

A Preliminary Study on the Meranaw Traditional Balod “Tie-Dye” Technique in Weaving

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Abstract

This paper is a historical narrative study documenting two of the most ancient living *Meranaw* cultural heritage: weaving and tie-dyeing. These century-old surviving crafts serve as a testament to a long standing contacts and trade relation between the Philippines and her neighbouring countries such as India, China and the Asian countries more particularly Indonesia whose *Ikat* weaving style closely resembles the *Meranaw balod* technique in weaving. What links the Philippines with these countries and what finds the *Meranaw* more similar with the weaving tribes in Northern Luzon and Southern Mindanao are the similarities in their weaving culture. Highlights of this paper include the origin of the *Meranaw balod* technique in weaving, the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* with regards to the use of natural and indigenous raw materials for weaving such as plant fibers and the concoction of different plants and vegetables to produce dyes, and some mythical performances, ceremonies, and ritual offerings associated with the weaving and *balod* craftsmanship. This paper recommends the preservation of the *Meranaw* weaving cultural heritage through continuous recording or documenting, archiving, preserving them in their living form and ensuring its transmission to the next generation.

Keywords: *weaving, tie-dyeing, cultural heritage, indigeneous art, Meranaw*

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Introduction

This paper attempts to trace, describe and analyze two of the most ancient handicrafts that the *Meranaw* tried to integrate and use in the making of one of their traditional hand-woven fabrics, the so-called *balod*–inspired textiles: tie-dyeing (*balod*) and weaving (*ka-awl*).

As defined, *balod* is an ancient method of tie-dyeing or resist-dyeing that involves covering areas of thread to shield them from penetration of dyes; *it* is a skill-intensive process of marking, tying and dyeing the designs into the thread before it is woven.; those wrapped thread that resisted the dyes emerge as the designs or patterns of the woven fabric.

Though this cultural art of *balod* technique in weaving had long been existing, quite a few educated *Meranaws* have an interest in writing about this age-old weaving cultural heritage. Many cherish to wear it, but rarely do they attempt to research its origin, the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* in using natural plant fibers and dye in their designs, the essential preparations in the production of this *balod* hand woven fabrics and the mythical performances and ritual offerings associated with such weaving craftsmanship.

This paper provides the historical origin of the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving; the ingenuity of the *Meranaw* weaving artisans in the production and utilization of indigenous raw materials for weaving and dyeing; the essential steps in the preparation and process of the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving; the meanings, rituals, beliefs and practices associated to the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* art/technique in weaving; and some measures done in order to preserve and make their *balod* weaving industry more viable.

Theoretical Framework

The paper used three theoretical frameworks namely the theories of *functionalism*, *diffusion* and *innovation*. Linton's (1936) theory of *functionalism* suggests that the *Meranaws* learned the weaving and *balod* handicrafts because they want to use such kind of handwoven fabrics for purposes and value of satisfying some of their basic needs such as bodily comfort (e.g. wearing handwoven *malong* for special occasions and as luxury textile), for dowry exchanges (*sayat*), for wedding gifts, for household use such as blankets or bed sheets, for economic use such as fishnets, wall decors, and sometimes for funeral purposes.

Hunter's (1976) theory of diffusion as one of the sources of cultural heritage is also used in this paper.

...diffusion means the process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group..."; ...it could also mean the transfer of cultural elements from one society to another with accompanying degree of reinterpretation and change in the element...

The theory of *diffusion* provides lights as to how these *Meranaw* artisans were able to learn *balod* weaving or the tie-dye technique in weaving. Hunter's (1976) theory of diffusion proposes that such skills must have been brought and borrowed from our migrating Asian ancestors and its diffusion in the *Meranaw* culture was the result of trade and social contacts between these *Meranaw* and those of their Asian ancestors. After its introduction, the *Meranaws* started to create their own innovations based on what they need, their capacity and capability to do it and the demands of their environment.

Moreover, the theory of discovery and invention or innovation complements the theory of diffusion. According to (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936):

...discovery is any addition to knowledge while invention or innovation is a new application of knowledge...new ideas or traits originated either inside or outside caused some changes in their culture because the people accepted it and use it regularly...that if an invention or discovery is ignored, no change in culture results. It is only when society or people accepts an invention or discovery and uses it regularly that we can speak of cultural change which may originate from inside or outside a society, are ultimately sources of all cultural change...

