

A Barometer of Modernity: Village performances in the highlands of West Sumatra

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ABSTRACT

Silek Minang is a local genre of West Sumatran martial arts that is nationally recognised in Indonesia as Pencak Silat. Music is absent in Silek Minang training but accompanies public performances to create a multimodal sensory experience that taps deeply into sentiments of cultural heritage. These holistic representations of tradition serve to maintain a regional sense of identity in the midst of growing nationalist and global influences. With a consideration of modernity, globalisation, and changing modes of cultural transmission, this article discusses a selection of performance genres including Silek Minang during a religious festival in the hinterland of West Sumatra.

Felicia Hughes-Freeland observes that, “dance became a legitimate object of study when globally it was being removed from its socially embedded conditions of practice” (2008: 12). In the context of globalisation, dance anthropology has had to situate its subject within permeable and shifting locales. Tamara Kohn’s multilocal ethnography of the transnational practice of Aikido, for example, discusses how body practices travel and how “social communities form around practices rather than locales” (Kohn, 2011: 66). Lisa Wynn, studying transnational and transcultural Belly dancers who converged upon Cairo, demonstrated that anthropologists can no longer portray themselves as travellers in juxtaposition to fixed, stable, and localised communities (Wynn, 2007: 18-19). Wynn’s study of foreign and Egyptian singers and dancers demonstrated that a cultural form has to be understood within the historical context of its performance and transnational circulation (2007: 225). In the “lived and representational” (Hughes-Freeland, 2008: 22) world of translocal embodied arts, observations should be contextualised in the social environments where the activity takes place, within the demands of the cultural locale, and the framing of the historical moment.

West Sumatra is situated along a historically important trade route in Southeast Asia. With a persistent flow of foreign exchanges and interactions, preservation of local cultural knowledge as a bounded entity has been integral to the formation of a recognisable Minangkabau identity. One of the central elements of this identity was *Silek Minang*, a regional genre of martial arts (see also Cordes, 1992; Pätzold, 2000) nationally recognised in contemporary Indonesia as *Pencak Silat*. ‘Silek Minang’ is a generic name for a patchwork of situated, disparate, locally organised repertoires of physical pedagogy that have been constituted through a variety of social, political and kinship processes. The ubiquitous influence of Silek Minang in cultural values and aesthetics reflects the magnitude of its importance in West Sumatran society. Each Minangkabau community boasts a guarded pedagogy conferred sparingly through exhaustingly extensive methods. Formal measures are observed by the proprietors of cultural knowledge to entrust the techniques of Silek Minang to

reverent members of each generation. In the dissemination of Silek Minang, students are chosen carefully and the transmission of skills follows various cultural codes.

In a book written by the Secretary General of the International Pencak Silat Federation (PERSILAT), Silek Minang instructor Edwel Yusri (born 1963-) writes about the gifts that he had to offer in order to be accepted as a student by respected guru (Anwar, 2007: 6-8). To become the student of one guru, Yusri had to offer a knife, four meters of white cloth, three kilograms of rice, a complete betel set (a kind of nut for chewing), and tobacco leaf cigarettes (2007: 6). To become the student of another guru, he had to offer a hen, a knife, a white cloth, the tiger claw fruit (a kind of citrus that only grows in West Sumatra), rice, white incense, silver coins, as well as a betel set containing fennel, gambier and areca nuts for chewing (2007: 7). Before undertaking periods of training with these teachers, Yusri had to perform a ritual bathing in warm coconut oil (2007: 8). The offerings and rituals signified Yusri's loyalty and commitment to the guru and the guru's acceptance of Yusri as a student. This initiation process was a way of formalising the unwritten agreements between teacher and student and of symbolizing the sacred journey they would undertake together.

Exclusive submission to a single Minangkabau cultural authority is the preference of most teachers. Rituals of initiation signify that a student accepts the expectations and cultural guardianship that the guru demands. The agreements between guru and student have to be carefully negotiated and respectfully adhered to. Training is often secretive and fighting techniques are imparted sparingly. Not all budding practitioners are able to learn the entire repertoire of techniques and not all practitioners are allowed to train with more than one guru. When Silek Minang is performed publicly, lethal techniques are adapted for the stage so that they appeared more dance-like and beautiful. Performers are not permitted to reveal the secrets of their art to an uninitiated audience.

