TAMBARA 23 (2006): 143-164

Reflections on the Tboli Textile at the Cusp of Socio-Cultural Change

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Tnalak, the impressive stretch of meter upon meter of *krungon* (abaca fiber) so tightly woven in an organized schema of abstract, geometric configurations of black, reddish-brown, and pale ecru of abaca, echoes esoteric narratives of their weavers and of the Tboli tribe itself. This distinct Tboli textile exists not only as an ordinary object, but functions as a conduit of messages communicating the tribe's shared cultural meanings and collective imagination. By exploring the factors involved in the weaving of tnalak and in the tnalak itself, one understands the cultural milieu that produces it so that its symbolic nuances are revealed.

Indeed, one may be able to get a comprehensive view of the tnalak and the Tboli tribe by considering the different contextual facets which shaped the cloth and its weavers. Though one might not be a Tboli, it is possible to understand and appreciate the creative process of tnalak weaving as experienced by the weaver herself. The individual experience of the Tboli weaver, through tnalak, is thus "rendered in a form accessible to the community" (Layton 1991, 195).

Paul Ricouer (1976, 16) says:

> My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public. Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of the lived experience as lived.

To perhaps identify it as one among a wide range of textiles, the word tnalak has been ossified by common parlance, rendered conveniently as a noun. Tnalak comes from *talak* meaning 'center,' 'path,' or middle (Pastor-Roces 1991) that "somehow conveys a notion of 'centering.'" Syntactically an adjective or verb rather than a noun, "t'nalak [is] clearly not categorizing objects but an ordering of a physical and spiritual environment, into a state of equilibrium" (302).

Of Dreams and Spirits

Dreaming for the Tboli is an intimate conversation with the spirits, and its fruits are their folktales, beliefs, and crafts (*Hinabing Panaginip* 1999). Therefore, tnalak weaving is an experience of the sacred. As the weaver dreams, her soul travels to a house where a weave is spread which she must see from a distance before it disappears. If she looks too closely, she cannot weave the countless designs coming from the spirits. Ricouer says:

> [W]e are here crossing the threshold of an experience that does not allow itself to be inscribed within the categories of *logos* or proclamation and its transmission or interpretation... The bond between myth and ritual attests in another way to this non-linguistic dimension of the Sacred.

The element of the Sacred does not end with the dream. Rather it is present in each stage of tnalak weaving. Pastor-Roces says:

> [I]f, indeed, ritual and other matters spiritual constituted the real context within which these textiles were produced, it makes sense, so to speak, that these textiles reflect the qualities of ritual: an interiority, rather than bravura impact; an esoteric, rather than exoteric nature; a high level of precision that defies the normal requirements of making a cloth that "looks good" (or, in a substantial number of cases, that "looks" anything beyond the austere fact of cloth); and a visual protocol that seems unchanging (266).

Tnalak is a tangible expression of the intimate communion of the Tboli tribe with the spirits who are the source of their surroundings and their culture. Governed by the taboos of social custom, the weaver is compelled to weave what was shown to her in the dream lest illness befalls her (*Hinabing Panaginip*). After gathering and stripping the abaca fiber, the weaver stretches it on a bamboo frame and begins the laborious *ikat* process by first tying the *lendek* (knots) before dyeing the colors black (from the leaves of the *knalum* tree) and reddish-brown (from

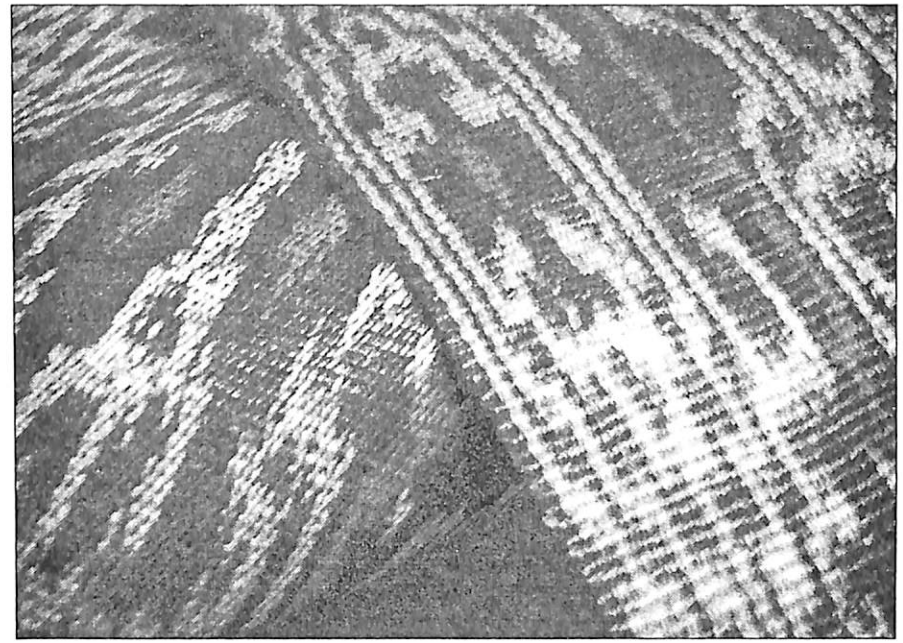

Figure 1. A tnalak weave showing highly stylized human and frog designs.

