

“TIYULA ITUM” AND PANGALAY: SULUK ANTHEMIC EXPRESSIONS IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

Desiree A. Quintero, Ph.D.

Independent Scholar

(desireeq@hawaii.edu)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22452/brj.vol11no1.8>

Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the song “Tiyula Itum” (2009) as popularly danced to among the Suluk people in Sabah, Malaysia. The name of the song refers to a quintessential Suluk viand *tiyula itum*, soup that is blackened by burnt coconut and cooked with slices of meat and spices, often served at gatherings such as weddings, *pag-gunting* (infant hair-cutting ceremony) and *rumah terbuka* (open house) during Hari Raya Adilfitri. The song “Tiyula Itum” created by the Sabah recording artist Troy, combines elements of *lugu*, vocal music associated with religious rites, synthesiser, and lyrics sung in Bahasa Sug (Suluk/Tausug language) with the interjection of bamboo and *kulintangan* instrumentation. The combination of these elements provides a rich and dramatic soundscape for performances of *pangalay*, a dancing known for its slow and sustained movement. The music video posted online via YouTube in 2009 features *pangalay* by dancers of Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk, a company known in Sabah for performances that include *pangalay* with a live *kulintangan* ensemble. “Tiyula Itum” is often heard at live performances of *pangalay* and has since inspired various choreographies that feature dance and music of Suluk people. The song “Tiyula Itum” refers to and produces the *pangalay* dancing body, and becomes a Suluk anthemic expression in Sabah, Malaysia.

Keywords: “Tiyula Itum”, *pangalay*, Suluk, anthemic, Sabah

Introduction

It was September 2013 and rehearsals for the stage performances to mark Sabah’s 50th Malaysia Day Celebration were taking place outdoors, in front of

the Wisma Budaya Building in Kota Kinabalu, the capital city of the east Malaysian State, Sabah. The grand occasion was to take place at Prince Philip Park, Tanjung Aru, where models of several traditional houses of some of Sabah's ethnic groups were to be constructed, and the event drawing an estimated 50,000 attendees. The massive choreography organizing dozens of bodies on and off stage aimed to give an entertaining and fantastical visual display showing hints of the diversity of Sabah's culture-scape, as part of the nation of Malaysia.

The performance troupe Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk (KES) representing the Suluk ethnic group participated in the stage show with about 20 dancers, some dancing atop several *kibut*, a jar with a small opening used to store water, performing what was referred to by organisers as "Suluk dance", or dancing known as *pangalay*. The need for recorded music rather than live traditional *kulintang* instrumentation was used in order to fit the fast transitions between choreographic sections, giving a definitive time limit to particular sections of the stage performance. During the rehearsal, members of KES voiced preference for "Tiyula Itum"¹ by recording artist Troy, a song often played during gatherings and celebrations by individuals who *pangalay*. For Suluk people, "Tiyula Itum" is Suluk, from the language it is sung (Bahasa Sug or Suluk language) to the lengthy instrumental section sans vocals primarily used for the purpose of *pangalay* dancing. However, show organisers changed the music to "Lolay Liyangkit" by another Sabah artist named Kamis, a song that is a "mashup" of two different *lugu*, traditional vocal music, set with melodies from an electronic synthesiser. For the stage performance, the Suluk group was to dance both song sections "Lolay" and "Babu Babu", an upbeat song reminiscent of the "Oh My Darling Clementine" melody. The two songs, "Tiyula Itum" and "Lolay Liyangkit" although both use the electronic synthesiser, are different in tempo and melodies. Perhaps the striking difference for the observer is visually seen in the ways in which the songs produce different ways of moving. This difference was particularly evident during the rehearsal where dancers of KES in the first run of the performance danced to "Tiyula Itum" with *pangalay* that is characterised by slow and sustained movement. However, in subsequent rehearsal run-throughs the performers danced to "Lolay Liyangkit" with movement that was quickened following the upbeat mood of the song. For the KES performers, "Tiyula Itum" as reflective of Suluk aurally signifies *pangalay* movement in ways that other songs do not. This paper explores how the song "Tiyula Itum" created in 2009 by Troy with *pangalay* dancing fulfils a certain perceived performativity of music with dancing as primarily Suluk expressions that transcends the notion of bounded nation-state identity, yet is anthemic in iterations by Suluk people.