Music appears in public performances of Silek Minang but is rare or absent in training and rehearsals. Silek Minang performances can be integrated into scenes of local Randai theatre but can also be performed as a stand-alone choreographed presentation accompanied by available musical ensembles during public events and ceremonies. The notion of setting martial arts to music may seem strange given that music is usually more fitting for dance. Indeed, local audiences who watch Silek Minang performances do not draw a connection between the music and movement but see them as separate modes of expression that nonetheless cohabit the performance space. Combinations of traditional music and traditional movement, however, create a multimodal sensory experience that taps deeply into sentiments of nostalgia, heritage, and identity. Creating such holistic images of tradition plays a role in maintaining a regional sense of identity in the midst of growing nationalist and global influences.

Since the late twentieth century, Silek Minang like many Minangkabau arts has been challenged by, first, a de-emphasis of kinship patterns that once strongly emphasised the role of maternal uncles in teaching responsibilities; second, the slow acquisition of Silek Minang techniques and philosophy through the conventional teaching model; and third, the emergence of a public school system and a new mode of Islam that has drastically changed regional education. French anthropologist Jean-Marc De Grave (2001), writing about Javanese Pencak Silat, observes that there has been a delocalisation of Pencak Silat practices from the houses of the masters to the practice-halls and gymnasiums of trainers. Silek Minang in West Sumatra is rapidly following suit. Once closely affiliated with the matrilineal structure of West Sumatran society, Silek Minang instruction is opening out to both boys and girls. The transmission of cultural knowledge is being distributed through alternative channels as modernity pulls West Sumatran communities in new directions. As noted by Pencak Silat historian O'ong Maryono, the Javanese model is being adopted across the archipelago by "progressive schools" (Maryono, 1998: 118). The consequence, as De Grave sees it, is that young trainers are deprived of the opportunity for true apprenticeship, lack a density of experience, and are psychologically unprepared within the framework of the task of transmission.

Through the lens of Silek Minang performances in the highlands of West Sumatra during an important religious festival in the Islamic calendar, this article will discuss the changes that are occurring in the transmission of Minangkabau cultural knowledge.

Entertainment for the festivities

The small hillside village of Andaleh Baruah Bukik lies deep in the highlands of West Sumatra, the area that forms the cultural epicentre of the Minangkabau people. Each year, the villagers hold a celebration, called *Hari Raya Idul Fitri*, to mark the end of the fasting month.¹ The community is not very rich, and paying musicians and dancers as well as for costumes and the hire of audio equipment can be quite expensive. To save on costs, *Sunat* ceremonies (circumcision rites for young boys) are held at the same time. Merging the funds for these two events enables a bigger celebration.

The festivities begin with the activities of the *cimuntu*—ghosts from West Sumatra’s mystical past that still live in the Minang imagination. Just before the *Hari Raya* festivities begin, members of the community sneak up into the mountains and disguise themselves in coconut hair or coconut leaves, taking on the guise of the *cimuntu* (see Figure 1, below). They walk down the mountain and through the village collecting money and summoning people to the front of the town mosque to join in the celebrations. No one knows the identities beneath the masks. The *cimuntu* play the part of naughty ghosts that scare children, while simultaneously coordinating and controlling the events that make up this special version of *Hari Raya*. In other villages, the presence of *cimuntu* might be seen as backward, animist, and in conflict with contemporary religious thought. In Andaleh, however, the *cimuntu* are an accepted part of the ceremonies that bring joviality and control to the order of events.



Figure 1. Dressed in coconut hair, a disguised Minangkabau person plays the role of a forest spirit (*cimuntu*).

