

# Ritual Dances of the T'Boli

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**Abstract** - The study investigated the dances and rituals of the T'boli's of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. The respondents were the T'boli tribal dancers. The study used the qualitative research design involving ethnographic technique. The study found that the dances show the T'boli's affinity with nature. The unique dance movement is characterized by: heads bowed low; arms extended sideward and forward or obliquely sideward; and knees and trunks slightly bent. There is frequent use of the upper torso, subtle facial expression, and arms that flow from pose to pose—the fingers held close and still, curling in and out and the elbows are flexed. Generally, the T'boli rhythmic movement often builds up to trance to ensure that omen from the spirits is interpreted properly. The T'boli ritual dance is used to appease the gods; solicit good harvest; seek deliverance from pestilence; mark birth, weddings and death; prepare for war; celebrate victories; affirm social unity and identity.

**Key words** - Ritual Dances, T'boli, Lake Sebu

## INTRODUCTION

Dance is one art Filipinos excel in. With the formation of dance groups that perform locally and internationally, Philippine dance has become known and appreciated by heads of state, rich and famous, and even the masses. In the Philippines and in other civilizations, dance has always had a religious undertone. Dance was used to please or appease the gods, and to communicate with the mighty

powers that dominated the realm of our forefathers (Aquino 1948). Culturally speaking, the dance of ancient times reflected the heart and soul of humanity.

The development of dance in the Philippines parallels the history of the culture. The heterogeneous features brought about by geographical barriers, the isolation of various national cultural communities, and the diverse foreign influences at various periods have resulted in an extensive variety of dances. Variety is only in movements and steps, but also in costuming, music spirit, purpose, and character emerging from the people's idiosyncrasies, temperament, and inherent traits (Aquino 1961).

In isolated regions, untouched by these waves of cross-cultural influences, people have retained their own identities and standards long enough to establish a tradition in dance. In no case has any form been well defined as to be recognized as classical. Courtship, festivals, hospitality, thanksgiving, and war are just some subjects illustrated by our dances, which revolve around community life and the most commonplace events as birth, marriage, and harvest. These dances also have similar steps and movements (Alejandro 1978).

More than 20 cultural communities other than the Igorots and Muslims live in isolation in hills and mountains throughout the Philippine archipelago. Like the hill tribes of Thailand, these groups live in the style of their forebears. Dance for them is a basic part of life, performed essentially for the gods who must be appeased with sacrifices for favors (Pitt 1978). Generally exhibiting simple, rhythmic movement, dances often build up to trance to ensure that omens from the spirits are interpreted properly. Some movements of the different dances mimic birds and the natural environment.

Having both a religious and a social function, dance is used to appease the gods; to solicit rain; to seek deliverance from pestilence; to mark births, weddings, deaths, and funerals; to prepare for war and combat; to celebrate victories; and most importantly, to affirm a community's social unity and distinct identity. Dancing is one of men's earliest manifestations as they strove towards civilization.

Inspiration may come from animals, birds, insects, whose movements are a form of communication. Dances imitative of monkeys are found among the Ikalahan, the Mansaka, the Baluga, and the T'boli. Hawks and bees too are sources of fear, awe, pleasure, and dance among the Manobo, the B'Laan, and Tiruray. Music may have also come from the sounds of birds and animal life and from the rhythms of nature (Unabia 1985).

Ethno-linguistic group dances of the non-Christian Filipinos are important in tracing the historical development of the dance in the Philippines as they reveal the nature of pre-Hispanic dances, of which no record is available. The Spanish conquerors failed to subjugate and Christianize the Muslims of the South, the tribal peoples of the northern highlands, and other indigenous communities. Their ethnological dances give a glimpse of the country's past and that of the neighboring Southeast Asian countries.

Ethnic dances of the northern tribes are used as a form of worship, a framework for courtship and mating, and a way of expressing and reinforcing ethnic unity and strength (Pagulaya 1983).

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study looked into the dances of the T'boli tribe of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, and how they reflect the culture of the T'boli. In particular, it sought to answer the following objectives: (1) to describe the existing T'boli dances and rituals; (2) to characterize the dance in terms of basic dance movements, costume and accessories and properties, musical accompaniment and instruments; and (3) to determine the cultural implication of characteristic body movements of the dances.

