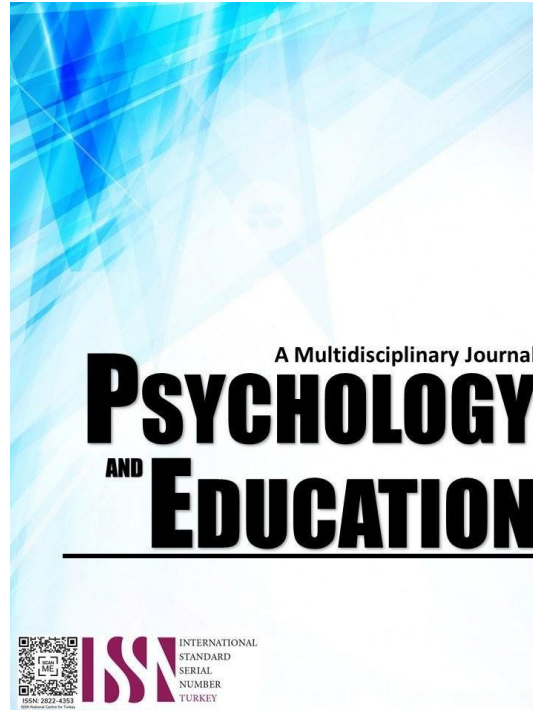


# **DANCING WITH THE BLAAN: AN ETHNOGRAPHY STUDY IN UNDERSTANDING THE MARAL**



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## Dancing with the Blaan: An Ethnography Study in Understanding the Maral

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### Abstract

The Maral Blaan dancers' dance experiences were the focus of this ethnographic investigation. It also looked at the Maral Blaan's moral principles and how they affected the dancers' emotional, social, and spiritual lives. In order to support the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s., 2021, it recommended actions for the IPED Program's implementation. Significant results of the study revealed that the Maral Blaan dancers expressed that they have happy and inspirational experiences; they inherited the skill and take pride of sharing their talents with others; however, they fear that Maral Blaan may possibly be on its verge of extinction. They also fear of being discriminated and bullied. The study was able to generalize certain emergent themes by considering the effects of the Maral Blaan's moral principles on the informants. Maral Blaan is an entertainment (rather than a form of worship) that is used to summon the presence of gods and goddesses. The social impact revealed the following themes: Maral Blaan helps people establish higher self-esteem, fosters excellent relationships, and brings people together. Maral Blaan also enhances spirituality because of its spiritual nature. The study braces the implementation of the IPED Program to support the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021.

**Keywords:** *cultural dance, Maral Blaan, understanding Maral Blaan, moral values of Maral Blaan, impact of Maral Blaan*

### Introduction

Polonuling, a small barangay in the Municipality of Tupi in South Cotabato, has been home to me since birth. It consists of diverse cultures and traditions of indigenous people (IP) with a wide range of customs and traditions. Among these IPs is the Blaan tribe. The Blaan first settled in Mindanao's south, in the provinces of Davao del Sur, Sarangani, and South Cotabato. The Blaan tribe has a rich culture that is incorporated into their daily existence. They became well-known in the Philippines as a result of their traditional fabric weaving, known as "Mabal Tabih", and their ritual dance, known as "Maral", which is commonly performed in most of their events, such as praying for a bountiful crop, weddings, and welcoming guests.

I used to hang out with non-tribal friends and avoided making friends with other tribes. As a child, I was afraid of tribal people because of the terrible acts that some of them were involved in. As a result, my interactions with my classmates from other tribes were vastly different from how I interacted with my non-tribal peers. However, as time has passed by, and we have accepted modernity in our lives, we have learned to treat everyone equally and to be free of prejudice. As a result, we taught at school how to recognize different cultures and how to respect other tribes by studying their traditional dances and allowing non-tribal children to dress up and learn their dances.

Our teachers ensured that we were able to demonstrate our own identity and culture in every school activity. The members were given the chance to showcase their cultures and traditions during our barangay Fiesta. The IP (Indigenous Peoples) Day was one of them. The indigenous people were given the opportunity to display their traditions and customs through traditional dances and ceremonies during this occasion. During the 77th Linumbayag Festival and Araw ng Polonuling, our barangay came up with the theme Mamamayang Nagkakaisa sa Gitna ng Pagkakaiba ng Tradisyon at Kultura.

I enjoy performing dances both in school and in village fiestas. Tribal dancing was also one of the various dance styles I used to perform. I also did modern dances, dance sports, folk dances, and other types of dances.

My memory still lingers when one of my trainers encouraged me to play a major role in a tribal dance performance. I was initially apprehensive to accept the part since I believed tribal dances should only be done by tribal people. In my high school days, only tribal students did their traditional dances, I remembered. We dubbed them "baduy" or unfashionable whenever we saw them dancing their ancient dances because of their unusual dance moves, which were repeated until the end of the music, appearing repetitive.

The chance to perform the dance paved the way for my passion for dancing to develop. When I was in college, I joined Teatro Kalakat Cultural Dance, a cultural dance troupe of Sultan Kudarat State University. I was granted of a dance scholarship because of my passion for dancing.

I enjoyed the experiences we had as we performed and competed in various events and traveled to various locations within Sultan Kudarat and even outside the province.

Our dance troupe specialized in many dance forms like modern dance, cultural dance, ballroom, and hip-hop. As a dance scholar, I was required to learn and master all dance forms for us to maintain our scholarship. Not to brag about it, but with my ability to perform as a dancer with full agility and grace, others called me proficient in ballroom dancing. But still, I need to learn all forms of

dance especially cultural dance. The opportunity to perform various dances made me appreciate the cultural dances of the tribal people, especially the T'boli and Blaan dances. I felt so captivated by the dances' characteristics and their storylines. Every time I perform a Blaan dance, I felt like I belong to the tribe. I have learned that dance steps have meanings. So, I realized that I need to dance with authenticity for me to portray it with justice. At first, it was difficult doing it. But after a year of proper training and guidance from our Blaan co-dancer, I was able to internalize and portray as if I were a Blaan, too. Yes, I performed various Blaan dances, but never the Maral Dance.

During our visit to one of the Blaan communities in the Municipality of Tupi, I was astounded the first time I witnessed a Blaan lady do the Maral dance. I was so enthralled by her performance that I became curious and anxious to understand it, noting her expressions, physical, hand, and foot movements.

I wished I could join her in the Maral, and understand the implications of the bodily movements of the dancer. It is the only way I could give justice to a meaningful interpretation of the dance.

In doing this research, I was able to perform the Maral with a comprehensive grasp of its dance steps, its meanings, and its purpose. The results of the study may be used to support the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021, stating among others to support the Indigenous People's Education (IPED) Program. I may help promote the Maral of the Blaan and support that it be included as part of the IPED Program. And in order to preserve its moral implications, students should be taught how to perform it.

Amboyas (2012) as cited by Hannah (2022) states that one of the basic steps of the indigenous dances is the trunk slightly bent forward moving upward and downward. This body movement is known as the earth-centered pose, because the performer tries to balance between control and relaxation, and at the same centers his weight in correspondence with gravity. The more one is centered, in line with the gravitational pull, the more relaxed the person would be. This centeredness can be observed in African, Native American, and Asian primitive dances. The footwork is almost the same, such as chasing, walking, creeping, mincing steps, and whirling (to make a fast-full turn and towards any direction) which means, not just the upper trunk of the body that is physically inaction but also the lower extremities that allow all the muscles to relax and make the system of the body work normally.

Dancing the ancient Blaan dance was a true honor since it demonstrated that the Philippines is endowed with a wealth of culture and traditions that are dying, owing to a lack of appreciation for its importance and relevance in our lives today. Only the native elders usually dance. According to Ortiz, Relampagos, Pejana, Siarot, Tolo, and Inocian (2017), the world's modernity has resulted in significant growth in people's economies as a result of technological advancements. As a result, traditional methods were also modernized. The preservation of cultural heritage is jeopardized as cultures change from traditional to modern. This dance has already impacted Blaan and other tribal groups' identities, particularly in Mindanao. This dance also symbolizes people's happy relationships, while the tempo and steps of the Maral remind me of how human life is intertwined with nature.

Seeing the Blaan dancers, I imagined myself dancing with them. I felt connected to nature when dancing the Maral because I was doing it barefoot. Although I am not a Blaan by birth, I like the way I performed it because of the innovative and unusual movements that made me feel as if I had entered other realms of existence. This dance does not necessitate memorizing basic steps; rather, it is a dancer's self-expression, and the step emerges naturally every time they execute it. The Maral Blaan dancers base their movement on the rhythm of ancient musical instruments such as the tananggong, falimak, and faglung. They dance haphazardly depending on the occasion, moods, and emotions. Also, I noticed that respect should be shown during the performance because each step is similar to praising or offering to the highest entity.

Based on these assumptions, this study was designed to investigate and comprehend the morals of Maral, a Blaan community dance through an observer-participant.

The goal of this research was to better understand the moral dimensions of dance and creative self-expression in a public indigenous community environment. The findings of this study were intended to fill a gap in the literature on studies about the moral implications of indigenous peoples' dance rites, particularly those of the Blaan tribe.

It employed a qualitative ethnographic research design in order to get a complete anthropological understanding of the tribe's Maral. As the researcher, I was immersed in a Blaan community as an observer-participant. Blaan participants were asked about what Maral dancing means to them, why they continue to perform it, and how it affects their emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. On my part, I contemplated how the dance has affected me, having performed the Maral myself. The responses to these critical questions eventually brought me to the significant values of the Maral Blaan, which is the study's main purpose.

In this study, I engaged with and actively interpreted the data. This was done to strengthen the overall research and data collection. This method was also referred to as 'sensitivity' and included having insight on relevant issues, particularly regarding the emotional, social, and spiritual values of understanding the Maral Blaan.

The main purpose of this research was to explore and understand the moral values of the Maral Blaan through the ethnographic perspective of an observer-participant. It was my hope for this research to reveal the emergent morals of Maral as experienced by Blaan and myself. The goal of this research was to examine the potential goodness of Maral to the Blaan's creative self-expression in a public indigenous community in an effort to expand the understanding of cultural dance concepts outside of the mainstream

setting.

My most important purpose of doing this study is to focus on my contribution to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Blaan tribe by pushing the Maral Blaan to be included as part of the IPED Program by providing support to the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021 in its implementation among the IP schools.

The Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021, specifically imposes and instructs to implement the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program as it progresses in the SOCCSKSARGEN Region. Further, a Cultural Heritage Learning Center (CHLC) is aimed to be established in schools implementing the IPEd Program in the indigenous cultural communities (ICCs). The Cultural Heritage Learning Center is aimed to pass on the indigenous knowledge and skills to the IP learners in the public schools within the ICCs. Specifically, the project has the following objectives: to pass on indigenous knowledge and skills to the IP learners; to maximize the presence of the IP elders or culture bearers from the community as resource persons for the skills transfer; to increase the number of IP learners who practices and masters the indigenous skills; and, to encourage Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) to sustain the practice of these indigenous knowledge and skills.

With my exploration of the Maral Blaan, I fully learnt and understood it and recommend its inclusion as part of IPEd Program in order to preserve the Blaan cultural heritage. Further, through this study, I may become part of the CHLC in IP schools in our area.

### Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the moral aspect of the Maral, the dance of the Blaan tribe. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do the following describe their dancing experiences:
  - 1.1 the observer-participant; and,
  - 1.2 the Maral Blaan dancers?
2. What are the moral values of the Maral Blaan, considering its impact on the following aspects:
  - 2.1 emotional;
  - 2.2 social; and,
  - 2.3 spiritual?
3. Based on the results of the study, how can the Maral Blaan be included as part of the IPED Program to support the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative-ethnographic research design. Ethnography (Reeves, 2013) is a type of qualitative research that gathers observations, interviews, and documentary data to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of different social phenomena. Meanwhile, ethnography is a research methodology and as such, it has a strong foundation in empiricism and naturalism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Collectively, these approaches emphasize the collection of data in naturalistic social settings. Like other forms of qualitative research, ethnography does not differ from positivistic inquiry, as ethnographers hypothesize about their research, nor does the ethnographic method set out to test hypotheses.

Moreover, ethnography is a technique usually used by anthropologists, ethnographers, and other social scientists. Simply said, ethnography is the study of people in their own surroundings using techniques like participant observation and face-to-face interviewing. As cited by Watkins, Checkland, and McDons (2020) from Sidky (2004), ethnography uses empirical fieldwork to document cultural similarities and differences.

Ethnography is a qualitative research method in which a researcher studies a particular social/cultural group with the purpose to better understand it. Ethnography is both a process and a product. An ethnographer actively engages in a group in order to get an insider's perspective on the group when conducting ethnography (Allen, 2017). In this study, I used ethnography to study a group of Blaan dancers. I immersed myself and got involved in dancing. I observed and imitate the Blaan dancers' movements in the way they danced in order to fully understand them as unique ethnic cultural community.

### Participants

Using purposeful sample design, the participants of the study were the seven (7) Maral dancers of the Blaan community of the Municipality of Tupi, specifically those who reside in Barangays Bunao, Lunen and Kablon. They were selected purposely after satisfying the inclusion criteria. They must belong to the Blaan tribe; they are knowledgeable in performing the Maral; they are currently teaching young generations of their tribe of the Maral; and they continuously perform the Maral until today. Most importantly, the selection of the participants was referred to the Blaan elders for approval.

This Blaan community of Tupi, South Cotabato lives a unique life of their own, different from other Blaan people in other localities. Brought about by the influences of their environment, including the culture of other tribes in the area, they claimed their differences,

even in the way they performed the Maral Blaen.

The participants of the study were members of the Blaen tribe of Tupi. These Maral Blaen dancers lived in Barangays Bunao, Lunen and Kablon of the Municipality of Tupi South Cotabato. They were chosen based on the criteria. Firstly, they are individuals in the Blaen community who have experienced performing the Maral Blaen. Secondly, they are individuals who are currently teaching young generations of the Blaen tribe regarding Maral. Thirdly, that they are individuals who continuously perform the Maral until the present day. Finally, they are Blaen people who continue to perform the traditional Maral, and they were highly recommended by the elders in their community. They were chosen as participants of the study because of their rich experiences with the phenomenon.

The selection process was quite difficult since I only knew a few Blaen friends. But I sought the help of the local officials in identifying the participants, and they recommended to me, so far, their best Maral dancers.

### Instrument

The study made use of a semi-structured in-depth interview (IDI) guide. The IDI guide contained semi-structured questions that required Maral Blaen participants to freely express themselves about their experiences. The validation process also included the participation of three experts (dance teachers) who were knowledgeable about teaching and performing cultural dances. I carried out comments and suggestions to improve the IDI guide. Moreover, the IDI was pre-tested from three samples in other Blaen communities located nearby the study sites. I followed the McCracken process of validating the research instrument. McCracken's process of validation (Prescott, 2011) for instruments used in qualitative studies, such as those exploring the experiences of cultural dances, typically involves a thorough and systematic approach. This process ensures that the tools used are both reliable and accurately capture the participants' perspectives. McCracken focuses on several key steps to validate instruments: first, ensuring the content validity by involving experts in the field to review the instrument and confirm that it adequately reflects the dimensions of the experience being studied. Next, the instrument is pre-tested or piloted with a small sample from the target population to identify any issues with clarity, relevance, or comprehensiveness. Data gathered from this pilot are then analyzed to ensure that the instrument elicits the intended responses and accurately measures the phenomena of interest. Additionally, McCracken emphasizes the importance of continuous data collection and analysis during the study, refining the instrument as needed based on emerging findings and participant feedback. Through these iterative steps, McCracken's process helps to ensure that the instrument is robust, capturing the complex and nuanced experiences of Blaen dancers on Maral Blaen in a meaningful and valid way. Further, I used English language, and the interview questions were later translated into the mother tongue of the participants which is Blaen, through the assistance of an interpreter, knowledgeable about speaking and understanding the local language of the participants. The responses of the participants have corresponding translations in English to check the consistency.

In the Interview Guide Validation, McCracken's method of validation was applied to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data interpretation. This approach, which focuses on engaging participants in a process of iterative feedback, allowed for a deeper understanding of their perspectives and helped refine the analysis. McCracken's four steps model for designing and implementing a long qualitative interview was adopted as basis on how the interview questions was validated.

The Four Stages of McCracken's Model are as follows; first, the review of analytic categories and interview design. The first step begins with an exhaustive review of the literature. Literature reviews are not simple exercises in data collection. The conscious and unconscious assumptions of the scholarly enterprise will be searched out and will govern how these assumptions force the definition of problem and findings. The literature helps define the problems to be studied, helps assess the data, and assists in the foundations of interview questions.

The above-cited statements describe how the first step should be done. In order to perform this, the researcher reviewed the literatures and prepared questions which are based on the literatures.

The second on the four stages was the review of cultural categories and interview design. This second step involved self-examination. Hence, on the review of cultural categories, it is particularly important in ensuring that the instrument resonates with the cultural context of the participants. When studying the experiences of Blaen dancers on Maral Blaen, this stage involves examining whether the instrument reflects and appropriately captures the cultural nuances, values, and beliefs that influence how patients perceived and responded to their experiences. The review of cultural categories required the researcher to engage deeply with the cultural background of the target population, Maral Balaen dancers — ensuring that the questions or prompts within the instrument are not the objective of this step was to give me a more detailed and systematic appreciation of his personal experience with the topic of interest. I assessed and examined the experiences that surrounded the topic in his mind.

The cultural review helped identify cultural categories and relationships that become the basis of question formation, prepared by me for the "rummaging" that occurred during the data analysis, and allowed me to understand the world I am in to root out the ground of familiar expectation.

However, I faced a challenge during this step about whether the instrument is objectively designed and will not merely be dependent on my perception and biases.



So, what I did was to ponder on the questions that was asked during the preliminary interview with the Maral Blaan dancers while I was still establishing the problem in the introduction. I recalled the questions I will ask during the preliminary interview and assess whether these questions have associations, incidents, assumptions, and relevance to the topic of interest.

The third stage in the sequence was the interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories. The third step involved designing the interview guide. The interview guide was consisting of a biographical question and followed by a series of questions about the Maral Blaan dancers' experiences. All of these focused in answering the "grand tour" question with floating prompts that are ready. It also consisted of "planned promptings" in the form of "contrast", "category", "special incident", and "auto-driving questions". With this interview guide at my hand, I have a rough guide with which to negotiate the interview. It does not specify precisely what happened at every stage of the interview, but it established a clear sense of direction of the interview and the ground it eventually covered.

I began an interview by demonstrating that he is accepting, is curious but not inquisitive who is prepared and eager to listen with interest to virtually any testimony. Once the preliminaries are completed, I deployed the grand tour question, followed by the floating prompts. I was alert for impressions, management, topic avoidance, deliberate distortion, minor misunderstanding, and outright incomprehension.

In this step, I encountered issues whether the similar results will be obtained if this study is repeated in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants. how congruent are the findings with the reality, and whether the results of this study will be applicable to a wider population and in other situations since the findings was specific to a small number of specific environment and individuals.

I did a trial interview. The interview guide contained some questions that I used during his preliminary interview with the Maral Blaan dancers in the nearby barangay. The questions that were found to be helpful in seeking answers to the statement of the problem was retained while some of the preliminary questions was improved to ensure that it becomes relevant to the topic of interest.

The last and concluding stage of the four was the interview analyses and the discovery of analytical categories. This fourth step was the most demanding. It is the analysis of the data. The objective of analysis was to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the participants' view of the world in general and the topic in particular. I came to this undertaking with a series of what the literature says ought to be there, a sense of how the topic at issue is constituted in my own experiences, and a glancing sense of what took place in the interview itself. I prepared to use all of these materials as a guide to what exists there, but I was also prepared to ignore them. In the full powers of discovery inherent in the qualitative interview are to be fully explored, I must be prepared to glimpse and systematically reconstruct a view of the world that bears no relation to my own view of the one evident in the literature.

In this step, I appended the transcriptions of the audio recordings obtained during the trial interview. After following all the foregoing processes of McCracken's, I concluded that all of these models was considered to be relevant in the formulation of the final interview guide.

## Procedure

In collecting the data, I ensured that all activities related to this research were consistent with the research ethics, freedom of information, and data privacy protection.

I started the conduct of this study by formulating my title and had it approved by my adviser. After the title approval, I organized my first three (3) chapters. I arranged appointments to seek approval of the conduct of the study in the locality. I wrote letters addressed to the Municipal Indigenous Center. This was done so that I get endorsement to be presented to the respective barangay officials to allow me to gather data in the respective barangays I chose. And since my study involved the indigenous group of the Blaan tribe, I also wrote a letter to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in Koronadal City.

