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Cultural Motifs in *Blaan Flalok*: Revitalization of Oral Lore for Preservation, Development, and Sustainability

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Abstract

This study analyzes the culture of the *Blaan* indigenous peoples (IPs) in General Santos, Sarangani, and South Cotabato, Philippines, as reflected in their *flalok* (oral lore). Utilizing qualitative-descriptive methods, it discusses patterns of traditional beliefs in myths, legends, and folktales as retold by *Blaan* ancestors. Thompson's Motif-Index Theory was used to codify recurring concepts in selected *Blaan* folk narratives. Frequent *Blaan* cultural motifs in the *flalok* include familial relationships, domestic work, tribal war, competitions, animal trapping, and agricultural farming. The research contributes to the continuous enrichment of Philippine Studies and delineates Mindanao Studies as a significant aspect of that work. It provides a reference for cultural workers, researchers, and academics to understand how the lives and works of Mindanaoan Tri-people (IPs, Bangsamoro, and Christian settlers) sustain broader Filipino cultural perspectives. Specifically, it provides more inclusive starting points for enduring cultural motifs to be part of the broader cultural appreciation reflected in Philippine theater, film, creative writing, dance, music, and other arts.

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Philippine folklore is a source of distinct Filipino literature. It represents the attempt of our people at self-expression and reveals their life and spirit through traditions, customs, dances, tales, sayings, and songs. These various elements of culture mold and unite families and society. However, scholars also argue that in the spirit of uniting communities, folklore limits some modern expressions of identity, ethnicity, and gender. The researchers in this study comprise two observers of *Blaan* culture and one participant of the culture with a long-standing relationship with the *Blaan* people as an “insider” with working knowledge of the community. All members of the team are academics who have been teaching in different institutions in Mindanao Island of the Philippines; two (one male and one female) are from the Department of Education (DepEd), and one (male) is from a state university under the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The researchers partnered with a non-governmental organization (NGO), particularly the *Flalok* Project of the Conrado and Ladislawa-Alcantara Foundation Incorporated (CLAFI).

Our research is centered around the concern, as highlighted by Yu and De Catalina (2022), that oral lore is gradually diminishing in the modern world. Hence, there is a need to preserve, sustain, and develop the oral tradition of the *Blaan* to protect their culture, lifeways, values, and identity as an indigenous people (IP) (Sumaljay, 2009). The Philippines is a conglomeration of diverse communities; however, many cultures have preserved their heritage through the use of folklore, providing accessible links to past practices as well as binding ties to their folk. The continuous study of the past and the call to preserve folkways fascinates many researchers and has prompted the investigation of methods to promote cultural identity and sustain continuity between past and present lore. Thus, *Blaan* learned that oral tradition is a form of indigenous knowledge that will continuously grow through communal interaction (Agbas et al., 2017).

Flalok, an oral lore of *Blaan*, is an integral part of cultural heritage and a valuable resource for historical and contemporary folk narrative studies. It reflects groups’ and individuals’ moral values, beliefs, and identities over time (Medler, 2010). In worldwide folklore studies, folk narratives generally refer to any traditional literature that has been passed on by word of mouth. It includes traditional literature: myths, legends, and folktales told in particular situations for particular purposes by a folk group. The best evidence of transmission is those practices of oral lore in indigenous cultural communities (ICCs) worldwide. Hence, *Blaan*’s affinity with their land, forest, and the variety of environmental resources has led to the development of *flalok*. The interconnectedness of these components is vital for developing their culture, religion, and community (Gloria et al., 2006).

Folklorists, literary scholars, and anthropologists worldwide ignited their interest in oral lore by collecting, studying, and preserving the oral literature of the world’s different peoples. In 1812, the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published volumes of oral folk narratives and interpretations of Germanic mythology. However, Kothari (1981) asserted that some people do not work with folk narratives as a distinct discipline. Instead, they collect whatever folk narratives they find interesting and integrate them superficially into their work. In 1983, Boas undertook a geologic expedition to investigate seawater under Arctic conditions. His year-long stay with the whalers and those now referred to as Inuit and First Nations indigenous peoples turned him into an ethnographer and convinced him that the local knowledge he gained helped him understand indigeneity.

Today, there has been an effort to widen the concept of valuable national literature in the Philippines. In this paper, the collection and analysis of oral traditions of different indigenous peoples (IPs) will promote a more prosperous Philippine literary arts tradition. Demetrio (1975, p.8) states, “A nation is judged not only by how economically well-off it is but also by its ability to develop and maintain a cultural distinctiveness.” Hence, our interest in this paper is to retrieve folk narratives to build cultural identity and distinct examples of Philippine communities.

The rise of social media and increasing dependence on technology for communication makes it unsurprising that many people, especially the young, no longer experience hearing folk stories and beliefs handed down through oral methods. Students of Philippine culture also lament the scarcity of published collections of Philippine literature, especially of the fast-vanishing species that we call oral lore. One way of taking this journey with 'rareness' is by retrieving the oral lore of indigenous people whose varied traditions have been passed on through generations. Bresnahan (1979) argues that the oral lore chanters and tellers were like literary society.

