

D.S. Farrer

MUSLIMS IN GLOBAL SOCIETIES SERIES

# Shadows of the Prophet

*Martial Arts  
and Sufi Mysticism*



Springer

# Muslims in Global Societies Series

## Volume 2

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D.S. Farrer

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Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism



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*But as there is no language for the Infinite,  
How can we express its mysteries  
In finite words?  
Or how can the visions of the ecstatic  
Be described in earthly formula?  
So mystics veil their meanings  
in these shadows of the unseen*

*Mahmud Sa'adu'l-Din Shabistari  
(quoted in al-Attas 1963: 25)*

# Preface

Contemporary accounts of Malay culture that focus on shamanism, dance, medicine and performance reveal only a partial view of Malay mysticism. However, given knowledge of the Malay martial art (*silat*) a more comprehensive understanding of Malay mysticism, religion, sorcery and magic becomes possible. Recognizing the *silat* master's (*guru silat*) role in Malay mysticism reconfigures the social anthropology of Malay religion, sorcery and magic. Hence this account explores Malay mysticism, shamanism and sorcery from the perspective of *silat*, which may be considered as a kind of embodied war magic or warrior religion.

*Shadows of the Prophet: Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism* is based upon my doctoral dissertation (Farrer 2006b). Part I of the book, *reflections*, outlines the methodological and theoretical base of the research. Chapter 1 outlines the fieldwork method of performance ethnography used to investigate a transnational *silat* organization called Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. This group are an offshoot of the Islamic Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order headed internationally by Shaykh Nazim, and led in Southeast Asia by a Malay Prince; H.R.H. Shaykh Raja Ashman. Readers who prefer to delve directly into the ethnographic materials may skip Chapter 2, which contains an extensive academic literature review of anthropological theories of art, embodiment, magic, and performance read alongside Malay animism, shamanism, ritual and theatre. This reading encouraged me to merge perspectives from the anthropology of art with the anthropology of performance to conceptualise *silat* through the “performance of enchantment” and the “enchantment of performance.”

Part II, *echoes*, sketches eleven *silat* styles, alongside *silat* weaponry, dance, and martial techniques, before turning to the distinctive features of Seni Silat Haqq (Chapter 3). Next, I address the cosmology of *silat*, especially the shadow and reflection soul, which relates to Islamic Sufism, Malay magic, shadow theatre, and to notions of appearance and reality. Changing tack I consider Islam as a warrior religion, analyzing the secrets of the prayer, chanting (*dhikr*), and the idea of becoming a shadow of the Prophet (Chapter 4).

Part III, *doubles*, explores the *guru silat* in the creation and maintenance of *silat*, and provides detailed genealogical data. I outline the career of the *guru silat* and regard how they double one another through spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*), consider ritual empowerment granted through worldly and other-worldly powers, including rajas, saints, and spirits, and explore the relation of the *guru silat* to the

state (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 considers *silat* practitioners travelling from England to Malaysia, and Malaysian practitioners travelling to England to stage a theatre show. British students experienced social dramas engineered through collective forty-day retreats where adherents expected to break their egos (*nafs*), which considered alongside theatre raises questions concerning how social and aesthetic dramas feed into one another.

Part IV, *shadows*, charts the unseen realm (*alam ghaib*). Divination rituals provide the *guru silat* with a personality theory, followed by an ordeal through boiling oil to reveal the power of God to grant invulnerability. The experience of these rituals examined together with cross-cultural and historical data, alongside theories of debunking, ritual heat, and war magic, let me to propose a theory of *occulturation*, meaning the attribution of occult power to esoteric skills (Chapter 7). Finally, Chapter 8 traces death and the afterlife. In summoning the shadows of the potent dead via martial dance, artwork, and urobic icons *silat* physically and spiritually transforms the practitioner by relinquishing their fear of death.

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Shaykh Nazim and H.R.H Shaykh Raja Ashman both generously gave their permission for this study to be undertaken. Pa’ Ariffin introduced me to *silat* in 1996 and provided warm hospitality during my many stays at his houses in Malaysia. Hospitality was also extended by his family including Muss, Din, Tutak, Watri, Jad, Fatima, Mrs. Mahidin and Pa’ Tam. I would like to thank the entire Seni Silat Haqq Melayu troupe, including Moone, Cecily, Chief, Colin, Toby, Paul and Nazim. Nirwana Gelanggang in Kuala Lumpur, especially Cikgu Kahar, Jazwant, Solleh, and Rambo taught me valuable lessons. Cikgu Ezhar initiated me into *silat gayong*. I am grateful to the late Razak for hosting me after some particularly greasy fieldwork.

I would like to thank Mahaguru Hussain bin Kaslan for allowing me to observe his black-belt class, *guru silat* Samat for lessons in *silat cimande*, and Sheikh Alau’d din who put me through a *silat* instructor’s course with the Singapore Silat

Federation. Thanks to Pa' Zaini and Azman for lessons in *silat lima beradik*. Dr. Saiful Nazim provided me with home visits for emergency medical attention. My thanks go to Ted and Julia for hosting me in grand style in Kuala Lumpur. The late *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad and his wife Hamida were remarkable consultants, and I thank them for their warmth, friendship and hospitality.

I have been learning martial arts since 1975, and many instructors have helped to develop my view of the martial arts. These include Bob Rose, John and Nicky Smith, Des Bailey, Douglas Robertson and Donald Kerr, the late Grandmaster Ip Shui, Ip Chee Geurng and especially Paul Whitrod. Many thanks also go to Sifu Ng, Sifu Chow and Sifu Tan for teaching me Chin Woo.

Julie, my wife, translated *silat* materials, gathered data from female Muslim informants, and took excellent photographs. Very special thanks go to Wak Bari, Salma, Masri, Hadi, Lisa, Captain Jamal, Johari, Mdm. Watri, Yayi and Datuk Jafaar. This work does not necessarily express opinions other than my own, and the people I consulted are not culpable for any errors and omissions that may appear in the following pages. *Terimah kasih dan maaf zahir batin*.

Guam  
May 2009

D.S. Farrer

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## ***Dramatis Personæ***

### **“Bandits”**

Shaykh Nazim

Shaykh Raja Ashman  
Pa’ Ariffin Yeop Mahidin

Nazim  
Mut Nor  
Eshan  
Faizal

Pa’ Din  
Moose  
Tutak  
Moone  
Yeop  
Mrs. Mahidin  
The late Datok Yeop Mahidin M.B.E.

Head of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi  
Sufi *tarekat*  
Caliph for Southeast Asia  
Leader of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu &  
Silat Gayong UK  
*Zawiya* secretary, Kuala Lumpur  
*Tarekat* member  
*Tarekat* member  
*Tarekat* member

Royal bodyguard/*silat* teacher  
Malay actor  
*Zawiya* caretaker, Janda Baik  
Pa’ Ariffin’s wife  
Pa’ Ariffin and Moone’s son  
Pa’ Ariffin’s mother  
Leader of 26,000 *kampung* guards

### **Seni Silat Haqq Melayu**

Cecily  
Chief  
Khalid  
Siddique

Singer, dancer and actress  
London landlord  
London taxi driver  
Khalid’s student

### **Silat Seni Gayong UK**

Suleiman  
Yasmin

Pa’ Ariffin’s *silat gayong* student  
Suleiman’s wife

**Others**

Cikgu Ezhar

Cikgu Kahar

Mohammad Din Mohammad

Syed Hussain Alatas

Masri

Wak Sarin

Razak

Pa' Zaini

Special forces trainer (*silat gayong*)

Black belt instructor (*silat gayong*)

*Guru silat (silat kuntau Melaka)*

Sufi mystic and political writer

*Silat siluman harimau*

*Guru silat (silat siluman harimau)*

Patron on Nirwana Gelangganng

*Guru silat (silat lima beradik)*

# Chapter 1

## Seni Silat Haqq Melayu: A Sufi Martial Art

The integral connection of religion or spirituality to Asian martial arts has long been known, as has the correlation of combative forms to the nobility. For example, in Japan the Samurai followed the code of *bushido*, a derivative of Buddhism and Shintoism, and in some styles of Chinese kung fu sets of movements are named “Buddha hands” and “yin yang seizing hands.” Therefore it is not surprising that religion, mysticism, and magic are embodied in Malay martial arts (*silat*), or that *silat* was once considered to be the exclusive purview of the Malay aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> Along with noble and spiritual connections many Asian combative forms, including *silat*, are also linked to medicine, art, and calligraphy, but these links and their overall assemblage have rarely received attention in the Malaysianist anthropological literature.

“Martial art” is a modern term for Asian combative practices and the discourses arising from them spanning long centuries of transmission. Martial arts are a whole comprised of philosophy, religion, magic, medicine, and the combat skills needed to defend the self, family, community, religion, and state; as such they are microcosms of culture *par excellence*. By “martial art” I am referring to an ontological and an epistemological category; a martial art is composed from a series of parts (philosophy, religion, magic, medicine, and combat skills), conceived and configured into an analytical whole. Therefore martial arts may be understood as a complex “multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 2002: 8).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Malaysian informants use the term *silat* to describe Malay martial arts. Following their use I employ *silat* as a noun, and *bersilat* as a verb meaning to “play” *silat*. *Bersilat* is abbreviated from “*bermain silat*,” which literally means “to play *silat*.” *Pesilat* refers to what Malays call the “*silat* player” or practitioner. There is a formidable arsenal of terms used to refer to martial arts in Southeast Asia, and many problems of definition, semantics and synonyms. In Malaysia, Malay martial arts are referred to as *seni silat* (the art of *silat*), *bersilat*, *ilmu silat*, (*silat* science/magic), and *seni-beladiri* (self defence). *Gayong* is another synonym for *silat* in Malaysia and Sumatra. There are many variations in Indonesia, but basically in Sumatra *silat* is called *silek*, and in Java *silat* is known as *pencak silat*. Chinese kung fu fused with *silat* is known as *kuntao*.

<sup>2</sup> Martial arts offer insights into discourses of power, body, self, identity (Zarrilli 1998), gender, sexuality, health, colonialism, nationalism (Alter 1992, 2000), history, culture (Sheppard 1972), emotions (Rashid 1990), and warrior cults (Elliot 1998). Ethnographic literature documenting the martial arts began to flower in the 1990s including, for example, Lowell Lewis (1992) on the

Literature regarding *silat* has steadily accumulated during the past three decades. General surveys of *silat* in Southeast Asia include Draeger's (1972) pioneering study of Indonesian combatives and weaponry, and Maryono's (2002) more recent overview which examines the transition of *silat* from mysticism to sport (*silat olahraga*). Technical manuals of Malay *silat* include Anuar (1992), Hamzah bin Ahmad (1967), Ku and Wong (1978), Orlando (1996), and Shamsuddin (2005). References to *silat* are to be found scattered across the literature of Southeast Asian theatre and dance, including de Zoete and Spies (1952: 252–257), Fernando-Amilbansa (1983: 34), Mohd. Chouse Nasuruddin (1995), and Simatupang (n.d.). Other references are found in martial arts literature such as Chambers and Draeger (1978) and Maliszewski (1996). Cordes (1990), Mohd. Anis Md. Nor (1986), and Pauka (1998, 2002) address *randai silek*, the *silat* based theatre and dance form of the Minangkabau. De Grave (2001), Gartenberg (2000), Wiley (1993, 1994), and Wilson (1993, 2004) discuss *pencak silat* in Java with an emphasis on power, mysticism, rationalization, and the development of the modern Indonesian nation state.

Rashid (1990), Sheppard (1972, 1983), Tuan Ismail (1991), and Shamsuddin (2005) focus specifically upon *silat* in Peninsular Malaysia. Tuan Ismail (1991) produced an exceptional analysis of Malay *silat* (*silat Melayu*) from a social science perspective, which included dozens of technical photographs and discussion. Rashid (1990) proposed that *silat* acts as a psychological trigger of the emotions prior to violence. Steeped in Islamic mysticism, Malay *silat* coexists with animist cult-like practices (Rashid 1990: 92–93). Hence *silat* is addressed in books on Malay magic as a form of magical dance (Skeat [1900] 1984), as a type of war magic (Shaw 1976: 22–29), and as a form of shamanism (Werner 1986: 22–39). My account seeks to address and expand the discussion of *silat* as a form of shamanism, sorcery, magic, Sufism and alchemy.<sup>3</sup>

As microcosms of culture the martial arts are a good place to re-examine some of the thorny problems of anthropology. Africanist anthropology draws a distinction made famous by Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977 in his study of the Azande: that the witch is innately a witch by virtue of a witch substance contained in the belly, whereas the sorcerer's knowledge and power are learned. Though seen as a cause for misfortune the powers of the witch are exercised outside of the knowledge of the witch who may not even be aware that he or she is a witch. The unconscious power of the witch to cause harm contrasts with that of the sorcerer whose malevolent power to injure and kill is exercised deliberately through magical ritual. In contrast to Africanist anthropology, Stephen (1987: 67, 73–75) notes that in Melanesia the shaman, the sorcerer, and the meditative mystic are part of the same complex of

---

Brazilian martial art *capoeira*; Wiley's (1997) *Filipino Martial Culture*; and Zarrilli's (1998) work on *kalaripayattu*.

<sup>3</sup> I employ the term "alchemy" in the Jungian sense, not literally to transform lead into gold, but as a metaphor for the transformation of the self (Jung 1953).

practitioners—each is a master of souls—with the difference being that the shaman has simply been more accessible to anthropological enquiry than the sorcerer.

Developing from Stephen's work my thesis is that the analytical separation between the *bomoh* (indigenous Malay healer) and the *guru silat* (*silat* master) tends to be overblown: the *guru silat* are warriors and healers, artists and religious virtuosos, sorcerers and shamans.<sup>4</sup> Although, *guru silat* are here predominantly conceptualised as war magicians, they may also be addressed as warrior shamans (to emphasise the magic of healing) or warrior sorcerers (to emphasise the magic of killing). Therefore, without more of an understanding of Malay *silat* and of the practices of the *guru silat* the anthropology of Malay magic, shamanism and sorcery is imbalanced.

The problem of faulty conceptualizations rebounding through the literature partly arises due to the conceptual legacy bequeathed by the British colonial scholars. For example, Winstedt's [1925] (1993) book *The Malay Magician* bears the subtitle *Being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi*, but omits to discuss the *guru silat*. I attempt to redress the balance which has tipped so far in disfavour of the *guru silat*, and to restore them to their rightful position as the inheritors, producers, and keepers of the Malay inheritance (*warisan*), including knowledge relating to combat, healing, sorcery, magic and shamanic performance. To my knowledge this is the first ethnographic account to examine Malay *silat*.

## Prologue

This account of the Malay martial art *silat* focuses upon a particular *silat* organization called Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. Pa' Ariffin, who is a follower and bodyguard (*hulubalang*) of the Malaysian Prince H.R.H Shaykh Raja Ashman, leads Seni Silat Haqq Melayu.<sup>5</sup> Raja Ashman is the son of the Sultan of Perak, and a foremost figure (*caliph*) of a transnational organization of Islamic mystics known as the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order (*tarekat*).<sup>6</sup> The Haqqani branch of the Naqshbandi Order—there are many branches, see Nicholson [1914] (1963), Trimmingham (1971), and van Bruinessen (1992, 1998)—is headed by Shaykh Nazim, who is venerated as a living Saint, and regarded

<sup>4</sup> Wilkinson is perceptive when he says that Islamic mysticism “when it takes the pantheistic form of self-identification with emanations from a divine principle” is the source of many performances such as the *dabus* (where “aspirants” stab themselves with *keris*) (Wilkinson 1906: 16).

<sup>5</sup> In the Malay language (*Bahasa Melayu*) *pak* abbreviates *pak cik* meaning “uncle,” *mak* abbreviates *mak cik* (aunt), and these are used as an honorific prefix by *silat* elders, and connote a kind of fictive kinship. In Malaysia many *silat* masters may prefix their name with *cikgu* (teacher) rather than *guru silat*, although the terms can be used interchangeably. Many students simply refer to the teacher as “Pak” (said Pa’ as the “k” is not aspirated in Malay). Javanese Malays may use the term *wak* (Uncle) or *embok* (Aunt) in much the same way (only here the “k” is aspirated). In Indonesia, *guru silat* may be called *ibu* (mother) or *pak* (father, from *bapak*) (Farrer 2006a: 29 n13). Pa' Ariffin uses the old style Pa' in writing his name and his overseas students run the words together calling him something like the incendiary liquid “paraffin.” I have adopted this usage throughout.

<sup>6</sup> *Caliph* means deputy, ruler of the community of Islam.





**Fig. 1.1** Janda Baik *zawiya* (Sufi lodge)

by his followers as the contemporary representative of God upon earth. Seni Silat Haqq Melayu claim to practise the original Malay *silat* (*silat Melayu*), which they bill as a Sufi martial art, and (formerly) a closely guarded secret of the Malay aristocracy.<sup>7</sup>

Except for occasional lengthy forays into Malaysia, Pa' Ariffin resides in the United Kingdom. In 1996, shortly after having attained a hard won black-sash in Southern Praying Mantis kung fu, I joined his cosmopolitan group for black-belt training, and I trained in London with them for the next two years. In December 1999 I was invited by email to a jungle camp in a village called Janda Baik in Pahang, Malaysia (Fig. 1.1).

Here the *guru silat* and many of his followers gathered together with two container loads of their possessions, and began to stockpile food as a precaution “in case anything should happen” (Pa' Ariffin).<sup>8</sup> They were waiting for Doomsday (*Qiamat*), which in a premonition foretold by Sheikh Nazim was said to coincide with advent of the New Millennium.

At the time I was reading *When Prophecy Fails*, and this curious ethnography of a millenarian cult in 1950s America prompted me to attempt a lone ethnography of

<sup>7</sup> In Peninsular Malaysia the term *seni* (art) differentiates Malay *silat* from Indonesian *pencak silat*.

<sup>8</sup> Nielson (1998: n.p.) notes the same phenomenon in Lebanon where Naqshbandis gathered to wait out the New Millennium after stark predictions of the world's demise from the group's leader Shaykh Nazim.

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu; at first covertly, secretly making field notes while supposedly writing letters home, and later overtly, when I decided to seek the approval of the group (Festinger et al. 1964). The end of the world failed to occur, but towards the end of the Millennium several students converted to Islam, by surprise. For example, when Pa' Ariffin asked one student "are you ready?" he had expected something entirely different. This sounds bizarre, but he thought he was going to place his hands into a cauldron of boiling oil. The ordeal by boiling oil was a kind of reward the senior students had been promised for their hard work; a reward that was to follow a forty day period of prayers and training, but one that did not materialize for anyone at Janda Baik. Inexorably, most of the students ran out of money, time, and patience for the *guru silat*, and for each other, and after several heated arguments Seni Silat Haqq Melayu began to disintegrate. In this case cognitive dissonance did not bring the group closer together—instead, to coin a phrase from Pa' Ariffin, they became "fed up of being fed up" and scattered.<sup>9</sup>

Later, other camps were spoken of, this time more for *silat* than anything else, but none was immediately forthcoming. Finally, in 2001 the *guru silat* decided to put a few of his students through another forty day period of training in Malaysia, and I tagged along. This time, the training did culminate in an ordeal by boiling oil. The ordeal by boiling oil (*mandi minyak*) is an initiation rite of the Malaysian martial arts organization Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia, a martial art that shares certain fundamental affinities with Seni Silat Haqq Melayu.

Upon his return to London Pa' Ariffin began to concentrate his efforts upon introducing *silat gayong* to the U.K. The remaining students of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu expressed a strong dislike for their new uniforms, with their three-quarter length trousers and pointy hats (*tanjat*), and regarded the idea of shifting from Seni Silat Haqq Melayu to Silat Seni Gayong U.K. as an inverted metamorphosis, a "status degradation," where the polished style of the aristocrats was to be replaced by what they regarded as a crude peasant prototype.<sup>10</sup> Late in 2002 Pa' Ariffin brought a contingent of Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia students (*pesilat*) to the U.K., and using funds derived from a few of his diehard British students set up a theatre show in London called *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*. The show ran for one week and although it

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<sup>9</sup> For a useful discussion of literature concerning cognitive dissonance see Luhrmann (1989: 268–273).

<sup>10</sup> Finkelstein (1996: 678) points out that: "Although he [Garfinkel] listed eight conditions required to achieve status degradation the notion hinges on the way in which 'moral indignation brings about the ritual destruction of the person being demeaned' (1956: 421) so that 'he must be defined as standing at a place "outside," he must be made strange' (op. cit.: 423)." Finkelstein uses this notion to explain the collapse of authority in the prison when a new governor refused to implement the Christmas staff rota, leading to his inability to run the prison, and his subsequent replacement. Finkelstein argues that the governor's appointed task was to degrade the prison from "a tough place for hard men to a closed training prison. In attempting to accomplish this task the governor was made "strange" and in the process orchestrated his own degradation" (Finkelstein 1996: 682). As we shall see, a similar process is at work in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu with the collapse of the authority of Pa' Ariffin when he shifted his attention from Seni Silat Haqq Melayu to Silat Gayong Malaysia U.K.

was not entirely a flop resulted in significant financial losses, ferocious outbursts of temper and yet more schism. Later, Pa' Ariffin was to go on to take a minor role in the big-budget Malaysian film, called *Puteri Gunung Ledang: A Legendary Love* (2004), which cemented his career as an actor, and returned him to the big screen, a screen that he had disavowed years earlier.

## Deviationist Religious Cults

The bloody 13 May 1969 race riots between the Malays and the Chinese preceded a resurgence of *silat* movements across Malaysia (Shamsul 1997: 212). Although he does not go into detail, Shamsul links the “reemergence of Islamic-oriented, millenarian-inclined, martial art (*silat*) cult groups” to “the first phase” of the rise of the *dakwah* movement (Shamsul 1997: 212–215), a revivalist Islamic movement which was developed further by Muslim university students through the formation of ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia).<sup>11</sup>

This development of *dakwah* (lit. to summon or to call to Islam) Shamsul dubs “the reawakening period (1969–1974)” (Shamsul *ibid.*). Shamsul shows how the *dakwah* movement subsequently went through three more stages, including “the forward movement period (1975–1979)” where students returning from scholarships to the Middle East led the movement to become increasingly radical; followed by “the mainstreaming period (1989–1990),” where the leaders of the movement (such as Anwar Ibrahim) and their ideals are incorporated into mainstream politics. This incorporation led to the widespread dissemination of a moderate version of the *dakwah* movement. The result was the inculcation of an overt, self-righteous, and politicized Islam, clearly visible through the ever-increasing adoption of the “mini *telekung*,” a headscarf for women that covers the hair, neck and the chest (Shamsul 1997: 217). The fourth stage, “the industrial period,” that proceeded from 1990, is where the Malaysian government’s successful response to the *dakwah* movement paid off in terms of booming trade relations with Iran and other nations in the Middle East.

To control the *dakwah* movement the Malaysian government must define its position and trajectory, and oppose those nonhegemonic *dakwah* elements it deems extreme or deviationist. By the year 2000, The Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (Jakim) had compiled a list of 125 so-called “deviationist” religious cults which are said to move “about the country as *silat* groups or as people imparting lessons on the art of self-defence.”<sup>12</sup> These groups include the “Qadiani, Taslim, [a] movement spreading the teachings of Hussein Anak Rimau, Budi Suci,” Nasrul

<sup>11</sup> As Shamsul points out “*dakwah* is an Arabic word meaning salvation, including evangelical activity” (Shamsul 1994: 101). See also Mutalib (1993). Kessler (1986) discusses the acrimonious dispute between Shamsul (1983) and Nagata (1980, 1984) concerning the *dakwah* phenomenon.

<sup>12</sup> Jakim Research Division Director, Mustafa Abdul Rahman, quoted in *The Straits Times*, 18 July 2000.

Haq,<sup>13</sup> and Al-Ma'unah.<sup>14</sup> Adherents, once identified and captured, are sent for rehabilitation at the Islamic Faith Rehabilitation Centre (*The Straits Times*, 18 July 2000). *Silat* groups were also involved in the training of Jamaah Islamiah, the Southeast Asian branch of Al-Qaeda, shown on television news clips performing *loi* (a sideways jumping technique found in *silat*). To offset accusations of “deviationism” Singaporean *silat gayong* instructors discontinued their practice of the ordeal by boiling oil when they heard reports that Al Qaeda operatives underwent the ritual as part of their training.

Elsewhere, Shamsul notes that it is important to distinguish “the longstanding Sufi groups, such as the *naskhshyabandiah school*, [who] have also sometimes been hastily and mistakenly categorized as one of the recently formed *dakwah* groups” (Shamsul 1994: 104). Nagata (2004: 105) briefly discusses the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* in Malaysia in an article on “alternative models of Islamic governance,” focusing primarily on the “*dakwah* (‘call to the faith’)” movement, specifically on the Al Arqam (previously the Darul Arqam) group, which was officially banned as deviationist by the Malaysian authorities in 1994. She states that “rumors described the existence of martial arts training camps and militias in Southern Thailand, where Asha’ari [the leader] maintained a residence” (Nagata 2004: 110). Nagata says that Al Arqam spread through the creation of polygynous kinship networks (2004: 101). Given its community-based provision of social, religious, educational, welfare, and economic programs and opportunities, Nagata asks if it is appropriate to consider Al Arqam as “theoretically, running a mini-Islamic state” (2004: 113).

Nagata (2004: 113) briefly considers several possible models for such an Islamic state from the Middle East and from the seventh century CE city-state of Medina, and notes the exemplary living in alternative religious communities has the potential to demoralize “incumbent political regimes” and that this is “disturbing” to the authorities. Nagata concludes by mentioning the traditional diasporic and proselytizing function of Sufi *tarekat*, and says that: “It may be tempting, further, for outsiders to view these linkages as an infrastructure which may opportunistically serve, on occasion, as a conduit for less quiescent activities, including terrorism. In a post-9/11 climate, there is always the temptation, looking backwards at such networks, to see more teleology, conspiracy, or militancy, and to tar all Islam with the same subversive caricature.” Although Nagata makes several references to the Naqshbandi Sufis under Sheikh Nazim, in this article she mainly reworks and repackages old material concerning Al Arqam. Furthermore, her message regarding the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* is not clear: are they an alternative form of governance, or merely a religious movement?

<sup>13</sup> For an account of Nasrul Haq see Nagata (1980: 433–434; 1984: 64–69).

<sup>14</sup> Al-Ma'unah are also known as the Al-Ma'unah arms heist gang, so-called because they raided a military armoury on 2 July 2000 and stole more than one hundred assault rifles, grenade launchers and ammunition. Before surrendering after a tense five-day standoff the group killed two of its four hostages (*The Straits Times*, 13 July 2000. “Al-Arqam Cult Back Under Different Name”). According to the police, the Al-Ma'unah cult were terrorists who planned a violent uprising to overthrow Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad’s government (*The Straits Times*, 12 July 2000. “Cult’s Killings Go Against Islam”).

It is well known that in former times the Sultans' power in part stemmed from their power within Islam, where they could be considered the Shadow of God on earth (Milner 1981: 53–54). In the modern era of capitalist state formation in Malaysia the power of the Sultans is curtailed (except as regards religious matters), but that of the aristocracy is emasculated. It is in the climate of an increasingly self-confident Malay middle-class, bolstered by the government's special assistance for Malay economic development, and its co-option of a religious *dakwah* ideology, that the marginalized former aristocracy must operate.

## Note on Organization

This account is organized into four parts that roughly correspond to the terms double, echo, reflection, and shadow. Broadly speaking I use the term “reflections” to refer to the performance ethnography and to the discussion of anthropological theory, “echoes” to provide a linkage between performance and cosmology, “doubles” to describe the mimesis and alterity of the *guru silat* and their students and the relation of social to aesthetic drama, and most importantly “shadows” which relates to the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order and to Malay “animism,” specifically in terms of calling the shades of the dead. Because one term can sometimes be substituted for another their placement is somewhat arbitrary; yet doubles, echoes, reflections, and shadows convey a theme that pervades *silat* and Southeast Asian culture.

Before proceeding further the “tain of the mirror,” by which I mean the research methods and my role as an ethnographer need to be outlined.<sup>15</sup> The *tain* of the mirror is the reflective backing placed on the back surface of the glass, and this is an apposite metaphor to apply to ethnographic practice, because the finished result may conceal the ethnographer, and the artifice of style, presenting the reflection as if the ethnographer were invisible. To defray this artifice somewhat, wherever possible I have tried to adopt a self-reflexive experiential stance (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 31–33).

## Entry to the Group

My initial entry into the group occurred in 1996 after I saw an advert for black-belt training in the gymnasium of Middlesex University.<sup>16</sup> I turned up to winter class and spent an evening rolling around the floor on mats. After two sessions Pa' Ariffin

<sup>15</sup> I adapted the notion of “the tain of the mirror” from Gasche (1986).

<sup>16</sup> I first began training martial arts in England at the age of eight in the 1970s. Later I studied Chow's Family Praying Mantis Kung Fu as an indoor student under *Sifu* Paul Whitrod from 1988–1996. An “indoor student” trains full-time, and teaches instead of paying for classes: adopted by the master, they are taught beyond the regular syllabus. Normally I would train three to five

invited me to St Ann's Mosque to train. When I arrived I could not find the hall, so I asked for directions and was told to ascend the spiral staircase all the way to the top. At the apex of the tower a conclave of bearded men in long robes stood clustered together in a small room. One turned to me with a stern look on his face.<sup>17</sup> Gripping my hand and peering deep into my eyes he asked my name and my business, and to my reply of my name and "I'm here to learn *silat*," he said "welcome Douglas." From here I found my way to the hall, and joined in a class of about twenty-five students adopting the low postures of *silat* in the dark. Only a shard of light entered the hall from a nearby doorway.

At the end of the class the lights were switched on and I was asked to spar with the two foremost male students. The first, Khalid, had been a monkey style kung fu boxer for twelve years previous to sixteen months or more training with Pa' Ariffin. He was a tricky opponent with a powerful reverse back-kick and a way of disrupting my stance by coming in close and then jerking his hips, but his moves were repetitive and soon gauged. After a while I saw an opening and placed him in a single arm and shoulder lock, and just as I was about to deliver a hammer-hand blow to the back of his now prone head, the *guru silat* roared "stop!"<sup>18</sup> Next I fought Bernard; Khalid's senior in training time, though younger and fitter. His method of fighting looked more like *silat*, but he was inexperienced in close-quarter combat. I hooked his outstretched right kicking leg with my left arm, and seized his windpipe with my right hand. The finish is to rupture the larynx and tread heavily on the opponent's foot with a simultaneous push to the floor to break the ankle of the pinned left foot. Instead I released him, bowed, and that was the end of that. Why did I stay to train with these people? One reason was that I sensed that I could learn something new and different from the agonistic martial arts I was used to. Moreover, I was especially keen to learn the renowned Malay martial arts footwork which I had previously seen mixed with Hung Gar kung fu. So from December 1996 to April 1998 I trained *silat* with Pa' Ariffin in London, four or five times per week, and on my own every day for one to three hours.

Subsequently, I have had so many entries into and exits from the group that it is impossible to summarize them all. For the most part Pa' Ariffin treated me with respect, and extended a warm friendship, especially when I first visited Malaysia in 1999, and met him at the *zawiya* (Sufi lodge) in Kuala Lumpur. Except for the time I knocked out the European *silat* champion, Abdul Rahman, in a match in 1998, I have never fought any of his other students. During training I was partnered with Chief, a diminutive adolescent, for the next two years, and irrespective of my

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hours daily. On the day of my "graduation" my instructor told me to study another martial art, and explore it thoroughly before returning. After some deliberation, I took up *silat*. Hence this project may be viewed in relation to the anthropology of experience (Laderman 1994; Turner and Bruner 1986; Turner et al. 1992).

<sup>17</sup> I realized later that this was Shaykh Kabbani, the son-in-law of Shaykh Nazim, and one of the leaders of the Haqqani Order.

<sup>18</sup> This hammer-hand strike (*gau choi*) derives from Chow's Family Praying Mantis Kung Fu.



intense entry into the group I did subsequently manage to make friends with most of the students. So, to sum up this brief autobiographical sketch it could be said that instead of going native I have gone anthropologist.

## The Fieldwork

I was immersed in *silat* and lived in “the Malay world” from 1996 until 2007 (Benjamin 2003). Fieldwork in Malaysia specifically with or concerning Pa’ Ariffin and Seni Silat Haqq took place over several visits totalling about nine months. Due to my teaching commitments, and Pa’ Ariffin’s own busy international travelling schedule, this fieldwork occurred sporadically, over periods of time ranging from weekends to several months at a time, from 1999 to 2003.<sup>19</sup> The fieldwork was multi-sited, predominantly urban, and explored *silat* in Malay as well as non-Malay contexts. From 1999 until 2006 data was collected in several locations including Janda Baik, Kuala Lumpur, London, Melaka, Penang, The Perhentian Islands and Singapore. I collected data from several different styles of *silat* (*peguruan*) including Seni Silat Haqq Melayu (London), two schools of Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), Silat Kuntao Melaka (Malaysia and Singapore), Silat Seni Gayong Pasak (Malaysia and Singapore), Silat Al-Haq (Malaysia and Singapore), Silat Harimau (London), Silat Siluman Harimau (Riau Archipelago and Singapore), Silat Lok Sembilan (Kuala Lumpur), Silat Cimande, Silat Grasio, Silat Macan, and Silat Setia Hati in Singapore. I have also examined *silat* in a sport context, and interviewed participants from many different styles, with participants hailing from local and international backgrounds. However, my intention is not to provide a broad survey of *silat* (no doubt an interesting project in Malaysia), but to understand a *silat* group in its relationship to the community who partake of it, and with whom it interacts. This has taken me into the field of the Haqqani Sufi Order, concerning which I have gathered a considerable amount of field data, due to Pa’ Ariffin’s close connection to the Shaykhs.

This ethnography is primarily based upon Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. However, one case cannot be understood outside of its relation to others within a cultural field, so from the initial stages of the research I cast my sampling net as wide as possible. I used the method of snowball sampling and for the purposes of validity

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<sup>19</sup> Specifically, I was with Pa’ Ariffin for six weeks from December 1999 to January 2000, and again for several weeks in March, July, and December 2000. For most of May and June 2001 I stayed with Pa’ Ariffin whilst participating in an accelerated course in Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia, under Cikgu Kahar of Nirwana Gelanggang, and Cikgu Ezhar (from his home). In 2002, I twice visited London for the purposes of data collection, for five weeks. During 2003, I spent three months in Malaysia, though only half of that time directly with Pa’ Ariffin. It is impossible to say exactly how much time I spent with *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad as we were friends. Din lived nearby and we stayed in touch from 2002 until he died in 2006.

conducted crosschecks with *guru silat* from different *peguruan* (as recommended by Agar 1996; Babbie 2001; Becker 1998; Peltó 1970). During the initial phase of the research Pa' Ariffin was my key consultant and he often provided additional data through emails, chat-rooms and telephone conversations. Pa' Ariffin regularly read through my manuscripts, sometimes laughing with delight; other times snorting with derision, saying "this is fantastic, where the hell did you get this stuff from?"

My main sample includes nine *guru silat*.<sup>20</sup> Some prefer to be called *cikgu* (teacher); others *pak* (uncle). It seems to me, to adapt Turner's (1988: 44–45) "star group" notion, that the *guru silat* is a kind of "star identity."<sup>21</sup> By this I mean that the *guru silat* is a key "traditional" Malay role through which liminal discourses of Malay social and personal identity are constructed, negotiated and contested. The *guru silat* occupy a variety of roles stretching across categories from the feudal Royal bodyguard (*hulubalang*) to the *bomoh*.<sup>22</sup> The *bomoh* category itself may be subdivided into various groups, such as the *tukang bekam* (specialist in blood letting), and the *tukang urut* (masseur), but may also be conceptualized in different terms as *dukun* or *pawang* (here used as an equivalent to *bomoh jampi* or herbalist and medical specialist using magic spells). My interest is primarily with the ritual practices of the *bomoh-silat* (Werner 1986: 22–39), but it should also be borne in mind that *silat* appears in other Southeast Asian performance genres such as the *kuda kepang* (the hobby horse dance), emerging into the modern roles of sports professional, special forces trainer, commercial wedding entertainer and the professional artist.<sup>23</sup> Whilst any one *guru silat* does not perform all these roles, the roles demonstrate their spheres of activity, and give an idea of the range of interpenetrating roles available.

By examining the social identities of various *guru silat* a composite picture can be produced. This composite, whilst not existing in real life, does seem to offer some useful boundaries helpful in defining the *guru silat*. All of the *guru silat* have knowledge and experience of the main roles—it is a question of how much emphasis an individual places on a particular role and the recognition the individual receives from the community. Rashid however points out that in the Malay village the *imam*, *guru silat*, and *shaman* belong to different traditions and schools

<sup>20</sup> Whilst taking an instructor's course in *silat* I also met and trained daily with forty Singaporean and Indonesian *silat* instructors and their senior students for three weeks in Singapore in July–August 2001.

<sup>21</sup> A "star group" is characterized by highly intensive relations as "the group one most desires to belong to and enjoys belonging to" (Turner 1988: 44–45). Turner (*ibid.*) differentiates the star group from the primary group, in-group, reference group, membership group, friendship group and kinship group.

<sup>22</sup> For Turner "A mystical character is assigned to the sentiment of humankindness in most types of liminality, and in most cultures this stage of transition is brought closely in touch with beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or preterhuman beings or powers" (Turner 1969: 105).

<sup>23</sup> Regarding *kuda kepang* see Burridge (1961) and Heinze (1988: 235).



of learning; they are specialists maintaining different and potentially explosive spheres of power and authority (Rashid 1990: 92). According to Rashid:

*Silat* ... [is] ... more private and cult-like, involving the mastery of animistic, Hindu and Islamic ideas of spiritualism and supernaturalism, and the *Imam* more public and open, involving the mastery of principles, statutes of the Koran, and Hadith. Again, the *guru silat* may have certain rituals in common with the *bomoh* (shaman or medicine man) in the evocation of dead humans, animistic or Hindu spirits, and in the use of similar ritual items like the lemon, black and yellow cloth, and myrrh (*kemian*). However, he differs significantly from the latter in his dependency on group learning and a formal tutelage system. Shamans and folk medical practitioners pass on their special knowledge and skills to certain members of their immediate family and kin only but have the whole village as their clientele. In contrast the *guru silat* selects his clientele very carefully after providing the opportunity to everyone to go through the training (Rashid 1990: 92–3).

I find Rashid's differentiation between the *guru silat* and the *bomoh* to have been too sharply drawn. Perhaps the division is breaking down with the onset of urbanization and modernity and with the increasingly marginalized and now possibly anti-structural roles of the *guru silat* and *bomoh* being drawn closer together, in contrast to the mainstream structural role of the *imam*. A bridge across this divide may be formed where the *guru silat* is also an *imam* from a Sufi order, as in the case of Pa' Ariffin.

On the other hand, perhaps the difference is not necessarily always as clear-cut as Rashid's ideal type suggests. For example, Rashid says that the *guru silat* differs significantly from the *bomoh* in his "dependency on group learning and a formal tutelage system" (ibid.). I would agree that this is often the case, yet *silat* masters also resort to less formal, less rationalised, and more individual methods for instruction and may themselves acquire their knowledge of *silat* through magical, religious or mystical means. For example, *guru silat* Wak Sarin, a master of five Indonesian styles of *silat*, created *silat siluman harimau* (evil tiger style) after shutting himself up in a remote cave in an island in the Riau Archipelago for several months. Through prayer, ritual, fasting alongside the summoning of the evil tiger the *silat* moves "just came to him" (Masri, from fieldnotes). Like Wak Sarin, some other *guru silat* I know will only teach members of their family, and say that in former times their styles were only taught to family members (yet with the Malay practice of consanguineous marriage, polygyny and the extended family the Malay family could span most of the village).

The issue is further complicated by problems of defining whether a *bomoh* is a "shaman," and if so, which type or types. Here a distinction between the "medical shaman" and the "warrior shaman" could prove useful, though it is clear that the roles to some extent overlap and duplicate one another. Some shamans prefer to be called *pawang* due to the negative connotations of being labelled a *bomoh*.<sup>24</sup> The

<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson (1906: 77) translates *pawang* as "wizard" and (to paraphrase) says that the *pawang* is formerly the lineal representative of the interests of Siva, otherwise known as Bĕtara Guru (Siva the teacher), but that *pawang* is now used of all practitioners who use the formulae of old religions in their occupations, such as the fisherman or trapper.

main issue concerns trance, which for a shaman is essential, whereas for Muslims this state, like intoxication, is taboo (*haram*). Sometimes the nomenclature *tabib* is used by the *guru silat* as a disguise behind which the *bomoh* or *pawang* shelters. It is tricky to tease these categories apart because some of the *guru silat* profess to be *bomoh* and *tabib*, others to be *pawang* and *tabib* and so forth. The *guru silat* practises are complex. Like shamans they heal through séance, spells, prayers, herbal treatments, massage, and bloodletting, but like sorcerers they summon “supernatural” entities, animal spirits and the souls of the dead. This is compounded with the substitution of ancient Malay magical spells for readings from the Holy Quran in the machinations of death dealing magic, love magic, and invulnerability magic. To adumbrate this complexity I employ the term “war magician,” as an umbrella for “warrior shaman” and “warrior sorcerer” respectively.

Given Malinowski's (1948) hypothesis that magic is seen in situations of chance and uncertainty and Turner's (1969) claim that mystical powers coalesce around liminal roles one would expect to see magic linked to martial arts.<sup>25</sup> Fighting is a risky business, and warriors (*pendekar*) and *hulubalang* are by definition liminal figures standing between life and death.<sup>26</sup> From this perspective it is unremarkable that the *guru silat*, akin to Winstedt's [1925] (1993) “magician,” can similarly be configured on a spectrum from Sufi, shaman, to sorcerer, or from *tabib*, *pawang*, to *bomoh*.

Magical roles are difficult to sustain nowadays given the pariah status modern Islam in Malaysia and Singapore attaches to so-called “Islamic deviation.” However, there is still a demand from the Malay community for the services of *guru silat* in a *bomoh* (indigenous healer) capacity. For example, *guru silat* Samat is regularly called to deal with cases of possession (*rasuk*). Upon arriving at a house in the middle of the night *guru silat* Samat found upset parents who said that their son was possessed. He examined the son, who was hiding in the toilet, and then proceeded to slap him hard. Eventually the son confessed that his spasms and convulsions were withdrawal symptoms from his addiction to heroin, a condition unknown to his parents, but readily apparent to *guru silat*

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<sup>25</sup> Malinowski said: “Again, in warfare the natives know that strength, courage, and agility play a decisive part. Yet here also they practice magic to master the elements of chance and luck” (Malinowski 1948: 14).

<sup>26</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford, the former Pahang Resident, provides the following description of the Malay *hulubalang*: “In every Independent Malay State there is a gang of fighting men which watches over the person of the King and acts as his bodyguard. It is recruited from the sons of the chiefs, nobles and men of the well-bred classes; and its members follow at the heels of the King whenever he goes abroad, paddle his boat, join with him in the chase, gamble unceasingly, do much evil in the King's name, slay all who chance to offend him, and flirt lasciviously with the girls within the palace. They are always ready for anything, ‘from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter,’ and no Malay King has to ask twice in their hearing, ‘Will nobody rid me of this turbulent enemy?’ Their one aim in life is to gain the favour of their master and, having won it, to freely abuse their position” (Clifford [1897] 1989: 145–146).

Samat (a former prison officer). Whether or not the result of the operation is to prove “supernatural” forces (or in this case not) is irrelevant, the point here is that certain behaviour is treated as if it were caused through “supernatural” agency, and appropriate measures are taken to counter it through the procurement of the services of the *guru silat*.

## *Performance Ethnography*

Aside from “mild participation” in exoteric activities Evans-Pritchard spurned participation in esoteric life, which among the Azande would mean becoming a witchdoctor, because:

Previous experience of participation in activities of this kind has led me to the conclusion that an anthropologist gains little by obtruding himself into the ceremonies as an actor, for a European is never seriously regarded as a member of an esoteric group and has little opportunity of checking to what extent a performance is changed for his benefit, by design or by the psychological responses of the participants to the rites being affected by his presence. It is, moreover difficult to use the ordinary methods of critical investigating when one is actually engaged in ceremonial and is supposed to be an eager member of an institution (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977: 151).

However, my research is the result of a “performance ethnography,” an idea inspired by Zarrilli’s (1998) book on the Indian martial art *kalaripayattu*. Performance ethnography requires the full participation of the researcher in the performance genre. For Zarrilli (1998: 255 n6), following the postmodern turn in anthropology, culture is not considered a passive entity “out there” waiting to be collected, a pristine entity that may remain unsullied by the presence of the anthropologist. Zarrilli, following Fabian (1990: 18) says that performance ethnography refers to the way people realize their culture through a fluid process of creating meaning, of cultural praxis, and is “an appropriate metaphor for an epistemology of ethnography, where ‘ethnography is essentially, communicative or dialogical; conversational, not observation’” (Zarrilli 1998: 255 n6). Zarrilli also points out that tourists visiting *kalari* (training grounds) in South India were “as likely to see one or more westerners training as they were to see Malayalis—a fact not always appreciated when taking photographs or videotapes of “natives” practising a “traditional” art (Zarrilli 1998: 22–23).

In today’s cosmopolitan environment perhaps Evans-Pritchard could enrol in a class in Azande magic in North London, where no doubt his ordinary methods of critical investigating would no longer be applicable. For Malinowski (1948: 123) to conduct anthropological fieldwork it is not sufficient to sip whisky on the veranda whilst interviewing the “natives,” and correspondingly I would say that it is insufficient to just to hang around the village, or in Malaysian contexts, drink coffee in the coffee-shop (*kopitiam*).<sup>27</sup> Instead Malinowski recommended the full immersion

<sup>27</sup> See Provencher (1971: 141) on the coffee shop ethos.

of the anthropologist into the “native” culture. In a postmodern context this one way immersion is no longer considered viable as each individual is recognized as immersed or at least implicated in the power structures and representations of the international cosmopolitan order. Hence new methods are required to supplement the old in anthropological inquiry.

### *Ethical Guidelines*

Ethical guidelines for social research hinge on three principles: minimal risk, informed consent, and the right to privacy, and these principles apply to the collection of data and to its subsequent dissemination. Due to the dangers of participation in martial arts performance ethnography, minimal risk meant not getting injured, and not harming those I trained with, which is an important criterion when you are knife training and continually being tested in an oppressive boot-camp environment. It also means not openly or directly revealing material the consultants would prefer I kept concealed, data that includes though is not limited to “dirty data” (van Maanen 1982, in Thomas and Marquart 1987: 2).

In 1999 I carried out a brief period of covert research on Seni Silat Haqq Melayu in Janda Baik, but was soon convinced by my friend Dr. Ellis Finkelstein that this approach suffers from more drawbacks than advantages, and that to adopt an overt approach would be more effective.<sup>28</sup> The Seni Silat Haqq Melayu group is highly secretive, but the advantage of an overt approach is that once people knew I was doing research they would admit things to me furtively, out of sight and earshot, although sometimes they would beg me not to reveal or repeat what they had said.

To gain informed consent I provided a brief description of the research topic to the *guru silat* and their students. The following snippet from my fieldnotes occurred immediately after I announced to one of the (former) Seni Silat Haqq Melayu instructors that I intended to do a research project on *silat*:

Khalid: (his face clouding over): “This camp is about obeying the rules.”

Me: “Are the rules written down? [pause] And if not, how do people know them?”

Khalid: “Anyone who does the *silat* knows what the rules are already. What is the rule and what is not the rule. The rule is quite simple. We don’t do nothing. Follow bosses rules or next guy. I don’t say nothing on subjects I have no permission of. No comment” (Khalid, from fieldnotes).

Several of Khalid’s *silat* students gave similarly grim responses; but only one refused to be part of the data set. Colin swore, and laughed in my face. However,

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<sup>28</sup> Covert ethnography is considered unethical, and informants tend to get suspicious. For example, LaVey, the Ipsisimus (head Satanist) of a California Satanic group, told Alfred (1976), when the latter eventually approached him with a confession of carrying out covert research, that he had known about it all along, and that he considered this to be the appropriate satanic thing to do. Furthermore, after covert ethnography the researcher must still attain permission to use the data (Babbie 2001).

Pa' Ariffin and his wife were pleased with the idea, and took me to see Shaykh Raja Ashman to seek his permission. Duly permission was granted, with this caveat from Shaykh Raja Ashman: "The most important thing is respect." Gaining "permission" to conduct this study from the elite, particularly from Pa' Ariffin, Shaykh Raja Ashman, and from Shaykh Nazim, was essential (if not always sufficient) to gain information from those lower down the authority chain, because a cult-like obedience principle restricts the disclosure of information. This is in accord with the fundamental pedagogic principle of *silat*—that the teacher will only reveal knowledge at his or her pace and not at the request of the student. Informants were given the option to disguise their identity, by adopting a pseudonym of their choice, but only two chose this route and hence this account employs the informants' real names unless otherwise indicated. Consultants were informed that they could withdraw individually provided data and withhold specific information upon request. Nobody was asked to sign anything: to request this sort of official written permission slip goes against the anti-official ethos of the entire ensemble.<sup>29</sup>

It might be objected that I have sketched a peculiar view of Malay Muslims, who prefer to be "represented" in a more orthodox Islamic way. To such critics I would reply that the Sufi *guru silat* is hardly an ordinary person anyway: possessed of extraordinary skills and abilities, they regard Islam as divided into four levels of learning that one must go through, yet co-exist within simultaneously, to accomplish a mystical state of transcendence (see Chapter 4). Hence *guru silat* would regard these critics as at a lower level of religiosity. Here, of course, I am speaking of the self-avowed traditionalist *guru silat*, and not the secular sports coach (Farrer 2006a: 26 n3).

## ***Recording Data***

In theory, I wanted to write the fieldnotes unobtrusively, alone, and type up the data into my laptop during the night, and just make the occasional note in a small notebook when in the field. However, as I lived mostly in the house of the *guru silat* and his family, and shared a bedroom, private note taking was impossible. To compound this, most of the time we slept after three in the morning, only to rise again before dawn. Hence alongside the occasional note in my small book, I would write lengthy notes after the training sessions in a large notebook, and type up any remaining data from the day before the following morning. This meant that I was sometimes typing or writing as people were engaging in routine activity around me, and thus I managed to record entire conversations, almost verbatim. One of the problems with notetaking was that the informants often wanted to know what others had said previously, and sometimes it proved difficult to stop them from grabbing my book to read it. Of course, there was always the potential that they could feed me material

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<sup>29</sup> Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Kabbani urge their followers not to be "official" (officious).

that they wanted me to record, in order to channel me in any particular direction, but this disadvantage is offset by the scope and size of the record, which extends to 450 single-spaced typed pages. Aside from these notes, and the several hundred photographs that I took, I recorded emails, mobile phone text messages, telephone conversations, and gleaned data from website discussion forums.<sup>30</sup>

Whenever practicable I used a Sony semi-pro digital video camera to document my observations, and I recorded fifty-five hours concerning *silat*, including rituals, practice, rehearsals and theatre. I filmed some everyday activity, but not as much as I would have liked, as the camera can be overly intrusive, except for events where “the tourist gaze” is considered appropriate (Urry 2002). My informants would not accept “the camera . . . deployed as an impartial instrument in the service of science, fixing all that is fleeting for infinite future analysis” (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 78), resulting in a kind of unselective, unstructured, and objective research footage, but they did not seem to mind an “observational style” at *silat* classes, religious or ritual events, although sometimes students wondered why I wasn’t pointing the camera in the “right” direction, or taking photographs of the same things as they were. I tried to compromise by taking some of the pictures they liked (both still and video), but mainly I simply tried to capture footage that interested me, including sometimes just the general flow of activity.

With the use of a Sennheiser torpedo microphone mounted on the camera I soon discovered that I was able to pick up speech at a distance of twenty-five meters, as well as whispered magical formulae taped without the sorcerer’s knowledge. Although Cikgu Ezhar allowed me to film his ritual activity, both he and I were surprised that the microphone picked up his whispers, and because I told him this he explained the *Silat Seni Gayong* Malaysia lime cutting ritual to me (see Chapter 7). It is one thing to film, observe, describe, and perform—it is entirely something else to gain an indigenous explanation. I also found that the normal microphone fitted to the camera allowed me to tape dialogue, whether or not I was filming, with a simple flick of the switch, and in this way I would record long Malay monologues, or several people speaking simultaneously, providing thick descriptive data impossible to note by hand (Geertz 1973). My wife Julie, herself Malay, would later translate any speech I could not comprehend, and together we would sift and discuss the materials.

## *Interpreting Data*

Apart from Julie—who sometimes accompanied me to collect data from female informants—other members of her family regularly provided me with assistance in understanding deep Malay concepts, sentiments and artefacts. Two of her uncles are *guru silat*, one for *silat gayong*, the other for several Javanese styles of *silat*;

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Pa’ Ariffin’s forum <<http://www.silat.f9.co.uk/mainmenu3.htm>> and that of *guru silat* O’Ong Maryono <<http://www.kpsnusantara.com/cgi-bin/yabb/YaBB.cgi>>.

and sometimes one or other of them would accompany me into the field, visiting Melaka and Kuala Lumpur, and even participating with me in the *mandi minyak*. Without this family, among whom I lived for six years, my understanding of *silat* would be very different. From the outset, they viewed Pa' Ariffin's performance of *silat*, as captured on film, witnessed in person, and seen through his students, in a different way than I did. I had thought Pa' Ariffin's performance excellent, but to their eyes it was barely average. This lesson was brought home to me forcefully on the day of my wedding in 2001. In the morning, upon waking, Julie said: "All the *silat* you have done so far is little better than nothing." I found her comment quite insulting given that I had learned two styles of *silat* already.<sup>31</sup> However, when one of her uncles "welcomed me to the family" with a performance of wedding *silat*, demonstrating superb skill to the crack of *kompang* (drums), I saw exactly what she meant. This, however, is another story, mentioned here only because they made me seriously question my way of seeing *silat* and the Malay world.

