

# The Curvilinear Ethnoaesthetic in *Pangalay*<sup>1</sup> Dancing among the Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia

Desiree A. Quintero<sup>1\*</sup> and Mohd Anis Md Nor<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*University of Malaya, MALAYSIA*

\*Corresponding author: [daquintero@gmail.com](mailto:daquintero@gmail.com)

**Published online:** 15 November 2016

**To cite this article:** Desiree A. Quintero and 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. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/ws2016.15.1>

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/ws2016.15.1>

## ABSTRACT

*Pangalay* refers to a dancing among the Suluk people in Sabah, Malaysia performed primarily during social occasions that focuses on movement motifs of the hands and arms, moving in a slow and sustained way with a musical ensemble called *kulintangan*. *Pangalay* integrates spontaneity and imagination through the agentic process of a dancer, that is grounded in visual notions of the curvilinear, denoting kinaesthetically bound movement imbued with the aesthetic qualities of curving and curling in space of the body, specifically in the movement motifs of hands, arms and for some dancers, asymmetry of the bodyline. The curvilinear as abstraction is an aesthetic experience premised on the idea of the bending of or deviation from the straight line, as in the curve, and the twisting and turning of the line, as in the curl. This concept is embodied in both the *kulintangan* motifs that rise and fall, rhythmically slow or quicken, and in the movement motifs executed by the dancer that curve and curl through space. *Pangalay* is improvisation of movement within aesthetic conventions of the curvilinear that are culturally shaped, reflecting the ethnoaesthetic of the Suluk people.

**Keywords:** *dance, pangalay, Suluk, Sabah, curvilinear, ethnoaesthetic*

## PANGALAY

The Suluk people are designated as one of over 50 ethnic groups in the Malaysian state of Sabah and are referred to as Tausug in the Philippines. Communities of Suluk people are located throughout the Sulu archipelago in the southern Philippines, and in Sabah in the eastern part including the Sandakan and Tawau divisions, the northern area in Kudat and the state capital of Kota Kinabalu on the west coast. Prior to the formation of the nation of Malaysia in 1963, Suluk people motivated by trade had begun to settle in Sabah about 200 to 300 years ago. It was the eruption of violent conflict in the early 1970s between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and various armed groups in the southern Philippines and the subsequent economic deprivation in the region that instigated mass migrations of people from the Sulu archipelago in present-day Philippines to Sabah. The research presented in this essay was conducted primarily among first and second generation Suluk people either born in or migrated at a young age to Sabah, Malaysia.

*Pangalay* refers to a dancing among the Suluk/Tausug people performed primarily during social occasions as part of *maglami-lami* or "merry-making" that focuses on movement motifs of the hands and arms, moving in a slow and sustained way against a quickened pulse of the musical ensemble called *kulintangan*. *Kulintangan* also refers to the main melodic instrument that is made up of horizontally laid knobbed gongs placed on a wooden frame called *papagan*. The *kulintangan* is played by two musicians, one musician playing the melody on the lower register and the other musician playing a constant and consistent rhythmical pattern usually on the highest pitched gong called the *tung tung*. The three large hanging knobbed gongs or *agung* are played by two musicians, with one musician playing two gongs with rhythms that interlock and the other musician playing the large single gong. Traditionally in the Suluk *kulintangan* ensemble, a double-headed drum called *gandang* was played with the hands and at times in pairs, as documented by anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Thomas Kiefer in the 1960s in the Sulu archipelago (Kiefer 1970). In conversations with Suluk people,

the *gandang* was mentioned as traditionally a part of the *kulintangan* ensemble. However, in the present-day, the singular or dual *gandang* is not as common among the Suluk people in Sabah, and the singular double-headed snare drum played on one side called a *tambur* or *tambul* is more commonly found.<sup>2</sup>

*Pangalay*, the verb form being *mangalay*, involves the idiosyncratic ways of dancing set within certain aesthetic conventions with the ostinati rhythms of the *kulintangan* ensemble. *Pangalay* integrates spontaneity and imagination in an agentic process of a dancer that is grounded in visual notions of the curvilinear, denoting kinaesthetically 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. *Pangalay* is improvisation of movement within aesthetic conventions of the curvilinear, reflecting the ethnoaesthetic of the Suluk people. This essay seeks to explore the ways in which the aesthetics of the Suluk people that are culturally shaped become kinaesthetically manifested and experienced in social spaces of dancing with *kulintangan* music.

