



Research article

Weaving Dreams of a World Among Worlds: *T'nalak* of the T'boli as an Ecological Practice

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Abstract

George Marshall claims that environmental advocacy does not get enough traction despite the urgency of the climate crisis because of two things. One, the human brain reacts to things that are personal, definite, visible, and urgent. Climate change does not exhibit any of these and, thus, tends to be ignored. Two, most consciousness-raising efforts take the scientific route, disseminating information using technical jargon. While it appeals to the analytic side of the brain, it does not compel action. The brain's intuitive/emotional side must be affected to elicit an effective response to an event. *Affect* is achieved creatively, especially through stories with which people can identify. The modern world, however, shuns stories as pre-scientific, outmoded, and false. Using a pluriversal view where the coexistence of different but overlapping epistemologies is imaginable, this paper shows that the reactivation of marginalized knowledge systems could counter the dominance and universalism of the (Western) modern world. Traditional epistemologies, as performances, could model the intuitive and personal relationship with the environment claimed to be effective in compelling climate action. It demonstrates this through the *t'nalak* culture of the T'boli, one of the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines. *T'nalak-making* is a sacred ritual that *performs* a cultural ecology that sees the world as divine, composed of spiritual beings that guard natural resources. As such, the T'boli build relationships with them by respecting and caring for the environment where these spirits dwell and rule. As the *t'nalak* gains wide recognition through the performance of the annual *T'nalak* Festival and the *t'nalak* itself gains protection from modern systems as an intellectual property, the *t'nalak*-based cultural ecology could inspire a similar attitude toward the planet to help mitigate the effect of climate change.

Keywords: T'boli, *T'nalak*, Cultural Ecology, Pluriverse, Performance



1. Introduction: Climate change, P-A-I-N, and Indigenous Consciousness

The Global Climate Risk Index 2021 lists the Philippines as 17th among the countries most affected by climate change based on 2019 data but lists it as 4th globally, using the 2000-2019 period data (*Global Climate Risk Index*, 2021). Of the Filipinos affected, Indigenous Peoples suffer the most

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because their livelihood is closely tied up with the land or coastal areas. Already bearing the harsh effects of war, modernization, and lack of political voice and power, a rise in cyclone-related disasters has further driven them out of their ancestral lands (Abano, 2020; *Philippines: Indigenous Knowledge Takes on Climate Crisis*, 2023; *The Indigenous Communities Facing the Climate Crisis in the Philippines*, 2022). Some of the adverse impacts of climate change on Philippine Indigenous Peoples include rising sea levels, barren landscapes, and malnutrition (Biana & Rivas, 2021). However, environmental advocates still need help to get people involved and committed to addressing such climate realities.

Founder of Climate Outreach in the UK, environmentalist George Marshall (2015), uses insights from psychology to explain people's general lack of response to the threat of climate change. He takes as premise psychologist Daniel Gilbert's claim that our brain is ill-suited to deal with the climate crisis since it will react only to something personal (P), abrupt (A), immoral (I), and happening now (N)--P-A-I-N. When we speak of global warming, no person perceives it as a threat; changes happen over a long period, unable to catch our attention; it is not itself immoral, and its effects are not experienced immediately. Despite global warming being an actual threat, we do not deal with it because it does not fit our brain's talent for "ducking" out of harm's way. There is no assailant, no sudden changes, nothing is despicable, and nothing seems to be happening now as we live our lives. (Garcia, 2020, p. 105; Gilbert, 2006; Marshall, 2015, pp. 46–47). Gilbert thus concludes that "Global warming is a deadly threat precisely because it fails to trip the brain's alarm, leaving us soundly asleep in a burning bed" (Gilbert, 2006).