Our analysis in this paper focuses on *Blaan flalok* (oral lore). *Blaan* initially inhabited the valleys in Mount Matutum, South Cotabato, in the Philippines. They have gradually moved to different areas of Sarangani Province and Davao del Sur (Guéguen, 2010). In Mindanao, the *Blaan* are considered one of the most colorful indigenous cultural communities. Their culture of animism, which is cognizant of the supernatural elements of local nature, is reflected in their religious beliefs, customs, and traditions (Francisco et al., 2021). Presently, their population is approximately 136,000 people, 35% of whom are Christians and 11% are Evangelical (Joshua Project, 2023).

The Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) of the Province of Davao Occidental, spanning from 2017 to 2022, further claimed that the *Blaan* can be categorized into two groups: the To Baba (lowlanders) and the To Lagad (highlanders). The lowlanders are primarily situated in the coastal regions of Sarangani, General Santos City, and parts of Davao del Sur, particularly in the municipalities of Jose Abad Santos, Balut, and the Sarangani islands. On the other hand, the highlanders are concentrated along the borders of Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat provinces. Therefore, other *Blaan* communities in Mindanao are generally referred to as To Lagad.

Our study seeks to codify the cultural motifs found in *Blaan flalok* within the barrio of Alabel, Sarangani Province, Philippines. Employing Thompson's (1955/2016) Motif Index Theory, we intend to unveil recurring cultural patterns within selected stories. Our objective is to interpret these patterns within the context of the indigenous knowledge system and practices of the *Blaan*, thereby contributing to the cultural record of *Blaan* identity and distinctiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Stith Thompson created a taxonomy of folk literature that includes, among other things, folktales, legends, and myths. In a story with three categories: actors, items, and single incidents, the theme is the most minor, oddest, and most noticeable component. Most motifs fall under the third kind of motif, which may also stand alone as a story in its own right. Thompson created a comprehensive motif-index list as an analytic tool to organize folk literature logically because he thought categorizing themes was crucial in studying tales. The motif index assists categorization because it reflects narrative units in a structured manner and enables the identification of narrative elements in the oral lore (Harun et al., 2021). As a literature student, he began his oral lore interests and constantly emphasized the interrelationship of oral and written narrative versions. Literature and oral tradition are very different, each following lore, law, and transmission practices. However, they may seem alike on the surface since there has been an interchange of content and style between them since the beginning of written literature.

Thompson makes three strong points related to our study. First, he regarded genre distinctions mainly as a technical convenience for study, in the same manner that the types and motifs of his indexes should be used, that is, technically. One should look at the genre definitions of each culture concerning its folklore. In this respect, we identified *Blaan flalok* as the focus of our study. Secondly, the similarities between basic human situations and experiences and the nature of human thought produce parallels across folklore types and motifs through independent invention. One must not rush

to assume diffusion between two similar motifs in separate places before the possibility of polygenesis, the independent invention of complex tales in specific localities, has been adequately considered. Third, he reemphasizes the universality of storytelling, particularly among pre-literate peoples, for whom it is an essential means of transmitting information and entertainment. The laws of reaction and transmission are the same in all cultures (Martin, 2007, pp. 18-19).

In the words of Stith Thompson (2016, p. 16), “In folklore, the term motif is used to designate any one of the parts into which an item of folklore can be analyzed.” It might be seen from a character, an occurrence, a brief, straightforward tale, a piece of background information, or an invented setting. A motif must possess a unique quality that allows it to endure in tradition. The historic-geographic technique of motif index was established by folklorists who felt that each motif was universal in the distribution or prevalent in certain narrative types over huge areas but only sometimes associated with the beginning of a single tale (Martin, 2007, p.16).

Materials and Methods

The project followed the guidelines of the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) in the conduct of research. The researchers first gained access to research documents by approaching the Conrado and Ladislawa-Alcantara Foundation Incorporated (CLAFI) project leaders to seek permission to undertake the research. Approvals were granted in 2018. One team member, a participant-researcher, and a prime mover of CLAFI used Key Informant Interview (KII), Focus Group (FG), and validation methods to retrieve knowledge about folk narratives and cultural identity in Philippine communities. Upon issuing the Certificate of Pre-Condition by the NCIP, CLAFI, and 30 volunteer *Blaan* teachers-writers went to General Santos, Sarangani, and South Cotabato. Together, they identified *Blaan* ancestors, considered bearers of culture and knowledgeable with *flalok*. The other two remaining team members who played as observer-researchers were able to process the gathered data by applying the Motif-Index theory of Stith Thompson.

In the actual data collection process, the participant-researcher of the team and the selected *Blaan* teacher-writers went to their respective storytellers. They used their mobile phones to record the whole *Blaan flalok* as they were being recounted. As a little show of appreciation for their kindness in sharing their oral lore, each storyteller received a simple gift of pre-packaged groceries. The stories were gathered between February 2 and February 19, 2016. Following a selection process, out of 72 published *Blaan flalok*, CLAFI granted six (6) oral lore to be utilized in this research. Data from FGs with *Blaan* storytellers were analyzed further. The storytellers requested the research team that their names must appear in the paper to support the authenticity and veracity of *flalok*.