## ETHNOAESTHETICS

Ways of visually understanding, interpreting and being moved by performance are culturally coded aesthetic experiences. The term aesthetic comes from the Greek *aisthetikos* meaning perception by the senses (OED 2015). Aesthetics concern notions of beauty and taste formed from an evaluative process filtered through cultural values (Kaeppler 2003), that brings to the forefront the experience of art and performance. Taste as aesthetical, is awareness coming from having a visceral, sensate experience that brings about emotional and bodily responses. For example, Suluk dancers often mention that a *kulintangan* ensemble that plays well as in a thick layering of several ostinati of interlocking and steady rhythms of the *kulintangan*, *agung* and drums, affects them in physically manifested ways such as in the "hair standing on my arms." The "taste" of listening is shaped by not only the understanding of "how" to

listen to *kulintangan* rhythms in order to decipher "good" playing, but the ways in which listening is a sensate experience. The musicking of the *kulintangan* is an aesthetically cultural experience. As such, aesthetics in dance not only deals with dance as it is visually presented as in appreciating the "beauty" of art through the cultivation of one's judgement and taste, but the ways in which culturally shaped aesthetic principles are embodied and experienced by doers and beholders of the performance.

Beauty in as much as it may be subjectively understood as in what is considered pleasing, is filtered through cultural understandings. For example, while speaking with two Suluk dancers and watching a video of *pangalay* uploaded to YouTube by a Filipino-American group, they commented on the hands of the dancer in the video. They described the dancers' hands as *kangkang*, meaning "stiff" or "distorted" as if electrocuted. For the two Suluk dancers, *kangkang* of the hands is not "beautiful" and lacked the energy and curve characteristic to Suluk *pangalay*. What is important is the sense of energy that is brought into the hands. As such, many Suluk dancers will focus their attention to their hands while they *mangalay*, drawing the attention of beholders and themselves to the hands and fingers as they curl and twirl in space. Rather than the lack of energy presented in the stiff *kangkang*, the hands become an extension of the kinetic flow of the curving line emanating from the dancer that is bound and sustained. Taste and the sense of beauty in *pangalay* is an aesthetic experience formed from the sensibilities of the Suluk people.

The prominence of the curvilinear in the performance of *pangalay* among the Suluk is what Royce (1977) calls an "ethnoaesthetic" where aesthetic judgements are a reflection of the system of rules of a culture that pervades its artistic activities. In the case of *pangalay* among the Suluk, the embodiment of curving and curling lines dominate a dancing with *kulintangan*. As such, Mohd Anis Md Nor (2003) describes the *kulintangan* ensemble and dances of Sulu cultures as akin to the curvilinear aesthetics of the visual arts whereby, melodic-rhythmic patterns and interlocking ostinati of the *Kulintangan* pot gongs, beating of drums and wooden

or bamboo beaters display the dynamics of accentuated beats, timbres and the ascending and descending melodic-rhythmic motifs. In the same way, the dance is aesthetically pleasing when the flexed but stiff fingers, quavering outwards with thumbs apart, are accentuated with the rise and fall of shoulders and undulating arms, yet sustaining a curvaceous silhouette of the body cast by thrusting the hip to the opposite direction of the head or arms (Mohd Anis Md Nor 2003: 180).

The curvilinear as abstraction is an aesthetic experience premised on the idea of the bending of or deviation from the straight line, as in the curve, the twisting and turning of the line, as in the curl, and in the movement motifs executed by the dancer that curve and curl through space. Thus the curvilinear as an aesthetic is embodied in both the playing of *kulintangan* rhythms and in the motifs executed by the dancer. The ascending and descending *kulintangan* melodic-rhythmic motifs that rise and fall, rhythmically slow or quicken in constant repetition, rising and falling in undulation, are driven by the incessant beat played by musicians on the *tung tung* and drum(s). As *pangalay* is improvisational, there is a basis from which movement is first conceived. There can be differences in the ways in which individual dancers move as *pangalay* is intrinsically extemporised. Simultaneously, there is an idea of what entails "beautiful" dancing that exists within the mind of the dancer who navigates within conventional movements that involve the curling and curving of the body through space.