Furthermore, cognitive-experiential self-theory (CEST) shows the brain to have two parallel processing systems: the analytical or rational and the experiential/intuitive or emotional. While the former is conscious, deliberate, largely language-based, and depends on logic and favors evidence, the latter

operates in an automatic, holistic, associationistic manner, is intimately associated with the experience of *affect*, represents events in the form of concrete exemplars, and schemas inductively derived from emotionally significant past experiences, and is able to generalize and to construct relatively complex models for organizing experience and directing behavior by the use of prototypes, metaphors, scripts, and narrative. (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994, p. 819) [emphasis added]

Affect is an emotional response to an experience. It is a powerful emotion that can move an individual to act and address a situation at hand. Marshall (2015, p. 49) deduces that climate change advocacy campaigns that use scientific data fail at generating *affect* because they mostly speak to the brain's rational processing, which spends much time deliberating over evidence and probabilities. They do not attract the experiential processing that could motivate us to act. *Stories*, on the other hand, do the trick. They can translate the facts the rational brain collects into meanings, making environmental care "a non-negotiable sacred value" and climate action a conviction (Marshall, 2015, pp. 105, 225). Psychologists, communication experts, and writers agree that stories are what we can relate to, and compelling ones can move us to act regarding climate change (Marshall, 2015, pp. 106–107).

For this reason, Indigenous Peoples generally serve better as stewards of the environment (*Philippines: Indigenous Knowledge Takes on Climate Crisis*, 2023). Their synthesis of nature,

multispecies worldview, and the symbiotic relationship with the environment inspires them to use natural resources sustainably (Biana & Rivas, 2022; Duhaylungsod, 2003, p. 610). This knowledge is not translated scientifically, but in stories, especially ecological stories, that form the foundation of their cultures, which commonly view the existence of the world as a product of divine generosity as supernatural beings sacrifice themselves to sustain life (Garcia, 2018). They are attuned more to the experiential rather than the objective and analyzable aspects of life, easily forming sacred narratives that guide their actions. As the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres acknowledged, Indigenous Peoples have the traditional knowledge and practices that work to preserve the environment and can provide appropriate responses to the climate crisis (Abano, 2020; *‘Let Us Learn from Indigenous Peoples’*, UN Chief Declares, 2023; Naw, 2023; Nelson et al., 2019).

Indigenous ecological practices also demonstrate ecospiritality, which has been defined as “having a reverential attitude toward the environment in taking care of it while dwelling within its premises.” (Suganthi 2019) The stories that make up their cosmologies preserve what Korab-Karpowicz (2002) calls the “mythical consciousness” that experiences the world as a subject rather than an object. (Garcia, 2020) As such, the reverence for their surroundings is at the core of their culture. The foundation of their practices is, therefore, spiritual, exhibiting the sacred intertwining of all beings with the environment.

Unfortunately, such traditional worldviews have been marginalized. While their technology (as *techné*) serves them well in climate change mitigation, Indigenous Peoples are not consulted in policy-making because their ways do not align with the framework of climate change science (Gabriel & Mangahas, 2017). The modern individual’s trust in science and (Western) logic has undermined the value of indigenous myths, especially cosmogonic ones that tell of the origins of beings and places, that often present the world as a person—as a *Thou* rather than an “it” (to borrow Martin Buber’s terminology)—thereby undermining their knowledge and expressions of such as outmoded and false or erroneous. A pluriversal view, however, can save them from this dismissive assessment.

As a decolonial method, pluriversality admits a plurality of overlapping realities and interpretations of those realities. Founded on relationality, it is the counter-praxis to the West’s totalizing claim to universality (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 2). From a pluriversal view, all ways of knowing and being enjoy legitimacy within their respective contexts. There is no one reality to serve as a universal standard of what is correct and what is erroneous belief. Instead, there is a multiplicity of realities engendering their respective epistemologies. As Mignolo (2018a, p. x) puts it, pluriversality “[renounces] the conviction that the world must be conceived as a unified totality...in order for it to make sense, and [views] the world as an interconnected diversity instead...” It advocates for the pluricentric world by acknowledging various local and indigenous practices that thrived before the universalism of Western civilization was set up and the world made mono-centric after the 1500s (Mignolo, 2018b, pp. 90–92). As such, the pluriversal appreciates and respects ontological and epistemological differences and finds the creative space where these differences overlap at the boundaries of “worlds.”