Figure 2. A tnalak design spelling the name of Lang (Dulay), National Artist for abaca-ikat weaving awarded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts in 1998.

pieces of root from the *loko* tree) (Pastor-Roces; Casal 1978). Taking several weeks to tie, the knots look like an "infinite quanta of atomic flecks," (Pastor-Roces, 280). "T'boli women do not sketch or draw the design but merely follow a mental picture" of the symmetrical design and, using their bodies, are able to measure each distance (Casal, 142-143). It usually takes two months to finish a piece of tnalak; it could take more if the woman's help is needed during planting or harvest time (Pastor Roces).

Pastor-Roces describes the strenuousness of working in the dim light of a thatched hut on stilts:

> ...the weaver inevitably puts her eyesight and the motor functions of her arms and hands through severe tests. The intricate weaving in of warp threads demands intense, unfailing coordination of eye and hand movement. Furthermore, the loom was held taut by her lower torso, which meant an unchangingly rigid position for long hours, helped only by the foot brace, which nonetheless, required an unmitigatingly still outstretch of the legs.

Weaving the textiles mean literally, hundreds of thousands of the tiniest finger and arm maneuvers, while the body remained tensely upright, and indeed, immobile, except for the subtle movements backwards and forwards to maintain an even tension on the warp. In effect, the loom was the woman. Her body was the technology, for she only had at her disposal some sticks and rods and measures of thread. The textile all but appeared as though issuing from her belly (301).

As the weaver is harnessed to the *gono mowol* (backstrap loom), her field of vision is limited to millimeters of thread lengths, while allowing the hands only the most surgically involved movement (301). "Representing an infinitude tedium that is difficult to imagine except in terms of some kind of trance situation," weaving thus involves a "divine assistance, summoning transcendent levels of concentration enveloped by taboos, and of, indeed, a female culture of prolonged and laborious physical plateaus..." (280).

Boi Diwa Ofung says, "Weaving is the weaver's desire. She desires for it and asks the spirits for wisdom and help in making a design. Though she cannot see the spirits, she feels their presence beside her." To the rhythmic drone of the loom, the weaver invokes the *fudalu*, the spirit of the abaca. In the delicate tension of the weaver's desire and guidance of the spirits, she then reaches the ethereal equilibrium that is tnalak—a centering. "The process is difficult, just as the life of a

katutubo (a native person –ed.) is a struggle.The weaver does not eat, her muscles from her shoulders to her legs ache. but she does it with joy," says Boi Diwa.

A Tboli believes and feels that the spirits are present in a beautifully woven tnalak. "When I see a tnalak, my hair stands on end because the spirit is there. It is beautiful," says Michael Angelo, a Tboli teacher at Sta. Cruz Mission College. Pastor Roger of the Holobong Group Cooperative attests to the spirits' presence and says that he feels the spirit in his grandmother's work because the tnalak is beautiful. The sacred resonances transcend the weaver and her work extends to the tribe as the tnalak acts as a space for dialogue. By granting the non-weaver passage, the tnalak proves worthy of its name's signification as a "path."

Tnalak and Social Interaction

By providing a clearing through its symbolic web of cultural meanings, tnalak makes possible social interaction. It embodies a ritual power and thus plays a crucial role in social life. Tnalak "communicated concepts and took part in the rituals during which such concepts were brought to bear on social life." (Layton, 93)

One of the Tboli folktales, *Bong Datue* (Great Big Datu) describes *Nga Hamiton* as "the ideal maiden since she was proficient in weaving" (Casal, 143). Folkbeliefs also set a system of taboos for the tnalak. Casal enumerates a few:

1. A woman carrying raw abaca fiber should not be stopped on her way. She must proceed undisturbed on her journey since, if stopped, the weaver would fall sick.
2. Children are not allowed near a loom in use, for if they touch it, they will succumb to an illness.
3. For the same reason, neither should anyone touch a weaver's instruments, according to the general belief that similarly prohibits the touching of farmers' or hunters' instruments (141).

A woman skilled in weaving is as respected and highly esteemed in Tboli society as a man skilled in battle. Boi Diwa Ofung enumerates the admired qualities of a weaver: kind, feminine, determined and dedicated t

her work, gracious and can adjust to all kinds of people. If the tnalak were a person, Boi Diwa sees it as a woman who is kind and generous; who exercises leadership and knows how to protect the rights of her companions.

Lemi-e Logi is the taboo that forbids a woman to have intimate relations with a man while she weaves. Lang says "an unmarried weaver is preferable as any contact with a man would disturb the arrangement of the fiber and ruin the design." Lang laughingly recounts about the husband of a woman to whom she was teaching the design being incensed when his wife would not go near him. This is how integrated a woman is to the tnalak she weaves in such a way a man cannot directly touch it. Rather, it is through the weaver that he comes into contact with the textile.