The theory of discovery and invention explains how the *Meranaws* were able to learn this weaving and tie-dye technique in weaving. Generally, since *invention* or *innovation* denotes a change which requires a significant amount of imagination, such theory supports this paper more significantly on the changes introduced in the *Meranaw balod* hand-woven fabrics. The *Meranaw* weaving artisans continued to adapt to the changing demands of their buying environment for their handicrafts to be more viable. They made some innovations or changes on their designs, colors, and functions of their handwoven fabrics in order to be more relevant to the demands of their market. They are now open to experimenting new product designs, and more usable items in response to the demands of those that buy their products. They are now birthing new in their traditional weaving that they have never done in their history, otherwise their *balod* weaving industry will start to decline.

Scope and Limitations

This paper focuses on the origin of the *Meranaw* ancient indigenous art of *balod* or tie-dye technique in weaving, the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* in using natural plant fibers and dyestuffs as raw materials in their *balod* (tie-dye) technique in weaving, and some mythical, beliefs and rituals associated in the performance of such craftsmanship. The research was conducted in Barangay *Ampao* of *Bacolod Grande*, Lanao del Sur, a bastion of and one of the prime originators of the art of *Meranaw* weaving.

Conceptual Model

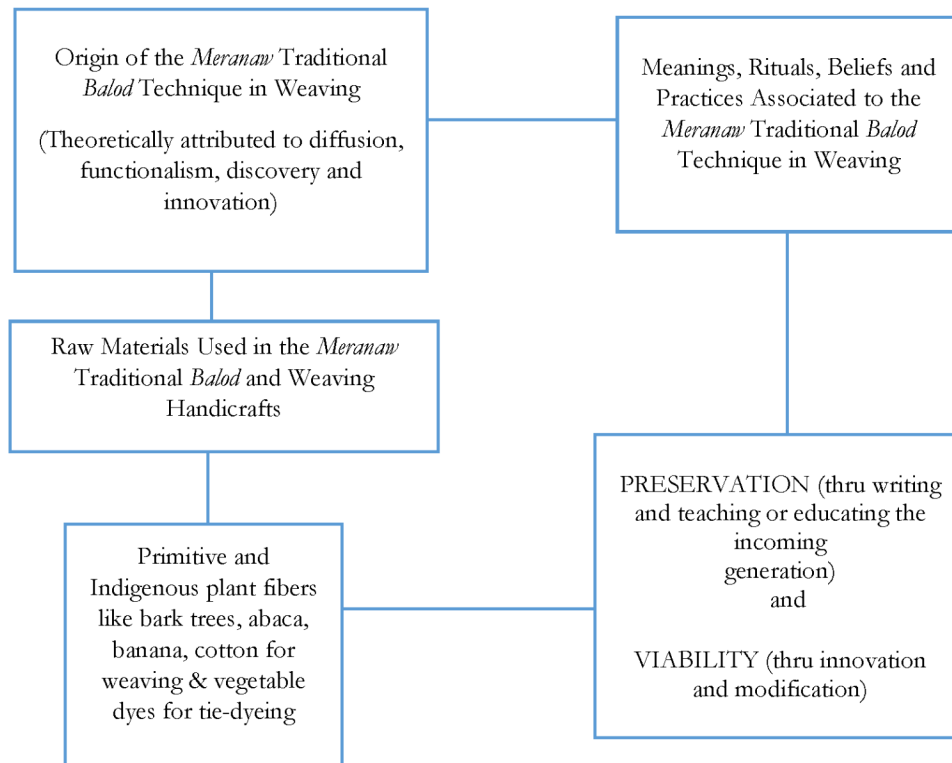


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Related Literature and Studies

This part elucidates selected literature and related studies that support the data presented and reveal facts about the craft and substantiate the antiquity of weaving and tie-dye craftsmanship that has been produced for centuries in many countries across the globe including India and many other Asian and African countries.

According to Stephens (2018), the art of weaving has evolved over the course of thousands of years, through *discovery* and *experimentation*. The idea of interlacing materials together to create a weave was probably inspired by nature (e.g. observing bird's nests, spider webs). And this technique evolved through time, and man eventually was able to stretch and dry fibers, in order to produce finer threads.

In another book, Powell (1971) states that weaving was born of necessity in the pre-conscious period of our human history and weavers wove their fabrics in order to live using

indigenous plants and raw fibers, spun these into yarn and woven into fabrics.