### FRAMEWORK

Analyzing a tribal dance is difficult not only because of the lack of evidence concerning its origin and rapid dying of extant forms but also because of the fact that the term tribal covers many kinds of dances. Tribal dances not only vary from one tribe to another but also fall into many different categories such as weapon dances or war dances, fertility dances, sun and moon worshipping dances, initiation dances, hunting dances, wedding dances, and mimetic dances (Gabao 1988). These dances cover the most meaningful events, customs, and values related to the ancestral matrix of a race.

The following are factors that contribute to a better understanding of the dances:

**Origin.** Studying a people's dance entails a lot of work and studies. Goquinco, author of "The Dances of the Emerald Isles," said that to gain insights into the multifaceted dance culture, one must first know the origin and socio-religious and cultural background of the people."

**Costumes and Accessories.** Costumes and accessories are an integral part of dances. These come hand in hand with awareness of a man's own body and the need to beautify oneself. Different groups of people vary in the costumes they wear. The Webster Third New International Dictionary defines costume as a distinctive style and prevailing fashion of personal adornment including the study of wearing the hair jewelry and apparel of all kinds, characteristic of any period, country, class, occupation or occasion. Accessories are defined as any various article of apparel (as scarf, belt or piece of jewelry) that accents or otherwise completes one's costume.

**Musical instruments/Accompaniment.** Musical instruments are devices producing sounds or rhythmic form of sound accompanying a dance or service of bodily movements that make up a dance. It is important to note that some tribal

dances are accompanied by the following native instruments: drums made of animal skin, graduated-size gongs, small bells, bamboo flute, and wood blocks.

**Dance Steps, Body Movements and Cultural Implications.** Dances of any given country evolve naturally and spontaneously in conjunction with the pattern of daily living. Hence, each group of people possesses diverse history, customs, tradition and character traits that are reflected in their dances. Such diversity contributes to the uniqueness of each group.

So (1984) stated that characteristic body movements are based on the ways of the natives. “Show me how you dance and I will tell you who you are,” Goquinco stated in introducing a truism where one must reinforce characteristic body movements, dance steps and arm/hand movements to reflect custom, tradition, and character.

Encyclopedia Britannica defines dance as the movement of the body in rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space for the purpose of expressing an idea or an emotion, releasing energy; or simply taking delight in the movement itself.”

This study postulates that every dance possesses unique characteristics and reflects the expression and culture of a particular group.

### METHODOLOGY

Both the historical and descriptive methods of research were utilized in this study. The historical method was used to study the development of the dances of the T’boli Tribe. The descriptive method was employed to describe the steps and movements, costumes, accessories and properties, music accompaniment and instruments of the dances for analysis and notation. The subjects of this study were the members of the T’boli Tribe Dancers of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. (Fig 1) Also, the study included as primary source of information important personalities of the T’boli Tribe.



Fig 1. T’Boli tribal dancers

Table 1 Members of the *T'boli Helobung* group dances

| Members          | Age | Position                     |
|------------------|-----|------------------------------|
| Oyog Wanan       | 41  | Consultant                   |
| Dala Kasaw       | 55  | Member, Dancer, Chanter      |
| Maafile Angkoy   | 57  | Instrumentalist, Dancer      |
| Manudal Biala    | 50  | Instrumentalist, Dancer      |
| Yuna Kamansa     | 43  | Band Director                |
| Rosie Sula       | 39  | Consultant                   |
| Umeg Ganlal      | 32  | Dancer                       |
| Roger Derilon    | 35  | Executive Director           |
| Ngabut Quay      | 34  | Treasurer, Dancer            |
| Yuni Yambok      | 26  | Artistic Director, Secretary |
| Wamalaida Yambok | 28  | BOD, Dancer                  |
| Greg Sagadol     | 40  | BOD, Instrumentalist         |
| Kumale Sugan     | 23  | Dancer                       |

The researcher used interviews and observation techniques to gather data. The video camera recorded the music, accompaniment, costumes, accessories and properties.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Existing T'boli Dances.

There are eleven dances identified with the T'boli of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. (Table 2).