The tnalak has a myriad of uses, making it important and valuable in Tboli culture, from the most quotidian experiences as using it for clothing, to gathering wealth through the barter system, to being used as the dowry of a would-be bride, to the playing of a key role in the "*mo'ninum*" (marriage festival). The *kumo* [blankets woven by the bride's relatives and friends] consist of three pieces of finished woven materials (their edges stitched together, lengthwise), which designs form an unbelievably successful whole—"the side pieces' bands framing the central piece's medley of Tboli designs" (Casal, 145). The kumo "take several months to finish...[and] parallel rows of horizontal bamboos have to be set up all along the mo'ninum house's length...to be able to hang all of them" (80). The mark of a premium tnalak is the orderly symmetry of the geometric designs, the evenness of the dyeing, the tightness of the weave, the brilliance of the dye, the softness and the sheen of the whole cloth. Tnalak is appreciated because they are well-made and not just because they look beautiful. The qualities of a well-woven tnalak are testament to the weaver's skill. "It's [tnalak] importance is the identity of the Tbolis because no other tribe but ourselves know how to weave tnalak, and this helps our tribe so the Tboli-ness of our culture will never disappear. It shows our tribe is unique," proudly say two Tboli teenagers studying in a college in the nearby city of Koronadal.

The style of tnalak reflects the culture of Tboli society. "Style refers to the formal qualities of a work of art. A style is characterized by the range of subjects it depicts, by the regular shapes to which elements of these subjects are reduced, and by the manner that components of the art work are organized into a composition" (Layton, 150). To the outsider,

all tinalak designs are the same. But to a weaver, "what may look like a meaningless figure to an outsider, may represent a leaf" (Bayog 2004, Section 4). Even if the abstract pictorial representation is the same, one would see upon scrutiny that the geometrical designs are different, says Michael Angelo. The differences are very subtle and one must develop an eye for it. Each of these designs says something about the culture of the Tboli, says Boi Diwa. The *banggala* (house with a person inside) shows the many mental divisions in a traditional Tboli house because their men have many wives. The *klum* (shield) was used by the Tboli for self-defense against enemy tribes who wanted to seize their territory. Other designs come from their surroundings such as the *klenge* (crab), the back of the *snobo-bun* (frog), the skin of the *sawo* (python), the wings of the *kofi* (a kind of bird), and the *halo* (a lizard they eat). The *gmayaw* (a mythical bird) is a design from their forefathers, and the *tofi* is the name of the person who made such design. These designs are retained in the tribe's collective imagination, becoming part of their traditional style which the weavers teach to the next generation of weavers.

For tnalak woven with the traditional designs, the three colors have not changed because that is what the spirits have taught, Boi explains. The Tboli weaver, therefore, expresses and reifies her tribe's collective force through her fidelity to a 'deeply held protocol' to keep that tradition alive. "[A] culture has life only in as much as it forms the convictions and beliefs of a set of people, who act in certain ways because they accept those ways as right, or indeed in many cases cannot conceive of alternatives" (Layton, 199). The weaver works within "a cultural tradition that both provides a vehicle for [her] creativity and determines the forms that it can take. [C]reativity exemplifies the processes by which culture is constituted, rather than opposing and disrupting collective behaviour" (199-200).

Although the weaver's dream and the entire process of weaving tnalak are a personal endeavor, the weaver takes up a social role. She gives her dream as well as the metaphorical patterns of the Tboli tribe's shared imagination a public expression. Her creativity comes alive in the "individual experience of this cultural tradition" (195). Despite the "bounds imposed by cultural convention" (197), the geometric style of tnalak opens space for a weaver's creativity and innovation through her personal selection, interpretation, and variation "from within a range of motifs" (200). Her "[c]hoice is exemplified by the fact that

there are no set terms for combinations of the named designs" (206). Like A.L. Lloyd's study on folk songs (see *Folk Song in England* 1975), "every fresh creation [of tnalak] expresses elements of an already-shared cultural tradition [that] demands an act of creation to give [it] tangible form" (210).

The tnalak then, functions as a cultural symbol par excellence, re-creating and expressing the Tboli individual-collective ethnic identity, their "sense of their uniqueness and solidarity" and "Tboli-ness." It also joins the present generation to the past by clearing a space for dialogue as unfamiliar designs arouse their curiosity.

"This tnalak is really a legacy of the Tboli that cannot disappear. It means: authentic Tboli. No one else can weave a tnalak," says Lang Dulay. She adds: "My work is valuable to me. Through it I am able to help myself because it provides me with a means of livelihood. But more than that, through my work, my skill would be remembered. Each tnalak says that I am a Tboli."

Weaving, hence, is an act of self-representation. Because this self is bound to the collective self, the dialectical tension between the identity of the personal self and that of the community is given tangible form.