### *Methods to Lift the Veil of Secrecy*

One of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammad is "keep what you are doing secret" (Kabbani 2004: 87, italics removed). To lift the veil of secrecy in the study of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu I needed to utilize methods that went beyond performance ethnography as a consultative and dialogical enterprise (Zarrilli 1998: 255 n6, following Fabian 1990: 18). The most difficult aspect of the fieldwork was not learning *silat*, but being placed in the tricky position of a researcher being compelled to ask no questions. One of Pa' Ariffin's most memorable lines, that operated as a glowering injunction against questions of any sort was that "I, my, and why, are from Shaytan" (Fig. 1.2).

In other words, it is Satanic to ask questions, and Satanic to propose—let alone live by—a discreet model of the self. So much for dialogical consultation.<sup>32</sup> Pa' Ariffin

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<sup>31</sup> I have learned bits and pieces from many *silat* styles and have been given permission to teach three. First, on 17 December 1997 after two years of full-time training in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, I was invited to teach the style. During 1998 I took private lessons in Silat Lima Beradik (in Singapore), graduating with a ritual feast (*kenduri*) and the gift of a Malay knife (*keris*). Together with Pa' Ariffin I undertook an accelerated instructor's course with Silat Seni Gayong in Malaysia in 2001. In the same year I took and passed an instructor's course in Singapore in *silat olahraga* (sport *silat*). *Silat olahraga* is a modern composite comprised of four sets of movements consisting of techniques drawn from Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore. In 2002 I took lessons in Pencak Silat Cimande and Silat Grasio. In Malaysia, in 2003, I studied Silat Kuntao Melaka, (a codename for the banned Seni Silat Hulubalang Melaka), and returned to Silat Seni Gayong to learn more knife fighting (*buah pisau*). Since 2002 I have been learning *silat* taught to me in secret by elders of my wife's family. Aside from this over the past six years I have observed hundreds of commercial *silat* classes, watched eighty-eight demonstrations of wedding *silat*, and interviewed over one hundred *silat* masters (*guru silat*), and their students in Malaysia and Singapore.

<sup>32</sup> The injunction against questions makes it pointless to attempt a survey approach (questionnaires or structured interviews) to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, after the style of Barker (1984) who,



**Fig. 1.2** Pa' Ariffin and his son Yeop



went on to sternly pronounce that to question the *guru silat* runs counter to Malay *adab* (respect).<sup>33</sup> Like Metcalf's (2002: 34) aristocratic informant Kasi who flatly prohibited anyone from discussing the death songs with him and thus attempted to sabotage his research whilst at the same time playing the role of key informant, Pa' Ariffin was bane and boon, friend and foe to my investigations.

Pa' Ariffin's injunction against questions did not worry me overly because I had taken to heart some advice Whyte [1943] (1993) offers concerning not asking questions in *Street Corner Society*. Whilst doing participant observation in a gambling den Whyte was silent for so long that he felt he had to say something, anything; so he asked the chief gangster (from memory) "So, I suppose you've paid off the police then?" The gangster was stunned, and Whyte had to beat a quick exit. Doc, Whyte's "key informant" later said to him: "Don't ask any of those who, what, why, when, where questions." Afterwards Whyte realizes that: "As I sat and listened, I learned the answers to questions I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interviewing basis" (Whyte [1943] 1993).

Malay martial arts are sometimes deemed to be so secretive as to be beyond anthropological inquiry. For example, Faucher declares that more important than the "sacred" relation established between the *guru* and pupil, interfered with by others on pain of "immediate death by spiritual means [...] is the fact that these secret techniques should never be disclosed to members of outside groups" (1998: 79).

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after a twelve year ethnography surveyed Moonies, ex-Moonies, and those considering joining the Moonies to see if they joined out of free will (choice), or because of "brainwashing." The use of the survey approach to confirm ethnographic results is a popular adaptation by sociologists to anthropological field methods to attempt to ensure their social scientific reliability (Agar 1996; Alfred 1976; Babbie 2001; Pelto 1970). However, some anthropologists regard survey triangulation as simply evidence of weak ethnography and of sociological insecurity with the method.

<sup>33</sup> Malays can be notoriously stoical when it comes to outsiders. One famous American anthropologist confessed to me that: "We stayed in the village for eighteen months, and nobody would talk to us."



Faucher follows Rashid who notes that *silat* is traditionally a secret art taught only to Malays, and until recently was relatively unknown in the west. According to Rashid:

Their relative seclusion from the outside world is a result of their close identity with the Malay animistic-Islamic traditions which perpetuate a series of cult-like ritualized activities designed to render these arts impenetrable to outsiders (Rashid 1990: 64).

Notwithstanding the monthly publication of *Silat Beladiri*, a *silat* magazine widely available in Peninsular Malaysia, and the broad dissemination of information regarding *silat* on the Internet, *guru silat* remain secretive with their arts, and choosy to whom they disseminate them.

However, the existence of secrets, and secret societies, does not *a priori* prohibit their analysis and explanation.<sup>34</sup> My way to deal with secrecy was to learn *silat*, and undergo initiation. Goffman (1959: 141–143) shows that there are different types of secrets, from easily obtainable “open secrets” to well-concealed “dark secrets.” Dark secrets concern “facts about a team” which it knows and conceals, and which are inconsistent with the image of self that the team tries to maintain in front of its audience. These are also “double secrets” (one is the crucial fact that is hidden, and another is that crucial facts have not been openly admitted) and every effort may be made to keep these secrets forever. “Strategic secrets” refer to the intentions and capacities of a team, which it conceals from its audience to prevent them from adapting to the state of affairs that it is intending to bring about, for example, the strategic secrets of businesses and armies. However, these are usually revealed after some time (they are performance related). Goffman also discusses inside secrets, entrusted secrets, free secrets and latent secrets (Goffman 1959: 143–144). In the course of this research I have come across examples of most of the above types of secrets, some that I too must agree to keep. Significantly, there is a stock of “inside secrets,” or “trade secrets” known to the *guru silat*.

The first thing to discover about secrets is that they exist, and once a “cultural field” of secrets can be established, they cease to be double secrets (Bourdieu 1990: 145). *Guru silat* Mohammad Din told me—after the fashion of Plato’s dictum—that life is but remembering what you have already known, and that *guru silat* will not reveal anything that the student does not already know. I tackled this restriction through investigative reflexivity—by finding out a little from one source, and then taking it to another, and vice versa, and proceeded to assemble the pieces like

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<sup>34</sup> For Evans-Pritchard to unearth secret lore via ethnography it must be understood that “the corporation [secret society] has an esoteric life from which the un-initiated are excluded” and that: “Not only are knowledge of medicines and tricks of the trade hidden from outsiders, but much of the inner social life of the corporation and many of its beliefs are unknown to them. The usual methods of inquiry were here largely ineffective and the ordinary systems of controls inoperative” (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977: 150). To address the “esoteric life” problem Evans-Pritchard [1937] (1977: 151) persuaded his personal servant to be initiated into the witch doctors’ corporation, so that he could then tell him everything he learnt during the course of his tuition.

doing a jigsaw puzzle without the picture. I must admit that I was influenced by the findings of social psychology, for example, “the-foot-in-the-door tactic” where to gain compliance one requests something small before requesting something more significant (Hogg and Vaughan 2002: 212).

So much talk of secrecy alerted me to observe all the more carefully. Given the hot tempers of some of the members of Seni Silat Haqq group, Evans-Pritchard’s point was cogent: “When informants fall out anthropologists come into their own” (Evans-Pritchard’s [1937] 1977: 153).<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that Islam prohibits alcohol, believed to be an intoxicant that makes the individual lose their sense of self in submission to God, another way I gained valuable data was by occasionally going out drinking with members of the group. Due to my long university apprenticeship their alcohol tolerance was generally lower than mine, and once tipsy they sometimes relinquished material that I could double-check later.<sup>36</sup> I gathered some great data from *guru silat* over pints of Guinness whilst “on holiday.” However, even sober informants related supramundane phenomena such as seeing dragons, having fights with *jinn* and summoning shadows.<sup>37</sup> I would largely agree that it is important to “consider ... life as it is lived rather than as it is reported on” (Barbash and Taylor 1997: 36). Finkelstein (1993: 9–10) in his ethnography of “the fortress” (Dartmoor Prison) found it necessary to privilege participant observation over the survey technique, because what people actually *do* is discrepant with what they *say* they do.<sup>38</sup> But in a way, what people say, and what they don’t say, *is* what they do—Austin’s (1975) “performative speech act” (and whatever its inverse would be).

The nature of social research is partial, not absolute. The issue of secrecy hinges on trust, and trust only develops over time with the development of a shared understanding. Where informants have requested that I keep data secret I have done so,

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<sup>35</sup> Evans-Pritchard is instructive in the matter of perseverance in the face of difficult ethnography. Upon arrival in Sudan, he travelled miles out into the Nuer territory, and made contact, whereupon his servants abandoned him in his tent (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 10).

<sup>36</sup> Islam prohibits alcohol as it is perceived to be an intoxicant that makes the individual lose their sense of self in submission to God.

<sup>37</sup> *Jinn* in Arabic, means “hidden.” The *alam ghaib* includes spirits from the Islamic pantheon such as *jinn Islam* (good Muslim spirits), and *jinn kafir* (evil non-Muslim spirits), as well as indigenous Malay entities such as ghosts (*hantu*), faeries (*pari pari*), and vampires (*pontianak*). Chittick points out that: “In the Islamic intellectual tradition the Arabic words used to name the substance of these intermediate, fiery creatures can best be translated as ‘image’ (*mithâl*) or ‘imagination’ (*khayâl*). This does not mean that the *jinn* are ‘imaginary’—far from it. In fact, they are more real than creatures made only from clay, since they possess more of the attributes of light, which are the attributes of true existence” (Chittick 1992: 133).

<sup>38</sup> Finkelstein’s approach is influenced by La Peirre (1934: 230–237), who challenges (Weberian) claims that attitudes (the Protestant Ethic) dictate actions (capitalist behaviour). La Peirre visited 137 hotels, guesthouses and trailer parks in 1930s America accompanied by a Chinese couple. In a follow up survey La Peirre asked each establishment if they would serve Asian guests, and fifty percent (of those who replied) said they would not. However, La Peirre whilst on his travels with the Chinese couple had only been refused service once.

except where the same data was also revealed to me openly by others, which given the field of secrets was often the case. Certainly, many stones remain unturned, hieroglyphs undeciphered, spells (*jampi*) concealed, yet I hope to have “raised the veil just enough to let us catch a glimpse of the Medusa’s head behind it” (Marx [1867] 1990: 91). In fairness however, the Medusa’s head may be said to better characterize the accounts of the anthropologist, rather than, as we shall see, the dialogical mimesis and alterity, repetition and difference of the *guru silat*.

## The Central Questions

What can the study of war magic reveal in the Malay context? In social anthropology, since Malinowski, war magic has been relatively neglected, especially when compared to the analysis of sorcery, shamanism, witchcraft, and the performance of healing, and this gap is readily apparent in the current Malaysianist anthropological literature. Hollan, in his review of Watson and Ellen’s (1993) *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*, raises some interesting questions concerning the directions of further research. Hollan writes that:

As Ellen correctly points out, we know relatively little about Southeast Asian sorcery ... Ellen summarizes what we do know ... although ... issues emerge that warrant further analysis. For example, why is most sorcery in Southeast Asia “defensive” in nature? What is it about these societies that lead so many people to feel vulnerable to outside forces, both human and supernatural, and thus to find it necessary to seek invulnerability and protection? Why are other humans and spiritual beings so often perceived to be stingy, envious, and angry? When sorcery does become more “offensive” in nature, why does it so often take the form of love magic, abetting efforts to find or to hold onto spouses and sexual partners? (Hollan 1995: 825).

Hollan does not directly mention “war magic” here and neither is it addressed in Watson and Ellen’s edited volume, but it is implicit in Hollan’s mention of “invulnerability and protection” (see Chapter 7). Recent ethnographic accounts have advanced our understanding of Malay shamans (*bomoh*, *pawang*, *dukun*) and their love magic, curing, and harming of others through sorcerous means. These accounts address the shaman in relation to issues of medical anthropology, specifically healing, often from perspectives that draw heavily from the anthropology of performance, embodiment and psychoanalysis (Laderman 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1995, 2000; Peletz 1993, 1996). Although these studies help to understand magic, sorcery, and shamanism in the region, they neglect war magic. Their main advance lies in the application of new perspectives, particularly embodiment and performance, but they primarily concern medical anthropology.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Even an account of “malign magic” in the Philippines has no discussion of war magic. Typically “data on sorcery were gathered as part of a broader study of social and cultural aspects of medicine in the Philippines” (Lieban 1967: 4).

My research project seeks to address the war magic lacuna by considering the embodied practice and performance of Islamic versions of the Malay martial art *silat* in relation to Malay magic and mysticism. In the polyglot Malay language the boundaries between magic and mysticism are not clear cut, with the term *mystik* (mysticism) used as a gloss for both magical and mystical doctrines, rituals, and practices. I use “Malay mysticism” to refer to esoteric ritual practices designed to empower the self, and to gain power over the world, and this includes the indigenous mysticism known as *kebatinan*, alongside ideas and practices derived from Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and animism. The magical and mystical practices of *silat* go “beyond rationalism” (Kapferer 2003), such as the ritual where *silat* practitioners plunge their hands into cauldrons of boiling oil, an ordeal believed to provide empirical proof that divine intervention renders invulnerability.

Apart from secrecy, which has been proffered as a reason not to venture into the anthropology of *silat*, there may be institutional reasons for the failure of works on magical discourse to address martial arts. Compounding the Malinowskian avoidance of war magic, subsequent conceptual boundaries create difficulties for the academic purusal of *silat*. Initially I thought this may have arisen due to a narrow conceptualization of the term “shaman.” Ethnographic studies of shamanism commonly employ the established anthropological notion that a shaman is someone who goes into trance, and who is primarily involved in some sort of healing through spiritual means (Eliade 1974; Halifax 1991; Heinze 1988; Lewis [1971] 2003). If this definition is accepted, it automatically precludes an analysis of the Malay Islamic war magician as a type of shaman, because Islamic *guru silat* are forbidden by religious prohibition from entering trance states. Hence the term “shaman” delimits the magical field to issues of trance and healing, to the exclusion of sorcery or war magic, that look from the outside to be more to do with the skills required to inflict pain and death than those required for healing. But as Mohammad Din Mohammad pointed out, the *guru silat* are always healers, and the healers always have *silat*, because “in the years that it takes to learn *silat* you will surely get injured.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in many Asian societies the martial arts and indigenous medical practices were taught together. Furthermore, in earlier literature, Islamic *guru silat* are referred to as *bomoh-silat*, a concept which reveals the *guru silat* as a particular type of *bomoh* or indigenous healer, bearing in mind that *bomoh*’s are perceived to enter into trance which given the increasing Islamization of Malaysia nowadays provides the reason for the abandonment of the term (if not the occupation). Whilst Malay *guru silat* may not enter directly into trance, many engage in other mystical practices that act as a substitute. Hence, the study of war magic in the Malay context sheds further light upon Malay magic and mysticism, including issues of vulnerability, invulnerability, healing and protection.

However, this account is not restricted solely to “the Malays” or to the physical boundaries of Peninsular Malaysia as I have focused upon a transnational Sufi orga-

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<sup>40</sup> For a detailed discussion of the life and work of Mohammad Din Mohammad see Farrer (2008).

nization in the process of spreading to the west. In sum, I refer to the totality of *silat*, comprised of elements drawn from Malay animism, magic, and Islamic mysticism, alongside the practice and performance of the dance-like movements, as *war magic*, a rubric under whose domain could be included warrior religion, warrior mysticism and the war sorcery of the martial arts.

War magic is the harnessing of mystical forces or *ilmu* (skill) for the purpose of combat in the seen and unseen realms. The resurrection of war magic drives a stake into the original and initial concerns of anthropology, namely magic and religion. Each chapter set out here tackles a set of issues that concern war magic, configured primarily though not exclusively in relation to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, an organization that harnesses *silat* to the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat*. Before further examining these questions I proceed to examine the scope, etymology, mythical origin, and historical background of *silat* in Peninsular Malaysia.

## The Field of Silat

*Silat* and variants of *silat* are found throughout “the Malay world” (Map 1.1). Benjamin points out that: “Historically, the Isthmus of Kra, the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Riau, Sumatra, and Kalimantan have belonged to one historical reality—the Malay World” (2003: 5 n2). Through a complex maze of sea channels and river capillaries that facilitated exchange and trade throughout the region, *silat* wound its way into the dense rain forest and up into the mountains.

Some of my informants and some academics refer to this region as the *Nusantara*, which narrowly translated refers to the culture of the Indonesian archipelago (Taylor 1994: 83), and surrounding locales, but more broadly it is defined as a geographical region that extends “from the Easter Islands in the east to Madagascar in the west” (Maryono 2002: 2). Benjamin (2003: 7) corrects the extended notion of the Malay world, which he argues is simply a device of contemporary Malay scholarship, and following Milner (1981) declares the term “the Malay World” should be reserved for those regions that were historically ruled by a Malay Sultanate.

However, to Malay ears Benjamin’s term for “the Malay world,” the *alam Melayu*, “sounds weird” and implies a supernatural realm “like you exist in your own universe” (Julie). Given the strangeness of co-opting the term *alam Melayu* I simply employ “the Malay world” instead, and in much the same sense as Benjamin except that I would include parts of the Sulu Archipelago and Aceh.<sup>41</sup> It may be said that *silat* spills out from the Malay world to be found beyond its borders, but this statement is also problematic because Java is widely regarded as a centre of *silat*, and yet is not part of Benjamin’s definition of the Malay world. Where *wayang kulit* (shadow theatre) is found, so too is *silat*; the terrain of shadow theatre is the terrain

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<sup>41</sup> I am uneasy with Benjamin’s (2003: 5 n2) definition as it excludes parts of the southern Philippines (e.g. Moro) which are also part of the historical reality of the Malay world. Furthermore, only the edges of Kalimantan can be said to be included in “the Malay world.”



**Map 1.1** Malaysia and the Malay world

of Asian martial arts, including India, North Asia, Southeast Asia and China. The problem of defining the scope of the Malay region is similar to the problem of defining exactly the scope of *silat*, which is one reason why I find the term “war magic” particularly appealing. Some may say that “war magic” is too delimiting a term to refer to martial arts, but I think this is only the case if a narrow definition of magic is employed that regards magic *a priori* as something false and not as potentially real, which is an issue I take up in subsequent chapters.

In more concrete terms *silat* is a form of cultural capital that may be seen employed in a variety of situations and settings including police and military combat training, wedding performance, royal entertainment, club demonstrations, *kuda kepang* (Javanese hobby horse dance), *sepak takraw* (Malay football), *dabus* (ceremonial self-piercing with a *keris*), Balinese dance (*baris gede*), Malay courtly dances, as well as featuring in exorcism, massage, theatre, movies and in sporting events.

*Silat* exponents proudly regard *silat* as indigenous to Southeast Asia, and not a derivative of an Indian, Chinese, or any other martial art. However, to my knowledge nobody claims that *silat* originally derives from Peninsular Malaysia. Draeger (1972: 23) makes a good case for its origin and development in the Riau Archipelago, romanticized and demonized in former literature as the notoriously dangerous islands that once acted as a trade route and historical thoroughfare from Indonesia to the mainland, its people stereotyped by the glamorous if none too polite name of “sea pirates.” Sopher says that “one or two accounts note the timidity of these people and their reluctance to go ashore, but the majority of writers assert that



the sea nomads are or used to be fierce pirates” (Sopher 1977: 88). Sopher continues that piracy was a “special cultural characteristic resulting from close contact and close political affiliation with Malays” who organized the island people (and not specifically the sea nomads) into a “machine for piracy” to extract profit by means of violence from productive coastal communities: they were “in effect the guerrilla mercenaries of a political state” (Sopher 1977: 88–89).<sup>42</sup>

For Draeger (1972), who carried out a survey of *silat* styles in the early 1970s, *silat Melayu* was the ancient form of *silat* from which all modern forms derive. According to Draeger, *silat Melayu* is a crude prototype of *silat* originating in the Riau Archipelago that subsequently became *Silat Minangkabau*, and from Sumatra spread to Java and across Southeast Asia. As Draeger states:

Actually, there are very few Indonesian forms of *pentjak-silat* untouched by Menangkabau styles. The latter, as progressively developed extensions of the early and crude *silat Melayu*, provide the mechanical bases for *pentjak-silat* throughout the archipelago (Draeger 1972: 133, *itals.* added).

Many Southeast Asian *silat* performers, especially Javanese and Sumatran immigrants and their descendants, view a performance of Peninsular Malay *silat* stony-faced with no comment, or will politely say “very nice” if asked for their opinion. Privately they regard Peninsular Malay *silat* with scorn, if not outright derision, disparaging what they claim is the inferior, invented, and borrowed quality of Malaysian *silat*. This type of sentiment seems to have caused Malaysian aristocrats such as Pa’ Ariffin to become defensive, and they in turn are derisive of Javanese or Sumatran “peasant *silat*” as compared to “royal *silat*.” According to Tuan Ismail (1991: 66–67), *silat Melayu* in the form of *silat sekebun* (the style reserved for the Malay *guru silat*) derives from the eleventh century Pagar Ruyong royalty of Sumatra. This is one reason for Malaysian claims that *silat Melayu* originates from “royal *silat*” and is not a development of “peasant *silat*”<sup>43</sup> However, *silat Melayu* itself consists of derivatives of many regional *silat* styles, including *silat Jawa* (Javanese *silat*), *silat Minang*, (Sumatran Minangkabau) and Bugis *silat* (Ku and Wong 1978: 7–12).

Hundreds of different *silat* styles exist across the major islands of the Indonesian archipelago, especially Java, Sumatra, Aceh, Sulawesi, and the Riau Archipelago. Distinct styles of *silat* are also to be found in Brunei, East and West Malaysia, the

<sup>42</sup> Andaya and Andaya (2001: 26) say the power of Srivijaya derived from its rulers’ influence over the Orang Laut, whom they describe as a piratical fierce fighting force. This holds good for the Malay system of governance with the *laksamana* (admiral) in charge of exercising this force. Indeed, the *laksamana* may have been Orang Laut, as was Hang Tuah himself (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 74).

<sup>43</sup> Historically the Malay societies of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, and the Riau Archipelago were stratified into three classes: the royal family (sultans and rajas), the aristocracy (*bangsawan*), and the peasants (*ra’ayat*) (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 46–51; Farrer 2006a: 26; Gullick 1958: 21–22).

Philippines, Singapore and Southern Thailand.<sup>44</sup> Nowadays, *silat* is found globally, with schools established in many European countries including France, Holland, and Britain, as well as in America and Australia. It is difficult to assess how many *silat* styles are extant. Draeger says that, “*Pentjak-silat* exists in 157 recorded styles” (Draeger 1972: 33), yet Maryono (2002: 2) says that there are over 260 styles or genres of *silat*. Official estimates vary, but Haji Abdullah Shafie, former President of the Singapore Silat Federation, says they recognize 2,000 styles of *silat* in Indonesia, 300 in Brunei, 300 in Malaysia and 36 in Singapore.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to assess how many people practise some form of *silat* in Peninsular Malaysia, let alone in Southeast Asia. In 1963 Silat Gayong became the first officially registered *silat* organization in Malaysia, and Tengku Kassim, the elder brother of the first Prime Minister of the newly post-colonial state (Tengku Abdul Rahman) gave it “whole hearted encouragement and support” (Sheppard 1972: 148).<sup>46</sup> By the 1970s, as Sheppard notes, there was, “a pan-Malaysian Organization with branches in every state in West Malaysia and in 1970 it had a total enrolment of more than 50,000 members” (Sheppard 1972: 148). Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia currently assesses its “membership” to be one-and-a-half million members worldwide, an exaggeration based upon a total of all known memberships, including those which have lapsed. It is clear from these figures that *silat* is a mass phenomenon; what is not clear is how deep this phenomenon penetrates into, or indeed is formative of Malay culture.

### *Towards an Etymology and Definition of Silat*

The word *silat* is said to derive from *silap* (to make a mistake). This means that you use the opponent’s strength against them—in their strength lies their weakness. This strength could be physical or psychological. Other etymological roots suggested by informants include *sekilat* meaning “as fast as lightening” derived from *kilat* (lightning); *sila* (as in *silsilah* or chain) indicating the transmission of *silat* from *guru* to *murid* (disciple of *silat* or other religious or secular knowledge); and more mysteriously, from the Arabic *solat* (prayer), although linguists regard *solat* as an unlikely candidate for the etymological root of *silat*.<sup>47</sup> Other contenders for the etymological root of *silat* include the Orang Selat (an indigenous Malay people of Singapore), and *selat* as in Selat Melaka (the Straits of Malacca).

<sup>44</sup> In Thailand a relative of *silat* appears in the form of the traditional Thai martial art, known as *krabbi krabong*.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Haji Abdullah Shafie, President of PERSISI (Persekutuan Silat Singapura—established in 1973) in Singapore, August 2001.

<sup>46</sup> *Tengku* is a royal Malay title.

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Benjamin, personal communication 10 October 2002.



According to Rashid (1990: 85–89) rituals of *silat* are used as a switch for the emotions in situations of inter-ethnic violence. There is clear evidence for the involvement of *silat* groups in violence against the Chinese during the post-war interregnum, and during the racial clashes of 1969 (Cheah 2003: 296; Shamsul 1997: 212). Against Rashid's (1990) formula *silat* may be said to act as a medium of peace rather than as a trigger for conflict. For example, Pa' Ariffin's definition of *silat* is not, as one might expect, that *silat* is the art of war, but that *silat* is "the art of stopping war."<sup>48</sup> No doubt this does not eschew the role of violence as "stopping war" may also be achieved by violence, only on a smaller scale (riots, assassination). Nevertheless, a model where a switch of the emotions equals a particular outcome (violence) is problematic when it comes to a rounded conception of *silat*. Rashid's (1990) model is influenced by frustration/aggression theory, and is part of an early endeavour to place emotions more firmly on the social science map. More recent literature contends that there is a complex dialogical relationship between cognition and emotion, which would also apply to *silat*. Moreover, *silat* performers' movements are sometimes so elegant they appear dance-like.

*Silat* is not simply reducible to the agonistic function of war magic. Malays refer to some types of *silat* as dance, such as *silat pengantin* (wedding *silat*) which according to Sheppard (1972:141) is also known as *silat Medan* (from Medan?) and as *silat pulut* (rice cake *silat*).<sup>49</sup> This provides further evidence for the multiple roles of *silat*, a martial art that is certainly implicated in the Malay technology of violence, but which also functions as a means of celebration through dance (Fig. 1.3).

Malaysian *guru silat* regard *silat* as an indigenous art form. *Ilmu*, defined as mystical knowledge and as science, is an important component of the art. Pa' Ariffin says that *silat* is eighty percent knowledge, and only twenty percent physical. *Silat* is a form of knowledge that is embodied in the practitioner, resulting in a set of martial skills that may occasionally be seen in the public performance of the *guru silat*, but which should also condition their conduct and composure in day to day life.

To prefix *silat* with either *pencak* or *seni* is a political issue given the competitive nationalist implications in the unfolding development of nation states in Southeast Asia and the historical formation of national representative bodies of *silat*. In Peninsular Malaysia the term *seni* operates to distinguish Malay from Indonesian styles of *silat*, where *pencak* refers to the fighting aspects of *silat* or to the combative use of a cutting weapon (Sheppard 1983: 101). Hence, the Malay claim that *seni* is the root of *pencak* and not merely a flowery embellishment, or stylistic addition.

Al-Attas notes that the Holy Quran can be read in its exoteric or esoteric aspects and that "it is the latter, like a Rosetta Stone which when deciphered would reveal inexhaustible treasures that comprises the 'wellspring' from which Sufism develops" (al-Attas 1963: 4). This insight applies to *silat*, where *pencak silat* is the exoteric aspect, and *seni silat* is the esoteric aspect. In other words, *pencak* (fighting) can be regarded as the *zahir* (outer/exoteric knowledge), whilst *seni* pertains to

<sup>48</sup> Pa' Ariffin is making an implicit reference to Sun Tzu's classic text *The Art of War*.

<sup>49</sup> *Pulut* denotes sticky rice, and is often associated with special festival food.

**Fig. 1.3** Wedding *silat*  
danced in Singapore



the whole of *silat* including *batin* (inner/esoteric knowledge) and *zahir*. *Seni silat* is thus considered to be a deeper level of understanding. Therefore, it is said that each aspect of *silat* emanates from *seni*, including both the fighting and the dance aspects, *pencak silat* and wedding *silat*. No doubt Indonesian practitioners might disagree with this argument. The main point to be borne in mind however is that *seni* for *Seni Silat Haqq Melayu* refers to the art of *silat*, an art that is comprised of physical (*pencak*) and esoteric (*kebatinan*) elements.

### *The Emergence of Silat*

It is believed that the origin of *silat* in Peninsular Malaysia may be traced back to Hang Tuah in the fifteenth century.<sup>50</sup> The legend of Hang Tuah and his four

<sup>50</sup> It is commonly asserted in the popular literature that martial arts originated more than two thousand years ago in India (Maliszewski 1987: 225; Payne 1981: 5). Chinese kung fu is said to originate with the Indian monk Ta Mo (Bodhidharma), who arrived at the Shaolin Monastery in the fourth century C.E. However, Hsu (1997: 59–60) dismisses the Shaolin origin of kung fu as a “fairytale” which fails to take into account the historical and archaeological evidence concerning warfare and martial arts in China during the Spring Autumn Period (722–481 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). On the other hand, Kerala, in South India, in tourist promo-

companions is an important historical and mythological trope in Malaysian history and politics (Errington 1975).<sup>51</sup> Hang Tuah was imprisoned and unjustly put to death by the Sultan of Melaka (Muzaffar Shah 1446–1458) for crimes of lust never perpetrated, and upon learning of this, his comrade in arms and friend, Hang Jebat, ran *amok* and subsequently locked himself up in the Sultan's palace with several of the Sultan's concubines. Apparently, Hang Jebat killed anyone else who ventured near him, and only one warrior in the land was capable of defeating him, that warrior being the invincible Hang Tuah. As luck would have it, Hang Tuah was not dead, but was languishing in prison, hidden from the Sultan by the machinations of Tun Perak, the *Bendahara* (Chief Minister). During the ensuing battle the barely rehabilitated Hang Tuah is said to kill Hang Jebat (or in other renditions Hang Kesturi), thus placing his fealty to the monarch above his loyalty to his friend. This ratifies a covenant by which the monarch's power is considered absolute; the subject is obliged to unquestioningly obey, given the sole proviso that the Sultan shall not belittle or dishonour the subject. Andaya and Andaya characterize this Hobbesian social contract as one where service is exchanged for just rule (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 35, 49).

In the *Sejarah Melayu* (the Malay Annals) the martial prowess of the Malay rulers and nobility is dramatically recounted in many colourful vignettes, for example, that of Sultan Ala'u'd-din personally apprehending thieves in flight, and chopping one in half "cleaving his waist as though it had been a gourd" (Brown 1970: 106). These legends are important because they establish the principle of the divine rule of kings, kings who are said to be the Shadow of God on earth, and because they firmly tie Divine Right to the war machine (*silat*). Pa' Ariffin's father, sometimes called the *Singha Melayu* (the Malay Lion), was said to be the "reincarnation" of Hang Tuah (Sheppard 1964), and Pa' Ariffin assiduously extols absolute fealty and loyalty to the monarch. Melaka, the home of Hang Tuah, is regarded as the Mecca of the *pesilat*. The legend of Hang Tuah was made into an epic film by P. Ramlee, and it concludes with the following question: "Who was right? Hang Tuah or Hang Jebat?" This was always an interesting question to ask

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tions, proclaims itself "the birthplace of the martial arts."<sup>55</sup> Balakrishnan begins his book with the thundering declaration "*Kalarippayattu* is the only form of the most ancient traditional systems of physical culture, self-defence and martial techniques still in existence" (Balakrishnan 1995: 13, italics added). Indian martial arts go under several different headings, but *kalarippayattu* in Kerala "in its present form dates back to at least the twelfth century C.E." with various types of wrestling and weapons training... "developed primarily to prepare Kerala's martial caste (*Nairs*) for combat, although higher caste Yatra brahmins, lower caste Tiyyas, and many Muslims and Christians were also proficient in the form" (Maliszewski 1987: 225). For *silat* Maliszewski says: "By the 1300s [*silat*] had become a highly sophisticated technical art that was open solely to members of the nobility and the ruling classes. Indian, Chinese, Arabic and, later, Japanese influences permeated in varying degrees a number of styles" (Maliszewski 1987: 226, italics added). Later Maliszewski refines his view, and says that after the fourteenth century "the practice of this combative art was open to other social classes" (1996: 83).

<sup>51</sup> The companions were Hang Jebat, Hang Kesturi, Hang Lekir, and Hang Lekiu.

*guru silat*, who, with the exception of Pa'Ariffin, almost invariably answered that Hang Jebat was right and that Hang Tuah betrayed him unjustly.

The origin myths of *silat* often involve a whirlpool generated by a waterfall. Some myths say a man invented *silat*, others say a woman. One mythological account of the origin of *silat* relates the story of a woman who had withdrawn from her husband after a violent beating. Later, on the way to (or back from) the waterfall, she witnessed a battle between a crane and a snake. When she got home she thrashed her husband, who subsequently became her first *silat* pupil.<sup>52</sup> The origin myth is often used to account for the exceptionally graceful, feminine look of *silat*. However, following the *Sejarah Melayu*, Sheppard writes:

The evolution of the Malay art of self defence is said to have come about as follows: at the end of the thirteenth century when Muslim missionaries had only recently arrived in North Sumatra, three young Sumatran Malays from Minangkabau .... journeyed to Aceh .... to study the new religion. Their names were Burhanuddin, Shamsuddin and Aminuddin. Their teacher's house was near a forest pool; this was fed by a cascade of water, which fell more than sixty feet from a rocky ridge in the hills above. A tall Bongor tree stood close to the edge of the pool .... One day Aminuddin went to bathe and to fetch water for the household. The cascade which struck the centre of the pool set up a constant succession of ripples which spread outward across the surface. This was an everyday occurrence, but Aminuddin noticed a Bongor flower riding on a ripple some distance from the water's edge. The impact from the cascade sucked in anything which floated on the surface towards a central whirlpool, and the flower was drawn gradually away from the bank. But the spray from the waterfall set up a kind of artillery barrage [*sic*] on the fringe of the whirlpool. When the flower reached a certain point in its drift towards the centre the barrage struck the surface in front of it, and as if it were animated, the flower sprang back in the direction of the bank: sometimes to one side, sometimes to another. [...] Half an hour later the flower was still in buoyant movement when suddenly, propelled by a combination of spray and breeze, it was carried outside the orbit of the whirlpool and began to float slowly towards the bank .... Aminuddin picked the flower from the water and he thought that he heard a voice from the Bongor tree telling him to apply the lesson of the flower, and to teach it to his friends. On that morning *silat* was born (Sheppard 1972: 140, italics added).

From here the three Malays returned to their village, Olakkan, on the West Coast of Sumatra to teach *silat* and religious knowledge (Sheppard 1972: 141). This myth situates the founding of *silat* as contiguous with the introduction of Islam, and specifies a female founder. *Silat* here is related to the flower dancing in the waterfall, and to the voice of the Bongor tree, which shows that whilst *silat* is a vehicle for the transmission of Islam, it is simultaneously a repository of older "animist" beliefs, which Skeat [1900] (1984) refers to as "Malay magic" or the Malay "folk religion."

In Northern Sumatra Islamic graves from the thirteenth century C.E. have been found that can be used to date the spread of Islam, which became prominent in Peninsular Malaysia by the early fifteenth century during the Melaka Sultanate

<sup>52</sup> For *silat* origin myths see also Draeger (1972: 9–10); Maryono (2002: 34); Pauka (1998: 27–28); Sheppard (1972: 140); and Tuan Ismail Tuan Soh (1991: 36–37).

(Bellwood 1997: 140). However, according to the Seni Silat Haqq Melayu website, *silat* developed many centuries before this:

*Silat Melayu* is the traditional combative art of the Malay people dating back to at least the sixth century, the system had a formal syllabus by the eleventh century, and is held by many to be the common root from which the many branches of *silat* later developed. The geographical origins of the system are subject to debate, however it reached its historical peak during the fifteenth century under the Sultanate of Melaka, and the exploits of Hang Tuah the *silat Melayu* exponent extraordinaire are still recounted today as an integral part of the cultural legacy of *silat*.<sup>53</sup>

According to Pa' Ariffin *silat Melayu* has been "the same" for many centuries.<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to compare this account to Draeger, who, after emphasizing the important geographical location of Riau, which due to "multidirectional migratory flows" acted as a melting pot of combative ideas and weaponry, says:

Many Indonesian combat authorities feel that Indonesian-style combatives began on Riouw. These combatives later served as the basis of what came to be called *pentjak-silat*. The old Riouw combatives are today termed *silat Melayu*, and it is known that they were in use as early as the sixth century A.D. They were crude forms; their germ ideas, however, were carried to the Menangkabau kingdom at Priangan, its ancient capital, and also to the Srivijaya empire centered at Palembang. In the former area, *silat Melayu* underwent great diversification and formed what is today traditionally recognized as the source of Indonesian *pentjak-silat* (Draeger 1972: 23, italics added).

Although one account emphasizes change more than stasis, it is agreed that Malaysian and Indonesian *silat* initially developed independently of Indian forms sometime in the sixth century C.E. to absorb Hindu and Islamic elements only later.

We see that for Seni Silat Haqq Melayu *silat* only reaches its "historical peak" of development in the golden age of Melaka. Hence the tradition of *silat Melayu* upheld by Pa' Ariffin is deemed to be that emerging from the royal Melaka court in the hundred or so years before the Portuguese conquest in 1511. "Tradition" also stretches back to the customs, beliefs, and practices of the eleventh century royal immigrants who fled from Sumatra to Singapore, who then subsequently fled to found their royal dynasty in Melaka. After the fall of Melaka this royal tradition is split and conferred through the favoured son to Johor, where it is ultimately lost to the Bugis; and through another son to Perak, a remote backwater at the time, that has nonetheless the modern distinction of having the sole surviving heirs to the Melaka throne (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 62, 77). Therefore, the Perak nobility, including Pa' Ariffin, and the Perak Royal Family, envisage themselves as the living bearers of the original Malay royal tradition, *silat* included.

<sup>53</sup> Source <<http://www.silat.f9.co.uk/mainmenu3.htm>>.

<sup>54</sup> Unlike many of my informants I resist essentialising *silat*. Instead of constructing an ideal type of *silat* to stand in all places, and for all time as the unique and absolute, "real," "original," "royal," "traditional," or "authentic" *silat*, I regard *silat* as a social project under continuous re-construction.

## The Haqqani Sufi Tarekat and Seni Silat Haqq Melayu

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is connected to the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order, led in Southeast Asia by the Malaysian Prince H.R.H Shaykh Raja Ashman, the Caliph of Shaykh Nazim. To comprehend Seni Silat Haqq Melayu my work necessarily engages aspects of transnational Sufism (see Chapter 6). I seek to understand *silat* as the embodied practice of Malay notions intertwined with Haqqani Sufism in the process of spreading transnationally. It is not my intention to generalize about “The Malays” or *Melayu* whether as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) or as a “hierarchy of being” (Wee 1985).<sup>55</sup>

In the United Kingdom and in the United States the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* recruit followers through martial arts organizations that operate from within Universities. These organizations claim to offer the royal, secret, and authentic martial art of the Malay aristocracy. Because people who train Haqqani “Sufi martial arts” (*silat*) do not necessarily have to convert to Islam, this openness facilitates the penetration of the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* into networks of potentially sympathetic contacts. Whilst they take their arduous ascetic religious practices very seriously, mischievous playfulness runs through their quotidian interactions. The Haqqani organization is elite, royal, serious, and secretive, yet also porous and playful, and these combined features add to its mysterious intrigue and appeal.

There is another *silat* club called “Seni Silat Haqq” based at the University of Michigan who are also affiliated with the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* of Shaykh Raja Ashman and Shaykh Nazim. Outside of two brief contacts with a student via email, data from their website, and the withering comments of Pa’ Ariffin, I have acquired little information concerning this group. Apparently, after only six months of training, their *guru silat* Shaykh Bapak Waleed (Leonardo), from Panama in South America, split off from Pa’ Ariffin, who taught him *silat* in Los Angeles during the late 1980s. Pa’ Ariffin previously called his style “Seni Silat Haqq” and only added the *Melayu* suffix after 1999. When I asked Pa’ Ariffin why he changed the style’s name, he said his style “changes its name every seven years.” Maybe he said this to save losing face by admitting that he wanted to differentiate his style from the style of his ex-student, who has developed a notable website.<sup>56</sup>

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu must also be differentiated from “Seni Silat Al-Haq,” a style of *silat* originating from Singapore; the latter is one of eighteen styles

<sup>55</sup> Anthropological or sociological accounts of Sufism have focused primarily upon the Sufi organization and the charisma of the saints (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Gellner 1969; Gilsenan 1973; Lindholm 1990). There are few works specifically concerning the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* in Southeast Asia (al-Attas 1963; van Bruinessen 1998, 1992). Recent scholarship has turned towards the study of transnational Sufism (Nielson 1998; Werbner 2003; Werbner and Basu 1998; Zhelyazkova and Nielson 2001).

<sup>56</sup> See <http://www.umich.edu/%7Esilat/pencaksilatpentjaksilatsenihaqqminangkabausatriamudain-structoprfile.html>.



composed by the late Pa' Hosni, who travelled extensively in the region to study under hundreds of Sufi and *silat* masters.<sup>57</sup> In Malaysia, Seni Silat Al-Haq is the style of *silat* taught (privately) by Pa' Ariffin's brother, Pa' Din (who learned it from Pa' Hosni in Singapore), and Pa' Din was very upset that Pa' Ariffin also named his style after *haqq* (truth). Sibling rivalry is a regular feature reported in Malay ethnography, and this may sometimes underlie the fusion of different styles of *silat*, as well as drive the fission, alterity, or splitting of *silat* (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The Haqqani Sufi *tariqa* (*tarekat* in Malay) of Shaykh Nazim al-Qubrusi al-Haqqani consider themselves to be the Royal *tariqa*, a virtuoso and elite religious organization stemming from the Ottoman Empire. The *Naqshbandiyyah* have longstanding historical connections with Southeast Asian monarchs. Riddell (2001: 103), in his case study of Aceh, where written records go back to the sixteenth century, shows that Shams al-Din (c. 1575–1630) initiated Sultan Iskandar Muda into the *Naqshbandiyyah* order serving “as Shaykh al-Islam, the supreme spiritual guide” to the Sultanate (Riddell 2001: 110).<sup>58</sup> In present day Brunei, Shaykh Nazim “is considered saint of the age...welcomed by the generosity of its people and especially by the Sultan, Hajji Hasan al-Bolkiah” (Kabbani 1995: 396). The “people” and the Sultan are mentioned together in one breath: the solidarity of the “common people,” together with the Sultan, is something that the Haqqani like to emphasize. For the Haqqani, the body politic is composed of the people as the body with the Sultan as the head: both require the other in order to survive and prosper; both have different functions and needs; both acquire their position by *fiat*.

Though the Haqqanis adopt so-called “folk” religious practices such as the use of talismans, due to their royal orientation they would shun the idiom of “folk Islam.” Shaykh Nazim's group seems to collapse the distinction between “high” and “popular” (folk) Sufism established by Nicholson [1914] (1963: 131, 139), as their mission is to diffuse “high” Sufism among the masses. The Shaykhs establish and maintain extensive transnational links through their first-class-jet-set lifestyles, supplemented with the use of substantial websites, a host of publications and email. Centres have been established in North America, Britain, most of Western Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia (Nielson 1998: n.p.). I would agree with Neilson who says that it is difficult to establish the number of members worldwide “as the very concept of membership is nebulous, and declaration of adherence (*bay'a*) at a meeting led by Shaykh Nazim is easy, as distinct from most other Sufi groups which require an often lengthy initiation process” (Nielson 1998: n.p.).

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Cikgu Jamal of Silat Serantau, Singapore (Pa' Hosni's former student).

<sup>58</sup> According to Andaya and Andaya (2001: 55) no necessary connection may be made between Aceh and the historic Melaka Sultanate: evidence of the Sufi connection to the Melaka Sultanate is still unclear. My point is that the *Naqshbandiyyah* have had connections with Southeast Asian royalty for centuries.

Led by the charismatic Shaykh Nazim, otherwise known as *Maulana* (Master), and his sons-in-law, Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani and his brother Shaykh Muhammad Adnan Kabbani, through tours, books, websites, and performances of secular and divine power, the Haqqani actively proselytize in the west. Together they brave the dangerous “land of infidels, *kufristan*, of idolaters, hypocrites, backsliders—the ‘unbelievers’” in order to bring them to salvation (Werbner 2003: 43).

Their strategy is clearly effective: in Shaykh Nazim’s first visit to America in 1991 he visited fifteen states and established thirteen centres for the Haqqani order, and by his second visit in 1993 Kabbani could boast that “through him over 10, 000 people in North America have entered Islam and have taken initiation in the Naqshbandi Order” (Kabbani 1995: 396). Shaykh Nazim, who comes from Cyprus, has been visiting Malaysia since 1985. Since that time thousands of people have taken *bay’ah* (initiation, pledge, spiritual connection).<sup>59</sup> I have not been able to gain figures as to the exact number of followers (however defined) that Shaykh Raja Ashman has in Malaysia. In 2003 a rough estimate for Kuala Lumpur from my headcounts of people regularly attending the *zawiya* would put the number as somewhere in the region of four hundred to five hundred individuals. My visit in 2008 would double this number, where the *zawiya* now occupies the original house plus the one next door to it.

## New Age?

Nielson points out that: “Of several groups now in Britain, the largest are in London, Birmingham and Sheffield. Nielson continues that “during 1999 a new centre was established in Glastonbury which has especially attracted white converts” (Nielson 1998: n.p.). This is significant because Glastonbury is the centre of New Age religiosity in the U.K. (Prince and Riches 2000).

Heelas (1996: 55) discusses self spirituality as a significant component of eastern world rejecting-activity (Taoism, Buddhism, and Sufism); activity that is oriented towards transcending the ego (a familiar trope of the Naqshbandis). He stipulates that “although it would be inappropriate to think of such eastern teachings as being ‘New Age’ in their traditional settings, they surely can be treated as such in the west” (Heelas 1996: 55). In my view this conclusion is problematic, and the problems occur because of the way it is formulated. Heelas unnecessarily delimits the New Age concept to the “west” and (I suppose) to “modern” rather than “traditional” settings. The concepts “traditional” and “modern” are

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<sup>59</sup> Nazim, the Haqqani Foundation secretary pointed out that the Haqqani Foundation is run by five millionaires, and provides the economic muscle behind the Naqshbandi Sufi Order of Shaykh Nazim.



problematic given that the notion of tradition itself is a product of modernity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Transnationalism, defined as “the organisational crossing of national boundaries” is helpful to think beyond simple dualisms such as east/west, traditional/modern, us/them, in a world whose interconnectedness, globalization, and cosmopolitanism seems ever more readily apparent (Werbner 2003: 1 n1).<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu and the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* are better characterized by the term “field” than “setting” since they comprise complex international networks. Hence, I would say that it may well be appropriate to see eastern teachings as being “New Age” in the west and in their traditional “settings.”

Despite their arduous religious observances and claims to tradition it is surely relevant to consider Seni Silat Haqq Melayu and the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat*, whether in Malaysia or England, as a New Age movement, as a “pop-religion” (Turner 2004). Correspondingly, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, for all its claims to “noble traditional lineage,” can also be seen as a form of New Age pop *silat*. However, the higher echelons of the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* and of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu certainly do not endorse a perception of the organization as a New Age pop religion, and would shudder at the prospect.

Nevertheless, the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* are approached by many of the British (though not necessarily Caucasian) adherents as a type of New Age religion, which causes all sorts of upsets. For example, Pa’ Ariffin, whilst a Haqqani *Imam* (roughly a priest) in London, would bitterly complain that the female converts left their used tampons stuffed behind the radiators of Peckham Mosque, something unimaginable in Malaysia where menstruating women would not enter the mosque as a matter of course. Pa’ Ariffin narrates that he always had a problem in the United Kingdom with mothers: “This is not your mosque, this is Allah’s mosque,” they would say to him, to which he would reply, “Do you see Allah here or me here? If your kid misbehaves someone must tell them off.” More positively, consider Cecily, a petite Goth enchantress with long blue hair, who, scantily clad in black leather loved to dance in the firelight to feral music, in the midst of beer swilling drugged people at Glastonbury festival, casting her spell with a *pedang* (sword) in the “traditional” style of the Malay aristocracy.<sup>61</sup> In bringing Islam to the west the Haqqani certainly have their work cut out for them. But this is to run ahead with the story, and for now I will turn to a brief outline of the forthcoming chapters.

<sup>60</sup> Werbner (2003: 1 n1) usefully distinguishes between transnationalism, globalization (the global diffusion of ideas, images and consumer goods), and internationalism (which denotes relations between states in the international arena).

<sup>61</sup> As Sarah Pike points out: “Native American jewellery and buckskins, pentagrams and crystals, anything in black or purple, flowery gauze skirts and “ethnic” clothes, leather bodices, boots or other medieval wear .... are part of a distinctively Pagan style” (Pike 1996: 132).

## The Chapters

Chapter 2 addresses the anthropological literature relevant to my premise that the *guru silat* should be rethought as a war magician because of their work in the unseen realm (*alam ghaib*). Earlier I proposed that a misconceptualisation of *silat* occurred primarily because the analytical framework imposed by colonial ethnographers was faulty. This faulty analysis has been recapitulated into the present era. The central tenet I have in mind here is the colonial theory of magic as something existing outside of or beyond the body. In other words, Victorian scholars promoted, albeit unwittingly, a disembodied theory of magic. For differing reasons the error is compounded by some of the founding figures in anthropology, including Malinowski and Mauss. Alongside the faulty classification of magic, mysticism, the occult, spirituality, sorcery, and the “supernatural” are wrongly seceded from healing, performance, ritual and theatre.

*Silat* encapsulates an embodied form of Malay mysticism and magic. War magic is something embodied and actual, as opposed to something fake or solely virtual, and this leads me to challenge Gell’s (1998, 1999) cognitive take on the magical power of art with a view grounded in perspectives of embodied performance and skill (Csordas 2002; Ingold 2000: 5). Changing the anthropological focus was facilitated by taking an embodied approach to war magic, a view that was informed by my performance ethnography of *silat*. Breaking away from the avoidance of war magic facilitates an anthropological rethinking of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery, and has implications for the anthropology of art, embodiment, experience, healing and performance in Malaysia and beyond.

Chapter 3 discusses the practice and performance of *silat* from a technical martial arts point of view, and outlines the background and history of various styles of *silat*. Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, like most if not all Malay styles of *silat*, is a composite style that derives from several others. Malay *guru silat* acknowledge the amalgamation of the styles, and regard themselves to be gardeners in the garden of *silat*. Beginning with bodily “hexis” I examine what it is about *silat* that makes it so physically enchanting, and enquire how this magic in motion is achieved (Bourdieu 2002: 209). I modify Gell’s [1992] (1999) notion of the “technology of enchantment” to become the “performance of enchantment,” by which I mean that the technical basis of the martial techniques are honed to such a degree through practice, rehearsal, and performance that their execution takes on a magical appearance, and creates an uncanny effect for the opponent. For example, a *silat* practitioner may develop the ability—through footwork and misdirection—to vanish from in front of his or her opponent, only to instantly reappear behind them. The real magic of *silat*, where practitioners gain incredible endurance, power, speed, and strength is the result of arduous endeavour in a complex martial art that exists in a symbiotic relationship with everyday life.

Chapter 4 focuses upon the mystical, spiritual, and religious dimensions of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. Again, stretching Gell from the cognitive domain into the domain of embodied performance, I refer to the methods and procedures used to

draw power from the unseen or sacred realm as the “enchantment of performance.” The neglect, omission, or bracketing off of *silat* has created artificial bounds upon Malaysianist anthropological research, not least because *silat* invites an exploration of an alternative cosmology, that of the shadow soul (*bayang*), which has remained mysterious for over a century. I navigate an understanding of “the unseen world” from the perspective of the Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* as well as from the standpoint of *silat*. In *Bahasa Melayu* mystical powers of the animist variety are known as *kebatinan*, which derives from the Arabic word *batin* (inner feelings). In Sufi mystical doctrine similar mystical powers are formulated as part of the doctrine *tasawwuf* (mystical science). Animism and Sufism are usually separated analytically, but this type of surgery leads to complications and distortions that may be avoided if the two are conceptualized together, like separate threads within the same weave, rather than as two unrelated bits of string. For example, meeting Shaykh Nazim for the first time may be considered an intense mystical experience, and the charisma of the Shaykh may transform the entire *Weltanschauung* and ethos of the *silat* performer. This experience feeds into “traditional” Malay embodied ritual practices derived from *silat*, concerning how to draw power from the unseen world.

Chapters 5 and 6 thicken the description and tackle the theme of doubles in relation to the construction of *silat*, and the relations of the *guru silat* to each other and their students. Chapter 5 provides a case study and genealogy of Pa’ Ariffin. I trace the career of the *guru silat* from the cradle, through childhood, sibling rivalry and initiation, and depict Pa’ Ariffin in relation to his liege Shaykh Raja Ashman, and his saint, Shaykh Nazim. Pa’ Ariffin’s permission (*ijazah*) to create *silat* derives from his “trusteeship” of mystical gifts (*amanah*) derived from his father, his liege, his saint and from other *guru silat*. Status, power, control, and authority are refracted through issues of creativity and authenticity, and are examined here through the notions of permission (*ijazah*) and spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*). *Ijazah* is “the permission” to transmit *silat* styles or techniques through or across the generations. *Gerak* is a kind of mystical doubling whereby the *guru silat* appropriates martial techniques and in the process creates *silat*. Movements, sets of movements, and ultimately whole styles of *silat* may be doubled through *gerak*, and if passed down through the generations become invented traditions, themselves subject to the mimesis and alterity of *gerak*, which ultimately re-invokes the issue of *ijazah* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Taussig 1993). I conclude Chapter 5 by outlining how Pa’ Ariffin attempted to bring Seni Silat Gayong Malaysia closer to the auspices of the Sultan of Perak through a ceremony that rehearsed the steps necessary to activate the Malay shadow state that remains within the wings of democracy.