Viewing indigenous knowledge through this lens, Sandra Harding (2018) acknowledges that the Indigenous People’s deep knowledge of nature’s workings helped them thrive in the past but now asks if “multiple knowledge systems [could] flourish again today, continually transforming

themselves to engage effectively with their changing natural and social environments...” (Harding, 2018, p. 39). In other words, having been marginalized after Western universalism held sway, could these epistemologies—and cosmologies—be reactivated, made to interact with existing knowledge systems, and perhaps help respond to environmental changes? In asking this, Harding is asking for a pluriversal engagement with the Indigenous Peoples’ ecological practices.

In this study, we would like to answer this question with a hopeful affirmative by showcasing the *t’nalak*-centered culture of the T’boli, one of the Philippines’ Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, we look at the ritual of creating *t’nalak* as *performance* because performances are actions that accomplish something (Schechner, 2013). The ritual of creating *t’nalak* fabric, central to their community, becomes a performance of their identity as a people and a continuing act to contribute effectively to mitigating the climate crisis. This paper aims to present and gain insights from the cosmology of the T’boli people, especially those of the Dreamweavers—the women who weave the *t’nalak* textile and maintain the T’boli way of life amidst the encroachment of modernity that threatens their culture and puts at risk their ecological view of the world. We claim that the ritual of weaving the *t’nalak*, from dream to loom, provides an effective model of being (ontological) and knowing (epistemological) that is intuitive, affective, inclusive of all beings, sustainable, and, therefore, respectful to the environment, addressing the two obstacles Marshall observed in climate change advocacy. In a pluriversal world order, the T’boli way of creating the *t’nalak* is a performance of identity and resilience that can relate to other ways of being in the world that seek to save the planet from anthropogenic causes of destruction.

2. The T’boli and their *T’nalak*

The T’boli people consider Lake Sebu (in South Cotabato, Philippines) the center and origin of their people (Paterno, 2001b, pp. 10–15), even though they have been driven higher into the mountains due to various reasons involving government intervention, and their lack of political and economic power (Duhaylungsod, 2003, pp. 616–617; Hernani et al., 2021, p. 204). They tell that long ago, their ancestors Bo’i Henwu and Kludan survived the drought through the mountain spirits’ help. In a dream, a spirit told Bo’i Henwu to look for a big leaf near a rock. Finding the spot the next day, she lifted the leaf and found a white frog underneath to whom she explained her troubles, after which water trickled out of the stone. After drinking her fill and bathing, she set the frog back down on the stone and covered it again with the big leaf. She shared this with Kludan, who, in turn, shared it with everyone. As if understanding the people’s needs, the trickle of water from the stone became a gushing stream, spreading until it became Lake Sebu (Paterno, 2001b, p. 15).

As dwellers in hills and slopes, the T’boli people revere their land and protect everything that stems from it. Myrna Pula, a T’boli, says of this in an interview,

We know we must walk through the forest with the reverence of a nun in a cathedral. No fallen leaf should be unnecessarily disturbed; no pool of water made to ripple. We never take without asking and explaining our need. The spirits know; they will understand, if only we are respectful. The earth is a very strict mother who harshly disciplines her

children, but who in the end always cares for her children. So we believe and so it is. (Paterno, 2001b, p. 4)

This attitude of inviolable use of resources is deeply embedded in their narrative culture. The T'boli epic song tells us of nature spirits and the legend of *Tudbulul* and his struggles to protect the paradise *Lemlunay* against enemies. The epic has eight episodes, telling Tudbulul's life from birth to wake, and it narrates the hero's dedication to the land and connection to nature, inspiring the T'boli to guard and take responsibility for their environment and community (Hernani et al., 2021). For example, in the *Tawan Sohul*, or the sixth epic episode, Tudbulul undergoes rituals for the sun and moon to regain the powers he lost in an incident of madness (Mora, 2013). Tudbulul's temporary madness represents his breach of contract to marry Lemfayon, the Lady of the Moon, and his disconnection from natural forces. Tudbulul's eventual marriage to Lemfayon symbolizes his reintegration into the sacred and the restoration of cosmic order (Mora, 2013). When the epic song is performed during marriage rites, it is also believed to be a collective healing event for the community.