We used a qualitative-descriptive research design patterned in Yu et al. (2022) and Dino et al. (2023). This first involved identifying a selection of *flalok* to represent recurring myths, legends, and folktales noted in FGs and KIIs. The criterion for final *flalok* selection was based on organization and data analysis according to criteria such as popularity, peculiarity, influence, admiration, and overall acceptance by different *Blaan* living in several communities. This principle of recurrence and consistency was used to qualify the oral lore selected for this research. It ensured that the six (6) selected *flalok* were identified as distinct local knowledge in the places where *Blaan* reside. As a result of organizing and analyzing the discussion and interviews, the following were selected as representing key narratives and indigenous practices: Myths: *Kan Ku Mdatah Langit?* (Why has the sky receded upward?); *Tising Lanah* (The Lost Ring), Legends: *Kumutku* (My Blanket); *Buntud Tulan* (The Hill of Bones); Folktales: *Skuya* (Competition), and *Lmiman Fnu Na Aniguk* (Turtle and Monkey went Hunting).

Using this data, the researchers undertook a second stage of analysis reading for recurring

cultural motifs in selected *Blaan* folk narratives and applied codes to these motifs. Thompson's book *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (2016) provided the benchmarks for this analysis stage. Qualitative description proceeded similarly to Yu and Dino using the following general steps: collecting data, organizing data, determining the core data for analysis, applying analysis within the chosen theoretical framework, and making interpretations relevant to the research aim/purpose.

The study serves several purposes: drawing attention to *Blaan flalok* as a mechanism of communication and cultural maintenance, a systematic way of identifying motifs, and, more importantly, a way of using indexes to analyze and interpret changes in indigenous practices and local knowledge. Equally important, it identifies research practices that facilitate working with barrios and their residents to generate shared indigenous knowledge and communication practices.

Results and Discussion

The *Blaan* call their folk narratives *flalok*. These stories are transmitted orally and recorded to keep track of the culture and history of the ICCs. The *flalok* reflects their values and socio-cultural practices. *Blaan* elders usually tell the stories while the young ones listen. *Flalok* fuels curiosity in the youth who hear it. This curiosity leads to a more profound knowledge of *Blaan's* heritage and history. The more stories a younger listener hears, the more their minds are exposed to rich information and enculturation, especially about their ICC's culture and traditions.

Blaan Myths

The myth *Kan Ku Mdatah Langit?* (Why the sky receded upward), retold by Maga M. Ecoy, contains the recurring cultural motif of a *Blaan* woman pounding the corn, telling heaven to go up as it is too low, and her pestle reaches it every time she pounds it. In Thompson (2022), this recurring motif has the code A625.2.2, a typical Filipino folklore.

Di muna du, nun satu tua libun, nun ngaan tukay lagi Fuyuy tua libun ngaan di fanga labun du gal mngel kanen. Kafngen fkurang dun nimuan mdak blibù agul. Di kluton kdak blibù, gasduk lu di langit du mdanà, man tua libun, “edul ge di tah, langit. Magket langit ditù di tah gagin ngàan. Là garè tua libuni kagket langit. La sikuf di nawan i kagket langit Taman lêan nulit man dun, “edul ge tah, langit! Too edul tah langit. Na ta balù kagut dun la gumaham La ti garè i tua libun dun, gedul tah langit gagin i ngàan. Na manakan edul tah, ti keyen tah, tamawag gukel langit gagin i ngàan. Di klidu nawa i tua libun, maloh i Iwakan di fîfîn. Là mlon ta nun lingen tamlo. Ta manan, “Nè gu nun malna?” Nun tmimel, “Dee di gutnga gu nun malnà.” ta là gamtimel tua libun du fnù baan blibù.

[TRANSLATION]

Once upon a time, an old woman had a baby boy. The old woman put her child to sleep in a cradle on a cloud because the child was crying. After letting her child go to sleep, she continued pounding corn. In her pounding, the pestle she was using reached the heavens because they were too low. The old woman said, “Move higher heavens,” and, indeed, the heavens moved higher. But beyond the old woman's knowledge, the heavens moved higher with her child. The old woman repeatedly said, “Move higher, heavens.” The heavens moved higher and higher until she could not reach it anymore. The old woman did not know that her child moved higher along with the heavens. When she looked up, she was surprised that her child was already up there with the heavens. The old woman got sad and started to cry. While crying, she suddenly heard a voice say, “Why are you grieving?” Somebody answered, “Look up to the heavens.” And the old woman couldn't talk anymore because her mouth was full.

The myth reflects the economic practice of the *Blaan*, as the corn pounding practice is used for family consumption or selling in the market. The *Blaan* are cultivators of the land, practicing swine farming and growing rice and corn, among many other crops. The myth also reveals that the *Blaan* are industrious and hardworking. Also, it shows that the *Blaan* are loving people, for they cherish love for

family, as evidenced by the older woman's grief at the loss of her child and her passion for taking care of her child even while doing household chores.