Pangalay is the name for dancing that involves slow-movement that focuses on conventional motifs of the hands and arms practised among and associated with the Suluk people. The name of the song by Troy refers to a quintessential Suluk viand *tiyula itum* meaning “black soup” that is blackened by burnt coconut and cooked with slices of beef, goat or chicken, often served at social gatherings. The origins of the soup remain unknown, yet the soup is believed to increase the libido and blood pressure, and is considered to belong specifically to the Suluk/Tausug ethnic group. The dish uniquely Suluk in the charring of coconut first until it is blackened before grated (*lubi*), and then cooked with meat and ingredients such as turmeric, lemongrass, and ginger (Sitti Airia Sangkula Askalani Obeso, personal communication, 2015). The presence of burnt coconut is in fact what makes *tiyula itum* a unique Suluk/Tausug dish. Without the burnt coconut the dish would no longer be considered *tiyula itum* (Nelson Dino, personal communication, 2014). What relationship does a traditional viand and dancing bodies have? Both can be considered to reflect a collective “cultural” expression; for example a dish called chicken adobo and the choreographed dance *Tinikling* both belong to the nation-state identity of the Philippines, and thus considered “Filipino”. Yet, the cooking of the dish and the performance of the dance are often times acts of “Filipino”, in a sense acts producing the imagined notion of “Filipino”. Similarly, *pangalay* and “Tiyula Itum” within the context of Troy’s song are Suluk referents, that is, they “stand for” Suluk. In performance, “Tiyula Itum” refers to and produces the *pangalay* dancing body.

The Suluk dish *tiyula itum* is also known as *tiyula sug*, which in simple translation is “Suluk/Tausug soup”. However, the term *sug* can have multiple meanings such as referring to a people, a geographic place of land and surrounding areas, and an ocean current. The Tausug, referring to the people from the Sulu archipelago in the southern Philippines, were once considered an economic and politically dominant group in the Sulu and Sabah region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Warren, 1981). In Malaysia, the Tausug people are referred to as Suluk² and are one of fifty officially categorised ethnic groups in Sabah (Salleh, 2006, p. 108).

The word Tausug comes from *tau* meaning person or people and *sug*, a word having variously attributed meanings², but can refer to “sea current” (Kiefer, 1968; Hadji Mashur bin-Ghalib Jundam & J. Sabalvaro, 1978; Warren, 1981). The term *Sug* is also a self-referential term often used by Suluk/Tausug people to specifically refer to the Sulu archipelago and the island of Sulu (Jolo) as Lupah Sug, land of *sug*. The Sulu archipelago and Sabah is an area where many Suluks trace not necessarily as only a physical “place” of the land of islands and surrounding seas, but a regional area from which all that is

associated with the Suluk/Tausug emanates. The ideas of “home” and “origin” are related terms that are often equated on the level that a supposed origin makes a home that in turn fosters deep emotional feelings and attachments, conjuring a sense of belonging, namely the Sulu archipelago and Sabah. For the Suluk in Sabah, great importance is placed on the geographic space of the Sulu Sea as an area of maritime connectivity: a sea traversed that is between islands, between relatives “here” and “there”, between Sulu in the southern Philippines and Sabah in Malaysia, between a historical past and a present. Although many may use the identifiers Tausug and Suluk interchangeably, for this essay’s discussion of the song “Tiyula Itum” and *pangalay* dancing, the term Suluk is used as Sabah is the site of the research.

In Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco’s (2011) essay that critiques the concept of Philippine Theatre he argues against the singularity of looking at national identity as “Asian-ness” or “Philippine-ness”, and instead suggests looking at identities as in multiple “Asian-nesses” or “Philippine-nesses”. Tiatco goes on to state that, “The Philippines is not only an amalgamation of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial cultures. It is also made up of several cultural traditions, in which none appears to be at the centre” (p. 140). In Tiatco’s essay, the discourse that implies a multiplicity of identities de-centers identity away from a nation-state construction of “Philippine”, that can also be applied to other national identities such as “Malaysian”, suggesting the construction of “nation” by individuals on other levels. Benedict Anderson (1983) defines a nation as “an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 6). For Anderson, nations are imagined in the sense that individuals imagine themselves as part of a whole, sharing affinities, in communion with one another although they may never physically meet others in the community. In this sense, although community may be ‘imagined’, bonds are viscerally and deeply felt, where collective identity can exist outside of bounded nation-states. When a group of people or individual subscribes to a particular identity, they are a part of a community that is imagined, where these bonds can be the motive for emotional actions.

