

# Revitalisation of the Performing Arts in the Ancestral Homeland of Lampung People, Sumatra

**Karen Kartomi Thomas**

*Theatre and Performance Studies, Monash University, Australia*

karen.thomas@monash.au

## **ABSTRACT**

*Lampung's ethno-lingual groups turned their attentions to reviving their performing arts more than two decades ago, activities which gained momentum after 2004 when the newly elected governor of the province Sjachroedin ZP instigated a revitalisation (revitalisasi<sup>1</sup>) cultural program. Lampung's minority indigenous population resulted from large-scale transigrations especially from Java that began under Dutch rule from 1908 and continued well after independence and into the present. With encouragement from the government regents (bupati) in the province's regions sought concrete ways to revive and promote the local arts. In West Lampung they arranged the staging of both traditional and modern contemporary forms in ceremonial processions and festivals that take place on significant holidays such as Independence Day celebrations, regional government official welcoming ceremonies, and other large-scale local festivities including the week leading up to the end of the Muslim Fasting month (Idul Fitri or Lebaran).*

*The indigenous people of Lampung (ulun Lampung) divide into Saibatin and Pepadun categories. The Saibatin group consists of the Peminggir (coastal) people, as they have been known since the Dutch colonial period (Funke 1961). Groups living inland and in the mountainous areas known as Abung and Pubian, when grouped together, are also referred to as Pepadun (other spellings include Papadun and Papadon). The effects on the performing arts of the directive from Lampung's governor through to the regents of Saibatin ethnic groups in the Skala Brak area in the province's mountainous northwest are examined. All of Lampung's ethno-lingual groups recognise Skala Brak—located around the province's highest Mount Pesagi—as their ancestral homeland. It is Skala Brak's distinctive performing arts—including the sakura masked theatre and its variations, and two well-known local female dances, muli sembah (welcoming dance) and sigeh pengutin (long fingernail dance) that have been revitalised and refashioned as new Saibatin creations (I., kreasi baru).<sup>2</sup>*

**Keywords:** *West Lampung performing arts, masked theatre, female dance, Sumatra Indonesia*

## INTRODUCTION

In an age of modernisation and globalisation, the current governor seeks to preserve Lampung traditional custom (*adat*) and to support efforts that value indigenous Lampung culture through a focus on architecture, history, traditional symbolism and the performing arts (Eryani 2012: 136–141). He fully endorses the efforts driven by the Council of Traditional Lampung Elders (Majelis Penimbang Adat Lampung, MPAL) to restore and protect traditional cultural practices, and increase understanding of Lampungese and Lampung script through primary school education. One of his aims as stated in his biography by Hesma Eryani, is to improve domestic and international relations specifically with the aid of the performing arts, which at his request and in accordance with traditional processes (I., *proses adat*), are incorporated into ceremonial receptions organised for official parties of domestic and international visitors.

For example, official ceremonial receptions include processing in public parades, riding the ceremonial "chariot" (*rata* or I., *kereta kencana*), wearing traditional Lampung costume consisting of woven cloth (*tapis*) and head-dress (*siger* for females or *kikat kepala* for males), and being welcomed and received with performances of male martial arts (I., *silat*) dance duels and specific female welcoming dances. A desire to advance domestic and international relations in part motivates the government's focus on reviving Lampung's performing arts. Holding such lavish ceremonial festivities for visitors from overseas in his opinion makes way for a "new tradition" (I., *tradisi baru*) of revitalising Lampung culture.

A second more underlying challenge that the governor faces is a redefining of Lampung identity due to the province's minority indigenous population. At the 2000 census recorded by the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (*Badan Pusat Statistik*) the indigenous ethnic groups combined totaled just 11.92% of Lampung's entire population after more than a century of transmigratory arrivals from other parts of Indonesia settling in Lampung.<sup>3</sup> This has resulted in the view that a concerted refocus on upholding and maintaining Lampung's (performance) traditions as well as societal values such as being hospitable towards guests and newcomers to Lampung, maintaining self-respect (*pi'il pesenggiri*), offering mutual assistance (*beguai jejama*), and other values mentioned later, is required to help prevent indigenous groups from being placed on the margins of society and instead to reinvent a legitimate indigenous voice. The marginalisation (*marginalisasi*) of the indigenous ethnic groups has long been occurring due to their minority numbers relative to other immigrant groups (Sinaga 2012: vi). Incidents described by Mustika such as the unlawful behaviour of some Saibatin *sakura* masked groups in a few West Lampung villages in the mid 1980s only exacerbated their minority social standing (Mustika 2011: 214–220).<sup>4</sup> The *sakura* festival and preparations leading up to this annual event from the late 1980s onwards became an arena in which to encourage socially acceptable behaviour. It became an opportunity to build up indigenous pride by focusing on traditional Lampung values, and to help the indigenous Lampung people to reestablish a social standing that is at least equal to that of immigrant communities. Artists, together with the