The myth of *Tising Lanal* (The Lost Ring), retold by Eduardo S. Balunto, possesses the repeated cultural motif of the *Blaan* process of courtship and marriage. Kafi (the hawk) and Tanefe (the hen) develop a lifetime enmity due to the marriage dissolution. When Tanefe (the hen) decided to refuse the marriage proposal of Kafi (the hawk) and marry Masel (the rooster) due to their developed friendship since they were young, Kafi (the hawk) was deeply frustrated and angered. Kafi (the hawk) became more outrageous when Tanefe (the hen) lost the engagement ring that he gave her. In Thompson (2022), this recurring motif pattern has the code A2494.13.10.3, the same analysis of African fables by (Rosenhuber, 1926). This reveals that this story has the same form as some African folk narratives.

Magu satu du, mayeng kafi digu sdaf du na Wak mada digu sdaf I BulenMayeng Kafi lam labun du mabal libun nween yaan. Kakelen ditu di blabal I du na blabal bulenlande teenen libunManak mayeng ali Kafi na Wak, salu digu sot du, non teen la libun fye baweh, tamdak I dad Ibal Kafi na WakFdana mdaf Wak na Kafi fdarong di kane tinefe Anuk Bnas, manen "Bi sawang libun ge?" manen "hee kan?" Maye ge do? Nwe tage yaan" man Kafi "sawang libun na tam aye ge?" Du tamaye ge do, ble tagi I tising gu blawenmda I Tenefe kahan di tnaloo tising blawen KafiTaman Kafi" tasakdo temon!" na slah ani slaham bliagam, kanton bliag dunen I bukayDi lial Kafi slah tinefe anak bnasNa man Kafi di kane Anuk Bnas, "tnagak ta ge du nagu lo mule ditu di banwe mi digu sdaf du, silang gu mile safedem ku ta song ate" Tmimel anak Bnas "Hee, na kilen kakelam dini?" na man Kafi, "kel agu dige di walu ni, na ta ksong ta yelle ku la teenem agu di walu ni, kel agu dini di oyer ani, ta dunan aye ta du ksong" man Tanefe, "hee" "ani manen ta le gami mule wak ditu di gu sdaf du."

Ti kakel Anuk Bnas ditu di gumne lasmalek Masel Anuk, "det I dagit mne di tnaloo aye Tanefe Anuk?" "Blawen" man Tanefe Anuk Bnas"na ne gu mweam dun aye? ye gum we gudun ani Masel, di Kane Kafi blen deg," "kan?" "du nwean agu yaantoon agu ti knaye bay la maye agu dun." "Tayman MaselNwe Masel blawen na baten, du la mayean ku swe Kafi na Anuk Bnas du ye Kaye dale swe alwe. "Ye duen gu la dini Tanefe Anuk Bnas, du makol agu blawen ble gu ge, kan ku ye knayeam I lagi mda di mawag?" Nwe Masel i tising blawen di tnaloo Anuk Bnas na batenYe duenen i balu anak kenen kun tmuke kalmikis du ye fan ngabalen I tising.

La mlon, kel Kafi na Wak magin I dad Tuan. Du ni du ksong laNa ta mliru Tanefe Anuk. Smalek Kafi, kan ku mliru ge, git I kalnirum? Tmimel Tanefe Anuk, "ye kalniru gu ni du ta lanah I tisingam, tala dinin." "Kan?" salek Kafi"Bat Masel du la mayean ku myaan agu dige." "ta dunen aye," taman kafi, "dnawat gu "kafngen snaleken Tanefe Anuk, "simto knayeam di Iwe mi? Masel ku do?"

tmimel Tanefe Anuk, "ye knaye gu Masel du gami sagin mda di munan." Taman kafi, "dnawat gu "kafngen snaleken Tanefe Anuk, "simto knayeam di Iwe mi? Masel ku do?" tmimel Tanefe Anuk, "ye knaye gu Masel du gami sagin mda di munan." Man Kafi, "lo ye fine gu fanggabalem do tising bat I Masel, du ku la teen gu run, sngel kel digusenam balu ku dee nga yu, kanfe." Na dunen aye kel dim du ni ku teenem Kafi na Wak ku nun teen la anak mliton kanfe du mda di tising na slah lanah atu.

[TRANSLATION]

There were two friends, Kafi (hawk), who was from the east, and Wak (crow) from the west. One day, they went out to look for a wife for Kafi. They went to Kafi's place first but have yet to find a female. So they flew further until they reached the east where Wak lived. There, they found a beautiful hen named Tanefe. They flew lower and got near Tanefe. "Are you single?" Kafi asked. "Yes, why?" answered Tanefe. "Will you agree to be my wife?" Kafi asked. Tanefe consented. "Since you like me, I am giving you this golden ring and white necklace," Kafi added. Tanefe then put the ring on her finger and wore the necklace. Kafi bade goodbye to the place and promised to return on their wedding day.