The curling or curving motifs echoed in the visual arts of Sulu cultures is called *ukkil* among the Suluk, a term that refers to both the act of "carving" and the object produced. These particular curvilinear designs combined in a limitless range of abstracted scroll, leaf, flora and fruit elements and ornamentations that decorate a given space such as the carvings on boats, *sunduk* (grave markers), hilts of bladed weapons, beams in former traditional houses and the embroideries on the tubular cloth worn by women called *habul tiya'ihan* (Photo 1). The curvilinear motifs are intricate and pervade spaces, in repetition giving a sense of two or three dimensional flow and movement, curving in space.



**Photo 1** Habul tiya'ihan. Lukis (design of embroidery) by Mark Tolentino (2015).  
Photo by M. Tolentino.

Within the realm of Aesthetics in Western visual arts, notions of judgement based on taste, bringing either pleasure or displeasure, shape how one looks at "art". Taste has centred on the competency of the observer having knowledge of the perimeters where works of art and performance are characterised by being "aesthetically pleasing" or not. For example, in

using the previously mentioned example of the two Suluk dancers commenting on the hands of a *pangalay* dancer as being *kangkang* in a YouTube video, their judgements as cultivated taste reflect a knowledge of what is pleasing and not. For the Suluk observers the *kangkang* of the hands were not "beautiful" indicating that what is valued in *pangalay* for them is a means of defining the form. For the Suluk, the curving hand, the hand that kinaesthetically curves, is thus an embodiment of a Suluk understanding of beauty. Whereas for the Filipino-American *pangalay* dancer in the video, the curving of the hands is perhaps not important against other motivations for dancing such as the display of identity as Filipino-ness. Taste involves judgements that are processes filtered through cultural lenses that reveal underlying aesthetic motivations of performance for what would culturally make sense as "pleasing", or what does not make sense as "displeasing".

As such, within such aesthetic conceptual ideas, (2002) suggests that, "The infinity of God underlines the artistic parameters of Malay-Islamic art while the lines, angles, squares, hexagons, foliages and twisting trunks are the means to quantify spatial horizons, vertical and horizontal spaces" (Mohd Anis Md Nor 2003:179). In a sense, as it was noted by David Szanton, "art is *ukkil* in Sulu" (Szanton 1973: 6), noting the ethnoaesthetic perimeter by which the arts reflect Malay-maritime (Sulu) Islamic aesthetics. Thus, what is suggested is that motifs derived from the flora of the natural world are adopted and abstracted into the curvilinear in endless variations, combinations and unfolding improvisations that permeate both the plastic arts (arts involving carving, sculpting or moulding) and performing arts amongst maritime peoples in Southeast Asia. This is particularly prevalent throughout communities in the area referred to by Warren (1985) as the historical Sulu Zone, inclusive of the islands of the Sulu archipelago, Zamboanga and Palawan in present-day Philippines, and northern Borneo, Malaysia. The aesthetic preference for the curling or curving becomes a kinaesthetic endeavour in the performance of *pangalay*. In the plastic arts where flow and rhythm of the curvilinear is implied in static three or two-dimensionality, in *pangalay* this flow and rhythm is bodily manifested through the curving quality of movement motifs. This is

shown in a variety of ways, including the bodily manipulation of *malantik* (the hyperextension of the fingers, hands and/or elbows), the dancer's curving and turning pathways that follow arc-like variations that have no definitive pattern through space and the rhythmic time of the *kulintangan* ensemble.

Movement that is stylised in *pangalay* can be described as being inspired by natural phenomena in the ways in which movement mimes the palangay or "character" of marine, flora or fauna. The Suluk writer Nelson Dino (2015) suggests that the notion of *pangalay*, Suluk language meaning "nature" or "character" is related to *pangalay* dancing. Mimed movement in *pangalay* is thus abstracted, invoking only the palangay or "character" of something, rather the literal representation the "thing" itself through imitative movement. Curvilinear motifs in *pangalay* are not codified, although some motifs are more recognisable in their execution than others, such as the motif of the *linggisan* referring to a frigate bird endemic to the littoral areas of north-eastern Sabah and the Sulu archipelago, the literalism of narrating movements imposes meanings and depicts a realism where movements specifically become waves, birds, flowers, and so on. However in *pangalay* among Suluk practitioners, no direct meaning is associated with most movement motifs. *Pangalay* as a dancing comes out of a process of stylising and abstracting movement through Suluk curvilinear ethnoaesthetics, executed with sustained and curving qualities. A dancer, through his/her curvilinear motions expresses an intimate connection with the *kulintangan* as an aesthetic experience of being immersed within the rhythms of the *kulintangan*.