In collecting the data, I was doing field notes by immersing myself in the community. My immersion lasted for a week. First, I had to establish rapport to prepare my participants. I did an observation on the emotional, social, and spiritual values of the Maral in the lives of the Blaan people. Moreover, the participants were oriented to the process of interview and discussion as well as the confidentiality of their responses. The participants were also informed that the interviews were videotaped, audio-recorded, jotted, and I transcribed and made ready my data for the thematic analysis. I distributed the consent certificate to the participants; I asked them to sign it as verification that the in-depth interview underwent.

After they gave their approval of participating in my study, I made some arrangements with them about the schedules of their respective interviews. We discussed the schedules and venues of the interviews in reference to their availability as well as mine. Also, I negotiated with a group of them about my desire to immerse myself, that is, to personally experience Maral Blaan. At first, I did some observations. I watched them dance. Then, I prepared myself. I danced with them.

I documented the interviews I made with them. I also documented a video of my dance performance with them. When I already had with me the data needed for my study, I processed the qualitative data and organized my thesis. I transcribed the recorded interviews,

analyzed them for themes and meanings, and interpreted the results with supportive discussions taken from my review of related literature.

### **Data Analysis**

Ethnographic data analysis is applied in the study. After collecting the data and writing the transcripts of the interviews, I analyzed all collected data following the steps provided: I did field notes and collected other data; I made notes on the texts read, paying attention to traces of patterns, connections, similarities, or contrastive points; I wrote analytical memos; I reduced data and focus on what was needed; and, I formalized the analysis further through coding (Eriksson & Kovalainen, n.d.).

All data were presented in narratives (Fettermann, 2010). According to Watson (1994), Rosen (2000), and De Rond (2008), to let the reader know what happened in the field, what it was like from the participants' point of view to be there, and what particular events or activities were interesting and worth exploring further.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I ensured that all ethical considerations were followed, as mandated by the Holy Trinity College Ethical Review Board because it helps avoid engaging in practices that may implicitly or explicitly abuse or exploit those whom I seek to do research with. Thus, ethics in research should be observed especially since I ventured into one of the traditions of an ethnic group in the community. It is often necessary to observe and maintain the three most important cores of ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Most importantly, I asked for the approval from the local Indigenous Peoples Center in Tupi, South Cotabato. Then, I sought permission for approval from the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Koronadal City.

After the approval of the request, customary laws research and documentation and the affidavit of the undertaking were signed by the public attorney to ensure that activities are aligned with the operating guides set by the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). When the request was granted, the collection of data took place. The informants were informed of the request for interviews, and I made sure that I asked for consent from all the activities that were presented to them. During the interview, I saw to it that the participants spoke in their native language so that they can freely express their thoughts on a particular topic.

**Informed Consent.** As mentioned earlier, the interviews did not start without the prior consent of the informants and those from the authorities. I sought my informants' consent to avoid any offense or discomfort regarding the disclosure of their data coming from them. Everything like the purpose of the study, my research intentions, the scope of the interview, and their right to withdraw their participation during the collection of data if they notice some discrepancies or any violation of their rights, were explained to them. The results of the investigation were treated properly to maintain confidentiality on some personal information. The true identities of the informants were disclosed and their responses were kept protected. I also informed them that no monetary collection or payment will be taken from them.

**Voluntary participation.** I did not use force on any of my informants involved in the interview. Their participation was voluntary, and as I mentioned previously, the informants may withdraw or discontinue taking part in the ongoing study. I maintained that one fundamental ethical principle behind research ethics which is respect. I ensured the important implications for consent practices, and this means that the informants were fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research and must give their consent to participate.

**Data Privacy.** The data gathered and the informants who provided all the information I needed have been ensured of the necessary safeguards. Their responses were kept and protected, and their true identities were coded to maintain anonymity. When I sought my informants' approval on the conduct of the study, I also assured them that their trust and confidence in me remains.

**Cultural Sensitivity.** All throughout the conduct of my study, it was an ethical imperative for me to ensure cultural sensitivity in all areas or aspects of my research and maintain the commitment to do no harm across cultures. Moreover, I was also careful on issues such as exploitation, community damage, and inaccurate findings especially when it comes to age, gender sensitivity, dialectical oppositions/discriminations, cultural practices, customs, traditions, beliefs, religion, and even academic, economic, and social status.

**Gender Sensitivity.** I understood and gave consideration to socio-cultural norms and discriminations in order to acknowledge the different rights, roles & responsibilities of Blaang women and men in the community and the relationships between them.

**Health and Safety Protocol.** I made sure that the health protocols set by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) were properly observed when I conducted my study in order to ensure my safety as a researcher as well as the safety of my participants and other individuals that were involved in my study.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section presents the findings of the study. The narratives of the participants about their dance experiences were taken from the interviews. Significant statements are extracted from their stories and are grouped based on the developed themes. These themes are analyzed and given meanings. The interpretations are supported by discussions and related literature.

## The Profile of the Maral Blaen Dancers

As the observer-participant of this study, I considered my immersion with the Blaen community in learning to understand their Maral Blaen. I described that I had a happy experience. I understood the emotional, social and spiritual values of Maral Blaen. I developed a good sense of bonding with the Blaen community. I also realized that Maral Blaen is a valuable avenue to enhance the spiritual aspect of my life to connect to my Creator.

There were seven (7) participants who volunteered and made themselves available during my gathering of data. Of the seven informants, only 14.3% or one male signified his participation; 85.7% or six were female. The single Blaen composed 14.3% or one, and the married composed 85.7% or six.

Among the seven informants, FP7, a 75-year-old female dancer, who hails from Kablon, was the oldest. MP2, a single 21-year-old from Acfaon, Bunao was the youngest.

The rest of the dancers were in their 50's and 60's, except for FP6, who was married, and in her early 20's. There were two informants representing each of the barangays of Kablon and Lunen. There were three informants who represented Sitio Acfaon of Barangay Bunao.

The seven informants shared their experiences as Maral Blaen dancers. I secured their true identity by giving them corresponding codes: FP1, MP2, FP2, FP3, FP4, FP5, FP6, and FP7. I conducted the face-to-face in-depth personal interview with each of them in order me to get closer and a more personal interaction with each of them.

FP1 describes her dancing performance as a happy experience. She says that she learned dancing when she was a very young girl. It was her father who taught her how to dance. She recalls that only those who know how to dance are called to perform during special occasions. A sense of pride and happiness exudes every time she is asked to dance. She is inspired to dance in front of a big crowd, especially when she dances in front of a Blaen audience. She shares that in the Blaen culture, this skill is usually handed down from the elders. Aside from dancing, she and her other siblings are also taught how to play musical instruments. Now, at 58 years old, she teaches dancing and playing of musical instruments to her grandchildren and other kids in the neighborhood. Of course, her children were once her students, too.

MP2 expresses that he feels happiness and excitement every time he dances. When performing on special occasions, the dancer has to project emotions related to celebration. He says that there is a need to show a happy face in order to entertain the visitors.

This is especially true to the Blaen culture. He recalls that at first, he was hesitant to become a dancer. He was somewhat shy. However, his parents explained to him the need to learn the skill as nobody would inherit it, so there is this danger of losing this part of the Blaen culture. At age 15, he was motivated to join the group of Blaen dancers. He was fascinated by their performances. So, when he learned the skill, he, too, became a teacher of dance.

FP3 comes from a prominent family, yet, her aunt pushed her to learn to dance when she was still a young girl. Just like other kids, she was at first hesitant and shy to dance, exposing herself in public performances. She claims that she did not finish schooling because her parents arranged her marriage while she was still in the elementary grades. When asked about how she feels when she dances, she says that she is happy and fulfilled. She is proud to belong to the Blaen Community. She begins her performance with a short prayer. She dances freely as a bird every time she performs.

She is happy and inspired to show her talent to everyone, whether Blaen crowd or not. This attitude motivated her to share her talents with others. She became a teacher of dance. She teaches Blaen kids and adults. Some non-Blaen would come to their barangay and ask her to teach them to dance. The Blaen community, to where she belongs, calls her the "Star Dancer" because she does her craft with exceeding perfection of the art.

FP4 claims that she seldom performs nowadays, but expresses eagerness, in case she would be invited to dance on special occasions. She admits that she experiences the sense of joy and pride each time she performs a dance, whether alone or with other dancers. There is a special kind of happiness she feels as she freely dances. She claims that she is proud of being a Blaen, and she is not ashamed to show her talents. It was her parents who taught her to dance. Her other siblings learned the same skill from their parents, too.

FP5 is a 66-year-old dancer. She boasts about her dancing. She said that she seldom dances, but whenever she does, she demonstrates a real feeling of freedom and happiness. She has a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction, especially, that she considers dancing as her own achievement. She is a dance tutor, too. She teaches dance to her grandchildren because she understands that the kids need the skill in school.

By handing them the skill, they help preserve the Blaen culture, that is, the art of dancing. FP6 is a 24 years old dancer. She learned dancing from her parents, too. She said that her parents explained to her the importance of learning the skill of dancing. So, as a young girl, she embraced dancing.

At first she was shy to dance in a crowd, but later, she gained her confidence when she experienced dancing with other dancers, too.



Just like the other Blaán dancers, she feels happy and proud as a Blaán dancer. She is more inspired when she is requested to dance on special occasions. And now, she also shares her talent with other kids. She becomes a dance tutor to Blaán kids, especially her relatives.

FP7, who is now 75 years old, claimed that the peak of her dancing experience was in 1965 yet; she was 57 years old. She says that words can't describe enough the happiness she experiences when she dances. She feels extremely happy, proud and satisfied. She boasts about performing in bigger crowds of both Blaán and non-Blaán audiences. I was her father who inspired her to dance. At first, it seemed like a game. She danced with other kids, especially her siblings. Later, she performed in crowds for special occasions. This time it was more serious dancing because she danced with other adult dancers. Today, she shares her talent with younger kids, teaching them the art of dancing.

### **Dance Experiences**

This section contains the narratives of my dance experiences as an observer-participant and those of the Blaán dancers. I was able to determine the valuable themes of this study, considering the morals of the Maral Blaán, based on my experience and those of the participants.

The major themes on the moral value of Maral Blaán included a happy and inspirational experience, dance as instigating feeling of pride, and dance as a cultural heritage.