One of Tudbulul's sisters is the weaver Fu Dalu, perhaps the most important spiritual guardian of the T'boli lands. She has a dual nature in that while she is believed to bless farmers with bountiful harvests or heal the sick, she can also destroy crops and bring illness (Hernani et al., 2021). The T'boli, mindful of this, seek to revere and appease her by caring for their natural environment and ensuring that they coexist harmoniously with her manifestations and the elements in their environment. They strive to preserve, protect, and manage natural resources to strengthen their connection with Fu Dalu and other spirits (Hernani et al., 2021). This includes the soil around Lake Sebu, fertile ground for the wild abaca plant, which produces the whitest abaca fibers used in weaving the *t'nalak* or woven textile (Zerrudo, 2022).

Fu Dalu is also believed to be the spirit of the abaca tree. The T'boli offer clothing and jewelry to Fu Dalu during the full moon (Gillis, 2022). She is described as "a fierce protective spirit who safeguards the integrity of the *t'nalak* and the weaving process. The spirit is said to be striking, very fair, with long hair that falls to its heels" (Castro, 2001, p. 41). The T'boli believe Fu Dalu shows the favored weavers' unique designs in their dreams. Thus, these women are called "dreamweavers," calling on Fu Dalu to visit the artisans' dreams whenever they make *t'nalak* and inspire unique textile designs. The T'boli believe that creativity and knowledge are inspired by the divine, and spirit guides such as Fu Dalu transmit mastery to the artisans from the one ultimate source of creative breath, *D'wata* or the Supreme Being (Mora, 2012). The *t'nalak*, then, is an essential element in the T'boli's life from birth to death. The woven cloth is put on a woman's stomach at birthing and newborn infants are swaddled in it. It is used as a dowry during marriage, bartering for other essential goods, and as a healing cover for someone sick (Belgera, 2023; del Mundo, 2022; Hernani et al., 2021, p. 206). They are often handed down as family heirlooms (Alvina, 2001, p. 53). While not all designs are dreamt—many of them are handed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter to granddaughter—the spirit of abaca inspires the best ones. When it happens, it is said that Fu Dalu dwells in the abaca fibers, so the weaver must be extra careful and precise in her rendition of the dreamt design (Fabella, 2023; Paterno, 2001a, p. 24).

The process of creating the *t'nalak* is "fraught with beliefs and cautions," attesting to the sacred nature of the task. Children cannot play with the abaca fibers or play around the loom. The abaca must not touch the ground or be touched by non-weavers. The weavers also abstain from bodily pleasures until the *t'nalak* is done. The *t'nalak* weavers are, therefore, constantly in communication with Fu Dalu, hearing her speak and hoping to be blessed by her. Utmost care is taken in each stage to ensure the process is done correctly, for if something is done wrong, Fu Dalu will make the guilty ones sick (Castro, 2001, pp. 42–45; Gillis, 2022).

For instance, the photographer Neal Oshima (2018), documenting the *t'nalak* process, tells of his young T'boli assistant who also did the burnishing of the textiles brought from Lake Sebu. The young man fell ill and insisted on visiting the *t'nalak* in Oshima's studio and communing with the hanging textiles with music and prayer to heal. He explained that his illness was Fu Dalu's way of scolding him for burnishing the *t'nalak* so far away from Mindanao. The spirit saw this as a disrespectful act that must be rectified (Oshima, 2001). Thus, from the cutting of the abaca plant to the burnishing of the woven textile, a prayer is said at every step, calling on Fu Dalu to bless the project, keep the fibers strong and prevent breakage, and hoping that no illness befalls the workers and weavers until their task is done (Alvina, 2001, p. 46; Castro, 2001; Clariza, 2019, p. 85). The whole process of *t'nalak* weaving thus reveals the ecospiritual foundation of this T'boli ritual, demonstrating the "spiritual connection between human beings and the environment...[engaging] a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer land-scape, and soul to soil." (Lincoln 2000) In the case of the T'boli, their reverence for the abaca also connects dream to the waking world.