local population worked to revive the Saibatin performing arts and to recreate elements, such as motifs and devices of traditional performance in new dance and theatre forms. Government directives received at local and provincial levels to revitalise indigenous art forms, prompted the Head of Culture in the West Lampung Department of Tourism, Art and Culture (*Dinas Pariwisata Seni dan Budaya Lampung Barat*), Nyoman Mulyawan (a dancer, musician and choreographer who happens to be of Balinese descent) in 1995 to lead the cultural, performance-based developments in and around Liwa (Mulyawan, pers. comm. 11 April 2012).<sup>5</sup> The revitalisation efforts have continued to bring Lampung performance culture to the fore. With every rendition, these efforts reassert the existence of indigenous symbols that come alive in the theatrical performances of processions held at various levels of society—from official government events and ceremonies, to those held in villages described in this study. The refashioned forms of the performing arts continue to reignite with each performance the potentially potent cultural hegemony of Lampung culture that the government perceives will lead and play a part in unifying a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population and assist in its political leadership on a local, national and international scale.

In the following sections I describe several male and female forms of Saibatin theatre and dance presented at *sakura* festivals (*pesta sakura*) that are held as ceremonial processions in villages around the Skala Brak area of West Lampung. A genre of masked theatre that finds its roots in traditional ritual is investigated. I also trace some of the changes in style, content and reception, which have resulted in new creations of masked theatre and dance. I examine the function of the theatre of *sakura* and the artistic modifications it has undergone since the 1990s. Finally I discuss the introduction of new female dances and their links both to traditional female Lampung dances and to the long established ceremonial role of the young adolescent female and male couple (*muli maranai*).

The origins of the indigenous West Lampung masked tradition<sup>6</sup> and its name *sakura* (also spelled *sekura*), are unclear. However orally transmitted legends (*warahan*) from both Lampung's Saibatin and Pepadun traditions and passed down through the generations, indicate

that the people of Liwa believe that their ancestors, the animist Tumi ethnic group (*buay Tumi*) led early on by a female ruler Ratu Sekarmonng (also spelled Ratu Sekerumong) lived in the ancient kingdom of Skala Brak in the 13th century CE at the end of the Hindu period (Mustika 2011: 6). The area of Skala Brak surrounded the esteemed Mount Pesagi and included the mountainous region of northwest Lampung and the town of Liwa. In order to protect themselves against natural and supernatural forces, they wore *sakura* masks and costumes of leaves and other plain clothes in their worship rituals when calling up ancestral spirits (I., *roh nenek moyang* and *roh leluhur*), and also performed barefoot in order to maintain direct contact with the earth through which benevolent spirits entered the human world.<sup>7</sup> Elders state that *sakura* performers sought the assistance of the gods (I., *para dewa*), spiritual ancestors (I., *nenek moyang*) and nature spirits (I., *penguasa alam semesta*) to protect the village and its inhabitants during harvest season, healing rituals, and rites of passage (Mustika 2011: 149).

## PROCESSIONAL MASKED THEATRE

After preparations leading up to a West Lampung *sakura* festival are complete, hundreds of adults, teenagers and children converge in one of a small number of villages (*pekon*) located near Skala Brak in the Liwa area that participate in masked events. Participating villages include, Kenali (in the Belalau district), Canggus, Balak, Sukau and Kotabesi (in the Batu Brak district at the foot of Mount Pesagi), and Gunung Sugih Liwa and Way Mengaku (in the Balik Bukit district). With the assistance of the village leader (I., *lurah*), the festival is organised and presented to the community annually and on a rotational basis. Casts of *sakura* actors, musicians and dancers, are drawn principally from local pools of young males who are artists and musicians from communal performing arts studios, such as "Sanggar Seni Setiawan," "Sanggar Stiwang," or "Sanggar Andan Mupakat dan Karang Taruna" based in Liwa and surrounds. A *sakura* festival normally begins mid-morning and may last up to seven days. Males with frame drums (*redap*, and I., *rebana*) in hand gather together in a designated area

such as at the home of the village leader or at Liwa's Square of Independence (I., *Lapangan Merdeka*) in order to participate in the ceremonial procession (Photo 1). The masks they wear conceal the true identity of each actor to prevent threatening spirits from entering their bodies and hence the village community. Depicting various types of characters, the masks function as an integral part of the production of entertaining comedy skits and fast martial arts duels with daggers (I., *kris*) and spear-like rods (*payan*). The loud music of the indigenous ensemble (*talo balak*) accompanies masked actors as they invite benevolent spirits from the supernatural



**Photo 1** *Sakura kamak* masks are characterised by their distorted, grotesque features. *Sakura* actors perform interlocking rhythms on the frame drum as they sing *bebandung* quatrains.

Source: Azzuralhi (2011b).

world to attend the event.