The emotional values of Maral Blaán surfaced the themes Maral Blaán forms community bonding, Maral Blaán connects the people to their gods and goddesses, and Maral Blaán strengthens positive attitudes. On the social values of Maral Blaán, I was able to identify the themes Maral Blaán is an entertainment, and Maral Blaán attracts its community to gather for a purpose. And on the Spiritual value of Maral Blaán, the identified theme was Maral Blaán is used to call the presence of gods and goddesses.

### **Dance Experiences of the Observer-Participant**

This section provides a vivid narration of my dance experiences. Dancing is my passion. My experiences as a cultural dancer, specifically, the Blaán dances are unforgettable. The Blaán community of Tupi proves to be accommodating to me. When I approached them that I wanted to learn the Maral, their dance, they did not hesitate to give me the chance to explore it.

I explained to them that what I would do is an academic requirement for getting a master's degree. Not only that, as a cultural dancer myself, I want to deeply understand the beauty of the art in dancing, especially the cultural dances which is why I chose Maral.

At first, a Blaán friend Carlo and I negotiated to seek permission from the local leaders that I will be allowed to conduct the study.

Fortunately, it was approved without hesitation. I was introduced to an elder dancer Ye, who is a 60-year-old senior dance teacher and sitio female leader. My first few days were a round of orientation. They gave me some basic information about how to dance. And we agreed to do a courtship and marriage dance which is trending at that moment in their community. I was told about the story of the dance and which character I would play in the dance, and they gave me instructions on how to do my part.

The other dancers were identified on their part, too. Ye played the part of a parent; a lady dancer was the subject of pursuit to be the bride; and Carlo was my rival. The story builds up with me as not the chosen one by the parent. So, I should exert the effort to win the heart of the girl and the mother. I should portray in the dance my intense emotion of liking the girl through eye-to-eye contact, and that I expressed willingness to grant them dowry. I should impress Ye, the mother, so she should favor me.

As a dancer, I used to learn any dance by counting the movements. So, I inquired Carlo what counting should I apply to perform my part.

He did not give me any answer. Instead, he just told me in which direction I should be moving during the dance and what I should do. He added that I should bend while dancing. Bending allows the dancer to turn freely and keep the balance of the entire body. And so, after the briefing we prepared for the dance.

First, we did a ritual of the "tuob-tuob", burning of coconut husk, chicken feathers and some herbs. We bathed in the smoke. They said that the fumes would prevent body fatigue from dancing. This ritual would make the dancer's body light. Then we removed our footwear. Dancing in barefoot makes a significant symbolism. Carlo and Ye explained that the feet enable the dancer to connect to nature. This reminds us that "from dust we come from, to dust we return". They gave me my costumes. Carlo explained to me how the headpiece should be used. He said that when there are points that look like horns in the headpiece arrangement, the dancer belongs to a royal rank while if it is arranged otherwise, the dancer now belongs to the millennial. So, after we had fitted our costumes, we proceeded to the area where we decided to perform the dance. On the way to the place, people were looking at us. At first, I was shy. Later, I saw the Blaán community smiling at me.

I was beginning to gain my confidence, and I began to walk with pride as if I were a Blaán. So, the music started playing. I was observing the movements of the dancers, and I waited for instructions of what I should do. But, they just continued to dance. They did not mind me. So, I decided to join the dancing by just creating my movements. I created movements and gestures to show my intense emotions by attracting the girl. I established an eye-to-eye contact. I moved around to follow the girl's movement, trying to

win her gaze at me. I used my feet purposely; I did my mincing gracefully, following the tempo of the music.

After a while, I noticed that Ye just moved forward. She was silent. And in a little while she spread her arms widely and began to dance with us. While I was still dancing, I could not help but notice and expressed great awe of what she did. When she spread her arms, it was a scene as if I saw a bird! A possessed bird! Ye was dancing like a proud bird! I also noticed that their mincing was so refined. I see no struggle in all the dancers; they just moved freely and were enjoying the dance. There was no choreography to follow. The dancers just internalized the theme and the character assigned to them. I came to realize that this is quite difficult to do for a non-Blaan dancer. And perhaps more difficult to teach, too. The native dancers were so authentic with their art. And we danced for about five minutes. At last, I caught the girl's eyes! And it was the sign of acceptance of my intention.

Ye appreciated my performance. She claimed I did my part almost perfectly as if I were a Blaان, too. Carlo told him that I am a cultural dancer, which is why it was not hard for me. They did not mind at all that I was there for my thesis; they supported me all the way to learn about Maral. Then we were told to pack away our costumes. I followed how they fixed the costumes. We folded it properly with respect. For them, the costumes are significantly important because they are handmade. At the end of the day, I came to realize that the Blaان people are generous about their cultural heritage. The culture is very rich. Although they are often regarded less, they still show pride in their culture, and they are willing to share it with anyone who expresses a desire to learn about them. Through my experience dancing with the Blaان, I discovered some untold truths about the Blaان and about Maral.

Maral portrays the everyday life stories of the Blaان. I danced to express varied emotions, depending on the theme of the story I needed to portray. And since I portrayed a character in a courtship and marriage Maral, I expressed emotions of happy feelings. I went barefoot; it reminded me "from dust we come from, and unto dust we return". I wore the costume with due respect and care.

The way I wore the headpiece signified my rank. I felt that the impact of dancing is more symbolic after I knew the theme and my purpose of dancing. The "tuob-tuob" ritual prevents the other dancers and me experienced body fatigue, and it made our movements light, too. I danced freely; there is no exact choreography to follow. I just internalized my character and the theme. My eye-to-eye contact and sensitivity to the movements of other dancers enabled me to relate with them, too. I was amused because I danced without counting. As I danced, I just created my own movements. I did not do the counting; I just adjusted my movements with the music. There was no pressure in my execution. I enjoyed the dancing. For a beginner learner, counting is basic. If Maral is to be taught to other dancers, especially to non-Blaان, counting should be applied.

I believe that a real Blaان Maral dancer teaches the art authentically. When I viewed the video of our dance, I noticed that I was dancing like a Blaان. I was making movements fitted to the music and coordinating with other dancers, too. I know that if I were to do the same dance concept again, my movements may not be the same, but I may not be making a big difference in my performances. Indeed, dancing with freedom gives the dancers the enjoyment in their performance. There was ease of movements, but challenges the performers of their creativity. Considering my dance experience with the Maral Blaان, I discovered four (4) major themes about the Blaان and the Maral Blaان.

In the first theme the Blaان community is accommodating, I formulated six (6) core ideas, namely: when I approached them, they did not hesitate to attend to me, they introduce me to other dancers, they explained to me the value of the costumes, and they explained to me the significance of the rituals.

The second theme Maral Blaان is dancing with freedom, I formulated another six (6) core ideas, namely: I was dancing freely through the rhythm of the music, I danced with gusto, but I connected with other dancers, I created my own movements, but internalization was necessary for the execution.

There was no specific choreography to follow; there was no pressure at all about choreography. The dancers danced barefoot, and the third theme Maral Blaان portrays the everyday life stories of the tribe, I formulated two (2) core ideas, namely: the dancers express various emotions based on their daily experiences of life, and I was dancing a ritual. And the fourth theme Maral dancing gives a happy feeling, I formulated one (1) core idea, that is, I was happy dancing with the Blaان. As a whole, my experience dancing with the Blaان is an experience to treasure for a lifetime.

Table 1 presents the themes and their corresponding core ideas which I identified based on my experience.

**Table 1. *The Dance Experience of the Observer-Participant in Dancing with the Blaان***

<i>Major Theme</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>
Blaان Community is Accommodating.	When I approached them, they did not hesitate to attend to me. I got approval to conduct my study without hesitation. They introduce me to other dancers. They explained to me the value of the costumes. They explained to me the significance of the rituals.
Maral Blaان is Dancing with Freedom	I was dancing freely through the rhythm of the music. I danced with gusto, but I connect with other dancers. I created my own movements, but internalization is necessary. There was no choreography to follow.

Maral Blaán Portrays the Everyday Life Stories of  
The Tribe

Maral Dancing Gives a Happy Feeling

The dancers dance barefoot.

There was no pressure at all about choreography.

The dancers express various emotions based on their daily experiences of life.

I danced depicting a courtship ritual.

I was happy dancing with the Blaán.

### Blaán Community is Accommodating

In the first theme the Blaán Community is accommodating. This realization gave me an assertion that the Blaán is a friendly tribe. Those whom I met satisfied my queries and had given me an organized schedule for my data gathering.

When I Approached Them, They Did Not Hesitate to Attend to Me. I was a bit hesitant at first. I was cautious. But I took the effort to ask them what I need to know. Right then, they did not hesitate to attend to my queries, and they gave me satisfying answers.

I Got Approval to Conduct My Study Without Hesitation. I they introduced me to other dancers; they gave me information about the dance; they explained to me the value of the costumes and the significance of the rituals. All these made me comfortable.

They Introduce Me to Other Dancers. It is important that the dancers should be acquainted with each other. While dancing, they need to communicate with each other through eye contact, bodily movements, and gestures. They need to be sensitive about giving enough space for dancing with each other.

They Explained to Me the Value of The Costumes. I come to realize that the Blaán tribe gives high respect and value to their costumes. For them, these are sacred pieces and should be taken care of and be regarded with high respect. Furthermore, they have taught me how to keep them safe.

They Explained to Me the Significance of The Rituals. Maral Blaán is not just a dance, but dance that tells stories of life of a people. When performing, the dancers should re-enact the experiences in life through their eyes, and other parts of their body. Dancers should be precise of the dance imitation.

### Maral Blaán is Dancing with Freedom

This is the second theme. I formulated six (6) core ideas, namely: I was dancing freely through the rhythm of the music; I danced with gusto, but I connect with other dancers; I created my own movements, but internalization is necessary; there was no choreography to follow; the dancers dance barefoot; and there was no pressure at all about choreography.

I Was Dancing Freely Through the Rhythm of The Music. When the Blaán team gave me a little of the instructions I needed, I joined the dancers; I danced. At first, I was so conscious, but later I gained my confidence and just danced freely, but gracefully. However, I made sure that I allow spaces for other dancers to move around.

I Danced with Gusto, But I Connect with Other Dancers. I enjoyed dancing. I danced a lot, but I maintained eye contact with my partner. I was conscious that there were other dancers than me. I was sensitive of others' movements and much more with mine.