Image 1: T'boli Julie Mantang Fanulan weaving T'nalak at Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. (Photo by Rico H. Borja for the Philippine News Agency, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

In Image 1 above, T'boli weaver Julie Mantang Fanulan attentively weaves the fibers into the loom and ensures she takes utmost care in their handling. It may seem that *t'nalak* weaving is a solitary practice, but it takes a whole community to complete it over several months (Abola 2020, pp. 56–57; Paterno 2001a, pp. 27–33). The men harvest the abaca and strip the plant, separating the filament from the pulp. Drying and softening the fibers is also a community effort. Then, the

women sit at the longhouse, where they tie lengths of fiber in tiny, almost invisible knots to form long threads for the warp and weft of their loom. The fibers are then wrapped for resist-dyeing (*ikat*) according to the design in the weaver's head, without any physical pattern to be followed. Since *t'nalak* is woven only with the colors black, red, and white, the fibers are wrapped accordingly. First, the black parts of the design are dyed using the *k'nalum* leaves, then the red ones using the *loko* roots, while the original white of the abaca is preserved. The dyeing process takes days, and the people must keep the fire going, boiling the natural colorants so that the fibers absorb the colors well. The weaver then assembles the fibers on the loom, sometimes with the help of family members and neighbors, and then sits with the backstrap loom to weave. They weave in the cooler parts of the day to avoid the abaca breaking. Once completed, the *t'nalak* is "ironed" to flatness, sheen, and suppleness by burnishing it with the back of a cowrie shell. This last task, like harvesting the abaca plant in the beginning, is delegated to the men in the community.

Corazon Alvina (2001, p. 46) explains that the three colors of the *t'nalak* are related to the spiritual beliefs of the T'boli. Red (*halo*), black (*hitem*), and white (*bukay*) correspond to the three realms where souls go after death depending on the manner of death—by bullet or blade, by natural causes, and by suicide, respectively. This is the reason that non-tri-colored weaving cannot be called *t'nalak*. The T'boli's cosmology keeps them deeply connected with their environment, making its preservation a non-negotiable value. Their sacred stories make them value their resources, so they strictly observe what they believe is taboo, lest they offend the spirits. This enables, even forces, them to be very sensitive to the workings of nature and equips them to react accordingly to its processes. Gilbert's P-A-I-N requirement, therefore, comes naturally to them. First, they see the world as the dwelling place of spirits and the all-important abaca as the natural domain of the sometimes kind and sometimes fearsome Fu Dalu. The earth is a person (P) to them, "like a mother," so they ask and explain their need before taking anything from it. The cosmogonic myth of Lake Sebu shows that the lake was born out of a need Bo'i Henwu and Kludan asked of the white frog under a big leaf.

Having intimate familiarity with their environment, the T'boli feel the minute changes (A) that may be imperceptible to others. For instance, this is how they know to weave the abaca in the early mornings or the late afternoons when it is cooler or the fibers easily break in the sun's heat, when to harvest the plant, and how to cut them properly. They are also acutely aware of violations done (I), manifesting in illnesses when the spirits' will is not followed. Hence, they strive hard to rectify them and appease the angry divinities. In their myths, this is exemplified by Tudbulul's madness and its cure; in contemporary narratives, by Oshima's assistant who needed to repent for his infraction of burnishing the *t'nalak* away from home.

The T'boli are aware that things are constantly in the process of change and that anything can happen (N), so at every step of the way, they say a prayer as insurance against disaster, a wish for a good life in Lemlunay, or as gratitude for the blessings they enjoy. Moreover, their knowledge and ways of being are founded on the stories they tell of the divinities that guard their land and lake, making them very susceptible to Epstein's intuitive/emotional processes. These qualities form the T'boli's cultural ecology that is now celebrated in the annual *T'nalak* festival.

3. The *T'nalak* Festival: Performative Cultural Ecology

The first *T'nalak* Festival was held in 1999, after Bo'i Lang Dulay, a T'boli dreamweaver with over a hundred designs dream-inspired by Fu Dalu, was awarded the "Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan" (National Living Treasure Award or NLT) in 1998 (Belgera 2023). Since then, the Festival has been held annually in South Cotabato, Philippines. Performed by the Indigenous Peoples and communities inhabiting the surrounding areas of Lake Sebu, the South Cotabateños champion environmental awareness and sustainability through various activities and commit to preserving their landscapes and ecosystems ("*T'nalak* Festival," 2023). A week-long celebration, the *T'nalak* Festival features the *t'nalak* fabric as the event's cornerstone. Aside from presenting the *t'nalak*, they also perform dances, music, create other art forms, and engage in competitions. Furthermore, the event also features a food fest and an agricultural trade fair to showcase organic produce, native delicacies, and handicrafts, including complete nipa huts (*bahay kubo*). During the recent festival culminating on July 18, 2023, intricate *t'nalak* fabrics were displayed alongside colorful costumes amidst street dancing and live traditional music. These dance performances depict day-in-the-life scenes of the T'boli community and their rituals and stories about love, bravery, and harmony with nature throughout the generations (Belgera, 2023).