Table 2 *T'boli dances of Lake Sebu South Cotabato*

| Name               | Description of Dances   |
|--------------------|---|
| Madal Tahu         | Dance of the T'boli Goddesses.  |
| Madal Siwol        | Is a courtship dance, a boy pursues a girl. The girl uses an unfurled Kayab or Turban to taunt him with, as she holds the ends of the Kayab, she sways from side to side as she follows the beat of the drum. |
| Kadal Temulon Lobo | A war dance, this dance is a narrative as the performer's movements tell how he has killed his adversary, who may have been his rival for a girl's affection.   |
| Madal Iwas         | Is a dance imitating the movement of monkeys  |
| Madal be Tonok     | Is a healing dance performed by a healer while attuning for a sick person. He dances around a booth where the sick person sits inside.  |
| Madal be Kumbing   | Dance with Kumbing is played to call back the moon during eclipse.  |
| Madal be S'ludoy   | A dance with the music of bamboo setter, usually danced by the Ubo people.  |
| Madal Betaku       | A witch dance imitates the movement of a witch who tries to attack the baby, then when the mother knows the presence of the witch she drives away or kills-by playing Kumbing T'boli musical instrument.      |
| Madal Mit Mata     | This is a flirtation dance by a woman with courting gestures, it is usually danced for entertainment.   |



**Fig 2. The male T’boli courting the woman in dance form**

The 11 dances identified with the T’boli. They are *Madal Tahu*, *Madal Siwol*, *Madal Soyow*, *Madal Iwas*, *Madal Be Tonok*, *Madal Be Kumbing*, *Madal Be S’ludoy*, *Madal Temelek*, *Madal Betaku*, *Madal Mit Mata*, *Madal Tahaw*. Four dances are associated with the elements of nature, *Madal be S’ludoy* makes use of a piece of bamboo. It has some relevance from a forest such as *Madal Be Kumbing*(Bamboo) *Madal Iwas*(Monkey) *Madal Tahaw*(Birds). The theme is animistic and makes propitiatory offering to household gods, like *Madal Be Tonok*, *Madal Tahu*, and *Madal Betaku* sense, *Madal Mit Mata* and *Madal Siwol* pertains to a clandestine affair between lovers, (Fig 2) *Madal Soyow* is a character who kills to win the girl’s affection.

Table 3 *Dance and its association with elements of nature*

| Name of Dance    | Association with Nature |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Madal be S’ludoy | Bamboo                  |
| Madal be Kumbing | Bamboo                  |
| Madal Iwas       | Monkey                  |
| Madal Tahaw      | Bird                    |

The four dances in table 3 are related to forest elements while the other two Madal Iwas and Madal Tahaw are related to animals. Bamboo and animals are playing important roles in the life of the T’bolis.

Table 4 *Dances and their locational purpose*

| Name of Dance    | Association with Nature | Where/What for                  |
|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Madal be S’ludoy | Bamboo(Forest Products) | Forest                          |
| Madal be Kumbing | Bamboo(Forest Products) | Forest                          |
| Madal Iwas       | Monkey                  | Forest                          |
| Madal Tahaw      | Birds                   | Farm(Calendar used for farming) |

Table 4 reveals that the T’boli has a close affinity with nature since it is their source of shelter and food. Four of the two dances of the T’boli are associated with nature which implies that the world of the T’bolis is their environment.

Table 5 *Dance and its association with spiritual belief and religion*

| Name of Dance  | Association with their belief |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Madal be Tonok | Spiritual belief              |
| Madal Tahu     | Religion                      |
| Madal Betaku   | Spiritual belief              |

Table 5 shows that two dances are related to spiritual belief of the T’bolis, Madal be Tonok and Madal Betaku. These dances drive away the evil spirits that affect a sick person. Madal Tahu is the religious ritual celebration.

## ANALYSIS OF THE DANCE

### **Basic Dance Steps and Movements**

The 11 T’boli dances have common dance steps and body movements.