I Created My Own Movements, But Internalization is Necessary. Since I am a dancer myself, the little instructions given to me was enough for me to become creative; I made my own movements, but I maintained internalization of my role as a dancer in that ritual dance. I continued dancing freely.

There Was No Choreography to Follow. I was able to build my confidence in dancing the Maral Blaán. No counting to memorize was necessary; no choreography to observe. So, I just danced freely.

The Dancers Dance Barefoot. It is quite easier to move; to perform the dance steps when on barefoot. This makes the internalization of the role of the dancer more meaningful. It is significant because it made possible the dancer's connection with nature.

There Was No Pressure at All About Choreography. Maral Blaán is dancing with freedom because there is no pressure on the part of the dancer to memorize counting, bodily movements or dance steps.

As long as there is music, the dancer only need to dance with the timing of the rhythm of the music. The loudness and softness of the music signal the dancers which parts of the dance need to be emphasized.

Maral Blaán Portrays the Everyday Life Stories of the Tribe Maral Blaán is not just any dance. It is portraying the stories of success and failures; it tells the stories of a people. It is a dance of Blaán culture itself. The bodily movements and gestures identify what belong to the Blaán community, identifying a local color of what the Blaán is as a tribe. The costumes and other ornaments add to the vivid performance of what Maral Blaán is about.

The Dancers Express Various Emotions Based on Their Daily Experiences of Life. On how the Maral Blaán dancers perform the dance, they express the various emotions of the tribe. Blaán experience emotions such as happiness, excitement, sad, depression, and more. These feelings depict that they are alive and living; they are humans, too.

I Danced Depicting a Courtship Ritual. I was dancing a courtship dance in my emersion with the Blaán. I took the role of a groom-to-be, pursuing a bride.

So in this dance, I performed my role as the persistent suitor, turned victorious in winning the hand of my bride. As I am familiar with what courtship is about, I did my role, as I was instructed, with precise movements.

### Maral Dancing Gives a Happy Feeling

I agree with the participants in this study when they claimed that they are happy dancing the Maral Blaán. Though it was just a short visit to the Blaán community, the emersion experience gave me a nostalgic feeling. It is something I will treasure a lifetime.

I Was Happy Dancing with The Blaán. This is more than enough of an opportunity to enjoy a dance. I did not experience the stressful performance to worry about counting and memorizing choreography. I was dancing with freedom. I was dancing with the Blaán. I am a cultural dancer. Indeed, dancing fascinates me a lot, even as a young boy. And now, I am a teacher, and at the same time a dance enthusiast. I do a lot of dancing, including the cultural dances of the indigenous people of this country. Brought by my curiosity to have a better understanding of the Maral Blaán, I was motivated to conduct this study about it. I dug deeply into their personal experiences to fathom their thoughts and feelings on the various impacts of the moral values of the dance in their emotional, social and spiritual aspects of their lives.

To be able to successfully achieve the objectives of my study, I initially established rapport with the Blaán, and I began exploring their dance experiences.

### Moral Values of Maral Blaán

I was able to formulate two (2) major themes for the emotional moral value; six (6) major themes for the social moral value; and, one (1) for the spiritual moral value of Maral Blaán.

Table 2 presents the major themes and core ideas that I was able to formulate out of the stories of the Maral Blaán dancers. Following right after each theme, are the core ideas related to it.

### Emotional Moral Value

I was able to identify two (2) major themes for the emotional value of Maral Dance. In the first theme, Maral Blaán is a happy and inspirational experience, with the core idea feeling inspired of the dancers.

Table 2. *Dance Experiences of the Maral Blaán Dancers*

<i>Moral Value</i>	<i>Major Themes</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>	<i>Frequency of Response</i>
Emotional	A Happy and Inspirational Experience	Feeling as inspired dancers	Variant
	Maral Blaán Heals Emotions	Dancing is a form of therapy	Variant
	Fear of Ethnic Discrimination	Fear of being bullied	Variant
		Fear of feeling inferior	Variant
		Fear of death of old dancers	Variant
	Fear of Maral Blaán's Extinction	Fear of not passing of Maral Blaán from descendants to another	Variant
Social	Dance as Cultural Heritage	sharing the talent with others	Variant
	Dance as an Opportunity for Bonding	Maral Blaán attracts the members of its community to gather for a purpose	Variant
		Maral Blaán unites its people.	Variant
	Maral Blaán is an Entertainment	Maral Blaán is not a form of worship but as an entertainment	Variant
	Maral Blaán Improves One's Personality	Maral Blaán develops self-confidence and boosts one's self-esteem.	Variant
Spiritual	Maral Blaán Seeks the Help of Gods and Goddesses for Some Purposes, But Not to Worship	Dancing seeks Dwata's blessing to boost one's spirit	Variant

### A Happy and Inspirational Experience

Blaán people live simply, usually in the hilly and mountainous areas because their main source of livelihood is agriculture. Though they humbly live in the highlands, the Blaán people live a happy and quite satisfied life with their families.

The Blaán are happy and inspired, entertaining themselves with the richness of their culture, especially the art of dancing. Maral, the Blaán dance, is an expression of their happy and inspirational experience. This dance comes in various presentations, portraying the daily activities of the Blaán (Caresma, 2005).

Feeling As Inspired Dancers. When performing Maral, the Blaán dancers have to express happy emotion, whenever they perform a

portrayal of a real-life scenario that requires them to affect the audience with a happy mood. It is a powerful tool to convey messages which cannot be done in words. Filipino national artist for dance, Aquino, said that we have dances and songs for all occasions it be celebrations of triumph or of death (Gocuingco, 1980). This is true when he/she interprets a wedding dance, a festivity, or merry-making. When I asked the participants how they feel when they dance, they expressed:

*In: Describe your dance experiences.*

*FP5: I am happy. I would always love to show my talent. I feel inspired to dance, especially in a big audience.*

*MP2: When we dance, sir, we show happiness and excitement. The way we dance, Sir, Makita mo gid na. Naga celebrate kami sa isang okasyon. (You will see that. We celebrate the occasion.) Example isa ka fiesta o kasal. We need to show happiness and entertainment for the visitors.*

*FP3: Hindi basta basta pinapalabas ang maral kung walang okasyon. Lalo na sa IP Day. Doon talaga pinapalabas yong kasadyahan ng mga tribu ...Kapag IP Day, doon na talaga naming pinapalabas ang lahat ng mga sayaw. Masaya talaga kami. (Maral is not presented if there is no occasion to celebrate. Especially on IP Day. There, we showcase the pride of our tribe... During IP Day, we present our dances. Indeed, we are happy.)*

When a person connects with another, a feeling of inspiration is usually developed. In dancing, when the performer does something that is fun and entertaining, and he/she sees that the audience are happy, he/she is inspired to dance.

*FP1: Inspirado ako. Syempre marami nagatingin sa akin habang sumasayaw. (I am inspired. Of course, people look at me while I dance.)*

*FP5: Kapay gusto ang ginagawa ko at nasisiyahan ang mga tao, inspirado man akong sumayaw. (When I love what I am doing and people are enjoying it, I am inspired to dance.)*

In the performing arts, such as entertainment and music performance, a dynamic interaction occurs between the performers and their audiences at the moment of generating great enjoyment (Shikanaia & Hachimurab, 2014). While performers make an influence on their audience, they are also influenced by their audience. In addition, the performer tries to amuse the audience and, conversely, the audience wants to enjoy the performance. Consequently, a good relationship will be established between the two parties and enjoyment will be shared. This sharing establishes a close communication between the performer and the audience. Hanna (2022) said that what makes our movements moving. In dance, our purpose is to express emotions, communicating physically, allowing those feelings to move through the body, out of the body, and in doing so, to move others. Dance can be used as a vehicle for expression (Ayansu, 2022). It can help tell a story, convey feelings and emotions, and connect with others and with ourselves. Body movement can be expressive and communicative. It can be used as a means of self-expression where words are not necessary – the body does all the talking.

### Maral Blaan Heals Emotion

When experiencing hurting caused by conflict in relationship and failures in life, the Blaan take time to dance. Dancing is a Form of Therapy. There are multiple benefits to the art of dance; these benefits are commonly categorized into two realms of wellness:

Physical and mental (Jeffrey, 2015). Further, dance has this multifaceted mental benefit while allowing the emotional benefits to exist as their own realm. Most of the brain is working while dancers execute their complex movements: fast decision-making, keen attention, monitored emotions, accessing the past alertness and recognition of surrounding potential problems, creation of immediate solutions, maintaining balance, monitoring facial expression, moving with grace, agility, and coordination, and remembering sequencing. In short, while dancing, the brain is processing extreme multitasking and acting like a flight simulator.

The Blaan dancers showed happy faces during their performance. Perhaps because they have chosen the theme for happy dancing. There was even one dancer who mimicked an animal. This was a very entertaining performance of a Maral Blaan I saw. Although she was a female dancer, she vividly performed as a monkey. Her movements were authentic, and so are the sounds she made. She was dancing as if she were a monkey. And so, the audience watching her enjoyed her presentation. Earlier, she was claiming that she had a problem with her family. That was the reason why she was hesitant to come and dance. But she was convinced by the group leader, explaining what I need for my study. And so, she came to grace my request. After her performance, she said that she was feeling good about her problem already because felt inspired; a bigger crowd came to watch her dance, and the people applauded by giving her their appreciation for what she did.

When you're depressed, dancing may seem like the last thing you want to do. Dance, on the other hand, might be just the thing to get you out of a funk. Dance not only boosts mood-boosting substances like endorphins and serotonin, but it also helps people feel more connected during moments when they feel alone. Dance's emotional healing elements benefit from cognitive growth as well. Focusing the body and mind on specific motions provides short relief from emotional anguish and recurrent thinking cycles, as well as a boost in confidence. The pleasure of dancing extends far beyond the novelty of trying something new. It has a way of bringing our body, heart, and mind into harmony, which has an impact on ourselves and people around us. It facilitates connection, builds confidence, and establishes a physical routine that helps us feel good on the inside and out. The informants have expressed that Maral Blaan is



beneficial to them, considering how they face their everyday lives.