Tanefe also went home. Masel (rooster) saw her and asked, "What is that on your finger?" "This is gold from Kafi because he is going to marry me. He likes me very much, but I do not like him," she explained. Masel did not like what he heard. "I have been away to dig gold to give you because I want to marry you. Why would you marry someone who lives from afar?" Masel then took the ring from Tanefe and threw it away.

After several days, Wak, Kafi, and his parents were back for the wedding. Tanefe became very sad. Kafi asked her why. "I am worried because I lost your ring. Masel threw it away because he does not want me to marry you," Tanefe explained. "Who between the two of us would you like to marry?" asked Kafi. "It is Masel because we have been together since we were young," Tanefe answered. "You have to return the ring to me. You must look

for it because I will go after your chicks if I do not get it back,” Kafi warned her. Tanefe could not find

and return the ring to Kafi, which is why, until now, hawks and crows hunt little chicks.

The myth mirrors *Blaan*'s social practices. The giving of the golden ring and necklace by the Kafi (hawk) to Tanefe (hen) reflects the practice of the *Blaan* regarding courtship and marriage. The family of the man gave gifts to the family of the woman. The *Blaan* term for dowry or bride price is known as *kasfala*, while the practice of gift-giving is called *kafini*. When Masel (the rooster) learned about Kafi giving the ring and the necklace to Tanefe, he got angry, for he had been digging gold himself for Tanefe's dowry. In the story, Tanefe chose Masel over Kafi when the latter made her choose because she and Masel had been together since they were young. This culture of the *Blaan* is associated with fixed marriage, or *koswo libon*. It is a ritual that encompasses a long period because their parents had a compact that a wedding between them would occur when Masel and Tanefe reached the proper age.

On the other hand, the scene when Kafi brings his entire family to meet Tanefe's family symbolizes the union of the two families and community affairs. In the culture of the *Blaan*, a wedding must result from a consensus among all the family members to show respect for each member, especially the parents of both parties. Nevertheless, the presupposed marriage failed due to the misunderstanding between Kafi and Tanefe. Hence, Kafi demanded that Tanefe return the ring and the necklace to him. It is a culture of the *Blaan* wherein the man may demand the return of the dowry if the marriage is dissolved. The man may take offense against the woman if the bride's price is not returned.

Blaan Legends

In the legend, *Kumutku* (My Blanket), retold by Mina Bacali Sogi, the first cultural motif is (F11), the *Blaan* traditional belief in journeying to heaven and magical transformation like in Demetrio (1975) when he analyzed existing Filipino lore. It is seen in the part of the story when Sku (a young boy) was left behind when the boat that carried people to heaven arrived, and his parents could ride except for him. The second motif (D150) is reflected in the last part of the story when the boy transforms into the *Kumutku* bird after repeating the phrase “kumut ku” (my blanket) for a very long period in the cold night. Thus, the cultural motifs based on Thompson (2022) reflect Filipino folk stories.

Di muna du, nun dad salay mnè di gutngà dlag. Nun kay ngà la lagi dagitan Sku. Satu du, mdà mään na yéan nun fagtulen la kanen Sku. “Nang ge ali magu mawag là garèam ku gtagag ge,” man yéan, “Là garèam dun ku det i kakel aweng garing mwè gito, slabù mään. Kabay mdà Sku la ti flingen di dad tuan” Faloh yu gu kabye gasil agu samfulè” man Sku Klalan talù, klalan milah mdà, “ayé, a mà gasil agu samfulè” man Sku Na too gasil samfulè Sku mulè di gumnè la Ta yé nun du, mbal Sku mlat nabèn fanaan. Là mlon gkagol, ta kel aweng garing gu smakay la mbaton. Fan-ngabal dad tuan Sku. “Wee... Skul Tanèam? Takel aweng garing.” Kabay là ti kel Sku. Mdà di du to, tambaton i dad tua Sku lulen aweng garing Ti kakel Sku fan-ngabalan dad tuan We yé, we mà! Tagumnè yu? Kamu yu tmagak deg? Là agu gsakay di aweng, kit Sku Tamlo dini, na ditù, landè teenan. Ti kakifuhan, ta beg fan-ngabal Sku kamutan” Balù beg yu mbaton beg yu tagak deg kumut gu,” man Sku Mngel Sku Uteman di ngelan, “kumut gu, sèe tbu kumut gus sèe tbu hu hu hu!” Ta katu gkurang Sku di dalanen mngel Ti kfayahan mnè Sku di tah fatal Too ti mlirù kanen. Magu file butang, myak Sku di tah kayu du fandaman samfulè

dad tuan Kanton naye kulitan, ta nun taenan tmbò dad bul anak Na tatanbuan talù, kumut ku, kumut ku Mdà atu, mbaleng Sku anak tah kayu dnagit Kumutku.