#### 1. Dance steps:

- A. The basic steps found in the T’boli dance are tapping, jumping, shuffling, and turns. The natives shuffle their feet to the sound of the drums as a warning to start Helobung or endless joy

#### 2. Body movement:

- A. Head position. The head is slightly bent forward with the dancers looking downward. The head follows the movements as the arm reveals the shyness of the women.
- B. Hand position: Most of the arms are in open position, extended sideward, upwards, obliquely sideward, upward,

downward, the fingers are lightly open as the arms are down and slightly bent or close as it goes up, while the thumbs hold the side of Lewek (Malong) (Fig 3).

- C. Trunk and Knee Position: The trunk and knees are slightly bent most of the time.



**Fig 3. Yakab**

T'boli dances have five basic movements: the head tilting downward, the eyes pointing downwards, the trunk slightly bent forward, the knee slightly bent and the arms extended in sideward position. Of the five basic movements, the movement involving the knees slightly bent is found in the seven dances. The head being tilted downwards and the eyes being cast downward are also found in the seven dances. The body movement is less but the hand movements are prominent.

*Table 6 Costumes, accessories and properties*

| Costume  | Description  |
|--|--|
| K'gal nesif(Blouse)<br>Female  | Is extremely popular; it has a cross-stitched design of 2-3 inch geometric and highly stylized animal(Bekong) and male (Hakong) symbols embroidered in white and yellow, which shows the creativity of the T'bolis |
| Luwik Tedeyong<br>(Lower)<br>Kagal T'nalak upper<br>And<br>Sawal T'nalak | Malong with T'boli designs.<br><br>Popular to T'boli T'nalak made of abaca with geometric design and color combination of red and black symbolizing a Datu or Royal family   |





**Fig 4. Male and female costumes**

Table 6 shows the terms for and the description of the different costumes (Fig 4) of the T'boli, K'gal nasif and Luwik Tedeyong are for women and Kagal

T’nalak and Sewael T’nalak are for men.

Table 7 *Accessories and headdresses*

| Accessories                       | Description  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Slo-ung Kenibang<br>Kayab(Turban) | Made of bamboo, at the top a cloth a combination of red and white color used only for woman.<br>Traditional T’boli made of abaca cloth |
| S’wat                             | Used to crown women using traditional hairdo   |
| S’wat Tembuku                     | A short comb with mirror as the central decoration or motif  |
| S’wat Tembuku                     | A short comb with of mirror as the central decoration or motif   |
| S’wat Henafak                     | Short ornamented brass comb  |
| B’ ketut                          | Round mirror(3/4 inch in diameter) surrounded by tiny colored glass beads worn in the ear.   |
| Kawat                             | Brass rings pierced along the ear’s edge.  |
| Nomong                            | Characteristic type of earring consisting of 9-12 with 4 inches in diameter.   |
| B’kuku                            | Chandelier type of earrings.   |
| Kewel                             | Used either for necklace or earrings consisting of several stands of tiny multi colored glass beads.                                   |
| Necklace                          |  |
| Li-eg / hekef                     | A chalkier made of pure bead work  |
| Li-eg tenoyong                    | hawk bells   |
| Bracelet                          |  |
| Singkil Linti                     | Made of brass, about 4 inches in diameter and between 3/8 inch tick.   |
| Kala                              | Usually 5 wide bracelet made of brass, worn tightly on the arm.  |
| B’lusu                            | Plain brass bracelet.  |



Fig 5. lieg / hekef

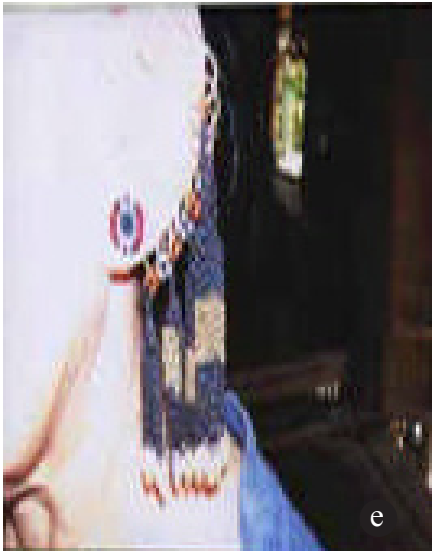


Fig 6. (a) Slo-ung Kenibang (b) Singkil Linti (c) S'wat (d) Li-eg Tenogong (e) kawat