*Facilitator: Nakatulong ba ang maral sa pagbuo ng iyong damdamin sa pagharap mo sa iyong pang araw-araw na problema? (Can Maral Blaans help in conditioning yourself as you face your everyday problems?)*

*FP5: Oo. Makatulong. Biskin may problema ka, Ahh.... Magsayaw lang. Magmaral lang... Minsan mag away ang magkapatid...yong maliit pa kami. So pag may tugtog, siyempre, mawala ang galit mo. Mawala na yon... Ay ipakita ko sa kanya iyong galing ko (laughs) para masaya siya (laughs) Ay, oo. Mawala na yong galit sa akin. (chuckles). At mawala din yong galit ko sa kanya. (Yes. It can help. Even if you have problems. Ahhh... Just dance. Just do Maral. ..Once the sibling quarrel... we were younger then. So whenever there's music, of course, the anger just disappeared...I just show her that I am good at dancing.she's happy. And yes, she's no longer angry. And my anger faded, too.)*

The above-cited interview clips implied that Maral Blaans is therapeutic or it contributes to the healing of whatever negative feelings the dancers experience.

One of the innovative methods to construct a peaceful life is through art. Sklar (2001) backs this viewpoint, claiming that the arts foster creativity and fresh perspectives, resonating across cultures and worldviews. Schirch (2005) emphasizes the same point, that art can be utilized as symbolic communication to shift perceptions and resolve conflicts. This means that art can be an effective strategy for promoting a happy existence towards achieving calm and tranquility. Citro and Cerletti (2009) suggest that aboriginal dances are cultural forms when it comes to other related cultural dances.

Musical noises and body motions are used as markers of cultural experience when individuals dance. As a result, aboriginal dances might have an impact on performers' identities.

The objective of aboriginal dancing, according to Sun (2010), is to pass down ethnic culture and to develop relationships among ethnic groups. It can be considered an acculturation strategy.

Generally, the Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021, regarding the Implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program, states among others, to provide support in the development of culturally-appropriate learning environment responsive to the community context of the IP learners.

Once its implementation is fully enforced, the self-esteem of the members of the Blaans tribe may strengthen, the community, including the non-Blaans, may develop harmonious relationships with each other. Incidences of bullying may be avoided the spirit of oneness will be developed.

### **Social Moral Value of Maral Blaans Fear of "Ethnic Discrimination"**

In my visit to the various barangays during my immersion, I noticed that the Blaans are silent-type of people; they are shy, too. I read through their eyes that they don't want to reveal the many secrets they keep. Most of them are less demonstrative or expressive of their thoughts and feelings. However, for Maral presentations, they could freely become creative to show in their performance real-life scenarios of their lives.

**Fear of Being Bullied.** Since Maral Blaans dancers are identified through the dance, some experience public humiliation by being discriminated and becoming victims of bullying.

**Fear of Feeling Inferior.** The Blaans dancers see themselves as different from the others. This is exactly the main reason why the younger generation of Blaans refuse to learn Maral. They are avoiding getting discriminated against or bullied. They fear of becoming victims of being left out or become the object of humiliation publicly. That is why they even deny their identity that they are Blaans with the way they dress themselves or with whom they keep company. They show this behavior through their actions, but their words just simply express, "No. I don't want to Maral!" These excerpts from the transcript reveal.

*Facilitator: Ano ang dahilan bakit may mga kabataan na Blaans na ayaw matutong magmaral? (What are the reasons why there are youths that refuse to learn maral!?)*

*FP1: Ginaturuan ko man yong aking mga apo. Kaya lang, mahiya kasi sila. (I am trying to teach my granddaughter, but shy is shy.)*

*FP7: Ayaw nilang matuto. Hindi sa tamad sila kundi takot silang mapahiya. Kami kasi na mga Blaans, karamihan sa amin mahiyain, lalo na kung i-request kaming sumayaw sa maraming tao. Iwasan naming na mapahiya kami kasi baka may mas magaling pang sumayaw sa mga nanonood at insultuhin lang kami. (Hey! It's not that they don't want to learn. They are not lazy, but they are afraid to get humiliated in public. It's because we, Blaans, most of us are shy, especially when we are requested to perform in a big crowd. We are avoiding to get shamed because we think that there are viewers in the crowd who are better dancers than us. And they might humiliate us.)*

*FP7: Ayaw nilang matuto. Hindi sa tamad sila kundi takot silang*

*MP2: May mga nasa sa tribu namin na sadyang mahiyain sila. Kasi nahiya nga sila na kutyain Mahiya sila na ipakita yong dance nila na ganito kasi baka tawanan or i-bully... May mga form of bullying. Oo, bullying. Yan ang kinatautan nila. (There are in our*

tribe who are really shy. This is so because they are afraid to be humiliated. They are shy to show their dance because of the thought that they might be bullied.)

Humiliation means lowering someone's status in one's own or others' eyes, with the goal of making them ashamed or humiliated. Public humiliation is nothing new. In all communities, it has been employed as a form of punishment. Shaming somebody in front of their peers is increasingly universally seen as undesirable behavior, even in less formal situations. This indicates a moral development, but it is being countered by the rise of social media and, with it, new forms of humiliation. Indeed, social media shaming has become a social scourge, as Welsh journalist and documentary maker Jon Ronson powerfully depicts in his latest book. So You've Been Publicly Shamed (McCann, 2015) by Ronson is an important contribution to public knowledge of an emotionally fraught topic.

### Fear of Maral Blaan's Extinction

Extinction, for a part of culture, may be painful for a group of people (Kinoc, 2021). The loss may mean a gradual death for its tribe. In the case of the Blaan community, who are now influenced by the modern world, the scenario is vulnerable to happen unless the Blaan community takes initiative to preserve it. With Maral, the Blaan needs to hone young dancers to love the art, be proud about it and be happy doing it. However, the influences of the modern world may prevent its preservation later.

Fear of Death of the Old Dancers. Exactly, there is a feeling of fear of death among the elders because nobody would continue the tradition that identifies them as a people, the Maral Blaan. If the younger generation becomes a group of passives, apathetic, shy and indifferent, then most likely Maral Blaan will vanish in thin air as part of a very rich and colorful Blaan culture. The participants expressed:

*FP1: ... wala na magmana sa akin ba. Baka mamatay ako (chuckles) dapat ang mga apo ko marunong sila. Ang problema, mahiya. (That's it. I said, nobody inherits. What if I die, there would surely be grandchildren who know. But the problem is... they are shy.)*

*FP7: ... wala na magmana sa akin ba. Baka mamatay ako (chuckles) dapat ang mga apo ko marunong sila. Ang problema, mahiya. (That's it. I said, nobody inherits. What if I die, there would surely be grandchildren who know. But the problem is... they are shy.)*

The above-cited interview clips implied the love of the Blaan of their cultural heritage. They want to preserve it. I felt their fear of the extinction of Maral Blaan while they were narrating their stories. They were sad. Cultural extinction can include the loss of language, traditions, habits, and customs. Extinction of a culture can happen from both the forces of nature and those of humans (Zhang, 2021). In the case of Maral Blaan, its extinction could be attributed to humans, the Blaan themselves. If this tradition is not handed down to the younger generation, it would fade away at the same time when the elders die.

Fear of Not Passing of Maral Blaan from Descendants to Another. Maral, as their native dance, portrays their lives in a different perspective as it surfaces the stories of their lives. It tells their stories as a people. Usually, a family member, either the father or mother, promotes the learning of the dance to their children. In some cases, close relatives like aunts or grandparents do the job.

*FP1: Ginaturo ni tatay sa amin noong maliit pa kami. (Father taught us when we were young.)*

*MP2: Noong nine years old ako, gina-encourage ako ng auntie ko nag anito... na turuan ako na magmaral... nakitaan niya ako ng potential. (When I was nine years old, I was encourage by my aunt that she would teach me maral.)*

*FP3: Yong auntie ko ang gusto na matuto akong magmaral. (It was my aunt who want me to learn maral.)*

*FP6: Noong maliit pa kami, si tatay. Lahat 'kaming magkapatid. Kahit ang mga lalaki, marunong yan sila magsayaw. Kaya ang ginagawa ni tatay sa amin, gina-apon-apon niya kami kada hapon para makasayaw kami lahat. (When we were young, our father used to gather all of us, sibling, including the boys. They know how to dance. So, our father gather us every afternoon just to dance. All of us.)*

Payne (2015) says that dance is a fundamental human behavior linked to social rituals. It has become a symbolic link between the tribal community's culture and social life, as well as a physical movement and emotional expression. Various research and psychological interventions have concluded that "dancing and movement as a psychological intervention can affect an individual physically, emotionally, and socially" in modern times. Culture affects every aspect of an individual's life, including how he/she experiences, understands, expresses, and addresses emotional and mental distress (Bhale & Director, 2014). The closeness of the family members allows them to influence each other, especially the elders to their children. When families want to preserve something that "belongs to them", it is necessary that they have to exert efforts to preserve it by handing it down to the younger generation.

### Dance as Cultural Heritage

The Blaan have very close family ties. This bonding enables each one to share the cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions of the tribe.

This tribe has a very rich culture, especially their art, of which the Maral is one. The elders have to pass it on to the younger generation. Dancing, as an integral part of a culture, mirrors the lives of a community; therefore, the elders need to influence the

younger ones in order to preserve it (Kinoc, 2021).

**Sharing the Talent with Others.** The Blaan tribe is a generous group of people. They are more than willing to share a part of their culture to others by way of teaching them, as in the case of maral. Since Maral is purposely performed to entertain, I believe that it is rightful when it is shared to those who want it.

The Maral Blaan dancers are unselfish in their talent in dancing. They gladly teach Maral to both Blaan and non-Blaan willing dancers. More than that, the learners may either be children or adults, relatives or not. The informants have expressed.

*Facilitator: Halimbawa, hmm mag aral sa elementary no? Tudluan mo magmaral ang indi B'laan nga teacher. Sila ang magtudlo naman sang maral sa mga estudyante. Okay lang sa inyo, Nay? (Example. Hmm, studying in grade school. You teach those teachers who are not Blaan then they will teach the students. Is that okay with you, Nay?)*

*FP7: Oo naman. Pwede ko man sila turuan magmaral. Magsunod lang sila sa ginagawa ng Blaan. (Of course yes. I can teach them how to the maral as long as they do what the Blaan do.)*

*MP2: Nang marunong na akong magmaral, nagturo na rin ako sa iba. (When I already learned to dance, I began to teach the others, too.)*

*FP3: Teacher ako ng maral. Matagal na. Kahit hindi mga Blaan tinuturuan ko. May iba pumupunta dito para magpaturo dahil sasali sila sa contest. (I am a teacher of maral. It's been a long time now. I teach maral even to non-Blaan. Some others come to learn because they join contest.)*

The above-cited interview clips implied the elderly Maral Blaan dancers of their generosity and willingness to teach those who want to learn the dance. In its broadest sense, culture is many things. It's the simple activities that make up our day-to-day life, and the extraordinary ways in which we express our ideas, artistry and creativity. It's the customs, languages and traditions that reflect our past, as well as the shared experiences that help to shape our values and beliefs for today and tomorrow. Culture is important because it fosters a sense of belonging, contributes to quality of life, and helps us relate to each other. Individually, it contributes to our health, wellness and esteem, and collectively, it adds to our social capital and economic prosperity. It is important to share your culture with others. It is an avenue to preserve your own (Novascotia, 2022). For the Blaan community, they are happy that others enjoy their Maral, too.