Continuity and Change

In the past, it was considered an anathema that their sacred natural resources, entrusted to them for safe-keeping and passing intact to future generations, could be owned or treated as a commodity to be exploited and abandoned. But the Tbolis have to adjust to the shift from the local barter system to the more complicated monetary exchange system, and from community-oriented way of sharing resources to individual accumulation of wealth and ownership (Gaspar 2000, 11-12).

As art is made in a social setting, and as a social setting changes constantly (Layton, 43; Hanson & Hanson 1990, 1-2; van der Veen 1993), then it is inevitable that "art objects participate in the social processes of continuity and change" (Layton, 47). The Tbolis acknowledge the necessity of earning a living. "Now everything is about money; everything has an equivalent price, and we're forced to sell what we own..." laments Boi Diwa.

Among those which they have been forced to sell is a woman's most precious possession—the tnalak. A previously bartered good, the

tnalak has acquired monetary value within the market economy and is now subsequently 'devalued.' A carabao, the worth of a tnalak before, does not have the same commercial value as an eight-meter first-class tnalak, today worth four thousand pesos. The modifier, "first-class" (distinguishing it from "second-" and "third-class"), is not just a result of commercial cataloguing to easily facilitate its participation in the market. More significantly, it is a telling consequence of the effects on the textile's quality and the processes circumscribed in weaving.

Other than the commercial catalogue, tnalak has also branched into categories, each with its own socio-economic and symbolic logic, thus requiring a separate ethical treatment. The following discussion will ensue according to these categories: 1) *in-process Tboli textile*; 2) *Tboli tourist art (textile)*; 3) *neo-traditional Tboli tnalak*. The first refers to the textiles that, although technically finished products, are still operating within the compass of manufacturing, as they are also raw materials to be converted into another product. What makes these textiles different from traditional tnalak is that the latter is seen as a priceless treasure to be handed down through generations, while the former is produced to be manufactured into something else. Both categories though result in a tnalak that is "a product of both social and economic processes...[and] made for purposes of commerce in a general market." It is the kind that is peddled "reproductions of 'traditional' art and souvenirs invented for tourists" (Coleman 2002, para 2). The last category refers to the textiles which, though not unaffected by contextual changes, have remained faithful to the poetries of the tribal ethos, and thus can still be duly called tnalak.

The Klubi Weavers

Klubi is one of the five communities of Lake Sebu where Tboli women carry the tradition of tnalak weaving. The other identified communities are Tablo, Lamqua, Lamdalag, and Tbong. In the past, a barangay's unique style could be identified, but "today, Klubi has no more style of its own," say Flihan-Sulan and Mening-Sulan, two women from Klubi. "Needs first before tradition. Before, when tnalak was woven the traditional way and the whole process was done by the weaver, from dreaming to gathering the materials to the actual weaving, it was beautiful. The weaving was straight; the design was very beautiful;

it was unique. Now, it is different when one weaves a traditional design. The changes began when money came in. Many foreigners come. It's different now, we need to sell it for income."

The in-process Tboli textile for them is more valuable than the tnalak in the past because they need it to live. "It's for the family, clothes, food, tuition - everything we need to live."

The designs of the past were given names by their dreamers so as not to be forgotten. Through the book "Dreamweavers," these designs are used as reference by the market which dictates the designs and even the color of the textiles ordered from the Klubi weavers. It is ironic though how the book, meant to uphold the tradition, also promoted tnalak as a commodity, thereby promoting its disintegration in the cultural fabric of tradition. "Now, we do not need to dream," say Flihan-Sulan and Mening-Sulan.

Weaving is rushed to meet the orders from the market, leaving no time for dreaming. The designs are not dreamt, but imitated from those of the old folk. If a woman does not know how to weave, she can ask one who does to teach her, patterning her design after the traditional. There is no personal ownership involved because the finished tnalak is made to be sold. There are even instances when a weaver who does not have raw materials works for someone who does but does not weave, thus showing how class relations are slowly being formed with the new system. There need not be stories in the textiles, which just need to be rated well by the market as a product. The commodification of tnalak and the superseding of its embodied tribal ethos are far from upsetting simply because the tnalak gives them income. "Even if it's sold very cheap, it's okay as long as we have income," say Flihan-Sulan and Mening-Sulan.

"Commercial weavers are accepted today because of the need. They cannot be blamed. Their weaving isn't well-processed and has spaces between the fibers. The dyes aren't indigenous anymore. You don't see the plants as much as before," says Michael Angelo. The Tboli claim that no amount of washing could make their indigenous dyes fade. Their traditional dyes are "color-fast and as good, if not better, than the best modern commercial dyes" (Casal, 144).

Silver says that weaver cater to external demands because they have to. "The necessity to earn a living overrides the stigma of not conforming to locally-respected themes" (216). Despite the loss of

personal ownership and indigenous methods, the in-process Tboli textile still functions for them as an ethnic marker, embodying cultural pride. They take consolation in the known fact that a Tboli wove the textile. "We are the only ones who know how. The Blaans don't know how," proudly say two Tboli college students.