Fig 7. B'kuku

Table 7 shows that there are 20 accessories (Fig 5,6,7): which the T'boli tribal dancers use: Slo-ung Kenibang, Kayab, S'wat, S'wat Tembuku, S'wat Henafak, B'ketut, Kawat, Namong, B'kuku, Kewel, Li-eg Hekef, T'noyong, Singkil Linti, Kala, B'loru, Singkil Babat, Singkil Sequlong, Tugul, Tising, Hilet. Five of these 20 accessories are for the head. Slo-ung Kanibang, Kayab, S'wat, S'wat Tembuku and S'wat Henafak. Five (5) are for the earrings. B'ketut, Kawat, Nomong, B'kuku and Kewel. The necklace includes Li-eg Hekef and T'noyong. The bracelet has Singkil Linti, Kala and B'loru. Three items are anklets: Singkil Babat, Singkil Sigulong and Tugul. There is a ring Tising and girdle or belt Helit.

Beads are essential and are found in the Slo-ung Kenibang, B'ketut, Kawat, Nomong, B'kuku, Kewel, Li-eg Hekef, T'noyong, and Tugul. One accessories give away a person's high status in the T'boli society, Slo-ung Kenibang (Princess hat) from the table above.

Table 8 Properties/props of T'boli dances

| Properties/props | Description  |
|------------------|--|
| Kefilan          | Men's bolo, worn for self defense.   |
| K'lung           | Rectangular wooden shields of about 16 by 30 inches similar to that of Ifugao. |
| Boho             | A bolo used for cutting bamboo.  |
| Ehek             | Used for hunting.  |
| Leban            | Basket where seeds are placed.   |
| Nadal            | Used for digging to plant rice.  |
| Boho ne hanak    | (bow and arrow)- With the bow made of yantok.                                  |

Three properties are used for self-defense namely: Kefilan, Kehung, and Boho ne hanak, Two props are “Kadaw Mila” (Planting) Ehek and Leban and the Fandi Nadol (Malong) are most common. They are used in some dances by putting them around their neck, the edge of the malong is held and is executed like the birds flying..

Table 9 *Musical instrumenst*

| Name of Musical Instrument | Description  |
|----------------------------|--|
| K'lintang                  | Eight graduated laid-out brass gongs played by both men and women.   |
| T'nonggong                 | Drum made from bamboo and stretched monkey or deer skin.   |
| S'ludoy                    | Bamboo Zither that is used during the day when the player is light hearted or when a visitor is being welcomed.                                    |
| Hegelung                   | Long, slender spindle-shaped, two stringed lute with frets made of lefak wood and covered in bee wax taken from the songko, smallest type of bees. |
| B'lowon                    | Large hanging gongs which are struck by the wedding guests from the groom's side to signal their approach to the bride's house.                    |
| Kesal                      | Bamboo pole.   |
| Kumbing                    | A bamboo mouth harp is more frequently used by men for short distance courtship.   |
| S'lioli                    | A bamboo flute.  |
| Dewegey                    | Violin made of coconut shell.  |