Chapter 6 further examines the career of *guru silat* Pa’ Ariffin only now in relation to the theory of social and aesthetic drama known as the “infinity loop model” (Schechner 1994: 630 Fig. 5; Turner 1985: 300). In the infinity loop model social drama feeds into aesthetic drama and vice versa, and this provides a powerful tool with which to organize and understand a bizarre array of encounters that arose during the course of the fieldwork. I trace not only how a group of *silat* practitioners ventured from London to Kuala Lumpur, but conversely how a group of Malaysian *silat* practitioners ventured from Malaysia to London. I emphasise that the theatre

is not peripheral to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, but provides its very *raison d'être*. In my view, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is best understood as the conception of an actor, choreographer and director. Indeed for Pa' Ariffin *silat* is a form of theatre. I outline a variety of social dramas where Haqqani practices have fused with Sufism to give a unique brand of *silat* training where the practitioners undergo forty day retreats in Malaysia involving “ego” mortification, conversion to Islam, and even marriage by accident. These social dramas are not all reflected in Pa' Ariffin's London play *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* (staged in 2002), but only the agonistic elements found their reflection alongside a staged reconciliation. Far from any rifts being healed, the show deepened the divide between Pa' Ariffin and nearly all of his former students. In my view the resolution of conflict played by the benevolent Sultan is the wish fulfilment of an end to the violence of continually ruptured relationships.

Chapter 7 explores the rituals of divination and revelation in the main style of Malaysian *silat* which is called *silat gayong* (a precursor of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu). Based upon my own experience, I describe and explain the significance of the lime bath (*mandi limau*), the flower bath (*mandi bunga*), and the oil bath (*mandi minyak*). The oil bath is a test the *pesilat* undergoes to prove their faith in Allah by dipping their hands into a cauldron of boiling oil. I was astonished by the sheer flexibility of the *mandi minyak*: historically it was a trial by ordeal, later an invincibility ritual, and more recently it was considered as a medicinal practice. After considering several contemporary theoretical explanations for this type of “supernatural” phenomenon, I introduce the concept of “occulturation,” shorthand for the attribution of occult power to esoteric skills. Applying the ideas of Turner (1961, 1975) concerning “divination” and “revelation,” I consider the lime bath as a rite of divination, and the oil bath as a rite of revelation. In the lime bath the *guru silat* summon the shadow of a long dead ancestor to reveal the neophyte's personality type. The oil bath reveals the power of Allah to suspend natural law in order to answer the prayers of the supplicants in an embodied ritual proof that goes beyond language, and beyond what people would normally consider possible. These *silat gayong* rituals indicate that it is important to develop an understanding of the Malay war magician's understanding of death, or *deathscape*.

Chapter 8 closes the section on shadows. Here I regard *silat* through its notion of the shadow soul and its conception of death, and relate this to symbols, artefacts, and performances of eternal transformative regeneration. When death is regarded as a stage between this life and eternity, then it is unsurprising that the spirits of the “the potent dead” dead are believed to watch over the living (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002). Death in *silat* is not regarded as an end but rather a means to attain access to the netherworld. Therefore *silat* masters may draw the chthonian power of the ancestor's spirits into this realm through necromantic summoning. This takes an embodied form in the *belebat* set of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. My argument is that necromantic sorcery is embodied in the martial dance, initiation rituals and rites of *silat*. *Silat* functions to physically and spiritually transform the *silat* practitioner and relinquish their fear of death and dying. However, there is a discrepancy between the virtuality and actuality of death, a divergence I formulate as a disjuncture of deathscapes.

In sum Chapter 1 outlines my hypothesis that the Malay martial art must be reconfigured as part of an analytical complex including the Sufi, shaman and magician. I have argued that the omission of the martial artist from this complex is an error of colonial analysis. This error results from a style of thinking that posits a disembodied theory of magic (see Chapter 2), a style of thinking that is basically essentialist. Against this I locate a concrete example of *silat* in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, and regard it in its complex multiplicity, accepting that contradiction, paradox, and ambiguity are part of the object of enquiry, instead of ignoring untidy elements that would not fit a preconceived theory (McHugh 2004). In order to begin to analytically reconfigure the *guru silat's* position I have outlined the methods of performance ethnography that have permitted me to move beyond the veils of secrecy concerning *silat*, and sketched out a definition of *silat*, alongside the field and emergence of *silat*. In conclusion I have proposed that *silat*, like Sufism in the hands of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*, may become New Age.

## Chapter 2

# Silat: Art, Magic and Performance

Anthropologists have called for a rethinking of magic, witchcraft and sorcery (Kapferer 2003; Meyer and Pels 2003; Wiener 2004). Similarly, Townsend (2004) calls for reconfiguration of definitions of shamanism. My work resonates with calls to rethink magic, sorcery, and shamanism, but from the perspective of Malay mysticism embodied in *silat*. I contend that the *guru silat* should be examined as the predominant type of Malay magician, where war magic encapsulates elements of shamanism, sorcery and Sufi Islam. Here I begin to situate the *guru silat* and the practice of *silat* firmly within Malay cosmology and explore the ramifications of such an insertion for anthropological theory.<sup>1</sup> This requires a discussion of war magic, a terrain that I reclaim from the perspective of martial arts.

That the *guru silat* has been relatively excluded from the Malay magical complex, and from discussions of Malay indigenous healers (*bomoh*), is part and parcel of a tendency to regard the practice of martial arts as a peripheral activity assumed to be marginal to culture and society. However, in my view, *guru silat* are the gatekeepers of Malay war magic: as experts in the field of death they are concerned with how to live, heal, kill and die. The ability of the *guru silat* to peer into the netherworld, and call shades, places them on a par with the shaman, with the caveat that Islamic *silat* masters are prohibited from entering trance (Farrer 2006a: 25).

Initially my broad aim was to establish the groundwork for the anthropology of martial arts. Like Gell (1998: 4) I tend to regard social anthropology as the study of “social relations” rather than as the narrated memoirs of a reified “culture,” and

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<sup>1</sup> I consult several broad areas of anthropological literature; especially work on mysticism, magic, art, performance, practice and embodiment. Another area concerns martial arts scholarship, and lay writing on *silat*. The study of transnational Sufism, particularly of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*, as well as materials produced by members of the *tarekat*, receives attention. Besides this, I consider aspects of the literature by anthropologists, historians and others on Malaysia and Southeast Asia where this affects my understanding of *silat* and Sufism. Waterson (1997) and King and Wilder (2003) provide useful paths through this maze. Studies in medical anthropology, often combined with theories of performance, embodiment, dance, and theatre have proved useful. Malaysianists who have advanced the study of the Orang Asli receive attention because the Orang Asli share cosmological elements with the Malays, albeit that these are sometimes inverted or transformed.

I have therefore decided to focus on specific groups of *silat* practitioners. Alongside my ethnographic approach I examined anthropological literature concerning art and performance (including ritual, experience and embodiment). Quite unexpectedly I found that coming to understand *silat* necessitates a revision of earlier anthropological theories of magic and mysticism.

Kapferer (2003) declares that to rethink magic, witchcraft, and sorcery it is imperative to go “beyond rationalism.” “Beyond rationalism” provides a versatile axiom for contemporary phenomenological projects in anthropology, and condenses a current of thinking that underlies several branches emerging from phenomenology. These branches include theories of “somatic modes of attention” which challenge mind/body dualism (Csordas 2002: 241–259); theories of the “senses” which interrogate sensory awareness and seek to explore experience beyond the five senses (Telle 2003; Zarrilli 2002); and theories which conceptualize “social action,” including sorcery, magic, and witchcraft, as constitutive of identity, or as embodiments of power relations (Gell 1998; Kapferer 2003, 2004).

Following Mitchell (1956), the Manchester School (including Victor Turner) regarded ritual and theatre as embodied performances of encoded symbols that reveal the relationships of the performers and audience to the social structures they inhabit. The idea that underlying structure can be detected and analyzed through symbolic expressions was the keystone of structuralist theory.<sup>2</sup> However, with the ascendancy of the phenomenological paradigm the structuralist sociological enterprise that would consign social action to a pattern of encoded residual meanings that reflect, represent, or symbolically encode social structure is abandoned (Jackson 1989: 101; 1996: 11–12; Kapferer 2003: 118; Rio 2003: 130).

Anthropologists have begun to criticize “the dead-end street that the constructivist paradigm in anthropology is becoming” (van de Port 2005: 176). The social constructivist approach assumes that there is an open path through the forest that leads somewhere, whereas the path may be hidden, and the destination concealed (Heidegger 1993; Krell 1993: 34; Weiner 2003: 8–11). The woodsmen entered the forest for their own purposes, and not necessarily to link one German village with another culminating in the *autobahn*. Weiner says that crude notions of the social construction of reality are misconstrued in societies where people speak in code and hide their names and that in Foi culture there is a “non-constructionist approach to saying, revealing, and knowing” (2003: 130). In a similar vein, Malay social relations are not an open-faced mine for the anthropologist to freely hack at, or a naked structural edifice displayed for all to see, but a subtle flow of veiled interpretations, cautious suggestions and guarded opinions. Within a veiled gender segregated environment communication is subtle. In the mosque sparks fly as eyes connect through a gap in the screen separating the sexes. Fingertips flicker beneath the palm as change is received in a shop.

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<sup>2</sup> Phenomenology does not deny the existence of underlying symbolic structures, but asserts that they are continuously in a process of construction and reconstruction by people engaged in symbolic, ritual, theatrical or performative behaviour; it accepts that changes in performative behaviour can be indicative of changes in the social structure or social change.



A polysemic, multivocal approach alive to diversity and multiplicity is required to begin to fathom the mystery of *silat*. Neat evolutionary typologies of religious “progress” or “advancement,” accompanied by a host of definitions, where religion is said to supplant supposedly less “civilized,” or less “rational” forms of magic are inadequate to conceptualize what actually occurs (for example, Durant [1935] 1963). The same inadequacy applies to perspectives that assume religion and magic exist primarily as disembodied “beliefs” as I demonstrate below.

Evolutionary schemas presume and impose a logic of development that may well be absent. The unhinging of the secular and the primitive, the advanced and the religious was something that concerned Mary Douglas, who developed the schema of “group” and “grid” to better understand comparative data (Douglas [1970] 2003). Kapferer points out that “grid” and “group” are useful concepts to distinguish witchcraft and sorcery (in the sense of Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977), and to predict where either is likely to be found, sorcery for grid, and witchcraft for group societies (Kapferer 2003: 12). Implicitly contrasting grid and group, Kapferer says that:

Douglas suggests that socio-cultural and historical realities that are highly differentiated internally, that manifest strong internal divisions and boundaries, and that express widely shared schemes and codes of social and personal control (often restrictively so) are likely to have sorcery as a major mode of practice rather than witchcraft. In societies that are relatively flexible and are not highly socially differentiated, in which the boundaries and divisions between persons and communities are not strongly marked, and in which personal and social codes of conduct are diverse and relatively non-restrictive, witchcraft is likely to be common (Kapferer 2003: 12).

The schema may work for synchronic models of societies in stasis, but is awkward to apply when there are overlapping superstructural elements concomitant with processes of combined and uneven development in a multi-cultural environment like Malaysia. In Malaysia, both the Malay and Chinese communities exhibit characteristics of grid when viewed as isolated entities, but when framed in opposition may be regarded as group. In other words, intra-and-inter-group perceptions, stereotypes, alliances, loyalties, tensions, and conflicts mean that grid and group may exist simultaneously.

For definitions following Evans-Pritchard [1937] (1977: 21) sorcery is intentional, malevolent, and the activity of a ritual specialist, whereas witchcraft is malevolent, though accidental and unintentional. According to Wazir (1990: 44) both sorcery and witchcraft are prevalent among the Malays living in Peninsula Malaysia. However, Wazir does not mention Evans-Pritchard’s distinction of wilful sorcery as compared to uncontrollable witchcraft, and she does not make it entirely clear upon what basis, if any, that Malays differentiate sorcery and witchcraft. Although the existence of the Malay witch (*nenek kabaya*) seems to be something of a myth, there are frequent, though guarded, cases of witchcraft accusation levelled against individuals who are sometimes alleged to commission *bomoh*, *pawang* or *bidan* (midwife), and here it would seem that witchcraft concerns accusations levelled as a controlling mechanism in a tightly knit community. According to Wazir (1990: 40) witchcraft occurs through spirits invading the victim; with the spirit (*pelesit*) necessarily being directed by a ritual specialist and not invading of its own accord. This,



of course, would be sorcery in Evans-Pritchard's [1937] (1977) sense. Whatever the case, in Malaysia, as in Europe, the Africanist distinction is problematic. Stephen's (1987) point that in Melanesia the shaman, sorcerer, and the meditative mystic are part of the same complex of practitioners is useful here as the *pawang*, *bomoh*, Sufi, and *guru silat* may also be said to seek the mastery of souls (see Chapter 1).

Malays make a distinction between black magic (*ilmu sihir*) and white magic, between magic that falls within the fold of Islam, and that which violates its principles. Some claim that black magic involves summoning *jinn* or Shaytan to do ones bidding, whereas white magic (lit. *ilmu putih*) in the form of Islamic chanting (*dhikr*) utilizes the power of the miracle of the Holy Quran. In any case, what is crucial is the good or evil intention (*niat*) of the practitioner.

In the anthropological literature the categories or definitions of religion, magic, sorcery, and mysticism tend to reflect or present disembodied entities. I suggest that *silat* is a lived embodiment of magic and religion, and would criticize theories of magic and religion that are singularly cognitive (based on perception, emotion, or belief), and that fail to acknowledge social action embodied in practice and performance (Csordas 2001: 267–270; 2002). To rethink *silat* as the lived embodiment of Malay war magic it is useful to explore the acquisition of skill. Embracing biology, culture, and perception into a single synthesis, Tim Ingold's concept of "skill" is as much underneath rationality as beyond it. For Ingold (2000: 5) skill differentials are what distinguish people rather than cultural variations. By "skill" Ingold does "not mean techniques of the body, but the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment" (ibid.). Secondly, skills are not transmitted across generations, but re-grown anew by each generation. For Ingold, in basket weaving, as in a mollusc making a shell, the end product comes from the activity itself without the necessity for a pre-existent design (2000: 290, 339–348). The same can be said for wayfaring, when to navigate the Pacific Ocean in a boat without a map, compass, or GPS satellite device, one would need not a cognitive map, but an ability to tune into the changing environment, the water, the air, and the position of the stars, "to know as you go" as Ingold puts it (2000: 219–242).

I contend that the magic of the old martial arts masters is *real*, a carefully hidden know-as-you-go skill honed over long years of practice, leading others to react with astonishment if not fear upon its revelation. That I argue for the reality of magic may come as a surprise, but it seems to me that this is what remains once magic is stripped of spells, tricks and ritual. In combat, the supra-psychological skilled component—what may be called the real magic—can mean the difference between life and death.

## Beyond Rationalism

Kapferer (2003) lays down the gauntlet to contemporary anthropologists of magic, sorcery, and religion to venture *beyond rationalism*. I perceive practical and theoretical uses for this notion, but there are some tricky epistemological

problems, the most fundamental of which is probably the question of madness (Derrida 1978: 31–63). Kapferer's edited book *Beyond Rationalism* is comprised of a series of articles that attempt to rise to Kapferer's challenge by exploring the senses, such as the smell of death (Telle 2003); the emotions, including anger and fear of the absented third person or murderous sorcerer (Rio 2003); and the uncanny in relation to maleficent fetishes in the Congo (Devisch 2003). It would seem that it is not so much that anthropologists must experientially go beyond rationalism by undergoing frightening ordeals, but that they must be sensitive to realms that exist beyond their experience of what is deemed rational and what is considered real.

Kapferer's cue to go beyond rationalism resonates with the dictum of the Sufi *guru silat* to ask no questions, but to place the self (*diri*) into the hands of the master, like a corpse being washed for the grave (*mandi mayat*). For the *guru silat* skill may only be attained via guided experience, but the guide may be from this world or from the unseen realm. Questions do not suffice to access a raw level of mystical experience, which is considered to lie deeper than the word and the language within which it is embedded. Mundane language only serves to veil the hidden reality of the unseen. The ethnographic present may seem irrational, but until after the event one is in no position to know. Initially the ethnographer does not know, and in that sense is structurally in a similar position to the Naqshbandi *murid* (disciple) or *pesilat* (*silat* student). They must suspend doubt in order to experience in order to know, albeit that the ethnographer's knowledge is always provisional, whereas the Sufi aspires to the Absolute. To doubt means first to question, but one cannot question the *guru silat*. Hence, to explore the mystical realm one must "empty one's cup" and bracket doubt, bracket rationality, ego, and prior experience in a manner homologous to the phenomenological *epoché* (Husserl 1931: 107–111; Jackson 1996: 10).<sup>3</sup> Only then may an individual wander through the garden of *silat* to discover its secrets. Of course, this type of bracketing carries tremendous dangers for those who might be manipulated by unscrupulous, mercenary, or evil powers: some demons are better not celebrated.

For Kapferer (2003) going beyond rationalism means avoiding the pitfalls of rational traps such as mysticism. The term "rational trap" is not clearly defined by Kapferer, but I think it best applies to early theories of magic that prioritized the hypothetical reasoning of "savages" (Spencer 1893; Tylor [1871] 1913). Therefore, to venture beyond reason, would be to supersede animism. Animism is founded on the premise of savage rationality, where the anthropologist adopts the standpoint of the imaginary other, and introspects: "if I were a savage what would I think?"

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<sup>3</sup> Pa' Ariffin employs the expression "empty your cup" which is also commonly found in Zen Buddhism. In the context of martial arts the expression "empty your cup" is a good example of "cosmic debris," by which I mean ideas that have diffused over large geographical areas, rather than ideas that appeal to fundamental experiences and are thus liable to independent invention in different places.

Spencer (1893) employs the standpoint of the imaginary other, the hypothetical savage, as a narrative and methodological device to discuss shadows, echoes and reflections. The imaginary other is also evident in Tylor's [1871] (1913) elucidation of the dream realm wherein the soul ventures whilst the body sleeps. Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Prichard ridiculed this style of thinking with the analogy of the farmer wondering where the horse has bolted, scratching his chin and musing "if I were a horse where would I go?" Bloch demurs, and points out that the very existence of anthropology proves that it *is* possible to communicate with all other human beings, and that the problem with the "if I were a horse" arguments is that anthropologists do not study horses (Bloch 1977: 283). However, *silat* masters may study the movements of horses, and the movements of many other animals besides, and they "communicate" with them on a mystical level. If I were a tiger how would I fight? (see Chapters 3, 5, and 8).

In Sumatra and Malaysia the crocodile and tiger symbolize the gendered kinship group, the crocodile spirit for females, and the tiger spirit for males (Banks 1983: 72). In totemism, the correspondence between savage rationality and structural reality is regarded as indirect, as symbolic. Unlike animism, in totemism savage rationality is relegated to the unconscious or to prehistory, it is the pre-rational "midwife" at the birth of culture, located where culture emerges from nature, language from emotional utterance (originally figurative and metaphorical), and where analytical concepts crawl out from the surreal mist of all-enveloping concepts (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 102). Language (semiotics) would then seem to hold the key to analyzing myth, ritual and performance. But what if the performance of *silat* lies beyond rationalism, operating within a "spiritual" field, or within the realm of the projected unconscious? In this sense *silat* would be a type of theatrical metaphysics, a language beyond language, or a language of the bodymind (Artaud 1989: 36–37; Blacking 1977).

Taussig (2003) responds to the "fraudulent" sorcerer immortalized by Lévi-Strauss (1963: 167–185) with a "new" theory of magic. Against Lévi-Strauss, who regards the sorcerer's magic as a kind of primitive cathartic psychotherapy, Taussig (2003: 288–289) argues that the powers of the sorcerer are not supposed to be operational upon this realm, but properly operate in the realm of the spirits. Magicians are inherently sceptical, because their rationale lies beyond mundane rationality. Their trick is to trick the spirits: the magic of magic lies within the mimetic doubling of reality. In other words, the fur or stone spat out by the shaman contains the evil spirit that the spirits have placed within it as they sucked along with the shaman. The sorcerer's job and lot are summed up in Taussig's pithy phrase as "the skilled revelation of skilled concealment," a formula that applies equally well to the *guru silat* (2003: 273). But useful as it is, Taussig's explanation only operates at the cognitive and performative levels, and neglects to account for actual embodied skill located in magical practice.

My plan, which I found along the way, is to go from the phenomenologists' beyond rational to the beyond rational of *silat*, a beyond rational that led me to place my own hands into boiling oil, and to consider the emic idea that just as my hand casts a shadow over the keyboard as I type, so too is my very being a

shadow cast by something else. This theme of the Malay martial artist I call the “epistemology of the shadow.”<sup>4</sup>

## Supernatural Vulnerability

Hollan (1995: 825), in his review of Watson and Ellen (1993), asks what is it about Southeast Asia that leads people to feel vulnerable to human and supernatural forces, and thus engage in defensive sorcery, such as that involving invulnerability and protection. Similarly, his question can be applied to martial artists: what is it about these people and their societies that they seek to take up self-defence? And how does *silat* fulfil this requirement?

Recent debates concerning the relevance of the term “supernatural” across cultures have reproblematised the relation between nature and the religious or magical realms, and called into question eurocentric assumptions concerning the universality of the “supernatural” (Klass 1995: 32; Lohmann 2003: 117–118). However, in Malaysia, the term “supernatural” seems oddly appropriate. Beyond space, time, and nature, Allah is by definition incomparable. Nevertheless, one should remain sensitive to a different understanding of “reality” and the spiritual realm than in the supposedly secular west. In the Malay Muslim sense there is no “natural” realm beyond the supernatural order of things given by the will of Allah. Malays would hotly refute a “natural realm” divorced from spiritual entities, a realm beyond Allah and *jinn* that the idea of the “supernatural” implies (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 24; Klass 1995: 25–33). Hence the problem is not of a supernatural realm outside of nature, but of a rational, natural, scientific, modern realm outside of Allah.

Hollan’s (1995) question concerning why other humans beings are often perceived to be vulnerable appears to be partially answered by Faucher. Faucher’s (1998: 37, 256–262) Malays are related through kinship networks based upon village life with a clear demarcation between civilization and the hostile jungle outside the *kampung* (village). The inside/outside dichotomy spawns a dichromic xenophobic “moral boundary” (us/them) that operates on a magical level. Strangers are regarded as possibly infected with evil in the form of *jinn* or *hantu* (ghosts) that may have entered into their body during their journey through the wilderness. Evil attachment (moral infringement) can occur to individuals through eating or drinking *haram* (taboo) foods and beverages, through the machinations of others who curse them via a sorcerer, or when wayfaring through the jungle on their travels. To

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<sup>4</sup>Bateson perceptively notes that from the perspective of human natural history “ontology” (what exists) cannot easily be disentwined from “epistemology” (how we come to know about it) (2000: 312). Bateson uses “epistemology” to refer to both epistemology and ontology because it is awkward to keep switching between them: there is no general term for both, except perhaps “cognitive structure” or “character structure,” and these fail to see that “what is important is a body of habitual assumptions or premises implicit in the relation between man and the environment, and that these premises may be true or false (Bateson 2000: 314).

touch the stranger or outsider, whether in greeting or by accident, is to form a connection, a conduit through which the infectious evil forces may pass. In Faucher's model each community of known persons acts like an electrical circuit board with moral energy channelled through the fingertips. Thus, before the *bomoh* can accept an outsider as a guest into his or her house, the guest may be expected to take a lime bath (*mandi limau*). The lime bath is "to wash away the dirty ones" (as Cikgu Ezhar once said to me, before requesting that I take one). Faucher's account contradicts Wazir's (herself Malay) who says categorically that:

The Malay idea that spirit-possession is an integral aspect of witchcraft differs significantly from those found in "purer" animistic cultures . . . where nature spirits are viewed as autonomous entities which spontaneously enter humans on the slightest provocation, necessitating a shaman or traditional specialist to enlist his or her own spirit-guides to control the former [...] spirit possession is always a symptom of witchcraft. Spirits hardly ever enter humans independently (Wazir 1990: 40–41).

Somewhat ironically, with the success of what is often dubbed Islamic fundamentalism, more politely termed the *dakwah* movement, or the long term rise of Muslim Puritanism (Peacock 1978), the animist conception encapsulated in Islam comes to the fore. *Jinn* (good or evil spirits) may invade as and when they wish, especially when one is weak or at their lowest point, with the proviso, according to the Haqqani, that even *jinn* must have sought and gained permission from Shaykh Nazim before they may enter and attack the initiands.

*Silat* functions to protect the individual and community against dangerous foes, whether seen or unseen, local or foreign. Therefore, *silat* necessarily operates from a platform of war magic or warrior religion. One way to avoid invasion by the forces of evil is to pray regularly at the five allotted times per day in Islam; another is to protect the home, vehicle and the person with powerful Islamic talismans. Perhaps this is the reason why religious logos frequently appear on the back of Malay cars. Yet this does not augur that everybody is paranoid and anxious. One day, as I entered the Causeway to Singapore on my way back from a trip to Malaysia I was behind a Malay car with the usual Allah and Muhammad logos emblazoned across the top of the rear window. Poking out directly beneath them were the Disney puppets, Tweety and Sylvester.

## Mysticism and the Occult

More than thirty years ago Lewis said that we live in the age of "marginal mystical recrudescence" [1971] (2003: 17). In the run up to the *fin de siècle* a wave of science fiction films hit the big screen, such as *Dark City* and *The Thirteenth Floor*, tackling alternative realities and existential doubts about the self. "Reality" is not what it seems. After the millennium a shift to occult fantasy occurred: *Harry Potter* took the world book market by storm, and *The Lord of the Rings* topped the box office for several consecutive years. Since the 1970s the hippies have grown up; the

children from the LSD generation have become middle-aged parents in responsible positions. The margin has moved to the centre, and “mystical recrudescence” is now mainstream.

But what is mysticism? Paraphrasing Webster’s dictionary, “mysticism” refers to a theory postulating the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable knowledge or power. The term “mysticism” derives from the fifteenth century “mystical,” which refers to spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence. “Mystical” derives from the older fourteenth century term “mystic,” which refers to “mysteries” or “esoteric rites,” and to the “occult.” A “mystic” can be defined as a follower of a mystical way of life, and/or an advocate of a theory of mysticism.<sup>5</sup> The etymology of mysticism stretches back into antiquity relating, for example, to symbolic, allegorical, spiritual, esoteric, mysterious, occult phenomena and practices in Hellenistic Greece.<sup>6</sup> What these dry definitions fail to convey is the power of mystical experiences, and their abrupt fleeting nature.

Almost a century ago Evelyn Underhill considered magic and mysticism to be diametrical opposites, occupying poles at either end of a spectrum containing religion at the centre [1911] (2002: 70). In this formulation there is no clear break between magic and religion, or between mysticism and religion, as each shade off into the other. Magic is differentiated from mysticism, as magic, like science, is an endeavour to attain something for the self or for humanity: magic is a form of “self-seeking transcendentalism” (Underhill [1911] 2002: 71). Conversely, for Underhill mysticism is fundamentally philanthropic: it exists to give rather than to take, to provide and not attain, and implies the abolition of individuality in the surrender to ultimate Reality (*ibid.*). Mysticism, whether Christian or Islamic, seeks to transform and empower the self, magic attempts to change the world. The mystic’s quest is to attain conscious union with “a living Absolute,” with the “Divine Dark” (Underhill [1911] 2002: 73).

Kapferer dismisses mysticism as a trap of western externalist rationalist understanding (Kapferer 2003). Likewise, the word *occult* is sometimes considered as contaminated with too much western baggage to be of much use anthropologically. I find these positions problematic. In my view Kapferer does not equate mysticism with magic, but with *mystification*. Moreover, Kapferer says he is averse to a total theory of ritual, a doomed enterprise that gives rise to “interesting, but ... limited and frequently overly ethnocentric and occasionally mystical results” (2005: 38). “Mystical results” surely refers to the experience recounted by Edith Turner who says that during the *ihamba* ritual she saw a strange “deep grey opaque thing” emerge from the back of a patient (Turner et al. 1992: 14). For Kapferer, social phenomena require social explanation: demons *per se* don’t exist, but their exorcism creates a “ritual virtuality” where people tackle their intransigent modern problems through the performance of rite (2003: 118).

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<sup>5</sup> Webster’s Online Dictionary.

<sup>6</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online.



In my view, mysticism should not provide the *explanans*, but needs to be situated at the level of the *explanandum*. Nevertheless, I would not lightly dismiss individual or group mystical experiences, encounters with spirits and suchlike, but would argue that uncanny experience is not the end but a starting point for social analysis.

Kapferer's (1997: 274–281) argument is that while sorcery does cross boundaries, is transgressive, and therefore dangerous in the sense Douglas (1966) outlines, this does not mean that sorcery is epiphenomenal to the construction of social relations, what Kapferer calls "sociality," as for Kapferer sorcery is itself the grounds for the construction of social action and identity, and not merely a reflection of the structural formations based upon social action. Sorcery *is* power, though power is not necessarily sorcery. Sorcery is not a *representation* of structures of power, but power in its own right, power that for Kapferer is simply the reified power of the community. Although Kapferer takes a stance that is critical, if at times admiring of neo-Durkheimian perspectives, his phenomenology ultimately posits Durkheimian solutions to the problem of ritual and religion, only ritual and religion are replaced by sorcery. Kapferer is dismissive of mysticism and fetishism in explanations of sorcery because he argues that the power of sorcery is real and not ephemeral. However, I would contend that sorcery itself is an aspect of mysticism, its negative manifestation, and that both are amenable to be located as forms of social practice that structure social action and channel and engage human agency.

Kapferer begs the question through a hasty dismissal of *mysticism* as if the meaning were precise and established. Many anthropologists, like my informants, employ the term mysticism (*mystik*) as a substitute for, or interchangeably with magic (*sihir*), and the distinction between them is often blurred, especially in South-east Asia. To reiterate my earlier point, following the British anthropological tradition, I employ *mysticism* broadly to refer to magical thinking or enchantment, a magical type of thinking that may well be based in, or provide the rationale for ecstatic experiences (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977: 12). This dual formulation of mysticism encapsulates magic and inner exploration and can switch neatly between them. Mysticism here also has the important advantage of appearing less offensive to Islamic sensitivities than the explosively loaded terms magic, witchcraft, sorcery and the occult. Furthermore, in the Malay context, "mysticism" sidesteps some of the problems that beset the "supernatural."

More narrowly, mysticism refers to a fleeting altered state of consciousness (Tart 1990). This may be aroused, simulated, or experienced through liminal performances, including experimental theatre, percussive practices which activate unconscious process, and through ritual where sources of "meta-" power that are often inhibited by society's "indicative mood" may be released or accessed (Turner 1985: 297). Mysticism is an emotional heightening that the Sufis endeavour to make permanent in a kind of structuring of anti-structural moments (Turner 1974: 294). Remembered, alleged, and avowed mystical experience also has a profound effect on social interaction, the establishment and maintenance of charisma, and the presentation of self in everyday life.

In *silat* and Sufism the boundary between magic and mysticism is far from clear. The murky terrain concerning the definitions and boundaries between religion,

magic, sorcery, mysticism, and the occult is further complicated by the anti-magic stance taken by the Islamic reform (*dakwah*) movement and the Malaysian government, who regard shamans and animist practices as “backward,” and if undertaken by Muslims as “deviationist” (*syrik*). As I mentioned earlier, today some *guru silat* who practice some form of magical healing—and in the *alam Melayu* virtually all “traditional” or “indigenous” healing involves magic (Endicott 1970: 26)—transpose the Arabic term *tabib* (Sufi physician) for *bomoh* or *pawang*. Similarly, *mystik* normally occupies a slot in Malay conversation that may perhaps be better configured by *ilmu sihir* (forbidden magic, witchcraft, or sorcery).

Mysticism (*kebatinan*), in the context of *silat*, strives towards the attainment of magical results such as invulnerability, incredible speed, and “superhuman” strength. In Sufi mysticism, which Sufi *silat* styles emulate, power is derived from the ability to manipulate time and space. For example, the ability to appear simultaneously in more than one place, a well-known Sufi ability to literally “distribute the person” (Chambert-Loir 2002:140; Gell 1998: 21, 74, 103–104), is one of the key powers of *silek bayang*, a style associated with Sumatran elders (Maryono 2002: 229).

Malay Islamic *silat* styles are comprised of a fusion of indigenous and foreign kinesthetic skills enshrouded by the cosmic debris of Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism and animism (Endicott 1970; Skeat [1900] 1984; Winstedt [1925] 1993; Wilkinson 1906). Gnosticism and totemism can also be nailed to the list, Gnosticism (Jonas 1963) because it shares certain arcane features with Malay magic, such as the symbol of the snake eating its own tail, and “individual totemism” (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 37), where movements performed within Malay *silat* epitomize the movements of various animals such as the crocodile, tiger and eagle.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding mysticism via *silat* collapses the mind/body dualism inherent in earlier definitions of mysticism. Mystical experience is not merely a fleeting revelation or a transient feeling of ecstasy (James 1917), nor is mysticism simply a self-reflexive interiorizing, a process of “mind.” *Silat* is the embodiment of mystical experience. If *taijiquan* is meditation in motion, then *silat* is magic in motion: both are embodied forms of mystical practice. This practice seeks to configure a self-renewal through a technology of martial practice combined with ritual and performance. Hence, mystical experience derives in part from a “performance of enchantment” combining embodied practice, ritual and revelation, whereas mystical rhetoric is part of the “enchantment of performance” where mystical experience bursts the shell of mundane reality only to be reincorporated back into structure of day-to-day life.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss “individual totemism” involves a relationship between a sorcerer and a certain animal species, normally a reptile. The animal lends its assistance to the sorcerer, on the one hand as a beneficent or maleficent agent, and on the other as a messenger or spy. Cases are known of the sorcerer exhibiting a tamed animal as proof of his power. [...] More precisely, the zoological species appears as a mediating term between the soul of the species and that of the sorcerer” (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 37).



## Malay Shamanism

During the last century studies of Malay shamanism drifted from magic, medicine, and pharmaceuticals to an emphasis on healing and performance. Recent studies have addressed the *bomoh* as a healer, including the village *bomoh* (Faucher 1998), and the state *bomoh* serving the sultan (Werner 2002). Anthropologists have analysed the role of the *bomoh* in performances of indigenous Malay theatre such as the *mak yong*, *wayang kulit*, and in séances of healing (*main puteri*) (Ghulam-Sarwar 1976, 1992, 1997, 2004; Kessler 1977; Laderman 1991, 1995, 2000). Just as in “traditional” Chinese martial arts the kung fu master (*sifu*) is by definition a healer, so too is the master of *silat*.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, performers of *main puteri* had to be experts in *silat* to stage the heroic exploits and battles from Malay epic history, and also for protection whilst they travelled on the road.<sup>9</sup>

### *Latah: Social Mirroring*

Despite reading about *latah*, alongside “ragin Cajuns,” and “jumping Frenchmen,” actually seeing *latah* for the first time was quite a shock.<sup>10</sup> At a party (*kenduri*) I casually mentioned that I had never seen *latah* before, and so some of my Malay family friends (*saudara angkat*) decided “to set one off” with a sharp poke in the ribs. Tanter (lit. Auntie in Bahasa Indonesian), a formidable middle-aged woman shaped like a cue ball gripped the *latah* woman, Cik Siti, in a face-to-face bear-hug in a kitchen packed with veiled women. Clutched in Tanter’s vice-like grip Cik Siti repeated almost everything said to her, and mirrored all sorts of grimaces. I had not realized that she could speak English, when she asked, pointing to me “Who is he?” though knowing quite well who I am. The outburst made me uncomfortable: it looked like possession or schizophrenia. My Malay companions found the situation hilarious, especially given my discomfort. In hindsight the outburst was prompted as much to see how I would react to, and interact with the *latah* woman, who had become an intermediary for the others. It was as if we were standing in a hall of mirrors, only all the mirrors were faces, and then where somebody’s reflection should be another took her place.

According to Winzeler (1995) the Malayan hyperstartle pattern known as *latah*, which includes symptoms such as coprolalia (obscenity), echolalia (verbal mimicry), and echopraxia (bodily mimicry), is prevalent among *silat* practitioners (1995: 15,

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<sup>8</sup> Kung fu forms part of the curriculum for Chinese opera. Similarly, the Indian theatre tradition *kathkali* derives many of its training methods from *kalarippayattu* (Zarrilli 1998, 2002). The close relationship of martial arts to theatre in Malaysia is perhaps therefore unsurprising.

<sup>9</sup> *Main puteri* performers were notorious for their seduction of virgins and other people’s spouses.

<sup>10</sup> Scientific findings emphasize the cross-cultural nature of what is here referred to as *latah*, giving examples such as “Jumping Frenchmen” and “Ragin’ Cajuns” (Lees 2001: 403–404; McFarling 2001: 531–532; Saint-Hilaire and Saint-Hilaire 2001: 530; Tanner and Chamberland 2001: 526–529).

82–84). Winzeler (ibid.) notes that it is not clear whether it is through practising *silat* that people become *latah*, or whether *latah* people are attracted to *silat* in the first place. *Latah* was not something I noticed among performers of *silat*, but it was not something I particularly asked about. But if *latah* is prevalent among *silat* practitioners then why is it rarely encountered? Perhaps some of the techniques of *silat*, such as slow circling steps, changing to a sudden attack with a bloodcurdling yell deliberately invoke a *latah* response in an opponent. However, a sudden pounce with a bloodcurdling yell will evoke a startle response from virtually anybody.

Kessler (1977) discussed one case of *latah* in his account of *main puteri*. Kessler details two cases that required healing, including a *latah* case, and another case I shall refer to as the “listlessness” case. Kessler lists the symptoms displayed that may lead up to a *main puteri* performance as melancholia, listlessness, and withdrawal, food and drink being tasteless, an inability to relax during the day, and not being able to sleep at night (1977: 306, 308). Kessler does not provide a name for the specific malady—hence I refer to it as the “listlessness” case. (Perhaps “listlessness” could be called *layu*, a Malay term that sums up an exhibited feeling of a lack of energy.) For Kessler, following Lewis [1971] (2003), *latah*, and other states such as the listlessness case occur as a predominantly female response to transitions in status, or what I refer to earlier as “status degradation” incurred through divorce or from the husband taking a second wife. The husband taking a second wife is a potential doubling that is a perpetual cause of anxiety among Malay wives.

Kessler describes the role of *bersilat* in the listlessness case, but not in the *latah* case. *Silat* is an integral part of the *main puteri* performance, featuring in the music, the war tune (*lagu perang*), and the warrior tune (*lagu ulubalang*), in the storyline, and in the *dramatis personæ* (Kessler 1977: 309; Laderman 1991: 105). Kessler informs us that the *bomoh* and the female patient engaged in an unarmed duel, the *bomoh* offering merely feigned assaults and the patient raining heavy blows with increasingly frenzied determination, until an exhausted climax ultimately results in a cathartic purging of emotion for the estranged wife (1977: 310–311).

Kessler says, in parenthesis, that the *bomoh* carries out the performance of *main puteri* as “a specialist in cases of this sort, as well as a *bersilat* teacher” (1977: 310). Kessler’s article begins to show that understanding *silat* provides a key to understand the *main puteri* performance: the healer and the *guru silat* are the same individual. Kessler is keen to explain the *main puteri* as occurring because gender conflict occurs with issues of sovereignty (a connection that begs more explanation). Although Kessler discusses *silat*, he does not have a concept of the war magician; instead he places the issue in parenthesis. The role of *silat* in the *main puteri* performance, magic, healing, and culture requires further study. It is high time to invert the subject/predicate inversion of previous Malaysianist scholarship, to de-bracket the *guru silat*, and bring them out from among the shadows.

The fact that the *bomoh* is also a *guru silat* is always somehow incidental or parenthetical to the anthropologists’ main theme of healing or theatre. However, I contend that the *bomoh-silat* does not merely form an additional element in Malay shamanism to be appended to the others, but provides the underlying key to the

entire Malay shamanic complex. My position is partially verified by Werner (1986) and Shaw (1976) to whom I shall now turn.

### **Roland Werner: *Bomoh/Dukun***

Werner's (1986) study, entitled *Bomoh/Dukun*, concerns "traditional medicine" in Kelantan, to which the author, a western trained medical doctor, is sympathetic. War magic is implicit in Werner's discussion of *silat*, which he says forms an integral part of the training of the *bomoh*. Clearly an unpolished draft manuscript Werner's book is a raw and unfinished patchwork of ethnographic fragments. According to Werner the *bomoh* may become a specialist in one of three fields to become a herbalist (*bomoh akar-kayu*), a herbalist and medical specialist (*bomoh jampi*), or a puppeteer of *wayang kulit* (*dalang*), and is expected to amass wide knowledge in "religion, culture, and Sanscrit [*sic*]" (1986: 17).<sup>11</sup> Werner summarizes the training and "curriculum" of the prospective *bomoh* alongside tests to reveal the prospective pupil's suitability (who in former times were Brahmins or hermits), including staying overnight in a vacant haunted house without being afraid to test their "courage and fearlessness" (1986: 17–19). Werner (1986: 19) notes that the rare specialty of witchcraft is only taught to those with special affiliation with the spiritual world who are over forty years of age. The "*guru-bomoh*" selects his (or her?) pupil on the basis of eighteen criteria, seventeen of which are physical characteristics, such as broad lips, a flat stomach, and arched feet (Werner 1986: 19).

Werner (1986: 22–39) includes a chapter on a style of *silat* called Silat Seni Pedang. Unfortunately his description of *silat* is thin. However, Werner does discuss elements of the *bomoh*'s "graduation" tests, and provides a useful series of ethnographic notes, drawings and photographs. According to Werner:

[The] sword fighting ceremony is the highlight of training for the *bomoh*, which altogether may last up to eleven years. After this considerable time of practical and theoretical exercises, the candidate must fast for seven days during which time he is not allowed to sleep at all, but only to pray, and which is followed by the *silat* ceremony (Werner 1986: 22).

Werner (1986: 27–33) goes on to discuss the Quranic verses used by the group, and inserts seven pages of translation, but without any analysis or commentary of his

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<sup>11</sup> Werner (1986: 17 n1) mentions eight other types of *bomoh* in a footnote, but does not specify how these relate to the previous three categories. These are *bomoh patah* (bone setter), *tukang urut* (masseur), *tukang bekam* (specialist in blood-letting), *tok mudim* (circumciser), *bidan* (birth-attendant), *tok puteri* (shamanic ritual specialist in the border region of Thailand and Malaysia), *tok minduk* (the *tok puteri*'s "interpreter"), *keramat hidup* (a living saint), *pawang* (a "nature-hygienist"), spiritual protector of the fields and crops, but also in various specialities, including *pawang ular* (snake specialist), *pawang buaya* (crocodile specialist), and *pawang laut* (sea specialist).



**Fig. 2.1** Pa' Ariffin, a specialist in blood-letting

own.<sup>12</sup> *Guru silat* I have spoken to say that *silat seni pedang* (the art of the straight sword) is a rare form of *silat* that originates from Thailand, and is originally practised in the Northern Malay states. The *pedang*, a light sword with a slight curvature, forms one of the key weapons sets of *Seni Silat Haqq Melayu*, but Pa' Ariffin only taught this set to Cecily. Pa' Ariffin's mastery of the sword, blood-letting practice, and knowledge of Sanskrit mantra, makes him an excellent candidate for the title of *bomoh-silat* (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2).

Most of the remainder of Werner's book is taken up with "traditional" Malay medicine. Werner discusses anatomy, physiology, pathology (1986: 41–47), principles of diagnosis (1986: 48–56), and more importantly, for my purposes "the philosophy of sickness." In the philosophy of sickness Werner (1986: 57–58) briefly discusses *semangat*, four-element theory, death and the return of the plant, animal, and human souls to the "universe/world soul," and the divided human soul. Werner continues with types of sickness (1986: 64–65), including "spiritual sickness," such as "revenge sickness" caused by sticking pins in wax dolls, and "*jinn*-witchcraft" sickness, where the *bomoh* may use a ring placed on his middle finger, summon a *jinn*, and direct it via the moon to cause sickness or bring evil to the victim (Werner 1986: 65).

Various *jinn* can be called to overcome the magic charms of the victim including *Jinn Tanah* (the *jinn* of the ground), and *Jinn Jembalang Bumi*, who is the shadow of *Jinn Tanah*. The above detail concerning the *jinn* and shadow of the *jinn* shows that not only humans have shadows but so also do other spiritual

<sup>12</sup> Werner's translation derives from the *Holy Quran* translated by Abdullah Yusof Ali (3 vols.) Lahrdre (Pakistan): Shaiklt Muhammad Kashmiri Bazar.

**Fig. 2.2** A *bomoh-silat* attempting to remove Chief's *jinn*



beings. Although Werner does not explicitly use the terms “war magic,” or “war sorcery,” it is clear from his account that *silat* is contiguous with other forms of death dealing magic.

### ***William Shaw: Aspects of Malaysian Magic***

Shaw (1976: 22–29) surveys Malay, Chinese, and Indian magical, mystical, and esoteric knowledge in Peninsular Malaysia and provides a section on “*silat gayung*.” Shaw (1976: 11) says that the principal concern of magic is the secret of personal immortality. A key facet of magic is to gain invulnerability against the enemies’ weapons: “In former days,” says Shaw, “attaining invulnerability, formed an essential part of the training of the majority of warriors, bandits and secret society fighting men” (ibid.). In modern times, however, “the rituals have usually been shortened, debased and simplified,” and quick instant solutions have arisen which proffer protection “with a minimum of personal inconvenience” (ibid.). The same could be said in the present day training of *silat*, where the time and energy expended physically training is drastically reduced. Many of the lumbering *guru silat* and their

senior students in Malaysia are obese; and the thinner ones seem to control their weight by chain smoking heaps of cheap cigarettes.

If senior students and *guru silat* are not engaged in keeping fit by physically training it becomes pertinent to ask what they are doing instead to secure “invulnerability?” The answer is that *silat gayong* acts like a secret society, as the following statement from Pa’ Ariffin attests:

Gayong is very cliquey; it’s like a secret society. If you touch one person one thousand will come after you. If you touch one *gayong* guy before the end of the night you will see one thousand motorbikes, cars and lorries outside your home. [They] started as a secret society [and] even surrounded police stations. There were *gayong* in the police ... you could make a police report and it could just go missing ... Their first loyalty was to *gayong*, and not the police: that was just a day job (Pa’ Ariffin from fieldnotes).

Invulnerability and self-defence is not something acquired solely by the private individual engaged in solo martial arts training, or engaged in magical activities, but is something collective, acquired through participation within and membership of a semi-secret society, a “warrior cult” that has deeply penetrated the police and the armed forces (Elliot 1998).

## Silat Scholarship

The most comprehensive publication concerning *pencak silat* is that by Maryono (2002). Maryono is a Javanese *guru silat* of thirty years’ standing and coach of the Thai national *pencak silat* team. Apparently Maryono’s wife, an anthropologist who speaks several European languages, assisted him. Basically Maryono reworks and expands Draeger’s (1972) original survey of *silat*, only replacing Draeger’s useful illustrations with inane cartoon characters. From an Olympian standpoint Maryono dismisses the ethnographic approach to *silat* as too limited “to provide an overall understanding of the diverse cultural manifestations of *pencak silat* in Indonesia and the socio-cultural changes they have undergone in the course of time” (2002: 27), and instead advocates a survey approach based upon “unstandardised open interviews” and participant observation (2002: 25). Altogether 250 “respondents” were interviewed. Though of great interest, Maryono’s result is patchy. He flirts with the language of anthropology, but muddles basic terms like “respondent” for “informant.” This slip reveals his attitude to the study—“respondent” is a sociological term to describe people who tick boxes indicating pre-established answers arranged for pre-established questions. Although Maryono provides some good leads, his account lacks thick description.

Maryono (2002) classifies Javanese *silat* and Malay *silat* under the same rubric: as the *silat* of the Malay people. This is problematic because whilst some Malays might consider themselves to be part-Javanese, or to be of Javanese ancestry, many Javanese would not consider themselves Malay, certainly not if that means being



Muslim, as it does in Peninsular Malaysia by constitutional decree.<sup>13</sup> Maryono concentrates upon Sumatra, Java, and Bali as the dominant regions for *pencak silat* (2002: 12) and divides the subject into four areas: (a) art (*seni*) “performed to celebrate the beauty of movement”; (b) self-defence (*beladiri*); (c) sport (*olahraga*); and (d) spiritual exercise (*olahbatin*) (2002: 9–10). I have no problem with Maryono’s division, but would point out that I approach *silat* not from the dominant centre but from the English frontier and the Malaysian outback. My goal was not to grasp the whole of *silat* in the entire region for an indigenous readership, but to focus in-depth on a particular and peculiar “star group” so as to reconfigure the anthropology of Malay shamanism, magic and performance (Turner 1988: 44–45).

French anthropologist Jean Michel de Grave (2001) studied rituals of *silat* in Java. His examination of three styles of *silat* shows it to be a vehicle utilized by Javanese culture towards the socialization of social and religious values. These values do not operate in a timeless vacuum for de Grave, but reflect and produce the changes in society that are part of the wider social and political transformation of Indonesia in the twentieth century. The systematization of *silat* as a sport, and its organization through offices, rules, procedures, and hierarchy is linked to the development of the postcolonial state. The rationalization of *silat* in Indonesia manifests a larger process of national construction, as well as being the vehicle through which that construction occurs.

Pauka (1998, 2002) outlines the evolution of *silek* (*silat*) in Sumatra, that since the 1930s has developed into a type of theatre called *randai* (see also Mohd. Anis Md. Nor 1986). Pauka’s (2002) multimedia production summarizes her earlier book (1998). For some reason Pauka (1998: 18–26) makes no reference to Victor Turner’s hypothesis that ritual evolves into theatre, but her work can be said to confirm it. A shift from ritual to theatre and from theatre to film can also be shown in Malaysia. Shortly after directing and starring in the theatre production *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* in London 2002, Pa’ Ariffin briefly appeared in an early scene, and choreographed the action for *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, Malaysia’s first big-budget film. Schechner (1994: 613–614) however, dismisses the notion of ritual evolving into theatre as a red herring because ritual and theatre are equally forms of *performance*. In this way performance theory contests the uncritical evolutionary stance adopted by the “founding fathers” of sociology and anthropology, a criticism that also applies to Weber’s rationalization thesis. I am uncomfortable with talk of social evolution, and prefer to stick to the less judgmental notion of “emergence.” I would discount theories of the social evolution of ritual to theatre as the transition could proceed in either direction, with theatre genres stimulating the invention of new ritual “traditions.”

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<sup>13</sup> Previously, to be Malay one needed to be a Muslim, speak the language, and adopt local custom. The criterion of being born in the land was only added later. As Kahn (2001: 128 n19) notes, the definition of a Malay for The Federal Constitution is “a person who professes the Muslim religion, habitually speaks Malay, conforms to Malay custom and (a) was born before Merdeka (Independence) Day, in the Federation or Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or Singapore, or was on Merdeka Day domiciled in the Federation or Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person (Article 160, cited in Syed Husin Ali, 1981: 2).” [See Husin, Syed Ali].

No doubt sport *silat* in Southeast Asia is the vanguard of the disenchantment and re-enchantment of *silat*, and part of the process of the state hijacking and reinventing cultural “traditions” in an attempt to develop a modern Malay identity reflective of nonsyncretic “Islamic” values. However, many older *guru silat* quietly hold sport *silat* in contempt, and regard it as the purview of those who do not possess “the real thing.” My research examines practitioners who resist the rationalization and pacification of *silat* largely in favour of an “aristocratic” Sufi warrior identity, and hence the forthcoming pages do not prioritize the sport of *silat*, which in any case has already been partially done (Maryono 2002).

The few indigenous scholarly accounts of *silat* in Malaysia are of interest, especially Rashid (1990) and Tuan Ismail (1991). Rashid “interpret[s] the emotive transition from self-control to violence through the ritual media of *silat*” (1990: 64–65). However, this is rather a one-sided view because other powerful emotive transitions surely accompany the amazing skill needed to produce good wedding *silat*. In both cases the spectators’ hair may stand on end. Emotional transitions are not one-dimensional, but may result in multiple outcomes, from violence to entertainment. Second, Rashid’s “superman” notion, whilst appropriate in the emic portrayal of the acquisition of super-human power, does not adequately capture the idea of the struggle against “the animal within” in the reconstruction of the self of the *pesilat*. The *pesilat* or *murid* who has conquered the animal within is perhaps better rendered by the term “overman” than “superman.” For Nietzsche (2000: 787) the “superman” is only super in relation to the “good,” and it is precisely the “good,” those insipid modern “mass men,” who the overman (the aristocrat) is born to surpass. And to the “good” it appears that the “overman” is the Devil. Class is an issue in how *silat* is framed. Perhaps “superman” may be appropriate for the aesthetics of the *parang* (machette), and “overman” for the aesthetics of the *keris* (see Chapter 3).

Tuan Ismail’s (1991) excellent account is a veritable goldmine and reveals a style of *silat* known as *seni silat sekebung*. According to Tuan Ismail (1991: 50) *seni silat sekebung* (*silat sekebung* means “the garden of *silat*”) is one of several styles that could be properly representative of *seni silat Melayu*, and was chosen as a “purposive sample” after he observed nine other styles of *silat*.<sup>14</sup> A less modest view of *seni silat sekebung* would say that it is the pinnacle of Malay *silat*: it is the *silat* of the Malay *guru silat*.