Suluk writer Nelson Dino (2015) describes the idea of the unity of the Suluk through an expression “*Tausug ban yan misan pakain*” (“that person is indeed a Tausug wherever he goes”) (p. 33). As such, Nelson Dino (2015) continues to write that,

The Suluk are inhabitants of the Sulu Archipelago all the way down to Sabah and islands that are bounded by the Sulu Sea. “Suluk” is not just a name but an identity. Wherever they are as “Suluk”, they are still Suluk. They never become something else

even by citizenship because citizenship is per statehood and not by blood. The Suluk in the state of Sabah are citizens of Malaysia, but they are still Suluk... The Suluk in the Sulu Archipelago and elsewhere in the Philippines are known as Tausug, but they are of the same ethnicity as the Suluk in Sabah. The only difference between them is the citizenship, but in identity, they are the same. But citizenship is not a boundary for them. (p. 33)

As expressed by the above quote, there is recognition that the terms “Suluk” and “Tausug” while seemingly interchangeable are articulations that connote two contexts. Suluk and Tausug as terminologies of identities are conjugated, characterised linguistically and by individuals as being in a relationship ‘with’ each other, yet are not fully synonymous with one another within larger nation-state contexts, often translated as one’s citizenship. That is, Suluk and Tausug as both exonymic and endonymic terms that are both self-reflexive and yet ascribed as nation-state categorisations of ethnic groups as sub-identities to the national self that is often translated as national citizenry. The two terms as advocated in the Dino quote, refer to a purported ‘oneness’ of identity primarily through blood despite dualistic nation-state labeling. The terms are always in the process of ‘joining’ as one tries to make sense of identity and dispersion of people within the context of and across two nation-states. The concept of “Suluk” is never fully detached from the notion of “Tausug”, even from the local/micro levels to the larger national levels, yet these two seemingly connected terminologies exist within different nation-states and through the experiences of Suluk/Tausug in Malaysia and the Philippines. In this “joining” process, certain practices—as a way in which a community defines and recognises as “belonging” to them as it epitomises “belongingness” as a group—become relevant as connectives between a meaningful imagined whole of Suluk/Tausug, as Suluk ‘here’ with a collective history that inevitably connects to Tausug ‘there’, a relationship instigated by the bordering of nation-states, yet sustained by the people themselves. Here a collective imaginary of identity is referred to that spans beyond the political borders of the Philippines and Malaysia, but at the same time is locally envisioned as Suluk in Sabah, the place from which Sulu (Jolo) is longingly gazed and the place within which the song “Tiyula Itum” was created.

This essay seeks to look at the ways in which identities and connectivities are created by social activities among Suluk people. The term *anthem* refers to a rousing or uplifting song identified with a particular group, body, or cause, and is often used in reference to a national song that expresses patriotism and loyalty. In this essay anthemic is used to refer to a musical

activity that rouses feelings of affinity to the group, creating unanimity as Suluk. Sabah is a terrain where a diversity of groups interact with one another, constantly blurring lines of ethnicity yet reinforcing boundaries between groups, and where ethnic minorities such as the Suluk are located somewhere between the majorities and the imagined totality of nation-state. It is this in-between place where expressions of identity become significant markers of Suluk, in a sense 'anthemic' as a repeated action that is performative, 'standing for' groupness sparking multiple responses such as devotion and pride that often brings up visceral reactions. Existing within yet outside of nation-state discourses, expressions of identity that are anthemic act as connectivities binding people together.

