Some women won't nurture supportive roles to their husbands and his other wives. Communication facilities, especially cell phones, have allowed the fast movement of information with pictures, an addition to a woman's spies or friends that hinder married men from pursuing another woman. Then there is the high cost of living, which discourages men from maintaining a very large family.

Muslim men face the responsibility of convincing their future Christian wives to convert to Islam and have their children raised in the Islamic faith. Young Muslim women are less likely to marry non-Muslim men. They may actually feel infatuation for Christian men, but they tend to subvert those feelings. Muslim boys are given the opportunity to explain to their parents their desire to live out their dreams, while few women can.

Parents are likely to insist on their children's adherence to pure marriages. Don't we Christian do the same, whether for religion or race? As parents, we insist our decisions take precedence, whether it's about our children's [relationships](#) or schooling. But as Nellie or Mitzi Gaynor sings in *South Pacific*, "We've got to be taught from year to year to hate all the people your family hates, you get to be carefully taught... It goes on to the color of the skin where many judgments begin."

Now, a very unique situation are the Royal Nonis of Lanao Sur. Vice Mayor Sultan Quirino Sampiano Sultan of Baroraw, Balabagan, explained the Noni lineage to me. It is a revered union that began in Lanao del Sur with the marriage of the Iranun Royal Amatunding of Butig municipality, to the sister of Sultan Kudarat of Maguindanao, whose name was Gayang. It was an accidental marriage, this royal marriage between a half-brother and half-sister. The consequence? Purity of blood.

The story goes like this:

Shariff Kabungsuan, a prince from Johore, alighted in Tubok (now Malabang) and married the daughter of Datu Gandar of Malabang. Their marriage was blessed with a son named Saripada Maka'alang.

Maka'alang married a Bila-an woman and begot Bankaya. Bankaya married three women. First was his aunt Maganot. Maganot and Bankaya begot the father of Kudarat. The other wife of Bankaya begot Dimasangkay and the third wife begot Gugu Sarikula.

Dimasankay married two women, one from Simuay, Maguindanao, and the other from Butig, Lanao del Sur. From his Butig wife he begot a girl, Omon, and from his Simuay wife he begot a boy, M'Borong.

The separated half-siblings Omon and M'Borong lost track of each other. Then they met and **married** each other without knowing they were half-brother and half-sister. Their offspring were known as the Noni, signifying purity of blood because of the intermarriages of both royalty. Omon and M'Borong begot a son, Amatunding, whose great-grandparents were of royal blood from Kabungsuwan, and his women, the royal wife Angintabu. Amatunding married his first cousin Gayang, sister of Qudarat and daughter of Buisan. The offspring of Amatunding and Gayang marked the beginning of the Maranao ancestry. Interesting how Maranao intermarriages produced royalty!

Ascendancy from the Noni lineage is a political advantage. "One who does not belong to a Noni family may surely lose in a political exercise. If two Nonis compete, their financial and political status will foretell their victory." Their educational background is regarded as less important than their family lineage.

We cannot overlook that respect for parents is a value that has been ingrained in the very core of our society. This is a given for both Muslim and Christian families.

Commonalities do bind us all. We're all brothers, Muslim and Christian Filipinos, heirs to the 7,107 islands of the Philippines. Two currents in our Filipino culture that run parallel and have mutually enriched each other over the centuries.

One religion came from Arabia, the other from Spain, but our blood and our skin, our minds and our hearts, whatever faith we profess, were born in our land.

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