The Suluk ethnoaesthetic of the curling of the curvilinear in *pangalay* may be expressed in different ways by individual dancers. The prominence of the curvilinear in *pangalay* is indicative of the marine, flora or fauna of the natural world, but avoids direct depiction or symbolism. *Pangalay* motifs are thus meant to give a sense of bodily-realised curvilinearity, where abstracted motions are executed in a repetitive manner, highly stylised as depicting unrealistically and nonrepresentational. *Pangalay* motifs do not have direct meaning that dancers can articulate, making movement non-descriptive and not always fully definable.



Not all motifs have terminologies that are associated with them thus leaving room for vast interpretations and meanings of one's dancing. As *pangalay* refers to "dancing with the hands" in popular understanding that is not a linguistic rendition of the term, movements of the hands vary between dancers and is generally referred to as *bunga lima*, literally translated from Suluk language as "fruit (*bunga*) of the hands (*lima*)" referring to movements of the hands. "Fruit" in a sense is not a direct imitation of an object, but refers to the beauty of the hands through abstracting movement.

The *bunga lima* extenuates the hands, ornamenting movement from the arc-like pathway of the arm upwards where the hand ends with a seeming "flowering" flourish, fingers and hands turning, twisting and curving in space. *Bunga lima* is any movement of the hands that seemingly ornaments one's moving through space. The curling of the hands is the action of the simultaneous turning and curved pathway of the hands displaying *bunga lima*, as if one's hands are curling, twisting in space. The sustained movement of the arms, ending with a sudden and quick flick of the hands upward is also a *bunga lima*. The concept of the *bunga lima* considers the movements of the hands, but executed in a multitude of variations and imbued with different qualities that are entirely left up to dancers and their stylistic preferences for moving. The hyperextension of the fingers and hands is considered beautiful and is at times emphasised in the use of metal finger caps called *janggay*, usually made out of aluminum, but can also be made out of brass. If one were to imagine the images created by these tracings, a series of curling lines and foliage designs would be interspersed through space around which a dancer navigates.

The hyperextension of the fingers, hands and elbows is known as *malantik*, from the word *lantik* translated from Suluk language as "double-jointed" (Hassan et. al 1994, 273). *Malantik* is seen in the double-jointed elbow, where the elbow is hyperextended when the arms are extended outwards, giving the visual impression that the elbows are "broken" (Photo 2). The *malantik* of the elbow can be emphasised in movement by a light pulsing upward while the arm is extended displaying an incredible and particular flexibility.



**Photo2** *Malantik* of the elbow. Nurhaima binti Halid (2014).  
Image taken from video by D. Quintero.

However, among the Suluk in Sabah, the *malantik* is seen more commonly in the curving of the hands and fingers of dancers (Photo 3). As such, the curve of the fingers and hands is so desired that some individuals massage their hands to physically manipulate the body to create *malantik*, where the curvature of limbs and extremities are considered beautiful.



**Photo 3** *Malantik* of the hands. Radia binti Sabri of the performing group Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk. (2013)  
Photo by D. Quintero.

Although the *malantik* of the hands and elbows is desirable, not all dancers have such qualities. The curving of the hand is desired as it is considered *cantik* (Bahasa Melayu-Malay Language for "beautiful"), but is not essential for one's dancing. Male *pangalay* practitioners generally do not emphasise the curvature of the hands (although there are some male dancers

whose hands are *malantik*), but express the curvilinear in their *bunga lima* with relaxed palms. Not all practitioners' hands, male or female, are *malantik*. For example, while watching *pangalay* performances at a *parakala pagtiyaun* (wedding celebration) in August 2015, an older dancer in her 60s whose hands weren't particularly *malantik*, garnered great appreciation from audience members as her dancing was imbued with a frenzied energy in relationship to the *kulintangan* ensemble. Her dancing was still considered *pangalay* that displayed her particular style of dancing of extended arms, sudden (urgent and hurried) and bound (contained and controlled movement)<sup>3</sup> almost constant rapid moving of the hands as she danced with a particular inward focus that brought onlookers as beholders into her dancing. As such, although *malantik* is a literal bodily manifestation of the curvilinear, the hyperextension of the hands and elbows although desirable, is not necessary in order to *mangalay*. *Malantik* is seen as a desirable quality, but does not entirely define a dancing of *pangalay*. What is desired in *pangalay* is the sustained and bound curving that is manifested as the curvilinear through the dancing body in movement.