"Tiyula Itum" - the song

The song "Tiyula Itum" created by recording artist Troy was commissioned by a Suluk group in Sandakan, Sabah. According to Troy, sponsors for the recording of the video and song "Tiyula Itum" wanted a song that was Suluk, sung in Suluk language (Bahasa Sug) that could be used for dancing. The dancing specifically refers to *pangalay*, the verb form being *mangalay*, the name of a dance form associated with the Suluk/Tausug people. The song combines elements of *lugu* Suluk vocal music associated with religious rites, electronic synthesiser, and lyrics with the interjection of recorded *kulintangan* and bamboo instrumentation, providing a rich and dramatic soundscape for performances of *pangalay*. *Kulintangan* among the Suluk people is an ensemble usually consisting of a row of horizontally-laid pot gongs called *kulintangan*, a single or paired double-headed drum called *gandang* (double-headed drum) or a *tambur* (snare drum), and three hanging knobbed gongs. The song "Tiyula Itum", with its inclusion of recorded *kulintangan* music offers an alternative to live music, whereby individuals are able to *mangalay* despite the lack of a live music ensemble. Since access to *kulintangan* musicians that can play Suluk melodies may not be at all social gatherings, "Tiyula Itum" is the recorded song that can be played in order to "stand in" for live instrumentation. "Tiyula Itum" is often heard at live performances, such as at *parakala pagtigyaun* (wedding celebration) or festive holidays, and has since inspired various choreographies that feature *pangalay*. "Tiyula Itum" with *pangalay* has thus become a Suluk anthemic expression in Sabah, Malaysia. This essay explores the notion of an anthemic that expresses a collective "we" through the use of the song "Tiyula Itum" and *pangalay*.

Underlying the song *Tiyula Itum* is an ostinato, played with two sticks on bamboo acting as the pulse, creating a dramatic yet nervous tension

throughout the song. According to Troy, this beat is derived from a traditional Suluk percussion pattern played on bamboo. Troy suggests that this is an old pattern that may accompany Suluk *pangalay*. The song is divided into four main sections: the *lugu*, the *sangbay*, the instrumental section, and the refrain of the *sangbay*.

Lugu

Lugu is a style of Suluk singing that is sung in Bahasa Sug or in some cases sung in Arabic that is associated with religious rites. According to Ricardo Trimillos (1972), *lugu* “denotes any music sung in the indigenous style; at its most specific, it refers to the repertoire of melodies set to a prescribed set of texts” (p. 98). The concept of an “indigenous style” brings up a dialogue of possible meanings and implications for it suggests a certain manner of singing that is meaningful and aurally recognisable for beholders. At the time of Trimillos’ research among the Tausug in the southern Philippines during the 1960s, five traditions of *lugu* existed that he had differentiated by social function. The five types of *lugu* in his descriptions are *lugu maulud*, *sa’il*, *tarasul*, *ba’at* and *langan bataqbataq*. Trimillos describes the types of *lugu* as, “*lugu maulud*, songs to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, *sa’il* songs to celebrate a marriage or death, *tarasul*, didactic songs based up on the Koran; *ba’at*, stylised love songs of the court; and *langan bataqbataq*” (Trimillos, 1974, p. 276). If we are to consider Trimillos’ classifications, the *lugu* at the introduction of the song “Tiyula Itum” can be best be described as a “non-religious” *lugu* sung in Bahasa Sug as the contents of the lyrics deal with an affection for Lupah Sug, yet the singing is similar to vocal styles of *lugu* performed for religious rites. In the beginning of the “Tiyula Itum” video (Troy, 2009), as the *lugu* is sung, a woman, a man and a young boy rock a young girl to sleep in a *dundangan*, a term from the root *dundang* or “lullaby” that refers to type of cradle created by hanging a *habul* or tubular cloth, suspended by wood and string, (Nelson Dino, personal communication, 2017). The scene in the video offers what would have been one context of when a *lugu*, in this case like a lullaby, was heard. The lyrics are as follows:

Bahasa Sug

Lupah Sug, ku kalasahan
Anduh kailu halaum pangatayan
Langan, langanun ta kau dayang
(Troy, 2009; translation by Troy, 2013)

English

Jolo, Sulu, the place I love
You are always in our heart
I’ll sing you a lullaby

Lupah Sug, ku kalasahan (Jolo, Sulu, the place I love)

This line can reflect any of the perspectives of the singer, the writer or even the listener. As the song is written in Bahasa Sug it can be posited that the primary audience for the song are Suluk people. The line references a specific geographic place of Lupah Sug perhaps recalling a place that is referred to as the ancestral homeland. According to Nimmo (1986), "Jolo has always been considered their [Tausug] cultural homeland and historically the island has been synonymous with the Tausug" (p. 26). However, Lupah Sug can be interpreted as either Jolo/Sulu, as Troy's translation indicates, extending out from Jolo to "land of the Suluk" or places where Suluk people call "home", that includes the Sulu archipelago and Sabah.