### **Dance as an Opportunity for Bonding**

The young, transformative generation needs exposure to positive experiences and interactions. In the performing arts, such as entertainment and music performance, a dynamic interaction occurs between the performers and their audiences at the moment of generating great enjoyment. While performers make an influence on their audience, they are also influenced by their audience. In addition, the performer tries to amuse the audience and, conversely, the audience wants to enjoy the performance. Consequently, a good relationship will be established between the two parties and enjoyment will be shared. This sharing establishes a close communication between the performer and the audience.

**Maral Blaan Attracts the Members of Its Community to Gather for a Purpose.** Maral Blaan dancers perform in public places to gather the people for specific activities; it is used to call people to assemble in a place. Indigenous dancing can also assist to bring people together in a community by bringing them together for significant events. It also symbolizes a happy relationship among tribe members, as dance can be used to reconcile tribe members who have had misunderstandings. Performing arts is a creative way to peacebuilding. With development and peace and conflict practices, the arts are gaining attention for constructing and establishing spaces to conceive and perform alternate choices around deep-seated issues. The power of the arts to facilitate discussion as an important component of peacebuilding in their research. One of the Blaan tribe's ceremonial events is the Maral Blaan to share their feelings about various events in their neighborhood. It is a type of ritual that commemorates victories and bountiful harvests. Dance, as an intangible heritage that has been passed down, has served numerous roles for the people and the community.

**Maral Blaan Unites Its People.** According to studies, dancing in groups promotes social bonding (Rama, 1991). According to researchers, when people dance in a group, the synchronization that happens when dancing causes a blurring of the self into their groups.

Synchrony unites us, strengthens our ties, and broadens our sense of self. Maral Blaan has a noble purpose. It encourages its community members to have something in common, say, common interests, common hobby, common purpose, and common action. In the case of the Blaan tribe, they influence the other members of their tribe to engage in dancing, too, emphasizing on their benefits, especially in preserving their culture. At the time I saw the dancers gather in the area to perform, the leaders approached the other onlookers to join in the dance performance, too. She convinced them that their objective is noble, that is, to entertain. So, the other known dancers joined the performance without hesitation.

Indeed, it is good to have a sight of a Blaan community which gathers and dance for enjoyment or for whatever purpose. It was easy for me to approach the sitio leaders to find the Blaan dancers. By the time they heard that I need to witness Maral Blaan and explore through in-depth interviews about their cultural art, the people gathered in excitement. They were telling me that because of the

pandemic, they were locked in their homes for quite a time. So, they hunger for the performance of Maral Blaán. As my team waited for the dancers to arrive, there was a thrilled crowd of onlookers who arrived first. I was delighted to see them respond to my call. When the music started, more people proceeded to the venue.

FP6: Kung magsimula na ang tugtog, magmaral na kami nyan.... darating na ang mga tao para manonood. Kapag medyo marami na ang mga tao, mag-umpisa na ang programa o ang aktibidad na gagawin sa araw na yan. (When the music starts, we begin to dance. In a little while, people would come and watch. When there are more people gathered in the crowd, the program starts or the activity for that day.)

FP4: *Kapag makarinig ng tugtog ang mga tao, magpunta sila. Alam na nila na may magaganap na palabas. At isa sa gusto nila makita ay ang pagsasayaw. Pero ang pagsayaw ay saglit lang din dahil kasunod niyan meron pang ibang gawin or panoorin o pakinggan ang mga tao. (When people hear the music, they come to gather. They know that a performance would take place. And one of the things they want to see is dancing. But the dance happens for a moment. What follows next would be an important activity or lecture for the people.)*

Dance can be a way for people to express their fundamental feelings based on shared ideals. Dance is one of the most powerful forms of human expression, and therefore it is a powerful means of communication. Through movements of the human body, dance conveys the whole range of human emotions; tells stories; and strengthens, disciplines, and refreshes the whole person. Dance has been used as a form of worship, creativity, and ritual preservation by the majority of our ethnolinguistic groupings (Buot, 2012). It's a strong instrument for communicating ideas that can't be expressed in words. Aquino, the Philippines' national dancer, noted that there are dances and songs for every event, whether it's a triumphant celebration or a funeral (Gocuingco, 1980). One of the innovative methods to construct a peaceful life is through art. Sklar (2001) backs this viewpoint, claiming that the arts foster creativity and fresh perspectives, resonating across cultures and worldviews.

Schirch (2005) emphasizes the same point, that art can be utilized as symbolic communication to shift perceptions and resolve conflicts. This means that art can be an effective instrument for establishing a peaceful and tranquil life. The Implementation of the IPEd Program will promote social interaction among the people. The Blaán tribe will be accepted as a part of the community. The Blaán enhance their social skills when they generously pass on the knowledge and skills to the learners among schools in the community. They would feel the pride of sharing their dance, thus preserve it. The elders, when their presence is maximized as resource persons for skills transfer, will realize their value as mentors of their dance. This is an effective way to preserve the Maral Blaán.

As I was watching the Blaán dance, I was amused that they were dancing with gusto. Just before they began to dance, they were eagerly sharing their stories of topics about anything. Then, after their performance, they showed happy faces and continued to tell their stories again. I overheard them talking about recent happenings in their lives. Some shared their sad stories while others shared, otherwise. Then they showed gestures of compassion for each other.

The research argues that emotions, thinking, and learning is all connected. Education provides opportunities for endless emotional experiences, and the students' brains will be altered by those experiences (Jensen, 2022). Emotions drive attention, create meaning, and have memory pathways. This strong, productive combination leads to learning. The brain is far more active and chemically stimulated when emotions are involved. Dopamine and norepinephrine are released during movement and physical activity.

These emotional chemicals (hormones and neurotransmitters) enhance long-term learning when administered either before or after learning. A frequent theme in dance research is that dance is a safety valve that releases pent-up emotions, tensions and drives (Pavitra & Shubrata, 2017). The arts transform, so to say, subjective human emotions (into states) leading to internal calm and transcendence from mundane existence. Learning happens as an ending result of these various psychological states. The more intense the emotional state, the more learning will take place. Though dance choreography can be deep in meaning, movement does offer instant gratification that elicits positive feelings and emotions.

### **Maral Blaán is an Entertainment**

It is often a mistaken idea that Maral Blaán is a form of worship. For the Blaán tribe, Maral is performed prelude to the activity of worshipping their Supreme God Dwata. However, the dance is done to attract the community to gather at some place for a specific purpose; therefore, mostly they would say that it is regarded as an entertainment. When people have gathered, the objective of the gathering is done, say, the Blaán community altogether come in prayer to their Dwata.

Historically, dance has been an important part of worship for many cultures and religions around the world. While dancing is certainly mentioned in the Bible, with roots in pre-Christian pagan traditions, dance as worship was phased out of the Christian church as part of the 16th century Protestant Reformation and did not make a reappearance until the 20th century.

Maral Blaán is Not a Form of Worship but as an Entertainment. As I was observing in this dance journey, I discovered that Maral Blaán is performed to entertain the people; to attract them; to make an assembly. The worship is done after the dance performance. However, the informants have expressed that every time they make the dance performance, they first pray to God.



*Facilitator: Ipahayag ang maral bilang isang paraan ng pagsamba. (Express that maral is a way to worship your Dwata.)*

*FP3: Pero hindi ito isang pagdarasal. Magsasayaw para maipon ang mga tao para sa isang mahalagang pagtitipon, gaya ng pagsamba. (But this is not a form of worship. We dance to gather the people in an assembly like worshipping our Dwata.)*

*FP4: Ginagawa man naming iyan. Nakasayaw man ako dyan sa simbahan naming kung may okasyon. Ginagawa namin magmaral bago magsamba para darating ang mga tao. (We are doing that. Of course, I am happy because He is my strength. I dance in the church whenever there are occasions. We perform the dance before we worship so that people come to worship.)*

The above-cited interview clips implied that Maral Blaen is used to call people to gather for a purpose. The sound of the music invites people to gather. The community of Blaen understands that something important is going to happen. When the people have gathered, the dancing stops, and the main activity begins.

### **Maral Blaen Improves One's Personality**

Dancing provides an opportunity to spend time with others. This allows the development of the dancers' social aspect in life.

**Maral Blaen Develops Self-Confidence and Boosts One's Self-Esteem.** Based on the shared ideas, dance can be a mode of communication of the innate emotions of the people. It is a powerful tool to convey messages which cannot be done in words. The research accompanying this study unveiled discrepancies amongst major themes in the research about mental health of young adults. It is common for texts to mention self-esteem and self-confidence.

During my dance experience for days, I noticed that the Blaen dance confidently, especially when they are dancing in groups. Even the children, who joined the adult dancers, demonstrated that they were confident in their performance.

Someone can be confident in various skills, such as dancing, cooking or painting, but still have low self-esteem. In contrast, self-esteem is how someone feels about themselves and their personal worth. The term "self-esteem" can be synonymous with "self-worth." It helps to establish how one thinks, feels, and acts. It is commonly thought that dance would contribute to positive self-esteem.

So, with regards to dance-confidence self-esteem, if someone feels that other people think they are good at social and recreational dancing then they will have higher dance confidence self-esteem than someone who believes other people don't think they are very good at social and recreational dancing. Experience is the best teacher. The more experience you have, the more confident you will become.

I witnessed that the young dancers showed the same confidence as the adults. And because Maral Blaen is a free-flowing dance, it allows each dancer to just do his/her own gestures and movements, provided he/she dances with the theme. Some of these dancers, especially the younger ones, get their source of strength from the older dancers. Indeed, the older ones are good influencers to encourage the younger ones to do the Maral Blaen, too. The encouragement showed the cooperation to help preserve their own culture.