Many Suluk practitioners in Sabah have mentioned that motions may have similar qualities of the natural world, such as in verbal descriptions "it is like a *linggisian* (Suluk language for "frigate bird") swooping to get fish" or "it is like the *billi* (Suluk language for 'bird of prey') flying". However, when one observes the movement, it is not a direct imitation (not literally flapping one's arms as if one is a bird), but motion that goes through a process of abstraction by the dancer. The motion of a *billi* flying is stylised within the curvilinear aesthetic, with arms extended and moving with a light-sustained-bound quality in continuous motion. In a similar way, as observed by Szanton), the Suluk *ukkil* of *manuk-manuk* (Suluk language for unspecified "bird") has no recognisable bird forms in the woodcarving, yet there are stylistic resemblances that indicate the curvilinear *manuk-manuk* (Szanton 1973:15). The carving thus makes sense and is interpreted by the artist who creates the work. Stylistic resemblances of movement by different dancers, rather than "precision" of executed

steps, bear aesthetic likeness with one another through the curvilinearity of motion that is individually expressed by each dancer. One gets the "sense" of a movement that is implicit rather than what is literally imitated. What is connoted by the movement motif in *pangalay* is the curvilinear, the *pangalay* or character of *billi*, not the literal representation of *billi*.

The kinaesthetic is punctuated at times with the asymmetry of the bodyline, where the dancer places weight on either the left or right leg, thrusting the hip in the same direction as the weight bearing leg, while the torso leans in the opposition direction, and the curving of the fingers or elbows as in *malantik*. This visuality of the kinaesthetic is also reflected in the curving, turning and arc-like pathways of dancers in a contained space usually near or in front of the *kulintangan* ensemble using movements of travelling, such as *tingki*, to dance on tiptoe, or *tikang*, stepping or walking. Thus the preference is for the curve rather than the straight, for the varied rather than the uniform, the florid rather than the simple, for the improvisatory rather than the fixed. Asymmetry and the preference for diversity in dancing and movement styles rather than the singular reflects the non-uniformity and the multiplicity of the Suluk aesthetic.

The curving elements as in showing the "beauty of the elbow" in *malantik* and the turning movements of the hands at the wrists as in *bunga lima*, coupled with the slowness of moving, compels an aesthetic focus of the onlooker primarily to the curvilinearity of *pangalay*. Where in the visual arts Abraham Sakili writes, "The ornament is defined as the relationship between the forms and motifs rather than as the sum of these elements" (Abraham 2003: 108), in *pangalay*, the movements and the body moving through space privileges the process of dancing rather than the finality of body positions and steps. *Pangalay* in a sense is a process that in its performance with the *kulintangan* ensemble by dancers and musicians reiterates an aesthetic of the Suluk people, the Suluk ethnoaesthetic. *Pangalay* with *kulintangan* as *lami-lami* is a performative act of "doing" as "Suluk", making individuated ways of performing curvilinearity possible within the ethnoaesthetics of the Suluk in Sabah.

## LAMI-LAMI

*Maglami-lami*, the noun form being *lami-lami*, connotes merry-making by Suluk communities before, after or during significant social or religious events. For example, *lami-lami* performed at a wedding or *haylaya* (religious festival), such as the time period following Ramadhan, the month of fasting for Muslims. At weddings, *maglami-lami* occurs before the *pagkawin* (the solemnization of marriage) and during the *parakala pagtiyaun*, the celebration after the *pagkawin*. During the *parakala pagtiyaun* and other celebrations, members of the *kampung* (Bahasa Melayu or Malay language for "village") and other guests may attend. Social gatherings in the *kampung* provide opportunities to affirm the bond among participants, community members, family and others, especially in weddings where as Nelson Dino (2015) notes, "every attendee supports the celebration through gifts or cash in envelopes." In turn, hosts at social gatherings feed guests and provide *lami-lami* in the form of music either as synthesised electronic music referred to as organ, a live band and/or a *kulintangan* ensemble. Particularly with organ and *kulintangan*, all those gathered are a part of performances either as dancers who are asked to or request to perform, and those watching the performances of music and dancing as beholders. *Pangalay* in this sense as *lami-lami* is participatory involving dancers, musicians and beholders cohesively binding people together.