There are 11 dances identified with the T'boli, and these include the Madal Tahu, Madal Siwol, Kadal Temulon Lobo, Madal Sowol, Madal Iwas, Madal be Tonok, Madal be Kumbing, Madal be S'ludoy, Madal Betaku, and Madal Mit Mata. The Madal be S'ludoy, Madal be Kumbing, Madal Iwas, and Madal Tahaw are particularly associated with forest or animal elements such as bamboo, monkeys, and birds (Yamut, 2008). The T'boli dances are said to show the T'boli's affinity with nature, respect for the environment, and their age-old traditions; their rhythmic movements are used to win over the gods, attract a good harvest, mark celebrations, and strengthen unity in the community (Yamut, 2008). The festival and the ritualistic movements recognize that the community can have power over their environment and relationships with nature. Since the primary purpose of the *T'nalak* Festival is the preservation of the T'boli culture, which is founded on their sacred relationship with nature, it serves as a performative cultural ecology that could influence participants, local or tourists, in thinking about one's role as a responsible consumer and agents of climate action.

The festival is a *performance* not because it showcases the dances, music, food presentation, and various handicrafts of the T'boli but because by presenting them the way they are done in daily life, the festival *affirms* the existence of the T'boli and honors their cultural practices. It also *offers* them to spectators as an alternative way of living. It is, therefore, a *performance*—the doing or the performative—of performances, a meta-performance that enacts community life and its cultural tradition while opening avenues for change and development.

The awarding of Bo'i Lang Dulay as National Living Treasure, which prompted the staging of the festival also allowed her to work closely with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in establishing a School of Living Tradition in Lake Sebu, the Manlilikha ng Bayan Center (Lang Dulay *T'nalak* Weaving Center), to ensure the continued teaching and learning of the *t'nalak* weaving. The renewed interest in weaving *t'nalak* then paved the way for a reinterpretation of the *t'nalak* as a source of economic and social empowerment. This is evidenced by the establishment of cooperatives designed to uplift T'boli life, like the Cooperative of Women in Health and

Development (COWHED) and the Lake Sebu Indigenous Women Weavers' Association, Inc. (LASIWWAI), among others.

The *T'nalak* Festival and all ensuing developments affirm the *t'nalak* as craft. The fabrics bear the imprint of the weavers' hands and become proof of their community's existence with their bodily intelligence manifested in their skill, which can be taught and learned (Baumstark, 2016; L. Garcia, 2009, pp. 64–67; Metcalf, 1997, p. 76). As the *t'nalak* are presented in the festival, the T'boli present their identity and unity as a people, proclaiming the fabric's importance in their community life. In Figure 2 below, we see the members of the community actively participating in the festival through street dancing while featuring the *t'nalak*. As the festival displays talent and cultural pride, it also celebrates the rich traditions of South Cotabato. It is a venue to affirm the fabric's significance and how it plays a role in forming their identity. As one of the weavers worriedly asked, "Kung mawawala ang paghahabi, sino kami sa mata ng mga tao?" [If weaving is dying, who are we in the eyes of people?] (Abola et al., 2020, p. 59).



Figure 2: T' boli dance during colorful street dancing competition on the 9th T'nalak Festival in Koronadal, South Cotabato. (Photo by Mark Navales, via <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)

The ritual creation of *t'nalak*, inseparable from the life of the T'boli, performs several actions. As a craft, it teaches the young generation of weavers and non-weavers about the cloth's spiritual significance and encultures them into the T'boli community. As a product, it empowers the T'boli women economically and socially. As a cultural asset, *t'nalak* affirms the community's identity. Finally, as cultural ecology, *t'nalak* allows the T'boli to mitigate climate change threats to their livelihood and serve as an alternative model for addressing environmental degradation. These, however, are not separate achievements. All aspects are intricately bound together just as the *t'nalak* as ritual holistically embodies the T'boli culture.