Tnalak and the System of Commerce

Late in 2003, the Kasanyangan-Mindanao Foundation, Inc. (KFI) was financing abaca in the Klubi area when it was approached by the wives of the farmers who requested for help in finding a market for tnalak. Functioning as traders ("middlemen"), KFI delivers fiber to Davao and passes by Tagum Agricultural Development Co., Inc. (TADECO), a member of Anflo Group of Companies, which is their market for tnalak in Davao. TADECO gives orders for tnalak (how many rolls, the design, and the color) to KFI who then relays it to the Klubi weavers. KFI advances the capital for weaving needed to buy the abaca and dyes. To be identified, the Klubi weavers attach their names on the cloths they have woven so that when TADECO itemizes them and determines the class or gives suggestions for improvement of a low-quality weave, KFI could make payments and relay the suggestion accordingly upon their return to Klubi. TADECO determines the class by the quality of the weaving, judging it first class if it is finely woven and shiny, or second and third class if the fibers are bigger. "It's just like clothing. From the cloth itself, its texture, one can know its quality," says Ating Velasco who works for TADECO.

Paying within a range of PhP120.00-180.00 to their traders in the barangays of Lake Sebu, TADECO buys the first class from KFI at PhP130.00 per meter, which in turn gives the weaver PhP115.00 per meter. "I told them before that they might not be paid for its worth, but they said it was okay as long as it was sold," says Jay from KFI. One roll of ten meters costs around PhP700.00 to make so their income is PhP450.00. "There have been changes," says Nelson from KFI. "Prices have risen from PhP70.00 to PhP130.00 per roll, and orders have grown from thirty to a hundred rolls a month. Before, few households were involved, now more households (one weaver per household) are involved."

Perhaps one of the reasons why the Klubi weavers are not adequately supported by the local government, muse Nelson and Jay of KFI, is because there is not one single, unified association of weavers. If there were, then they could control prices, eventually regaining control over their art instead of being helpless to the dictates of the market. Furthermore, the current system of commerce with KFI and TADECO exerts hegemonic control that could most likely prolong the present, ascendant practice of textile weaving and trade in Klubi.

"Our vision is to preserve the dying art of the Tboli. It is their weaving we are trying to preserve," says Juvenal S. Fernandez, supervisor of TADECO handicrafts. The program began when her boss, Mrs. Maricris Floirendo-Brias, took interest in helping the Tboli to preserve their identity and culture." With this guiding vision, they give market orders for tnalak and buy them from Klubi, Tablo, Lamqua, Lamdalag, and Tbong. In TADECO's showroom in the T'boli Weaving Center of the Waterfront Insular Hotel Davao, the tnalak is transformed into "finished products"— throw pillowcases, table runners, and other household items, embellished with sequins and other ornaments. A throw pillowcase could sell for almost a thousand Philippine pesos. Finding markets through trade fairs, TADECO started exporting Tboli textile to Europe in 1995.

In Manila, TADECO has one distributor, Be-at-Home, a high-end store. It is very specific about its orders: plain tnalak, which means tnalak devoid of any design. According to Fernandez, the plain tnalak is easier to design for contemporary uses. Nobody orders traditional anymore, by which he means the tnalak with the traditional designs done in "modernized colors" such as orange, instead of black, red, and white. What has happened is that tnalak has become a generic term for anything that the Tbolis have woven.

Along with socio-economic changes are semantic shifts, making the words "traditional" and "tnalak" problematic. Comments Lang Dulay, "It's just for fashion. It is not original tnalak. It is not treated as tnalak. It comes from the demands of designers or businesspersons."

Fernandez looks at the problem from another perspective, saying, "Sad to say, I don't see first class anymore. It's all commercialized. When you say first class that's the kind made a long time ago. But when we started exporting, when we entered the arena, it was commercialized too much, and you don't see first class anymore."

Indeed, concludes Lang Dulay, "It's not tnalak anymore."

To help market the thick, rough, and quite expensive in-process Tboli textile, TADECO explains to buyers how it is made from abaca by the Tboli tribe. The TADECO market, however, is not the ultimate consumer. If the goal is truly to "preserve" tradition, then it should not be enough that the Klubi weavers be given livelihood, while they are alienated and remained hidden behind frills and price tags. A consumer walking into a furniture store, picking up a throw pillow, and thinking if it would go with her living room motif would not know that it came from the tradition of tnalak weaving or that it was made by a Tboli. There are no tags attached to the finished products sold by TADECO stating that the material was woven by Tbolis. Nor are there means of ensuring that the Tboli's name is brought by the buyer to the consciousness of their consumers. In the laws of commerce, once an item is bought, the buyer has control over the commodity. Thus, once the ultimate consumer buys the tnalak, what once and still does give pride to the Tbolis has already been thrice removed from their hands.