Anduh kailu halaum pangatayan (You are always in our heart)

"You" in this line can refer to Lupah Sug, as personified, rather the use of the neutral "it", giving a sense of affection for place. "Our" refers to those who have a connection to Lupah Sug, referring to the Suluk with a "heart" resting in a metaphoric singular body linked to "Our"; as a collective with one "heart". Nostalgia, sameness in the experience, collective history and culture as Suluk/Tausug, and affection are intermixed in the constancy of "always", meaning that there is always a connection with Lupah Sug. It suggests that no matter where a person geographically or physically may be, the emotional connection remains un-severed, a bounded-ness existing within the heart of the Suluk imaginary.

Langan, langanun ta kau dayang (I'll sing you a lullaby)

"You" again refers to Lupah Sug. "You" may also refer to the audience who is listening, assumed to be Suluk and those who would understand what is being sung. The *lugu* as a lullaby references a geographic yet symbolic place to be cared for with affection. Although the Suluk in Sabah have a definite sense of Sabah as their home in referring to themselves as Sabahans and Malaysians, they reference their connection to a geographic region of Lupah Sug.

Sangbay and Kulintangan

The verses of "Tiyula Itum" reflect courtship, whereby the singer speaks directly to and about a female dancer with accolades, what has been referred to as *sangbay* genre of song dance (Hatta Yunus @ Sawabi, personal communication, 2013). To briefly discuss *sangbay* within the *pangalay* dancing context, *sangbay* can also be performed by a couple- a male and a female dancers, where the male dancer "serenades" the female dancer through

pangalay movement. The focus of the attention of the male dancer and the audience is always on the female dancer. In the song “Tiyula Itum”, verses such as “*Palunuka palantika, tingkih tingkian. Kasubulan maqkanam bang pagkasulitan*” (“Soften your hands, and move your foot down. Boys will admire you most if they like your dancing”) (Troy translation, 2013) speak specifically to the *pangalay* dancer. The *sangbay* talks of the dancer’s beauty through her dancing, and the courting of her by the singer.

The last line of verse two says, “*Naghamut na in sarap sin tiyula itum*” (“The smell of delicious black soup will come to you”) (Troy translation, 2013). This curious addition would seem to have no place since the previous lines speak of “*liad liarah ba indah in baran*” (“bend your body my dear”) (Troy, translation, 2013), or speak of the sweetness or beauty of the dancer. However, *tiyula itum* in this song has a dual meaning. It is a dish that is served at celebrations such as *pag-gunting* (snipping of the hair of a newborn child), *harilaya* (Bahasa Sug for religious festive occasions, *hari raya* in Malay language), and most especially at wedding celebrations. The last line of the verse implies a marriage proposal to the dancer, or as Troy described, “If you dance beautifully, let’s make preparations and all have *tiyula itum*” (personal communication, 2013). The additional meaning in the song is that “Tiyula Itum”, both the dish and the song, is quintessentially Suluk.

“Tiyula Itum” and Pangalay

As previously mentioned in this essay, during the rehearsal for Sabah’s 50th Malaysia Day Celebration the song choice for the Suluk participation by Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk in the stage performance was changed from Troy’s “Tiyula Itum” to Kamis’ “Lolay Liyangkit”. Although the dance formations onstage remained the same, i.e. female performers in a horizontal line placed mid-stage and dancing atop *kibut* while the men dance downstage front, the two songs generated distinct ways of moving by dancers that precipitated particular movement motifs. What this suggests is that particular songs instigated a response of particular motifs that revealed the conventional emic motif-music relationship demonstrated by dancers. In this case, this occurred despite the choreographic vision that sought to structure dancing bodies into formations that could not extract particular ways of moving by dancers who motifically reacted to the song change. In other words, when the music changed so did the dance movement, brought about by the dancers themselves although all of the other elements did not change such as time allotted for the group dance and spatial formations of bodies on stage.