The cimuntu direct a procession of people down the mountain that includes transvestites dressed especially for the occasion, musicians, dignitaries, and young boys who will be circumcised. A crowd follows the procession down to the village square in front of the town mosque where various performances will take place. Next to the town square is a building where young boys will undergo Sunat. The Hari Raya festivities promise various arts performances as well as a popular game called *Panjat Pinang* where young men from the village form two teams, each trying to climb tall wooden poles, made from trunks of the Pinang tree smeared in grease. The climbing of the Pinang is a comedic accompaniment to the Sunat ceremonies. Although Panjat Pinang is ostensibly a competition, onlookers are less interested in the eventual winner than in the entertaining sight of men slipping and falling down the pole. The cimuntu have a hard time controlling the crowd as it presses to get nearer the Pinang poles.

These contemporary festivities are a mixture of Minangkabau tradition, Islamic religion and various modern influences, with a history that according to locals dates back to at least the 1930s. Nowadays, the celebrations run for many days and involve various artists, who bring the community together through music, dance and performance. These eclectic performances offer a window into the changing cultural world of the Minangkabau people, revealing re-creations of tradition juxtaposed with interpretations of the modern.

Silek Minang is frequently performed for audience entertainment at rural festivities such as Hari Raya Idul Fitri. The art is performed in pairs to demonstrate open hand combat and weapons expertise. While training sessions do not have musical accompaniment, percussion and woodwind ensembles accompany public demonstrations. These ensembles draw upon the musical expertise and instrumentation available in any one community. Traditional Minangkabau instrumentation is preferable but musicians must also think about how best to entertain the public with the instruments, skills, and materials available. Though training might be unaccompanied by music, the use of traditional music in public demonstrations of Silek Minang adds to nostalgic sentiments of tradition, heritage and identity. In the context of rural festivities, music, Silek Minang, and other performance genres are put on display for entertainment, but they also serve as a reminder of cultural heritage and regional identity.

Reinventing performance traditions

The mainstay of almost any traditional Minangkabau musical ensemble is a set of bronze kettle drums called *Talempong Paciek* (see Figure 2, below). Musicians play interlocking patterns on the kettle drums. The interlocking patterns create a melody that emerges when all the musicians are playing together. Double-sided barrel drums, called *Gendang Tambuah*, and the bowl-shaped *Tasa* drum (see Figure 3, below) are another popular form of entertainment. Music is used to entertain and also to accompany a number of Minangkabau performances such as *Tari Piriang* plate-dancing, trance-like displays of the mystical practice of *Dabuiah*, as well as demonstrations of Silek Minang.

The Minangkabau have a number of different aerophones, of which only a few are used to accompany Silek Minang. The most efficacious wind accompaniment to Silek Minang is served by the crisp and buzzing sounds of the *Sarunai* (a short reed bamboo clarinet with four finger holes). Performances of Silek Minang may alternatively feature softer woodwind instruments such as the melodic *Bansi* (a bamboo recorder with one finger hole behind and seven finger holes in front as well as a whistle hole) or the soulful and nostalgic *Saluang* (a basic bamboo flute with four finger holes). As a general tendency, the *Bansi* and *Saluang* only accompany interludes of Silek Minang during traditional *Randai* dance-theatre performances (see Pauka, 1998: 21) or at most during the opening bows of a Silek Minang presentation. The *Bansi* and *Saluang* have soft timbres that correspond well with the solemn opening bows. The harsh tones of the *Sarunai* usually accompany the fight sequences. The loud and buzzing sound of a reed aerophone presents a dynamic and logical match between combat displays and audience engagement.



Figure 2. Members of the arts group *Sari Bunuan Macan Andaleh* play Talempong Paciek kettle-drums in the Hari Raya procession towards the town mosque.



Figure 3. Members of the arts group *Sari Bunuan Macan Andaleh* play Tasa and Gendang Tambuah drums during the Hari Raya procession towards the town mosque.