In the case of the Philippines, a renowned Filipino Anthropologist, Jocano (1975) pointed out that our Philippine century-old weaving culture must have taken its roots from the greater Malay-Polynesian civilization who had stepped on our shores very much earlier than the Europeans. They must have brought with them some elements of their culture, then it was borrowed and integrated with the existing culture of our indigenous settlers. It was from them where we could attribute the *discovery* (addition to knowledge) and the invention (new application of knowledge) of our century-old weaving technology.

Similar to weaving, the concept of tie-dyeing was also born out of a perceived necessity. Many studies reveal that the origin of tie and dye belongs to the category of pre-history, as countless dyers through the ages in many countries must have experimented with the use of binding to create patterns on cloth immersed in vats of dye (Smith, 2019).

Alfred Buhler, Eberhard Fischer & Marie-Louise Nabholz's (Buhler, 2018) substantiate the fact that the art of tie-dyeing is an ancient handicraft that has been practiced in the Indian subcontinent, in many other parts of Asia, America, African countries, China and Japan as early as 6th century A.D., about one and a half millennia ago (Sill, 1995). He also noted that the earliest surviving examples of *tie-dye* included a pre-Columbian alpaca **found** in Peru and silk from 4th century Chinese tombs.

From among the different tie-dye weaving techniques that were reviewed in the course of this study, the one that nearly resembles the *balod* (tie-dye) weaving technique of the *Meranaws* is the **ikat** textile weaving style in Indonesia. The word *ikat* is derived from the ancient Malay word or Indonesian word *mengikat* which is similar to the *Meranaw* word *miyangikut* which means to *tie or to bind* (Waldek, 2020).

Scott (1992) cited that the early Spanish lexicographers were able to reconstruct the weaving techniques of our ancestry by collecting, recording and defining the names of the different parts of the loom. One finds it in Pedro de San Buenaventura's *Vocabulary of the Tagalog Language with Castilian*, the earliest Tagalog dictionary extant, and one of the best during the whole Spanish period (Scott, 1992).

Lane (1989) also substantiates the fact that some Filipino tribes had been making indigenous fabrics through weaving and creating patterns, designs and motifs using the tie-dye techniques. These tribes include the *Tbolis* and *Blaans* of Southern Mindanao as well as the *Igorots*, *Bontocs* and *Kalingas* of Northern Luzon.

However, with regards to the *Meranaw balod* (tie-dye) weaving technique, there was no similar study conducted particularly on the ingenuity of the *Meranaws* in using native plants as fibers and raw dye. One can find it in some books (Department of Trade and Industry,

2020) but they only mentioned how weaving started among the *Meranaws*. Another book written by Macarambon (1979) touches on the striking similarity between the *andon* and the Indonesian *sarong* but not specifically on the *Meranaw balod fabrics*.

Methodology

This paper utilizes ethnography, a qualitative research procedure where a considerable amount of time is spent interviewing, observing, gathering documents, describing, analyzing, interpreting and understanding the patterns of a culture-sharing group in order to understand their behaviors, beliefs, and language (Creswell, 2013).

The narrative- descriptive historiography technique through the use of oral interview on selected *Meranaw pangangawl* (weavers), *pamamalod* (*balod* designers) and *pangungusod* was employed.

The research study was conducted in the weaving villages of the Municipality of Bacolod Grande namely Barangay Ampao, Orong, Dilabayan, Pindolonan, Buadi-Awani, Tuca, and some barangays of Kalawi. The place is fairly situated and ensconced in between two wonders of nature---the panoramic Lake Lanao and the majestic Mount *Gurain*, a fabled mountain with the highest altitude and longest range in the entire Lanao Region. Based on the data obtained from the Office of the Municipal Mayor of Bacolod-Kalawi, the said municipality has a population of 20, 146 and a total land area of about 3, 978 hectares. Its northern border is bounded by that of *Mount Gurain* and the Province of Lanao del Norte; the southern brink is protruding upon Lake Lanao. The eastern frontier is connected with the Municipality of Tugaya, whereas its western edge is adjacent to the Municipality of *Madalum*, both of Lanao del Sur. Comprising its territory is about 2, 468 hectares of timberland and only about 1,500 hectares of alienable and disposable lands.

Bacolod Grande, a forty (40) minute-drive from *Marawi* City, is one of the municipalities in Lanao del Sur where people still practice the indigenous art of weaving the way they used to in the old times. The place is not only known for its best *balod* fabrics but also exceptionally hand woven luxury fabrics called *malong* such as *rawatun* and *andon*. But with the passing away of many of her weaver experts, we can hardly find an exceptionally hand woven *balod* fabric in the place. Her rich weaving cultural heritage had never made her a glorious travelling destination for tourists, culture lovers and enthusiasts.