As “Lolay Liyangkit” played for the stage performance, the movement that dominated both women and men onstage was, with slightly flexed knees, light swinging and left to right and right to left of the hips³ that was initiated by the feet stepping lightly to the beat of the song. Movement of the hips originating in the feet was seen also in the dancers atop the *kibut* (jars) who, rather than stepping and putting the full weight of the body on the standing foot while lifting the other foot, shifted weight from foot to foot without lifting the feet in order to lightly swing the hips. The body remained upright and straight, with no or little bending at the hips, with an overall light-sudden effort for all movement. Both arms extended outwards either to the upper left or upper right side of the body, one arm extended while the other bent. The pulsing of the palms of the hands emanated from the forearms, while the back of the hand and fingers were flexed, creating a curving of the hand. The pulsing of palms was in seeming coordination with the movement of the shoulders upward and center initiated from the inner part of the shoulder blades that are in almost constant motion throughout the song, and varies in timing according to each dancer. A prevailing aspect of dancing to the upbeat tempo of “Lolay Liyangkit” is stepping right on the beat that is executed by both men and women performers. The focus for the dancer thus becomes the beat and coordinating movement to and on the beat that shapes one’s dancing using the conventional motifs of the feet, hips, arms, shoulders, and hands.

However, in comparison to “Lolay Liyangkit”, dancing to “Tiyula Itum” during the show rehearsal, the performers of Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk exhibited a different impetus for movement. Motifs were produced having slow and sustained effort with individuated ways of moving and that exemplifies KES dancing. While the hip swinging movement initiated by stepping on the beat is predominant with “Lolay Liyangkit”, hip swinging is nearly absent when dancing to “Tiyula Itum”, offering a more varied range of motif-music relationships based on the individual dancer’s own skill and preferences for movement. If we take for example the movement of the men, in “Lolay Liyangkit” all three dancers stepped on the beat, with swaying of the hips similar to the women dancing atop *kibut*. In contrast, during the opening of “Tiyula Itum” in rehearsals, two of the male dancers produced martial-esque movements that had strong, sustained and at times sudden qualities moving in their own style and timing, and was in contradistinction to the female dancers whose dancing seemingly flowed from one movement to another in individual ways. The third male dancer in comparison did not perform any martial-esque movements, but had qualities of sustained and bound movement of the arms, turning around his longitudinal body axis. It is this individual style of moving

that does not attempt to conform to others’ movements, or even to the beat of the music, that characterises much of *pangalay* dancing.

The dancers’ recognition of the beat in “Tiyula Itum” in the slight bounce of the upper body and the shoulders was occasionally danced, but was not consistent throughout dancing and not performed by all dancers. The ostinato of the bamboo that provides the constant beat for the entire *sangbay* and *kulintangan* sections in “Tiyula Itum”, unlike the “Lolay Liyangkit” composition, that instills dancers with a strong tendency to move in a markedly sustained way: motifs that were lengthened and elongated with each dancers’ “sense of timing” differing from one another. Rather than coordinating movement to the beat like that of “Lolay Liyangkit” whereby movement is dictated by and on the beat creating a sense of uniformity of the dance motif, dancing with “Tiyula Itum” produces extension and accentuation of motifs as dancers resist the beat while creating a consistency in the qualities of moving: Individual styles of moving takes precedence in “Tiyula Itum” over a uniformity of dancing together stepping right on the beat. The sustained quality of moving was seen in all dancers. For example, a female dancer atop the *kibut* performed one movement that was particularly sustained. Her arms motioned slowly upward and downward, bending at the elbows and wrists, with right arm and left arm alternately moving as the legs remained flexed with minimal movement of the feet, as the body would slowly move downwards and center. The slowness of the movement emphasised the curving of the arms and curling hands through space. The arms moved in a bound way, as a deliberate articulation of joints within the dancer’s bodily space, withstanding, and resisting the draw of the beat of the song.

As such, “*Pangalay* integrates spontaneity and imagination in an agential process of each dancer grounded in visual notions of the curvilinear, denoting kinesthetically bound movement imbued with the aesthetic qualities of the body curving and curling in space, specifically in the movement motifs of hands, arms and, for some dancers, asymmetry of the bodyline” (Quintero, 2016; Quintero & Mohd Anis Md Nor, 2016). “Tiyula Itum” provided aural stimulus for Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk performers producing the *pangalay* dancing body similar to dancing to *kulintangan* in ways that “Lolay Liyangkit” did not. This is perhaps why performers much preferred “Tiyula Itum” as their musical choice, likening the instrumental section of the song to traditional *kulintangan* playing while describing “Lolay Liyangkit” as *moden* (“modern” in Malay language). The ostinato of bamboo driving “Tiyula Itum”, underlying the verses and instrumental part of the song with the recorded *kulintangan* inspires dancers to respond with conventional movement motifs and effort qualities, thus generating *pangalay* dancing.