[TRANSLATION]

Long ago, there lived a couple in the middle of the forest. They had a son named Sku. One day, the parents advised him. “Do not go very far; you might be left behind,” the mother said. “We do not know when the golden boat will arrive to fetch us,” the father added. Nevertheless, Sku did not listen to his parents' advice. “Let me go. Promise I will come home right away,” Sku said. He left as fast as he was talking, yet he came back home immediately. Another day, Sku asked permission to go hunting, bringing his arrow. Shortly after he had left, the golden boat arrived. The boat would transport them from earth to heaven. His parents looked for him, “Sku, where are you? The golden boat has arrived.” However, Sku was nowhere to be found. Sku's parents needed to ride on the golden boat as it had already left. As soon as Sku arrived home, he looked for his parents. “I missed the boat! Mother, Father,

where are you? Why did you leave me behind?" shouted Sku. He kept on calling but failed to see his parents. Night came, and Sku looked for his blanket. "You should not have brought my blanket when you left," Sku cried. "Kumut gu (my blanket) hu hu hu," he went on crying until he fell asleep. The

next morning, Sku sat on a rock, very sad. Several days passed, and Sku climbed a tree, thinking his parents would return home. When he looked at his skin, he saw feathers starting to grow. He started making the sound "Kumut gu, kumut sku," and Sku turned into a bird which people named Kumutku.

The legend teaches about the virtue of obedience to a parent's authority. Children should always obey their parents, as doing otherwise would lead to harm. It is evident that Sku (the young boy) was left when the golden boat that would carry people to heaven arrived at their home. This *Blaan* culture reveals that they strongly believe in the existence of heaven as they live on earth; for them, the chance to have a journey to heaven is priceless. The *Blaan* believed in the importance of a heavenly home rather than an earthly dwelling.

The legend *Buntud Tulan* (Hill of Bones) has the recurring cultural motif of a tribal war. It paves the way towards an original place name, describing an event that happened in a particular place reflected in the code (*A1617.3.), and the creation of mountains mirrored in the code (A960) took place through the piling of the dead bodies of the enemies until a hill was formed. Our initial analysis of this *flalok* indicated alignment with two different motif indexes (Thompson, 2022).

Di amdu ni, non Bolul ditu di safu, Padidu sacof di Malapatan, di gu sabla du na dnagit la Buntud Tulan. Na det kibo kagwu-an dagitan ani bolul ani, na ani sin flalok toolunan. Di monan, non bong kasda-as aye dad Blaen na Manobo di banwu ye Aye dad Manobo ta-o fulong dale magot fana na bohohol Na tan non basbaluw aye dad alwu tribu ye. Aye amo aye dad Manobo na Bong Dong na Kay Dong Aye amo aye dad Blaen na Bong To na Kay To Satu du alu Bong Dong na Kay Dong ngatu alu di sabla dad kontalu la na du-u fnati la dad Blaen na salngad sa nimo alu Bong To na Kay To, na aye sin gumda aye kasda-as la Bong Dong na Kay Dong samfuli alu ngatu di daul daramu na amlak alu dad lagi mo asda-as na salngad na nimo aye dad Blaen Na saslang alu ditu di safu na non bong kasda-as aye ta nimo la. Kanto gamtj alu Bong Dong na Kay Dong Lo tukay Blaen mati, ni dalu aye atmaban di kasda-as aye. Di akwasan di bafngu bong kasda-as aye, aye dad Blaen, santifon la aye acru-u to mati na salnurok la tu di lo satu. Ta mi-os fadian, bulun, na fali, asnge di ta akbalingan tana aye lawuh dad to mati, na ta ambaling buntud tana. Na aye katlo dad Blaen dun na Buntud Tulan. Aye sin bong amlawil tanda di aktaban aye dad Blaen di bong kasda-as la di dad Manobo (Lutero, 1986).

[TRANSLATION]

Once upon a time, there was a tribal war between the *Blaens* and *Manobos*. The *Manobos* were experts in the use of bow and arrow. There was a misunderstanding between the two groups, which resulted in war. The leaders of the *Manobos* were *Bong Dong* and *Kay Dong*, while those of the *Blaens* were *Bong To* and *Kay To*. One day, *Bong* of their opponents killed many *Blaens* *Bong Spears* while the *Blaens* were experts in *Manobos*, so the war started. *Bong Dong* and *Kay Dong* went back to their *ICC* and gathered as many warriors as they could. The *Blaen* leaders did the same. They set at *Sapu Dong*, and *Kay Dong* went to the area. *To* and *Kay To* did the same to the *Padidu*, and both *ICCs* fought each other mightily and savagely. When *Bong To* and *Kay To* shot their arrows, they killed thousands of *Manobos*, including *Bong Dong* and *Kay Dong*. A few *Blaens* were also killed, but the victorious *ICC* gathered and piled the dead bodies in one place. Weeks, months, and years passed until the dead piled bodies turned to soil, forming a hill. The *Blaens* won the war. The day after the encounter, they called the place *Buntud Tulan* (A Hill of Bones). It is living evidence of the triumph of the *Blaen* over the *Manobo*.