Data gathered in this study are from the fifteen (15) key informants who are expert weavers in their respective communities. They belonged to the primary group of *Meranaw pangangawl/panganga-ol* (weavers), *pamamalod* (*balod* designers) and the *pangungusod* (beamers). The key informants possessed three different or distinct expertise but interrelated to one another because a *pangangawl* cannot weave without the *pamamalod*.. In the same manner that a *pangangawl* and a *pamamalod* cannot function without the *pangungusod*.

Rarely can you find a *pangangawl* who knows how to make *balod* and who knows how to assemble all the essential paraphernalia in weaving.

This study made use of some data gathering instruments which were tailored to probe avenues of exploration that can yield information relevant for the topic being studied. These include interview schedule, participant observation, focused group discussion, the use of native (*Meranaw*) dialect, frequent visitation, the use of modern technology, like tape recorder and video-recording, and library works.

Three groups of participants who were identified to represent the groups involved in the production of finished hand-woven fabrics consisted of five (5) *pamamalod* or *balod* designers, who by virtue of their age and experience, they are presumably experts in *balod* processing and designing; five (5) *pangungusod* with older ages, ranging from 60 – 75 years that perform the most delicate and strenuous part in the production of an woven material, and five (5) *pangangaoll/pangangawl* or the weavers.

Results and Discussions

The art of weaving and tie-dyeing have evolved over the course of thousands, if not, millions of years in various parts of the globe. The use of different tie-dye terminologies in many archaeological findings lead scientists to conclude that tie-dyeing similar to weaving is a century-old handicraft. This holds true with the tradition of weaving and tie-dyeing craftsmanship of the Filipinos, particularly the weaving tribes of Luzon such as the *Ifugaos*, *Bontoks*, *Kalingas* and the weaving artisans in Southern Mindanao like the *Meranaws*, *Maguindanao*, *Tausog*, *Jama Mapun*, *Tiboli* and *Bagobos*. Their art of weaving and tie-dye technique in weaving must have been introduced to them from outside or from our migrating ancestors like the Malays and Indonesians and it became an addition to their knowledge and applied to regularly.

In the Philippines, the use of early Spanish dictionaries, one of which was that of Franciscan friar Pedro De San Buenaventura (Scott, 1984) enables us to reconstruct the Filipino weaving techniques after knowing all the recorded names for the individual parts of the loom, plant fibers and dye raw materials used in weaving.

Lane (1989) says that this art of tie-dyeing are reflected in the *T'Nalak* of the *T'Bolis* of South Cotabato, the *Mabal Tabih* of the *B'Laan* tribe in Sarangani and South Cotabato, the *Inabal* of the *Bagobos* and *Manobos* of Davao del Sur and those of the woven fabrics of the *Ifugaos*, *Bontocs* and *Kalingas*.

Origin of the Meranaw Traditional Balod Technique in Weaving

According to Omaira, the term *kabalod* whose root word is *balod* is:

... *giyangkotowa a ka -phu-li-bu-di-ron, odi na giyangkotowa ka-phu-ngi-khut-ti-ron, odi na giyangkotowa ka-phu-pha-mo-wa-ti-ron sa batuk ago so ka-phu-gi-lus-saon...* (...it is the process of wrapping with strings, the process of tying or the process of designing and dyeing...)

This *Meranaw* traditional *balod* (a *Meranaw* word for *miyangikut*) weaving technique closely resembles the Indonesian *Ikat*, an ancient Malay or Indonesian word *mengikat* which means to tie or bind. Both handwoven fabrics are created using a skill-intensive process of marking, tying and dyeing the design into the yarn before it is woven. What differs is the design because while the *Ikat* employs very elaborate and intricate designs (e.g. human figures), the *Meranaws* employ geometrical, leaf forms and other *okir*-inspired designs in their *balod* fabrics.

Figure 2 is an example of the *Meranaw* traditional *Balod* hand woven fabric with multiple designs and colors using the tie-dye technique in weaving. Figure 2 is a *Meranaw balod* bedsheet or bedcover usually used during special occasions. It is made of cotton thread and measures a standard size of two yards wide and four yards long. Meanwhile, Figure 3 shows an Indonesian woman doing the *ikat*, a method of resist-dye technique to pattern textiles. This method involves tying or covering areas of the thread to shield specific parts from penetration of the dye. After dyeing, all resists are opened and yarns of the pattern are woven. This *ikat* closely resembles the *Meranaw balod* technique where both apply the same process of marking, tying and dyeing the design into the thread before it is woven.