The metaphor of the “garden of *silat*” implies the diffusion of different styles of *silat* across the Malay world from the source which is *seni silat Melayu*. The garden of *silat* invites a similar treatment to that Lévi-Strauss (1982) bestowed upon the garden of masks of the Native American peoples of British Colombia. As Lévi-Strauss points out:

Assuming that there exists a type of mask that stands in opposition and correlation to the Swaihwé, one should, therefore, knowing this, be able to deduce its distinguishing features

<sup>14</sup> The other styles Tuan Ismail (1991: 50) observed were *seni silat gayung*, *seni silat lincah*, *seni silat cekak*, *seni silat kalimah*, *seni silat kunningan*, *seni silat pengantijjn*, *seni silat cemendek*, *seni silat nasrul-haq*, and *seni silat al-muazat*.



from those I have used when describing the prototype. Let me try this experiment. Through its accessories and the costume that goes with it, the Swaihwé mask manifests an affinity for the colour white. The opposite mask will therefore be black, or will manifest an affinity for dark hues. The Swaihwé and its costume are adorned with feathers; if the other mask does entail trimmings of animal origin, these should be in the nature of fur. The Swaihwé mask has protruding eyes; the other mask's eyes will have the opposite characteristic. The Swaihwé mask has a wide-open mouth, a sagging lower jaw, and it exhibits an enormous tongue; in the other the shape of the mouth should preclude the display of this organ. Finally, one would expect that the origin myths, the respective religious social and economic connotations of the two types, will have between them the same dialectical relationships (of symmetry, of contrast, or of contradiction) as those previously noted from the plastic point of view alone. If this parallelism can be proven, it will definitely confirm the initial hypothesis according to which, in a domain such as that of masks (which combines mythic elements, social and religious functions, and plastic expressions), these three orders of phenomena, seemingly so heterogeneous, are functionally bound together. Hence, they will justifiably receive the same treatment (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 57).

Despite the language of positivist social science, I wonder if this experimental design was *a priori* or *ex post facto*. Regardless, Lévi-Strauss does suggest an exciting hypothesis of symmetry, contrast, and contradiction to explore transformations. The clue to the mystery of the masks is that:

When, from one group to another, the plastic form is preserved, the semantic function is inverted. On the other hand, when the semantic function is retained, it is the plastic form that is inverted (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 93).

The idea of parallelism and the reflection or inversion of plastic and semantic forms is useful here to address the changes that take place when *silat* moves around within and beyond the Malay world. For example, Chinese kung fu is sometimes openly avowed to be the origin of styles of *silat* which bear little resemblance to kung fu (for example, *silat Macan* supposedly derives from a Buddhist monk); conversely Chinese origin may be denied or substituted when a *silat* style looks almost identical to kung fu. Eagle claw kung fu is definitely a significant influence upon Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, although outside of kung fu perhaps the “crow” wields an even stronger influence. Neither of these birds features in the story of its creation.

Gell (1998) develops a more sophisticated account of transformation than Lévi-Strauss, and decouples the myth from the plastic form by treating the object not as a symbol but as an index of inherent agency. According to Gell: “All patterns are variations on only four ‘rigid motions in the plane’, to which repeated motifs can be subjected” consisting of: (1) reflection, (2) translation, (3) rotation, and (4) glide reflection (Gell 1998: 77–78 Fig. 6.4/I). “Glide reflection” is one of the ways patterns appear to be animated, or to have their own inherent agency, which ultimately beguiles the eye of the beholder (see Appendix A).

Aside from the Chinese connection, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu may also be regarded as a transformation of Javanese *silat*. Whereas the Javanese enter trance (*menurun*) and call the animal spirit into the body through spells (*jampi*), the *silat Melayu* practitioner must learn to suppress the animal, and instead of *menurun* conducts the ritual

practice of *gerak* to summon the power of Allah into the body through prayer (*dhikr*) (see Chapter 5). But a triangle is still a triangle even if it is inverted. It is not that trance symbolizes possession by an animal, but that repetition of movement and verse brings about a change in the relation of consciousness to the body, where the body leads the mind rather than vice versa.

## Magic in War

Because the concept “war magic” contains both war and magic, it is necessary to situate it in relation to both terms. Sheppard points out that “from the sixteenth century till the advent of British Administration, warfare either on sea or land was seldom absent from some part of the peninsula” (1947: 10). War magic has been invoked many times across the centuries, and has played a part in struggles against the foreign colonial powers including the British, Dutch, and the Portuguese, as well as during the struggles between chiefs and among royal successors (Reid 1988: 121–136, 1993: 152–153). War magic persists into modern times: World War II, the Malayan civil war (1948–1960), and the race riots of 13 May 1969 all featured the rise of invulnerability cults (Cheah 2003; Horowitz 2001: 98; Short 2000: 151).

Historically, due to the abundance of land, but the scarcity of people, competition in Southeast Asia concerned status and the control of manpower. Hence, in war “the physical objective of the combatants was to seize people rather than territory” (Reid 1988: 122). As Reid points out:

It was the object of warfare to increase the available manpower, not to waste it in bloody pitched battles. Hence attention was paid primarily to mobilizing large and intimidating forces, catching the enemy off balance, and demonstrating by some initial success that the supernatural forces which decided such things were on one’s side (Reid 1988: 123).

In the Malay world “standing” or “the acquisition of non-institutionalized acquired prestige that can’t be passed on to the next generation” was, and to some extent still is, achieved by amassing a coterie of loyal followers (Errington 1989: 189). Standing was measured in terms of the quantity and quality of followers. High-ranking followers would bring many others to the table. Even today, thousands of people will turn up to weddings in support of their venerated elders. Hence, if standing depends upon followers, and the object of conflict is to amass more followers, then internecine war would be tantamount to social suicide.

The necessity to shepherd followers as a scarce resource explains the historic role of champions in Malay warfare. Champions would engage one another in challenge matches or tournaments. Challenge matches (*bertinju*) minimized the amount of blood spilled on the battlefield to prevent the waste of valuable labour power. War via heroic champions changed in struggles with the more ruthless Europeans who were accustomed to much bloodier warfare (Reid 1988: 124).

Reid explains the significance of followers in social structural terms. Prior to free wage labour the primary source of labour mobility was bondage or debt-slavery (Reid 1988: 132). The Southeast Asian system was “both more personal and more monetary” than feudalism in Europe or slavery in Ancient Rome which were sanctified by church and state (Reid 1988: 136). In Southeast Asia there were no legally acknowledged conditions for freedom: instead “loyalty was more important than law, and everybody had a master” (ibid.).

Success in war was seen to be the result of the intervention of “supernatural” forces. The struggle was believed to take place in the cosmic as well as in the human realm. Invincibility was the hallmark of the great warrior. Rulers and their champions were believed to be protected by special *jinn*, spells, prayers, and powers gained through ritual asceticism (*bertapa*). Although reluctant to engage in mass slaughter, individual bravery was combined with indifference to death in combat, and individual champions could turn a battle simply through a demonstration of superior martial and spiritual skills; correspondingly, the fall of the champion usually led to the end of the battle (Reid 1988: 124). Among Indonesians the Javanese were especially renowned for their bravery: a vanguard of *amok* warriors would commence the attack with a “furious charge” risking their lives to “kill or scatter a number of the enemy” (Reid 1988: 125). Reid says that the consumption of opium or cannabis and lengthy ritual and spiritual preparation induced “a trancelike state of assumed invulnerability” (ibid.).

In Peninsular Malaysia war magic and Malay invulnerability cults were instrumental in the formation and defence of the nation state. For example, Malay and Chinese conflict erupted in the post-surrender period as the retreating Japanese abandoned the villages and the small towns. Across the remote hinterlands of Malaysia the largely Chinese and communist Malaysian People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) enacted reprisals against Malay and Chinese “collaborators.” Cheah states that in response to MPAJA “peoples trials” and the subsequent execution and mutilation of perceived or real Malay collaborators with the Japanese forces (the so-called “running dogs,” especially the former Malay police) the Malays retaliated with *parangs* against guns, and “their own peculiarly unique methods of warfare which combined traditional Malay martial arts, Islamic religious fervour, and faith in supernatural powers” (2003: 295–296). Cheah notes that with the collapse of the Colonial and the Japanese systems of domination

when rural Malays found themselves continually harassed and threatened by Chinese in the MPAJU/MPAJA, they discovered that neither the Malay aristocracy, the Malay bureaucracy, the Malay police force nor the Malay Giyu Gun [a Japanese originated paramilitary organization] were of any help. Every strata of society seemed helpless in facing this new foe. Even the Japanese found it difficult to suppress or eliminate the Chinese MPAJU/MPAJA. It was by turning to their religion, Islam, that the Malays found their new leaders. They rose from the ranks of the Muslim “holy man” (Cheah 2003: 298).

Of course, the Muslim “holy man” in this context refers to the *guru silat*. Not only were the Malays able to withstand the MPAJA attacks, but they launched reprisals against Chinese villages. As Cheah states:

They were able to slaughter and terrify the Chinese villagers without check until remnants of Chinese settlements fled to larger Chinese towns for refuge. Neither Chinese villagers nor the MPAJA could stop them nor understand their fanatical force (Cheah 2003: 296).

“Fanatical force” was partly generated through invulnerability practices, backed up by Islamic chanting (*dhikr*). Such activities were prompted by charismatic leaders such as Kiyai Salleh, whose *parang panjang* (sword) alone was reputed to have claimed 172 heads (Naguib Alatas, in Cheah 2003: 208). *Amok* is often constructed as “fanatical force” in the Malaysianist literature (Winzeler 1990: 96–122) and sometimes treated as if it were a unique “cultural syndrome.” However, *amok*, far from being an individual, disorganized, and insane activity may be mistaken with a coordinated, group form of violence, a *furor* (Dumézil 1970: 10) that is unleashed through invulnerability rituals, much in the way that the Viking berserkers unleashed their violent emotions through rituals, possibly involving the consumption of hallucinogenic mushrooms (Farrer 2006a: 33 n31).

Rashid points out that “*guru silat*, with their following of strong men and fighters, provided a kind of local garrison to be recruited during times of emergency” (1990: 87). Rashid (1990: 85) shows how *silat* warriors were specially selected by the sultan throughout the state to serve at his court. *Silat* warriors (*pendekar-pendekar silat*) were given the title *panglima* and were involved in rebellions against British colonial rule in Perak culminating in the 1875 murder of British Resident J.W.W. Birch. *Silat* warriors were also involved in the 1915 rebellion in Kelantan led by Tok Janggut (Rashid 1990: 86). More recently, *silat* exponents played a significant role during the 13 May 1969 race riots in Kuala Lumpur, where:

Almost spontaneously, an army of *silat* exponents from a variety of *silat* groups united under one banner to form a special force that spearheaded the formation of a massive impromptu phantom army known as the *selendang merah* (“red waistband or scarf”) (Rashid 1990: 88).

With the eclipse of the power of the sultans in Malaysia the agonistic function of *silat* attenuates, and outside of police or military training, *silat* largely appears in the guises of sport, theatre and cult. Nevertheless, clarified by points I make ahead, the transgressive element of the liminal can be reactivated—in this case through a ritual involving *ilmu kebatinan* (spiritual knowledge). The potential reactivation of *silat* warriors through liminal ritual acknowledges the force the sultans could potentially exert in Malaysia. Though they may be blunt, old tigers still have teeth.

## War Magic

Social anthropology has tended to relegate war magic to an anthropological backwater in favour of the analysis of witchcraft, shamanism, sorcery and the performance of healing. Discussions of war magic tend to regard it as a disembodied phenomenon, and have not made the connection between agonistic martial arts and the magic of the body. Rio (2003: 129) tackles homicidal sorcery (*abio*) on

Ambrym Island, Vanatu, central Melanesia, making arguably the most important contribution to Kapferer's *Beyond Rationalism*. Rio configures the sorcerer as an "absented third person." However, if Rio had taken an embodied performative approach, and made the sorcerer the *first* person, then he could have addressed war-sorcery in relation to the clubs, bows and arrows, and war dance he mentions in passing, and quite possibly have found that the sorcerer may not have been absent at all (Rio 2003: 151).

Reay provides a typology of "death dealing sorcery" in Papua New Guinea (1987: 91). To summarize and paraphrase Reay, death-dealing sorcery takes at least four different forms: (a) war sorcery involving the use of personal leavings; (b) war magic involving the use of magical or magico-religious objects; (c) sympathetic magic; and (d) cursing. Reay points out that the difference between war sorcery and war magic is that a war sorcerer manipulates objects associated with the intended victim, whereas the war magician manipulates objects associated with the supernatural powers invoked to cause death (1987: 91). Although Reay mentions that the Kuma kill their foes with spears and arrows, she gives no details, and does not contemplate the dance or the training of the warriors. Instead she emphasizes the "technique itself" to be the essential component of magic, such as smoking a cigar backwards (Reay 1987: 89). Reay places too much emphasis on objects and not enough emphasis on performance; furthermore I see no reason why war magic as a form of death-dealing sorcery should not include defences against malignant sorcerers and maleficent entities. Thrusting (manipulating) a *keris* (magico-religious object) deep into a man's chest seems to fit the bill of war magic, especially when we consider that the blade sucks out the *semangat* of the victim to feed upon.

*Contra* Maryono (2002: 2) it may not be *silat* that extends from Madagascar to Easter Island, but war magic. A more ambitious project than any so far attempted would be to ethnographically survey the diffusion of martial arts—configured as war magic—from Madagascar to Easter Island, or more narrowly from Indonesia to New Zealand. This could reveal new insights into Southeast Asian, Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian societies. Salient characteristic movements, *techniques du corps*, such as the twisted horse stance, could be isolated and treated structurally as if they were indices, whose diffusion could then be ascertained across this vast geographical region. A similar approach has been accomplished for the anthropology of art with some success (Thomas 1995).

War magic is a rather neglected category given its vast geographical range.<sup>15</sup> It may be thought that war magic is a minor relative of more important concerns such as love magic, beauty magic, or magical control of the weather. However, Malinowski [1922] (1999: 409) says that some of the best data he received concerning magic in the Trobriand Islands (and it will be remembered that all of his works concerned magic in one way or another) came from the "war-wizard" Kanukubusi, who led him to the important discovery of the substance in the belly, where the magic is

<sup>15</sup> Even Tambiah (1990) makes no mention of war magic.

stored.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, as Young points out “although he published very little of it, Malinowski collected a great deal of information in 1915 on Trobriand warfare and its magic, *boma*” (1998: 123). Unfortunately, although Malinowski provides some discussion and a photograph of the aged war-wizard, (plate LVIII) he does not enter into much detail, merely noting that the war-wizard was the last in his line [1922] (1999: 409).<sup>17</sup> Malinowski [1922] (1999: 403) develops a theory of Trobriand magical performance that recognizes three elements in magic—“the *formula*, the *rite*, and the *condition of the performer*” (italics in original), but he immediately presses on to state that “the spell is by far the most important constituent of magic” ([1922] 1999: 403; see also Tambiah 1990: 73–74).

Whilst Malinowski’s [1922] (1999) formulation has the advantage of recognizing the spell, the ritual, and the performer in the performance of magic, his emphasis upon the spell encourages a logocentric and disembodied view of magic. Malinowski’s [1922] (1999) breakthrough was to recognize the performative dimension to magical practise; nevertheless giving priority to the magic spell subsequently resulted in the application of linguistic, structural, functional, semiotic, and semantic modes of interpreting magic; a position advanced by Tambiah (1968, 1985, 1990) who looks beyond the spell or prayer to focus upon the “performative” dimension of magical and religious ritual. “By “performative,” Tambiah’ means the particular way in which symbolic forms of expressions simultaneously make assumptions about the way things really are, create the sense of reality, and act upon the real world as it is culturally experienced” (Bell 1997: 51).

Reay notes her surprise that in Kuma war magic the spells were the least important ingredient, as “a simple command to the ghosts or to the materials informed by the ghosts or ancestral spirits sufficed” (1987: 88). The same could be said to be the case in the Malay World. In modern Malaysia it appears that the grip of the older cultures has been loosened, and that earlier religious forms have disappeared, been outcast, demoted, substituted, or demonized, as indicated by the virtual disappearance of *wayang kulit* in Kelantan over the past decade, and by the widespread substitution of prayers (*doa*) for spells (*jampi*) in Malay ritual (Laderman 1983: 27; 1991: 33).<sup>18</sup> The easy substitution of the spell shows that linguistic forms, including myths, are insufficient to provide an explanation of the source of magic. Neither myth nor spells lie at the root of magic. Instead magic is founded upon the ability to perform esoteric skills.

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<sup>16</sup> Kanukubusi situates magic power in the stomach, a coincidence that bears an uncanny resemblance to the magical substance said to reside in the belly of the Zande witch (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1977: 40; see also Reay 1987: 92).

<sup>17</sup> To view what has become of Trobriand war magic see the excellent film *Trobriand Cricket*.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Laderman says: “There is no longer any consensus regarding which ritual practitioner should treat the fields. Some people, responding to a general increase in Islamic orthodoxy in Malaysia, have substituted Arabic prayers for the *bomoh*’s spells; others are sceptical about the need for any supernatural intervention whatsoever in the growing of rice” (1983: 26–27 italics added).

To understand and to perform magic it is not enough to *believe* that one can access the power of the gods (*mana*) simply through spells; one must also have an embodied method or *tapu*. The study of Malay mysticism through *silat* encourages this type of embodied approach to magic, one that emphasises the positive role of *pantang* (taboo) in the acquisition of magical power, but also one that reconnects the body to the spell. The spell is subordinate to embodied practice in the quest to attain mystical experience. In the beginning, the word had to be physically uttered.

Writing from my own experience I document a method where people dip their hands into boiling oil in modern day Kuala Lumpur (see Chapter 7). I found that although the ritual frame changes over time the core procedure remains intact (see also Bloch 1986). The individual's underlying intentions (*niat*) condition the framing of the ritual, which shifts from judicial ordeal, to invincibility rite in preparation for war, to a medicinal balm. The attribution of sacred or mystical power to esoteric skill is a type of framing I call *occulturation*. Occulturation is where an esoteric skill is framed as magic through ritual performance.

I have indicated the importance of magic in war and war magic respectively. However, at this point I must emphasize that magic and the development of practical skills are not antithetical in the Malay world. The Malay spiritual outlook does not belie the effectiveness of their martial arts, which are based upon the mastery of essentially pragmatic martial skills (see Chapter 3). Before returning to theories of magic from the anthropology of art I trace further developments in the anthropology of performance.

## The Anthropology of Performance

The anthropology of performance seemed a natural starting point for this project given the performance of *silat* at weddings, demonstrations, competitions, and in theatre and film. Goffman (1959) provides the initial impetus to the anthropology, sociology, and social psychology of performance through his work on the presentation of self in everyday life. The subsequent academic division of labour sees performance tackled from many directions including anthropology, linguistics, feminist, cultural, queer and theatre studies. It is commonly suggested that performance is indicative of a paradigm shift, supplanting earlier concerns with ritual and textual analysis (Bell 1998: 220). Both McKenzie (2001) and Schechner (2002) suggest that performance is the heir to postmodern theory; nevertheless performance is regarded as a diverse array of conglomerated ideas, and not as a perspective.

Performance quarries include the construction of self and identity (Hughes-Freeland 1998a, 1998b; Pike 1996), psychoanalysis (Blau 2001; Laderman 1991), verbal art (Bauman 2001), embodiment (Csordas 1994, 1999, 2002), and the state (Geertz 1980). Aesthetics is a late addition to performance (Hobart and Kapferer 2005; Richardson 2002). The sites of performance include rites and ceremonies,



shamanism, the eruption and resolution of crisis, performance in everyday life, sports, theatre, entertainment, play, and the process of making art (Schechner 2002: 11). Here a useful distinction can be made between “as” and “is” in performance. “As” concerns historical cultural genres of recognized performance, such as theatre; “is” concerns examining actions as performances, and this may be done through a processual model (Turner 1982, 1988), a model of symbolic interaction (Goffman 1959), or various other means (Schechner 2002: 30–32). Schechner (2002: 42) makes an interesting point that the boundary between “as” and “is” in performance has become increasingly blurred, with people aware of the fact that they are constantly shuttling between one performance and another, whether at school, work, or in bed.

According to Turner “*performance* does not necessarily have the structuralist connotation of manifesting *form*,” but rather the processual sense of “bringing to completion” or “accomplishing” (1982: 91). By processual Turner means the ritual process going from separation through liminality to reaggregation, an idea derived from van Gennep [1909] (1960). Therefore “to *perform* is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than do a single deed or act” (Turner 1982: 91). Turner distinguishes between aesthetic drama (cultural performances) and social drama. Social drama involves breach, crisis, and redress, resulting in either restoration or schism (Turner 1985: 293). Social drama may be applied to everything from divorce to revolution. Redress occurs through ritual, legal process, or other intervention. Social and aesthetic drama engage through a “feedback loop” where “real” life is mirrored in theatre, on television, or cinema, which in turn feeds back into “real” life (Turner 1985: 300). The mirroring of social and aesthetic drama is theorised by “the infinity loop model” (Turner 1985: 300: Fig. 5). The ethnographic data I have collected provides a lens for a field experiment on the utility of Turner’s mirroring model (Handelman 1998).<sup>19</sup> Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is a style of *silat* designed for performance on stage, or for the silver screen. It will be interesting to see if, and if so how, the social dramas that took place in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu are mirrored in their theatre production *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* (see Chapter 6).

According to Turner, with the change to “modern technically advanced” societies from “tribal” societies, a shift from the liminal to the liminoid occurs, which corresponds to the evolution of ritual into theatre (Schechner 1988b: 9; Turner 1982: 32, 45, 54–55; 1985: 296). This process occurs with the institutionalisation of liminality, most notably in “the monastic and mendicant states of the great world religions” (Turner 1969: 107), a set of ideas that may also be worked through with Weberian concepts of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment (Ritzer

<sup>19</sup> Although I lean towards grounded theory in the collection of data (Emerson et al. 1995: 143–168; Glaser and Strauss 1968), and endeavour to regard *silat* as my consultants see it, and not impose a logic derived from prior theory, I recognize that where the logic of anthropological theory and the ethnographic data coincide an excellent opportunity for a field experiment arises (Festinger et al. 1964).



[1999] 2005). Turner's bipartite evolutionary model of the liminal to the liminoid has come under fire because it misplaces the issue of subversion in liminality. Pike (1996: 134) argues that the liminal and the liminoid may coexist in the same ritual, and may play subversive or conservative roles in either tribal or "modern" societies. Second, Turner's tripartite structuring of agency in van Gennep's [1909] (1960) terms of separation, liminality, and reaggregation imposes a logic upon the liminoid which the performers may reject (St. John 2001).

Schechner (1994: 613–647) criticizes the notion that ritual evolves into theatre with the claim that both are equally ancient forms of performance. Schechner (1994: 614–615) compares the cave painting of "the sorcerer" of *Les Trois Frères* with a photograph of a Yaqui deer dancer, who wears a similar headdress made from antlers. Schechner concludes that an occult or supernatural interpretation of "the sorcerer" is mistaken. The Yaqui deer dancer dances a fertility dance to appease the spirits of the animals before the hunt, and Schechner claims that this is a form of theatre in that it utilizes "symbolic representational techniques" for the purposes of ritual and for having fun (Schechner 1994: 614–615). For Schechner the difference between ritual and theatre is not one of origin, but that at certain periods in time one concerns "efficacy" and the other "entertainment," with the possibility that each can become more or less efficacious or entertaining in an inverse correlation through time (1994: 625).

Kapferer (1991, 1997, 2003, 2004) develops the *anthropology* of performance from a phenomenological perspective, and steers a different course than "performance studies" as developed in cultural and theatre studies (for example, Phelan and Lane 1998; Schechner 1985, 1988a, 1993, 2002; Zarrilli 1998, 2002). Kapferer (2004) turns away from theories of "symbolic representation," but influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (2002) he posits a theory of dynamic ritual "virtuality." Ritual opens a virtual space wherein identity is contested and changed and social roles are recast. Moving away from thinking in terms of symbolic representation helped me to think through the performance of *silat* as a necromantic *danse macabre*, a death ritual designed to call the heroic spirits of the noble dead in a ritual economy of death and afterlife I refer to as a *deathscape* (see Chapter 8).

Taking the concept of frames (Bateson 2000; Goffman 1974), and applying it to liminal ritual led me to develop the theory of the enchantment of performance and the performance of enchantment. How actors frame a situation, space, and time is linked to their knowledge, experience, beliefs, interests and group membership. In Malaysia ritual doings are conditioned and legitimised by *niat* (intention). Before prayer, sacrifice, or ritual cleansing the Muslim must devote the offering solely to Allah. It could be that some people misinterpret the liminal for the liminoid, efficacy for entertainment, and vice versa, and that this phenomenon is cross- and intercultural. In other words, westerners may take too seriously what is play or theatre, and not pay enough attention to the ritual work, such as the painful acquisition of the low basic stance (see Chapter 3). Hence some students miss the real magic of *silat*, which is the ability through arduous practise to transform the body and self to attain psychophysical power (*zahir batin*).

## Performance and Identity

In the 1950s psychiatrists considered multiple or split personality to be symptomatic of a psychotic disorder (Schreiber 1973). In contrast, once again, the margin has moved to the centre, multiple identities, plural selves, the divided self, fractured identity, performed identity, distributed persons, online fakesters versus real identities, and so forth, have achieved common parlance. In Malay cosmology, the soul (*seman-gat*) has long been considered to be singular and plural, and to be comprised of seven elements (Endicott 1970: 8; Skeat [1900] 1984: 50). Moreover, the self (*diri*) may be regarded as multiple, being composed of twenty aspects, which may be experienced through a Sufi mystical ritual process known as *sifat duapuluh* (see Chapter 4).

Current social science regards the “self” as a process, or as relational, and not as a fixed sovereign attribute interior to the human actor (Ingold 2000: 103). Synonyms for identity include the “self” (Goffman 1959, 1961; Kapferer 1991; Kondo 1990; Mead 1934), the “soul” (Foucault 1979; Lacan 2004; Weiner 1999: 239–242), and the “person” (Gell 1998; Strathern 1988, 2001). My field data leads me to concur with projects that seek to de-centre (not erase) notions of the self, soul, or person and to regard it as complex symbol of identity that is performed, multiple, relational, and contested in a plurality of arenas (Butler 1990; Goffman 1959, 1961; Werbner 2003, 1996).

Decentering the self leads to the notion of the “distributed person”—a significant breakthrough in the temporo-spatial understanding of the self (Gell 1998: 96–154; Strathern 2001: 263). The “distributed person” is apt for processes of identity formation, construction, and deconstruction that occur in a continually shifting transnational environment. The issue is not that societies are shifting from the traditional to the postmodern, but that individuals in their quotidian activities perceive themselves as oscillating between the traditional and the postmodern: at prayer one minute, surfing the internet the next. The self is spread across a field of activities, relationships, institutions, places, memories, and objects and may achieve an immortal air of semi-permanence, yet the continual performance of self may be snuffed out with a single blow as it travels towards the final breath.

Felicia Hughes-Freeland (1998a: 46) argues that to restore issues of agency and social roles to conceptions of identity it is better to consider identity as based in “doing” rather than upon “being.” Identity is performed, experienced, and embodied in ritual, dance, theatre, and performance, and through these means is positioned and repositioned by social agents. Correspondingly, in *silat*, magical, religious, and mystical experience is embodied, performed, and uttered in ways that point beyond static forms of identity or being, towards identity conceived as a dynamic somatic doing of the social agent.

A key trope found throughout Asian martial arts is to transform the “mind, body, and spirit” of the practitioner to protect the individual from attack. Self-transformation, the reconstruction of the self, occurs through disciplining the body (Foucault 1979, 1988; Zarrilli 1998), crafting (Kondo 1990), or even mortifying the self (Goffman 1961). I examine the processes of the stripping and reconstruction of identity through the embodied practice, ritual and performance of *silat*.

Martial transformation of the bodymind comes at the cost of years of training punctuated by moments of liminal revelation.

For Jung, the unconscious is simply Freud's formulation of the "shadow." The shadow is the repressed baggage of an individual, their secret thoughts and forbidden desires bundled and hidden away (Jung 1971; 1995: 95–97; Le Guin 1992; Zweig and Abrams 1991). The more insistently an individual denies their shadow, the more powerful it becomes. Jung also formulates the shadow as a collective archetypal phenomenon, appearing most clearly in the great evil, violence, and cruelty of war (1995: 175). The shadow, the worst aspects of the self, is projected onto others when forgotten or denied, whereupon the other may be demonized, regarded as unclean, perverted, and wicked, all of which justifies their righteous extermination. For Jung the shadow appears only in the light of the "ego," our hard won self-awareness. The individual may venture on a journey of inner exploration, perhaps through dream analysis, and become aware of their exterior presentation to the world through the persona (mask), and then become aware of their shadow and its projections, next the animus (the male side to the female), or the anima (the female side to the male), the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious, especially through archetypes such as the Wise Old Man (the guru), the Wise Old Woman (the witch), the Trickster (the collective shadow), to finally recognize Atman, the "Self," which includes all the aforementioned archetypal elements, and is therefore a considerably different and greater entity than Freud's ego (Freud 1991; Hopcke 1999: 79–127; Jung 1995: 89; McLynn 1997).<sup>20</sup> Although they may not carry great academic weight, Jung's theories exert considerable popular influence over martial arts, New Age and modern Sufi discourses alike.

A compound type of psychoanalysis takes place in *Seni Silat Haqq Melayu*, as it tackles "ego" problems through the mind, body and spirit. *Silat* does not drape the body of the initiand across a couch, but forces the *pesilat* to face their fears, fly headfirst through the air, endure hunger, sleep deprivation, murderous criticism, relentless contradiction, helplessness, hopelessness and despair, tested finally with a cauldron of boiling oil or a leap barefoot onto broken glass. Borne in silence this treatment breaks down the character armour (Reich [1945] 1990: 52–53), by challenging the body to perform what the mind thinks is impossible, to prove that people may step beyond rational limits, suspend their fears, and accomplish something extraordinary, seemingly even magical.

Moments of liminal revelation and mystical and magical experience accompany ritual dramas such as the necromantic summoning of ancestors through spirits that appear in animal guise; versus parallel forms of necromantic summoning that whilst just as "intense," eschew "becoming animal" (Deleuze and Guattari 2002:

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<sup>20</sup> Jung is sometimes summarily dismissed as a sympathizer of fascism and as a mystic (McLynn 1997; Noll 1997), but he draws attention in the anthropology of religion because he offers a framework sympathetic to religious quests towards self-exploration and self-improvement (Morris 1987: 163–181). Jung's book *Symbols of Transformation* exerted a powerful influence upon Victor Turner's thinking, for example, Turner (1961, 1967, 1975) adopted Jung's view that *symbols* indicate the unknown, as compared to *signs* which reveal the known.

232–309). Both types of *silat*, those that become animal, and those that do not, may lay claim to being Islamic. The shadow cosmology underlies both, yet it is manifested differently in practice, as if social practice were a mirror held up to cosmology, and cosmology a reflection of ritual performance in a spiralling dialectic of intention and remembrance. Where embodied intentional social practice mirrors cosmology, identity is forged (see Chapter 7).

*Silat* is Malay magic and mysticism embodied in ritual, practice and performance. Learning *silat* unveils technologies of self-transformation in the Malay world. Self-transformation (identity reformation), is an important issue in an increasingly fragmented yet interconnected world, where postcolonial states and subjects more or less freely intermix, potentially creating a new cosmopolitan order. Perhaps the multiplicity of the soul is best viewed as a feature of plural or cosmopolitan societies, an early example being provided by medieval Melaka (Reid 1993: 126). A bleaker view would be that the development of capitalism encourages schizoid personality formation (Deleuze and Guittari 2002). Whatever the case, *silat* is a technology of analysis and self-transformation that has important lessons to offer a world newly open to the old idea of multiple unbounded identity. It is wrong to say that the self and psychology are modern western evolutions non-existent in ancient society or outside of the west. Instead psychoanalysis is premised upon fragments of earlier developments by “religions” operating with far more sophisticated notions of the self than those offered by Judeo-Christian eschatology.

## Embodied Magic

I asked Edith Turner at the 2002 AAA conference whom she viewed as the heir to her late husband’s anthropology of performance.<sup>21</sup> Her reply was to “read Csordas.” Csordas advocates that we regard the self as body, in practice and performance. Embodiment is an increasingly important concern for anthropology and sociology. However, precisely what sociologists and anthropologists mean by the “body” and by “embodiment” is a thorny issue.

Csordas’ concept of embodiment arises from a subtle critical appraisal of ideas concerning the body from studies in perception (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002), read together with the habitus (Bourdieu 1977). With *techniques du corps*, Mauss (1979: 107) provides an early stimulus to studies of the body and embodiment. I employ *techniques du corps* as a convenient umbrella term for posture and movement (not gesture). Csordas (2002: 59) points out that Mauss operates with a dualistic conception of the body *vis-à-vis* the person. For Csordas, however, the key feature of embodiment is that it collapses dualisms inherent in mind/body, subject/object formulations. For me this means that magic and mysticism are not best considered as signs, discourse, or text, but as embodied practice and performance.

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<sup>21</sup> American Anthropological Association’s 101st Annual Meeting, 23 November 2002.

According to Csordas, centralizing the body as the subject for social theory is not the same as developing a theory of embodiment, where the body is considered as “the existential ground for culture and self” (2002: 4). For my purposes the important point is that Csordas (2002: 7, 241) regards embodiment as a “coherent methodological standpoint,” one which complements (or challenges) the semiotic analysis of culture as text. Embodiment led me away from semiotic ideas of martial techniques as letters in an alphabet, and martial arts as a language (see, for example, Lowell Lewis 1992), towards thinking about *silat* as the embodiment of Malay magic and mystical experience. Embodiment ignites the ethnographic study of martial arts, which in turn leads to a renewed understanding of mystical experience.

Csordas (2002: 74–78) studied Catholic Charismatic Christians in America over a twenty-year period. He says that during this time “speaking in tongues” (glossolalia) came to appeal to a younger more working class membership, and “resting in the spirit” to an older middle class base. Embodiment reveals a shift in the stratified habitus of the movement.<sup>22</sup> *Silat* may then be regarded as an embodiment of the “noble” aesthetics of the *keris*, or the less noble aesthetics of the *parang* (see Chapter 3). However, I want to make it clear that the embodiment of *silat* occurs in much wider circles than those of the *guru silat* and their followers, and this is apparent in Malay quotidian movement, or habitus, including walking, squatting, sitting down and standing. I employ Bourdieu’s concept *hexis* as shorthand for embodied habitus (Bourdieu 1977: 87–95; Jenkins 1992: 75). It is their conscious mastery of the skills of the body that gives the *guru silat* their uncanny ability to transform the body of the willing adept to release the psychophysical powers or *bodymagic* inherent within. Ultimately, the *guru silat*’s position as the war magician rests upon their power to make the body’s magic unhidden.

Zarrilli (1998) contributes to work on the senses through his notion of “the body that becomes all eyes,” an emic phrase that refers to the enhanced extra-sensory awareness the *kalaripayattu* practitioner attains through years of training. Initially I was sceptical of the multiple-eyed martial body, and wondered if one poke would mean that the *kalaripayattu* practitioner would burst into tears. However, attending an actors’ training seminar run by Zarrilli I learned that in *kalaripayattu* the existential body is considered like an energy force field, rather than merely as a soulless cadaver (see also Zarrilli 2002: 181–200).<sup>23</sup> Standing with their legs apart the performers swung their heads up and down between their legs to demonstrate sensory awareness beyond the body. Zarrilli commented that they could feel their heads going through the floor and coming back out again. Hence a performer may increase bodily awareness beyond the body, and free the senses from the flesh. Swinging the head “through” the floor collapses mind/body

<sup>22</sup> According to Bourdieu *habitus* refers to “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures . . . collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of the conductor (Bourdieu 1977: 72).

<sup>23</sup> Zarrilli’s session on *kalaripayattu* applied it to actor training, specifically for the play *The Water Station*, directed by Philip B. Zarrilli, and presented at the Esplanade Theatre, Singapore, 16 September 2004.

dualism by extending awareness beyond the body. Developing sensory awareness beyond the body may account for the incredibly fast reaction times of martial arts virtuosi, who appear to have a sixth sense allowing them to perceive what is immediately about to occur in a combat situation, and an uncanny ability to sense when combat is immanent.<sup>24</sup>

In Malaysia embodiment has been applied to the theatre and dance of the Senoi Temiar (Jennings 1995), and to shamanic healing performance (*main puteri*) (Laderman 1991; Winzeler 1995). Reading Jennings and Laderman encouraged me to examine performance, embodiment, psychoanalysis, experience, and aesthetics in relation to *silat*, but focusing on the war magician rather than the healer. Regarding *silat* as the embodied practice and performance of mystical experience, as the “performance of enchantment,” highlights the creative aspects involved in the construction of *silat*. For example, gurus employ mystical means to attain *ilmu* (skill) through spontaneous movement, where the power of Allah enters the performer’s body. Another “performance of enchantment” involves the *silat* practitioner calling the spirits of dead ancestors, ghosts, or *jinn*, calling them (*berseru*) not primarily through a spell, but through the movements of *silat* (see Chapter 8). It is easy to say that *silat* is the embodiment of magic, mysticism and religion. It is another thing altogether to realize that *silat* is the embodiment of the epistemology of the shadow, and that through the shadow the practitioner seeks to transcend the mortal flesh by becoming invulnerable, and to transcend death by becoming immortal.

Mauss theorized magic in relation to *mana*, originally a Polynesian word for mystical power, which finds its kindred notion in the Malay *kramat* (Mauss [1972] 2001: 135–138). Concerning *mana* Taussig says:

Here’s what I think: that *mana* expresses a sense of bodily consciousness writ large into cosmic consciousness; that such bodily consciousness is actually more like an unconscious, what might be called the “wisdom of the body” or the body’s self-regulating autonomic nervous system; that so-called primitive societies created a magnificent theatre of ritual and magic out of the network connecting this unconscious “wisdom of the body” with the cosmos at large. Hence while [the] weather . . . today retains some inklings of *mana*, the mystical and magical meanings have been eviscerated, the theatre has been gutted, and the magic turned into pap because the cosmic frame of reference binding us to the natural world now barely exists. For us, weather no longer belongs to *wakan*, to divine mysteries, or to “pure force.” Instead it has become a “floating signifier,” the empty chatter with neighbors in the elevator. No more the voice speaking through the crashing thunder (Taussig 2004: 47–48).

For Taussig *mana* is projected into the heavens as a reified bodily consciousness which “moderns” now sense only vaguely, if at all. This is a good illustration of modern disenchantment, but Taussig does not develop the point that *mana* is only artificially divorced from *tapu*.

Alongside *mana* the experiential embodied practice of mysticism and magic involves *tapu*. Melissa Taitimu, a clinical psychologist and Maori practitioner of the

<sup>24</sup> But that is not to say that extra-sensory perception alone accounts for incredible speed.



Maori martial art *rakau*, gave me an impromptu demonstration of her style. Her nimble cross-stepping footwork used cross-legged stances remarkably similar to stances and footwork used in *silat*, only her movements had a more bird-like and jerky rhythm than *seni silat*.<sup>25</sup> Raising her fists overhead and then pulling her elbows down level with her shoulders, Melissa also showed me the “pulling down of the power of the Gods technique,” and explained that in her view “taboo” is a lousy translation of *tapu*. In a nutshell, *mana* is power from the Gods, whereas *tapu* are the necessary precautions one must take to obtain that power. *Tapu* is here positively defined, as opposed to the usual negative definitions of *tapu* as some kind of avoidance practice. *Tapu* is not just avoiding things to shun pollution, but involves embodied practices that allow the body to receive the power of the gods (see also Gell 1995: 35).

## The Anthropology of Art

Malay *guru silat* claim that *silat* is an art (*seni*). *Seni* is a Malay term that means art but also incorporates aesthetics. *Seni* pertains to calligraphy, painting, sculpture, carving, silverwork, *objets d'art*, and to performance, including dance and theatre. *Seni* also refers to the skill involved in the production of art. Thinking about *silat* in terms of art led me to read Gell's *Anthropology of Art*, a title that suggested to me the possibility for an anthropology of *martial arts*.<sup>26</sup> Gell's book is a development and continuation of his earlier work, especially the [1992] 1999 essay *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*. Gell emphasizes that social agency, which is primarily an attribute of the human actor, is also invested in things. Implicitly following in the tradition of Marx (commodity fetishism), and citing Mauss (the gift), Gell (1998: 18–21) steps beyond rationalism to say that art objects, and any other things invested with agency, including cars, dolls, and even anti-personnel mines, may act as sites of “congealed agency.” Art objects then may be considered to act as “second-class” agents or as “secondary agents,” and their agency should be the proper focus of the anthropology of art (Gell 1998: 17, 20–21).

Gell's master project was to reinvigorate the anthropology of art by basing it upon the study of social relations, and not upon aesthetics or semiotics—a controversial move that went against the grain of much of the contemporary anthropology of art (Morphy 1994: 648–685), and that stirred up trenchant criticism (Bowden 2004). Gell's anthropology of art project was cut short by his death. Because “difficulties must be surmounted one at a time” Gell's (1998: 13) definition of art excludes verbal and musical art, and refers primarily to *objects* including paintings, carvings, and sculptures, or to what Gell calls “visual art.”<sup>27</sup> However, Gell also considers

<sup>25</sup> Ms. Taitimu showed these techniques to me when we were attending the ARPU Doctoral Students Conference, Sydney 9–13 August 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Some of the arguments from this section appear in Farrer (2008).

<sup>27</sup> Gell says that “but in fact anything whatsoever, could, conceivably be an art object from an anthropological point of view, including living persons, because the anthropological theory of art

dance, body-paint, tattoos, mazes, sand-drawings, knots and even animal traps as art forms. Gell takes into account non-material types of art, and discusses the relation between drawn patterns and dance, where performance art complements graphic art (Gell 1998: 94). The acknowledgement of complementary spheres of art and performance, drawing and dance, strongly influenced the way I researched and came to an understanding of *silat*.

My interest is to apply the notion of the agency of art to a particular type of art expression or performance, to *martial arts*. Gell (1998: 12–27) develops four concepts with which to formulate his anthropology of art in terms of the “abduction” (inference) of agency, namely the “index” (the agency of the artwork), the “artist” (the “originator” of the agency of the artwork), the “recipient” (those who exert agency or have agency exerted upon them via the artwork), and the “prototype” (the entity represented in the artwork). My intention here is not to adopt or critique Gell’s conceptual apparatus wholesale, but to develop his insights into enchantment and captivation in relation to performance.

If, as Gell (1998: 21) points out, anti-personnel mines and art works have agency, the same can be said of martial arts techniques. The agency of martial arts techniques is hidden; just as the malevolent agency of the landmine is only revealed once the mine is stepped upon. A person may practise a technique for years before they realize that they are doing it “wrong,” that there is a more elegant, economic, and efficient way to perform the technique, or before they figure out its *raison d’être*. The body and the technique come together in a sudden flash of realization, not primarily cognitive, but bodily, and the technique just comes out better. The practitioner realizes that this was how the technique was supposed to be all along, just that they had not realized it before. Other examples in the martial artist’s repertoire are remembered and a pattern is ascertained. The postures (moves) need to be connected through fluid movement in order for their agency to be experienced and deciphered; then patterns may be revealed that have been passed down through generations of masters yet remain hidden to outsiders. The experience of martial agency involves subtle changes to the practitioner’s body and changes in their cognitive processing before an ancestral pre-established pattern is recognized. This type of revelation usually only occurs through regular or daily martial arts practice.<sup>28</sup>

Towards the process of achieving revelation *silat* includes mystical methods that facilitate the creation and recreation of *silat*. Describing himself as a “Sunday painter” Gell (1998: 72) is fascinated and mystified at the amazing skill of art masters in the production of the masterpiece. The application of the methods and skills of the virtuosi in the construction of works of art Gell refers to as the “technology

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(which we can roughly define as the ‘social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency’) merges seamlessly with the social anthropology of persons and their bodies” (1998: 7).

<sup>28</sup> In kung fu and other Asian body disciplines such as yoga, revelation, or spiritual experience through (martial) exercise is considered easier to achieve if practice is conducted at dawn when the mind is less cluttered with the day’s happenings.



of enchantment”—where the agency of the artist eludes and escapes the comprehension of the viewer leaving them ultimately mystified as to how the index was produced. The resulting “enchantment of technology” refers to a spell cast over those who would “see the real world in an enchanted form” (Gell [1992] 1999: 163; Campbell 2001: 123). In other words, the masterpiece appears as magically fashioned, an exalted “masterpiece” produced through divine inspiration, and exerts an “indecipherable agency” which traps the spectator within the index, a process Gell dubs as “captivation” (1998: 71).<sup>29</sup> Captivation and enchantment relate to the construction of *silat* through mystical practice, including *bertapa*, *gerak* (spontaneous movement), *seru* (necromancy) and the mesmerizing power that *silat* may exert upon the spectator.<sup>30</sup>

Initially Gell’s reflective terminology is somewhat awkward, so an illustration may be useful here. The *silat* practitioner lies upon the ground, seemingly incapacitated, with the upper leg folded over the lower that swishes to and fro on the ground like a wounded tail. This is the technology of enchantment because the “tail” is a lure; the trap is sprung once the unsuspecting opponent attempts to kick the leg. The kick is precisely the response the *silat* practitioner needs so that her folded legs may spring into a scissor movement to take down and lock the unsuspecting kicker.<sup>31</sup> When executed properly the technique is so explosive and utterly surprising that it may appear to the attacker as if they were knocked down by magic (the enchantment of technology). The technology of enchantment involves all the practice that goes into gaining the physical, experiential, and cognitive awareness necessary to adopt the prone position in a fight, and the result—suckering the opponent into misperceiving a weak point—is the enchantment of technology exerted over them.

According to Gell “apotropaic patterns are demon traps” (1998: 84). “Beguilement” is the key to Gell’s [1996] (1999: 187–214) explanation of complex designs sketched on the doorsteps of Indian houses to lure and trap spirits to prevent them from entering the house. Similarly, Tambiah (1984) says that the knotted corded bracelets given by Buddhist monks beguile spirits, who instead of entering the body are kept busy trying to figure out how the knots were tied. Gell claims that the designs on the Asmat shield “beguile” the enemy and make them fearful (Gell 1998: 6, 31).<sup>32</sup> Gell’s (1998: 68–72) clever arguments concern the power of the “index” to

<sup>29</sup> As Gell says “captivation or fascination—the demoralization produced by the spectacle of unimaginable virtuosity—ensues from the spectator becoming trapped within the index because the index embodies agency which is essentially indecipherable” (Gell 1998: 71). But I would add that demoralization is only one side of the equation: inspiration is the other.

<sup>30</sup> *Bertapa* is a type of isolated ritual seclusion to test the individual towards the acquisition of magical knowledge (*ilmu*).

<sup>31</sup> According to *guru-silat* Sumar Leki this lure is a classic tiger technique of *silat macan* (a Sundanese style of *silat harimau*).

<sup>32</sup> Smidt says that “art serves as a powerful bridge between the human and spirit worlds and in the days before headhunting ceased, an Asmat warrior would sometimes go into battle with only

“captivate,” demoralize, or even horrify the opponent, through its objectification of emotion. As Gell says:

The tiger which is about to pounce and devour his victim looks, above all, *terrified*—of itself, as it were—and the same is true of warriors bearing down with grimaces of fear and rage. The Asmat shield is a *false mirror*, which seems to show the victim in his own terror, when in fact, it is another’s—and in this way persuades him that he is terrified. Like the famous *trompe-l’œil* image (by Parmigianino) of the Medusa’s head in the mirror of Perseus (in the Uffizi gallery) the shield terrifies us by persuading us that *we are what it shows* (Gell 1998: 31, italics in original).

However, I am not entirely convinced by the cognitive approach to the anthropology of art, where objects such as shields, clubs, and daggers (*keris*) subvert “the recipient’s *sense of self-possession* in some way” (ibid., italics in original). Gell does not consider the way the shield would, could, or should be used in actual combat—if the Asmat just needed a fearful cognitive device then why not use something other than a shield, say a mask? (see also Thomas 1995: 92–97).<sup>33</sup> Gell’s (1998: 31, 96–102) “false mirror effect” postulates a stimulus/response pattern that assumes a predetermined relationship between perception and cognition, and ignores the person holding the shield, their reputation and demeanour, the person regarding it, and the entire set-up of social arrangements surrounding the taking of heads and warfare.<sup>34</sup>

In the anthropology of art, apart from shields, clubs are also commonly denoted as art or cult objects. In particular I have in mind a Fijian “lipped club” that is normally presented as an art object, presumably because nobody has ever revealed its application, whether for digging roots out of the ground, or for combat (see, for example, Thomas 1995: 98 Fig. 81). However, Róheim reveals the secret of the lipped club when he says that:

Trephining ... may have developed out of these incisions and blood-letting in the case of headache. At Uea (Loyalty Islands) the cure for headache was to let out the pain at the crown of the head by the following surgical operation: the scalp was slit up and folded over,

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his shield, relying on its evocative, literally terrifying symbols to overwhelm his enemy” (Smidt 1993). See the Despard Gallery <<http://www.despard-gallery.com.au/artists/asmat05/info.html>>.

<sup>33</sup> The Asmat were renowned for their prowess in head-hunting and for their murderous hostility towards outsiders exemplified by the disappearance of the art collector Michael Rockefeller in 1961. In an interview with Lorne and Lawrence Blair a naked Asmat warrior shows the method of how to prevent arrows from piercing the body, or prevent them from penetrating deeply, by vigorously twisting the body as the arrow strikes (in the film, *Dance of the Warriors*). In this regard Malay warriors wore silk shirts, which could wrap around an arrowhead and prevent it from piercing the torso, or if the arrow did penetrate then the silk would ease the extraction of the barb.

<sup>34</sup> This illustrates a difference between cognition and rationality. If the brain is hardware, cognition is software, and thinking (rationality) is the user interface (Hogg and Vaughan 2002: 43). For Weberians rationality comes in four flavours—formal (calculation), substantive (values), theoretical (intellectual), and practical (skill). For better or worse it may be possible to go beyond rationalism, but this would not be the same as going beyond cognition.

and the cranial bone scraped with a fine edged shell till the *dura mater* was reached. A very little blood was allowed to escape. In some cases the scraped aperture was covered over with a thin piece of coconut shell; in other instances the incised scalp was simply replaced. The “cure” was death to some, but most of the cases recovered. To such an extent was this remedy for headache carried on, that sharp pointed clubs were specially made for the purpose of striking that weak part on the crown of the head and causing instant death (Róheim [1930] 1972: 123–124; citing Parkinson 1907: 114–115; Turner 1884: 339–340).

In Southeast Asia, neglecting the performative dimension and instead favouring art (craft, tradition, ceremony, and ritual) led scholars to neglect the martial application of the *keris*. Alternatively, the *keris* may be regarded as a weapon for execution, murder and self-defence.<sup>35</sup> Alive to polysemy, the “performance art” approach may conceptualise the combative functions of a weapon alongside its aesthetic and cognitive properties as an art object. Esoteric combative functions reveal structures of authority, power, and knowledge within a group, and the group’s hostile othering of outsiders.

Above I related the classic tiger technique of *silat macan* (a Sundanese version of *silat harimau*), where the *silat* player encourages the opponent to misread a position of strength as vulnerable, a misrecognition that causes them to fall into a trap. On Pulau Tioman it is said that monkeys dip their tails into the water as a lure to catch fish. Once the fish nibbles the tail the monkey jerks out one hand to seize it. Therefore, the hunting movements of predators may encourage their prey to make a mistake (*silap*), a cognitive error, and get them to fall into a cognitive trap. *Silat* involves the ability to trick the opponent, and the ability to use the body to act upon them once they fall into a trap. The performer must be cognizant of the agency lurking within the technique, and able to follow this up through a response that is engrained into the body through diligent practice (or biology in the case of insects and animals).

How did the elderly martial arts master *O-Sensei* Morihei Uyeshiba, the founder of aikido, step from between two charging opponents faster than the eye can see so that they collide into one another? (*O-Sensei* was captured on film moving between frames at eighteen frames per second.) And how did he throw his opponents to the ground without even touching them? (Payne 1981: 95). How did Morihei Uyeshiba achieve—and not simply rehearse—the impossible? (Blau 2001). Here notions of the possible and impossible operate as rational traps, because surely it stands beyond rationalism that an eighty-odd year-old could move so fast. “Supernatural” prowess is achieved in the disjunction between “being” (the eighty-year-old man) and “doing” (stepping faster than the eye can see), a disjunction that gives rise to

<sup>35</sup> The utility of the *keris* depends upon the style of the *keris* (weight, size, etc.) and the skill of the person who is using it. In the past *keris* blades might be poisoned with a concoction of cyanide and arsenic (Gimlette 1915). “Self-defence” is a loaded category; in its contracted form it merely refers to an individual protecting life and (perhaps) property. “Self-defence” among people with a more collectivist and less individualistic notion of identity than in the west (such as the Malays) may expand by degrees to include the group, family, lineage, village, race, and the nation. In the Malay context, “self-defence” can also mean to attack and slaughter *en masse* “in defence” of the Malay “race,” exemplified by the 1969 ethnic riots (*amok*).

the attribution of magical and mystical powers, a process of setting and springing rational or cognitive traps that I term *occulturation* (see Chapter 7). The trap here is the old man, stereotyped as feeble and slow, who then springs the trap by moving faster than the eye can see, the end result seeming miraculous, uncanny or supernatural. Admittedly, this provides a rational explanation based upon the cognitive trap. But saying how a “supernatural” attribution occurs only answers the cognitive half of the question; to go beyond this is to tackle the issue of how an elderly man could move so fast anyway, and in addition challenge western pro-youth stereotypes of health, power, vigour and ageing.

I have shown that notions derived from the anthropology of art can be usefully applied to material objects (paintings and sculpture), and also to performances such as dance and theatre. Likewise, performance perspectives cast new light on the utility or function of art and cult objects. I regard *silat* as a kind of “performance art” (though not in the sense outlined by Goldberg 2001) because it incorporates aspects of theatre, dance and street performance. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, *silat* goes beyond entertainment and exists as a technology of violence, as it has practical dimensions in combat that concern efficacy.

For a theory to adequately account for the performance of martial arts, cognition and rationality need to be recognized as embodied phenomena that are manifested through performance. Therefore Gell’s concepts of the “technology of enchantment” and the “enchantment of technology” can be better conceptualised as the “performance of enchantment” and the “enchantment of performance” (see Chapters 3 and 4). In my view magic must be regarded as having three aspects (a) cognitive, including myth, perception and belief; (b) performative (liminal ritual being especially apposite for the release of mystical forces), and; (c) embodied (*tabu* over *mana*).