*Facilitator: How does Maral influence your behavior towards the Blaen culture?*

*MP2: Maka-influence siya sa Blaen culture, Sir. Kasi Sir, may mga discrimination man sa amin. So, dapat maimpluwensiyahn talaga naming sila na huwag talaga naming iwan ang aming kultura. Kasi... ginaencourage din naming sila na huwag mahiya or dapat maging proud. Dapat huwag nila hayaan ang ibang tao na mag-lookdown sa kanila.*

Through dancing, huwag sila mahiya na magdance... Pero sa pangunguna namin sa sayaw, kami yong nagpakita ng confidence sa pagsayaw namin. Dapat ma-encourage naming sila ng ganito. Dapat gayahin din nila kami. At kalaunan magkaroon na rin sila ng tiwala sa sarili nila. Hindi na rin sila nahihiya mag-perform. (It influences the Blaen culture, Sir. Because there exists some discrimination issues on us. Therefore, there is a need to influence them to not disown our culture. We encourage them not to be ashamed, instead to be proud. They should not allow other people to look down on them. Through dancing, they should not be ashamed to dance. But, we role-model them. We show them that we earned confidence in our dance performance. So, we have to encourage them this way. They should emulate us. Then later they develop self-confidence, too. They are not ashamed to perform anymore.)

### **Spiritual Moral Value of Maral Blaen**

Maral Blaen is used to refer to the presence of gods and goddesses. The Blaen tribe is very rich in mythology. They recognize nature as part of their lives. They believe that these natural things have the power to control the environment. So, they name their gods and goddesses and call them for guidance, protection, to encourage them, and seek help, praying that nothing bad will happen to them during their performance.

### **Maral Blaen Seeks the Help of Gods and Goddesses for Some Purposes, But Not to Worship**

The Blaen tribe only worship Dwata, their Supreme Being. And to pay honor to Him, they perform Maral Blaen. However, for minor requests, they seek the guidance of the gods and goddesses who take the form of natural creations of their Dwata. So, to do



this, they do various rituals, depending on their purpose.

*MP2: In terms of worship, sir, uhm...there are a lot of kinds of worship for the gods and goddesses. For example, in a tree, may paniwala kami nga may mga kahoy... 'yong lupa... 'yong bundok... may mga goddess namin. And through that, tinatawag namin ang presence nila to guide us...to protect us and to give us 'yong encouragement to perform. (In terms of worship, sir...uhm.. There are a lot of kinds of worship for the gods and goddesses. For example, we believe that the trees... the ground... the mountain... there live the gods and goddesses. And through that, we call for their presence to guide us.. to protect us and to give us the encouragement to perform the dance.)*

The above-cited interview clips implied that the Blaan people believe in the presence of their gods and goddesses. One way to invite them to come is through Maral. The Blaan tribe uses Maral as one of their ceremonial rituals to convey their feelings in response to various events in their community.

It is a type of ritual that commemorates victories and bountiful harvests. Dance, as an intangible heritage that has been passed down, has served numerous roles for the people and the community, according to Dulce (2020). Dance can be a way for people to communicate their fundamental feelings based on shared concepts. The majority of our ethnolinguistic communities have employed dance as a form of worship, creativity, and ritual preservation (Buot, 2012). It is a powerful tool for communicating messages that cannot be expressed in words. Aquino, the Philippines' national dance performer, noted that there are dances and melodies for all circumstances, whether triumph or death (Gocuingco, 1980). Through dance, one can easily presume some visible characteristics of the people which can be seen more in the context of its ceremonial dances.

The Maral Blaan's movements have meaning and significance in the lives of the aforementioned tribe. The movements of this ancient dance also change depending on the type of celebration depicted by the dancers. Because of the tribe's life narrative and experiences, the type and classification of indigenous dance differed from other forms of dance.

Years of practice have gone into perfecting the tribal dance. Indigenous dance is distinguishable from other forms of dance by its motions, which are designed to reflect a person's emotional, psychological, and spiritual characteristics.

Culture can be defined as a group of people's shared habits, values, and beliefs, such as an ethnic, racial, regional, religious, gender, class, or age group. Everyone belongs to many cultural groups, resulting in a mingling of influences in each individual. Dress, language, religion, customs, food, laws, codes of conduct, behavioral standards or patterns, conventions, and beliefs are all influenced by culture. It has a big impact on how people from all walks of life express themselves, seek help, deal with stress, and form social bonds. Every area of a person's life is influenced by culture, including how he or she experiences, understands, expresses, and deals with emotional and mental suffering. Dance is a fundamental human behavior linked to social rituals. It has become a symbolic link between the tribal community's culture and social life, as well as a physical movement and emotional expression. Various research and psychological interventions have concluded that "dancing and movement as a psychological intervention can affect an individual physically, emotionally, and socially" in modern times. Indigenous dancing can also assist to bring people together in a community by bringing them together for significant events.

It also symbolizes a happy relationship among tribe members, as dance can be used to reconcile tribe members who have had misunderstandings. The best spiritual relationship we can have is the one we share with other people. We find enjoyment in the spirit of community when our spirits come together and we move as one. The mystical feeling of connecting with others in a higher dimension through the art of dancing adds to the spiritual experience.

Meanwhile, Perez and Dela Rosa (2015) use Britannica as a source. Many historians agreed that dance was formerly a fundamental element of everyday life, accompanying both practical activities and religious rites, according to the Macropedia (2007). People began to see dance as a source of pleasure when more complex social economic structures began to emerge and a leisured class or caste emerged. More complex civilizations replaced tribal societies. Many older ritual forms, such as religious, work, and hunting dances, lost their original importance over time and evolved into leisure folk dances. Rall (2009) confirmed the ritual dances' reported loss of identity.

On the Spiritual theme and core idea developed for the spiritual value of Maral Blaan, the sub-theme was Maral Blaan boosts our spirituality, and its respective core idea was Dancing seeks Dwata's blessing to boost one's spirituality.

Dancing Seeks Dwata's Blessing to Boost One's Spirit. Before they dance, the Blaan dancers pray seriously in silence, seeking Dwata's blessings to grant them the energy to be able to sustain their dancing performance. Their prayer includes asking Dwata's intervention to prevent bad spirits from interfering in their dancing activity. The prayer also contains the request to prevent bad intentions of some viewers to disrupt their performance. The participants explained.

*FP7: Maral Blaan strengthens yong aming paniniwala (our belief). So, through dance, parang naga-help siyang mag-boost yong spirit para maka-feel naman ng strength. (sort of helping us boost our spirit to make us feel the strength) We pray before dancing. We ask Dwata's blessings for sustainable energy.*

*MP2: Uhhmmm... in terms of competition, we need Dwata in our lives. or in our preparation day and during presentation day.*

*Somewhat na ganito (like this), Sir. May mga ibang tribu na kagaya namin. May mga paniniwala sila na they are there na may mga masasamang balak ba while we dance. Natamaan ako ng kanilang mga bad spirits. May mga hurim-hurim sila ba. So, kung gusto nila na sumakit yong paa mo, mangyayari talaga. Minsan na yon nangyari sa akin. So, sa amin, hindi talaga kami mag-dance kung competition. Kasi competition yan. It's showing our culture.. tradition ang yong mga...ipakita naming yong mga dala naming ano behind. So, yon ang ginagawa naming....making fun, doon naming ma-recall ang ano... Kasi kailangan natin makipag-connect..kawawa kami after sa competition. Walang mag-protect sa amin... walang mag-guide sa amin. Walang mag-heal sa amin. (There are other tribes like us that believe they are there to cast evil spells on us while we dance. Err...I was hit by their bad spirits. They have chants. So, whenever they want you to experience foot ache, that would happen. Once, it happened to me. So, in our case, we refuse to dance in a competition. Because that is competition.It's showing our culture, traditions...we showcase what we have and what we bring..So, instead, we just make fun. There, we recall...there really is a need to connect. Because we need to connect there. If we don't relate it there, we would be at the disadvantaged. Nobody would protect us. Nobody would guide us. Nobody would heal us.)*

Dance is an expression of happiness, joy, freedom and liberation. It can teach children and adults a body-embracing way of living, believing and being in God's world. One participant says that through dance in general, "we want to communicate heaven to people down here, the message of salvation, our freedom in God, the joy in God, and the joy of dancing with fellowmen.

When we dance for ourselves, we invite positive energy into our space and our being, we are able to slip into the present moment where our 'problems' do not exist and we break negative thought patterns whilst releasing pent up stress and worry." Dance is imagination brought to life! Dance is prayer. Dance is mediation. Dance is walking through the clouds, flying among the stars, gliding on the moon and experiencing the pure bliss of heaven on earth (Jackson, 2016).

I understand that for the Blaan tribe, Maral Blaan, is regarded as both entertainment and an act of worship, as in the case of some rituals they perform like thanksgiving. Although it is a silent gesture of prayer, dancing is more meaningful because the thoughts and feelings are expressed by the dancer through gestures and movements.

Indigenous Peoples recognized their heritage to be connected to their collective memory as a community, related to their identity as a group of people. This is considered culturally important and meaningful.

The indigenous cultural heritage is not separate from indigenous identity and life. This was passed on from ancestors bridged to the next generations. The implementation of the IPED Program may pave the way the understanding of the value of Maral Blaan to strengthen the spiritual aspect of the people.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Maral Blaan dance stands as a significant embodiment of the Blaan tribe's cultural heritage, reflecting their daily life, emotions, values, and spiritual beliefs. Beyond its role as a form of entertainment, it serves as a medium for preserving traditions, fostering community pride, and strengthening social and spiritual bonds. The study affirms that the Blaan community, especially its elders, is eager to contribute to the preservation and transmission of this indigenous art through the IPED Program, in alignment with Regional Memorandum CLMD No. 153, s. 2021. However, challenges such as the influence of modernization, limited formal education among some members, and the need for consistent adherence to traditional performance practices highlight the necessity for intentional preservation efforts.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Department of Education actively implement and monitor the IPED Program, engaging authentic Blaan dancers as cultural bearers and trainers. Schools, both public and private, should integrate Maral Blaan into their curricula, provide teacher training, and encourage student participation in cultural presentations. Local government units may support the preservation of Maral Blaan by incorporating it into community events, creating policies to strengthen intertribal relations, and funding the development of authentic props and instructional materials. Future studies may explore video documentation, module creation, and prop development to ensure accurate transmission of the dance's techniques and meanings. Through collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and the Blaan community, the Maral Blaan can be preserved and promoted for the benefit of future generations.

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