Figure 2. A *Meranaw balod* bedsheet or bedcover



Figure 3. The Indonesian woman doing the *ikat*.

There are no written accounts that would sufficiently prove the beginnings of the *Meranaw balod* technique in weaving. Research findings revealed that the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving is an indigenous skill that their ancestors developed out of perceived necessity. A 73-year old expert-weaver key informant Napisa revealed that their parents did not learn such weaving skills from other people or places but it is their inherent talent. Implicitly, their ancestors were able to learn the weaving skills on their own, proving their intelligence and creativity through their imagination and prowess in weaving. Their weaving skills and knowledge were all inherited from their ancestors. Saber (1979) pointed out that the *Meranaw* weaving craft was introduced by the Indonesians who also learned it from India and the former introduced it to the *Meranaws*. Jocano (1975) added that such weaving heritage seems to be a confluence of Malayan-Indian-Chinese influences, conformably with the proximity of the Philippines, particularly Mindanao, to Malaysia, Indonesia and the ancient relations with India and China.

Hadji Hedjara (one of the key informants), who had been weaving for more than fifty (50) years, said that she learned how to weave through her dreams and from her aunt Bae sa Bayabao. She was cautioned not to fail in learning such weaving skills otherwise she may end with an incurable illness, if not, insanity.

Another weaver named Hadji Racma Bayamba shared how she learned the art from a supernatural way which was through a more bizarre way. An unknown-creature appeared to her teaching and coaching her the mechanics of such artistic skill. Another weaver, the late Racma Bayamba traced how she learned the art through *taginupun* or *taginupun a piyakamumusa* referring to a more frightening phenomenon called “*phiphayagan*.” According to her, supernatural creatures appear before her who coach and guide her. She confessed that she weaves so fast as if somebody is holding the *barira*.



Figure 4. An age-old *iroan* or *manga iroan*



Figure 5. hand woven *malong*

Figure 4 and Figure 5 suggest the antiquity of the *Meranaw* weaving craftsmanship. Figure 4 is a century-old *iro-an* or *manga iroan* (sets of weaving paraphernalia) that are required to be assembled before the weaving begins. This century-old living weaving paraphernalia, owned by Sakina Sarip Saber, a centenarian surviving wife of the *Meranao* hero *Datu Akader Saber* was retrieved in her house at Barangay Saber, Marawi City during the interview with the owner in 2019. Moreover, Figure 5 is a century-old handwoven *malong* owned by the late Hadja Napsia Pangcoga, an expert weaver during her time. It is made of cotton and silk thread they bought from Chinese stores in Marawi City. It has multiple colors with no designs because the *balod* technique in weaving was not yet popular and only few knew and learned the *balod* weaving style.

Another proof on the antiquity of the *Meranaw* weaving craftsmanship was found in Pershing (1901) in the *Unpublished Memoirs of John Pershing on Moroland* that mentioned the Moros he frequently saw during market day in Iligan held every Saturday. These Moros were fully draped with woven fabrics or cloth of different colors. In another article entitled *Notes on Maranao Moros*, 1st Lt. Leo Bowman (1908) mentioned about the cotton being spun into thread for weaving and the dress of the Moros similar to that of a *sarong*, presumably *malong*, measuring five (5) feet wide and nine (9) feet long worn by both men and women and woven by themselves (Moros) of bright colored cotton obtained from the Chinese.

Indigenous Raw Materials in the *Meranaw* Traditional *Balod* Technique in Weaving

The *Meranaws* had also made use of natural and indigenous plants for their weaving handicrafts such as *waka* (abaca), which when processed produced abaca fibers they call *kakayon*, a fibrous rough fiber, of which, when hand-woven produces a fabric is made known as *kindang* (Figure 6). *Binidayan*, Lanao del Sur was traditionally known for their large *waka* (abaca) plantation, of which the fibers are sold to Cagayan de Oro City.



Figure 6. Abaca fibre or *kakayon* to the *Meranaws* is from the plant leaf stalks of the abaca plant (*waka* in *Meranaw*).