The Minangkabau describe the music of Silek Minang as ornamental, being added for entertainment purposes and to raise the liveliness of the event. No rhythmic or mimetic relationship exists between the movements of the performers and the rhythm of the music. However, local artists suggest that the interlocking patterns of the percussion instruments are a strong metaphor for the interlocking movements of the Silek Minang performers. The beauty of the art relies on the synchronous performance of essential footsteps by the two performers, which the percussion instruments symbolically replicate. Furthermore, the circular breathing used to play the woodwind instruments evokes a penetrating sonic representation of the unrelenting attention required by the Silek Minang practitioners during a fight. The practitioners purposely avoid falling into time with the beat of the music because in a real fight, falling into synchrony with the music could make their movements predictable and thus more vulnerable. Some elements of the practice of Silek Minang, such as the attention and concentration of the practitioners, remain unchanged when the art is performed in front of an audience. Many elements, however, are purposely changed to make the art more engaging for an audience and sometimes to disguise its brutality.

Local adepts suggest that the visual aesthetics and spatial principles of Silek Minang do not permit a metered rhythmic sonic texture. The dynamics of combat should not be influenced by predictable rhythms. This philosophy applies equally to the artistic movements of the art, called the *bungo* (literally meaning flower). In cases where a rhythmical acoustic counterpart accompanies Silek Minang, the performers must attempt to insulate their concentration from musical sounds; unlike visual information, however, sound is very hard to block out. In a fight-like performance where the moves may be choreographed but the moment of attack is not defined, pulling attention away from the music is essential to the successful execution of techniques. The importance of this modulation of attention is highlighted by scientific experiments looking at the effect of music loudness and reaction to unexpected events. Experimental work has shown that, depending on the task characteristics, intense sound can affect cognitive processes such as information processing. Music can improve motor response time to centrally located visual signals, but increase motor response latencies to peripheral visual cues (Beh & Hirst, 1999; Staum & Brotons, 2000). Music presented at intensities of 75dBA (A-weighted decibels above the threshold of hearing) has been shown to affect short-term memory (Salame & Baddeley, 1989). The amplification of woodwind and percussion instruments through loudspeakers can make the music accompanying Silek Minang significantly louder than 120dBA, which not only affects cognitive processes but also has a deep visceral and stimulating effect. Music may heighten awareness of the central visual field but it decreases responsiveness to peripheral stimuli and might affect motor recall. Thus, the presence of loud music potentially introduces vulnerabilities for an unskilled fighter. Remaining calm, steady, and focused while musical rhythms penetrate your body can be especially difficult. Performances of Silek Minang exemplify a culturally trained skill in which performers must overcome auditory disturbances in the execution of potentially lethal movements.

The lack of rhythmic and mimetic relationships between the music and the movement of Silek Minang performances, combined with the performers' necessity to ignore the musical accompaniment, means that many audience members do not recognise the musical accompaniment as part of the performance. Ask a Minangkabau person about music for Silek, and most respond, "There is no music for Silek Minang." The quotidian experience of noise in social settings also predisposes Minangkabau people to have this response. Minangkabau people are conditioned by their sensory environment to dissociate loud sounds, especially music, from everyday activity. Over-amplified music blares out of speakers from communal transport vehicles, at street stalls, and in shops. Televisions are left on all day at homes, cafés, and office spaces. Every imaginable public space is occupied by noise. Local people have an intriguing capacity to maintain concentration in the midst of noise. At arts institutes, students learning music can even practice individual instruments while in the presence of many other students, each rehearsing their own song at their own pace. Such a learning space would be unimaginable to a student at a European music conservatorium where practice is conducted in noise-proof studios. Noise and music

inundate social spaces in West Sumatran villages. Thus, the presence of music during performances of Silek Minang can go by unremarked. And yet, the music begins with the commencement of Silek Minang performances, and ends at their termination. Musicians even report that they try to capture the tension of the performance through their music, principally through volumetric changes and speed changes. Modernity is rapidly changing the texture of noise in public spaces but the expertise of Minangkabau music groups and dance troupes is also changing. In the sculpted spaces of public performances, musicians and dancers deploy their skills to construct and deconstruct the protean relationships between sound and physical activity.