In 1996, Mrs. Brias hired a Tboli, Elena, to be TADECO's weaver who does demo weaving in a hut in the Waterfront Insular Hotel to help make the in-process Tboli textile more marketable. Ethical considerations with indigenous art are superseded when its demonstration is called for despite the noble aims of making the art known to the world. Lang Dulay herself was taken to Washington, D.C. to demonstrate her weaving. She says, "I was not serious. It was just an action, just for show because they requested it. Weaving is really from the heart. You exert all your effort."

For Elena who began weaving at fifteen, she agreed to work for TADECO because of the benefits of the job such as free lodging and food. She says that the major difference between her work in Lake Sebu and in the Insular Waterfront Hotel is that now, she just weaves plain textiles, while before, she would dream the designs.

Says Elena, "It was more valuable before because the designs had names, Tboli names. Before their (the Tbolis in the past) work was more beautiful because they wove what they wanted and they were proud of their work. Now, they (the buyers) give just any kind of names to the designs like 'Kris' design, or 'Victoria,' or 'Goody.' For me, it is as if they want our designs to disappear. But we follow because that's the order and we follow even if it isn't a Tboli design. Today, it's all for money. It was better before."

Like the Klubi weavers, the textiles still function as ethnic markers for Elena as she sees it as still "Tboli" because a Tboli wove it and no other tribe could weave the textile as they could. However, with the growing trend towards mass production of the textile in Klubi and the other barangays, the designs and the premium quality of weaving of the past will eventually disappear completely. The skill of weaving may still be there, but once its meaning is lost and once it is divorced from its place as ritual, a machine may one day replace the skill. In fact, a Japanese guest once told Elena that there are weavers being trained to weave the in-process Tboli textile in Japan, the country that invented the weaving automaton. "I think our product will be lost," says Elena. "And if our product is lost, so will we be."

Tboli Tourist Art

When Lake Sebu moved up from being a sixth class municipality in 1992 to a third class municipality in 2001, it registered tourism as its highest income earner. "Any visit to Lake Sebu is incomplete without keeping a souvenir of T'boli's colorful handicrafts." (Bayog 2004). "Introduction to new western lifestyles and the cash-economy necessitated foreign currency, for which eventually the tourist and souvenir industry became the main sources" (van der Veen). Lining the main roads of the municipality are stores where vast arrays of colorful coin purses, wallets, bags, and vests, made from Tboli textile, could be found. In fact, one need not even travel to South Cotabato for them as other tourist shops in other cities also have them in stock.

Tourist art is "a form of contemporary art produced locally for consumption by outsiders" (Jules-Rosette 1984, 9). Like all material culture, it is viewed as cheap and crude (Coleman 2002). Not unlike the workmanship of the Klubi weavers, the quality of Tboli tourist art is also inferior because of the relative inexperience of the weavers who are recruited to meet consumer demand.

Tourist art exists because of "the need to produce tnalak which will augment the needs of the family," says Michael Angelo. "Those who are not weavers buy tnalak from the weaver and make it into different products to be sold. [But] the product of the Tbolis is really the tnalak."

Boi Diwa seconds this. "It [the finished product] is still Tboli whatever they do to it because the raw material is Tboli even if the quality is inferior. Any finished product out of tnalak is Tboli because it is the product of a Tboli."

Michael Angelo acknowledges the loss of the poetic-complexes surrounding the tnalak, with the loss of ritual and sacredness as it becomes commercialized. However, just as the in-process Tboli textile, Tboli tourist art still functions as an ethnic marker, carrying for the Tbolis the significance of their tribal identity and tradition. As Michael Angelo puts it, "It has value because it is a legacy from our ancestors. The significance is that it is not only a product but a legacy by which we are known."

However, again, just as with the in-process Tboli textile, not everyone knows that a Tboli wove the textile of tourist art products or the place of tnalak in their culture, even if bought in Lake Sebu itself. "If the person is a non-tribe, the tnalak has no significance or value; it is just made into wallets," says Michael Angelo.

In Aldevinco Shopping Center, Davao City, both in-process Tboli textile and Tboli tourist art are sold. Some shopowners buy the in-process Tboli textile from traders, who then transform the textile into Tboli tourist art. One store sells the in-process Tboli textile to those who would transform it into tourist art after which they buy it back as finished products to sell. Most of the salespeople do not know what tnalak means or from where it came from. In one store, the "contemporary" rolls of in-process Tboli textile are more expensive than the "traditional" rolls because the dye is more colorful and better than the indigenous ones.

A Muslim woman who comes from South Cotabato says that she herself knows that tnalak was originally made from dreams and that the rolls of textiles are woven by Tbolis in Lake Sebu. "The others don't know where it's from or who makes it because they (buyers) just see the tnalak in department stores," she explains.

With the absence of the necessary stories, there is "historical discontinuity" as the tnalak travels from its construction in the hands of the weaver to the arms of the buyer in a process that Gibbons (1997) says "constitutes reconstruction/deconstruction of an image and a culture." To a strolling tourist whose eye is caught by an "exotic" wallet of indigenous material, the tnalak is just a product.