Another kind of banana plant is called *borongan*, which when stripped from its trunks or *opas* also yields banana fiber similarly called *kakayon* and when handwoven produces another fabric called *topo*. As narrated by Jiamellah (personal communication, January 25, 2019), after stripping the trunks of this *borongan*, they are pounded until all its rough and fibrous contents are removed and becomes very soft and fine. This banana, if sprinkled,

rubbed and squeezed with the ashes of an *apog* will change its color texture into pure white. This *Meranaw* word *apog* is actually the ashes obtained from flamed sea shells called *soso*. She continued that:

“...the soso are placed on top of a bamboo-made board where they are to be heated by the flame of a fire beneath it... the ashes of these shells are covered with a banana leaves overnight...then the apog is made on the following day... its color is white, like a very fine powder. If this is mixed with kalawag (turmeric) and moist this with water, the color changes to red. The kakayon, if s soaked with apog overnight, will turn very soft.”

Another raw material used in their woven textile is a vegetable fiber stripped from the cotton plant which they call *gapas*. As explained by Hedjara and Jiamellah (personal communication, January 25, 2019):

“... the cotton hairs (after removing from the seeds) are piled and then paddled until it becomes very flat and thin in all edges; then, around its surface or edges, they roll it with their fingers, stripped and spun into a single strand fiber using the gilingan or a small wooden spindle turned by hand. As the spindle turns around, you will see how such fine and smooth fibers are coming out of the spindle... “

These cotton fibers were used as their raw material in *balod* weaving probably because of the dye ability and softness of the cotton thread.

Kapangilus, the Meranaw Traditional Dyeing Technique Using Indigenous Raw Materials

Research findings revealed that the *Meranaws* had their own ingenuity of using natural or indigenous raw materials for their *kapangilus* or dyeing technique such as plants, fruits, leaves, and clay. One of which is the *lipao*, presumably a clay found near rivers, springs or rice paddies. According to *Oray* (personal communication, January 25, 2019), the tied thread when soaked in a *lipao* can turn it into black yarn.



Figure 7. Kalaloga plant

Another raw material is a grass-like plant called tagom, which when cooked, produces red color and is used to dye the *waka*. Both Hadji Jiamela and Hadji Sinab (personal communication, January 25, 2019), revealed to have used this *kalaloga*, whose fruits (*onga*), when cooked, produces red/orange color (Figure 7).

Some of the respondents mentioned the leaves of this so-called *pisaya* which when processed produces green and blue dyes. Hadji Sinab (personal communication, January 25, 2019), explained that:

“... the leaves of pisaya... when mixed with apog , water and ferment it for two days produces blue dyes...”

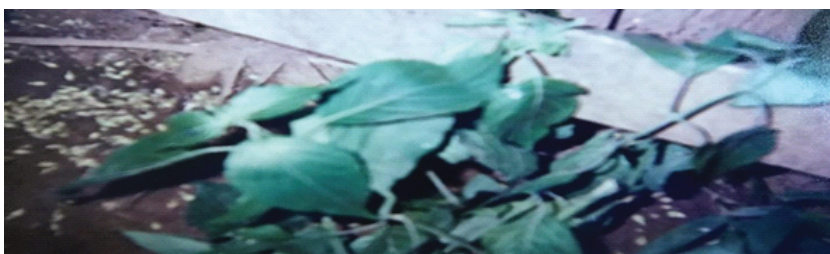


Figure 8. Pisaya plant

As mentioned by Hadja Hedjara (personal communication, January 25, 2019), another indigenous plant they utilize is *kayo a riya* which is also a source of black dye, whose leaves when *mixed* with clay called *lipao* produces black dye (Figure 9). She said that:

“... after pounding the leaves of the saging a riya...immerse the thread with its extracts...then cover this with lipao, a soft moist earth or clay found in springs... the thread turns black...but not pure black...unlike the newly introduced black thread...”



Figure 9. Kayo-a-Riya

For yellow dye, they use the concoction of the turmeric and the skin of a Mango fruit. Ina a Hedjara (personal communication, January 25, 2019), explained that:

“... the turmeric and the skin of a mango fruit are to be pounded or crushed... then soak the thread to the concoction or extract until its fully absorbed/until the thread is fully colored with yellow dye...”

Another natural dyestuff of ancient *Meranaw* weavers is the so called *torsi* made from a mixture of an extract from *talambo* or *phuga* (pomelo-like fruit) and scratches from any steel-made cooking wares (e.g. *kara* or *kodun*), the result of which is the *torsi* which is also used in blackening their teeth.