The intention of the masks and the characters the actors portray is to impress the two kinds of audiences present, the humans of the mortal world—men, women and children from local villages—and the protective spirits of the supernatural world.<sup>7</sup>

The masked actors and musicians sing (*menyambai*) rhyming quatrains (*bebandung*) often in response to each other (I., *membalas pantun*). The verses composed in an a b a b rhyming scheme may contain advice (I., *petuah*) that accords with traditional Lampung teachings, or they may be about feelings of love and longing as in the following verse in Lampungese that features Kenali in the district of Batu Brak:

Maghamek di Kenali  
 Tayuhan Batu Brak  
 Maghamek rasa mangi  
 Mani niku mak ku liyak

The people gather together in Kenali  
 A festival in Batu Brak  
 But a gathering feels lonely  
 If you're not here

At *sakura* festivals, the male masked performers proceed in procession around the village playing loud interlocking rhythms while performing humorous songs and skits for the community of families and visitors from neighbouring villages. Apart from the frame-drums, the instruments played consist of two double-headed drums (*gindang*), kettle gongs (*kulintang*, *kelintang* or *kelenongan*). They accompany their singing with hand-clapping (*tetabuah terbangun*) interlocking rhythms in two parts, or by beating the same, fast-paced rhythms with their hands on the edge of and the middle of the head of the frame drum. Sometimes the men carry upturned buckets (Mustika 2011: 225) instead of frame drums and beat their hands on the edge or middle of the bottom of the bucket. When accompanying themselves on the frame drum initially they do so on all four beats of each quadruple-metric measure. The rhythmic density doubles after the first eight beats, and a syncopated rhythm of edge- and mid- head

beats in unison, follows. An example of interlocking *rebana* rhythms in two parts notated in Indonesian solfa number script is given in Figure 1.

Rebana 1	{	4/4 //:	t	.	t	.	://:	<u>t</u> .	<u>t</u> .	<u>t</u> .	<u>t</u> .	://:	<u>t</u> .	.	<u>t</u> .	<u>t</u> .	. . .	://
Rebana 2	}	4/4 //:	.	b	.	b	://:	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	://:	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	<u>. b</u>	. . .	:// b

**Figure 1** An example of interlocking frame-drum rhythms in two parts notated in Indonesian solfa number script.

Source: Margaret Kartomi, pers. comm., March 2013.

The drum sounds are depicted by the abbreviated onomatopoeic syllables used to refer to them, i.e., the syllable tum notated "t" designates a deep, resonant undampened sound beaten with the left hand near the centre of the drum head, while the syllable ba, notated "b," denotes a sharp, relatively high-pitched right-hand stroke near the rim (Kartomi 2012: xi). A dot indicates a rest. The pairs of eighth notes are denoted by a line drawn under them and enclosed with repeat signs //: and ://.

Moving from house to house in ceremonial procession, the *sakura* cast stops periodically to invite viewers to laugh at their buffoonery and antics. The activities of singing, drumming, dancing, joking, and performing skits and martial arts duels conducted by the processing masked males are believed to assist in the cleansing the village (i., *bersih desa*) of lurking evil spirits. In return for the *sakura* entertainment, village onlookers offer the amateur actors food and drink. Villagers pay their respects to one another, an activity that nurtures kinship ties and forges strong communal bonds (*ajang ngejalang*) as they come together to watch the *sakura* parade (Mustika 2011: 389).





**Photo 2** *Sakura kamak* masks. The mask on the left is a humorous clown-type, while the other is a warrior type. Both masks, along with hundreds of others are housed in the Museum Negeri Provinsi Lampung (Lampung Museum), Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. More examples can be viewed in the catalogue of Lampung masks, Museum Negeri Provinsi Lampung (Lampung Museum), 2009.

Source: Photograph by Karen Kartomi Thomas, Bandar Lampung, 2012.

While audiences regard the old wooden masks (*sakura kamak*) in either their painted or unpainted form as ugly, they nevertheless understand the masks to be friendly, humorous, and harmless to humans. As in the old traditional *sakura* rituals, members of the theatre's cast intentionally wear grotesque and deformed-looking, carved wooden masks. The masks on the whole depict the faces of one of several character-types including male or female aristocrats,

peasants, farmers, soldiers, old men, legendary heroes, children, babies, various animals such as monkeys, tigers, civets (*luwak*) and other animals, as indicated by the colours and the shape of the facial features (Museum Negeri Provinsi Lampung [Lampung Museum] 2009: 2). An ogre character, depicted with distorted or lop-sided facial features, might make broad sweeping leg and arm movements, laugh crudely and jeer; an elderly grandfather caricature might walk with the stylised stoop of an old man. Masked actors wear full-body costumes that also cover the entire neck and back of the head.

The wooden mask shown on the left of Photo 2 is a humorous, clown-type with an oval face, downward drooping eyes, and a wide laughing red-painted mouth. His broad nose is painted a light-blue colour, which indicates that he is a royal character. The other mask is a warrior (I., *kesatria*) type as shown by his more slender nose and finer eyebrows. His blueness means that he too is of royal stock, and his red painted eyes and slightly parted lips show his serious nature.