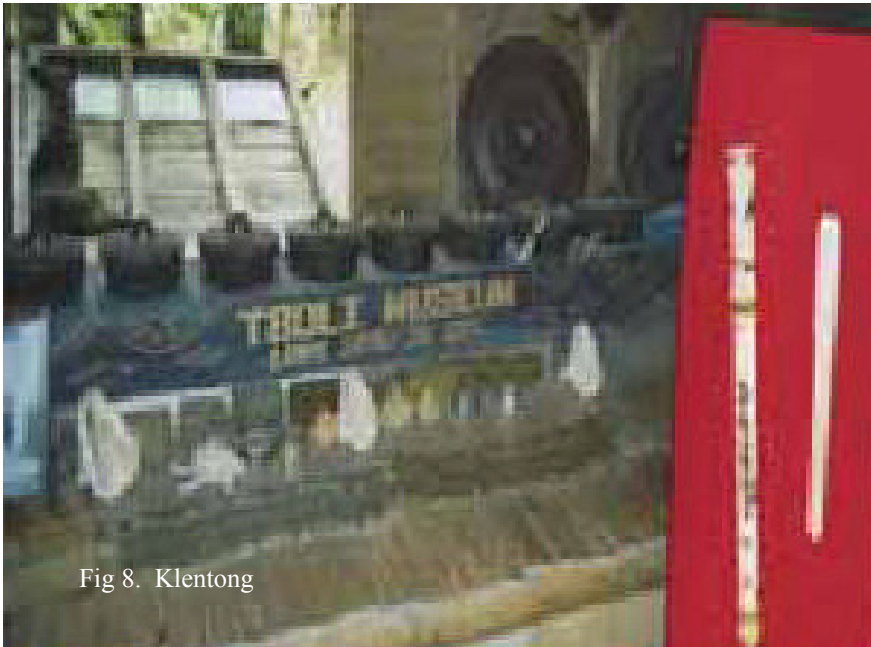


Fig 8. Klentong



Fig 9. (a) S'ludoy (b) B'lowon

Table 9 Shows that the T’boli use: nine musical instruments (Fig 8,9,10), namely: k’lintang, T’nonggong, S’ludoy, hegelung, Blowon, Kesal, Kumbing, S’lohi, Dewegey; four are percussion: K’lintang, Blowon, T’nonggong and Kansal; two are Guitar: the Hegelung and Dewegey; two are Harp: the S’ludoy and Kumbing; and, One: Flute; Four (4) musical instruments are made of Bamboo: T’nonggong, Sludoy,kumbing,S’lohi: Five of the dances use 2/4 musical beat.

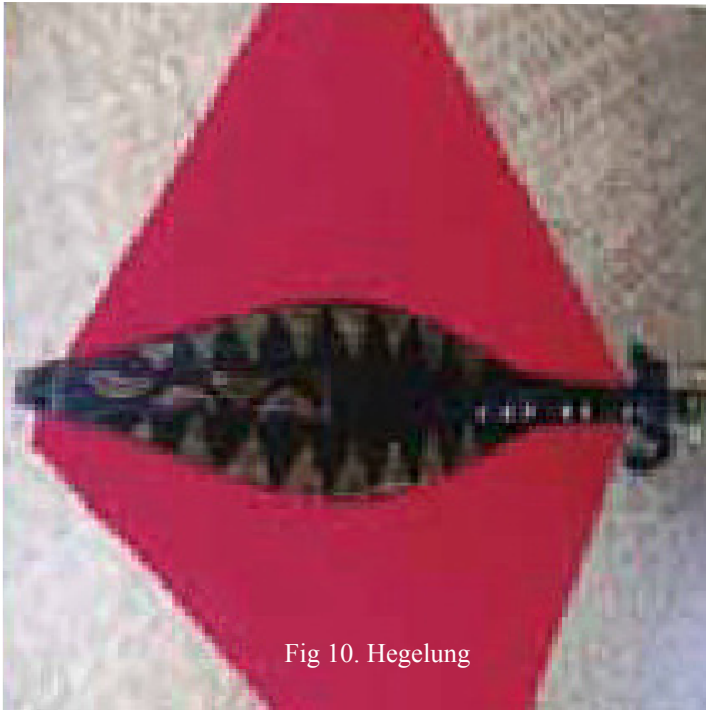


Fig 10. Hegelung

Table 10 *Dances and musical accompaniment*

| Name of Dance                     | Musical Instrument                    |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Madal Tahu                        | Klintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal  |
| Madal Siwol                       | Klintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal  |
| Kadal Tnulong lobo or Madal Soyow | Klintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal  |
| Madal Iwas                        | Klintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal  |
| Madal be Tanok                    | Klintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal  |
| Madal kumbing                     | Kumbing (Bawba)                       |
| Madal S’tudoy                     | Bamboo Zither                         |
| Madal Betaku                      | Kumbing                               |
| Madal mit Mata                    | K’lintang, T’nonggong, B’lowon, Kesal |
| Madal Tahaw                       | Klintang, T’nonggong, Blowon, Kanssal |

Table 10 reveals that seven T’boli dances use the Klintang, T’nonggong, Blowon, and Kansal. Moreover, some dances employ other instruments like Kumbing, bamboo guitar and bamboo setter.