The festival's popularity reveals its potential to create an emotional response in its audience. This *affect* is said to speak to the intuitive side of the brain and could compel action. The participants' enjoyment of the festivities is not analytical but emotional, becoming a possible way to learn about the *t'nalak*, its sources in the environment, and the T'boli's way of sustainable product creation. The festival, therefore, serves as an alternative means through which environmental advocacy could be done more effectively.

4. Pluriversality in Contemporary *T'nalak* Production

In an interview, a T'boli expressed concern about the future of their tradition. "If the old ways go, what is there left for our children?" (Paterno, 2001b, p. 23). Increasing modernization and technological advancement put traditional ways such as theirs at risk. Luckily for the T'boli, the *T'nalak* Festival succeeded in what it intended to do. Its success is evidenced by the proliferation of efforts to help the T'boli improve their lives. These have brought the *t'nalak* to the international arena. Entrepreneurship training and microfinancing, such as those offered by COWHED and LASIWWAI allowed the women to properly cost their woven fabric and gain more from them than they used to (Santos, 2012; *The Dreamweaver of Lake Sebu*, 2011). In 2017, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHIL) granted the "T'nalak Tau Sebu" collective trademark registration to various Lake Sebu-based weaving centers and associations, protecting the weavers' creation and ensuring consumers of the authenticity of the *t'nalak* purchased from them. Their *t'nalak* is also set to be registered as Geographical Indications. As shown, since the *t'nalak* represents a whole culture encompassing people and their environment, these economic developments go hand in hand with increased land protection. To protect the forest from loggers and maintain the biodiversity in their forest, crucial to keeping the authentic, traditional, and natural means of creating *t'nalak*, the T'boli now coordinate with the CustomMade Crafts Center (CMCC) for annual impact monitoring reports on the sustainability of forests (Arts, 2008). The *t'nalak* and, therefore, the T'boli have been allowed to thrive once more. The interest in the festival established around it is a manifesto that this tradition can lend itself to new forms without severing ties with its origins. This is the resounding "yes" we offer in reply to Harding's question we mentioned earlier on whether traditional ways marginalized by the (Western) monocentric world order could be revived and be one of the multiple knowledge systems that we could learn from today (Harding, 2018, p. 39).

Many factors continue to threaten the T'boli's resources and environment (Duhaylungsod, 2003). The newfound economic benefit of creating *t'nalak* also threatens the ecospiritual foundation of this cultural heritage, which keeps the T'boli's deep connection with nature. Because of national and international market demand, most *t'nalak* fabrics sold are "non-sacred." They are used in various functionalities that would not have been allowed in the original context of their creation (Garduce, 2014). Nowadays, *T'nalak* products require the cutting of the fabric, which is absolutely forbidden in the T'boli ritual practice unless a sacrifice is offered. They also would have violated the rule of not letting the fabric touch the ground had *t'nalak*-based footwear been done under the sacred context. Some T'boli view these actions as a "lack of sensitivity toward the cultural integrity of the *t'nalak*" (A. L. Garcia & Villaflor, 2022). *Haute couture* has also been captured by the beauty of the *t'nalak*, and local and international fashion designers have used the fabric for

their shows. Because weaving an original *t'nalak* takes months, copies made by machines make the designs available faster. While the T'boli remain secure in the authenticity of their creations, cheap and fast alternatives may threaten the economic benefit they now derive from their *t'nalak* (Sarmiento, 2018). Stronger protective laws concerning intellectual property rights, especially for traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, are also needed to combat counterfeit products (Fernan & Cerilles, 2021). These threats show that while the *t'nalak* cultural ecology could serve as an effective model for promoting climate action conviction, preserving it is not simple and involves many economic and political factors.