Aside from carved wood, masks may be made out of cheaper materials such as pieces of cardboard or cloth rags with cut out holes for their eyes. Some actors assuming ogre or animal characters wear fresh leafy coconut or coffee branches or thick vines as wigs that match the intentionally messily thrown together costumes of *sarong* and old *batik* material or ripped empty rice-sacks made of canvas or nylon. Once the mask is put on and held in place with elastic tied around the head, the actors cover the back of their heads and necks with scarves (*silindang*) or a piece of material (I., *kain*) tied securely together.

A second type of *sakura* mask, a cloth mask known as *sakura helau* (clean mask) may also be worn. Performers wrap *batik* or plain cloth around the entire head—back and front—and neck leaving an opening for the eyes. They put on a pair of dark sunglasses. Apart from concealing the actors' eyes from the audience and keeping individual identities hidden, masks also assist with increasing actor levels of confidence (Mulyawan, pers. comm, 11 April 2012). Masked actors are given the freedom to make jokes (I., *senda gurau*), shout out loud, and show their sense of humour. The actors feel that they can act in an outlandish manner or hide

their shyness without the audience knowing their identity. At the same time their individual identities remain unknown to the audience of malevolent spirits too, which the masked actors seek to repel from the vicinity.

### **The Theatre of Climbing Sacred Poles**

The wooden mask worn in ceremonial procession described so far is additionally worn at a very different kind of *sakura* occasion known as the climbing of sacred poles (*sakura nyakak buah* or *sakura cakak buah*). Up to dozens of poles measuring nine or ten metres high are planted in an open space. Masks worn by adolescent males range from the wooden aristocratic, ogre or animal types, to variations of the cloth masks and a pair of dark sunglasses. (Pre-adolescent boys are not permitted to climb the sacred poles.) Once the barefooted climbers on their vertical ascent reach the top, they may retrieve a small gift (such as a bag of peanuts or an umbrella) hanging from either horizontally attached bamboo bars or metal wreaths, before returning back to the ground.

The significance of these sacred poles carries across from traditional wedding or title-giving ceremonies (*pemberian adok*) in which dozens of young men prepare the traditional ceremonial stage (*lunjuk*, a temporary structure or *sesat*, a permanent building) by planting tall posts at its entrance, in its centre, and at each of its four corners. Gifts of household wares such as pots, umbrellas and utensils that suspend from the top are presented as gifts to the spirits and to the bridal couple or the recipient of a title (*adok*) at the end of the day retrieved by adolescent males (Van Dijk and De Jonge 1980: 37–38). The presence of the posts and suspending gifts from poles alludes to the animist activity of pleasing the benevolent ancestral spirits and of inviting them to descend to help protect participants and members of the audience in the ceremonial space. They also allude to the traditional motif of the tree of life (*kayu ara*) introduced into Southeast Asia in the Dongson era (Van Dijk and De Jonge 1980).

The community views the poles as a way of reaching the higher spiritual world and also of keeping intrusive and potentially dangerous spirits at bay.

Since the early 1990s, events of climbing the sacred poles have been organised by such groups as the local government (i., *pemerintah daerah* or *pemda*), together with local village communities and other groups such as, the "Andan Mupakat and Karang Taruna" performing arts' studio in Gunung Sugih Liwa, and the "Canggu Village Forum for Youth Communication" (*Forum Komunikasi Pemuda Pekon Canggu*) in Canggu village of the Batu Brak district.<sup>8</sup> As part of the efforts to revitalise Lampung's performing arts, masked theatre, female dances discussed below, distinct objects such as items of costume and the sacred poles, continue to feature at local West Lampung celebrations and anniversaries including end of the Muslim fasting month and Independence Day festivities.

### **THE ADOLESCENT MALE-FEMALE PAIR**

On both *sakura* occasions—in which masked male adults and adolescents circle around the village beating rhythms on the frame drum and performing martial arts duels, and at the climbing of sacred poles events—the audience of adults, teenagers, and children bears witness to masculine displays of skill, talent, and physical and spiritual strength. The structured environment of *sakura* in both instances validates the important and accepted social category of adolescent males and females (*muli maranai*; *muli* [female] *maranai* [male]). The culture of West Lampung has traditionally valued the adolescent male and female pair highly (Van Dijk and De Jonge 1980: 18). Lampung is the only province in Sumatra whose society recognises this as a social category to whom the elders formally assigns the social responsibility and function of receiving guests on important ceremonial occasions. The tradition of significant events that punctuate the lives of most individuals in Lampung include the transitional life stages of birth, late childhood, adolescence, marriage, obtaining rank, and death. Their formalised and functionary role of receiving guests at the gates of the ceremonial arena or the