Silek Minang during Hari Raya Idul Fitri

During the Hari Raya festivities in Andaleh, two groups, *Jenggot Merah* (Red Goatee) and *Gajah Badodorong* (Pushing Elephant), performed Silek Minang. In each performance, there were two performers from each group. The performance by *Jenggot Merah* preceded the performance by *Gajah Badodorong*. Both performances were accompanied by *Talempong Paciek*, the urgent and rousing beats of a *Tasa* drum, the ad hoc rattle of a tambourine, and the loud, rough hum of the *Sarunai*. A piercing melody on the *Sarunai* was played continuously, emphasising the tension between opponents and mimicking their sustained concentration. The performers themselves also produced sounds and noises, such as when one of the performers from *Gajah Badodorong* scraped his knife along the cement ground to emphasise the metallic texture and the sharp edge. The act of producing that sound viscerally evoked the materiality and lethality of the object he was holding.

A performance of Silek Minang generally begins with an elaborate series of ceremonial bows called *pasambahan*. These bows are performed between the practitioners, to audience members, to God and sometimes to the earth as well. Following the *pasambahan*, the practitioners perform cautious poses illustrating the bungle of the art. While maintaining a safe distance, the performers demonstrate postures of readiness, power and prowess. The ability to execute these sequences beautifully demonstrates the ability and adeptness of the performer. The fight sequences that follow are initiated by one opponent attacking the other. Open hand combat techniques are followed by knife techniques; a palpable escalation in tension always accompanies the introduction of a knife into a performance. The knife adds a layer of danger to the movement of Silek Minang that makes the potential consequences of the movements more transparent and conspicuous.

Each village has its own schools and unique practices of Silek Minang that are symbolically rich with socially-bounded meanings. Bows, symbolic attacks, and token gestures of protection are all subject to variation between communities. Because the practices arose in tight-knit communities over successive generations, repertoires of culture-bound gestures accumulated over time and have propagated throughout communities. To the outsider, the gestures are often impenetrable and sometimes unnoticed. These symbols can even be obscure to the uninitiated younger generation of any community. The slap of a thigh, the flick of a wrist in mid air, or even the angle formed by the thumb and the hand can all signify latent abilities that practitioners are trained to perform and recognise. Acknowledging these gestures and performing the appropriate response—by raising an elbow and simultaneously covering an ear, for example—demonstrates skill, knowledge and power. Performances exemplify distinctive characteristics of each village's particular style of Silek and are filled with endogenous networks of gestures and exogenous cultural associations.

The practice of Silek Minang is intended to equip practitioners with the skills to be able to react to the challenge of an unknown adversary. Practitioners search for physical efficiency in their movement as well as complexity in their range of skills. Teachers seek to imbue their students with the confidence to improvise in the face of adversity. In performance, however, the movements of Silek Minang are usually choreographed and performed with the teacher so that the fight does not lose the essential steps (Sedyawati, Kusmastuti, Hutomo & Karnadi, 1991). Choreographing the movements and performing them with a teacher lowers the risks involved, reduces the tension

between the performers, and ensures that fights do not break out. Attacks in Silek Minang are typically straight penetrating movements that require blocking or evasion. If a performance is improvised and not choreographed, this movement dynamic creates a high risk of injury. Improvised performances of Silek Minang are rare and only ever involve long-standing training partners of considerable age and experience. The community demonstrates a degree of consensus as to what constitutes an effective attack and what constitutes an appropriate block. A performance of Silek Minang can only occur between two practitioners who trust each other to be able to see and categorise each other's movements in ways that are relevant to the fluidity of a performance. Without the consensus about the efficacy of attacks and defences that are not performed fully, the interaction would degenerate. Attacks must flow with evasions, and counterattacks must flow with the corresponding blocks. Each performer of Silek Minang must code the movements of his partner in terms of trajectories and shapes that are consequential for his own movement. An attack has to be accepted as effective by the recipient and then pulled before it causes an injury, and the block must be accepted as successful by the attacker before other movements can proceed. If appropriate gestures of acknowledgment have not been pre-negotiated in training, then disagreement can ensue and accidents or conflict can arise.