Textile Art of Today's Tbolis

"I became a national artist because of my dreams," says Lang Dulay who was awarded Gawad sa Manlilikha ng Bayan by the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in 1998 for abaca-ikat weaving, an art form which only exists in the Philippines in Mindanao (NCCA video). "I am proud that from a dark place, my work is brought to the light and can be seen. I am proud that the Tbolis became known," adds Lang. The product of her dreams and dedication, the fiber, dye, orderliness and straightness of the weave, designs, texture and sheen of the cloth clearly make her work first-rate tnalak. Weaving her name "Lang" at the end of each roll, she remains faithful to the ritual and with it maintains a mystic and personally intimate relationship. "No one else can make it but myself," she says (*Hinabing Panaginip*).

Pastor Roger of the Holobong Troupe Cooperative proudly says that international visitors come all the way to Lake Sebu to buy Lang's tnalak, which she sells at PhP500.00 per meter for a roll of six to ten meters. "I never make a design according to the demand of the market. I just weave and keep it. If someone comes and likes my work, I sell it. It's not the demand."

Boi Diwa believes that to keep the tnalak's quality, weavers should do as Lang does. "They sell it at such low prices. It should be like Lang, keep it until someone comes looking for it then that's the only time that it's sold. If someone buys, the price should be high so that more effort is poured into making a tnalak while at the same time it can still give sufficient support to our daily needs," she says. The control and rising of the market value of tnalak began with the Holobong (Tboli for unending happiness and rejoicing) Troupe Cooperative. To adapt to the socio-economic changes, Lang has to situate herself and her art within the monetary system. In fact, just a visit to her has a fee of a couple of hundred Philippine pesos. The textile, the process, and the artist herself have become products for consumption—commodities. However, unlike the Klubi weavers, she exerts an amount of control within the system.

"They cannot make my work into products. They cannot make my work into a wallet because it is valuable. It is first-class," says Lang. There is, however, no assurance to Lang for this because once her work is purchased, then she loses control over it. Obtaining rights over her work

is a procedure that puts indigenous peoples like Lang at a disadvantage. She would have to come down from the mountains to register every single tnalak she weaves. The best alternative would be to supply each of her buyers with a contract that stipulates what can or cannot be done with her work. Of course, the parameters for ethical treatment presupposes the recognition that tnalak is a valuable indigenous art for the Tbolis. James Clifford (in Morphy 1992) suggests that treating a cultural production as art is one of the best ways to give it cross-cultural value, appreciating both its moral and commercial value. However, because of the ambiguity of the concept of art and the treatment of the varying nuances of cultures, the ethical protocol with regard to tnalak poses a problem, since, according to Handsman (in Morphy), artifacts when viewed as art loses "their human, historical, and political relations." Viewing the tnalak within the framework of non-Tboli values is an act of violence since that tears it out of its historical and social contexts that define the meaning of tnalak. Applying the tnalak within the framework of non-Tboli values is an act of violence that tears it out of the "integrities which are obviously their authentic contexts for definition" (Pastor-Roces), and thus "block[ing] understanding of their indigenous meaning and cultural context" (Morphy).

By exhibiting tnalak or hanging it on display as Western culture does with *real art*, the pragmatic and functional role tnalak plays in the context of Tboli society is forgotten. Furthermore, the aesthetic criteria – the quality of the weaving and the texture of the cloth – are not sufficiently explained. The Western concept of art as "set-aside objects" subsumes utilitarian objects such as textile under crafts (Graburn 1978) and disregards their being "primarily vehicles for the communication of ideas rather than axes, or bowls, or canoes with a decorative frill" (Layton, 42). Tnalak as an art is not just woven to be aesthetically pleasing but is itself a metaphor for the Tboli cultural identity and heritage. Weaving is a creative order of artistic experience, a vehicle through which Tboli cultural metaphors gain tangible expression.

Tnalak weaving is the entire creative order of the mystic-artistic experience, from dreaming to gathering the abaca to *ikat* dyeing, to weaving, and to shining the textile. Just as with Asmat art, "[t]o appreciate the role of individual creativity in [tnalak], the artist and the work [s]he produces must be placed in their cultural context" (Layton, 217). The very personal act of the entire weaving process in the present

concurrently joins the weaver to the spiritual realm through communion with the spirits, the past through her ancestors, the future through generations to whom she hopes to transfer and pass on her technology, and to her community with whom she shares the symbolic meaning of her work. It is spiritual and material, past, present, and future, personal and communal all at once.

Lang Dulay and Boi Diwa acknowledge that the first-class quality tnalak is disappearing because of commercialization and increasing demand, and say that the weavers who work to supply the market are not artists even if they are Tbolis, because they are not that committed and their dedication is not wholly focused on their work. "If the tradtitional tnalak were a person, she would be a young girl, kind, obedient, and generous. The new tnalak would be an old woman, but also kind," says a seventeen year-old Tboli girl. She sees the old tnalak as young because there is always something new, while the new ones are repetitive.