door of the hall or stage where ceremonies commemorating life stages take place, constitute a public recognition and celebration of their position and importance in West Lampung society. As a social category, their legacy persists in people's daily lives and ceremonies today.<sup>9</sup> They carry out their tasks in full traditional costume each wearing the respective male or female Lampung costume consisting of the headdresses (*kikat kepala* for males and *siger* for females), the prized, gold or silver threaded cloth (*tapis*) worn around the waist, numerous accessories such as gold bracelets, armlets, and necklaces worn at ceremonies throughout Lampung, and a Malay pants-suit (I., *teluk belanga*) for males or long-sleeved bodice (I., *baju kurung*) sewn with Lampung lace (*sulam khusus*) for females. Once the welcoming of guests is complete, the young males and females provide entertainment by singing alternate verses and performing social dances one by one or in groups for each other and the community audience. They do so freely while enjoying each other's presence in an unconstrained way (Van Dijk and De Jong 1980: 19).<sup>10</sup>

The Lampung tradition of celebrating the young male and female pairs on the one hand, and the controlled social conditions in which ceremonial performances take place before the witnesses of village elders and adults on the other, provide the context in which adolescents are permitted to socialise with one another. A masked male adolescent in a *sakura* procession may wear a *batik* scarf as a signal that he seeks a sweetheart (I., *jodoh*). Alternatively he may wear a specific scarf that enables the young female who gave it to him to identify him easily. A *sakura* male may sing a rhyming quatrain aimed at a specific adolescent female (*muli bathin*) whom he knows is in the audience.<sup>11</sup> Oftentimes pairs of mature adult males carry an heirloom dagger or shield and perform mock martial arts duels that shows their courage and protective role in the community, especially towards young women and new brides (*anak pangeran*) as they participate in ceremonial processions.<sup>12</sup>

### NEW CREATION (*KREASI BARU*) MASKED DANCE

Two new versions of *sakura* masked dance choreographed by Mulyawan emerged in the mid-1990s in Liwa (pers. comm., 11 April 2012). Dancers perform these new compositions in a marked out stage area in a public space during the course of the procession. Unlike the processional *sakura* in which actors create free and unstructured movement, the new *sakura* creations consist of sets of choreographed dance routines and formations performed in unison by 10 to 15 male dancers to the accompaniment of fast-paced ensemble music. The new versions are increasingly performed at state, regional and private ceremonies as well, such as those held on Independence Day, regional and religious (*Idul Fitri*) anniversaries. The design of the new shaman-like *sakura helau* mask is inspired by the old wooden masks. It is worn around the head with elasticised straps, and the actor conceals his entire body down to the ankles and wrists with tight-fitting pants worn beneath his modern costume. He covers his head with long pieces of cloth or other synthetic material attached to form a wig, which flops around his shoulders and half way down his back. A belt around his waist from which a multitude of strips of *batik* hang, gives him a larger than life presence when he performs energetic spins. The character's long staff also decorated with strips of *batik* and reminiscent of one with magical powers belonging to healers (i., *dukun*) during healing rituals, enforces the effect of the choreographed frenzied movements that suggest communication with the spiritual realm.

The design of the second *kreasi baru* mask (*sakura helau*) like the existing cloth style mask described earlier, consists of modern Lampung batik that covers the entire back and front of the head as well as the neck and often the top part of the shoulders (Photo 3). The rounded shape at the top of the head is achieved by wearing a black velvet Indonesian fez hat (i., *peci*) and wrapping *batik* cloth tightly around it. The performers mask their eyes with a pair of dark sunglasses. *Batik* scarves run from each shoulder across the chest to the opposite hip to decorate the matching Malay-style trouser suit worn underneath, and a folded *sarong*

is tied around the waist. Some perform with long swords as if to assert a show of strength and power, and as if to fend off evil forces from the stage. Their choreographed movements intended to project masculine strength, are quick in tempo and exhibit local style large leg



**Photo 3** A new creation of a West Lampung sakura helau warrior-like dance with a cloth mask and sunglasses performed in Kenali village, Belalau district, West Lampung, 2012.

Source: Photograph by Karen Kartomi Thomas, Bandar Lampung, 2012.

stances, poses and movements of the traditional martial arts routines and movements. Performers always dance bare-foot in such outdoor spaces as open fields, village streets that are cordoned off by police, and/or the front yard of the home of the village leader. Some sakura dancers may also stand or sit in specific formation to create a human fence that sets out the performance area for the presentation of sakura martial arts duels, and other modern sakura or female dances described below.

### **Islam, Links to Traditional Saibatin Performance Practices, and Women**

The *sakura* festivities held at the end of the fasting month are not dominated by strict Muslim beliefs and practices. Colonial-era writers in the 19th and 20th centuries viewed celebrations in Lampung such as at the end of the fasting month more as "folk festivals" (Funke 1961: 262) or "feasts" (*bimbang*) (Marsden 1986: 266). Preparations for big events such as *sakura* and their performances in Skala Brak, illustrate the ready integration of Lampung custom with Muslim-related activities.