The movements of a martial art are situated, distributed, and interactively organised in a community of practice. From the large variety of movements possible in any repertoire, members exercise a high degree of selectivity. Practitioners choose movements they deem useful for potential combat needs. The kinds of kicks, punches, blocks, throws, parries, escapes, locks, and holds that are chosen can be influenced by the physical capabilities of the practitioners, their personal preferences, and the stochastic acquisition and execution of particular techniques. If a community of practitioners mutually agrees upon the effectiveness of a movement, then that technique is dynamically absorbed into their evolving movement repertoire. Favoured movements and techniques are constituted as they are distributed and practiced among peers.

Minangkabu traditional performances have origins deeply embedded in village life with subtle influences from Hindu, Malay and Arabic cultures. All West Sumatran performance arts are said to derive from the movements of Silek Minang. For example, in the plate dance (Tari Piriang), the practitioner swings plates without dropping them or breaking them. In doing so, he or she draws on the same form of *tenaga* (energy) cultivated in the martial art. Dabuih, another performance form related to Silek Minang, has a heightened mystical content. Practitioners cut themselves with knives, jump on broken glass with bare feet and burn themselves with fire, all without drawing blood or inflicting pain. Dabuih performances are akin to magic shows and the various acts testify to the invulnerability, faith, and ascetic achievements of the performers. *Randai*, perhaps the most popular traditional theatre form across West Sumatra, is explicitly related to Silek Minang with the sequences of dance between each scene derived sometimes exclusively from the Silek Minang repertoire. In fact most plays end with a fight scene where major conflicts are settled using the movements of Silek Minang.

In more recent years, traditional art forms have been complemented by new performances. Hip-hop dances and improvised rap now punctuate the performances of Silek Minang, Dabuih and Tari Piriang. The community of Andaleh may live deep in the mountains, but their remoteness has not stopped the spread of global popular culture. While they strongly stress tradition, the musicians of Andaleh have incorporated the African *djembe* into their music; the performers sometimes wear jeans and T-shirts, where once they would have worn traditional attire; and the dancers even occasionally perform to American pop music. Despite strong resistance from traditionalist groups, Silek Minang is also changing because the standard national form of Pencak Silat exerts an influence over regional genres of Silek Minang. Regional Silek Minang groups who wish to be nationally recognised must teach and perform a standardised Pencak Silat curricula in addition to their local pedagogy. With increased attention to national and international influences, representations of indigeneity and tradition are becoming increasingly contested.

Modernising public displays of tradition

The changing performances of the *Hari Raya* celebrations in Andaleh are indicative of deeper cultural shifts. Minangkabau society boasts a matrilineal heritage, but has now almost completely adopted a Westernised nuclear family structure. Women once held authority over the traditional Minangkabau houses, with their typical double-peaked roofs and thatched walls. These distinctive homes have been abandoned for modern architectural designs and concrete houses where men play a growing role. But these same changes have not only brought new privileges to men. They have also allowed women to play an active role in festivities and become performers of tradition, roles from which they were previously excluded. For example, women now participate in every aspect of traditional Randai dance-drama theatre performances.

Before the shift to the nuclear family, young boys were not allowed to live at home. After the Sunat circumcision rite, they were required to leave home to be raised in a traditional commune called a *surau*, where they resided until marriage. Here they were taught traditional law (*Adat*), religion and other life-skills. *Adat* is Minangkabau customary lore comprising fundamental principles necessary to maintain balance and harmony between the needs of the person and the community (Tanner & Thomas, 1985). *Adat* decrees that men and women of the same lineage live in harmony, especially when dealing with inheritance decisions (Krier, 1995). In Minangkabau social formations, *Adat* once underpinned the very fabric of Minangkabau epistemology and ontology (Kahn, 1993). Colonialisation and the rise of nationalism have transformed many of the fundamental principles that underpin matrilineal customary law (Acciaioli, 1985: 152). One clear example of this conflict is the government's insistence on having all households headed by a male, and that his name has to be used on all government forms, with the wife's and children's names placed after his. This practice goes against the codes of matrilineality, where the mother's name is handed down to the children (Kato, 1980). In many regions throughout Indonesia, *Adat* is now increasingly used only for its aesthetic value in theatrical plays and performances (Acciaioli, 1985: 152).