Table 11: *Dance and musical beat*

| Name of Dance                     | Musical Beat       |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Madal Tahu                        | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Madal Siwol                       | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Kadal Temulon lobo or Madal Soyow | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Madal Iwas                        | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Madal be Tonok                    | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Madal Kumbing                     | 4/4 Time Signature |
| Madal S’ludoy                     | 4/4 Time Signature |
| Madal Betaku                      | 4/4 Time Signature |
| Madal mit Mata                    | 2/4 Time Signature |
| Madal Tahaw                       | 2/4 Time Signature |

Table 11 shows that seven out of Ten T’boli dances have a signature beat of 2/4 white Madal Kumbing, Madal S’ludoy and Madal Betaku may be danced in 4/4 beat time signature.

Cultural Significance of the Dances.

Table 12: *Characteristics of body movement and their cultural significance*

| Characteristic/movements   | Dance Found      | Cultural Implication  |
|--|------------------|---|
| Head Tilted<br>Downward  | Madal Tahu       | Shy, submissive, humble, respectful, timid  |
|  | Madal Siwol      |   |
|  | Madal Soyow      |   |
|  | Madal de S’ludoy |   |
|  | Madal mit Mata   |   |
| Slightly Downward Eyes   | Madal Tahu       | Shy, submissive, humble, respectful, modest, reserved, timid dignity.                       |
|  | Madal Siwol      |   |
|  | Madal Soyow      |   |
|  | Madal de S’ludoy |   |
|  | Madal mit Mata   |   |
| Trunk slightly bent forward  | Madal Tahu       | Shy, submissive, humble, docile, timid, modest lively exaggerate.                           |
|  | Madal Siwol      |   |
|  | Madal Soyow      |   |
|  | Madal de S’ludoy |   |
|  | Madal mit Mata   |   |
| Knee slightly bent   | Madal Tahu       | Respectful, submissive, docile, modest, reserved, timid, exaggerate lively, humble.         |
|  | Madal Siwol      |   |
|  | Madal Soyow      |   |
|  | Madal de S’ludoy |   |
|  | Madal mit Mata   |   |
| Arms Extended in sideward position, forward position, with the fingers open and close. | Madal Tahu       | Shy, nature lover, freedom lover, modest, reserved, aggressive, lively, humble, submissive. |
|  | Madal Soyow      |   |
|  | Madal mit Mata   |   |
|  | Madal Tahaw      |   |



Table 12 shows that there are five basic movements in the T'boli dances: the head tilting downward; the eyes pointing downwards; the trunk slightly bent forward; the knee slightly bent; and, the arm extended in sideward position and forward position with the finger open and close. It is interesting to note that from the head to the arms and down to the knees, the different parts of the body involved are either pointed downward or bent; the head is tilted downward, the eyes are cast downward, the trunk is slightly bent forward: the knees are slightly bent, and the arms are extended. The T'Bolis are naturally shy and humble people.

## CONCLUSIONS

T'boli tribal dances are a reflection of the culture of the T'boli tribe of Lake Sebu, South Cotabato. The dances show the T'boli's affinity with nature, as discerned in the four of the ten dances of the T'boli. They love colorful costumes and do not observe rank and status in their tribal society. These people believe in the existence of the spiritual world.

The shields are not only the *boho ne hanak*, *kefilan* but also *kelung* and *buhó*, which drive away the evil spirits. The unique dance movements found in the dances are: heads bowed low; arms extended sideward and forward or obliquely sideward; and knees and trunks slightly bent, which means humility. They respect the animals by touching the drum skin (cover) before the start and after the dancing. There is frequent use of the upper torso, subtle facial expression, and arms flow from pose to pose – the fingers held close and still, curling in and out and the elbows are flexed. The body weight shifts from one bent, and turns out knee to the other; the dance moves with shuffling steps, creeping on the flat ball.

Generally, the T'boli rhythmic movement often builds up to trance to ensure that omens from the spirits are interpreted properly. The T'boli ritual dance is used to appease the gods, solicit good harvest, seek deliverance from pestilence, mark birth, weddings, and death; prepare for war; celebrate victories; affirm social unity; and, identity.

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