For example, the fundamental societal value of self-respect (*pi'il pesenggi*), the traditional communal attitude of mutual help and of working together (*beguai jejama* or *nengah nyampur*), and nurturing kinship ties (*ajang ngejalang* or *sakai sambaian*), merge effortlessly with some of the main Muslim obligations (I., *wajib*) of visiting each other's homes to pay respect to immediate and extended family members (I., *silaturahmi*), and asking each other for forgiveness (I., *mohon maaf lahir dan batin*). On the morning of a *sakura* village procession, official opening speeches by government representatives may be followed by Islamic chanted expressions of praise to Allah (I., *zikir*). The reading or chanting of the Islamic opening formula for any noble activity, such as *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim, bismillahi rahmani rahimi* (With the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) mark the beginning and end of the event, as do prayers of thanks for the community's prosperity (I., *kemakmuran*) and sense of wellbeing (I., *rasa syukur, keselamatan*) (Mustika 2011: 278). In many societies Islamic phrases are read; however in West Lampung the use of the word chant is appropriate when referring to Islamic singing. The West Lampung people take no interest in bans on music as expressed by some orthodox Muslims. Traditional customs and values are strongly maintained and they have long found ways of integrating and combining Muslim values into their daily lives.

Conversions to Islam in some coastal areas of Sumatra are likely to have begun from the 17th century (Funke 1961: 261–267). Up until the arrival of Islam in the mountainous and internal areas of Skala Brak which occurred later in the 18th and 19th centuries, the West Lampung indigenous population largely adhered to Hindu-Buddhist beliefs that over time integrated with the local traditional customs (I., *adat*). Both males and females most likely took part in *sakura* masked village cleansing processions and ceremonies though these remain unknown. To this day *sakura* theatre performed by males only continues to enchant<sup>13</sup> (I., *pesona*) village audiences whose search for protection from *roh* (animist spirits) has persisted in their daily lives and ceremonies. The Muslim influence deemphasises the adolescent male and female social category in the community, but as I have argued, it nevertheless remains a significant component in West Lampung traditional ceremonial Skala Brak practices.



It is likely that women in the Skala Brak region once wore masks during the pre-Muslim period as they performed in the original animist healing or harvest rituals. Ceremonial processions, such as those at transitional rites including weddings and title-giving ceremonies, were also led by a pair of male and female masked clowns (Van Dijk and De Jonge 1980: 21). However, as Islam became more widespread in later years, the division of roles occurred and females were excluded from participating in masked ritualised performance.

Though they have not returned to wearing *sakura* masks, since the 1990s female dancers have played a more active role in the *sakura* procession. New versions of Lampung's well-known traditional female dances, the female welcoming dance (*muli sembah*) and the long-fingernail dance (*sigeh pengutin*) that choreographers have reworked and transformed, were introduced and inserted into the *sakura* program (Photo 4). For example, the beautified physical appearance of *kreasi baru* female dancers and their choreographed dance routines performed to the melodies of the orchestra, compliment the deliberately grotesque and unhuman-like appearance of the *sakura* masks and costumes. While they do not don wooden or cloth masks, the female dancers make up their faces with thickly painted black pencil makeup and long false eyelashes to accentuate the eyes, and they apply similar black makeup around the outline of the face to enhance the hairline.

The new version of the female welcoming dance is performed in groups of eight or more females in circular and/or triangular formations within a defined area. A male and female dancing pair follows and performs fast paced movements together as the procession slowly continues to move forward. The dance is accompanied by sung quatrains, and the music of the ensemble consists of six kettle gongs in a frame, a large gong (*talo balak*) and a smaller gong suspended from a wooden frame (*talo lunik*), two small handheld gongs (*canang*), a frame drum, a two-headed drum, a small pair of cymbals (*rujih*). The female dancers wear their hair in a bun arrangement (I., *sanggul melati*) special to West Lampung and dress in costumes of red velvet bodices and Lampung woven cloth (*tapis khusus*) skirts; the male dancer partnering one of the females wears a *sarong* of matching woven cloth. The females each hold a tray

as they perform which imitates the traditional brass tray (*talam*) and is decorated with gold-trimmed and gold-tasseled red and black square pieces of velvet cloth. The tray carries betel nut (I., *sirih*), cigarettes or sweets, which are offered to select guests during the course of their performance.



**Photo 4** This *kreasi baru* male-female dance was performed with fast paced movements as the *sakura* procession moved slowly forward, accompanied by the *talo balak* ensemble. Cangu village, Batu Brak district, West Lampung.

Source: Mulyawan (2011).