As part of life in the *surau*, training involved basic lessons in Silek Minang, after which young boys could develop skills in other performance arts and games. Young men were entrusted with the skills of Silek Minang so that they could protect their village (Sedyawati, 1981). Another motivation to learn Silek Minang was the practice of *merantau* whereby young men who had come of age would leave their village to make their money before returning home to marry and begin a family (see also Barendregt, 1995). Silek Minang, an art of combat and defence, was an essential skill for the young traveller. Today, however, the practice of *merantau* has dwindled and so too the interest in learning Silek Minang.

Nowadays, young Minangkabau boys are no longer brought up living in the *surau*, but live at home with their parents. The boys of Andaleh are no exception and continue to live at home after the Sunat ceremonies. Historically, being brought up in the *surau* was a central feature of a Minangkabau man's education and an integral place of cultural instruction in the indigenous martial art of Silek Minang. With the adoption of the nuclear family structure, Silek Minang is no longer exclusively for boys, and all boys are no longer obliged to practice. Many schools have become less secretive and training methods have altered. This transformation has led to changes that have spilled over into other arts. For example, Tari Piriang, along with other popular Minangkabau dances, no longer uses the closed postures and solid stances that once marked its relationship to Silek Minang. Dances like Tari Piriang have made the transition from the *surau* and onto the performance stage where the movements have become larger in order to appeal to audiences. In Silek Minang, however, the body is compact and practitioners present the narrowest possible surface. Related dances, which were in part used as a sort of cross-training, similarly used compact movements. As Minangkabau society opens itself to global customs, its dances and traditions similarly find themselves moving from traditions dominated by *en dedans* movement to performance arts characterised by *en dehors* movement.

At the threshold of cultural change and the precipice of a liminal present, the contemporary performances of the *Hari Raya* festivities in Andaleh represent a constant negotiation between regional heritage, national influences, and the pull of global trends. A Minangkabau proverb states, “*indak lakang dek paneh, indak lapuak dek hujan*”, meaning that some Minangkabau traditions are unchangeable and are “not worn out by the sunshine, nor eroded by the rain”. But subtle changes in Minangkabau performance arts reflect broader changes in West Sumatran society. Another Minangkabau proverb is arguably more appropriate: “*alam takembang jadi guru*”, the “blooming of the world is a teacher”. The social ecologies of the Minangkabau people are expanding as they become more exposed to outside influences. Correspondingly, their arts are evolving as they embrace change and adapt to new cultural environments. The culturally entrained bodies of the Silek Minang performers, the Tari Piriang dancers, and the Dabuih mystics become an expression of the lived present that recreates itself according to the evolving context of a constantly changing world. In many ways, the performance arts of Minangkabau communities are representative of the wider cultural shifts felt throughout West Sumatra. The integration of external influences and internal social changes are no doubt bringing forth re-evaluations and redefinitions among the West Sumatrans of what it is to be Minangkabau.

In the suraus of West Sumatra, Silek Minang was an instructive intervention that did not impose a choreographic design upon a student’s movement, but offered a means of improvisation for the student to move within Minangkabau society and to navigate through a specific world of cultural activity. In the practice of Silek Minang, young students learnt the prescribed yet unverbilised codes of conduct that permeated Minangkabau life. Since Indonesian independence and the advent of intense globalisation, changes in the structures of Minangkabau society have been so great that the practice of Silek Minang struggles to find the social anchors it once had. Nonetheless, performances of Silek Minang are a potent representation of Minangkabau history and tradition. Talempong paciek, also a cultural heirloom of the Minangkabau, adds to the nostalgic sense of tradition, because it too taps into sentiments of heritage and identity. The multisensory coupling of traditional music and traditional movement may seem arbitrary because of the lack of any rhythmic structural relationship. However, Silek Minang and Talempong Paciek reinforce each other to an audience who recognise both arts as rich expressions of cultural patrimony.

Note

1. Performances of Silek Minang during the Hari Raya festivities were documented on October 20, 2007.

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