In performances of *pangalay* with a *kulintangan* ensemble, individuals from the *kampung*, "village", and invited guests from other *kampung* and other areas in Sabah perform *pangalay* in a constant flow of one dancer performing after another with a group of local *kulintangan* musicians. Dancers of any age, male or female with various levels of ability and from different strata of the community may participate despite who they are, each given however much time they choose to perform. Dancers may include elderly women, young women and boys, individually or partnered, dancing between 5 to 30 minutes long. While the *kulintangan* drives the dancing in an almost constant playing throughout the night, each performance garners undivided focus by audience members with particular dancers lauded for their particular dancing style and stamina.

Within the spaces of *maglami-lami*, the ethnoaesthetic sensibilities of the Suluk people comes to fruition in the appreciation garnered by beholders of the performances of *pangalay* with *kulintangan*. This is expressed through the verbal praises and in the giving of *panji*, meaning "flag" that refers to the money placed between the fingers, hair or clothing of the *pangalay* dancer. In such performances at social gatherings, *pangalay* with *kulintangan* produces a wide range of reactions from audience members, from intense focus and quietness to cacophonous accolades that is indicative of a collective aesthetic experience. Audience members are literally moved by performances of *pangalay*. For example, in August 2015 during the days prior to a *pagkawin* in Kampung Bakau, Semporna one of several dancers throughout the night captured the attention of onlookers for the entire duration of her nearly 20-minute *pangalay*. Onlookers were transfixed in rapt silent attention, at times cheering loudly and moved from their sitting places to eagerly walk up to the dancer and insert *ringgit* currency between her fingers. Appreciation as aesthetic taste comes from a culturally shaped way of looking at and thus experiencing *pangalay*, and deeming the curvilinear as beautiful when expressed improvisatorially in endless variations by multiple dancers.

## **EFFORT AND SHAPE**

In considering the curvilinear as both visually observed and kinaesthetically experienced, etic tools to look at movement provide other means of understanding motivations of movement. The ideas of Rudolph Laban's effort and shape are used in this essay to describe movements of *pangalay* dancers. As explained by Charlotte Wile (2013), "Effort is the bodily expression of the mover's conscious or unconscious feelings, impulses, or motivation" that concerns dispositions toward time (sustained or sudden), attention to space (direct or indirect), activation of body weight (light or strong) and movement continuity (free or bound) (Wile 2013: 74) or (Wile & Cook 2010: 74). As such, effort deals with qualities that motivate or imbues one's moving rather than the quantified and dictated that deals with an amalgam

of movements, such as the organisation of steps into movement phrases. The distinction is useful when looking at *pangalay* as improvisational, where a dancing is seemingly different in each iteration, yet certain qualities of moving tend to dominate *pangalay* as a dance form. Considering the descriptions of effort, *pangalay* can be described as thematically involving sustained, or slow, and bound, or contained and controlled, movement. Simultaneously, other effort qualities such as strong or direct may be present in the motions of *pangalay* dancers, and may be used to understand underlying movement motivations.

Similarly, Shape Modes are explained as "attitudes toward the environment that are expressed in the way the body changes form" (Wile & Cook 2012: 88; Wile 2013: 88). As such, terms that are used for Shape Modes include Shape Flow, self-oriented moving, Directional Mode, goal-oriented, and Carving where the mover sculpts or moulds the environment (Wile & Cook 2010: 88; Wile 2013: 88). Shape Flow involves body parts moving in relation to one another, flexing or extending, movements that concern the body in relation to itself. This is differentiated from Directional Mode that involves interaction with the external environment concerning pathways such as straight, spoke-like pathways or arc, curved pathways. This is again further distinguished from the Shape Mode of Carving that concerns experiencing volume or moulding of one's environment. Carving in Shape Mode is used not to denote the literal "cutting", in terms of dancing the "cutting" of space, as in the way the term is commonly used, but is used in reference to *pangalay* as curving and curling of the body in space. All three types of Shape Modes are apparent in *pangalay*.

The body-oriented Shape Flow concerns for example the asymmetry of the bodyline where a dancer has the weight on the left leg, with the left hip thrusting to the left, with the torso leaning slightly to the right, as the arms extend outward from the body (Photo 4). In this case, the dancer moves body parts in relationship to herself rather than in relation to the external space outside of herself.