The legend mirrors that time in history when the *Blaan*, *Mandaya*, *Bagobo*, and *Tagakaolo* were engaged in a tribal war. These ethnic groups reduced their neighbors in Southwestern Mindanao to the status of tribute-paying colonies (Casal, 1986). The *Blaan* are experts in using a bow and arrow, as they use it primarily to hunt animals for food. The legend also shows that the *Datu* rules the ethnic groups. *Datuship* is the primary political system of the *Blaan* government. The *Datu* possesses the power to impose laws in the community. In the story, the *Blaan* warriors gathered the dead bodies of their defeated warriors and piled them in one place to pay respect.

Blaan folktales

The folktale *Skuya* (Competition), retold by Sing Alegado Calfaro, is driven by a cultural motif of competition that is embedded in the idea of having an indigenous game that is familiar to the *Blaan*; it can be replicated from the wise animals and a helpful deer in the oral lore. In the folktale, the animals who are participants in a race, especially the deer and the snail, prove to be wise because they are the ones who win. Of course, the snail is a very slow animal, but with the leadership of the deer, they emerge victorious. In Thompson (2022), the first motif has the code B120 – animals with magic wisdom – and the second motif has the code B443.1 – ‘helpful deer’; it has some likeness to some existing folk narratives such as Cross; Saints legends in Ireland, Jewish: Neuman in India, Balyas in Korea and Zong in Angola as seen in (Thompson, 2016).

Di munan, nun dad sgalak dnagit la Kuleng, Klangeh na Sò. Satul ale du skuya subè ku ne kel muna di ulu éél, ye gmagan di kaskuya. Di ksatul dad sgalak ani, linge Slarang I dad satulen”Magin agu du landè sa kane Sò dame “man Slarang”Hae, Iwe gamu, na Iwe mi gami klangeh.” man kuleng. Kibò masol du ta mdà ale du ta là beg. minit. Mdà ale ye kun, na le kibo mawag kun i Slarang ta tamlo. “Ne gumnè ye kè, Kuleng?” “na nê gumnè ye kè Sò?” “ne gumnè ye kè Klangeh?” “Ani mi gami,” man SlarangNa nagot Slarang kun i Sò, kanton nwè di tah batuSana mi dine So.” Kibò ale gafat di gusen i tukay éél. “Gami gmagan Klangeh. Gami Sò gmagan Kulengtulen Slarang. “Lwe gami So gami gmagan.” “Mdà ani, di gami gu flinge ye ku det i dad santulen du ta gami mdatah. man Slarang (Narrated by BC).

[TRANSLATION]

Once upon a time, there were three friends named Kuleng (Shrimp). Klangeh (Crab) and So (Snail). They talked and agreed to race. Whoever reaches the end of the stream first will be the winner. Slarang (Deer) arrived and overheard their conversation. “I want to join you,” Slarang said. “Okay,” agreed Kuleng. “Let us divide ourselves into two groups. I will be with Klangeh, and you will be with So.” Furthermore, they started the race as the rays of sunlight slowly lowered. When they were beginning to move apart from each other, Slarang looked for them. “Where are you Kuleng? So? Klangeh? Where are you?” “Because we’re here,” and Slarang took So from the top of the rock, held him up, and said, “So and I are here.” When they reached the end of the stream, Slarang told them, “We won, Klangeh. We won, Kuleng. So and I are the winners.” “From now on, both of you will listen to and follow us because we are the winners,” Slarang said.

The folktale is about animal racing, which is common in this genre of oral tradition. The story is about a shrimp, a crab, and a snail. It is strange why the deer wanted to join the race when it is a much faster runner than all the other animals, aside from living on land. Before the game starts, the agreement is that the shrimp and crab will be partners while the deer and snail are together. When the deer and snail won the battle, the other team needed to follow whatever they desired. Despite globalization, *Skuya* is still widely practiced by the *Blaan* in their communities and has been part of family celebrations and festivals.

The folktale *Lmiman Fnu Na Aniguk* (Turtle and Monkey Went Hunting), retold by Mundes P. Cawayan, can be regarded as a cultural motif of the *Blaan* setting traps to capture food to eat. The story can be conceived as an actual scenario and is performed by real individuals who are members of the *Blaan* ethnic group. Thus, it includes an animal (a monkey) as a trickster, clever dividing, and a cheater-cheated pattern of storytelling (J1117) with likeness in the analysis of a Tzutujil Maya folktale (Orellana, 1975). The Monkey and the Turtle set traps to catch animals in the narrative. With his usual deceptive nature, Monkey fools turtles by swapping their traps (J1510), the same as the interpretation of a Jew folktale (Bell, 2009). The turtle retaliates by shooting at the Monkey’s house, and one of the Monkey’s children is hit. This started the enmity between them and caused them to part ways.

Mda Fnu na Anguk Imiman ditù di lam dlag. Man Fnu kane Anguk "Snawa mdà ate Imiman?" Ta man Anguk, "Hae na mdà ate'". "Snawa dini gu deg di tana, dee ge di tah kayo du gkef ge" man Fnu na mayè Anguk. Kafingen ayé ta neye Anguk I bkeh liman la. Mdà I kane Fnu bkeh Sdè. Mdà I kane Anguk KoMdà I sdè anwe Anguk kahan di tah kayu. Mdà Ko fabkehan di kane Fnu liman. Kibò neye Fnu limanan. "Kan ani ta baling Ko I deg bkeh? I sde ta baling tù di tah kayu? Ah, yé mwe dun ani Anguk, karang ge na te sagti" Man FnuNebe Anguk na Fnu I gliman la di kat gumnè la.