In a pluriverse, these are the overlaps that the T'boli need to navigate as stewards of the environment, enacting their care of the planet through their indigenous, *t'nalak*-centered cosmology and knowledge system. As Mignolo explained, the pluriverse is not composed of isolated worlds but of different worlds entangled at the borders. Thus, "a way of thinking and understanding that dwells in the interstices of the entanglement...is needed" (Mignolo, 2018a, p. xi). The survival of the T'boli cultural ecology rests on its being able to deal with this culture that is different from its own "with both eyes open," as Harding claims, "envisioning future relations [that allow for as of yet] unexplored possibilities" (2018, p. 57).

While the cooperatives and the intellectual property protection provided to the Lake Sebu collectives help ensure the survival of *t'nalak*, the institutions that provide them to the T'boli operate on values that may be alien to them. Like most indigenous cultures, the T'boli embody a communal system where people are not separate from the environment. Their understanding of themselves and the world is transpersonal (Cervantes, 2023). For them, every aspect of the world—the mountains, the lakes, plants, and animals—is inhabited by spirits that they treat as persons. The prominence of Fu Dalu in their lives is evidence of this. Everything they do has an impact on the abaca and, therefore, on their lives.

On the other hand, intellectual property is rights-based and utilitarian, viewing human creations as mostly having only instrumental value. This is why traditional knowledge and cultural expressions such as the *t'nalak* weaving cannot be effectively covered by conventional Intellectual Property (IP) systems. Certain assumptions behind the concepts of "property" and "creator" often do not exist in indigenous societies (WIPO, 2020). But by opening themselves up to the regulations of the IP system, the T'boli engages with an ego-centered world. Yet, they are doing this precisely to keep the cultural value and integrity of their *t'nalak* which remains relational and communal. In this way, they maintain a tension between worlds, theirs and another's. But in this relationship, new ways of being are created: diverse, pluriversal.

The *t'nalak* act of weaving performs. Rene Javellana, SJ (2001) shows that transformations occur in the creation of the textile, from dreams to looms. Its success "is balanced gingerly on a spectrum of tensions, ranging from total absence to singing presence" (Javellana, 2001, p. 64). There is the tension in the fiber, the tension in wrapping and dyeing, and the tension that the weaver's back, hands, and legs maintain as she gives form to her dreams. This process, "[varies] with each performance, like the constantly changing pressure of a musician's flying fingers on a violin. Each *t'nalak*, therefore, is a product of complex artistic improvisation" (Javellana, 2001, p. 64). We imagine that dwelling on the margins where worlds pluriversally overlap in honor and for the benefit of the *t'nalak* is also about maintaining the tensions between different knowledge

systems and accompanying ways of being. Tension prevents dissolution and the fall back into a monocentric world. This way, the T'boli's cultural ecology around the *t'nalak* may flourish and contribute significantly to addressing the climate crisis and inspiring climate action conviction in others.

Conclusion

Most Indigenous Peoples bear the brunt of various anthropogenic climate catastrophes due to their vulnerable geographies. But the unique ways they work with nature, marginalized in the modern world, may be key to mitigating the effects of climate change in various environments. These cosmologies, told as sacred narratives or myths, guide their ecological practices. As the earth's natural guardians, they acknowledge its sacred value and build their lives in ways that are gentle on the environment from which they carve out their livelihood. Such views, if shared, create an affective ripple that could allow people to relate and understand what is at stake regarding environmental degradation. To put such a knowledge system at par with the prevailing ones, however, a pluriversal attitude is required.

This paper examines the case of the T'boli's ritual of *t'nalak* fabric creation. It presents it as a performance of their identity as a people and a performative cultural ecology. As a sacred story-based culture, its cosmology and accompanying knowledge system serve as an alternative model of ecological practices that could help mitigate the threats of climate change. In a pluriversal world, the T'boli productively interacts with other worlds as it maintains its own indigenous one. The *T'nalak Festival*, a performance of their daily performances, paved the way for further interaction with ways other than the T'boli's, transforming their world as efforts are exerted to ensure the continuation of the *t'nalak* weaving. But exploring new possibilities, such as what they are experiencing as they relate to what is "outside" brings concerns regarding the longevity and understanding of their cultural heritage and the future of the natural resources they need to maintain their tradition. Yet, this is how it becomes pluriversal. Like the abaca fibers of the *t'nalak*, the worlds are interconnected, entangled, and interwoven, not always comfortably, but hopefully, always creatively.

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