"The new ones coming out are just imitations of the dreams of the old folk. This means that if you did not dream the design, you really won't acquire the entire design," Lang says. She herself has one design that nobody can imitate, which today hangs in NCCA in Manila. According to Boi Diwa, one who dreams is more dedicated to her work than those who do not, thus her work is more beautiful and unique. The one who does not dream the design would have difficulty weaving it and would also easily forget the design.

"There are no more old weavers like Lang and Boi," says Pastor Roger. "But there are few among the new generation who still make very good quality tnalak." Both Lang Dulay and Boi Diwa cling to hope of transferring the Tboli weaving technology to the succeeding generations who can practice and imitate what is taught to them. What is important is their dedication. If dedicated, says Boi, they themselves can eventually teach it. Instead of dreaming, the young generation may imitate what they see in nature or a dreamer's designs. Boi observes that sadly, the youth are not very dedicated and do not desire to have dreams because they are not interested. In today's fast-paced consumer society, "they do not have the time to dream," says Pastor Roger.

Because of the changes, the importance of technology transfer is given greater emphasis than a faithful continuity of tradition. Folk beliefs also go through modification. Before, if one who does not dream the design weaves, the spirits are not with her, and she becomes ill and will

only have a few days to live. Today, however, even if the new generation does not dream the design, they believe that they are helped and guided by the spirits. "Before, the weaver was alone when she wove tnalak. Perhaps now, it should really be shown to the new generation so they can learn the process, especially those who want to learn to weave," says Michael Angelo. Before, it was inconceivable that a man weave tnalak or even go near the woman's loom. Today, however, Lang does not mind whether her student is male or female. She is just grateful that there still are people who know how to weave. The Klubi weavers still see in weaving the importance of not forgetting the past and in continuing tradition.

Lang expresses her hope and her mission: "The weaving of tnalak won't disappear because there are generations that imitate the work of the old folk. There are young Tbolis who want to weave tnalak. Tnalak is like a treasure that not just anyone can steal. It's only the Tbolis who do tnalak. So now I try and exert effort to teach the young while I am still alive so that making tnalak won't disappear. Even if there are new fashions, new designs, demands of businesspersons, the Tbolis cannot lose their identity, tnalak, customs, rituals, and behavior if there are among the new generation who are taught."

Weaving Weapons

The multivalent symbolisms of tnalak that have pushed it to precariousness are the very weapons of power the Tbolis may use to weave their own story against the background of commercialization, and thus becoming more active actors in their struggle for survival. Change is inevitable, and rather than it being the cause for lamentation and loss, change can be the cause for glory, celebration, and continuous assertion of their tribal identity. "Since hegemonic power conceals itself within relations, if there is to be resistance, it must be initiated by an apprehension or appreciation of how social structure empowers," writes Simmel (1950, 180). Lang Dulay herself has engaged in counter-hegemonic discourse through her economic integration. She has entered the system exercising a degree of control.

In awarding Lang Dulay the honor of being a National Artist, the NCCA has recognized the tnalak as a national art, in line with Republic Act 7355 which makes the preservation and promotion of folk art a policy of state (NCCA video). As such, great care should be exercised

in establishing a proper protocol for each neo-traditional Tboli textile created. The hope of the Tboli youth is that even if the sacredness or significance of the tnalak is not appreciated by the non-tribe buyer, at least the tribe would be recognized. To give tnalak value in cross-cultural translation without divorcing it from its cultural context, it should be made to speak. Becoming an agent for dialogue keeps its metaphors from dying. For this to happen, the tnalak needs its story to be told. As Morphy notes, the public not only has to know the raw materials used and their cultural significance, but also the non-material attributes of the object. Morphy adds:

> In order to analyse the aesthetic dimension of a particular object, it is necessary to go beyond sketching in the cultural background to an examination of the particular way in which the object is appreciated, perceived and evaluated as a form by members of that culture, and to show how the creation of an aesthetic effect is explicitly or implicitly part of the intentional production of perceivable form.

Without this explanation, the viewer does not get any meaning out of the displayed object. Interviewing viewers of an exhibit of Indian and Inuit Art, Graburn received responses as "'their arbitrary symbols meant nothing to me' (young woman) and 'the artifacts have no story or meaning to me, so they seem to be rather unimportant' (young woman)." The same will inevitably happen with the in-process Tboli textile and Tboli tourist art if it does not carry with it a story that can, at a minimum, identify the source of the tnalak which, to the ultimate consumer, is merely a commodity.

According to Giddens (1991), "self-identity becomes a reflexive project—an endeavour that we continuously work and reflect on. We create, maintain and revise the story of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now. Self-identity [is] in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going, the ongoing 'story' about the self.'" In the tnalak is woven the sublime narrative of the Tboli tribe. If the weavers hand the loom to consumer society, succeeding generations of Tbolis would weave in fugue and they would have no one but the enduring highlands to retell their story.

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