Simultaneously, “Tiyula Itum” also allows for a certain predictability of a structure of musical measures within which one could conceivably set specific choreographic movements. In comparison to a live *kulintangan* ensemble where musical changes are in a sense dependent on musicians in a relationship with dancers as an intimate connection, recorded *kulintangan* as a fixed accompaniment creates a different space for playfulness between recorded music and dancer. “Tiyula Itum” offers the dancer a certain amount of forethought and control over the dramatics of the dance. Where *mangalay* with live *kulintangan* music has fostered usually one or two dancers as separate “bodily” entities moving within their own spaces, interpreting each of her or his own relationship to the music at that moment, the recorded *kulintangan* offers an unchanging musical pattern that can be broken down into a structuring of movement sequences according to set musical queues, and possibly involve several different moving bodies, sharing the same stage space. The predictability of the music lends itself easily to organizing movement. As a result, the song “Tiyula Itum” offers access to the idea of *kulintangan* music without the need for live instrumentation, fostering different types of choreographies and creative interpretations of the music. This can be seen in group choreography atop several ceramic jars (*kibut*) such as in the rehearsals of Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk for Sabah’s 50th Malaysia Day in September 2013 choreographed by Tadz mahal Omar Sangkula, in intricate floor patterning utilizing dancer-ly counts of eight such as in the performances by the Sandakan Performing Arts Group, choreographed by Johari bin Sulaiman, and various YouTube videos⁴ uploaded on the Internet.

“Tiyula Itum”, a six minute song, is dominated by a nearly two and a half minute instrumental section which makes clear the function of the song: to *mangalay*. Six minutes may seem to be a rather short time for a dancer to *mangalay*, where a dancer may dance for an extended time period for up to 30 minutes or even longer with a live *kulintangan* ensemble. However, two and a half minutes of *kulintangan* for a song seems to be ample time for staged performances. For the composer Troy, all the elements of the song- the *lugu*, the content of the verses, and the synthesised bamboo and *kulintangan* are distinctly Suluk. And to extend this notion, “Tiyula Itum” as anthemically Suluk brings about the *pangalay* dancing body.

Conclusion

“Tiyula Itum”, in a sense, is a “lullaby” that speaks to Suluk people. The three major sections of the song- the *lugu* for *sug*, a vocal serenading *sangbay* of a *pangalay* dancer, and the *kulintangan* instrumental section culminates in the

dancing of *pangalay*. “Tiyula Itum” fulfils a certain performativity of music with dance as a Suluk expression. The music video features dancers from Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk and was posted by its members on YouTube in 2009. Since then, other videos using “Tiyula Itum” with *pangalay* have been uploaded. Whether other videos come from Malaysia, the Philippines or as far away as London, “Tiyula Itum” has come to epitomise “Suluk”. As a result of the video-posting members of KES have received comments⁵ and correspondences praising the dancing, with occasional comments that speak of how the video makes them, the viewers, proud of Suluk culture.

In the ongoing research on *pangalay* among the Suluk people in Sabah, the song “Tiyula Itum” has been used by different performing groups within different contexts: in weddings, as part of Hari Raya celebrations, and part of national performances in Sabah such as Malaysia Day rehearsals in Kota Kinabalu. During field observations, each performance demonstrated the development of different choreographies that clearly denotes “Tiyula Itum” with *pangalay* as Suluk. “Tiyula Itum” and *pangalay* are projections of Suluk identity, both for themselves and for the gaze of others at the local, national, and global levels via the Internet. As mentioned previously, when an individual or a group of people subscribes to a particular identity, he, she, and they are in a sense bounded to an imaginary that is, in this case, manifested through dancing with music. *Pangalay* with “Tiyula Itum” is a cathexis - a concentration of emotional energy on the imaginary, a powerful drive that makes such expressions anthemic and meaningful for one who is Suluk relishing ways of moving as the *pangalay* dancing body.

Endnotes

¹ In this essay, “Tiyula Itum” capitalised and non-italicised refers to the song by Troy, *tiyula itum* in lowercase refers to the Suluk dish.