## Becoming Intense—Becoming Animal

The shadow, which may be called into the body of the *silat* practitioner, demonstrates the way agency is embodied in works of art or performance. The embodiment of animist conceptions occurs most dramatically during moments of heightened liminal tension, during ritual or in situations of violence, and is manifested in an emotional heightening that Deleuze and Guattari (2002) refer to as “becoming intense, becoming animal.” The shadow is the key epistemological and ontological metaphor for Southeast Asian performance (Artaud 1989). *Silat* practitioners peer out of the corner of their eyes to the floor to observe the shadow, wear black to remind themselves that human beings are merely shadows, and train at night in the dark to become familiar with the shadow. In the Melaka Sultanate, in contrast to the Sultan’s royal yellow or purple attire, the warrior (*panglima*, *pendekar* and *hulubalang*) habitually wore black clothes as an insignia of noble office.

In Southeast Asia, shadows refer to the ancestors, to “the potent dead” (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002; Roseman 1991: 43). The shadow lies at the root of the Malay

engagement with their ancestors, through *kenduri* (ritual feasts), wedding ceremonies (*bersanding*), visiting graves (*makam*), *mimpi-mimpi* (dreams), and *seru* (calling). The spirit of the named ancestor is not called directly. Instead, “something” in addition to the spirit of the named ancestor is summoned, an animal spirit, such as a tiger or crocodile that was attached to their spirit in life, in a kind of necromantic lycanthropy (Chapters 4, 7, and 8).<sup>36</sup>

Individual totemism and animism provide static conceptions of the “native’s” conscious or unconscious “rationality,” but neither captures the sheer liminal intensity of the performance of *silat*. A better concept is that of “becoming intense—becoming animal,” which I see as the central concern of Malay war magic (Deleuze and Guattari 2002: 232–309). According to Deleuze and Guattari:

The hunting machine, the war machine, the crime machine entail all kinds of becomings-animal that are not articulated in myth, *still less in totemism*. Dumézil (1970) showed that becomings of this kind pertain essentially to the man of war, but only insofar as he is external to families and States, insofar as he upsets filiations and classifications. The war machine is always exterior to the State, even when the State uses it, appropriates it. The man of war has an entire becoming that implies multiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason, the power of affect. Wolf-men, bear-men, wildcat-men, men of every animality, secret brotherhoods, animate the battlefields. But so do the animal packs used by men in battle, or which trail the battles and take advantage of them. And together they spread contagion (Deleuze and Guattari 2002: 242–243).

The warriors of the war machine undergo intense ritual ordeals in order to become animal. Outside of the conditions of war, the martial arts are the primary site for the articulation of becoming intense, becoming animal.

In the style of the evil tiger (*silat siluman harimau*) becoming animal is the culmination of a ritual practice where the *pesilat* lies in a grave for seven nights (Chapter 8). The spirit that enters the practitioner, a tiger or crocodile, is nevertheless the spirit (or spiritual attachment) of an ancestor, so in this sense becoming animal is simultaneously becoming ancestral. Conversely, for *pesilat* of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, although they are taught to hold the posture of an eagle with arms outspread whilst poised upon one leg, the idea of becoming animal is an anathema, with Pa’ Ariffin proclaiming the virtues of “becoming human,” and emphasizing that one is not fully human until the animal within is under control.

To trace the articulation of the becoming animal of the *guru silat*, and the inverse—more precisely the “glide reflection”—of becoming human, takes us into the realm of an “inverted” epistemology (inverted from the western perspective) where religion appears to be magic and magic to be religion, where the authentic

<sup>36</sup> The shadow appears in spells (*jampi*) such as this line: “My shadow that of a fierce tiger” found in an old Perak incantation (Winstedt [1925] 1993: 74). Eliade’s comment is of interest: “We must not forget however, that the mythical Tiger Ancestor is regarded throughout Southeast Asia as the initiatory master; it is he who takes the neophytes to the jungle to initiate them (in reality, to “kill” and “revive” them). In other words, the tiger forms part of an extremely archaic religious complex” (Eliade 1974: 339).

appears to be fake, and the fake appears authentic, and where shadows are considered to be real, and the real merely a shadow. Learning *silat* requires acknowledging an alternative view of reality, one that regards western secular notions as false. Philip K. Dick, in a semi-autobiographical science fiction novel has one of his characters virtually quote one of my key informants verbatim. A policeman on an undercover assignment that requires he take a mind altering drug expresses the alternative cosmology perfectly: “‘Maybe it’s you fuckers,’ Fred said [to a police psychologist], ‘who’re seeing the world backward, like in a mirror. Maybe I see it right’” (Dick 1977: 170).

## Conclusion

Recent anthropological studies have called for a rethinking of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft as the central and original concerns of anthropology. My research project resonates to this call with a study of war magic and the warrior shaman in the Malay context. Because of their work in the unseen realm (*alam ghaib*) I argue that the Malay *guru silat* is a type of war magician, a term which subsumes warrior shaman and war sorcerer. *Silat* invites an exploration of an alternative cosmology, that of the shadow soul, which has remained mysterious for over a century. Malaysianist anthropological research has perpetuated a colonial conceptual error and omitted, neglected, or placed in parenthesis the questions raised by the study of *silat*. Furthermore, studies of *silat* have tended to be peripheral to anthropology. However, placing the *guru silat* at the centre rather than at the periphery of studies in Malay magic has profound implications for a more general rethinking of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery in anthropology, which with a few exceptions has long neglected the study of war magic.

Adjusting the anthropological focus meant taking an embodied approach to war magic. Partially what needs to be corrected is a lack of vision, a neglect of ethnographic observation, and I sought to accomplish this through a performance ethnography. And changing the basis of observation led me to challenge established anthropological theories of magic and sorcery. Alongside Malinowski’s great advance into the study of magic with the introduction of performance and the performer, came the prioritization of the spell, and, probably for reasons of colonial expediency, the neglect of war magic. Focussing upon the word prioritised studies of magic that were textual, mythological, or symbolic for decades to follow. However, placing performance at the fore brings with it a greater concern for practice and the body, and taking embodiment as a methodological paradigm led me to develop a new theory of magic. Magic is not simply a bag of tricks but involves the performance of esoteric skills and the revelation of hidden knowledge.

The anthropology of performance reaches its zenith in the work of current phenomenologists including Csordas and Kapferer. However, what seems to be missing in the anthropology of performance is an adequate conception of enchantment.

I project Gell's concepts of enchantment developed for the anthropology of art where he tries to explain the power art objects exert upon the viewer, and the miraculous creativity embodied in their production, into the realm of performance. This gives rise to an embodied theory of magic concerning the performance of enchantment and the enchantment of performance, which I develop in the following chapters.

## Chapter 3

# The Performance of Enchantment

This chapter provides an abstract, general, anatomical impression of Malay *silat* as I work towards a concrete view of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. The essential components of Malay *silat*, including its art and aesthetics, strategy, tactics, kinesthetics, training methods, stance, footwork, dance, patterns, weaponry, and rehearsed combat scenarios are reviewed.<sup>1</sup> Together these components make up the performance factor of the performance of enchantment. Earlier I noted that war magic should be regarded as having cognitive, performative and embodied aspects. By the performance of enchantment I mean the technical components that make up *silat*, the embodied skills that underlie *silat*, skills that when honed to perfection over years of practice may give the bearer the appearance of supernatural prowess. The performance of enchantment is inseparable from the enchantment of performance, which concerns the “supernatural” effect that the performance of enchantment has, and the two are here only roughly separated for analytical purposes. This chapter focuses upon the performance of enchantment, the concrete base of practical, if esoteric and closely guarded skills that the enchantment of performance arises with. The enchantment of performance is richly embellished with myths, stories, and legends, but this is the subject of the next chapter.

Recent debates in anthropology raise critical questions pertaining to aesthetics in relation to beauty, power and truth.<sup>2</sup> The rejection of aesthetics is untenable when art is regarded as performance.<sup>3</sup> Aesthetics should be regarded as an active doing

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<sup>1</sup> English speaking martial artists refer to martial arts techniques as “moves.” Although “moves” does not sound very polished, in the context of describing martial arts it is more apt than “gesture” which denotes the conveyance of meaning between actors, and “posture” which is too static to capture the dynamic aspects of martial arts. By “technique” I mean a single martial arts move, taking into account the whole body in motion, and including cognitive strategies for execution, emotional cathexis, bearing and demeanour. “Form,” “set,” and “pattern” are used interchangeably to indicate a string of consecutive techniques. “Style” refers to a particular school or type of *silat* and not to aesthetics.

<sup>2</sup> American Anthropological Association’s 101st Annual Meeting: panel “Back to Aesthetics: Critical Anthropological Perspectives on Beauty, Power and Truth,” 21 November 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary debates in anthropology have fluctuated from perspectives that direct attention “beyond aesthetics” (Gell 1998; Pinney and Thomas 2001), to those which call for a return to



in the world, and not merely a matter of passive individual taste. The aesthetics at the heart of *silat* reflects a division of “noble” from “low” culture, a division that is constantly reinforced in ritual and performance, such as Malay weddings where the bride and groom become king and queen for the day (*Raja sehari*). Kahn (1994: 33) notes that contemporary performances of *silat* in Malaysia represent the aesthetics of the middle-class, which configures its identity by imagining and performing itself as “Malay,” and this in turn is consumed through television, theatre, leisure and tourism. I would add that middle-class aesthetics are contested by the imaginings of déclassé aristocrats who struggle for *difference* in their emulation of the royal pomp and ceremony, power and performance of the golden age of the former Melaka sultanate, and who may occupy structural positions in the middle-class by virtue of the advantages bequeathed to their parent’s generation by a British colonial regime eager to govern through “noble” Malay representatives. Here I have in mind the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar, Perak, once known as “the Eton of the East.” Anthony Burgess taught there, and the school was attended by Pa’ Ariffin’s mother and his uncle Pa’ Tam, and by many royal personages including H.R.H the Sultan of Brunei.

## The Art and Aesthetics of Seni Silat Melayu

Draeger (1972: 23) claims that *silat Melayu* is a primordial martial art that squats at the root of the modern Malay systems. However, Malay *guru silat* maintain that *seni silat*, at least in Malaysia, is not merely a series of technical antecedents, crude or otherwise, but an art and aesthetics of movement, an art which springs from the ground of *silat Melayu*. In other words, the performance of *silat Melayu* embodies a cultural ideology or tradition – *seni* – where power is not expressed through the visible, the brash, loud, hard, and crude *zahir*, but through the smooth, soft, and silent *batin*.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Errington contrasts the noble aesthetics of the *keris* with the aesthetics of the axe:

How gender is mapped onto potency brings up ... the “effeminacy,” to European eyes, of the high status *halus* (refined, potent) men of the insular Indic States. The Javanese hero

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aesthetics (Sharman 2002). Are aesthetics merely reflections of art or does aesthetics provide a guide for perception and action? In his rejection of aesthetics Gell (1999: 160–161) argues that the anthropologist of art should be a methodological philistine just as the anthropologist of religion should be a methodological atheist (Berger 1967: 107). The idea of shelving one’s values alongside one’s taste is rejected with the turn towards a more reflexive anthropology. The strong anti-aestheticism of Gell and Bourdieu seems to have been a product of 1970s counter-culture (Blau 2001: 22; Weiner 2003: 16). Aesthetics is a tricky concept that following Kant’s “transcendental aesthetics,” or Strathern’s “comparative aesthetics” can be used to refer to “the specification of the forms of perception by which phenomena are made to appear” (Weiner 2003: 87), and not just to matters of beauty and taste. Ultimately, the “for or against aesthetics” debate is sterile because aesthetics and consumption condition the arena for the production of art, and the production of art in turn leads to changes in aesthetics and consumption.

<sup>4</sup> *Zahir* refers to manifest, bodily, outer, exoteric knowledge; *batin* to inner, spiritual, esoteric knowledge.

Arjuna, who appears in shadow-theatre, is slight of build, soft of voice, with downcast eyes, and quiet demeanour. These are precisely the qualities valued in high-status ladies. Yet Arjuna confronts the *rakasasa* (monsters), who reveal themselves to be such by their huge ungainly shapes, their insolent staring, bulging eyes, hideous laughs, and growls and shouts – and Arjuna wins with a flick of the finger. This confrontation, of course, is not between empty dignity and active “power,” but between the *keris* and the axe, between conscious potency and unconscious brute force. The point is not that the high potent noble man is effeminate, but that he and high-noble women are more like the *keris* than the axe (Errington 1989: 287, italics added).

Errington concludes by saying that “the unity of potency ... implies duality, because being a centre implies having a periphery; being a *keris* implies having an axe to serve you” (1989: 289 italics added). However, in Malaysia the *parang* is more relevant than the axe. Being the *keris* (Sultan) requires having other *keris* to serve you (aristocrats or *bangsawan*), followed by *parangs* (*rakyat*).<sup>5</sup>

*Seni silat* means the art of *silat*. *Seni silat* is a compound category that denotes the fluid movements of *silat*, and connotes *ilmu* – knowledge, magic, science or skill. *Seni silat* refers to the creation of *silat*, and to the strategy and tactics of individual and group defence. Alongside art, *seni* also encompasses aesthetics, because *seni* refers to the essential characteristics deemed to typify an ideal *silat* performance.

Due to the sheer range of *silat* styles it is difficult to specify a single set of features they all share in common: some prefer very low stances, some high, some concentrate on speed, and others upon power, some focus upon developing the legs, others upon the arms, and so forth. Malay *guru silat* recognize particular movements and the smooth circuitous flow of these movements as signature traits that epitomize *silat Melayu*. These include the flat outstretched palm where the thumb stands erect protruding out from the palm at a ninety degree angle (*undang pahlawan*); the upright posture of the spine where the back is held straight despite the adoption of low stances; and the sidelong downward gaze.<sup>6</sup>

One of the finest performances of *silat Melayu* I saw was a private impromptu demonstration by *guru silat* Muhamad Din Muhamad of the *sembah* (opening salutation) of *silat hulubalang Melaka* (otherwise known as *silat kuntau*). Some of the movements were remarkably similar to *taijiquan*; indeed the opening move of this *sembah* is identical to the *taijiquan* technique called “Buddha’s warrior pounds the mortar.”<sup>7</sup> Din’s performance looked more graceful, stylised, smooth, and circular than *taijiquan*, partly because of the skill of the performer, but also because of the less angular, less protruding nature of the movements. It’s as if

<sup>5</sup> This is in line with the shadow complex in Southeast Asian praxis, an idea I develop in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> In “old Malay” *undang* (a Javanese loanword) means invite, so since *pahlawan* means champion fighter, *undang pahlawan* more or less may mean “to invite” (challenge) a champion fighter (Pa’ Ariffin). Perhaps the thumb symbolizes the penis, and the penis symbolizes the manikin, therefore the erect thumb signifies one of the seven souls, or the life force (*semangat*) itself (Róheim (1930) 1972: 22).

<sup>7</sup> “Buddha’s warrior pounds the mortar” is the second position adopted in Chen style *taijiquan*.

the embodied aesthetic of *taijiquan* were masculine, as compared to the feminine aesthetic embodied in *silat Melayu*; or it's as if the shadow of a *taijiquan* expert was incarnate in the movement of *silat* (Farrer 2006a: 30).

Most though not all styles of *silat* use techniques of evasive entry, and engage the opponent with a chess-like logic of combat. Each movement is conditioned by the predicted outcomes, the opponent as a whole is sized up, and their attack analysed and countered within an instant. Stealth, trickery, and bluff appear in the form of feints, sucker punches, half-steps, a dodge left to go right, a bob up prior to crouching down low, and in the use of concealed weapons, especially a knife. Hypnosis, misdirection, distraction and "stealing the opponent's awareness" are also reported (Draeger 1972: 62; Sanders 1999: 237).

Techniques are often named after animals, for example, the tiger (*harimau*), leopard (*selegi*), crocodile (*buaya*), and the horse (*kuda*), but they may also be named after plants and common everyday movements, such as sewing, looking in the mirror, and chopping wood. Some moves are reminiscent of *doa* (Islamic prayers), or of Hindu offerings (*sembah*), others draw energy from the performer, environment or opponent. Rather than rely on force derived from greater size or physical strength, *silat* exponents characteristically utilize centrifugal force, leverage, momentum, gravity and inertia.<sup>8</sup> Evasive blocks (*tangkisan*) are employed against strikes, alongside stepping in, stepping aside or back.

The stances (*kuda kuda*) and footwork (*langkah*) are of special importance. They are the moving base from which a plethora of strikes (*pukul*), kicks (*sepak*), punches (*pukul*), sweeps (*sapu*), and slaps (*tampar*) can be unleashed. Malay styles favour locking the opponent (*kunci*) in submission holds by applying adverse pressure on joints, pressure points and arteries. Lethal holds (*kunci mati*) such as strangle holds and neck and spine snapping techniques are usually only taught to advanced practitioners. *Silat* was not developed primarily for the purposes of unarmed combat or for one-on-one self-defence. All *silat* styles assume encounters with multiple opponents and all engage in weapons training.

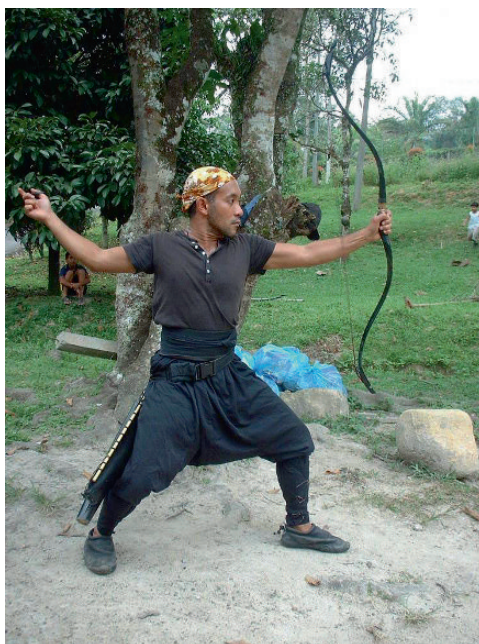
## Weapons of Silat

The range and diversity of Southeast Asian weapons and armoury is astonishing. Hundreds of predominantly bladed weapons appear across the Malay world. In Peninsular Malaysia it is possible to learn how to handle many different weapons including *badik* (Bugis dagger), bow and arrow (Fig. 3.1), chain, *golok* (a long heavy knife), *kapak kecil* (a small throwing axe from Kelantan), *kerambit* or *layi*

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<sup>8</sup>The same principles are operative in a number of Asian martial arts, but are especially developed in aikido, which is twentieth century derivative of jujitsu and (probably) *baguazhang* (Frantzis 1998: 118–119). According to Orlando (1996) in *kuntao* (a fusion of *silat* and Chinese kung fu) the main principles are said to be adhesion, whiplash, gyroscopic rotation, shearing (pincer movements) and seating (horse stance).

**Fig. 3.1** Pa' Din releases an arrow



*ayam* (a curved blade), *keris*, *lembing* (spear), *jembia* (Arab dagger), *parang* (machete), *pedang* (rapier), *pisau* (knife), *sanggul* (hair pin), *sarung* (male's one-piece cloth skirt), *sundang* (sword-kris), trident, and *tumbok lada* (pepper crusher dagger).<sup>9</sup>

The *kerambit* has a small curved blade shaped like a “tiger’s claw” and has a hole in the handle for the middle finger to pass through. The blade curves out from inside of the fist, jutting out to the side in a small yet sharp foreword facing hook. Although less easily concealed, the *parang* has proven killing efficacy, and provides the ideal means to decapitate someone as demonstrated in numerous “deadly ethnic riots” during the last century (Horowitz 2001), and more recently in inter-ethnic altercations in Kampong Medan in 2002.

Some *silat* experts may conceal several knives about their person, which could come in handy if they are unexpectedly held down or pinned in a lock. Pa' Ariffin tells a story of how he was stopped by the police in North London. They asked to search him. To save them the trouble Pa' Ariffin unloaded his knives onto the bonnet of the police car – one from his sleeve, one from his boot, one from the collar, and several from his many pockets and waist pouch. Although counting seven knives the police were so incredulous they let him go with just a verbal warning.

<sup>9</sup> Although some of the drawings are rather amateurish, Draeger (1972) provides a good indication of the enormous diversity of Indonesian weaponry.

## *The Keris*

The *keris* in Peninsular Malaysia *silat* training is practised solo and in two-person sets of movements. The most famous *keris* in Malaysia is the legendary *keris* of Hang Tuah, called the *Taming Sari*, which is now said to be in the possession of the Sultan of Perak.<sup>10</sup> Frey (1995: 17) points out it is only in the past forty to one hundred years that the *keris* is no longer worn for personal protection, though it has been retained for ceremonial purposes as a symbol of Malay heritage. The *keris* comes in many shapes and sizes and is associated with Malay manhood, wedding ceremonies, magic (*tuju*), mysticism and ritual.

In contrast to the sinuous blades preferred in Java, in Malaysia the straight *keris* was a symbolic marker of nobility or royalty. Previously, only the Malay aristocracy and royalty were allowed to possess a straight *keris* in Perak, known as the *keris sepuke*. The Malay *keris* would typically be sheathed in a wooden scabbard (*baju*), unless further encased in silver, another prerogative of the ruling elite. In Perak, if the *keris* possessed a long beaked bird handle (*pekaka*), and a straight blade, then the *keris* would be known as *keris sepuke pekaka*. The “bird” is supposed to represent the human soul or *semangat*, and although none of the Malay magic books specify exactly why, it may be symbolically connected with the “double,” the *kakak* (lit. elder sister, but here afterbirth) that is born with the baby and buried shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

Formerly, *keris* were used for self-defence and sudden attack, for *amok*, assassination and execution. Some of the old *keris* were credited with an independent spirit and were believed to fly about at night, and to rattle in their sheath with the approach of danger. Magical *keris* could never be bought, but must be freely given. My “graduation” from *silat lima beradik* (discussed later) consisted of a *silat* performance on my part, followed by a *kenduri* whereupon I was given a 100 year-old Javanese *keris* said to possess three magical powers. The secret name of the blade comes from a *wayang kulit* character and the “face” of this character appears on the left of the illustration below (Fig. 3.2).

The *keris* I received was given with the proviso that it should not to be waved about or used in the performance of *silat*, but is supposed to be reserved for magical purposes. First, telepathic communication with the *guru* through dreams is achieved by holding the *keris* pointing upwards whilst thinking of the *guru silat*. I

<sup>10</sup> Pa’ Ariffin displays a picture of the *Taming Sari* on his website <<http://www.silat.f9.co.uk/mainmenu3.htm>>.

<sup>11</sup> Upon noting the difficulty of finding definitive answers for matters of Malay mysticism, Cato (1996: 64), tentatively offers an explanation why the blade of the *keris* comes in two parts. He says that “those knowledgeable about such things believe that spirits are placed within *kerises* by powerful *empus* [blacksmiths], only after many hours of occult rituals and meditation. After the entity is magically inserted into the lower portion of the blade, the upper guardpiece is slid down over the tang until it mates with the lower blade, thereby confining the spirit within the *keris*” (Cato 1996: 64, italics added).

**Fig. 3.2** *Keris* detail, *wayang kulit* character (author's private collection)



tried this once when I first had the *keris* and Pa' Zaini called me up on my mobile phone the next day saying he had dreamed that I wanted to speak to him. Second, dipping the blade in drinking water supposedly renders the water good for healing: we tried it for flu with no obvious effects. When I was given this *keris* I was renting a mosquito infested concrete box in the posh ghetto of Singapore. There was often a strange unidentified whooping sound to be heard outside the window at night. The third and most important function of this *keris* was to drive away evil spirits (*jinn*), ghosts (*hantu*), and vampires (*pontianak*), and thankfully the creepy whooping sound soon ceased. Each *keris* has to find its rightful owner. Pa' Zaini had been given this *keris* by someone too frightened of the powerful spirit within to keep it. Pa' Zaini had then given it away twice only to have it returned to him due to nightmares and nocturnal disturbances experienced by the new owners. In giving it to me I suspect he was glad to have finally gotten rid of it.

## Martial Dance

The two basic components of Malay weddings are the *akad nikah* or the Islamic exchange of vows, and the *bersanding*, a set of ceremonies that hark back to Indic religions.<sup>12</sup> *Silat* is danced at Malay weddings across Southeast Asia, a few hours, days, or even six months after the *nikah*, but shortly before the feast forming part of a set of ceremonies known as the *bersanding*. In Peninsular Malaysia *silat pengantin* is performed at *bersanding* across the social spectrum, among the “nobility” and the “common” people. The performance of *silat* at weddings in Sumatra seems to have influenced Sheppard to offer *silat Medan* as a synonym for “wedding *silat*” (Sheppard 1972: 141, 1983: 104). However, *silat* also appears in weddings more widely across Indonesia and in the Sulu Archipelago (Fernando-Amilbangsa

<sup>12</sup> See also Mohtar (1979).



1983: 34). The elaborate flowing dance-like *silat* movements performed at weddings can be referred to as *bunga* (flower) or as *seni* (art). These stylised movements were also performed for rites of circumcision in Indonesia and for royal garden parties in Malaysia.

Due the depiction of the non-violent temperament of the *Senoi* people by Dentan (1979), I wondered if any of the Orang Asli groups had *silat*. I asked some of the top anthropologists in the field, but got no closer to the answer. However, Werner (1997: 40), with an excellent photograph, notes the practice of the “flower dance” for an Orang Asli couple at the bride’s *kampong*, the bride Mah Meri, and the groom Temiar.<sup>13</sup> In this photograph the bride and groom are seated upon the floor, and not sitting on chairs mounted on a ceremonial dais, as is customary for Malay couples. Meanwhile, with hands cupped, the *silat* performer crouches on one knee in a very low stance (*duduk harimau*), sharing the same eye level as the couple. This is significant because it shows that some Orang Asli groups do practice *silat*.<sup>14</sup> At first I thought that *silat* must be a syncretic adhesion to Temiar culture, however, Roseman (1991: 102) fleetingly mentions what the Temiar call *silat* in her study of music and mediumship (Benjamin 1996: 5). I would wager that further study of the “tiger shamans” reported among the Temiar by Jennings could reveal much about *silat*, albeit that *silat* is entirely absent from Jennings’s (1995) account of Temiar dance, theatre and ritual.

For Malay weddings *silat pengantin* (wedding *silat*) takes place directly in front of the splendidly dressed groom, who is considered king for the day (*Raja sehari*) and seated outside the bride’s residence, prior to being led in to unveil her. Drummers, facing inwards, form an oval in front of the groom, an enclosed space that occasionally parts slightly to allow *silat* performers to enter and exit at the end opposite the groom. Peering over the shoulders of the drummers, the guests surround this spectacle (Fig. 3.3).

Relatives of the bride or groom are invited to step into the space to play *silat* (*bermain silat*). The atmosphere is colourful and crowded, performers jostle for place, and the musicians whip their hands against their flat single-skinned drums (*kompong*). Suddenly a performer will step in to the oval, right hand dipped and

<sup>13</sup> Mah Meri and Temiar are different Orang Asli or indigenous Malay peoples (Benjamin 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Given the mix of Orang Asli and Malay cultures I feel that it should be a certainty that *silat* may be found among both groups. Historically “the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, which brings together numerous Malay oral traditions, notes that after Melaka’s fall to the Portuguese in 1511, the queen flees for safety into the jungle. Here she becomes a member of one of the northern Orang Asli groups, the Batek. Meanwhile, Hang Tuah himself retreats upriver to Perak where he is accepted as ruler by another Orang Asli people, the Orang Binduanda (literally palace servants). Although the latter are now referred to as the Orang Temuan, the older terminology suggests the close relationship between the Melaka court and the Orang Asli. A Malay text, the *Hikayat Deli*, originating from east coast Sumatra, describing how Melaka people flee to the jungle after an attack to become Jakun, or forest dwellers, similarly suggests the ease of movement in and out of Malayness” (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 49). If an Orang Asli group genuinely doesn’t possess *silat* then the move is perhaps out of Malayness, and away from violence, a move away from the state and into the backcountry (Scott 2003).



**Fig. 3.3** Wedding *silat* in Singapore 2004 (*rimau santai*)



pointing to the floor, whilst the “dirty” left hand is politely concealed behind the back. After a stylised bow (*sembah*) the dance begins, with the *silat* player (*pesilat*) slowly zigzagging his way up to the groom, whereupon he will proffer his *salaam* (handclasp).

The dancer’s movements should be graceful and responsive to the beat of the drums. Like the *silat de Zoete and Spies* (1952: 256) described in Bali, the performer’s arms, wrists, hands, and fingers carve intricate mysterious circling patterns through the air in gestures of adjuration or exorcism, as if weaving charms. The body position and footwork alternate from high fully extended postures, to low, crouched, folded positions requiring great dexterity, balance and flexibility. Wedding *silat* emphasizes the artistic, aesthetic elements of *silat*. The performers play free-style within a known set of rules (*adat pengantin*) concerning their appropriate behaviour. Hence the combative functions of the art are concealed, a knee is raised instead of a kick, an open palm replaces a fist, and the performer must not turn his back on the couple (to do so would risk violent intervention from the audience).

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu performed special sets for royal entertainment, such as *silat pedang* (sword) and the *belebat* (the four corners set). Pa’ Ariffin’s mother, originally from Perak, but residing in Kuala Lumpur and Pahang, surprised me one day by asking me wistfully what wedding *silat* was like, saying that she had never seen it.<sup>15</sup> This was a mystery to me, as wedding *silat* occurs across the Malay

<sup>15</sup> Dato Penggawa Tua (Mrs. Mahidin).

Peninsula, and practically every weekend at weddings in Singapore except during *Ramadan* (the Islamic fasting month). However, *silat* is not performed at Haqqani weddings solemnized by a Shaykh. Haqqani weddings emphasize the *nikah* (the Islamic, hence, legal exchange of vows), and may omit the *bersanding*. Nor was *silat* performed at the wedding of Shaykh Raja Ashman, as his wife Jane told me herself. “Royal *silat*” is more highly choreographed than wedding *silat*. There is a difference between wedding *silat* and what Sheppard (1983: 104) called “garden party *silat*” or *silat Medan*, the difference being that garden party *silat* is performed for the entertainment of the *Raja* (and not his imitation for the day), and that it is more highly choreographed and less spontaneous than wedding *silat* (see Chapter 8).

In western culture “The Arts” indicate painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, the theatre, and even the occult. The discussion of martial arts as dance raises questions pertaining to the status of dance as art.<sup>16</sup> The term “art” is problematic due to its association with high culture, as opposed to modern forms of pop art that are associated with mass culture. When *silat* is termed “folk-dance” it is implicitly regarded as low village culture. Furthermore, the performance of *silat* for royal garden parties places it as a higher art form within an indigenous context. However, a distinction between “high art” and “low art” is problematic for *silat*, as sometimes the performance of so-called peasant *silat* is of a much higher quality than so-called royal *silat*. The quality of *silat* is gauged by the ability of the performer to execute moves demanding a mastery of difficult low stances, performed with dexterity, balance, rhythm and individual style.

*Silat* sets have ritual and magical functions that may be coextensive or exclusive of their public performance. Wedding *silat* and garden party *silat* have necromantic as well as social functions (see Chapters 4 and 8). The *silat* dances performed at weddings and at garden parties may be considered as a form of performance art. Like John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*, at their best *silat* dances are executed freestyle according to their specific genre or animal influence.

## Hexis as Embodied Aesthetics

In *silat* the dance postures and gestures have symbolic meanings that can be interpreted on practical, mystical and aesthetic levels. *Silat* aesthetics derive partly from discourses of power: from *adat* (customary law) governing the traditional ritualised formal interactions between the Melaka Sultans and their subjects, and partly from Islamic, ancient Hindu, Buddhist, and animist religions.<sup>17</sup> Wedding *silat* shares

<sup>16</sup> *Silat* is considered to be a “magickal martial art” by Sanders (1999: 186). Sanders freely intermingles indigenous beliefs with western “magickal doctrine.” Although he does not mention the source of his occult beliefs, Sanders uses Crowley’s spelling of “magick,” and his ideas closely resemble those of the Order of the Golden Dawn.

<sup>17</sup> *Adat* can be defined as custom, manner, tradition, and habitual practice (Sheppard 1956; see also Nagata 1984: 135). *Adab* may be said to be the embodiment of *adat*.

aesthetics with Southeast Asian architecture, weaponry, dance, and theatre, including “shadow theatre” such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry), *wayang golek* (with three-dimensional wooden puppets) and *wayang wong* (where humans are literally the leather puppets), alongside traditional Malay theatre, dance drama, and performing arts (Sedyawati 1998).

Theories of embodiment, such as Bourdieu’s notion of *hexis*, provide an alternative to symbolic accounts of aesthetics (Bourdieu 1977: 87; 2002: 209; Jenkins 1992: 75). Building upon Gell’s [1985] (1999: 136–158) discussion of walking in relation to Umeda dance, I argue that *hexis* may embody aesthetics. Gell theorises that Umeda dances are all transformations of their walk. In an article on Umeda dance, from fieldwork conducted in the late 1960s in New Guinea, Gell (1975; [1985] 1999) notes the difference in the way the unshod cautiously tread compared to the booted. *Pesilat* also walk softly with the foot placed flat and skimming across the floor, rather than heel first like booted westerners walking on the pavement. Malay *pesilat* tread cautiously when shod in traditional leather sandals (*capal*), or when walking with their shoes off on the sprung floor of a wooden house.

Townfolk who have never acquired the skill of walking softly appear foolish in a wooden Malay house as they bounce up and down with a horrendous thumping noise. When outdoors, the shuffling flat-footed step with the knee slightly flexed is characteristic of the Malay walking style.<sup>18</sup> Through his own complex system of notation, Gell [1985] (1999: 144–145) indicates the position of the knee, and shows how the unshod’s style of flatfooted walking with the knee bent forms the basis of six different dance styles including *ida* or ceremonial walking, namely the women’s dance, the cassowary dance, the fish dance, the termite dance, the ogress dance, and the dance of the bowmen.<sup>19</sup> Hence, Gell derives Umeda dance “as members of a transformation set” from walking [1985] (1999: 156). However, after viewing *The Red Bowmen* film it seems more likely that the Umeda dance derives as a transformation set from copulation, a prospect which escaped Gell’s talent for ethnographic doodling.

Many of the positions exemplified in *silat* indicate that martial dance in Southeast Asia is based upon an intimate knowledge of what Mauss (1979: 107) called “techniques of the body.” My point is that walking is just one aspect of an understanding of the body in relation to the ground (*bumi*). What also needs to be taken into account is the many ways of standing up, squatting, and sitting down.<sup>20</sup> Foreshadowing Bourdieu’s notion of *hexis*, Mauss (1979: 101) used *habitus* to refer to acquired ability and faculty; that is not to the soul, or memory, and its

<sup>18</sup> This skill is highly developed in the Chinese martial art *baguazhang*. Recently I noticed that some Chinese girls in Singapore who wear flip-flops do not make the flip-flop sound as they walk. The only way this is possible is to adopt the style of walking discussed above.

<sup>19</sup> See the film *The Red Bowmen* (1983) based on Gell’s *Metamorphosis of the Cassowaries* to view the *ida* dance, the women’s dance and the fish dance.

<sup>20</sup> See *sepok* and *depok* in Draeger (1972: 46). *Sepok* is when someone adopts a low “sitting” stance by placing one leg behind the other, *depok* the same but by placing one leg in front of the other. These stances are typically used to drop down low, only to spring up with a hand movement or a kick.

repetitive faculties, habits, and customs (*habitude*), but rather to “practical reason,” which is manifested in individual and collective techniques and works, and is distributed unevenly across a population. An example is the ability to squat. When Mauss (1979: 107) speaks of the white Australian soldiers at rest squatting in the mud, he says their heels are dry, whereas those in the absurd and inferior position such as himself, who no longer knew how to squat, had to stand in the mud. Mauss (1979: 112) provides other autobiographical examples of practical reason – he slept whilst standing up in the mountains, and whilst riding a horse.

Rather than being a residue, an excess squatting outside of Malay culture, *silat* permeates it to the core, is revealed within, and is revealing of the aesthetics of embodied cultural practice, including prayer, dance and the physical display of *adat*. I contend that aesthetics are fundamental to the Malay habitus, and are manifested in quotidian bodily hexis. From the perspective of *silat* it is possible to see the Malay conceptions of Islam and *adat* enacted, performed, and embodied in the way Malays walk, talk, sit, stand, eat, step past a seated person, lie down and sleep. For example, Malays sometimes sleep on their back with the arms folded over the chest, with one knee raised. In *silat* this sleeping position is deliberately adopted in case one should need to suddenly awake, and turn, kick, or strike with a backfist from a defensive position after someone has broken into the house (Mohammad Din Mohammad). But it is also a *technique du corps* that may be assumed by Malays with no training in martial arts whatsoever as they lounge around in their now concrete houses with no fear of being stabbed through gaps in the wooden flooring.

## Silat Kinesthetics

Every physical technique, even simply kicking or punching, involves bodily movement. *Silat*’s sophisticated techniques encompass strategy, tactics, attack, defence, timing, and the generation of power. Turning, twisting, ducking, dropping, spinning, stepping, leaping, jumping, diving, rolling, falling, evading, slipping, seizing, jamming, bumping, butting, and feinting are some of the skills to be acquired. These skills are honed through sparring. A *pesilat* must know how to move each part of the body in conjunction with the whole. Speed comes with repetition and practice, and is accompanied by strength, balance, poise, flexibility, self-confidence, and an enhanced sense of kinesthetic awareness. Each technique in a string of moves usually has several combat applications, some of which may be far from obvious. Most open hand techniques in *silat* are easily adapted if not originally designed for weapons use. The techniques are taught through fixed patterns or sets of movements known as *juros*, through *bunga* (flower), the flowery dancelike moves, and *buah* (fruit), the combat applications. The body must be tough enough to withstand the impact from delivering or receiving forceful blows. I discuss power development under *amalan* (daily practice) and *prana* (spiritual breath). Before one can step, the basic stances need to be mastered.

## *Langkah and Kuda Kuda*

*Langkah* must be discussed alongside the stances (*kuda kuda*). *Langkah* refers to footwork, or changing stances through stepping. The magic of the body is unleashed through the development of the low stance, as it leads to tremendous abilities to jump and kick, as well as to control the ground so as to fight from below an opponent's waist. The stances generate different feelings in the practitioner, for example, *helang berlegar* describes a circling eagle, a feeling generated from moving off the initial stance, and is where a young eagle learns to search for its prey. It is difficult to adequately describe the stances in writing as in practice one must take into account the angle they are pointing (*segi*), the way they are turning, twirling, or swinging (*seludang putar*), the sharp points (*seludang*), and whether they involve striking from above (*tinggi*) or from below (*rendah*, a very low stance where the head is below the navel). *Sampeng* is a *silat* concept that goes with the stances and means going to the side, for example, *siku sampeng* (elbow strike to the side), *langkah sampeng* (step to the side) and so forth.

*Silat* stances include: (a) the horse stance (*kuda*) with both legs in a straddle position about two shoulder widths apart; (b) the archer stance (*duduk laksamana*), with the weight on the bent back leg (or front) and the other nearly straight, one hand up palm out, the other left on the thigh; (c) the docking dragon stance (*naga berlaboh*), which looks like the horse stance twisted through 180 degrees, but with the *naga's* tail "docking," i.e. the back foot resting with the instep on the ground, and both firmly grounded legs taking equal weight; (d) the sitting tiger stance (*duduk harimau*) where the back leg is kneeling on the floor; (e) *rimau menanti* (waiting tiger) a low stance with the back leg carrying the body weight in a squatting position, with the front leg extended into a straddle; (f) *rimau santai*, which is low and almost sitting, with one knee on the ground, crouching, and the weight or rather a buttock resting on heel of either foot or both feet; (g) *sendeng tapi*, a low stance at a forty-five degree angle, which is *menanti* reversed with the body weight placed over the front squatting leg, the rear leg providing the straddle; (h) *berdiri kaki tunggal* (standing on one leg), and; (i) *duduk lipat*, sitting cross-legged.

The names of the stances above derive mainly from Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, but similar stances are found in Sumatran and Javanese styles of *silat*. The basic stance of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is the ready stance (*pasang sikap/sikap rimau*) where the rear hand is held palm up in front, and the other rests on the front thigh, whilst the legs look as if one were sitting on a horse but twisting to the side. Basically it is a slightly twisted horse stance (*kuda kuda segi*), which is achieved by placing one leg just over a shoulder's width in front of the other. The same stance looking behind gives *libas*.

Apart from in *juros* (sets) and *sembah* (salutation) *silat* footwork is practised through the repetition of individual movements, such as leaping (*loncat*) backwards or forwards, or adopting any given stance according to compass points with the *pesilat* standing in the middle, or by practising a long series of *juros* connected together. The *pesilat* will be expected to hold low stances for hours on end to

develop strong legs, the spine, and “character,” requiring patience, daily practice, and an ability to withstand pain and tedium.<sup>21</sup> The low centre of gravity makes the *pesilat* difficult to throw. In kung fu it is commonly said that because boat people needed to fight from a stable base they developed the horse stance. This argument could easily be applied to the maritime Malays, especially the *Orang Laut* or the Sea Nomads (Sopher 1977). However, I think a better explanation is that the horse stance develops from the ability to squat, a *technique du corps* Mauss says is taken for granted in Asia and the Middle East, yet is forgotten in adult western cultures (Mauss 1979: 107). Similarly, the lion stance of *kalarippayattu* (and *silat cimande*) is closely linked to the squat, only with the feet placed slightly wider, and slightly straighter, with one leg in front of the other. The lion stance is similar to the basic position of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu (*pasang*), only in *kalarippayattu* the body is bent forward right over the leading leg, whereas in *silat*, the spine remains upright.<sup>22</sup>

The stance-work achieves great finesse in *silat*, because the secrets of the stance have been revealed. In traditional Chinese styles of kung fu the basic practice is to sit in a “squat” with the legs twice shoulder width apart as if sitting on a horse with the thighs parallel to the floor – for up to 3 h. In Okinawan karate, itself probably a derivate of Southern Chinese white crane kung fu, horse stance results in a lumbering plodding step from one position to the next in the classical stepping patterns (*kata*) such as *sanchin*. It seems obvious to the *silat* practitioner that in *sanchin* the secret of the footwork has been withheld (for *sanchin* see Normandeau 2003a).<sup>23</sup> In *silat* however, the horse stance may be transformed to become *libas*, where the performer twists the torso around, and looks behind (often preceding a jumping spinning kick, which utilizes the power generated from the torqued position), or it may become *naga berlaboh* by twisting and folding the legs. Second, through differential weighting, although both feet are on the ground, the *pesilat*’s entire weight may be placed upon one foot or the other, which can prove tricky for the opponent as they will not be able to gauge where the *pesilat* will step next, or where they are vulnerable or strong. Third, through hyperextension of one knee, with one leg in a

<sup>21</sup> Before training the legs may be warmed up with oils such as Bee Brand or *gamat*. Malays are renowned for their medicinal oils (*minyak*), which treat a multitude of ailments including rheumatism, back pains, trapped wind, stomach-ache, flu, colds and headache. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of oils, for all kinds of things including to strengthen the body, improve sexual vitality, and enhance sexual pleasure. The 130 million year old virgin rain forest changes from one mile to the next (along with the weather), and supports unique ecosystems supplying an enormous variety of medicinal and poisonous plants (Gimlette 1915; Kathirithamby-Wells 2005).

<sup>22</sup> With the exception of *duduk lipat* the low stances of *silat* are similar to those used in modern freestyle wrestling (Thompson 1999).

<sup>23</sup> In kung fu low stances typify so-called Northern styles, whereas high stances with the feet shoulder width apart (a high horse stance) typify later Southern innovations including Chow Gar, Pak Mei, and Wing Chun. Practitioners of these arts say high stances are an evolutionary adaptation giving greater speed and mobility. High stances may arise when there is insufficient time to master the low stancework. Of course, ideally it is better to master both high and low footwork. However, the negative side of extremely low stances, especially for westerners, is that prolonged hyperextension may damage the knees.



deep squat and the other straight, the horse stance becomes lower still to become *dudok menanti* or *sendeng tapi* allowing the *pesilat* to control the low ground; and fourth, by placing the weight upon the balls of the feet, given strong legs even very low stances become dexterous, fast and mobile.

## ***Bunga***

The predominant Malay aesthetic seen in all their art from carving to calligraphy is one of spinning, turning, and twisting, like ivy encircling a post.<sup>24</sup> The movements of *bunga*, often danced at Malay weddings, are graceful, stylised, smooth and circular. *Bunga* may involve one or several participants in synchronized stylised movement. *Bunga* teaches the finer points of technique, balance, positioning, footwork and gaze. The “moves” of *bunga* are multivalent in that they operate across practical and magical realms. It may be difficult to assess or even see the practical implications of any given move, unless it is also shown with an application, for example performed as part of a *buah*, or with a weapon in hand. Hence only an experienced eye may overcome the captivation inherent in the *bunga*. Sometimes the performance of *bunga* looks somewhat like *taijiquan*: indeed Pa’ Zaini referred to his style as “Malay tai chi.”

*Bunga* strategically disguises the lethal arsenal of *silat*. Beautiful, yet deadly, it is the flowery, graceful, aesthetically pleasing dance of *silat* that differentiates *silat* from other martial arts. *Bunga* serves as visible proof to Malays who would say that *silat* was originally created by a woman. The continuous twisting, and curling over of the hands is similar to Indian, Javanese, and Sumatran dance, and exemplifies the “feminine” beauty of *silat*. Initially, I could not see how *bunga* could possibly be deadly, until Pa’ Zaini, a wedding *silat* expert showed me the same elegant steps whilst holding a razor.

Sometimes, young “modern” Malays deride Peninsular Malay *silat* as “rubbish” and “pathetic.” The “effeminate” aspect of *silat*, exemplified by *bunga*, is possibly one reason why urban Malays spurn it in favour of other more “masculine” (non-Chinese) martial arts such as karate or taekwondo, which are perceived as being more realistic for combat. This is ironic, as both karate and taekwondo are twentieth century inventions; national “sports” that de-emphasize weapons in their training.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the martial arts of other Asians are perceived as real and effective,

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<sup>24</sup> *Bunga* stands in stark comparison to the modern militarist aesthetic of machinelike exact movement so typical of the so-called “hard” combative styles. The commonplace distinction between “hard” and “soft” martial arts is clearly seen in Japanese examples. Some Japanese martial styles are predominantly “soft,” such as aikido which emphasizes flowing, defensive movements; others, such as Gojo Ryu karate, are predominantly “hard,” emphasizing aggressive strikes to smash an opponent’s limbs, torso, throat or skull.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Funakoshi Gichin changed the name of karate *jitsu* (Chinese hand techniques) to karate-*dō* (empty-hand ways) in 1935 (Nakayama 1966: preface). The focus of the art shifted to



whereas Malay martial arts are devalued as feminine, ineffective, outdated, anachronistic and overly traditional. With the advent of the late twentieth century “development” the feminine or “effeminate” aspects of Malay culture have become associated with weakness, and are marginalized if not sloughed off, a process Khoo (2000) notes in Malaysian films as the rise of “hypermasculinity.” Hence in Kuala Lumpur, Japanese or Korean martial arts are preferred, with Japan especially operating as a model of Asian prosperity, achievement and modernity.

## *Juros*

*Juros* are strings of techniques practised in sets of movements, which contain important combat moves and footwork. *Pesilat* practicing *juros* appear to fight an imaginary opponent. However, the continuous repetition of the same techniques in a series prevents *juros* from looking exactly like western shadowboxing, which anyhow is less structured. *Juros* are multi-purpose training tools designed to teach the *pesilat* the art of bodily movement, through the practice of combinations of postures and techniques.

## *Buah*

In the language of performance, *buah* are “combat strategies” that rehearse a series of “strips” of combative techniques and their premeditated responses (Goffman 1974: 10).<sup>26</sup> The strips are found in *juros* and *bunga*, and *buah* teaches some of their applications; it is the fruit of the flower in the garden of *silat* (*silat sekebun*). To execute a takedown, or lock an opponent, an “entry” against a preconfigured attack (armed or unarmed) is required in the form of a technique that puts the opponent in a position in relation to the *pesilat* where a limb, the head, or torso (or combination of these) can be struck and manipulated into a compromising position to give the *pesilat* the advantage (Fig. 3.4). Malay *silat* practitioners may aim to strike the vital points (*nadi*) with the fore-knuckles gripped in a leopard fist (*selegi*), but overall they favour placing the opponent in locks or submission holds.

*Buah* is less graceful than *bunga*, but the moves are executed without brute force, appearing effortless. Some Indonesian styles of *silat* refer to *buah* as *pukulan*, and emphasize the strike (*pukul*) rather than the takedown; however, the striking of vulnerable points is implicit in *buah*, a word that also means “testicles.” Not all *buah* end in locking the opponent. The practice of *buah* against different opponents where

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moral education and the development of the self. For pre-war Japan this entailed a shift away from the recognition of Chinese martial ancestry.

<sup>26</sup> Rashid (1990: 63) defines *buah* as a method to teach the practical application of “combat strategies” to take down and lock an opponent.

**Fig. 3.4** Jas and Solleh perform *buah wanita*



one individual acts as the attacker, and the other as the defender, gives the *pesilat* skills of distance, timing, footwork, posture, and body mechanics. *Buah* is a form of rehearsal in a theatre of combat, and provides the *pesilat* an array of responses to any given attack.

Some *buah* simply knock the opponent down with a sweep (*sapu*), others may end up locking them, and then enacting a strike or kill. Some *buah* are just a few moves, others may consist of more than a dozen individual movements. In Peninsular Malaysia, the *buah* are given names like *amok* (amok), *cinabuta* (blind Chinese) and *kuda gila* (crazy horse). Repetitive practice leads to the ability to smoothly execute complex manoeuvres against a pre-configured attack, however, in actual combat the *pesilat* is meant to improvise, and respond to any given situation, and not blindly execute a series of movements. Hence the rehearsal is not designed to achieve a stimulus/response pattern through continuous repetition, but to ground the *pesilat* in the skills of combat.

## *Amalan*

Pa' Ariffin has developed what may be termed "iron shins," a common attribute among Thai boxers. Pa' Ariffin explains that to develop the iron shin the lower leg and calf should be beaten with a hot towel that is folded and tightly twisted

along its length. The beating with this heavy cloth cudgel must continue for about 15 min everyday for around three months. The towel must be wetted, preferably with scalding hot water. Subsequently a specially prepared liniment (*minyak gosok*) is massaged into the leg, with long downward strokes using the edge of the thumbs and the fingertips. This improves the blood circulation and along with tedious and painful stance training helps to develop the strong legs needed to hold low stances and deliver forceful kicks. Once the area is conditioned, over a period of three to six months, oil needs to be pressed into the region two or three times daily to maintain and improve the condition of the leg. According to Pa' Ariffin, the improved circulation enhances male libido because the veins in the leg connect directly to the penis. To improve the sex drive (size and stamina) the inner thigh area and not solely the inner calf receive massage. Pa' Ariffin said that this *amalan* derives from his father, but then he would always say that, especially when he didn't want to reveal the source of his knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

## Styles of Silat

Now that I have examined an “ideal type” of *silat* from the point of view of similarities, it is useful to examine *silat* styles from the point of view of their differences. This section is not exhaustive but paints a broad outline of some of the styles that Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is composed from, or against. As Seni Silat Haqq Melayu aims to epitomize the essence of *silat Melayu*, it is necessary to ask what *silat Melayu* consists of. The straightforward answer to this question is typically *silat Minangkabau*, *silat sendeng*, *silat Patani*, *silat Kelantan*, *silat Kedah*, and *silat Jawa*. Therefore, *silat Melayu* is not only the antecedent of other *silat* styles, but the result of their amalgamation.

## *Silat Melayu*

There is no absolute consensus as to which *silat* styles should be included in a discussion of *silat Melayu*. Ku and Wong (1978: 7–12) refer to “the main styles” of *silat Melayu* under the predominantly regional classifications of *silat Minangkabau*, *silat sendeng*, *silat Patani*, *silat Kelantan*, *silat Kedah*, and *silat Jawa*. *Silat sendeng* is the exception, as *sendeng* (slanting) refers to techniques entering via an angle, or from one side. The regional classification tends to lump together the diverse elements of *silat*, and simplifies the complex attributes in an interlacing network of component parts. Each of the *silat* types mentioned above has a more or less developed art (*seni*) element, particular strategies and tactics, a spiritual dimension, and a

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<sup>27</sup> *Amalan* also translates as “good deed.” These are taken into account on one’s deathbed and may be detected by the *kadi* who washes the corpse of the deceased.

host of technical manoeuvres including all or most of the following: *sepak* (kick or slap) *pukul*, *langkah*, *juros*, *bunga*, *sembah*, *buah*, *kunci* and *belebat*. The regional approach has the merits of simplifying a complex field, and it does to some extent represent the common-sense understanding of the Malay *guru silat* of the composition of *silat Melayu*.<sup>28</sup>

When I asked Pa' Ariffin about the Minangkabau styles he had learned, and where from, he said he had learned *silat Minang* from a teacher in Negri Sembilan, which is the main Minangkabau settlement in Malaysia. I pressed on saying: "Well which one? After all there are almost a hundred styles of Minangkabau *silat*." Pa' Ariffin looked mystified and said that "for us, it's just *silat Minang*." This conglomeration could suggest that the Malaysian *silat* lies in the shadow of Sumatra, and that it is merely a blurred, attenuated, and fragmented version of the original. On the other hand, to Malays it may suggest that the Malaysian form (from the nobility) is closer to the "original" Sumatran style that arrived in Singapore in 1160 when the Malays migrated from Minangkabau in Sumatra (Ku and Wong 1978: 7), a notion that fits with the idea that immigrants cling more tightly to their traditions, and may reject change to a greater degree than indigenes.