Essential Steps in the Meranaw Traditional Balod Technique in Weaving

According to Sanaoray Balindong (personal communication, January 25, 2019), the essential steps to be undertaken in order to produce the so-called *balod* designs include the *kasod*, which involves the hardest and tedious process of stretching and fastening the *tomadhung* in a wooden instrument known as *bidangan* for two days or more; the *Kapangikut/Kapamongkos* (tying or wrapping) where the fastened thread in the *bidangan* are tied with strings of rice sacks in line with the predetermined pattern or design. Before wrapping, they rub this first with either *taro* (beeswax) that comes from a waste of insects called *batiyokan*, or the *dukhut*, a waste of another insect known as *tamaing* or *tamosan* or the *gola a tunub* (honey bee) for the strings to stick together. According to Sanaoray:

“...if the nests of this insects called *batiyokan* are cooked, that waste substance they call *taro* separates from that nest...either they make this into ball-like form or store them in a can...and every ball-like form of *taro* costs fifty (50) pesos) ...these waste substances of *tamaing* and *batiyokan* are made after squeezing their nests to produce the *taro*...”

It is the *tomadhung* that is knotted or wrapped tight enough to resist the dye from penetrating into it. The third step is the *Kapangi-lus* or *Ka-sayn* (Dyeing), where they immerse the thread wrapped with strings into three gallons of boiling water filled with dyes they call *Venus*. After washing, hanged and dried, the wrappings are carefully removed. The dyed thread, which is to become part of the *tomadhung*, is again stretched on the loom and rubbed with rice paste (smashed cooked rice) to harden and form patterns or designs. At this stage, one can see the patterns or designs emerging, ready to be woven.

The Meranaw Traditional Balod Designs and Patterns

The *Meranaw* weaving artisans culled such designs from the legendary *okir* patterns, the generic term for scroll, geometric and flowering designs, often based on an elaborate leaf and vine pattern (Sakili, 2003). These elements of *okir* from where *Meranaw* traditional weaving artisans applied their designs are the *matilak*, *potyok*, *dapal* (raon), *pako*, *todi*, *pako longat*, *pako rai*, *naga* and *binitoon*. They favor two major colors such as yellow which stands for

royalty and maroon red or alizarin crimson red known to the *Meranaw* as *sutra* (Macarambon, 1979). Figures 10, 11 and 12 are samples of the old and traditional *Meranaw* traditional *balod* designs that present *Meranaw* weaving artisans no longer apply or include in their motifs or patterns.



Figure 10. One of the traditional *Meranaw* designs they call *Niyaga* whose root word is *naga* which means a serpent.



Figure 11. *Meranaw* Traditional *balod* design they call *ongkop* depicting geometric patterns and design elements such as diamond or angular forms such as square and triangle that are expressive of arrested action attributed to male.



Figure 12. *Meranaw* traditional *balod* design they call *onsod*.

The Meanings, Rituals, Beliefs and Practices Associated to the *Meranaw* Traditional *Balod* Technique in Weaving

Before the late expert weaver Hadji Hedjara Idaros passed away at the age of 90, she said that beginners are obliged to perform a very sacred series of rituals described by them as *di mbatonan* or *angay sa iroan*:

“...preparing two trays of foods consisting of yellow rice, cooked chicken, Meranaw sweetened pastries and cakes like dodol and amik, and two pieces of chicken eggs... The yellow rice is made into a crocodile-shaped figure, the two cooked chicken eggs as its eyes, the dodol as its arms and the amik as its scales...”;

phurawatiban so Nabi Ibrahim: “... the two trays containing foods are with white cloth, followed by praying to Allah that the student shall be blessed with the blessings of knowledge upon Prophet Ibrahim and his descendant Fatima (the daughter of Prophet Mohammad) who are believed to be the originators of all male and female craftsmanship, respectively...”;

and the kandori: “... the tuwan who performs the prayers, will receive dress, malong, P50.00 and one tray of foods...; those Meranaw sweetened pastrie will be given to neighborhood...; the remaining tray of foods will be eaten by the learner and not to offer this to anybody... The respondent added that these rituals are being kept secret because: ... if a lady or unmarried woman happens to witness the rituals, she may be impregnated...; and for a man to witness such rituals will cause his death... those that cannot learn such skills will suffer insanity or mental disorders, illnesses and difficulty in learning, especially if one refuses to perform such rituals

The respondent cited the case of her sister *Napsia*, who got sick when she declined to perform the rituals and the recovery of *Sanaoray* after she smelling the scent of a burned scrapes of an *iroa-an*.