The special new creation female dance introduced to the *sakura* procession, a variation of the traditional long fingernail dance (*sigeh pengutin*), belongs to one of Lampung's most well-known groups of dances, which is commonly performed at official and traditional ceremonial occasions, and in which the female adolescent dancer dominates. Adolescent females and males from performing arts' groups around Lampung learn the traditional version of this dance in pairs. This is a very popular and well known traditional dance studied and performed by male and female adolescents across Lampung as far as Sukadana in the east, Pakuanratu in the north, and Bandar Lampung in the south.<sup>14</sup> This dance is presented to audiences attending state and religious functions, and also at rites celebrating any of the life-stages. Two females stand balanced on top of brass trays raised about 30 centimeters off the ground while performing swaying arm and circular hand movements. A pair of young males kneels or crouches down next to the tray and holds it steady. Since the 1990s, new variations of the long-fingernail dance are regularly performed by young female and male pairs for tourists at five-star hotels in the capital city of Bandar Lampung, including the performance I saw at a five-star hotel in Bandar Lampung in April 2012.

In contrast to the grotesque wooden masks, the special female character based on the traditional female long fingernail dance just mentioned and introduced to the *sakura* procession, is an image of a youthful deity or a princess processing slowly around the streets of the village while maintaining a slight smile on her face at all times. Her allure is made all the more striking and her presence all the more royal-like as she sits poised high on a carriage-like wooden sheet supported on the shoulders of her four *sakura* masked servant guards. Her slow, circular hand movements accentuate her long, gold fingernails. Her many accessories commonly found throughout Southeast Asian female dance costumes include the gold metal-shaped flowers decorating her tall bee-hive hair-style, small gold-coloured garuda bird shapes protruding from her armllets, numerous gold bracelets worn on both forearms, and a gold necklace. Unlike the traditional costume consisting of a headdress, a bodice, and Lampung woven *tapis* skirt, the modern costume consists of generous lengths of artfully folded and

pinned gold satin material fastened securely around her waist with a gold metal belt. Around her neck hangs a small gold-coloured cloth neckpiece of Lampung lace. A piece of gold-coloured cloth several metres long, drapes around her neck and shoulders, and spills over the edge of her platform and falls to the ground dragging along the road for some distance behind her. As the *sakura* actors present her in procession before the eyes of the community audience, her elevated height encourages viewers to look to the sky and to catch glimpses of the sacred poles bearing suspended gifts. Children crowd around her everywhere. Men, women and children watch from the verandahs and front yards of selected homes and from the street. *Sakura* musicians walking ahead and accompanying her, wear wooden masks as they beat their rhythms on their frame drums together with 20 or so other *sakura* actor-musicians.

Unlike the *sakura* actors whose feet remain in contact with the earth at all times, her feet do not once touch the ground, which indicates that she represents a royal personage. The dancer's slow, circular, repetitive hand movements make her long fingernails all the more alluring to the eye. Her character, dance movements, costume and accompanying music suggest that she is an offering to the spirits who are invited to feast on her vision.

## CONCLUSION

Processional masked theatre of Skala Brak is a festive occasion, an example of a pre-Muslim performing art tradition that has been adapted to include Muslim spirits, and that is preserved and passed on to the next generation via key celebrations of the year including Independence Day, regional anniversaries, and *Idul Fitri*. As a form of cultural heritage, *sakura* helps define the Saibatin identity of West Lampung, the ancestral homeland of the Lampung people. As they have done in all likelihood for centuries, village communities come together to attend *sakura* events to watch and participate in the performance-based activity of cleansing the village through ceremonial parades consisting of theatre, dance and music. The adolescent males wearing *sakura* masks may also participate in the climbing of the sacred poles. The

processions and activities become all the more powerful before the eyes of an engaged community; the charm of the males' masked theatrics and the accompanying music, by my observation, enraptures large village audiences. In recent times the inclusion of female dances in the *sakura* procession has lifted the profile of the event. It not only presents images of beauty that balance out with the grotesque (masks) but also highlights the social standing assigned to adolescent males and females by the indigenous community. The tradition of *sakura*, probably dating back centuries, continues to the present day reemerging as a significant genre of celebratory performance connected to an animist past.

Since the early 1990s the revitalisation of West Lampung's performing arts in new versions of old theatrical styles and dance routines has seen an enduring core of traditional Saibatin elements that lie at the heart of the people's identity come to the fore. Lampung's performing arts including masked performance and traditional dance such as mock male martial arts duels- and female long fingernail- dances continue to provide culturally meaningful performance genres of celebration, wrestling to maintain their fundamental elements of structure, content and style. Modern, contemporary Lampung artists have selected theatrical motifs and devices of traditional performance from Saibatin masked theatre, martial arts routines, and female dances, and have reintroduced these elements into the modern performing arts in a province with an ethnically disparate collection of indigenous and transmigrant peoples and traditions. Each performance event constitutes an assertion of a redefined Saibatin identity that with its minority voice, endorsed by the governor and the council of elders, seeks the acknowledgement of Lampung's mainstream, multi-cultural and ethnically diverse society.

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Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge the reproduction of copyright photos in this article. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright holders whom I have been unable to contact.