As far as I was able to piece together, Pa' Ariffin learned *silat Melayu* from his father Yeop Mahidin M.B.E., who learned from Datuk Pawang Noh. Yeop Mahidin is also said to have learned *silat Melayu* from Zainal Alatas (the grandfather of Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman), and *silat cekak* from Pa' Samat of Kampong Ulu (but Kg. Ulu *what*? Pa' Ariffin did not specify; *ulu* just means "remote" – the "head" of a river, headwaters, or upstream – and is merely a prefix to a river's name). Pa' Ariffin also says that he was taught by Tok Ki Anjang, another student of Datuk Pawang Noh, and that he was taught *silat seni gayong* by Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman, who "cut his lime" in 1967 (see Chapter 7). He says he also learned *silat Melayu* from Pa' Daraman, *Pendekar Tuah* from Cikgu Mazlan (whose father Cikgu Hashim, learned from Yeop Mahidin); *silat sterlak* from Pa' Hamid (from Ipoh) in Kuala Lumpur, *silat lintau* from Pa' Dearman (Ampangan, Negri Sembilan); and *gerak suci sejati*, and *silat sekebum* (the origin of *silat Melayu*) from Cikgu Amin. This list proved impossible to verify as Pa' Ariffin said most of these people are now deceased or he has lost contact with them. However, his brother, Tutak, and their sister Judd, did remember their father instructing them as children.

## ***Silat Minangkabau***

Following Cordes (1990: 92–95) Pauka (1998: 27) says there are seventy-eight styles of *silek* in West Sumatra, although this figure does not include the many "schools" of *silek* that may only be practised in a localized region down to a single

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<sup>28</sup> Rashid (1990: 66) provides a useful classificatory table of the types of *silat* to be found in Peninsular Malaysia.

village.<sup>29</sup> Draeger (1972: 133) notes that *silek* forms a great influence on all *silat* styles, as from Sumatra *silek* spread to Java, and then to the rest of Indonesia and Peninsular Malaysia. Sumatran influence over Malay *silat* has technical, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions, affecting the techniques, music (*gendang*), training times and attire.

*Silek harimau* (tiger style) is a Minangkabau style that exerts an important influence upon Malay *silat*, and its authority may be seen in palm and claw techniques, stances, footwork, kicks, sweeps, *juros*, *buah* and weapons training. *Silat harimau* bears only superficial resemblance to Chinese fighting styles named after tigers, except that a few of the dynamic tension exercises are similar to those practised in Hung Gar kung fu (Kong and Ho 1973: 14, 22, 53). *Silat harimau* practitioners develop massively strong legs for leaping and kicking (Draeger 1972: 136). This is partly obtained by holding the ultra-low stances characteristic of the style. A high degree of flexibility in the spine, waist and legs must also be attained. The techniques of *silat harimau* (or *rimau* for short) require the performer to drop to the ground on all fours assuming very low positions and this develops a strong back, broad shoulders, and powerful forearms and wrists. These and other signs the *silat* expert gives off, such as oversized calf muscles, or the immaculate way they rise from kneeling in prayers without the aid of their hands using only a single smooth flex of the knees, make them relatively easy to spot to the trained observer.

*Silat harimau* is well-adapted to fighting in wet slippery muddy conditions, and for people who develop strong legs as part of their everyday activities of squatting, walking, climbing and maneuvering boats in shallow waters (Draeger 1972: 131). I have already mentioned the ploy of the *pesilat harimau* of dropping to the floor into a seemingly sacrificial position to deceive the opponent. There are other formidable motives for dropping to the ground. To the surprise of the unsuspecting opponent the *pesilat harimau* may seem to temporarily vanish, only to drop into a posture that directly engages the opponent from below, beside, or behind them. The vanishing effect (*ilmu ghaib*) is greatly enhanced at night. For example, *pesilat* may drop on all fours whilst pressing forward with their shoulder against the opponent's forward shin, simultaneously seizing the ankle with their hand, and potentially snapping the leg at the knee if sufficient force is applied. Quickly standing up from this position and yanking the opponent's ankle upwards will throw them backwards. The influence of *silat harimau* is apparent in many styles of Malay *silat* and may be seen where the *pesilat* drops their entire weight onto the floor whilst locking a part of the opponent's anatomy. Aside from the application of pins to immobilize an opponent, this body dropping method can result in arm and wrist breaks, shoulder dislocation, leg breaks, spine and neck breaks. With a tripping technique the full body weight of the *pesilat* may forcibly smash the opponent's face or the back of their head into the

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<sup>29</sup> According to Cordes there are ten major styles of *silek* in West Sumatra and these are *kumango*, *lintau*, *silak tuo*, *sitaralak*, *harimau*, *puah*, *sungai patai*, *luncua*, *gulo-gulo tareh*, and *silek baru* to which Pauka (1998: 27) adds an eleventh called *ulu ambek*.

ground. These techniques all feature in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, Seni Silat Al-Haqq, and Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia, styles I discuss later in this chapter.

Some *guru silat* say that *silat harimau* is not designed to fight people, but to fight tigers (see also Skeat [1900] 1984: 169–170). According to *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad, the *silat* master Pa' Hanifi Harimau of Kampung Bereh could jump twenty-five feet into the air, and push trees down after merely cutting them with his knife. He would complete his student's training by making them train with the tiger on the final day. As Mohammad Din Mohammad put it:

The tiger will go through the swamp and then through the water, then rest. They will go and fight it – bare hand. Until they *kebal taring*, i.e. the tiger bite you or strike you and you are not harmed. And you can change your mouth and teeth using the tongue to look like the tiger (Mohammad Din Mohammad, from fieldnotes).<sup>30</sup>

There are spiritual aspects of *silat harimau* that Malays regard as *haram* (taboo). For example a *silat gayong* master in Singapore (name withheld) was reputed to keep a spiritual *harimau* with him and learn from it. Linking or merging with a spiritual being, or keeping “a familiar” by one's side is known as *dampingan*, and is considered to be a type of black magic.

## *Silat Sterlak*

Draeger says that *silat sterlak*, another Minangkabau style, was designed as a countermeasure to *silat harimau* imitating “the fury of a herd of stampeding elephants, combining that with the wariness of the stalking tiger” (1972: 136). Draeger continues that “trainees are concerned with applying the whole body force behind the fist, foot, or head in making their attacks” and that “tradition tells of *sterlak* experts who have fought and defeated tigers in the Sumatran jungles” (ibid). Draeger also suggests that *silat sterlak* appears to have Chinese antecedents of the *xingyiquan* variety. *Xingyiquan* is a Chinese Taoist style of kung fu which roughly translates as “mind/body fist.”<sup>31</sup> It is based upon twelve animals and five elements. The animals are dragon, snake, tiger, monkey, bear, eagle, fish, falcon, horse, mystical bird (like a phoenix), swallow, and chicken. A short “form” or set pattern of movements (much like a *juros*) is based upon the characteristic movements of each animal (for example, leaping and swooping down for the swallow; twisting and turning for the snake). The five elements are earth, water, fire, air, and metal, and concern ways of hitting and moving, for example, water is soft and fluid and relates to “splashing” palm

<sup>30</sup> The latter part of this quote brings to mind the Kerinci people of Jambi in Sumatra who are believed by Peninsular Malays to be able to literally turn into tigers after dark (Skeat [1900] 1984: 161–163). Mohammad Din Mohammad says that when the Kerinci came to Malaysia to trade, they settled, intermarried, and their forbears lost the ability to turn into were-tigers.

<sup>31</sup> I first learned *xingyiquan* in London during 1994–1996, and *baguazhang* in Singapore 2005–2007.

techniques. *Xingyiquan* develops tremendous power, partly through stamping and transmitting the resultant energy through the fist or other weapon. *Xingyiquan* is the first of the three classical Taoist arts, namely *xingyiquan*, *taijiquan*, and *bagua Zhang*.

## *Silat Cekak*

*Silat cekak* was originally developed in the Kedah Court to counter the Thai fighting style known as the *tomoi*. Now one of the most popular *silat* styles in Malaysia, it was first registered as an association in Kedah in 1904, and for Malaysia generally in 1965 (Rashid 1990: 93). *Cekak*, means to “claw” or seize the opponent. It is renowned for its series of *buah* which have been influential in the development of more recent *silat* styles in Peninsular Malaysia, including *silat gayong*.

According to Rashid (1990: 66) *silat cekak*, also known as *papan sekeping* (a piece of wood), is an Islamic martial art that originates in Peninsular Malaysia.<sup>32</sup> Himself a former practitioner of *silat cekak* Rashid explains that *silat cekak*’s

genealogy of *guru*’s (*ranting sala silah*) began with the famous Panglima Ismail of Kedah who invented the *silat* and taught the technique to another warrior of the Kedah court, Panglima Tok Rashid. The latter then taught the art to a certain Yahya Said from Perak, on the condition that he agreed to return the *silat* to the Kedah Malays. Yahya Said himself never made it to Kedah but kept the knowledge of the art for forty years until it was finally taught to a Kedah Malay from the district of Sik, Tok Guru Hanafi (Halimah Ahmad 1977; Rashid 1990: 67).

The above quote clarifies why *silat cekak* is now commonly referred to as *silat cekak hanafi*. This distinguishes the art from *cekak serantau* (found in Singapore), which is a product of the prolific innovator Pa’ Hosni, and as such bears no direct relation to the *silat* of the Kedah Court.

## *Silat Sendeng*

According to Rashid (1990: 66) *silat sendeng* is an Islamic style that originates in Peninsular Malaysia. However, *guru silat* of Javanese origin assure me that *silat*

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<sup>32</sup> Rashid continues that “*Silat cekak* ... can be traced to the history of Kedah in the seventeenth century, during the tussle between the Kedah Malays and the Minangkabau for the throne of Kedah (Shahrom Ahmat 1971). During these wars Kedah was overrun by the Thais, and the Kedah Malays attempted to consolidate their strength by developing a technique of self-defence (eventually known as *cekak*) with the full support of the Kedah royal family and within the Kedah court. It combined different *silat* forms from Aceh and the Minangkabau area of Sumatra in order to specifically counter the Thai martial art form, the *tomoi*” (Rashid 1990: 67).



*sendeng* is from Java. *Sendeng* is an adjective meaning “askew; crooked; awry; twisted to one side; amiss” (Hawkins 2001: 216). *Sendeng* is possibly a covert reference to Chinese aspects of *silat*. Whatever the case, *sendeng* refers to the tactic of “slanting,” a style of *silat* movement that turns the body sideways on to the opponent, and serves to simultaneously extend the reach of the *pesilat*, and to minimize the exposed area available for the opponent to strike. Slanting also refers to the slanting entry into and through the opponent’s “spatial envelope,” traversing “personal distance” into the “intimate zone,” for example, entering at a forty-five degree angle from where the opponent is facing (Hall 1990: 46, 128). Techniques from *silat sendeng*, or techniques related to the concept of slanting, are found in many styles of *silat* from Malaysia and Indonesia. The corollary of *sendeng* is *sumbang* where the body rotates from a sidelong position to a position facing the opponent. When these two movements are performed consecutively, with a twist of the waist, a snap of the hips, and a turning of the feet, considerable amounts of kinetic energy can be unleashed, and may be directed into the opponent through a strike.

## ***Silat Gayong***

One of the most important styles of *silat* in relation to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is *silat seni gayong* (Chapter 7 discusses *gayong*’s ritual practice), which is numerically the most popular style of *silat* in Malaysia, and the crucible of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. *Silat seni gayong* and Seni Silat Haqq Melayu share some, though by no means all, ritual procedures and derive their *techniques du corps* from a common ancestry, especially the *buah*. Pa’ Ariffin is a relative of Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman, the founder of *silat seni gayong* (on his mother’s side). As a child, and when he was a teenager, he learned *silat gayong* from the founder. Pa’ Ariffin also claims to have learnt *ibu gayong*, the “mother” or root of *gayong* from his father Tuan (Sir) Yeop Mahidin M.B.E., whom he says was one of the teachers of Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman.

In 2001 Pa’ Ariffin became the official representative for Silat Seni Gayong U.K., and subsequently attempted to transform the students of his established style, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, into students of Silat Gayong U.K. This change was fiercely resisted by his students in London, who amongst other things, disliked the *gayong* hats (*tanjat*), which to them symbolized not just a shift in fashion, but a downgrade in status from the *silat* of the “nobility” to that of the “commoners.” It is difficult to assess exactly why Pa’ Ariffin chose to teach them a different style, but one reason may be that Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is basically an aestheticised version of *silat seni gayong* anyway (there are also political reasons, see Chapter 5).

According to Sheppard (1972: 148) *silat gayong* was the first attempt to systematize *silat*, and to provide it with syllabus, gradings, and a belt system, a move that was clearly modelled on earlier Japanese innovations in their martial arts. Sheppard writes that:

Until the Japanese invasion of Malaya, there was no uniform syllabus for the teacher of the Malay art of self defence. This defect was recognized during the lawless years of the Japanese occupation (Sheppard 1972: 145).

One of the founders of *silat gayong* was Mahaguru Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman, who was a policeman in the CID under the British colonial administration of Malaya. He established *silat gayong* in the early 1940s on Pulau Sudong (Sudong Island) seven kilometres south of Singapore, now an oil refinery. Sheppard states that:

The fundamental change from a parochial pastime to a regimented and highly organized form of self-defence took place during the troubled years of the Japanese occupation. It was then that a number of Malay leaders, including Dato Onn bin Jafaar of Johore and Dato Meor Abdul Rahman of Taiping in Perak evolved a unique system of teaching *silat* as a means of promoting godliness, loyalty, and self-defence (Sheppard 1983: 103).

Cheah documents various accounts of how Datuk Onn bin Jaafar, at the bidding of Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, managed to prevent Kiyai Salleh, the leader of the 1,600 Sabilillah (Holy War) Army of the Red Bands, from attacking Batu Pahat town. Hence *silat* can be defined as the art of stopping war, and not just as the art of self-defence or killing. Kiyai Salleh was later given the title of *penghulu* (chief) of Simpang Kiri, and recruited by Datuk Onn as president of the Simpang Kiri branch of Datuk Onn's Pergerakan Melayu Semananjung (Peninsular Malay Movement), continuing as president when Datuk Onn became president of UMNO in June 1946.

After the Japanese occupation Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman and his followers spread the new system of *silat seni gayong* from Singapore to Johore, and then all the way up the Malaysian Peninsula to Kedah "where it received substantial patronage from Tengku Kassim, an uncle of Tengku Abdul Rahman" (Sheppard 1983: 104). *Silat seni gayong* was introduced to the Royal Malaysian Police in 1973. An intensive training course was held for forty-eight police personnel from the lower ranks. Upon graduation, they were ordered to spread *silat seni gayong* to all the Police Training schools in Malaysia. Today, as Rashid attests, "*gayong* remains the most popular of all *silat* forms and is still sponsored by Malay political groups such as the United Malays National Organization (UNMO) and youth organizations" (1990: 67).

A product of World War Two, *silat seni gayong* was designed primarily to train the police, who were thrown into disarray during the post-war interregnum. As such it concentrates on combat efficacy, powerful incapacitating strikes, controlling locks, and weapons, and neglects *bunga*. In 2008, from my highrise condominium balcony in Kuala Lumpur, I watched four policemen tackle a rowdy hooligan who resisted arrest. Two policemen pinned the man's arms behind his body from both sides, and one stood in front and another behind. The policeman in the rear then kicked the man's legs out from under him in a classic *silat gayong* manoeuvre facilitating a pin face-first to the ground to apply the handcuffs. Next they forced him into the back of a police car. Five minutes later a man in plain

clothes drove up on a moped. Dismounting, he yanked open the police car door and slapped the suspect hard across the face as the police stood by idly. The slap was met with derisive whoops of laughter from the people watching in the surrounding tower blocks.

*Silat gayong* has a rough unpolished “masculine” look, and it lacks the flowing aesthetic “feminine” grace of *silat Melayu*. *Silat gayong* does not use music for the purposes of training: the *seni* aspects are crude and under-developed. However, this rough quality seems to well suit many of the men and women who practice *silat gayong*, who in Kuala Lumpur, except for the middle-class higher echelons, are mainly drawn from the urban working-class and from the outlying *kampongs*. Class aside, for the purposes of training they are all prepared to rough it out.

Datuk Meor was a pragmatist who amassed martial techniques from other martial artists via his confidantes and senior students all across Malaya. Travelling from place to place he would watch the *pesilat* perform the applications to a series of techniques, for example, *buah pisau* (knife fighting), and then if the techniques were good enough, have them written down, recorded, and “authorized” as part of the *silat seni gayong* syllabus, with his signature, seal and blessing (Cikgu Ezhar). Significantly, Datuk Meor failed to get permission from his grandfather, Zainal Alatas, to teach the style, but was instead sent by him to find a “higher authority” (see Chapter 4).

In Sumatra *silek* is also known as *gayung*. *Silat seni gayong* is a composite style that incorporates elements of Sumatran *silat*, especially *silat harimau*. It also includes Bugis elements passed down from the founder’s ancestors. Like most Malay styles of *silat*, *silat gayong* shares many of its *buah* with *silat cekak*. Used as a noun, *gayong* commonly refers to the small bucket that Malays use to scoop water in the toilet and bathing area. *Gayong* instructors took pains to assure me that their *gayong* is not a toilet bucket. *Gayong* also means “single-stick,” a weapon that is associated with magical powers in Malay literature (Sheppard 1983: 104). For the Malay martial artist, *gayong* is a verb that describes the action of dipping into the well of the unseen, to draw out mystical power for use in this world. Chthonian power is drawn through prayer, dreams, visions, and the specific ritual practices of *silat gayong* (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Aside from its curious ritual initiation through the boiling oil ordeal, *silat gayong* is visually distinctive from other Malay styles of *silat* due to its emphasis upon performance acrobatics, including flips, diving rolls, somersaults, and handsprings (see also Shamsuddin 2005: 65). The student learns to competently handle several weapons, notably the *parang*, *lembing* (spear), *sarung* and the *keris* (Fig. 3.5). Except for the *parang*, upon completion of each weapon the *pesilat* undergoes a test or *khatam* (a term which normally refers to a test upon completing a study of the Holy Quran). To pass the *khatam lembing* (spear test) the student must catch a spear thrown down a waterfall whilst standing in the pounding rush of cold water. For the *khatam keris*, late at night they wade out into the sea off Melaka in a group, and wait until the snakes (*naga*) arrive in a seething mass, to twist and turn between their legs, an ordeal said to be especially terrifying for women.



**Fig. 3.5** A Malay girl learning *silat seni gayong keris* at night (*Nirwana gelanggang*)

These *khatam* are part of the grading procedure, and belt ranking system, through which the student moves from white, to green, red, yellow, and ultimately black. Each belt (*benkung*) has several sub-stages: red, one, two, and three; yellow, one to five; and the black belt has seven stages marked by bars affixed to the ends of the belt. Unlike Singapore, the seventh degree black belt and the title of *mahaguru* is reserved for Datuk Meor in Malaysia. Malaysian *silat gayong* has several more belts than the Singaporean version taught by Mahaguru Hussin Kasslan, which is closer to the original style of Datuk Meor. The fattening of the syllabus occurred due to the accretion of techniques in Malaysia, whereas this tendency was checked in Singapore. This does not mean the Singapore version is quicker to learn, as Mahaguru Hussin Kasslan says he prefers to teach slowly.

Over the years *silat seni gayong* has splintered and fractured, and many different groups have originated, including Silat Gayong Pusaka, Silat Gayong Pasat, Silat Gayong Ghaib, Silat Gayong Fatani and Silat Gayong Marifat. Seni Silat Al-Haq is another splinter group from the arable soil of *silat gayong*. Formed by Pa' Hosni, and based in Singapore, Seni Silat Al-Haq eschews the ritual elements of *silat seni gayong*, and rejects as unIslamic the lime-cutting divination (*mandi limau*), and the ordeal by boiling oil (*mandi minyak*).<sup>33</sup> Seni Silat Al-Haq bears marked similarities to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu as taught by Pa' Ariffin, especially in terms of the *buah*, which for both styles derives from *silat gayong* and *silat cekak*. Both styles look

<sup>33</sup> Pa' Ariffin's brother, Pa' Din learned Seni Silat Al-Haq from Pa' Hosni in the 1980s.

more aesthetically polished (*halus*) than *silat seni gayong*. However, the training atmosphere of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu was completely different from its Singaporean cousins; the former was deadly serious, whilst the latter flopped around like limp socks in the intense heat and humidity of Singapore (although Pa' Hosni's son, the current teacher, is certainly no lame duck).

Silat Seni Harimau, founded by Cikgu Kahar, was a short-lived spin-off from *silat seni gayong* (Fig. 3.6). Cikgu Kahar lived with his wife and two sons in his *gelanggang* in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, eking out a precarious existence doing hand massage (*urut*) in the local market and teaching Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia. Years ago, after an amorous liaison with the founder's late daughter, Cikgu Khal-som (who until recently led the Perak contingent) was discovered, Datuk Meor violently ejected his "chauffeur" Cikgu Kahar from the *silat gayong* organization, only to reaccept him later on, with the rejection of the suit. The *mahaguru* threw yellow rice at Kahar, which meant that whatever powers given were rescinded, and that "whatever I have taught you I will take it back." *Silat seni gayong* thus exhibits in microcosm all the elements that characterize Malay culture, and demonstrates how ill feeling from amorous affairs can echo down the years, threatening to tear the organization apart, not least because it lacks the strong charismatic leadership of the late founder. This conflict re-emerges in Chapter 7 alongside accusations of sorcery.

In Weberian terms, despite the rationalization of *silat gayong*, disenchantment did not seem to take place: if anything the opposite occurred, and practitioners of *silat gayong* became notorious for their mystical knowledge and black magic (*ilmu*



**Fig. 3.6** Cikgu Kahar in London, 2002



*hitam*).<sup>34</sup> For example, *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad told me that he ate some curry puffs (*kueh epok-epok*) at a *guru silat gayong*'s house – Malay etiquette (*adat*) demands that one must sample food and drink when visiting – and subsequently found that he could not urinate.

In terrible pain, his abdomen began to swell, to the point where he felt that he would burst. Hours later, his own *guru silat* arrived, and gave him some blessed water (*air doa*) to drink to counter the black magic, and relieve the agony. He says that shortly after drinking the blessed water he went to the toilet, and whilst urinating felt a painful sensation at the tip of his penis. He then saw a black speck sticking out of the external meatus (*hujung zakar*), which his *guru silat* pulled upon, finger over thumb, slowly working out a long black thread believed to have been concealed in the food in an attempt on his life. My doctor, Saiful Nazim, himself a Malay practitioner of *silat gayong* and doctor for the Singapore national *silat* team, received this tale with a raucous laugh and said: "In western medical terms these are the classical symptoms of urinary infection, and the thread could be dried blood." However, this does not explain how the "thread" came to have seven knots in it.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the point is well established that *guru silat* fear the war magic of *silat gayong*, showing that one of the functions of war magic is to intimidate others, and not just to alleviate uncertainty and "master the elements of luck and chance" (Malinowski 1948: 14).

## *Silat Sekebun*

Silat Sekebun is the *silat* style of the Malay *guru silat*, and is well documented by Tuan Ismail's (1991) excellent account. The garden of *silat* (*silat sekebun*) is a metaphor that operates on practical and mystical levels. Of course, one cannot help but think of the Garden of Eden, and there is also a resonance here with Temiar Orang Asli beliefs of "the flower garden of the afterlife where the head-souls of dead Temiar reside" (Jennings 1995: 142). The garden of *silat* is occupied by spirits – of dead warriors, animals, birds, trees, shrubs, flowers, and vines, and each one of these exists in a different style of movement. Therefore the garden of *silat* is a

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<sup>34</sup> By rationalization I am referring to institutionalization, systematization and "the knowledge or belief . . . that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation" (Weber 1958: 139). For Weber, "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and [following Schiller], above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (1958: 155). Disenchantment involves the stripping of magical elements from thought. As Gerth and Mills point out: "The extent and direction of 'rationalization' is thus measured negatively in terms of the degree to which magical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency" (1958: 51). On re-enchantment see also Benjamin 1996.

<sup>35</sup> See also "The Dawn" (*Al-Falaq*): "Say I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn, From the mischief of created things; From the mischief of darkness as it overspreads; *From the mischief of those of those who blow on knots*; And from the mischief of the mischief of the envious one as he practises envy (Holy Quran 30: 113, italics added).

garden of movement, a garden (*kebun*) which may be practically explored with a *guru silat* through tuition, and mystically explored through spontaneous movement or *gerak* (see Chapter 5). Either way, in *silat* one needs a “guide,” and this is reminiscent of the spirit guide of the Temiar who lead them in the dreaming (Jennings 1995: 18).

Malay *pesilat* and *guru silat* may spend a lifetime on a quest to explore the garden of *silat*, collecting technical, religious, magical, and mystical knowledge so as to discover as many aspects of *silat* as possible. However, those on the quest are selective, and hunt the particular aspects that they consider important. Pa’ Ariffin says that:

When you walk through a beautiful garden you enjoy the scenery, look at the pretty girls, take a bathe in the water, and then move on to the next garden. When you leave, you don’t try and take the whole garden with you (Pa’ Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

Some individuals will go to great lengths to gain the trust of a *guru silat* and “go through” an entire style simply to acquire a single *juros*, or a single coveted technique and *jampi*. Ultimately, these fragments may be recombined with dozens of others, and when renamed and passed down (bestowed with the permission to teach or *ijazah*), may subsequently harden into tradition, or conversely, disappear, leaving only traces such as names, reputations and associated kin. Eventually these traces may in turn inspire fresh generations to discover what was “lost” by investigating a plethora of styles to find the elements required to reconstitute “the original.”

According to Cikgu Jamal there are seventeen types of *silat* passed down from his master, Pa’ Hosni, all of which Cikgu Jamal put under the heading of *innovasi* (innovation or creativity). A third of the *silat* styles currently found in Singapore result from Pa’ Hosni’s adaptations and innovations. For example, where there was Silat Macan Pa’ Hosni created Silat Harimau, in the place of *cekak* he created Cekak Serantau, for Silat Kuntao Melaka he replied with Silat Kuntao Asli, and for the banned Nasrul Haq he countered with Seni Silat Al-Haq (see Chapter 4). In the manner of a virus, Pa’ Hosni created versions of the styles he saw performed around him, *doppelgängers* that arose to replicate and displace the original.

The garden of *silat* is not free of weeds, parasites and serpents. Weeds live by removing the nutrients from the soil needed by other plants, or by growing along their stems to eventually strangle the host. The masters of the styles that Pa’ Hosni copied (names withheld) say that his versions are fake. They laugh at the heaviness of the performer’s steps, and they revel in their knowledge of the secrets not revealed by looking, but only through hard training and long tuition. Although horrified and outraged that their styles were replicated, they recognize the replica to be faulty; flawed techniques lead to injury in the practitioner, and develop a false sense of security in formule that are ineffective or easily countered in actual combat. Only the authentic *guru silat* can provide the key (*kunci*) to unlock these secrets. The secret training does not take place in the *gelanggang* in public, but takes place in private, at night, when you stay in the same room as the *guru silat*, perhaps for many days at a time without venturing out of the house.



## *Sport Silat*

Sport *silat* has become the style of *silat* to replace all the others. Sport *silat* presses against the limits of the technology of enchantment, and the performance of enchantment, and leads me to develop the idea of the “performance of re-enchantment.” Here I move from thinking about enchantment through agency, to enchantment on a structural level.

Enchantment is the important thing to salvage from the “for or against” aesthetics debate. Gell and Ritzer, though from different angles, attempt to resuscitate the concept of enchantment. Ritzer, applying Weberian notions to consumption, examines the workings of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment in the supermall, or what he calls the “cathedrals of consumption” which are “magical, fantastic and enchanted settings in which to consume” and may have an enchanted “sometimes even sacred, religious character” (Ritzer 1999: 7). Both theorists are self-avowed postmodernists, with the essential difference being that Gell maintains agency, whereas Ritzer eschews agency for the environment. However, for all its postmodern packaging this debate is as old as the hills: Gell’s agency surfaces as the freed slave; Ritzer’s cathedral is the cave of Plato’s analogy.

I define a martial art as a reservoir of skill, a stock of reserved knowledge and embodied practice transmitted across generations, concerning strategy and tactics of individual and group attack and defence, whether armed or unarmed, for the purposes of application in combat situations. This definition is preliminary, as it does not take into account the connection of dance to martial arts. However, a distinction should be made between martial arts and martial sports. Martial sports are modern routinised, rationalised, and disenchanted martial arts that are re-enchanted via the media as Olympic or proto-Olympic spectacles (MacAloon 1984).

Martial arts and martial sports are both martial ways; the question is whether the emphasis is placed upon competition, or upon combat and killing, and this will vary with different schools and practitioners. Even within supposedly tame martial arts there is a surfeit of banned lethal techniques. Nevertheless, in former days historians have shown that *silat* had a more agonistic function than nowadays is the case. For example, a century ago *silat* bouts were fought for royal entertainment and took the form of challenge matches between armed *silat* experts from different regions. Fights were to the death, unless broken up by members of the party (Sheppard 1983: 108–111). Challenge matches were still popular until the 1930s, and Sheppard recounts the tale of how the young (Lieutenant) Adnan used the style of the “mousedeer” to defeat the “tiger” of Haji Yunus.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lieutenant Adnan, leader of the Malay Regiment during the Second World War, has become a Singaporean national hero. The museum at Bukit Chandu graphically recounts his noble death. Sheppard says Adnan was killed in hand-to-hand fighting after ordering “his platoon to fight on to the last man. When the position was overrun, the Japanese bayoneted him and then hung him upside down from a nearby rubber tree while it is believed he was still alive” (Sheppard 1947: 18).

As globalisation takes place *silat* appears to undergo a process of rationalization and disenchantment. In Malaysia rationalization must be viewed within the broader context of Islamic revivalism occurring since the 1970s. It would seem paradoxical that despite its rationalization into a sport, *silat* remains enchanted. Is this due to cultural lag, or to the liminal nature of *silat*? Perhaps the market of *silat* – the students, mass media, and audience – re-enchants the art by the attribution of charismatic powers to the *guru silat*. More fundamentally “traditional” *guru silat* resist the cooption of *silat* into a sport.

Older generations of *guru silat* typically comment that *silat* becomes watered down with its “development” into a sport. The bastard offspring is said to lose not only its magic, but also its combat efficacy. The disenchantment of *silat* occurs contiguously with its transmission to the west. Other *guru silat* and observers disagree with this “traditionalist” view, and say that by systematizing *silat* and sharing it with “all races” the art is elevated from an amateur to a professional status (Sheppard 1972: 148). The rationalizing language of race and nation is invoked to advocate sharing, but only through professional competition. The rationalization of martial arts is a necessary step towards their recognition and acceptance as sports. However, martial arts, including *silat*, are also referred to as forms of self-defence. Martial arts are deceptively complex social phenomena composed of multiple overlapping layers of practical, religious, medical, magical, musical, and ethical knowledge and embodied practice. They are invented, preserved, and reinvigorated as “tradition” within and across a broad spectrum of social organizations including sports associations, kinship lineages, village communities, religious orders, cults, secret societies, and the police, secret service and the military.

Many Asian martial arts have become internationally recognized national sports since the 1940s, including judo, karate, taekwondo and wushu. These all form part of the televised “imagined community” of modern secondary nation states, and project the collective myth of the indomitable hero, a hero vanquished though not exterminated by colonisation (Anderson 1991). Crucially, the modern martial arts are sanitized, unarmed, or armed with blunt replica weapons, and the brutal applications of the moves begin to be lost.

The streamlining and systematisation of martial arts involves the formation and adoption of a limited number of fixed patterns. For *pencak silat* the official moves are derived from committees of *guru silat* representing Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Committees also dictate styles of performance, the division into sporting categories, written rules and safety regulations, and complicated aesthetic and other standards whereby competitive performances may be judged. Gone are the simple moves designed to break necks, snap spines, gouge eyes, and cause irreparable neurological damage, which are now considered “illegal.” The nation state’s panoptic regulation lurks above the collegial structure of committee management.

The rationalization of *silat* can be said to occur piecemeal across the span of centuries. For instance, it is claimed that *silat Melayu* had a “formal syllabus” by the eleventh century (Pa’ Ariffin). Paradoxically it is precisely the disenchantment

of martial arts that leads to their re-enchantment, but this time as a consumable spectacle. The rationalization, disenchantment, and re-enchantment of *silat* can be clearly seen to operate in the realm of sport *silat*. The question remains whether this logic applies to *seni silat* as a whole. One way to answer this is to examine *silat*'s ritual life (see Chapters 7 and 8).

The Second World War intensified the global exploration and systematisation of martial arts. The occupying Japanese forces in Indonesia collected *juros silat* and forged them into a composite system for the purpose of training troops. The same thing occurred in Malaya under the British. In *silat gayong* the use of coloured belts followed a Japanese precedent for judo and karate. Indeed, the founder of *silat gayong*, despite his pro-British sentiments, was forced to train the Japanese forces during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. The Malay Regiment (under the British) used *silat* to train for combat, and the Japanese led paramilitary forces such as the Giyu Gun (Malays) also trained in *silat*, but then so too did the communists in the subsequent Malayan civil war (1948–1960). For example, a photograph in Heniker (1955: 48, facing plate) shows a “Bandit” using the stance *rimau menanti* as a crouching position from which to brace a machine gun. The use of *silat* techniques by the communist Malays is not surprising given that C.D. Abdullah, the leader of the Pahang communists, was Pa' Ariffin's uncle, as was comrade Abdul Rashid Mydin (see Chapter 5).

In *silat gayong*, a wide red cloth sash is wrapped several times around the waist and ribs of the practitioner as a type of supple armour to protect the body against spear thrusts. In the Japanese system it appears that the original purpose of the belt is lost as it atrophies to a thin strip possessing merely symbolic attributes. The process of the rationalization of *silat* in the provision of a syllabus, allocating ranks according to belt, systematizing instruction, and developing clubs and organizations is greatly accelerated in the twentieth century. The transition from the feudal Royal elite, to village clique, to club status, mirrors the shift from feudal patterns of living to modern life based upon the discrete segregation of the domains of work, play and leisure. Most people who now learn *silat* do so as a pastime, as a sport or leisure pursuit in hours outside of work. The *guru silat*, from their pivotal role in the feudal political structure, now perform the roles of actor, coach, or choreographer, reflecting the shift from the liminal to the liminoid, accompanied by a shift to the performance of re-enchantment.

## Pre-Systematized Silat

The question of the rationalization of *silat* is now fairly well-worn and has been attempted by several authors. It involves examining the construction of *silat* as an Olympic or national sport (Cordes 1990; de Grave 2001; Maryono 2002). But what was *silat* like before it was systematized? In Southeast Asia, despite the presence of state run authorities such as PERSILAT, styles of *silat* that remain outside of the

recognition of the state agencies can be found that have little in the way of formal structures, fixed procedures, or established agreed upon set patterns of movements.<sup>37</sup>

### *Silat Lima Beradik*

In Singapore, in a style known as *silat lima beradik*, the movements are performed to a rough scheme, in sets or patterns. According to the *guru silat*, Pa' Zaini, *silat lima beradik* (five brothers) originated from Banyuwangi in East Java, and was taught to five brothers by a *wali* (saint) who was living in a tree (Fig. 3.7). In this style the hands continuously turn and circle, weaving smooth twisting patterns in the air, and the stances and footwork resemble classical Javanese dance, especially the *wayang wong*.



**Fig. 3.7** Pa' Zaini, Singapore  
1999

<sup>37</sup> PERSILAT (The International Pencak Silat Federation, Persekutuan Pencak Silat Antarabangsa), was established on 11 March 1980. The four founding members of PERSILAT are IPSI (Ikatan Pencak Silat Indonesia), PESAKA (Persekutuan Silat Kebangsaan Malaysia), PERSISI (Persekutuan Silat Singapura), and PERSIB (Persekutuan Silat Kebangsaan Brunei Darussalam). The Affiliated Members of PERSILAT are from countries "with a national level *silat* organisation, that has been recognised by the relevant Government Agency of that country" <<http://www.pencak-silat.co.uk/psfPersilat.htm>>.

*Silat lima beradik* is not recognized by PERSISI and is mainly performed for weddings, although old photographs of the teacher and his father spinning pairs of *golok* (a long heavy knife) indicate other uses. *Silat lima beradik* harbours two secrets: the first concerns its origin, the second its utility.

In terms of the first secret (contrary to the information provided by the *guru silat*) this style is probably Baweanese rather than Javanese, as is the *guru silat* himself. This disguise – where the name hides something else beneath it – is typical of *silat*, and masking the location of origin is unsurprising given the prejudice that Baweanese face from Malays, who believe them to practise powerful black magic. Among Malays the Baweanese are notorious for their love magic, especially the *nasi kangkang*, where a woman is said to stand with her legs astride a bowl of steaming rice so her vaginal juices will drip into it. The rice is fed to an unsuspecting suitor as a love charm. Baweanese in Singapore exaggerate that Bawean Island, which lies 75 miles off the north-east coast of Java, is not a safe place for strangers and say that unless the visitor is a Muslim they would not survive the night.

Every time Pa' Zaini taught the sets of movements (*juros*) the “set” would subtly change: sometimes it would be abbreviated with the omission of moves, and sometimes it would be expanded with the inclusion of new moves: he never taught the same set of movements twice. At first when Dr. Philip Davies and I studied this style in my home, we were perturbed that we were failing to learn or remember the sets correctly. However, once I reviewed my notes I soon realized that it was the instructor who did not “remember” the exact pattern from the sessions before, and this made me begin to wonder if he was forgetful or incompetent, especially as the lessons took place two or three times per week. Later, I was to discover that it is not the set that is important, but the individual moves, such as the lady looking in the mirror (*bayang dalam cermin*), sewing (*jahit*), or combing her hair with both hands (*sikat rambut*), or dropping down low to pick up sand to fling into the opponent's eyes (*melempar pasir*).

The seventh set of this style was called *wayang*, and consisted of a short series of steps and movements including a rear elbow strike and guard positions. The essential didactic feature of this form was that the hands and feet were to move together as if the hands were attached to the feet with strings, exactly like a *wayang golek* puppet. This provides evidence that, as would be expected, Indonesian styles of *silat* also regard the *pesilat* in training as a shadow, a human shadow in place of the shadow puppet (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, on a comparative note, in *taijiquan* you are told to keep your posture upright, as if you are a puppet suspended from a piece of string, and Pa' Zaini, as noted previously, referred to his *silat* as “Malay tai chi.”

As few *pukulan* were taught, and the hand movements of the *juros* looked so soft and gentle, at first it was difficult to imagine how this style could possibly be useful in combat. Nevertheless, I persevered with the lessons, and shortly after I had completed eleven “sets” and could perform them to the satisfaction of the teacher, I was taught the twelfth and final set, called *juros keris*, which was performed in training with a knife. With this *juros* the teacher finally explained the secret of the training: it was not about learning how to perform specific sets of movements to be

constantly replicated, but about learning how to wield a razor-sharp knife: moreover all of these sets should be practised with a knife or two in hand. The hand movements didn't need to be particularly strong or powerful, as neither is required to inflict massive damage with a razor.

The above example is instructive and relevant to my understanding of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu in several ways. First, it is clear that *silat* styles are often less than comprehensive in their approach to combat: instead they specialize in one aspect and attempt to perfect it; for example, *silat lima beradik* specializes in the “soft” hand movements of the knife. The disguise is inherent in the name and origin of the style. This provides a clue to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, which is a quest, an attempt to discover, and then reunite, diasporic elements in a comprehensive system of *silat*. Just as Baweanese origin is sometimes disguised in Singapore by people who claim to be of “Malay” or “Javanese” descent, so Indian or Chinese surnames may be disguised in Malaysia. This shows that those who would employ the weapons of the warrior are no strangers to the weapons of the weak.<sup>38</sup>

## Lok 9

In Kuala Lumpur, Silat Lok 9 specialise in teaching the *keris*. Lok 9 is taught in Kuala Lumpur by *guru silat* Azlan Ghanie, the editor of a monthly *silat* magazine called Silat Beladiri. Instead of following fixed recipes Lok 9 practitioners engage one another and attempt to find the correct way to place their opponent into a submission hold (*kunci*). Whereas formal sets of routinised movements are taught as part of the Lok 9 syllabus, which includes sets of armed and unarmed movements (*juros*), the *buah* taught in this *perguruan* are less systematic (Fig. 3.8).

They learn by application, or through a gradual process of trial and error. Despite what might be called an unorthodox learning method, the *buah* of Lok 9 strongly resemble *buah* from other *silat* styles including *silat seni gayong*, *silat seni cekak* and *silat terlak*. Pa' Ariffin was so impressed with Lok 9 that he adopted it as one of the missing elements of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. Pa' Ariffin said that although many people teach the *keris*, it is not “the real authentic *keris*” of *silat Melayu*, and that he has been searching for years to find this system. The *keris* is not much used for slicing actions, but for very rapid stabs like an *épée* in fencing. Although the blade for the *keris* is much shorter than the *epee*, the practitioner's range of movement is greater due to the extra mobility granted by the Malay footwork, including sidesteps into the *naga* stance, and quick turns of the body, to stab a passing opponent from behind. Pa' Ariffin believes that western fencing is a modern derivative of the *keris* art of *silat Melayu*, as practiced in fifteenth century Melaka. Indeed the symbolic connection between *juros keris* and fencing is immediate – both open with the same

<sup>38</sup> The “weapons of the weak” are calculated conformity, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance and slander (Scott 1985: 29–34).





**Fig. 3.8** Lok 9 buah

salute by raising the sword to the forehead and then slicing down across the body.<sup>39</sup> In *silat* the *keris* form starts with the performer kissing the *keris* to say this is mine, then offering it to Allah, then slicing down to cut the ego in half (Chief).

### Distinctive Features of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu

I conclude this section with an appraisal of some of the distinctive features of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, including the dress code and uniform, the stancework, blocking, “spiritual breath,” and introduce a set known as the *belebat*. Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is an eclectic mix of bits and pieces from all across the garden of *silat*, choreographed by Pa’ Ariffin, for export to England and America.

Pa’ Ariffin’s appearance is quite distinctive: he has a shaven head, moustache, and goatee beard, and almost invariably dresses in black. In the U.K. he would wear black leather socks indoors, and the same under leather boots if going out, but in Malaysia he wore black Malay sandals (*capal*). Pa’ Ariffin invariably wears the “traditional” black fifteenth century Malay costume, which is the trademark of his *hulubalang* and *panglima* (warrior) status. His attire consists of a baggy long-sleeved black shirt or *baju Melayu*, black waistcoat, black drop-crotch trousers, and a black cape, which is topped with black *songkok* (fez hat). He also wears a

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the fencing salute see Normandeu (2003b).



large black *hajji* style belt-kit equipped with all sorts of paraphernalia and gadgets including torches, pliers, a phone, knives and medicinal oils. Several of his students aped his style. Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is a reflection of Pa' Ariffin; it is the personification of his alter ego.

## *Silat Uniform*

The uniform for Seni Silat Haqq Melayu consisted of baggy black trousers and a V-neck black long-sleeved shirt or *baju Melayu* made from tough material. As Tuan Ismail (1991: 6–12) points out every part of the uniform has a special function for *silat*, for example, the headscarf doubles as a bandage, and the sash may be used as a weapon or body armour. The logo of the style must be stitched directly over the heart of the student – formerly this was a yellow badge decorated with the *haqq* insignia. Headdress was optional, as were belts, but students sometimes donned a black bandana. In Malaysia male students wear a *baju Melayu* and a black fez hat (*songkok*) for formal visiting or for trips to places of worship: otherwise they were free to wear whatever they liked, provided it met with the approval of Pa' Ariffin.

Similarly, for *silat seni gayong* the uniform was black, but with trousers and sleeves cut to three-quarter length, and with the addition of a floppy black open topped headscarf (*tanjat*).<sup>40</sup> Women or girls who trained often wore a bandana, or an Islamic veil (*hijab*), or left their hair uncovered except when uttering prayers at the beginning and end of the training sessions in Malaysia. As is usual in *silat* practitioners of both styles trained with bare feet.

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu was mainly taught in England. There are four distinctive features of this style – the gymnastic warm up, *kuda kuda*, *belebat* and *prana*. The style was eclectic, with practical moves that were simultaneously nimble and graceful. Seni Silat Haqq Melayu also taught a plethora of flashy moves that are well suited for the cinema, and it challenged students to achieve levels of competence in performance acrobatics that they would have deemed beyond their reach.

## *Gymnastic Warm Up*

Classes proceed with a line-up in front of the instructor where everyone stands bolt upright whilst folding the left forearm under the right arm – the posture used to wrap

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<sup>40</sup> Not all *silat* exponents wear black for training. In the Philippines they wear brightly coloured striped shirts and trousers, as they did previously for *silat* in parts of Malaysia and Singapore, and some Javanese stylists, for example, Silat Setia Hati (true heart) wear *batik* trousers and headdress, with large brightly coloured sashes, and red or orange shirts. A distinction should be made between the *silat* uniform worn during practice, and formal dress attire that is more elaborate and includes the *kain sampang* (an ornate cloth to wrap around the trousers).

a corpse for burial – and then place the palms together at chest level followed by a slight bow (*hormat*) to the instructor. Students next perform the opening salutation (*sembah*) commencing with a demanding technique that requires they stand up from a cross-legged position using only one leg and a stylised slap to the ground, which is followed by a series of simple ward-off techniques and steps, polished off with another *hormat*. While standing on one leg the students move as if drawing an arrow into a bow, followed by a smooth palm strike to the side symbolising the arrow unleashed. This indicates another distinctive feature of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu: the moves are redolent of archery.

Simple stretching was performed standing or kneeling – pushing the chin back with the fingertips, then pulling the head down, pulling the crown down to either side to stretch the neck, rolling the shoulders together, then separately forward and back, pulling the elbow in from underneath to stretch the shoulder, clasping the hands in front to raise overhead and then place behind.

Next came callisthenics including jumping up and down, star jumps, stepping in place, cross-stepping, bouncing, and twisting the body from side to side before landing. This last exercise was prominent before a game of *sepak takraw* (Malay football). *Sepak takraw* would replace the jumping if we trained outdoors and helped to develop the ability to perform spectacular jumping kicks. Callisthenics was followed by more stretching including solo stretching of the legs, spine, chest, and arms using yoga-like gymnastic exercises. These included the shoulder stand moving smoothly into the arch; arch back to the wall and climb down to the floor and up to standing; and from standing lie down backwards to flip up.

The stretching methods were strenuous and sophisticated. One way to describe them is to say they look like kung fu stretching methods, but put into motion like *hatha yoga*, where one stretch slithers smoothly into another (*sulundang jatuh sembah*). The most distinctive thing about the warm-up is the serpentine nature of the movements. The stretching was followed by rolling from a standing position, forward and back, then jumping and flying over six to eight kneeling crouching bodies packed together – to roll out to land.<sup>41</sup> One by one each student performed the flying jump and was able to assess the form, technique, and progress of the others. The same format was then used to execute jumping kicks to the front and side, and jumping scissors kicks performed over an obstacle. Handspring practice completed the warm-up, and preceded an hour spent practising the seventy-two steps of the *kuda kuda*.

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<sup>41</sup> From a standing position Seni Silat Haqq Melayu practitioners roll forward taking the force on the shoulder and hip (like judo, aikido, kung fu, and taekwondo) and not on the head and back of the neck as in gymnastics, wushu, and Silat Seni Gayong (see also Shamsuddin 2005: 65). In Seni Silat Haqq Melayu the gymnastic roll is done from a kneeling position, for safety reasons it is not done from standing or when landing after flying headfirst through the air.

## *Kuda Kuda*

Pa' Ariffin teaches seventy-two basic techniques (*kuda kuda*) for Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. It is unnecessary to document all of these steps here, as I merely want to unpack some of the distinctive features of the style. The steps are performed in the whirling manner of the whirling dervishes. This is a good defensive practice reminiscent of *baguazhang*. Each one of the seventy-two basic techniques leads to a string of other techniques in a series of combinations, including strikes, kicks, throws, sweeps and locks. The other techniques come from *silat cekak*, *silat gayong*, *silat harimau*, *seni silat Melayu*, *silat Minang*, *silat sendeng*, *silat sterlak*, and from further afield. Each one of the techniques has three, five, or seven combinations. No doubt there is a numerological formula that helps the martial arts expert take a set of favoured movements and grow them into a system, a formula that rests on a sequence of magic numbers. If I was certain of the formula it would appear in the next chapter under the “enchantment of performance,” however, I’m not, so I must venture to say “unexplored beyond this point.”

A good example of the extension of the basic *kuda kuda* is provided by one of the seventy-two techniques called *sendeng*. *Sendeng* abbreviates *masak langkah sendeng* and can be used as a counter against an opponent who tries to punch the face by dropping down into *menanti* and striking sidelong with *selegi* (leopard paw, a fist with extended fore knuckles), to hit the opponent’s testicles. The testicles (*buah*) are a favourite target of the *silat* exponent. As part of the seventy-two basic movements Pa' Ariffin only teaches the first technique. However, *masak langkah sendeng* follows the first part with a leaping knee raise with the rear leg (to the opponent’s now descending jaw) with tight double uppercut punches thrown close in to the body (*sumbang*). Dropping low the first technique comes in aslant, springing up the next technique turns to face the opponent. This technique illustrates the switch from a position side-on to the opponent, to a position facing them, a switch from *sendeng* to *sumbang*.

Another example is *sau*, which initially appears to be a light hook punch executed from a deep archer stance, with the rear leg fully extended, and the front leg in a deep squatting position with the knee hyperextended over the foot. This technique is effective as a hooking technique, used from in front with a turning leap to seize an opponent’s throat from behind (or other body part) prior to pulling them in down to the ground. Weapon in hand, *sau* can drop under an opponent’s guard, punch and slash open the stomach in a sideways unzipping motion using a small, easily concealed razor-sharp blade, where the edge juts out from the ulna side of the fist-grip (possibly a *kerambit*). Conversely, if a knife is held in the radial-grip as the opponent is dragged to the ground from behind, *sau* can be used to pierce the neck and slash the throat, with the added advantage that the carotid artery bursts away from the direction of the *pesilat*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> During the U.S. occupation of the Philippines so many U.S. marines had their throats cut that they had to be issued with leather collars, and became known as the “leathernecks.”

## *Tangkisan*

*Tangkisan* in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu are used to slightly redirect or offset the approaching energy of an opponent's attack at the last moment, when the opponent's limb is approaching its greatest point of extension. *Tangkisan* (from *tangkis*, lit. to defend, especially by warding off an attack) are not blocks or destruction techniques to strike an oncoming limb, but glancing taps that are performed close to the practitioner's body and at the last instant when the opponent is fully extended.

The extension is important because where the opponent's kinetic energy is concentrated in a point such as the fist the power is not met head on, but the arm is redirected by tapping it from the side, above or below the extended arm. This evasive action gives the *pesilat* an opportunity to move into a better position vis-à-vis the opponent, who is now potentially over-extended, and off-balance, or at a transitional point in their balance recovering from one movement before they execute another. Especially important in this regard are an upward *tampar* (slap), *tepis* ("parry," a slight block or elbow strike to the side of the head), *kilas* ("push-parry" a glancing vertical forearm block), and *kais* ("hook/pull in," a downward outer forearm hook). These smooth techniques are performed in quick succession as the body turns and steps (*elak*).

## *Prana*

Muslim *guru silat* say that all *silat* styles practice spiritual breath (*nafas batin*).<sup>43</sup> The exact origin of the practice of *nafas batin* is obscure, and although there may be several points of invention, Indian *yoga* seem the most likely candidate for primogeniture. In Javanese styles of *silat* the *guru silat* refer to the practice of *nafas batin* as *yoga*, and indeed the postures and concepts closely resemble those of *hatha yoga*. Practitioners of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu refer to *nafas batin* as *prana*, and besides the linguistic echo the actual practice of *prana* resembles the *pranayama* of *kalaripayattu*. *Pranayama* refers to special yogic breathing methods that repeat the following pattern: inhalation, retention, exhalation, and retention/pause (Zarrilli 2002: 305).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Through physical and psychological training martial arts train the "mind" via the "body," and the "body" via the "mind." Holding a posture for prolonged periods of time is one way martial artists condition the mind through the body, to develop endurance and override pain. The process is two-way as training the mind through meditation (the precursor of visualization for the modern sports psychologist) enhances performance. Blacking's (1977: 18) concept of the "bodymind" disrupts the dualism inherent in mind/body formulations and neatly captures the holistic dialectical process involved in training the "mind" and the "body" simultaneously as one entity.

<sup>44</sup>All Asian martial arts practice some form of yoga-like breathing, stretching and balancing methods. The "power of breath" has corollaries in most cultures of the world: in Ancient Greece they

*Prana* refers to “spiritual breath” and is done to access “divine power.” Experiencing divine power enhances health, strengthens the body, and clears the mind. Doing *prana* heals the injuries acquired during training. The exercise bears some similarities to the *prana* of Indian *hatha yoga* and to Chinese *qigong*. However, *prana* exhibits the characteristic serpentine twisting and turning movements of *silat Melayu* and the Sumatran plate dance (*tari piring*), and the long version is performed kneeling and sitting cross-legged. According to Pa’ Ariffin *prana* is a method to open the *chakras*. He says *prana* is a very old Malay secret passed down from his father and that it is the highest art of *silat*.<sup>45</sup> *Prana* is a four-part exercise that is best practised at the “magic hour” just before dawn, and takes about 30 min to complete. *Prana* should be done for a minimum of forty days. *Prana* involves holding the breath whilst maintaining a variety of postures (Fig. 3.9). The tongue is placed upon the roof of the mouth, in the same position as that of a newborn.

Twisting the hands above, in front, and to the side gives a shortened version of the full 30-min sequence of postures. From a standing position the hands stretch out to either side to weave something like a figure-of-eight, a posture the group refer to as *lam alif*. The *lam alif* is also done with the hands extended overhead. Returning to the outstretched hands at either side the weaving continues in front of the chest with the arms gradually closing in until they are in front. *Prana* develops strength in the shoulders, back, chest and forearms, and increases the ability to push the arm out. It has a combat function that is hard to explain. Basically, when the practitioner is grabbed they twist the arm into the figure of eight movement, and if this is done with the appropriate steps the would-be locker will end up locked. Pa’ Ariffin would twist his arms overhead as he awoke from sleep in the morning, and perform *prana* whilst lying down in bed. Pa’ Ariffin and several other *guru silat* say that one of the best places to perform this type of exercise is within a waterfall.