Kibò gamti Fnu, manan "E snawa dét I kmisak déé'?" E man Anguk, "saglad ale bool". Kariam ta tarè I dad ngàanNa kanto la too ti sadluh milah, Fnu kanen tufa di lam i yéelMdà Anguk ftàam kanen surengTa là gumahan FnuMdà atù gal kmahung fnu kanen di yéel. Na mdà Anguk gal magu kanen na mkéf di kayu.

[TRANSLATION]

Turtle and Monkey were talking to each other about hunting in the woods. "My friend, Turtle, let's go to the woods and set up our traps there." "Alright! Come on," answered Turtle. When they arrived in the woods, Turtle exclaimed, "My friend, Monkey, I'll set up my trap here on the ground while you make yours up in the trees since you can

climb them." Yes," Monkey agreed. The following day, Monkey went back to check on their traps, and he saw that his friend Turtle's trap caught a huge wild boar while his trap only caught a bird. Monkey secretly took the wild boar and placed it in his trap. After this, he took the bird that was once in his trap and put it there in Turtle's trap. On Turtle's return to the woods, he was surprised at what he saw. "How did this happen? Why does my trap contain a bird while Monkey's trap contains a boar?" He was puzzled and confused. "Aha! This is probably because of Monkey," Turtle said to himself. Monkey and Turtle went on their way home while bringing their catch. In Turtle's anger, he took his bow and shot an arrow towards Monkey's house.

A few moments later, Turtle heard someone cry. "My friend, who is crying over there?" Turtle shouted. "Oh! My friend, my children are fighting over the food," said Monkey. Suddenly, he noticed that one of his children was hit by an arrow. Without second thoughts, Monkey chased Turtle until they reached the river, and there Turtle hid. Monkey was unable to catch Turtle, so he decided to sit down by the river while waiting for Turtle to show up again. From then on, Turtle stayed in the river while Monkey would move his home from tree to tree.

Setting traps is an economic practice common to the *Blaan* since hunting is part of their culture. These indigenous people generally fish in the river, hunting and trapping wild pigs, deer, and other animals. If they are successful in this endeavor, it has a practical and economic return to their family/community. They also gather rattan and *almaciga* from the forest to augment their income. The animals in the story are the same creatures hunted by the *Blaan*. When the turtle learned of the Monkey's trickery, he took a bow and arrow to shoot the Monkey's house. The *Blaan* use these warring materials to protect themselves against wild animals.

Conclusion

The *flalok* (oral lore) is essential to *Blaan* culture. Moreover, the storytellers reveal the *Blaan* IPs' social, economic, political, and religious belief systems, customs, and traditions handed down from generation to generation. The constant retelling of these folk narratives gives assurance that their unique cultures and traditions are safe, given that young people are slowly getting immersed in the modern culture of the present time. The cultural motifs revealed in their *flalok* manifest that *Blaan* tell these folk narratives not only for the sake of storytelling but also with a conscious intent to teach culture to the young ones. It also unveils some *Blaan* moralistic standards on good familial relationships, protectiveness on territorial disputes, and competition/trapping games to make valuable decisions.

This study scrutinizes the cultural motifs reflected in the *Blaan flalok*. Furthermore, the researchers categorically classified the tales as myths, legends, and folktales. There were six folk narratives from General Santos, Sarangani, and South Cotabato, such as *Kan Ku Mdatah Langit?* (Why has the sky receded upward?), *Tising Lanah* (The lost ring), *Kumutku* (My blanket), *Buntud Tulan* (The Hill of Bones), *Skuya* (Competition), and *Lmiman Fnu Na Aniguk* (Turtle and Monkey Went Hunting). Since the elders are growing older, oral transmission of their folk stories is needed.

Many members of younger generations need more knowledge of cultural motifs. The fast-changing pace and different communication practices are often at odds with *Blaan flalok* forms of information exchange and communication in today's society. Younger members must recognize new practices as they fear being left behind by modernization. However, declining knowledge of *flalok* practices means they may also be excluded from important indigenous knowledge and practices central to sustaining their community.

Thus, if we contribute to revitalizing *Blaan* culture by preserving, developing, and sustaining oral lore in Philippine communities, there is still a chance that this oral tradition will continue its propagation from generation to generation through word of mouth. It will continue to prosper if cultural workers, researchers, and academics will take *flalok* more seriously as valued literature, incorporate it into programs, schools, film, and theater, and work with *Blaan* through United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Local Government Unit (LGU), National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) and National Commission on Culture and Arts (NCCA).

In general, it is emphasized that each folk narrative contains unique customs and traditions of the *Blaan*. *Blaan flalok* is not only for entertainment. It embodies the belief systems of the community to which it belongs. It is an effective tool to teach youngsters about *Blaan* cultural traditions, moral standards, and belief systems.

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