Some Modifications and Innovations for the Preservation and Viability of the Meranaw Traditional Balod Technique in Weaving

Traditionally, the *Meranaws* are not open to new cultural elements. Their craftsmanship still remained to be original, very traditional or folkish and worst, neglected because of the remoteness, too warlike and too poor to attract the interest of people from other places.

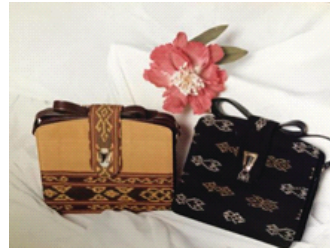
Research findings reveal that the *Meranaw* traditional *balod* technique in weaving is seemingly declining because of various reasons such as the dwindling number of skilled *Meranaw panganga-wl* and *pamamalod* due to deaths, old age, illness, loss of memory; the chain of passing down the traditional weaving craft through the generation was broken; many weaver artisans showed little interest in expanding their weaving industry; their children preferred to finish schooling and find new careers while others choose to venture into other businesses and shifted to other crafts ; a limited supply of essential raw materials

like thread ; and the absence of capital and ready markets for their finished products.

But realizing the unavoidable decline of their weaving industry, the *Meranaws* weaving artisans made some changes and innovations in their weaving industry as reflected in their designs, colors, raw materials and usage of their *balod* hand woven fabrics. To save this seemingly diminishing weaving heritage, the *Meranaws* are now venturing into making innovative products designs with market relevance as shown in Figure 13.



Functionable Bags



Shoulder Bags



Organizers



Table Runners

Figure 13. Some of the new product designs use their hand-woven *balod* fabrics that can create new larger marketing opportunities for such products.

New concept of converting these *balod* hand woven fabrics into more usable and functionable items was accepted. Although the quality, texture and value of their products were affected by changing the kind of thread that are of low quality and cost, they have no choice otherwise their *balod* weaving industry would soon decline.

Evidence shows that the Meranaw traditional *balod* technique in weaving is introduced by the Indonesians who learned it from India and the former introduced it to the Meranaws. This is supported by the similarity of meanings between *ikat* and *balod* which means to tie or to bind (Charter, 2019). Although there are differences in the designs, motifs and colors but their weaving style and technique, the use of waist loom, the preparation and process is somewhat similar.

The Meranaw developed intricate and complicated designs out of their ingenuity, intelligence, creativity and they have been mastering this much admired art form for a very

long time. The Meranaw traditional weavers employ more or less the same universal principle of operation such as the beaming –on (kasod), shredding (kapanongit), picking step and the beating-up. As for the tie-dyeing aspect, the essential steps involved in the Meranaw traditional balod technique follow a common basic processes like the stretching of the tomadhung into the bidangang; the wrapping/tying of these thread according to the predetermined motifs or designs; tied thread is soaked into boiling water filled with dyes; when dried, the wrappings are removed and those that resisted the dyes emerged as the designs of the hand woven fabrics.

The Meranaw traditional weaving practices in general is accompanied by mythical performances, the ritual offerings to the spirits of all those women who may have originated weaving asking guidance to make the fingers nimble, the hands adroit and the mind creative, thus becoming a dexterous weaver. Descending from the originators of weaving is also considered otherwise she will never learn the trade, suffer sickness, if not, insanity for not finishing her weave, for not interpreting the designs correctly or trying to learn what does not pertain to her.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can then be concluded that the *Meranaw balod* “tie-dye” weaving style is an ancient handicraft that has been practiced for thousands, if not, millions of years in various parts of the globe like India, China and in many parts of Asia, as evidenced by the use of different terminologies, all of which convey the same meaning which is the process of tying off areas or sections of the thread with strings, then immerse it with vats of dyes to make pattern or designs.

The viability of the weaving handicrafts is attributed to the ingenuity, artistic genius, tenacity of their culture bearers, and the innovation of products to adapt to current trends using traditional designs. Hence, a cultural heritage center with an advocacy of promoting and preserving Meranaw culture has to be established. The setting-up of weaving centers or training centers where expert *Meranaw* weaving artisans are encouraged to train a new generation of weavers. Moreover, the *Meranaw pamamalod* have to be empowered on product development to expand market opportunities.

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