² It has been suggested that “Suluk” or “Suluq” from Orang Suluk (Suluk person in Bahasa Melayu or Malay language) may have been derived from “Sulu” or “Sug”, referencing the geographic place of the Sulu archipelago, or the island of Jolo (also a supposed Spanish derivation of the word “Sulu”) that is located there (Saleeby, 1908; Kiefer, 1968; Hadji Mashur bin-Ghalib Jundam, 2005).

³ The hip movement has been referred to as *pakiring-kiring* among Sinama-speaking peoples. See MCM Santamaria (2014). However, the term also has other meanings. According to linguist Jubilado (2010) in referring to the song “Dayang Dayang”, “The locals in Sabah commonly called this song *pakiring*

pakiring due to the movement of the dancers who turn around as part of the dance. This particular movement is called *pakiring* in the local dialect" (p. 99).

⁴ For example see: Tausug Pangalai traditional dance at ELG 20110918 Event London Suluk. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNQ19fCm43g>; Tarian Sambai - JKKN SABAH (INSPITARI 2011), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT6XFjwTFs0>; Kulintangan Pangalay Muhammad Salman www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWTLYS8DB2M; Aisha & Lisa Putri Group Tiyula Etom, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6tY4QpJYKo>.

⁵ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRJj1cDH6Wc> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0AampZp9I0>.

References

- Abdulla, N. A. (1989). *The Food & Culture of the Tausug*. Mendila, Manila: CEU Research and Development Center, Centro Escolar University.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Dino, N. (2015). *Suluk in Sabah: The Way of Life and Culture*. Saba Islamic Media Sdn Bhd: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Jubilado, R. (2010). On cultural fluidity: The Sama-Bajau of Sulu-Sulawesi Seas. *KUNAPIPI: Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture*, 32, 89-115.
- Jolo, N. (2014, January 17). Is Tausug a Mere Tribe? In *Moroism*. Retrieved from <http://moroism.org/2014/01/18/is-tausug-a-mere-tribe/>.
- Hadji Mashur bin-Ghalib Jundam. (2005). *Tunggal Hulah-Duwa Sarah: Adat and Sharee'ah Laws in the Life of the Tausug*. Diliman, Quezon City: Vibal Publishing House.
- Hadji Mashur bin-Ghalib Jundam, & Sabalvaro, J. (1978). *Tausug: Field Report, Series No.1*. Diliman, Quezon City: Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, University of the Philippines.
- Kiefer, T. (1968). Institutionalized Friendship and Warfare among the Tausug of Jolo. *Ethnology* 7(3), 225-244.
- Nimmo, H. A. (1986). Recent Population Movements in the Sulu Archipelago: Implications to Sama Culture History. *Archipel*, 32, 25-38. Retrieved from http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arch_0044-8613_1986_num_32_1_2307

- Quintero, D. (2016). *Inhabiting Pangalay ha Kulintangan as Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cultural Centre, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Quintero, D., & Mohd Anis Md Nor. (2016). The curvilinear ethnoaesthetic in *Pangalay* dancing among the Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia. *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse*, 15, 1–25. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/ws2016.15.1>
- Salleh, H. (2006). *Encyclopedia of Malaysia: People and Traditions*, 12th vol. Archipelago Press: Singapore.
- Santamaria, MCM. (2014). From Sangbai to Sangbaian Pangigalan: Tracing the Evolution of the Contemporary Sama-Bajau Song-Dance Tradition. *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, 66(2), 1-25.
- Tiatco, S. A. P. (2011). Situating Philippine Theatricality in Asia: A Critique On The Asian-Ness/Philippine-Ness of Philippine Theatre(s). *JATI*, 16, 131-150.
- Trimillos, R. D. (1972). Tradition and Repertoire in the Cultivated Music of the Tausug of Sulu, Philippines. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.
- _____. (1974). Vocal Music among the Tausug of Sulu, Philippines. In Taib Mohd Osman (Ed.), *Traditional Drama and Music of Southeast Asia (Papers presented at the International Conference on Traditional Drama and Music of Southeast Asia)* (pp. 274-289). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Troy. (2009). *Tiyula Itum. On Patay Lidjikh* [DVD]. Kota Kinabalu: Skyline Records.
- Saleeby, N. M. (1908). *The History of Sulu*. Manila: Bureau of Public Printing.
- Warren, J. F. (1981). *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*. Singapore: NUS Press.