

# Chapter 13

## Dancing With the Dreamweavers: A Narrative Discourse of the T'bolis of the Southern Philippines

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter revolves around the impact of socio-political diaspora to the concept of tribal-ancestral land, which is sacred to the community and the cultural identity of the T'boli, an ethno-linguistic group. A narrative discourse approach is used to illustrate the tribe's struggles to the existing hegemony, particularly with the dynamics between the tribe and other inhabitants, the intrusions of other values and exploitations of their ancestral domains as explored across a changing sociocultural milieu. In an attempt to provide understanding of cultural identity amidst the changing social landscapes, the authors describe, identify, explore, and interpret the subject. Hence, the chapter provides the worldview of T'boli people and offers a narrative juxtaposition of the three opuses from three different fields. Further research is needed to ensure protection and preservation of the T'boli culture and its identity and indigenous significance within Southeast Asia and, specifically, the Philippines to better understand this land-based culture.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines, an archipelago of around 7,000 islands is culturally diverse. Most Filipinos identify themselves by their ethnic identity or by their language (Reid, 2005). Inhabitants of the uncolonized regions are generally categorized as indigenous and tribal—two terms that have negative stereotypes. Low than being called provincial, which debases the person's social and economic status, the term “indigenous” connotes that a person is unschooled, illiterate, unbaptized, wild and uncivilized. Regarded with contempt and indifference, persons from the indigenous societies are considered as *the other*.

Approximately 17 million indigenous peoples reside in the Philippines belonging to 110 ethnolinguistic groups according to the survey report of United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2003). There are around 150 languages that represent the different ethnic groups that spread across the Philippine archipelago. One of these groups, the T'boli, has preserved their culture amidst the series of intrusion from their local neighbors and from colonial societies. Amidst the different maelstroms from the outside and from within their own group, they have been trying to preserve their ancestral territories and their ethnic identities from erosion. In this chapter, the authors are using the terms “indigenous,” “tribal,” “native,” and “ethno-linguistic groups” interchangeably. These terms agree to the adopted definition of the United Nations (UN) and International Labor Organization (ILO) on indigenous peoples. The authors also used *lumad*, a Visayan term, which encapsulates the same adopted definition. The term is often used locally by the indigenous inhabitants in reference to their ethnic identity and their ethno-cultural lineage.

Culture is the constitution of geographical and socio-environment dimensions, which is human-made. To understand behavior or its determinants, cultural influences must be understood (Triandis, et al., 1973). In this chapter, culture is glimpsed using the person who is in the foreground; thus, aside from participating in the discourse, a T'boli scholar participates in the narrative as a T'boli member. His experiences are interdependent to the situation of the tribe (Wollants, 2012). As the grandson of a T'boli female leader named as one of the country's national artists before she died, their constant communion and affection to one another contributed to his psychological environment, which is interdependent to the physical or geographical environment. His late grandmother passed on to him a legacy embedded in his memory in the form of lores, songs, and dances. He would provide glimpses and voices to the presented issues.

The chapter explores the meanings of T'boli dances, which have been used to preserve their traditions. T'nalak weaving is also explored, the pride and glory of the tribe whereby women weavers are referred to as dream weavers as T'nalak weaving signifies the tribe's connection to the transcendental realms. The objective of the chapter is to discuss the impact of the diaspora to the concept of tribal-ancestral land, which is sacred to the community and the cultural identity of the new generation T'boli. The chapter also explores the meanings of T'boli dances and the sacred dreaming weaving, which have been used to preserve their culture and traditions.

## BACKGROUND

Indigenous communities thrive in the entire island archipelago of the Philippines. These ethno-linguistic groups have been trying to preserve their cultural and traditional practices against the changing social and political landscape. Mindanao, of the southern Philippine region, was undaunted by the centuries of foreign intrusion. Prejudice and disdain between major ethnic groups are matters of concern because even the Visayans and Mindanaons, the inhabitants of the two major island-regions outside of Manila,

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