**Photo 4** Asymmetricality of the bodyline. Nazara Halim, member of Persatuan Kebudayaan, Kesenian dan Warisan Suluk Sandakan- PUSAKA (2013).  
Photo by D. Quintero.

In another example of Shape Mode, Directional Mode concerns pathways that are goal-oriented. This can be seen in the arc-like pathway as the dancer moves the right arm from the lower right side of the body to above the head towards the high right. This pathway is a curved path intentionally moved from the lower right upward to the high right (See sequence in Photo 5).



**Photo 5** Directional Mode. Nurhaima binti Halid (2014).  
Images taken from video by D. Quintero.

The Carving Shape Mode through space involves the curling of the hands or curving of the arms characteristic in *pangalay* dancing (Photo 6). In the sequence depicted in Photo 6, the hands not only rotate at the wrist in a curling motion, the hands move in a bound and sustained way giving a sense that the dancer is "moulding" space with her hands.



**Photo 6** Carving Shape Mode of the hands. Tadmahal Omar Sangkula of the performing group Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk (2013).

Images taken from video by D. Quintero.

Where Effort gives a sense of movement quality, Shape Mode gives an idea of body or movement shape. For example, a dancer who extends her arms outward from the body in a spoke-like pathway in a Directional Mode may do so with sustained and direct effort. Effort and Shape Mode gives a sense of visual manifestation of movement, and looks at a dancing as an agentic process that is faceted, imbued with various qualities that reveal particular values that are culturally shaped.

## CONCLUSION

The curving and curling through space of the whole body, the hands or the arms reflects the prominence of the curvilinear as the Suluk ethnoaesthetic. This ethnoaesthetic includes but is not limited to the asymmetry of the bodyline, the curling of the hands in a *bunga lima*, the *malantik* of the elbows, and the sustained and bound way in which dancers execute motifs. The non-narrative movement gives a sense of the *pangalay* or "character" of natural phenomena in non-literal and abstracted ways rather than the finality or rigidity of poses, literal representation of things or the narrativising of a story. Although the sense of beauty may be seemingly subjective as expressed by the phrase, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", this article suggests that aesthetics is culturally shaped and goes beyond the visual as an object to behold, but suggests "beauty" as experiential. In as much as *pangalay* is gazed upon, within spaces of *lami-lami*, *pangalay* is aesthetically experientially shared not only by dancers and musicians alike, but also by beholders. *Pangalay* as performed by practitioners in Sabah is guided by ethnoaesthetic ideas that are made possible in spaces of *lami-lami* through processes of abstracting movement and reiterating a Suluk sense of beauty through embodied curvilinearity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Portions of this article are based on the doctoral thesis of Desiree A. Quintero, University of Malaya, Cultural Centre. The authors would like to thank the following individuals and organisation for their continued support: Judeth John Baptist and staff at the Sabah Museum, Wayland Quintero, Tadmahal Omar Sangkula and members of Kebudayaan Etnik Suluk, Hatta Yunus @ Sawabi and members of Persatuan Kebudayaan, Kesenian dan Warisan Suluk Sandakan - PUSAKA (Association for Suluk Culture, Arts and Heritage), Nurhaima binti Halid and family, and Mark Tolentino.

## NOTES

1. Portions of this article are based on the doctoral thesis of Desiree A. Quintero, University of Malaya, Cultural Centre.
2. There have been instances during fieldwork between 2013–2015, specifically in Semporna on the east coast of Sabah, where two drums were played simultaneously with the *kulintangan* ensemble. This is much like the dual *gandang* playing of the Suluk (*Tausug*) documented by Kiefer in the Sulu archipelago in the 1960s where the *gandang* playing was played primarily by the hands. A singular *tambur* or snare drum that is more common in the present day is played with two sticks. For example, during the celebrations before a wedding day in Kampung Bakau in Semporna in August 2015, a *tambur* was played simultaneously with a large plastic water container that acted as a second *tambur*. It should be noted that often when a drum, a *gandang* or a *tambur*, is not available, a plastic container played with two sticks is often used as a replacement.
3. Rudolf Laban's terminology is discussed further in this essay in the effort and shape section. For more discussion of Effort and Shape and its use within the movement notation system Motif Notation please refer to Charlotte Wile with Ray Cook's, *Moving About* (2010) and Charlotte Wile *Moving Extracts* (2013).