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## NOTES

1. All foreign words are in Lampungese unless otherwise stated I = Indonesian language.
2. My descriptions in this study are based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2011 and 2012, interviews with artist Mulyawan, many performers, dancers and musicians whom I met in Kenali, Sukadana, Pakuanratu and Bandar Lampung, and various other cities and villages in West, East and South Lampung, as well as information from Mustika's (2011) scholarly study of *sakura*. I

include my own observations of specific performances that I saw and those of a recording of a *sakura* festival provided to me by Mulyawan held at *Idul Fitri* in Cangg village, Skala Brak, that unfortunately I did not attend (*Dokumentasi koreografi lingkungan "beguai jejama" dalam Pesta Sekura sebagai identitas masyarakat Lampung Barat*).

3. The majority of transmigrants are Javanese (61.88%), Sundanese (11.27%), and others (15%). Due to space constraints, the important topic of the impact of their settlements on the Lampung performing arts do not feature in this study and must remain a subject for future research.
4. From 1986 to 1990, the behaviour of *sakura* groups in four West Lampung villages that reportedly included infighting, theft, carrying weapons, and vile public conduct by masked and therefore unidentifiable young males, was shunned by elders as failing to abide by the standards of traditional values and bringing disturbance and shame to the community (Mustika 2011: 214). In the early 1990s the elders instigated a return to traditional values specifically at *sakura* festivals: communities and their leaders were encouraged to come together, collaborate and find ways of eradicating displays of questionable values and behaviour, aided by police presence and the many artistic activities organised in preparation for the event.
5. Balinese choreographer and artist Nyoman Mulyawan who gained a master's degree (S2) from the Indonesian Institute for the Arts (Institut Seni Indonesia) in Jogjakarta came to Liwa at the invitation of the regent of West Lampung to assist in developing and revitalising the local performing arts in the early 1990s, and has lived there in this capacity with his family ever since. He has studied the traditional Lampung arts for over 20 years and is well regarded and accepted by the local community as shown by the continual involvement in festivals and performances organised by him, and the training, preparation and commitment that he requires of them. Interviewing some of the performers after attending a rehearsal of his *kreasi baru* dances in April 2012 confirmed his high standing amongst his peers and students.

6. A related form of masked theatre, *tupping*, emerged in Lampung's southeast coastal region of Kalianda. Migrations from Skala Brak travelled on foot and by boat via the complex network of rivers probably including along the Semangka River to Kota Agung in the Tanggamus district (*kecamatan*), and on to Kalianda (Funke 1961). Actors in both regions intentionally wore deformed-looking masks to depict a range of grotesque character-types as well as animal characters. *Tupping* of the southeast differs from *sakura* in the northwest in style, content and meaning, and is a topic for a separate study (see also Anggraeny 2012).
7. The Lampung worldview consists of an upper world, a middle world and an underworld (Van Dijk and De Jonge 1980: 36). Humans live in the middle world, and are surrounded by good and bad spirits of the upper and under worlds as shown in Lampung's famous ship cloths that typically depict a ship carrying humans and land-based animals journeying across the underworld sea of sea serpents (*naga*) and other animals and below the upper world of mythical garuda birds and other creatures (Totton 2009: 86)
8. Recent pole climbing events have been reported in numerous internet sites, for example by Karzi (2010), in the *Tribune Lampung* site (2011), and in the "*Liwa Kota Berbunga*" blog (n.d.).
9. The distinct role that the adolescent male and female pair is given on ceremonial occasions is supported by my own observations, when I attended the second night of a traditional wedding in Pakuanratu in Way Kanan regency in 2012, a title-bestowing ceremony in Belambangan Umpu in Way Kanan regency in 2012, and another title-bestowing ceremony in Bandar Lampung in 2011. On each of these occasions guests were greeted at the entrance hall or gate by a costumed adolescent male and female pair.
10. In Abung ceremonies in the early 1960s as described by Funke, "love pantun" (*Liebes-Pantuns*) were sung by adolescent males and to which adolescent females responded in kind (Funke 1961: 213). The British explorer Marsden first published in 1783 describes similar activities of *pantun*



singing and social dancing between adolescent males and females in Lampung (Marsden 1986: 298).

11. As noted by Mustika, *sakura* males may also display behaviours and emotions, such as rebelliousness or mischievousness (I., *kenakalan*) though this is not condoned by elders (Mustika 2011: 388).
12. At a circumcision and tooth-filing ceremony I attended in Pakuanratu (Way Kanan regency in the north) in 2012, mock martial arts duelers led the parade as a sign of protecting the participants (two boys and a girl) processing with a male-female *muli maranai* pair, and their parents and other family members.
13. See for example Azzuralhi's blog entry, "*Pesona Topeng Lampung*" (The Charm of Lampung Masks) (Azzuralhi 2011a). The ways in which the effects of *sakura* masked theatre is built up to enchant the audience is described in Thomas (2013).
14. In April 2012, I visited each of these towns and local performance groups welcomed us with traditional dances performed by mostly female and some male adolescents.

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