Later, one morning at the break of dawn, I performed a similar type of *nafas batin* in the powerful waterfall at Frazer’s Hill, a place in the mountains said to be full of *jinn*. On the first day I went down in the late afternoon to try out the waterfall. Because I had gone in the rainy season the cascade was so powerful that it was awkward to find my footing. I had to raise my hands overhead to protect

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called it *pneuma*, breath (*πνεύμα*), or *daimon*, vital breath (*δαίμων*); in India, *prana*; in China, *qigong*; and in Botswana among the !Kung it is called *n/um* (Lee 1993: 115).

<sup>45</sup> Pa’ Ariffin says he that learned *prana* from his father, Yeop Mahidin. Yeop Mahidin spent several years in India, where he may have picked up this knowledge. However, perhaps *prana* derives from his forbears, who as the name “Mahidin” suggests were of Indian origin. However, Pa’ Ariffin asserts that the name “Mahidin” derives from *muhyidin*, meaning “reviver of the way” (of Islam), and fiercely disavows any Indian origins, claiming that the British changed the name. The genealogy I collected shows that Yeop Mahidin was the son of Tun. Mohd. Sharif, himself a descendent of Kulop Kurap, a Bugis nobleman (see Chapter 5). Whatever the case, rumour has it among some of Pa’ Ariffin’s former students that he learnt “prana” from a video cassette recording; others say he picked it up from a magazine and a manual.

**Fig. 3.9** Chief performing *prana* whilst breathing *hu*



my skull from the deluge. The great torrents of water thundered down, and my feet become rooted in the black sand as I silently repeated a mantra given to me by a *guru silat*. After about 20 min it felt as if the entire course of the river poured through and not just around my body, and the boundaries of my body and my self seemed to dissolve into the cascade. This sensation, which can best be described as a feeling of becoming one with the river, was accompanied by a sudden rush of expanded awareness, as if the river had become sentient, or that I had become suddenly aware of the sentience of the river, perceiving the environment through an entirely different sensory apparatus. It is a strange sensation to feel encapsulated in a medium other than the skin and this type of training is undergone to demonstrate to the *silat* practitioner that the soul or spirit may exist outside of and beyond the body. Later I was informed that this type of seductive experience can be dangerous because “some people fail to come back,” meaning that they lose their mind in the process.

For the long version of Pa’ Ariffin’s *prana* exercise the moves require too much technical detail to describe here, so I will just mention a couple. One posture involves clasping the hands behind the head whilst in an erect kneeling position and then squeezing the inner forearms hard against the temples. Another posture leans forward from a cross-legged “lotus” position to bang the head on the floor nine or

ten times. Pa' Ariffin says this knocking puts blood into a vein in the middle of the upper forehead, a vein that is usually not full, and that is very important to good health.

Before the performance the main intention of *prana* should be internally stated before God and creation, and this intention (*niat*) should be to cleanse the blood and lymphatic system to stimulate, and to increase the flow of blood and *prana* around the body, and to open up all the channels between the *chakras*. The intention may also focus upon a specific problem or pain. In the fourth stage of the exercise the performer utters a long drawn out *hu* sound (see also Chapter 4). *Hu* is repeated fifty times. The reverberations of *hu* are said to have healing effects upon the body and open the way to access divine strength which is manifested in incredibly powerful strikes, and the ability to absorb blows. Chief, one of Pa' Ariffin's students, seemed to benefit considerably from *prana*. Chief was a weedy teenager when we first met and had problems with a sunken chest. He became powerfully built after doing *silat* for four years, although he suffered from back problems, apparently due to a *jinn* in his back (which Chief later claimed was put there by Pa' Ariffin in the first place).

## ***Belebat***

The *belebat* form, sometimes referred to as “the four corners,” is designed to teach the *seni* or artistic elements of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. It is practiced in class as well as performed in public demonstrations by two pairs of players making up a quatrain, with each player exactly mirroring or shadowing his or her counterpart. Gripping the muscles of the body whilst holding the various “warrior-poses” develops kinesesthetic power. I derive the term “warrior-poses” from Chia (1989), and the term well describes the postures of *silat*, postures that are adopted with the stances already discussed (including *kuda kuda*, *lebas*, *naga*) and involve the entire body, including the arms and legs.<sup>46</sup>

The footwork at the end of the *belebat* dance is similar to basic steps of *baguazhang*. *Baguazhang* is known for its hourglass and circling footwork patterns where one foot steps across the other, accompanied by palm techniques that operate according to the geomantic principles of the *I Ching*. *Baguazhang* is famous for its dramatic “changes,” sudden changes in the direction of stepping accompanied by the application of different techniques.

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<sup>46</sup> Chia (1989) outlines “warrior-poses” from a western anatomical perspective read through Chinese Taoism. Although Chia's excellent *Iron Shirt Chi Gung* (in three volumes) could feasibly be applied in the context of *silat*, and be used to explain many of the psycho-somatic and anatomical effects of the postures, his approach exists outside of the interpretations of the *guru silat*, which are based upon a different cosmology, discussed in the following chapters.



## Gaze

In the *belebat* set students are taught to look out of the corner of their eyes and develop their peripheral vision. The eyes always appear to gaze towards the floor, and never stare directly at the opponent. This is an aesthetic hallmark of *silat Melayu* that differentiates it from other styles of *silat*, and from other martial arts, which may glare directly into the opponent's eyes, or fix the gaze at their shoulder. A brief comparative note may be interesting here.<sup>47</sup> Street-fighters and predatory animals threaten their victims by staring directly into their eyes, a display which is known to stimulate the fight or flight response. In Southern Chinese kung fu the fierce gaze known as *ying an* (eagle eyes) is done to fixate the "prey," focusing on them as a whole, through a kind of tunnel vision. This mad-looking stare causes the pupils to dilate, said to indicate the *qi* or internal energy rising. Staring directly at the opponent's eyes is also found in *kalarippayattu*.<sup>48</sup> Japanese *karateka* fix their gaze at an opponent's shoulder to detect a forthcoming punch or other offensive movement. These looks all contrast strongly with the characteristic downward gaze of *silat Melayu*, which therefore requires explanation.

I return to the *belebat* in Chapter 8 as it provides a clue to fighting in the shadow realm. The pragmatic idea behind the downward gaze is to be able to see simultaneously in front, to the side, and behind: in *silat Melayu* this is the stance recommended for combat with three or more assailants (*pukulan tiga serentak*). Gazing downwards also dehumanises the opponent as it denies them any opportunity for mutual gaze or recognition. There is an Indian saying that "you never look in the eyes of someone you want to kill."

In this chapter I have outlined how *seni* refers to art, aesthetics, and skill, and shown that some of the *techniques du corps* of *silat* are to be found in the quotidian bodily hexis of the larger Malay population, whether or not they have embarked upon a course of *silat* training. The performance of enchantment, the real magic of *silat*, where practitioners gain incredible speed, power, strength, and endurance is the result of arduous endeavour in a sophisticated martial art that exists in a symbiotic relationship with everyday life. The account I give is not smooth and seamless, but reflects the contradictions and ambiguities that necessarily arise when the cosmic debris of Naqshbandi Sufism, Gnosticism, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism,

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<sup>47</sup> Lowell Leweis says in relation to eye contact in the Brazilian martial art, capoeira, that: "A central principle of capoeira play, drilled into students over and over, is never to lose sight of one's adversary in the ring .... Players are told to practice this in every variety of acrobatic position. However, many master players avoid looking one directly in the eye; in fact, they almost always use peripheral vision so they can appear not to be watching! This is indirectness in action as a form of feigning. Masters will sometimes turn their heads away or even turn their backs, as if to assert that they have eyes in the back of their heads. That they constantly tell their students not to do this, and then proceed to do it themselves, is a further illustration of perhaps the most basic lesson of *malícia*: rules are made to be broken" (1992: 102).

<sup>48</sup> Zarrilli: personal communication, 17/09/2004.

shamanism, and animism strewn across Southeast Asia are repackaged by the *guru silat*, New Age style, into a martial art designed for export to the west.

Pa' Ariffin said to me that in the martial arts "it is better to be a good all-rounder than a specialist." This philosophy is reflected in his style of *silat* which is an eclectic mix of a wide variety of other *silat* styles from within the garden of *silat*, although it may be said to be fundamentally of Sumatran origin and influence, especially through *silat harimau* and *silat gayong*. *Gayong* also has Bugis ancestry, but unfortunately I gathered insufficient data concerning Bugis *silat* to say much about it. In any case, technique, alongside cosmology, is not something written in stone, fixed and immutable, but something learned, inherited, lived, practiced and performed.

The *hulubalang* did not restrict themselves to local martial arts, but feasted upon any proficient martial arts they encountered. Previously Pa' Ariffin taught Shaolin kung fu, and he claims to have held a black belt in Shotokan karate, as well as having been the first accredited Malay instructor of eagle claw kung fu (in Malaysia this would be via the Chin Woo Martial Arts Association). Some of the moves of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu clearly demonstrate a Chinese influence. There are also Japanese influences from kendo, judo, and jujitsu, Korean knife fighting techniques from *hapkido*, and many similarities to the circular movements, locks and kicks of *hwarangdo*.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Pa' Ariffin adopted a bricolage approach similar to that of Bruce Lee, who abandoned rigid forms and styles in favour of amassing a series of techniques based upon practical applications. However, whereas for Lee the bricolage approach was a radical innovation and departure from Chinese norms, in the Malay world Pa' Ariffin was simply following a tradition of inventing tradition as my subsequent chapters demonstrate.

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Hyung-Min Jung (2001: 86).

## Chapter 4

# The Enchantment of Performance

*Jinn live in the world of spirits (alam al Gha'ib), mirror-image of the material world (alam al-shahada); although they may freely move about among men and occasionally even materialize in female form and marry one (Shaw 1976: 6).*

Gell's (1992) (1999) "technology of enchantment" tackles the *production* of the masterpiece, whereas the "enchantment of technology" refers to consumption via the magical effect a work of art potentially exerts upon its viewers. Previously, I substituted "performance" in place of "technology" because performance better reflects a nonmaterial field of art, leading me to the idea that the practice and performance of esoteric skill could unleash seemingly supernatural powers within the body of the practitioner.

Although the "performance of enchantment" and the "enchantment of performance" are separated for the purpose of analysis, they are dialectically interrelated and not absolute opposites. The performance of enchantment refers primarily to the *physical* performance of the techniques of *silat* necessary to release the hidden powers of the body. On the other hand the enchantment of performance refers more to the *social* processes involved in the enchantment of the performance of *silat*. Here I shift my angle of approach from the embodied skill and organization of *silat* to a consideration of the magical, mystical, and religious aspects that combined make up the enchantment of performance. Magical, mystical, and religious elements seep into the very fibre of *silat* to affect its production, exchange, distribution and consumption.

### Tricks of the Devil

A Malay woman bluntly said to me: "You must recognize that you have been under a spell. Until you do that, you can learn nothing more from us" (name withheld). Non-recognition of the forces of evil renders the individual vulnerable to the forces of the unseen, including evil *jinn*, witchcraft and sorcerers.<sup>1</sup> Inimical to the admission

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<sup>1</sup> As Wazir says: "Generally, personal misfortune or social calamity can be directly attributed to witchcraft; an illness on the part of the accused, prolonged courtship, wedding preparations that have gone sour, a sudden loss of job, a sudden death in the family, or physical injury or handicap"

of being under a spell is the idea that if one has been under a spell then so too can anyone else be placed under a spell, and the web of meaning extends beyond the boundaries of the individual's social relationships to encompass the globe.

In order to learn *silat* from a traditional *guru silat* the student must learn to accept the enchanted nature of the cosmos. Just as an analysand must recognize that they have a problem before the psychoanalyst can assist a cure, so for the Malay *guru silat* a student must embrace an enchanted view of the world to gain a deeper understanding of the self, and be able to effectively perceive the enemy (*Shaytan*). For example, in Janda Baik *zawiya*, Pa' Ariffin's former student, Faizal said:

For every man Allah created nine angels, and for every angel Allah created nine *jinn*s. If we could really see what was out there, then we would not want to go outside our door! (Faizal, from fieldnotes).<sup>2</sup>

To recognize one's self in the light of the enchanted cosmos, one must begin to adjust personal, social, psychological, and spiritual faults in order to overcome them by "polishing the heart" (a Sufi metaphor for perfecting the self). The project to perfect the self is the ultimate goal of Islamic Malay mysticism. In *silat* it takes the form of a quest to develop physical skills and to acquire mystical knowledge (*ilmu kebatinan*). The precise quota for the weight attributed to the spiritual in relation to the physical varies, but *silat* is said to be roughly seventy or eighty percent knowledge, and only twenty or thirty percent physical. This translates into a great emphasis upon spiritual training. For Seni Silat Haqq Melayu "spiritual training" means an "introduction" to Islam, Shaykh Nazim, and the teachings of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*, albeit deciphered through the lens of the *guru silat*.

Pa' Ariffin says "the greatest trick of the Devil is to have fooled people that he doesn't exist." The Haqqani orientation towards outsiders is that they are bewitched by the Devil (*Shaytan*), caught unawares in the power of the unseen through the evil machinations of its creatures. The only way to avoid spiritual contamination is to become a follower of Shaykh Nazim. This belief consolidates the usual Malay Muslim view which regards the swine consuming, booze swilling, non-Muslim infidel (*kafir*) as unclean in the literal and spiritual sense, holding that the only real way to be physically and spiritually clean is to be a Muslim. For example, *kafirs* may be seen scratching their bottoms in public, because they don't even know they should wash the anus after defecation. However, although praying five times a day and maintaining ritual cleanliness (*wuduk*) helps to avoid being caught in the net of the Devil, for the Naqshbandi it is not enough to simply embrace *shariah* to escape beguilement. There must also be power, power

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(Wazir 1990: 44). As previously noted Wazir does not differentiate witchcraft from sorcery in Evans-Pritchard's sense [1937] (1977: 21).

<sup>2</sup> Shaw (1976: 5) mentions that every human has two *jinn* within them, a white *jinn* (*Jinn Puteh*) who is a kind of guardian angel, and a black *jinn* (*Jinn Hitam*) who although not necessarily evil may be called upon to carry out magical assignments.

that comes from an association with the Shaykh, who is the living portal through which prayers reach the Prophet Muhammad.

The Haqqani, the Malay shaman, and the *guru silat* inhabit an enchanted world where cause and effect are necessary but not sufficient to explain events, and where effects do not necessarily follow from causes. My view of the “supernatural” was to recognize its possibility only as a last resort, when the prospect of attributing explanatory power to other factors is exhausted. Yet for the Haqqanis an atheist or agnostic “rational” outlook is symptomatic of the manipulation of the Devil: secular social scientific thinking is implicated in the web of satanic beguilement. For the Haqqani – in theory if not always in practice – the first line of inquiry for any explanation of misfortune should take into account the enchanted nature of the world. Everybody is subject to beguilement: outsiders and the followers of the Shaykh alike. Becoming aware of the Devil and following the Shaykh empowers one to resist evil. Resistance must be constantly shored up; permanent vigilance is required against a Devil who never sleeps.

The magic of Malay sorcerers works by robbing the victim of his or her agency. For example, magic charms (*susuk*) inserted directly under the facial skin ensure a youthful and beautiful complexion.<sup>3</sup> *Susuk* is common among Indonesian and Malay prostitutes who visit the *bomoh* to undergo a mirror surgical procedure to insert a small magical stone under their facial skin to enhance their beauty and attractiveness to men. The stone may be excised upon finding and settling down with “the right man.” Meanwhile these women take the risk of incurring the negative symptoms of *susuk*, which is the agony of a prolonged suspension of death (see Chapter 8).

As a consequence of sorcerous manipulation *jinn* or *hantu* may enter the body due to a weakness in the protective *semangat* (vital force). *Jinn* may enter more easily where something has been weakened or extracted, or, particularly in the case of babies and westerners, when individuals are inadequately protected with Islamic talismans and the like. In westerners, spiritual weakness may coincide with an atheist orientation, where the great mass of people has been tricked by the Devil. In any case, the absence or deficiency of *semangat* (specifically the *roh*) makes the individual vulnerable to invasion from without. Malign forces may enter the body through the ingestion of poisons, charmed food or drinks, through touch, or even through a glance. Spiritual invasion results in a host of symptoms including stiff joints, spasms, eyes twitches, breathlessness, backache, excessive shyness or loquaciousness, feeling lost, madness, listlessness, depression and possibly death. Addiction to cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, nefarious sexual practices, licentiousness, promiscuity, and adultery may also be symptomatic of the powers of evil *jinn* because they demonstrate a lack of self-control. “The dirty ones” must be removed to overcome misfortune, restore balance, and acquire or maintain good health.

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<sup>3</sup> Wazir provides similar examples of love magic and says that: “The *tangkal si-manis* has the effect of enhancing a person’s looks and sexuality, compelling members of the opposite sex to involuntarily seek out a relationship with the person” (Wazir 1990: 40).

As I have previously mentioned, *jinn* may enter the human body through their own volition due to a weakness in one's spiritual armour (*semangat*). More usually *jinn* are said to invade because of the machinations of a sorcerer or witch. Spiritual invasion may occur through a *pelesit* (a cricket familiar) guided by the evil sorcerer. Considerable excitement is aroused if a cricket is found in the house; the *guru silat* will seize it and place it upon his or her shirt – if the creature does not cling tight then it was sent as a familiar.

Pa' Ariffin's brother, Pa' Din learned *silat* from Pa' Hosni in Singapore and studied *ninjutsu* whilst attending law school in England. Pa' Din, who is a mine of information on the unseen, began to "see things" whilst he was a young child. According to his sister, Jad, this was when their father began to teach them *silat*. One day whilst watching the Malay television channel (Suria) in Singapore I caught a show featuring Pa' Din interviewed in depth about *bomoh*. Soon afterwards I visited Kuala Lumpur. Pa' Ariffin was away, but Pa' Din put me up for the night. Prompted by the television show, I asked him about *semangat*. He said that *semangat* has several meanings, and that each of these depends upon context, and explained that *semangat* resides within all people and can be translated interchangeably as "soul" or "spirit." Furthermore, the highest art of *silat* is to be able to reach the *semangat*, achieved through training the *tenaga dalam* (inner power). The highest art of *silat* is not physical, but spiritual. A warrior will attack his enemy's *semangat*, and this will be done from the outside in, or from the inside out. Pa' Din explained that another way to conceptualise *semangat* is as "will," so that an attack to the opponent's *semangat* will remove their will to fight. *Semangat* can also be considered to be energy. The warrior uses his *semangat* to attack the opponent's *semangat*; therefore, if done by an expert, a slight backhand strike can kill the opponent.

Pa' Din said that *semangat* is an important concept because it is the goal of all *silat*, indeed of all martial arts, to attain this power of the mind through the development of physical prowess: when the acolyte is ready the power "will just come." The power cannot be forced, and not all will be able to perceive it. Once the physical side of training *silat* is "exhausted" (perhaps Pa' Din meant complete), one concentrates on training the *tenaga dalam* and the *semangat*. To paraphrase Pa' Din, for the warrior life and death are one: warriors have no fear of winning or losing, or living and dying, because they are one, and when it is your time, it is your time either way.

*Semangat* is also found in nature and things. "Consider," Pa' Din said, "how you feel when you go to the beach, or when you are in front of any large mass of water. You feel calm. It has a calming effect."<sup>4</sup> Some people are affected by the energy from the moon; others are affected by the energy from trees or rocks. The *keris* also contains *semangat*, which is placed there in two ways. Pa' Din said that

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<sup>4</sup>The hypnotic cadence of Pa' Din's speech is remarkable. Ninja are renowned for their sleight of hand and hypnotic abilities (Elliot 1998: 133–154; Lung and Prowant 2002; Ratti and Westbrook 1973: 331).

he can't show me how to place *semangat* into the *keris*, but that he can show me what it means to feel *semangat*. The person who manufactures the *keris* places *semangat* into it through various processes including spells (*jampi*). Later the owner will place power into the *keris* as well. The warrior who possesses a *keris* with *semangat* will be able to draw upon its power when in battle – the *semangat* of the *keris* sustains the warrior, and in return the warrior feeds the *keris* with blood and human souls.

*Semangat* may be weakened or stolen by a *bomoh-silat* or by someone who harbours ill intent.<sup>5</sup> The Malays have a sevenfold soul, otherwise configured as seven souls, and *semangat* refers to the collective soul as well as to one of the number. To manipulate the victim the sorcerer captures one of the seven souls, possibly the *roh* (the breath of God), or the *bayang*. As Julie put it “they steal your shadow, your puppet within.” To capture a soul the sorcerer will call or summon it (*seru*).<sup>6</sup> One way to capture a soul is to tie a lime-branch of seven limes to the mosquito net of the bed in which the victim is sleeping (see also Skeat [1900] 1984: 50). For example, one night I slept late in a dark room in Cikgu Ezhar's house in Kuala Lumpur, and when I awoke in the morning I found seven limes attached to the net above my bed. I didn't confront Cikgu Ezhar about this: I was never personally fearful of Malay magic whilst in the field, being more concerned with not having my head smashed into the concrete by some brutal Malay policeman or clumsy English convert. However, later when I related this story to a knowledgeable Malay informant, Mr. Johari suggested that Cikgu Ezhar may have intended to capture my soul for benevolent reasons, in order to heal it.

## *The Shadow Complex*

The shadow has led to profound anthropological, literary, philosophical, and psychological discoveries. These include: (a) Plato's analogy of the cave, an exploration into the nature of reality and truth, ontology and epistemology; (b) the theory of animism developed by Tylor [1871] (1913) and Spencer (1893); (c) the great puzzles of self and identity descending into madness explored by Dostoevsky [1846] (1985); (d) Freud's notion of the “unconscious,” developed as the “shadow” by Jung,<sup>7</sup> and; (e) Artaud's fascination with the “hallucinatory”

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<sup>5</sup> This is clearly sorcery and witchcraft in Evans-Pritchard's [1937] (1977) sense.

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in Islamic belief, as Bowker, citing the Holy Quran points out: “One can remain animate and still (literally) have lost one's soul: ‘Those are the ones who have lost their souls [*anfus*] and what they have invented has led them astray’. It is the *nafs* which is the agent of action as well as the subject of experience: ‘It is we who created man [*insan*] and we know what his *nafs* whispers within him, for we are nearer to him than the jugular vein’” (Bowker 1991: 108).

<sup>7</sup> In Le Guin's (1979) *Earthsea* fantasy, Ged, the wizard's apprentice, steals a glimpse inside his master's book, and summons the shade of a princess long dead who appears followed



movements of Balinese dancers, and his attempt to create a theatre in the west that could go beyond words and the script towards a “metaphysic” of the body and emotions (Artaud 1989: 36–54).

Classical literature has long been fascinated by the shadow. Here the shadow appears as the double, or the *doppelgänger*, where the “hero” encounters his or her identical copy, is thrown into confusion and self-doubt, building towards a showdown culminating in murder, which if also suicide, is the end of the matter, or if the double is killed without the death of the hero then the cycle may be recapitulated with the discovery of yet another copy (Dostoevsky [1846] (1985); Saramago 2005).<sup>8</sup>

Malay *guru silat* have a complex notion of the shadow. This complexity is not surprising given that the shadow in Southeast Asian culture pops up in studies of Malay theatre (*wayang*), the Orang Asli, death, kingship, and in the grisly tales of the colonial ethnographers. Today, colonial tales form an integral component of the popular idiom of Malay culture, and should not be regarded as merely the orientalist outpourings of drunken colonialists. Pa’ Ariffin’s mother told me to read Barber (1971), Burgess (1972), Clifford [1897] (1989), and Winstedt [1925] (1993) as background research. Winstedt [1925] (1993: 25) recounts that to capture her shadow a woman stands with her back to the moon and faces an anthill. She chases her shadow for three nights. When caught, the shadow appears in the form of a small child, and will poke out its tongue, which the witch bites off. The tip of the tongue becomes a *pelesit*, the dreaded witch’s familiar that often takes the form of a cricket.

Clifford relates another tale that whilst visiting an Orang Asli compound, “Middleton” (a pseudonym) and his companions were awoken at night by scratching sounds. Leaving their tent they discovered an “old hag” exhuming the fresh grave of a baby. The woman appeared to kiss the baby’s mouth whereupon it let out “the wail of a lost soul” (Clifford [1897] 1989: 191). Later, they examined the grave and found the baby dead with its tongue bitten off.

Secondary sources demonstrate a considerable resemblance of *silat* to shadow puppet-theatre (*wayang kulit*) and to other Javanese performance genres, especially *wayang wong*, a type of *wayang* (theatre) that employs human beings instead of puppets (Ghulam-Sarwar 1997; Suwandi 2000). The shadow may be sent to bewitch the

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by a “gebbeth” rending Ged’s face with sharp claws. Through harrowing encounters and frenzied pursuit, Ged finally learns to defeat the shadow by learning its name, which is his own. Therefore resolution occurs through recognition of the shadow as the dark side of one’s self. Ged’s resolution spells out Jung’s psychology, where the shadow must be confronted and become known in order to prevent it from taking over and directing the personality (Le Guin 1992).

<sup>8</sup>From this sentence one may see how closely Victor Turner’s (1974) theory of social drama reflects literary drama. Hence, in literature the shadow appears as the double, or the *doppelgänger*, where the “hero” encounters his or her identical copy (breach), is thrown into confusion and self-doubt (crisis), building towards a showdown culminating in murder, which, if also suicide is the end of the matter (resolution), or if the double is killed without the death of the hero then the cycle may be recapitulated with the discovery of yet another copy.

enemy and contains “vital energy” which may be sucked out by a snail leading to death. The shadow should not be stepped upon, and “the modern magician to vaunt his power will declare his shadow to be ‘the shadow of one beloved by Allah and the Prophet and angels forty and four’” (Winstedt [1925] 1993: 17).

*Semangat* is “spirit” or “life force,” as well as being an umbrella category covering the seven elements of the soul. Early texts regarding Malay magic fleetingly report the existence of the human “shadow soul,” “reflection soul,” “puppet soul,” “bird soul” and “life soul” as components of *semangat* (Skeat [1900] 1984: 50 n2). The “sevenfold soul” or “the seven souls” of Malay cosmology is complicated because the seven elements are simultaneously separate elements and a totality. Malay ideas concerning the shadow soul resemble Orang Asli concepts entwined with Sufi notions (Roseman 1991: 21, 40–45). The sevenfold soul may also include *badi* (the evil impulse), which is possibly a ghostly remainder left in the world by murder victims (Endicott 1970: 73), and may now be fused with the Islamic additions of *roh* (the individual identity from the spiritual breath of God); and *nyâwa* (the part that goes to heaven or hell upon death). The Malay term *bayang* means both shadow and reflection (Fig. 4.1). Wilkinson expressed the *bayang* epistemology perfectly when he said that “man is but a



Fig. 4.1 “Confused Lovers” by Mohammad Din Mohammad (acrylic on canvas)

**Fig. 4.2** *Kuda kepang* trance dancing



mirror, God is the resplendent sun; man is a phantom, God is absolute being” (Wilkinson 1906: 15).<sup>9</sup>

*Bayang-bayang* is the plural form for shadows and reflections. In the Malay language the echoing of terms is common.<sup>10</sup> In Malay, plural forms are rendered through a repetition of terms, and not by an apostrophe placed before or after the “s.” For example, *orang-orang* (people) *guru-guru silat* (several *guru silat*), *anak-anak* (children), *bapak-bapak* (fathers), *ibu-ibu* (mothers), *negara-negara* (countries).<sup>11</sup> Repetitions may also be “reflected” such as *ibu-bapak* (parents) (Gell 1998: 78 Fig. 4.2). However, the doubling of terms may also transform the verb *makan* (eat), into *makan-makan* (eat together), or give rise to another meaning not indicated in the term, for example *hati* (literally “liver,” but more like the English term “heart”) becomes *hati-hati* (careful). Greater quantity may be suggested as in *berak-berak* (diarrhoea), and doubling may also be diminutive, as in *masak-masak* which means

<sup>9</sup> Wilkinson also notes that for Malays “echoes are the cries of *ghosts* [*hantu hantuan*]... a sudden shadow in the forest is a spirit flitting by [*jinn lintasan*]” (1906: 29 n1, n4, modified spelling).

<sup>10</sup> The notion of “echoing” here is merely an observation as is not meant to serve as a linguistic explanation for the reduplication of Malay terms.

<sup>11</sup> Gell’s “translation” (Gell 1998: 78 Fig. 2). See Appendix A.

children playing at cooking (*masak*). Symmetrical forms may also be accorded an echoic onomatopoeia such as *rama-rama* (butterfly).

Sufis claim access to mysteries that suspend the laws of time and space including telepathy, astral travelling, and immortality. Sufi mystics claim the ability to exist in multiple places simultaneously. For example, Shaykh Habib Nor is buried atop a pyramidal *keramat* (tomb) in a stone sarcophagus in Singapore. Habib Nor is credited with “supernatural” power: transcending time and space (mundane reality) he can transport himself anywhere at will, and is said to appear every Friday in Mecca. Or consider Syed Hussein Alatas, the maverick Malaysian political writer, who told me that he was simultaneously at home speaking to me in Janda Baik whilst answering his front door in Kuala Lumpur 36 kilometres away. Alatas, known locally as “the Poet,” says that the *khalil* is the other soul:

It can travel around – while you are in one place it can be in another. Like I am here talking to you but I am also in Kuala Lumpur and can protect my house, [and] know who is coming and going (S. H. Alatas, from fieldnotes).<sup>12</sup>

Malay forms of *silat* and Naqshbandi Sufism elaborate notions of the shadow that link it to the definition and transformation of the self. Sufism engages in ritual practices with the ultimate end being the “annihilation” of the self in the Oneness of Allah (*fanah*). The mystical journey into self-annihilation is undertaken to acquire “divine power,” an ancient Southeast Asian preoccupation. The Haqqani Sufi *tarekat* employ the shadow analogy in several ways. First, the Naqshbandis consider themselves to be the “Shadows of the Prophet” and live their lives in an imitation of His as recorded in the Islamic tradition (*sunna*). Second, Shaykh Nazim preaches that people are being pursued by shadows of their self. For example,

People are running away from a shadow – a shadow which is themselves that is why they are ill – and the harder they run, the more their miseries catch up with them. They flee from themselves all their lives in pursuit of a desert mirage that turns out to be nothing but sand. After all that struggle to reach that “oasis” and to quench their thirst they find that all their struggles and false hopes have only made them more parched and much closer to death for their efforts. When they arrive they drink the draught of death and must face a meeting with their Lord for which they are unprepared. This is the fate of those who waste away their lives in vain amusement (Nazim 1984).

Here there is a distinct resonance of Jung’s psychological archetype of the shadow, only instead of confronting the shadow, or what (transposing the “id”) the Haqqani refer to as the “ego” through psychoanalysis, *murids* strive to subdue (*jihad*) their shadows, their animal within, through forty day retreats (see Chapter 6). As Shaykh Nazim says:

The main goal of Islam and the Sufi paths, especially the Naqshbandi path, is to bring people back to themselves, to teach them to stop fleeing from their own shadow and to stop chasing a mirage (Nazim 1984).

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<sup>12</sup> Alatas, and his *khalil* should not be confused with the late Malaysian sociologist Syed Hussain Alatas who was their double in name only.

In *The Double*, psychoanalyst Otto Rank (1914) (1989: 49–50) demonstrates the widespread association of the shadow with death, and connects the shadow to the double motif, and to the guardian soul. Death will be tackled in relation to the shadow in the final chapter, but for the present I want to examine *silat* through the shadow in relation to the double.<sup>13</sup> As we have seen, the Haqqani disciple must become a “shadow of the prophet,” and this involves becoming a *double* of the Prophet Mohammad. Beyond the *tarekat*, and copying the Prophet Muhammad, *silat* students more immediately assume the attitudes and behaviour of their *guru silat* (see Chapter 6). In *silat*, as in other Asian martial arts, the students and *guru silat* engage in mimesis and repetition to learn new skills. Students first imitate the movements of the master in order to learn how to perform them properly. Entire styles of martial arts are transmitted in this way. Doubling may be overt as in the case of honest imitation, or it may be covert, as when *guru silat* replicate the styles of other *guru silat* without their consent like some kind of martial virus.

New martial arts movements may be instigated by charismatic figures who break away from an established school (*perguruan*) to strike out on their own. To become a charismatic figure in the world of *silat* – and these are a greater rarity than those who would imitate and replicate – requires that the *guru silat* must somehow disengage with “tradition” and engage with alterity and difference. The maverick, the trickster, and the iconoclast are not as rare in *silat* as perhaps would be expected in comparison to other martial arts (Ratti and Westbrook 1973: 173). The invention of *silat* in Malay culture concentrates upon form rather than substance, emphasising the spirit of *silat* rather than its exact recapitulation.

The Malay emphasis on form is redolent of the Gnostic doctrine of the shadow. In Plato the forms (categories) are real, whereas the concrete substance is merely the appearance of the form.<sup>14</sup> A similar Gnostic doctrine of the shadow operates in Malay ontology and epistemology in terms of appearance (*sifat*) and reality (*zat*), and in *zahir* (outer appearance) and *batin* (inner essence). *Silat* students in Malaysia usually wear black outfits.<sup>15</sup> Pa’ Ariffin points out it would be impossible to keep white uniforms clean given that *silat* students mostly train outdoors and do a substantial amount of groundwork. Moreover, on a mystical level, according to the

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<sup>13</sup> In Kuala Lumpur the Petronas Twin Towers are known as “Mahitir’s double erection.” The signification of the phallus is proclaimed on a grand, if temporary, scale by the erstwhile tallest buildings on the planet (Lacan [1966] 2002: 271–280). Beyond Provencher’s (1979: 43–53) controversial ideas concerning the supposed Malay “orality” as a “pattern of symbolism” there appears to be a Malay male obsession with strong erectile function, evidenced by the copious consumption of the ubiquitous coffee aphrodisiac (*kopi tongkat ali*).

<sup>14</sup> Plato’s analogy of the cave puts the shadow analogy at the centre and origin of the Ancient Greek concepts of truth and reality. The cave is the realm of the shadow, and reality emerges from the shadow as the unhidden (Heidegger 2002). However, Žizek (2001: 213–214) asks what if there is nothing outside the cave except ideology, saying: “What if ideology resides in the very belief that outside the closure of the finite universe, there is some ‘true reality’ to be entered?” (Žizek 2001: 214).

<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding the brightly coloured uniforms of *silat setia hati* or *silat kuntau Melaka* the shadow ideology, although expressed differently, remains central.



late Cikgu Khalsom, black is worn to symbolize our true nature.<sup>16</sup> Human beings are not independent of Allah, but are merely shadows. Human existence is not “reality,” but merely a shadow world in which people are tested. The belief in a “greater reality” is one reason the badge of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu emblazons the Arabic term “truth” (*haqq*) across their heart.<sup>17</sup>

By way of an example, the late Razak asked Suleiman to move his hand so that it cast a moving shadow across the table. Looking straight at him, Razak inquired, “Who moves?” In response to Suleiman’s bewildered look Razak explained that it is the shadow that moves: you have no strength to move it. When you try to move it, it isn’t only your will; it is Allah who moves it. Razak continued that:

I was in hospital for 20 days. My body was swollen all over. My daughter sent for a specialist. Then one day I heard a loud woman’s voice in my ear saying, “God will never let you be cured unless he wants to.” I heard this at three in the morning. It was so loud I woke up. I told a friend that in the morning. While I was sick and undergoing treatment I met this old man inside the mosque as I was praying because of my sickness. He said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I am praying to God.” He said, “Where is he?” I replied, “All around.” Then he said, “Then why don’t you make a round? Otherwise it’s like sending a cheque without knowing the address – a waste of energy.” I wondered what it is I have to find out. One day he came and held me and said, “Don’t move.” “I have no power,” I said. He said, “Who move?” I said I can’t answer, but I will in five years. After five years he told me. Basically, he is trying to say, “Do you exist or not?” This is Suleiman’s skin, Suleiman’s flesh, Suleiman’s bone, Suleiman turning, but where is Suleiman? Suleiman doesn’t exist. That is the truth; that is the ultimate truth (Razak, from fieldnotes).

As previously noted, *zahir* refers to the outer, manifest, bodily, exoteric dimension, and complements *batin*, which refers to the inner, hidden, spiritual, esoteric dimension. Ultimately the shadow cast by the outer flesh, and the persona, are considered to be shadows of the *batin* or the shadow within, itself a shadow of the reality of God. There are twenty shadows, characteristics, or aspects of the self (*sifat duapuluh*) within the human being that are invisible to the naked eye, that may be revealed through ritual practice. *Zat* is the yell emitted by warriors in battle; it refers to the ultimate reality of Allah, and brings the combatant into a state of oneness with Allah. Here *zat* is the *batin*, the hidden reality, whereas *sifat* is the appearance, the reflection of that reality. Another way to look at the problem is to substitute *essence* for “reality” in the translation of *zat*. Later I returned to Razak for further clarification. This is what he said:

In *silat* there is only one word you must say – *zat*. Why is that? *Zat* means God and what are you – you are *sifat*. When you say God without *sifat* it’s meaningless. I say house:

<sup>16</sup> Reported by Razak, from fieldnotes.

<sup>17</sup> Werner says that: “After we realize that His Life is Absolute Life, His Being is Absolute Being, while others are contingent and evanescent, our ideas of heaven and earth vanish like shadows. What is behind the shadow is He. Such reality as our heavens and our earth possess is a reflection of His absolute reality. The pantheist places the wrong accent when he says everything is He. The truth is better expressed when we say everything is His” (Werner 1986: 32).

but is it a house for dead people, a house for living people, a Malay house, or a Chinese house? Meaningless. Same for knife. When you say a small house then *sifat*; when you say a sharp knife then *sifat*. In Mecca you never see the word Muhammad – only Allah. But in Malaysia they are always together because Allah is *zat* and Muhammad is *sifat*. For example, a knife is *zat*, but a sharp knife is *sifat*. Without *sifat* *zat* has no meaning (Razak, from fieldnotes).

*Guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad sat in the garden and let a mass of biting “corpse ants” parade across his bare feet with no sign of discomfort. I asked him, how is this possible? His answer was that he spoke to the ants first and asked them not to bite him. So when Pa’ Ariffin spoke to the milk to solve my problem of lactose intolerance, or when *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad spoke to a mosquito to stop them from biting me, they spoke to the essence, to the underlying hidden reality, and not just to the individual glass of milk, or the solitary bug. In other words, the *guru silat* communicate with the spirit of the bugs, to the Platonic form, or deeper still to the shadow behind the shadow.<sup>18</sup> The odd thing about the Malay shadow is that the shadow itself casts a shadow, like a series of ongoing reflections in opposing mirrors. The shadow undermines ontologies and destabilizes centres. Subversive and transgressive, shifting and ephemeral, simultaneously multiple or singular, ambiguous and contradictory, impossible to grasp, it does not even depend upon the angle and direction of light.

## ***Kebatinan***

*Kebatinan* refers to the folk-religious practices, or mysticism, of the Malay and Javanese peoples. Across the Malay world the mystical, spiritual, or occult aspects of *silat* are referred to as *kebatinan*, a term that derives from the Arabic word *batin*. *Zahir* and *batin* are considered to be an essential dualism meaning the outer form (*zahir*) as opposed to the inner essence (*batin*).<sup>19</sup> The *zahir/batin* dualism opposes mind, the mental or spiritual aspect, to body, the physical aspect. The reader may therefore deduce that the term the “enchantment of performance,” as I use it, refers to *batin*, whereas the “performance of enchantment” refers to the moving, technical, or *zahir* side of *silat*. Some Malays believe that it is possible to have (mastered) the *batin*, without necessarily being an expert of the *zahir*, and proceed with the invention of *silat* through a creative ritual practice known as *gerak*. However, most *silat* experts say that the idea is to go from

<sup>18</sup> This is reminiscent of the theory of magic developed by Le Guin (Alfred Kroeber’s daughter) where the witch or mage must utter the true name of any person or thing in order to gain control over it (Le Guin 1979, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Chittick points out that: “The Koran and the Islamic tradition divide the created universe into two basic worlds. These are named by several sets of contrasting terms, such as invisible and visible, manifest and nonmanifest, high and low, subtle and dense, luminous and dark, spiritual and corporeal” (1992: 130–131).



the *zahir* to the *batin*; the *zahir* being the outer movements of *silat*, whereas the *batin* concerns inner power. In other words, *silat* exists so that the practitioner may go through the movement into the *batin*.

*Kebatinan* may be performed as a part of meditation, or as part of the practice of the movements of *silat*, or whilst holding entirely still. *Kebatinan* refers to the knowledge of internal power, the ability to channel energy through mystical means, a power developed through practices referred to in *silat* as *prana*, *nafas batin*, *tenaga dalam*, or *yoga*.<sup>20</sup> Rashid (1990: 73–74) outlines ten main types of *ilmu kebatinan* or “spiritual knowledge,” namely: *ilmu penggerak* (relating to body movements); *ilmu pencepat* (relating to speed); *ilmu pengeras/penguat* (relating to body strength); *ilmu pelemah* (on how to weaken and overcome the enemy); *ilmu pelicinan* (on how to be as slippery as an eel to escape from a lock); *ilmu pengadang* (on how to be protected all the time); *ilmu pembisa/penumbuk* (on how to hurt and weaken the opponent with a gentle slap); *ilmu ghaib* (relating to invisibility); *ilmu kebal* (to be impervious to injury); and *ilmu pengerun* (to appear formidable in front of the opponent).

*Silat* mystical practices include the calling (*seru*) of ancestral spirits (*arwah*), which take the form of animals.<sup>21</sup> Some Javanese styles of *silat* encourage becoming animal. In contrast, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu explicitly resists becoming animal in order to become human. To apply Lévi-Strauss’ (1982: 57) formula, although the “myth” or the ideational content changes from Java to the Malaysia, the performance of the martial dance, the mask, remains the same. Here by the “myth” I refer to ideas concerning how to engage spontaneous bodily movement and relating to what such an engagement pertains, whether to religious or magical practice, to God or *jinn*. Various animals, spirits, or *jinn* provide inspiration if not instruction in *silat*, including the mythical *garuda* bird (a Hindu God) known locally as *raja wali*.

Javanese “animist” styles of *silat* encourage spontaneous bodily movement through *menurun*, which involves summoning the spirit of an animal (Fig. 4.2). *Menurun* may be clearly seen in the performance *kuda kepang* (the hobby horse dance). When the horse spirit arrives the practitioner may become capable of “supernatural” feats. The trance dancers are whipped, stub out cigarettes on their tongues, walk on glass, husk coconuts with their bare teeth (Fig. 4.3), and eat glass without feeling pain. I observed one practitioner deliberately do a reverse somersault to land with the base of his spine on the back edge of a metal chair (the chair was held in place by two men). The troupe master or *dalang* may also be a *guru silat*; in this case, the opening movements of the *kuda kepang* performance derived from *silat setia hati* (true heart).

<sup>20</sup> Although there is considerable literature concerning *kebatinan* in Java, from where it apparently originates (Mulder 1980), there are few scholarly accounts of *kebatinan* in relation to Peninsular Malaysia.

<sup>21</sup> Manipulation of the *jinn* and the souls of the dead, known as *silat ghaib* (pronounced “raib”) is banned by the Malaysian religious authorities.

**Fig. 4.3** Husking coconuts with the bare teeth



In Islamic Malay styles of *silat* spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*) occurs when the *pesilat* summons the power of Allah (Figs. 4.4 and 4.5). Islam forbids *menurun* as it involves possession which is taboo (*haram*). Students are not supposed to allow the animal to take over, but must learn to use the animal's natural ability in combat. The spirit of the beast must not be allowed to possess them. In Seni Silat Haqq Melayu students must learn to control their animal self and prevent invasion by animal or demonic spirits. However, whether the Malays or the Javanese summon the spirit of a tiger, the spirit of a warrior, or that of Allah, the sheer intensity of the summoning remains the same, resulting in the production, through spontaneous bodily movement, of new *silat* styles, techniques, or combinations of techniques.

To avoid all involvement with mysticism in the practice of *silat* would be difficult if not impossible: it is more a question of emphasis. Secular sport *silat* leads the onslaught against the enchantment of performance. Sport *silat* chops up the various *juros* of *silat* into batteries of raw techniques recombined into sets by committees for the purpose of competitive judgement in sport. Like taekwondo, sport *silat* *juros* comprise mainly kicking and punching techniques, with a few hand twirls and fancy steps thrown in. Nevertheless, many of the positions clearly mimic animals, including the eagle, snake, crane, tiger and crocodile.

**Fig. 4.4** *Gerak 1*



**Fig. 4.5** *Gerak 2*



Holding animal positions for prolonged periods of time can result in psychosomatic experiences (Goodman 1990; Schechner 1993: 241–243).<sup>22</sup> For Pa' Ariffin techniques based upon the movements of animals summon (*seru*) the spirit of the animal that they enact *sui generis*, without requiring the deliberate intention or conscious awareness of the practitioner.

Pa' Ariffin therefore regards kung fu styles that mimic animals as dangerous for the practitioner, because through unintentional summoning these practitioners may attract something terrible from the unseen realm. Note that spells (*jampi*) are not required to summon the spirits.

*Jampi*, which are whispered or silently intoned, are preceded by part of a Quranic verse situated at the beginning of the spell, such as *bismillah hir rahman arahhim* followed by the greeting *Asalaam alaikum*, which is proffered to the spirit evoked. *Jampi* are similar in form to the Malay *pantun*, or poems commonly exchanged between lovers that take the form of the quatrain. However, Pa' Ariffin scorns “mystical powers” attained through *jampi* as unrealistic and un-Islamic. “Bullshit” is the precise expression he used. Instead, Pa' Ariffin encourages prayer, *dhikr*, and *prana* to attain divine power:

Pa' Ariffin slaps the floor and says: “That’s how we used to practise transferring energy. Not pah with the muscle, no. Like you are hitting to the other side of the universe. Or to the end of the block (he slaps the wall). Of course, modern Muslims, *astaghfirillah* [God help us], you’re copying the Buddhists: chop your head, chop your hands, chop your balls, chop everything except your beard: typical Wahhabis” (Pa' Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

Pa' Ariffin would speak of *ilmu kebatinan* by telling stories of his father Yeop Mahidin M.B.E. (see Chapter 5). Willing or not, both are the recipients of an ancestral tiger spirit.<sup>23</sup> The *harimau* protected his father, and his communist uncle C.D. Abdullah. It is said that C.D. Abdullah was saved from a bullet from Yeop Mahidin’s gun by the *kebal* properties bestowed by the *harimau* spirit. In Janda Baik, when his wife was pregnant, Pa' Ariffin told me that a tiger spirit appeared when his father was dying. They could all hear it prowling around, and several people saw it. Shortly afterwards, as Moone splashed her face with river water in the morning, she looked up and saw a tiger on the opposite side of the bank staring at her straight in the face.

Returning to the theme of *prana*, Chief initially accepted Pa' Ariffin’s suggestion that a spell had been cast upon him by his former girlfriend who was a Filipino witch known in her village as “the chosen one,” and that this had led to Chief’s back

<sup>22</sup> See Cuyamungu: The Felicitas Goodman Institute <<http://www.ritualbodypostures.com/discovery.html>>.

<sup>23</sup> As Banks points out concerning the indigenous Malay system: “The basic assumptions are that a distant ancestor made a pact with a spirit, either a *jinn* or a *hantu*, or became a *hantu*, and that once this pact or change of being occurred, all the descendants of this ancestor, because they inherit the spiritual essence (*angin*) of their forefather, are bound to maintain the relationship with his spirit familiars or face the possibility of being struck with illness or death. If an ancestor had made an agreement (*berpakat*) with a particularly malicious spirit, then this spirit could vent its fury on those in the present, his *anak cucu* (descendants)” (Banks 1983: 73, modified spelling).

problems. The witch could make the sea rise by shouting at it and exercised powers that even she did not fully realize. In the days before he broke with Pa' Ariffin, Chief claimed that his stiff back was caused by a *jinn* sent by the witch, and that the source of his problems was revealed to him as he practised *prana*. Whilst doing *prana* with his eyes closed Chief saw green, blue, yellow, and purple flashes, and saw a white flash around the eyes when squeezing his head. He also felt strong heat between his palms. Furthermore, an aural illusion occurs when the hands are placed in front of the eyes at arms length with the fingertips pointing towards each other. However, Chief isn't the only one who experienced weird sensations doing *prana* – one morning near the end of forty days of *prana* I heard a host of unseen voices whispering *hu* behind me.

It seems to me that *prana* serves to reconfigure the boundaries of the ego vis-à-vis the id. *Prana* allows the practitioner to master their fears and acts like a filtering mechanism whereby certain elements are squeezed out of consciousness allowing other material to emerge. Mystical experience is induced through breath control and a narrowed mental focus, and through a meditative procedure that can be likened to self-induced hypnosis, an altered state of consciousness that occurs due to the manipulation of the body.

The retention of the term *prana* instead of its replacement with the more Malay sounding *nafas batin* indicates Pa' Ariffin's acceptance of the syncretic nature of *silat*, and shows how *silat* can act as a medium of resistance to Wahhabi ideas, even whilst itself propagating them.<sup>24</sup> Pa' Ariffin's terminology and method of "transferring energy" is resonant of yet another layer of cosmic debris, that of *nasrul haq*, a *silat* group who were formerly active in Malaysia until they were banned by the government for "deviationist" teachings (Nagata 1984: 64–69).

One morning, as we sat around drinking coffee after dawn prayers, Pa' Ariffin said that *hu* is a *mantra* performed in *dhikr* and *prana* that gives divine power. To paraphrase Pa' Ariffin *hu* is a sound vibration that comes deep from the heart, not from the throat, and sounds like the "who" in "who are you?" More precisely, *hu* is the sound of the earth moving round the sun, the sound of the universe. Buddhists and Hindus all recognize *hu* as the universal sound, the sound of creation, "but we say it is the sound of the Divine Breath." Furthermore, in ancient Sanskrit *hu* means divine and "human" is a combination of the divine *hu* with "man," where "man" is the old Sanskrit word for "mind." So if *hu* is divine, then *hu-man* is "divine mind." From the *hu* vibration everything came, and in calling *hu* you are calling the Divine. Scientists studying space have heard that sound – that's all they hear – *huuu*. Pa' Ariffin continues that:

If you meditated to that sound, just that sound, every morning, your power will be as heavy as the earth. And if you concentrate on the moon as heavy as that (Pa' Ariffin, from field-notes).

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<sup>24</sup> Andaya and Andaya propose that: "Another medium for propagating Wahhabi ideas was the influential Sufi *tarikat*, or brotherhoods. Some of the most prestigious, like the Naksyabandiyya, which had been influential in the region since the early seventeenth century, were quick to respond to Wahhabi condemnations of moral decay and embarked on a process of self-purification" (2001: 122).



*Hu* is only one of the mantras available to the *guru silat*, who may draw from all of the ninety-nine names of Allah, including *Hai* and *Haqq*.<sup>25</sup>

A more detailed explanation of Malay mysticism came from Pa' Ariffin's brother, Pa' Din, one night when I went upstairs to collect my things. This was a rare opportunity because it was impossible to talk Pa' Din when Pa' Ariffin was around (see Chapter 5). He was sitting in the front room making arrows. I knocked, went in and sat down, and said I was going off tonight, and that the room seemed very peaceful. Pa' Din said he likes to hang out there, and that he would like to explain to me a bit more about *semangat*. As I listened carefully Pa' Din told me that he likes to make arrows to shoot them in Janda Baik (see Fig. 3.1). The reason he likes to shoot in Janda Baik is that there are a lot of "gargoyles" breeding there. These beings stand to the height of the door (about seven feet) and have the strength of twenty men. You can't just fight them, Pa' Din says, but they can be hunted, and that is what he is doing with the archery. Pa' Din cannot say their Malay name when I ask him, as it's stuck on the tip of his tongue. To summarize Pa' Din he says that gargoyles are of this realm, but they are unlike other unseen beings such as *pontianak* or *lelembut* (birth demons). The origin of these beasts is shrouded in mystery, but we must go back to the time of Noah and the Ark. Basically there were a lot of animals on the Ark [spacecraft?] and it was getting full of shit. So Noah, who knew the secrets of creation, rubbed the belly of the elephant and out popped the pig. The pig then proceeded to eat all the crap. Yet *Shaytan* witnessed this, and as a *jinn* that had attained knowledge even greater than the angels, he learned from this how to create beings, the secrets of genetics. Then he rubbed the belly of the pig and from the pig sprang the rat, which instead of cleaning up all the faeces has the diabolical purpose of spreading it all around! So the *jinn* mixed up with the animal gives the different species. These "gargoyles" are like that – part beast and part *jinn*.

Pa' Din continued that one third of *tenaga dalam* concerns touching the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth – just as when you say *Allah*. When a baby is newly born its "energy cycle" can be shown by gently opening its mouth. The tip of the tongue can be seen sticking to the roof of the mouth allowing the inner energy to circulate around the body. To say the word *Allah* the tongue necessarily hits the palate, and *Allah* repeated as *dhikr* will activate the energy cycle through a series of pulses.<sup>26</sup> Hence, belief in Allah reinforces an indigenous theory of *tenaga dalam*, just as *tenaga dalam* reinforces the belief in Islamic mysticism.

Pa' Din said that in creation everything has its opposite – just as you have something inside you pushing against your flesh to push it out (he touches his face, chin, and cheeks) you have something pressing in: if either one is faulty then it will buckle and deform. He pointed out that there exist various expressions of this principle in other cultures; in Chinese, *yin* and *yang*, in Japanese *in* and *yoo*. One starts with a vowel and ends in a consonant and the other starts with a consonant and ends

<sup>25</sup> On the 99 names of Allah see Friedlander (1993).

<sup>26</sup> In comparison most Asian martial arts conventionally teach the practitioner to *continuously* hold the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth during practice and combat.

with a vowel. So just like this, Allah has an Other, a hidden other, which is *hu*. The *hu* is the Other, the other world, the power of Allah.

The notion of “inverse contours” clearly emerges from Pa’ Din’s discussion of *Allah hu*. The shadow is a metaphor for inverse contouring. The shadow is not just a black patch on the ground, but also a reflection. As Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 10) point out, with the example of the hibiscus and the insect, at which point can you say this is the insect, and this is the flower? They form part of the same assemblage. Becoming animal is like this. Becoming *harimau* is not just about becoming the tiger, but also about fighting the tiger, and in order to do that one must somehow fit its contours. Doing the *harimau* walk leaves hand and footprints close together, the way a tiger leaves prints. The practitioner is not “symbolizing” the tiger, but this action may summon the tiger’s spirit (see Chapter 8).

