

GENDERING DANCE, GAZING MUSIC: DANCE MOVEMENTS, HEALING RITUALS AND MUSIC MAKING OF SAMA BAJAU AND SAMA DILAUT OF EAST MALAYSIA AND SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Amongst the Sama and Bajau of the Sulu Sea (formerly referred to as ‘sea gypsies’), the Sama Bajau of Malaysia (who no longer roam the sea but live in coastal hamlets and villages) and the Sama DiLaut of the Southern Philippines share commonalities in the way dancers are gendered through the choices of musical tunes while partaking in the ritual healing ceremony of *Magpaibahau* or *Magduwata* (amongst Sama Bajau and Bajau Laut in Malaysia), *Mag-paigal* (Bajau Laut in Semporna, Malaysia and in Sitangkai, Philippines), or *Pagkanduli* (Sama Dilaut in Sitangkai, Philippines). The *tagunggu* ensemble with the *kulintangan* pot gong set, *agung* (two big hanging gongs) or *tawag* (large gong), and *tambul* (drum) play tunes or *titik* for the spirit bearer (*Jin*), which is represented by *Jin Lella* (male Jin) or *Jin Denda* (female Jin). The tunes (*titik*) may also signify the places where these events take place such as Titik Lellang for the *Magduwata* ritual amongst Sama Bajau in Semporna, East Malaysia or Titik Limbayan for the *Pagkanduli* ritual of the Sama Dilaut in Sitangkai, Southern Philippines. Similarly, these tunes are associated with the gender of the spirit-bearers, Titik Lellang for the male spirit bearer and Titik Limbayan for female spirit-bearers. Dances or *igal* of the spirit-bearers in these communities are also identified and named after the tunes, such as Igal Lellang and Igal Limbayan respectively. This paper aims to highlight the responses between the *tagunggu*/*kulintangan* musicians and the dancing spirit-bearers in these two locations: Semporna in East Malaysia and Sitangkai in the Sulu Archipelago in Southern Philippines as they reciprocate on the gazes of the dancing spirit-bearers in sustaining appropriate rhythmic pulses to the tunes of gendered musical styles.

Keywords: *Magpaibahau, Magduwata, Magpaigal, Pagkanduli, Jin Lella, Jin Denda, Sama Dilaut, Sama Bajau, Semporna, Sitangkai*

Prologue

Within the community of the nomadic ‘sea gypsies’ of the Sulu Sea, the Sama Bajau or Bajau Laut of Malaysia and the Sama Dilaut of the Southern Philippines share commonalities in the way dancers are gendered through the choices of musical tunes while partaking in the ritual healing ceremony of *magpaibahau* or *magduwata* (offering of