**APPENDIX – GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

*agung* – large hanging knobbed gongs.

*billi* – Suluk term for "bird of prey" (See Hassan, et al. 1994).

*bunga lima* – a Suluk term literally translated as "fruit (bunga) of the hand (lima)", referring to hand movements.

*cantik* – Bahasa Melayu or Malay language meaning "beautiful".

*gandang* – a double-headed barrel drum.

*habul tiya'ihan* – Suluk term referring a tubular cloth intricately embroidered.

*haylaya* – Suluk term for religious festival.

*janggay* – Suluk term referring to metal finger caps.

*kangkang* – Suluk language for "stiff".

*kampung* – Bahasa Melayu or Malay language meaning "village".

*kulintangan* – an instrument consisting of horizontally laid knobbed gongs. Also refers to the ensemble of instruments.

*lami-lami* (n.) (*maglami-lami*, v.) – Suluk term for "merry-making" or "celebration".

*linggis* – Suluk term referring to a "frigate bird".

*mangalay* (v.) – see *pangalay*

*malantik* – from the root Suluk word *lantik* meaning "double-jointed". *Malantik* often refers to the hyperextension of the fingers, hands and/or elbows.

*manuk-manuk* – Suluk language referring to an unspecified bird.

*organ* – Suluk term referring to synthesized electronic music.

*pagkawin* – solemnization of marriage.

*pangalay* – a Suluk term meaning "character".

*panji* – a Suluk term literally translated as "flag". Within the context of *pangalay*, it refers to money placed within the fingers, hair or clothing of dancers in appreciation of their skill.

*pangalay* (n.) (*mangalay*- v.) - a Suluk term that refers to a particular way of dancing involving movement motifs of the hands and arms, moving in a slow and sustained way.

*parakala pagtiyaun* – Suluk language referring to the celebration following the wedding ceremony.

*sunduk* – Suluk term referring to a grave marker.

*tambur* (also *tambul*) – a snare drum.

*tikang* – Suluk language for "stepping".

*tingki* – Suluk language meaning "to dance on tiptoe".

*tung tung* – usually the highest pitched kulintangan gong playing a consistent and constant rhythm.

*ukkil* – a Suluk term referring to the act of carving and to the object that is carved.

## REFERENCES

Abraham P. Sakili. 2003. *Space and identity: Expressions in the culture, arts and society of the Muslims in the Philippines*. Diliman, Quezon City: Asian Center, University of the Philippines.

OED Online 2015. "aesthetic, n. and adj.". <http://ezproxy.um.edu.my:2060/view/Entry/3237?redirectedFrom=aesthetic&> (accessed 22 November 2015).

Hassan, I. U., S. A. Ashley and M. L. Ashley. 1994. *Tausug-English Dictionary: Kabtangan Iban Maana*. Manila, Philippines: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Kaeppler, A. 2003. An introduction to dance aesthetics. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 35: 153–162. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149325>.



- Kiefer, T. 1970. *Music from the Tausug of Sulu: Moslems of the Southern Philippines* [record]. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music Folklore Institute.
- Mohd Anis Md Nor. 2003. Arabesques and curvilinear perimeters in the aesthetics of maritime-Malay dances. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 35: 179–181. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149328>.
- Nelson Dino. 2015. *Sulug in Sabah: The way of life and culture*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Saba Islamic Media Sdn Bhd.
- Quintero, D. Forthcoming. Inhabiting Pangalay ha Kulintangan as Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia. PhD diss., University of Malaya, Cultural Centre.
- Szanton, D. L. 1973. Art in Sulu: A survey. In *Sulu Studies, 2: Coordinated investigation of Sulu culture*, ed. G. Rixhon, 3–69. Jolo, Sulu: Notre Dame of Jolo College.
- Royce, A. P. 1977. *The anthropology of dance*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.
- Warren, J. F. 1985. The Sulu Zone 1768–1898: *The dynamics of external trade, slavery, and ethnicity in the transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*. Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers.
- Wile, C. and R. Cook. 2010. *Moving about: Capturing movement highlights using motif notation*. Charlotte Wile Publisher.
- Wile, C. 2013. *Moving about extracts*. Charlotte Wile Publisher.