We are disturbed briefly, so we move to my room, where Pa’ Din says he will show me what he means. He sat me down cross-legged opposite him and told me to relax. Then he said “touch your palm across your thighs/knees. Then touch the floor.” He strokes the floor twice and I followed. He said to watch carefully as he placed his palms together slightly in front of his chest. He said that as I pull my hands apart I should imagine they are still together, and as I pull them apart I should feel the energy that connects them together is still there. Say *Allah* to open, then immediately, while still opening say *hu*. As they draw out to the end of the breath say *Allah*. Then bring them in again saying *hu*. At this point the palms should be close together, but they must not touch. Repeat the same exercise once more, then once again, only in the final move the palms are brought together. Pa’ Din continued that the exercise is a principle in motion, and the principle is the same one used in archery against the gargoyle. Using his finger to sketch on the floor Pa’ Din said the principle works like a triangle. The combination of breath, energy, and focus causes the gargoyle to freeze. Then you may shoot it. Apparently this is the same sensation as when someone is staring hard at you and you sense it and freeze. Pa’ Din says that there are two triangles and they are linked. But there are many possible combinations or reflections of breath, mind, spirit and body.

Pa’ Din says he created this exercise especially so that I would feel *semangat*.<sup>27</sup> The exercise should be done at dawn and dusk. Prayer is good too, he grins, “but people don’t understand that it is moving meditation, a powerful form of meditation.” Pa’ Din says the apocalypse is approaching and the unseen forces are now especially strong. In order to fight them – and you have to if you do *silat* or any other martial art – you must be prepared. There are now more of them than ever, and as the time approaches the hordes of demons and evil things are unleashed and prowl the land – especially in Singapore. When *Shaytan* was cast down he landed on Bali.<sup>28</sup> The nine *walis* came and fought all the evil generals that fell in the islands around Bali and beat them back. Eventually a deal was struck – you (*Shaytan*) can have Bali, but we (*Islam*) get the rest

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in Javanese *silat* the breath *Allah hu* is blown along the arms by turning the head from side to side whilst holding a crucifix position with the fists clenched.

<sup>28</sup> Pa’ Din made these comments before the Bali bombing occurred on 12 October 2002.



of the archipelago. Finally, Pa' Din says this contract expired recently, and this is why we are having all the problems starting up in Indonesia and worldwide.

Returning to Pa' Ariffin, I observed that he regularly rubs the middle of his eyebrows with his thumb fore-knuckles, especially when he is travelling or about to embark on a journey, and occasionally during prayer time. This is probably done to open the inner eye and facilitate gaze into the unseen realm. Opening the senses for the *pesilat* to better perceive the unseen world is a central concern of *silat*. For example, the initiation ritual of *silat cimande* (buffalo style) involves water dripped from a *serah* leaf into the eyes of the novitiate to open them to the unseen world. Some *guru silat* acquire their knowledge of *silat* through dreams (*mimpi-mimpi*) or visions. Datuk Meor is believed to have learned the use of various weapons directly from the spirits (*arwah*) of famous warriors, including Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat. Communion with the spirits of warriors (*seru*) bears a structural resemblance to the Sufi Shaykh's communion with "dead" (departed) saints. *Pesilat* may visit the grave (*keramat*) of the *pendekar*, but they may summon the shadow from any location, though usually from within the *gelanggang*. Spiritual contact with the dead or *jinn*s can also be accomplished through an intermediary, especially through a *keris*.

During Pa' Ariffin's 1999 Janda Baik *silat* training camp some of the people invited over from England became "too friendly" with the locals who offered to teach them *silat ghaib*. One man offered to teach S. (name withheld) over forty days how to become invisible (*silat ghaib*). The story goes that a man underwent this training and became invisible, but because the invisible man abused his power, he stayed that way. Becoming invisible means that "you're not just invisible but you're in a *jinn* world" (Chief). The students were not supposed to talk about the unseen at night, and through a series of bizarre though petty occurrences, such as thefts or disappearing objects, became terrified of the invisible man.

In this section I have outlined some of the main cosmological elements of Malay *kebatinan* as it applies to *silat*, including *zat* and *sifat*, *zahir* and *batin* and I have discussed an exercise designed to lead to the perception of *semangat*. The shadow (reflection and double) is a key element in understanding this cosmology and is reflected itself in ways that are reminiscent of the basic motion of pattern formation noted by Gell (Appendix A), especially as the shadow appears to take on a life of its own. In the next section I contrast the cosmology of *silat* from the direction of Sufism in order to regard the ways in which notions of *kebatinan* and Islamic mysticism fuse in practice.

## Sufism

Sufism is a mystical path to attain union with the divine (Allah).<sup>29</sup> Sufism is related to Gnostic, Hellenistic, Buddhist, Christian, Neo-Platonic and Indian beliefs, and

<sup>29</sup> In his ethnography of the Sanusi, Evans-Pritchard says: "The aim of Sufism has been to transcend the senses and to attain through love identification with God so complete that there is no longer a duality of 'God' and 'I', but there is only 'God'" (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 2).

forms the esoteric mystical core of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Sufi teachings are transmitted by word of mouth across the generations from *shaykh* to *murid*. Shaykh Nazim is the fortieth shaykh in a *silsilah* (lineage) called “The Golden Chain” that links the Shaykhs all the way back to the Prophet Muhammad through his *caliph* Abu Bakr (Appendix B). Pa’ Ariffin says that if you want to know about spirituality then you have to go to the door and the door is Raja Ashman: “He can open your door for you. Your door has a combination lock. He can open it for you.”

Islamic *guru silat* regard Islam as divided into four levels of learning that one must go through, yet co-exist within simultaneously to accomplish a mystical state of transcendence. First, *sharia*, which as Winstedt notes is “the outward mark of the religious and about which there is no secrecy.” The second stage is *tarekat*, “the mystic path . . . enjoined by his spiritual guide for the Sufi novice.” *Hakikat*, the third stage, refers to “the plane of truth.” Fourth, *marifat* “corresponds with the plane of perfect gnosis” (Winstedt [1925] 1993: 75, diacritical marks removed). The Naqshbandis emphasize *tarekat*, which involves communal gatherings in a specially selected place of worship, which they refer to as a *zawiya*. Meetings are generally on Thursday evenings, and involve the performance of *dhikr* (chanting in “remembrance” of Allah).

## The Malaysian Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Tarekat

There are clearly several layers or circles of what can only clumsily be termed “membership” to the Haqqani. The fanatical solidarity and allegiance to the group is better described as fealty, infatuation or love. Apart from deputies such as Raja Ashman only an elite circle of *murids* who have undergone special training during forty day seclusions were permitted to enter the private quarters of Shaykh Nazim (Maulana). Next in proximity to the Shaykh were those who have taken *bay’a* (initiation). Last, the outer circle consists of the more porous and shifting fringe of the organization, including converts and other more or less regular participants in the organization’s religious and social activities.

The *guru silat* serve as bodyguards (*hulubalang*) to the Shaykhs, their families, and retinue at home, and as they roam the world on their potentially dangerous missions of conversion and consolidation. Apart from attending the *tarekat* gatherings, the *hulubalang*, their families, and loyal students appear on demand to attend to the whims of the Shaykh. They are summoned on mobile phones at any time of the day or night. The *hulubalang* will drop anything and everything to obey the orders of the Shaykh. The *hulubalang* are provided with free accommodation and powerful vehicles to drive. A few Haqqani *murids* take salaried employment in the service of the Shaykhs, to satisfy preschool, secretarial and administrative requirements; others

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Weber noted the “intrusion of Persian Sufism, derived from India” into Islam, “and the formation of the order of dervishes (which show strong traces of Hindu influence)” (Weber [1922] 1991: 265).

like Pa' Ariffin receive material assistance (rooms, vehicles) but remain unsalaried. Their tasks are multiple, sometimes complex, and always varied. "Orders" range from just sitting about with the Shaykh for coffee, or escorting him to prayers, official functions, and parties, or any other duties a patrimonial prince may require.

Pa' Din and his wife Jameelah worked in Shaykh Raja Ashman's crèche, managed by Jane, the Raja's wife, attended by the Raja's children and the children of those under the wing of the *tarekat*. Pa' Din doubled up as the bodyguard of the royal children. One would not suspect Pa' Din of this function as he is small by Malay standards, but appearances are often deceptive in *silat*. I discovered this whilst lounging on the settee watching television one afternoon when Din, without warning, suddenly pounced upon me and trapped my left arm under my right as he elbowed me in the mouth hard enough to draw blood. This was Pa' Din's way of teaching me that effective attack may come from those least suspected at the moment least expected. Later, Pa' Din said "the principle of ninjutsu" is to "use deception to hit your enemy at his weakest point with your hardest blow." Other *guru silat* say that a favourite place to launch an attack is when the victim squats in the outside toilet, or when they are about to turn a corner in the road, or when they are asleep.

Bodyguards are vital for the Shaykhs because they travel extensively and frequently stay in western countries where the population is hostile to ordinary Muslims, let alone to flamboyant ministers of conversion. Beyond the hostility of the ignorant, crowd control and event coordination are required because tens of thousands of people may crowd around merely to catch a glimpse of Shaykh Nazim (such as when he visits the Jakarta National Mosque). This provides ample reason for the patronage of the *guru silat*, who, apart from being skilled in several different martial arts, may have received military training (perhaps national service). As the royal *tarekat* the Haqqani Sufi Order surrounds itself with the royal retinue, and includes bodyguards drawn from many different martial arts including *silat*, kung fu and aikido.

The adherents of the Haqqani Order headed by Raja Ashman refer to themselves and each other as "bandits." There is more than a hint of irony in this name. The term "bandit" has been used in several contradictory ways in the Malay historical context. During the Second World War, the Japanese referred to the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), and the Kuomintang (KMT) as "communist bandits" (Cheah 2003: 77). Later, during the "Communist Emergency" 1948–1960 – really a war of decolonisation (Gilroy 2005: 55) – the British colonial regime initially referred to the communists as "bandits," until the regime realized that this romanticized the enemy, and in the eyes of the Chinese made them less susceptible to capture or defeat. Thereafter the term "communist terrorist" (CT) was applied instead. The opposite of the wartime "bandit" was the "running dog." According to Cheah (2003: 70) the Chinese derogatory term *chou kou* (running dogs) was used in Malayan Communist Party and MPAJA accounts to refer to Malays as informers and lackeys of the Japanese. By the time of the "Emergency," however, the term "running dog" is applied to the CT's who betrayed their comrades to the security forces, often in circumstances where psychological warfare involved capture, soft

interrogation, and substantial payments to the CTs to betray their comrades (Barber 1971: 148). For example, Yeop Mahidin, Pa' Ariffin's father, loosened the tongue of a captured communist, Siti Hardar, with a glass of brandy and ginger ale in order to assist Colonel Ian Mendel's interrogation (Barber 1971: 89).

So why should the Haqqanis refer to themselves as Bandits? They certainly don't fit the bill of Malay "peasant bandits" (Cheah 1988). The clue lies in their self-perception as liminars, as being marginal in modern Malaysia and alienated in terms of religious outlook, practice and community. According to Moone they feel like bandits because they are "virtually outlaws in Islam." The Haqqanis feel alienated from "modern" Islam and complain that the Wahhabis have taken over Islam and Mecca:

Just before we depart from the house Pa' Ariffin channel hops to find the 12.30 am news. We see people turning around the black box [*Ka'bah*] at Mecca, and Pa' Ariffin, in disgust, says "Wahhabis." Then he says, "everyone protests about Palestine but no-one ever protests about Mecca. They chop off the hands of the Pakistanis, but never off the Saudi. Sometimes for no other reason than a man likes a woman and wants to take her. Mecca was captured by the Wahhabis 100 years ago; the tribes were given money by the British, and are still supported by the British and the Americans because of the oil. There are no human rights – there women have no rights, children have no rights – some of the worst human atrocities happen there ever." Later, that evening Pa' Ariffin says that, "they [Wahhabis] have spoilt a beautiful religion, the *tasawwuf*. Modern Islam has only been going for 100 years: they think they know it all, they are so proud, but in reality they know nothing" (Pa' Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

For the Naqshbandi genuine Islam has been lost to fundamentalist Wahhabism. This is because the Sultans with a few notable exceptions such as the Sultan of Brunei have lost their power with the emergence of the modern nation state. The defeat and subsequent loss of the Ottoman Caliphate initiated the decline of Islam. According to the Haqqani the present trouble with Islam is a direct result of the historic defeat of the Ottomans, which left the door open for the rise of the Saudi Arabian Wahhabis, who the Haqqani's dismiss outright as "a tribe of *Shaytan*."

Implicitly, although this was never said outright in my presence, the Malaysian government officials ranged against the Bandits are the running dogs (or in the service of the running dogs). Such officials include "the government *ustaz*," a timid little religious official sent in to lead the prayers before Raja Ashman sings the *dhikr* every Thursday night, and Eshan, who is alleged to be a police spy sent by the Malaysian government to keep an eye on the *tarekat*. Eshan, an Afghan, is also known as "the madman," although apparently he only pretends to be mad, and as "the magician" because he sometimes performs tricks at the *tarekat* children's parties. Eshan, a fat bearded man, sits on the floor effortlessly doing the splits in the *zawiya*. He says he hates the capitalists, the Zionists, and that people today are "slaves, but they don't know it: they live false lives working their whole life for somebody else." Eshan continues that *www* is 666 in Yiddish and that:

Eshan: "They are watching us."

Me: "Who?"

Eshan: “Spies, I know at least two here.” (He peers around the gloom outside the *zawiya* through eyes smudged with eye-liner, and then launches into a monologue concerning the Israeli Mossad secret police, M15, etc).

Me (amused): “You seem to know a lot about spies.”

Eshan: “I read a lot ... they are surrounding us, watching us, you can’t use email or go on the net or they send you a cookie to check you out ... It’s an American conspiracy, set up by the Jews” (Eshan, from fieldnotes).

## Reading the International Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Tarekat

Trawling the copious literature produced by the *tarekat* helps to make sense of some of the thinking, ideology, and practice underlying its offshoot, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. Naqshbandi Sufi resources include books, music CD’s, videos (VCD and DVD), websites, and a downloadable resource of speeches and talks called “Sufi Cinema.”<sup>31</sup> Haqqani websites offer “Islamic Internet shopping” for books, prayer beads, and instructional videos, and supply chat rooms and Internet dating for “Sufi singles.” Most of the books are produced from transcripts of the recorded speeches of Shaykh Nazim, others are written by his son-in-law, Shaykh Kabbani. Only a few works of this extensive corpus are considered reliable reproductions and “authorized” for consumption by Pa’ Ariffin. Several of these works make sense of the ideas that Pa’ Ariffin imparts alongside his *silat* training, so much so that sometimes the words I record directly from Pa’ Ariffin’s mouth appear verbatim in texts attributed to Shaykh Nazim. Like “Chinese whispers” these words echo through the *silat* troupe with ever greater degrees of distortion.<sup>32</sup>

Four Naqshbandi books are significant here. The first concerns the impending approach of doomsday (Kabbani 2003a); the second documents the establishment of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* in London (Kabbani 1995); and the third, *Pure Hearts* (Nazim 1998) offers an exceptionally clear summary of Sheikh Nazim’s social, economic and political beliefs. The fourth book by Shaykh Kabbani (2003b) is a hefty tome tackling the history, beliefs and practices of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order as a whole.

*Pure Hearts* (Nazim 1998) sets out the Haqqani view of modernity. Early on, Nazim (1998: 34) slams democracy as a recent invention, created so that the Jews could rule Palestine. According to Maulana, the Sultan and monarchy were in the way of the Jews, as Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. Democracy led to the foundation of the parties of the “jackals,” “wolves,” “foxes,” “scorpions,”

<sup>31</sup> <<http://www.shaykhnazim.net/>>.

<sup>32</sup> “Chinese whispers” is a game played by children in nursery education. The children sit in a circle and one child whispers something to the child sitting next to her. She then whispers this to the next child until the message, often grossly distorted, returns to the instigator (Moone, from fieldnotes).

and “rats” and the imposition of national borders, resulting in nationalism and world war (Nazim 1998: 34–35). Meanwhile, Nazim (1998: 35) tells us the Ottoman Caliph was gradually modernized and westernised, drugged, and left to die of shame. Nazim (1998: 51) criticizes the modern nation state, and berates the division of the Islamic *ummah* (community) into nationalities. The solution is to return to monarchic rule, and have one sultan for all Muslims (Nazim 1998: 52). Nazim (1998: 54) regards democracy as hypocrisy, and wonders when the British people will figure out that switching from the Labour Party to the Conservatives and back again achieves nothing. Instead of democracy for Britain, Maulana advocates a return to a “traditional kingdom.”

Echoing Wright Mills (1956), Nazim (1998: 85) criticizes the capitalist industrial complex, observing that people consume bad food that makes them sick, therefore, one multi-million dollar industry, fast food, feeds directly into another, the health industry. He is highly critical of modern technology (even refrigerators are satanic), and warns his followers to return to “nature.” Nazim (1998: 88) criticizes “officialdom” as producing a kind of bureaucratic personality disorder, and advocates “going back” to live on the earth instead of in skyscrapers. Apparently life away from the earth exposes people to harmful bacteria, leading to illness and cancer. Collectively, Maulana’s thoughts form part of the rationale behind the Sufi community at Janda Baik, one of the sites where I conducted fieldwork. Furthermore, the *silat* camp that took place there in December 1999 occurred directly in response to Nazim’s apocalyptic visions. The Naqshbandis are preparing for an almighty war, “Armageddon, the biggest war which will be on earth before the last day” (Kabbani 2003a; Nazim 1998: 40). Yet, for Sheikh Nazim, the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*, and Pa’ Ariffin, the most important thing is *peace*. But then, “peace be upon you” is the basic Muslim greeting.

### *Islam: Warrior Religion?*

For Malays Islam is more a means of self-defence from malevolent unseen forces than a religion of salvation, and as such it has an elective affinity to war magic. It is informative to regard what the Malay martial artist sees in Islam. Islam emphasizes orthopraxy over orthodoxy and “requires people to live in a certain way, rather than to accept certain credal propositions” (Armstrong 2001: 56).<sup>33</sup> More attention needs to be given to the embodied aspects of Islam, which are little understood, especially as compared to recent studies of Christian charismatics (Csordas 2001; 2002).

Islamic cults are all-encompassing and redesign the self through “stripping” or “mortification,” a procedure encouraged by *silat* troupes (Goffman 1961). Some

<sup>33</sup> More subtly, Bell notes the “tension” in Islam between orthopraxy and orthodoxy, maintaining that there is a “dual emphasis” as the *shahadah* is an orthodoxy that must be proclaimed daily, with orthopraxy consisting of *solat* (prayers), *zakat* (almsgiving), *sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (Bell 1997: 160).

versions of Islam, like other evangelical religious cults, resemble the “total institutions” described by Goffman (1961: 4–5). Total institutions operate internally upon a group of inmates or persons who are detained, confined, or otherwise resident on a permanent basis. Similarly, those born within or converting to the “house of Islam,” theoretically have no escape bar exile from the Islamic community. Islam provides a total worldview, one that is concerned with the institutionalisation of hierarchy, authority, obedience, manners, cleanliness, meditation, exercise, food, household, marriage, divorce, gender, childhood upbringing, and a host of daily practices. Islam literally means “submission” and this applies to all social acts ranging from the most private behaviour to the public election of officials. Small wonder then that in Islam the war-machine is subject to the strictures of the Quran, and to the doctrines of *sunna* (Kurdi 2003).

The sociology of Islam is beleaguered with problems of mistranslation in the sociology of religion (Alatas 2003: 460–461). For example, the term “prayer” well translates *doa* (the repetition of words from the Quran), but is not as effective in conveying *solat* (the yoga-like exercise performed by Muslims five times daily). A church is not the equivalent of a mosque as one is hierarchical, the other “galactic” (Tambiah 1976). A priest is not an *imam* – the priest is a bureaucratic incumbent; the *imam* plays a more patrimonial role. There is no “congregation” in Islam (congregation defines worshippers more narrowly than the expansive term *ummah* or community). Similarly, a *kampung* (village) is not a “parish” (contra Laderman 1983: 56). It is not self-evident what Malays mean by “prayer.” *Doa*, *baca* (literally “reading” Quranic charms), and *solat* must be taken into account alongside older “Hindu” forms of worship such as *sembahyang* (prayer).

Weber’s notion that Islam is a warrior religion is sometimes regarded as a product of his “orientalist” Protestant outlook, which regards Islam as a threat to Christendom (Turner 1998).<sup>34</sup> The sociological aspects of *solat* need not detain us further than the brief comment that the person at prayer (*solat*), unless alone, always follows the leader who is placed in front.<sup>35</sup> Usually this will be someone older, or someone more knowledgeable of Islam, or someone of higher status through noble rank, or a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad. When praying together as a family, the husband or father must lead the female(s) in prayer – even if he is a convert and far less knowledgeable in the way of Islam. *Solat* is one of the five pillars (*rukun*)

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<sup>34</sup> The Judeo-Christian world is steeped in the blood of colonized peoples who were regarded as savages or barbarians precisely because they were not Christians. Weber (1978: 265, 444, 474–475, 623–627), who develops the argument that Islam is a martial religion, is following the lead of Nietzsche who regarded Christianity as the religion of the spineless meek, a slave religion that has poisoned all that is “noble” in western culture leading to the demise of the warrior in favour of the “mass men.” However, with the “crusade” against Islam called the “war on terror” it would Christianity reverted to an agonistic aspect. On television President Bush was shown standing idle in Church, but outside raising his fist into the air; Arab militia were filmed in the street shouting *Allah hu Akbar* as they placed their heads in the dust before their Kalashnikov AK-47s.

<sup>35</sup> At Jerusalem, before Mohammad ascended to heaven (*syurga*) Jesus and Moses are said to have prayed behind him.



of Islam, and it is an obligation to be performed five times per day by Muslims. Hence, sociologically speaking, *solat* is hierarchical, patrimonial, and encourages a strong sense of discipline – features that led Weber to characterise Islam as a warrior religion.

But it is not the abstract sociological or psychological aspects of prayer that I wish to document. Instead, I want to trace the embodied aspects of *solat*, and consider what this secret knowledge means to the warrior. There are many secrets in *solat*, not all of which concern the warrior, but there are some that reveal practices that are highly applicable to the training of the martial artist. The warrior dimension of Islam forms a component of esoteric Islamic knowledge which my informants regard as sadly neglected by the Islamic “geeks” or Wahhabis who “sit around the mosque all day doing nothing” (Chief, echoing Pa’ Ariffin).

To perform *solat*, the Muslim adopts a vertical position, and then bows whilst stretching the legs, then drops to the knees to place the forehead upon the floor (usually a prayer mat), which is followed by standing upright again. The performance of these prayer positions is the performance of the *shahada*, a visual representation, or better, an embodiment, of the Arabic calligraphy for Allah, comprised of the letters *alif*, *lam*, *lam* and *ha*.<sup>36</sup> The adept kneels and arises in one smooth movement,



**Fig. 4.6** “Haqq” by Mohammad Din Mohammad (acrylic on canvas)

<sup>36</sup> Allah: *Alif*=A, *Lam*=L, *Lam*=L, *Ha*=H. There is a missing “a” after the second L because *Lam* with a stroke on top is also pronounced as “la.” In the painting “Haqq” by Mohammad Din Mohammad (Fig. 4.6.) as usual the character for the Prophet Mohammad appears as an anthropomorphic stick figure about to kneel, and here he is placed upon the top left next to Allah. Allah also appears locked within the kernel of the *lam alif*, indicating that Allah is the true secret of existence.

without using the hands for propulsion to stand back up. The balanced lifting of the torso strengthens the knees and develops low balance; deep bowing stretches the legs, and placing the head on the floor improves circulation by flushing the brain with blood. From this vantage it is not such a leap to realize that Islamic *silat* is sometimes Islamic calligraphy in motion, just as the *shahada* prayer is Islamic calligraphy in motion, an idea recognized by Muslims worldwide. Hence, *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad painted *dhikr* directly onto the canvas with his bare hands, using the moves of *silat* (Fig. 4.6).

## Secrets of the Prayer

Amongst the Haqqani-Naqshbandi *murids* at the Kuala Lumpur *zawiya* there was a man from Afghanistan who is a former member of the *mujahideen*. Pa' Ariffin said that the grim looking Mut Nor "emits negative energy" because of the all bad things that have happened to him, including the loss of his wife and children. Mut Nor is said to have sprinted away from Russian helicopter gunships and avoided bullets by dodging from rock to rock as they circled overhead. One day there were two gunships and as he ran around the rocks they crashed into one another. Mut Nor has a black mark shaped like an outline of a map of Afghanistan stamped upon his forehead. The story goes that thirteen *mujahideen* fought against a whole battalion of Russians from their hideout in a cave on a hill. Mut Nor was put on guard duty, but "was so scared he put his head on the floor for the entire night until he fainted" (Pa' Ariffin). The curious black mark was the result of holding a prayer position (*sujud*) upon his knees with his head pressed upon the cave's cold stone floor for the entire night, whereupon he arose to find the black bruise of his faith etched indelibly upon his forehead.

The *sujud* position, known as "prostration" in English, involves placing the forehead and hands on the floor (prayer mat) whilst kneeling. It occurred to me that the prayer mark could possibly be achieved faster by removing the body's weight from the hands and placing all of it upon the forehead. So although it appears as if the weight is resting on the palms placed either side of the head, in actual fact the position can double up as a head exercise to strengthen the muscles of the neck and the shoulders of the warrior. To the uninitiated, or to the scholar, it appears that the body's weight resides upon the hands whilst holding this posture, yet outward appearance is seldom the reality of Naqshbandi practice.

Over coffee one morning Pa' Ariffin explained to Suleiman, Chief, and I that there are seven *chakra* points that can hurt you or kill you. However, "the prophets say" that "if you are in the prostration position when there is a nuclear bomb [explosion] you won't get injured" (Pa' Ariffin). To paraphrase Pa' Ariffin, there are twenty-one meditative *chakra* points from the heel to the bottom, with largely negative points in the legs. Behind the knee is a positive point, but the *sunna* position closes it. So that's why, he explained to Suleiman, when God destroyed the city of Sodom and Gomorrah the Prophet Lot survived: because he bowed

away from the blast. Negative energy meets negative energy and they cancel each other out.

Kneeling for considerable lengths of time is an exercise well adapted to the warrior. Pa' Ariffin and his followers kneel during the dawn prayers for one and a half hours every day. Initially, kneeling for an hour-and-a-half every morning is excruciating. The pain causes the legs to go numb, and Suleiman and Chief tried not to fidget or gasp when they could eventually sit cross-legged. This is not simply sado-masochistic asceticism, but a method of stretching out the joints and the ligaments of the knees, of strengthening the legs, and the will. Kneeling forms an integral part of the martial training undergone in Sufi *silat* boot camps (Chapter 6).<sup>37</sup> *Murids* often place their weapons down in front of them whilst they are kneeling, especially if prayer forms a preamble to training *silat*, as it does in many Malaysian styles.

One night, before the *gayong* class began, we sit in a hall, on our knees, fists on the floor, dressed in black, praying. Thunder booms outside the open doorway and lightning explodes across the sky overhead giving the eerie feeling that at 11.00 pm it is noon daylight in the bright sun. "Really weird," says Moone later, we looked really weird, just like a cult! (Moone, from fieldnotes).

As part of the Naqshbandi daily morning prayers *murids* and *pesilat* would occasionally hold the *sujud* position for between 3 and 45 min. I experienced a vision whilst holding this posture for 45 min during fieldwork in Malaysia. On the dark pre-dawn floor I saw in front of my face another face, recognizably my own, yet drawn in three-dimensional skeletal outlines of blue fluorescent light. It seemed to come from a great distance yet was immediately beneath my eyes. In Malay terms, I had come face to face with my own shadow, or reflection soul (*bayang*). At first it was a frightening apparition, the appearance of which set me trembling with alarm: was I hallucinating due to excessive sleep deprivation, or seeing a ghost emerge through the floor? After a while I decided to relax, and the intriguing vision stayed with me for several minutes until it was time to raise our heads. At the time I did not report this experience to the *guru silat* or the other *pesilat*. This type of experience of perceptual transformation is familiar to drug users and anthropologists of shamanism alike. It entailed a profound experience of Self as Other, yet simultaneously and paradoxically remaining self, not as animal, or human, but neither exactly reflection nor shadow, which are at best metaphors for this sort of experience.

To stare into a mirror for anything from three to forty days until you see your shadow soul, or a ghost, is a Malay mystical practice to reveal the twenty hidden dimensions of the self (*sifat duapuluh*). The possibility of summoning (*seru*) evil spirits through gazing into the mirror provides one reason why *gelanggang* do not encourage training in front of mirrors as is commonly seen in other Asian martial arts schools. *Sifat duapuluh* was embarked upon by some of Pa' Ariffin's London students once they had quit him for another *silat* teacher, this time a Christian mystic,

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<sup>37</sup> Prolonged kneeling also forms an important part of the training undergone in the Japanese aikido riot police course (Twigger 1997: 60).

who instructed them to stare into a mirror for forty days consecutively. Mirror gazing is highly dangerous because apart from seeing the other aspects of the self, or your angels, evil creatures such as ghosts, demons and *jinn* may come instead.<sup>38</sup>

## The Prayer Buah

Pa' Ariffin showed a prayer *buah* to me in smooth and swift fashion, where *silat* becomes *solat* and *solat* becomes *silat*. The “prayer *buah*” (as it became known) follows the procedure of *solat* outlined above. From the *alif* or upright position first the hands are folded across the chest, and then raised so that the fingertips pass just behind the ears, whilst saying *Allah hu Akbar* (God is great). This is the “entry” into the opponent’s space in the form of a double elbow strike/defence, executed from the ready position. The hands then traverse back to the torso to the folded ready position, and as they do so they intercept an incoming right punch, clamping the wrist with the right hand, and using the left to fold over the joint in the opponent’s arm to draw them in. This is followed by the bow (*lam*), which folds the opponent down, into a debilitating position. Then the upright position (*alif*) is adopted once more, with the hands at the side, where a change of grip takes place – the opponent’s wrist now transferred to the left hand of the *pesilat*. This is immediately followed by *sujud* (*ha*), which literally prostrates the opponent, as their arm is painfully hyper-extended, and locked beneath the forearms and body of the *pesilat*.

The first and most important *buah* of Pa' Ariffin’s system is called *buah shahada*. It is a tough *buah* for non-Muslims to master. This is because they mistake a movement to take down the opponent as sitting on the back of their leg, whereas the precise movement is closer in angle to the way the knees bend when the devotee drops to his or her knees in the *shahada* prayer. To begin, the opponent standing with the feet together (*alif*) steps into a fairly long right archer stance, and throws a right punch to the defender’s midsection. The defender response is to take a step to a forty-five degree angle to the left and in front, with the left foot, whilst simultaneously slapping the opponent’s elbow from underneath (*tampar*) with the left palm. Next the defender steps in with the right foot into a horse stance (*kuda*) with the feet parallel, placing the defender alongside the attacker, to punch the floating ribs with her front lead hand, held close to her hip, whilst simultaneously drawing the *tampar* hand back into a defensive position with the fingertips pointing upwards, to check the arm, and prevent it swinging into her. After a short step back with the right foot to knock the opponent’s front heel, and disrupt their balance, the defender circles her left hand under the bicep of the punching arm, and opening the arm to the side she quickly sits upon the back of the opponent’s front thigh, as if about to kneel in the prayer position. The circling move and the drop onto the leg forces the opponent

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<sup>38</sup> In a similar practice known as *scrying* (from the English “descry,” to reveal), western occultists John Dee (1527–1608) and Edward Kelley (1555–1597) stared into crystal balls, and for Dee, a black obsidian mirror he called a “shewstone,” to communicate with angels to reveal the future.

onto his back, with his right arm braced/broken over the defender's left knee, and then placed under the defender's foot (big toe to centre wrist pressure point).

*Silat seni gayong* teaches a *buah* which utilizes the closing movement in the *shahada* prayer, after the devotee rises from prostration, to sit in a position at once strange and painful for the westerner, known as *tahyiat akhir*. Here the knees are in front of the body, as in kneeling, but instead of the weight being carried by the calves, the weight rests upon the left thigh and buttock, with the left foot tucked under the right shin. The right foot, placed behind, is propped up uncomfortably on the big toe, which is bent backwards. To the newcomer this position places great stress on the right side of the torso and requires much practice to become comfortable. In terms of the *buah*, first the *pesilat* would seize an incoming right punch at the wrist, draw it down and to her right, followed by a jabbing kick with the right front leg to the opponent's armpit, then stepping over the arm with the left leg, to drop into *tahyiat akhir*. The opponent's arm is sandwiched between the calves and thighs of the person kneeling in a lock that provides no opportunity for them to wriggle out.

Islamic style movements are also performed in wedding *silat*. In one *bunga* the performer edges towards the groom whilst mimicking the actions of *wuduk* (ritual cleansing), rubbing the hands together, "washing" the ears, wrists, and feet in time with the beat of the *kompang* drums. Other religious actions include holding both hands aloft; palms stretched uppermost, in an attitude of adulation, calling upon Allah to bless the newlyweds. These three examples convey the point that *silat* has an embodied understanding of Islam as a warrior religion.

## Shadows of the Prophet

The Naqshbandis attempt to become shadows of the Prophet Muhammad, who is considered to be "the Perfect Man." To become a "shadow" of the Prophet, the *murid* mimics in meticulous detail the dress, attitudes, and behaviour of the Prophet, paying great attention to the actions, sayings, and teachings attributed to the Prophet in their everyday behaviour.<sup>39</sup> The Naqshbandis strongly emphasize that in order to properly accomplish the mimesis of the Prophet one needs a guide, a Shaykh. For the Naqshbandi Sufis, following *sunna* (the ways of the Prophet) takes precedence over doctrinal understandings of Islam based upon readings of the Holy Quran. It is believed that without the guidance of the *shaykh* the Holy Quran will be misread, misunderstood and misrepresented.

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<sup>39</sup> There are 124,000 prophets and 124,000 helpers for each one. In Sufi mysticism, Mohammad is the first and last of the Prophets, by which it is meant that Allah first created the light of Mohammad before all other creation, including the Preserved Tablets, the Pen, Heaven and Hell, the Angelic Host, the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, stars, humanity, angels and *jinn* (Adil 1999: 1).

Fundamentally it is considered *sunna* to observe the five pillars of Islam, to be married as early as possible, to use only the right hand to eat, and to reserve the left hand for dirty tasks.<sup>40</sup> The specific ways and habits of the Prophet Mohammad are cross-referenced to one or more of the Hadith (oral traditions of the Prophet collected after his death). For example, Pa' Ariffin said: "Believers should acquire knowledge. They should also practice archery, wrestling and horse riding. This is *sunna*." Mutton soup is preferred because it was Prophet Mohammad's favourite dish. Males sit or squat to urinate. *Murids* shave or pluck their body hair from the groin and armpits. *Murids* must kneel or sit to lower the body when they eat and drink, say *bismillah* before consumption, and sniff the hand of anyone even a day older than they are as a mark of respect when greeting them (*salaam*). Alcohol is frowned upon; pork is anathema. Great care is taken to consume only *halal* produce. Finally, it must be believed that *jinn*, angels, prophets, saints, and the souls of the noble and evil dead roam the world, and that one day as the horn sounds the Day of Judgement all the dead will arise from their graves in assembly before God.

Surprisingly, for strict adherents to the *sunna*, the members of Pa' Ariffin's *silat* troupe rarely attended the compulsory Friday prayers (*fardhu jumaat*), which caused Suleiman, who had converted to Islam with an Indonesian *guru silat* several years before he had met Pa' Ariffin, significant misgiving. To Suleiman's question as to why we didn't attend the Friday prayer, Pa' Ariffin exclaimed "we are not fanatics" (another of his amusing dictums). After a gruelling prayer marathon one Friday morning, we sat around drinking coffee *tongkat ali*, when Pa' Ariffin declared to Suleiman:

Friday prayers "don't count – you don't have to go if it's too hot, if the road is slippery, or if you are sleeping. You don't need to learn Arabic either as the vocabulary is enormous with millions of meanings. For each verse in the Quran there are 24,000 meanings; people think they understand it when they know one. 'Just follow', says Shaykh Nazim, 'there are people you can follow'" (Pa' Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

Friday prayers in the mosque were only entertained when Shaykh Nazim or Shaykh Hisham were in town, or if Shaykh Raja Ashman called upon his followers to accompany him.<sup>41</sup> During a Friday visit to Kuala Lumpur's central mosque, the Shaykh Raja's followers lined up and "prayed" behind him a short distance from the other "worshippers." His followers performed dozens more rounds of prayer (*raka'at*) than the other men present. Finally, one-by-one, the entourage proceeded to bow and kiss (*salaam*) the hand of the prince.<sup>42</sup> These demonstrations of power did not go unnoticed

<sup>40</sup> The "five pillars" of Islam are to repeat the litany of faith (*shahada*), pray five times day, pay *zakat* (annual religious tax), fast during Ramadan, and go on *Hajj* (provided they can afford it).

<sup>41</sup> Some Malays lie low during Friday prayers. They leave their house so it looks as if they have gone to the mosque, but then they proceed to drive around, or go and sit in an Indian coffee shop (behaviour lampooned in a short film by Amir 2002). Men are under considerable social pressure to attend the Friday prayers to avoid neighbourhood gossip if they fail to participate.

<sup>42</sup> The hand is not kissed with the lips as in the western kiss. The Malay kiss (*ciium*) is a sniff, and in the case of a *salaam* the tip of the nose merely touches the back of the hand.



by the others present, some of whom looked on disapprovingly, others inquisitively. I call them “the others present” because in a mosque there is no “congregation” as there is in a Christian church, nevertheless, the prince and his group of over twenty followers did seem to form their own mini-congregation in the midst of the others. This does not simply mean that the Haqqani are a cult: the performance of pomp serving power is typical within Southeast Asian hierarchical societies (Geertz 1980: 13).

Male *murids* sported a distinctive *sunna* fashion. Walking sticks were in vogue. Some men wore black eyeliner (*celak*). Normally applied to the corpse before burial, *celak* heavily applied by the living gives a bizarre hollow eyed stare. Along with the ubiquitous beards and moustaches some male *murids* dressed in double-breasted striped shirts. During the evening performances of prayers and *dhikr* the men donned cones surrounded by massive turbans of yellow, green, blue or white (Fig. 4.7). The turban’s colour supposedly depends upon nationality, but also relates to hierarchy and function within the order. According to Pa’ Ariffin: “The yellow turban is a very big significance; you are supposed to be 100 percent disciplined in the art of war.” Men and women displayed rings with large colourful stones with the best ones considered to be those given by Maulana.

Female fashion was harder to pin down. If outdoors during the day some Malay Haqqani women put on fairly modest outfits such as *baju kurong*, others wore jeans and long sleeved shirts, some dressed in shorts and T-shirts.

On a Thursday evening for *dhikr* night most of the females dressed in “conservative” attire (Fig. 4.8) except for the inner circle who dressed to impress in expensive figure hugging silks:

Moone, newly divorced, was slimmer than ever in a *tudung* (headscarf) that rippled over her shoulders and chest, leaving the side of her hair uncovered. Pa’ Ariffin’s mother wore a half-on *tudung* with a kind of bandana at the front, with a *cheongsam* (Chinese dress) cut to fit that made her breasts stick out like twin peaks. Siti wore a red and gold *baju*, sexy and stylish. All these women are dressed to impress! Most of the men dress up too – Mus in a purple *baju* and matching skull cap. Some wear Naqshbandi clothes – turbans, little jackets that cling to the shoulders, double-breasted striped shirts, with long-crutch trousers. *Zawiya* fashion! (from fieldnotes).

*Silat* students aped the *guru silat*; they favoured black clothes, shaven heads and natty little beards. Some converts were considered to “go overboard” such as an English woman who plodded around heavily veiled in cheap pink Pakistani outfits that would make Pa’ Ariffin scream at the top of his lungs about it being appropriate for foreigners to dress like a Malay in Malaysia, but not like a Pakistani.

Haqqani homes invariably display photographs of Shaykh Nazim. Due to Islamic restrictions on displaying the human image, the pictures of the Shaykhs are often the only photographs displayed in the house. Placed in prominent positions on cabinets or bureaus, the photographs may stand together with fresh flowers in a vase, and they provide a religious focal point that differs from a shrine in that *murids* do not pray towards it.

All *murids* wore the distinctive *tawis*, a small black triangular leather pouch containing a circular photocopied version of a prayer or *ayat* written in the hand of





Fig. 4.7 Shaykh Raja Ashman and Pa' Ariffin, in white turbans



Fig. 4.8 Hymns to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (*maulud*)

Fig. 4.9 Haqqani talisman



a Shaykh. The pouch is usually tied about the neck with a leather cord. It contains a photocopy of Quranic verses drawn by Maulana, verses that have been breathed upon by the Shaykh with the breath of *Isa* (Jesus). In order to prevent its potency from leaking out the paper is specially folded into triangles and sealed in plastic wrap that formerly contained bread. The sealed *tawis* charm provides a public symbol of allegiance to the Haqqani. The *tawis* is also openly displayed on car windshields, private residences and business premises. The *tawis* serves to ward off *jinn* (Fig. 4.9). Babies and toddlers are especially vulnerable to unseen malevolent forces and have the *tawis* perpetually attached to their clothes with a safety pin.

Opened *tawis* are sometimes pasted on either side of doors, and function like door guardians. The *tawis* serves to infuse Seni Silat Haqq Melayu practitioners with the power of Naqshbandi Sufism. For example, some robbers set upon Chief and Moone returning home late one night in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. Both of them managed to adopt the flowing ready postures of *silat* and after a slight scuffle the robbers fled. During the fight Chief lost his *tawis*. Chief believed that the *tawis* had saved them from the robbers, and that when its task was complete, and its powers exhausted, the *tawis* departed. In an altercation the *tawis* serves to call the benevolent powers of the unseen, such as *jinn Islam* or guardian angels to provide aid against the forces of evil.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Shaw (1976: 12) says that possession of such talismans has led Malays in the past to become “incredibly foolhardy,” and cites the case of “a very old and decrepit villager” in 1857, who followed a tiger into the swamp with his *keris*. He stabbed the tiger, and just as the surprised and enraged animal was about to attack, one of the young men of the village shot it. Nevertheless, the old man took the credit for the kill. Here an extraordinary mystical explanation substitutes a mundane rational explanation, a phenomenon that I call “occulturation” (see Chapter 7).

It can be inconvenient to attain a replacement *tawis* as one must ask the Shaykh or the *guru silat*, and they may inquire into the circumstances of the loss of the old one. Given that the *tawis* can depart of its own volition, its departure might indicate the wrongdoing of the holder, who may have lost the *tawis* whilst engaged in some illegitimate activity that the Shaykh disapproves of, such as drinking alcohol or committing adultery. Such misdeeds would then have to be confessed to the Shaykh, which is potentially embarrassing, and could encourage his intervention. For example, confessing adultery could result in a speedily arranged marriage.

## Taming the Ego

One of the central components of Naqshbandi Sufism involves learning to control the “ego,” the “animal within.” During one period of training, a three-year-old girl accompanied her parents, Suleiman and Yasmin, who were Pa’ Ariffin’s students. An inquisitive child with blonde ringlets and blue eyes Karima was eaten alive by mosquitoes in the downstairs room of Pa’ Ariffin’s house. For reasons unknown the parents decided not to put insect repellent on their child, although they covered themselves frequently and liberally. Consequentially, they were rarely bitten whilst the hungry bloodsuckers made a banquet of the toddler. Uncontrollable tantrums were the result. Pa’ Ariffin was mystified as to how the parents could be so selfish, and had the difficult task ahead of him to resocialise stubborn adults who were set in their ways and resisted his every attempt at guidance.

Eventually, after the umpteenth bout of hysterical tears from Karima, Pa’ Ariffin yelled from upstairs down to Suleiman praying below: “We are all human being[s]: one half is animal, the other half is either angel or devil. Anyone denying that is denying God, denying the Hadiths.” Earlier, Pa’ Ariffin had tried to tell the parents that there was something wrong with their daughter, that she had become possessed and needed proper care so that she would not be subject to the petty rage of the demon or animal within. But the parents would hear none of it. To my mind it seemed the parents were more likely to be the ones suffering from the uncontrolled animal within, but I figured Pa’ Ariffin could not tell them this directly or risk losing them entirely.

## Dhikr

Shaykh Raja Ashman led the *dhikr* every Thursday night from his *zawiya* in Kuala Lumpur, or occasionally, in Janda Baik. Thursday night is the eve of the Islamic “sabbath,” a power night when the spiritual portal is open, and when the creatures of the night roam freely across the earth.<sup>44</sup> The “congregation” of Sufis echo the

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<sup>44</sup> Energy cultivation through breath control is a common feature of Asian martial arts practice. In this regard Muslim martial artists in India and Southeast Asia regard *dhikr* as an integral part of their “spiritual training” (Maliszewski 1996: 83–91; Zarrilli 1998: 150–152).

reedy tones of the *shaykh*, whilst swaying their heads from side to side in time with their chanting. It takes about one and a half hours for the 99 names of Allah to be sung aloud. Allah's names or attributes are repetitively chanted along with short phrases such as *lailahailalla*.

The orthodox religious or manifest function of *dhikr* is to polish the heart so that when someone leaves the *zawiya* they do so with no ego and with a feeling of peace. For *guru silat* the esoteric and latent function of *dhikr* is the acquisition of divine and therefore unsurpassable internal power. *Dhikr* is regarded as a sophisticated set of breathing exercises used to tap the divine power, which can *insya-Allah* (God willing) be harnessed to make the fighter invincible and invulnerable. Members of the Chishti *tarekat* are known to repeatedly hack at their arms with machetes before they go into battle, intoning *dhikr* with each chop of the blade.

The practice of *dhikr* for the purpose of martial arts training is widespread. Cikgu Ezhar of *silat gayong* encouraged his students to say *allhamdulillah* (praise be to God), *Allah hu akbar* (God is great), and *subahanallah* (glory be to God) 100 times each per day as and when they can find the time. This is to drive out the dirty ones and leave them clean so that the *batin* will come. *Guru silat* recite various combinations of *dhikr* for necromantic purposes to summon the shades of the dead immortal warriors such as Hang Jebat.

### ***From Ritual to Theatre***

Pa' Ariffin was an occasional actor, and worked as a choreographer for several movie fight scenes. Pa' Ariffin's brother, Moose, was also a successful Malaysian actor and has appeared in several popular TV series. Shaykh Raja Ashman was a patron of the arts with an interest in Malay theatre. We all sat together at a party in Shaykh Raja's house one night and I was impressed by their discussion of the merits of Grotowski for experimental theatre.

Pa' Ariffin's production, the *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*, brought a troupe of *silat gayong* performers to London for a week in 2002 (see Chapter 6). It was a theatre without words. Dance and enacted violence provided a catalyst for the emotions, portraying anger, honour, loyalty, and shame, crowned in the final scene with the benevolent forgiveness of the sovereign (played by Pa' Ariffin) who reconciled the warring factions. The production featured an endless ring of steel from the clash of swords. Sparks flew across the gloomy stage as giant weird shadows were cast upon the walls from red floor lights. Many in the audience were Pa' Ariffin's ex-students from Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. One student, Abdul Rahman, told of an incident that had occurred to him in Pa' Ariffin's house. Although they had both remained seated apart, Pa' Ariffin had somehow picked Abdul Rahman up and moved him right across to the other side of the room.

In 2005 Pa' Ariffin worked as the choreographer in Malaysia's first blockbuster movie, *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (The Princess of Mount Ledang: A Legendary Love). This multi-million dollar production signifies the hopeful resurrection of the Malay film industry, which has been redundant since the P. Ramlee films made

in Singapore during the 1960s. Near the beginning of the film Pa' Ariffin was cast as an aggressive gang leader who was trying to forcibly obtain a young woman to be his master's bride. The ruckus ensued in a gang fight against Lord Admiral Hang Tuah's intervention. Set in the Sultanate of Melaka (1402–1511), which had replaced the waning Majapahit Empire (1293–1500), the story unfolds the legend of the Malay hero Hang Tuah (played by M. Nasir), and recounts his love affair with the beautiful Princess Ledang (played by Tiara Jacquelina), who refuses to marry the evil polygamous Sultan Mahmud Shah by setting several impossible conditions. Although some critics slammed the fight scenes in the movie as being “too Chinese” especially given the reliance on wirework and special effects common in Chinese martial arts epics, the movie well represented the *buah* of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. Good use was made of hundreds of yards of fluttering cloth and atmospheric lighting, although in a late battle scene the camera kept going around and around the circling fighters for several minutes and ruined the hard won mystical ambience.

*Puteri Gunung Ledang* is punctuated throughout by scenes of Hang Tuah and the Princess communicating whilst he is on the coast and she is in the mountains far away to the south. In one scene the Princess appears to be standing right behind Hang Tuah in a market place, and they communicate telepathically across a courtyard. None present except Hang Tuah are aware of her presence and none except Hang Tuah can hear her call or see her. We see that the shadow soul may travel great distances to communicate and achieve supernatural congress. In one scene it is implied that Hang Tuah and the Princess make love when he sends his soul to her cave with the power of his *keris*. *Puteri Gunung Ledang* exemplifies a feeling of romantic nostalgia attached to this “golden age” of Malay history and contrasts to a sense of dissatisfaction with the present. The film opens with the following narrative:

The Malay Peninsula, late in the fifteenth century. A time when loyalty, honour, and sovereignty prevailed. Melaka was renowned for her power, her glory known throughout the world (*Puteri Gunung Ledang*).

Backed up with Arthurian legends the British traipse through their pre-colonial past with daytrips to ruins and castles. Meanwhile, the Malays look back to Melaka in the Middle Ages and visit the graves (*makam*) of warriors and saints. Via *silat* sorcery, including *gayong* (dipping into the well of the unseen), *gerak*, and *seru*, the knowledge, power, and skills of the former “glory days” are summoned into the present.

In this chapter I have outlined the important elements of the enchantment of performance for Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. The fusion of animism (*kebatinan*) and Islamic mysticism in *silat* include shamanic and totemic practices leading to “becoming animal” or “becoming human.” Starting from animism I inquire into Islamic mysticism, outlining the little known aspect of *semangat* called *bayang* (shadow and reflection), alongside a discussion of the inner and outer dimensions (*zahir* and *batin*), together with appearance and reality (*zat* and *sifat*), culminating

in a discussion of *kebatinan* (mysticism) manifested through spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*). Changing tack, I turn the bow into the wind and enter the equation of *silat* from the standpoint of Islamic mysticism, which in the case of *Seni Silat Haqq Melayu* means addressing the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*. As shadows of the prophet the Naqshbandi are privy to the mystical secrets of Islam, including the suspension of the natural laws of time and space, the secrets of prayer and *dhikr* for the warrior, and the realm of the immortal saints. Ultimately the world of immortal saints refracts the world of immortal warriors, and the “doctrines” of animism and Islamic mysticism become fused into a single set of closely interrelated practices.



## Chapter 5

# The Guru Silat

A portrait of the war magician augments an understanding of Malay mysticism by contributing an alternative view to what is already known about the medical shaman (*bomoh*). This chapter regards the ascension of the individual to become a *guru silat*, and should be read in conjunction with the following chapter where the *guru silat* is viewed in relation to the students. Malay styles of *silat* tend to be the constructions of the *guru silat* and not solely the transmissions of established lore – it is as if the *guru silat* are attached to a rhizome and through this are enabled to create *silat*. Here I find it helpful to interrupt the organic emic metaphor of *silat sekebum* (see Chapter 2), where *silat* was regarded as a garden, and instead regard *silat* as a rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 10) dispense with the root, tree, branch, and leaf metaphor (of thinking, linguistics, organization) for that of the “rhizome,” a configuration where any part may be linked to any other part, rather than one where one part links to others in a structured genealogical manner.

Permission (*ijazah*) must be sought and attained to create *silat* or disastrous mystical consequences can result. The notion of *ijazah* relates to issues of authenticity and authority. Permission to create *silat* may be granted by a *guru silat*, but permission is not their sole provenance, as permission to create *silat* may equally be attained from a Malay prince or sultan, or from a Sufi shaykh. It is useful to examine Seni Silat Haqq Melayu in this instance as permission is granted by Shaykh Nazim, Raja Ashman, and the *guru silat*’s father; alongside permission sought and attained from *silat gayong*, the largest *silat* organization in Malaysia.

The creation of *silat* may be a more or less complicated affair. Basically, through sorcerous calling the *silat* just comes or manifests itself in the form of spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*). This may occur during a period of seclusion and prolonged meditation (*bertapa*) at a remote cave or waterfall. The unseen world is engaged via elaborate ascetic methods including fasting, prayer, *jampi*, and *dhikr*, and through rituals such as cutting limes and bathing in flowers. The creation of *silat* may also occur with little ritual or ceremony in mundane settings, for example, when Singaporean *guru silat* Samat of *silat cimande* simply asks his students to stand up in his living room, recite *Allah hu Akbar* (God is great) and perform spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*).

The mystical process may be more or less mysterious than might be imagined. Consider, for example, the orchid that perfectly “imitates” the shape of the wasp as



a lure for the wasp to become part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus (Deleuze and Guattari 2002: 10). The orchid cannot see the wasp to imitate or copy it, instead there is a deterritorialization of the wasp through the reterritorialization of the orchid. There is a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp: the "boundaries" between natural phenomena are less concrete than we may be accustomed to believe. The creation of *silat* is not exactly accomplished through a "technology of enchantment" as the idea of a secular "technology" somehow violates the mystical performative nature of the construction of *silat* (Gell [1992] 1999). Neither does the "enchantment of technology" quite capture exactly the effect *silat* has over the *guru silat* and others who participate in the activity of *silat* (Gell [1992] 1999). Just as the boundaries of the orchid and the wasp are fluid, as one becomes the other, so also are the "boundaries" fluid in the construction and performance of *silat* (Deleuze and Guattari 2002: 10). Enchantment must be performed in order for it to become manifest, and performance must be enchanted in order to become sublime. The arrival of the Muse, of the Shadow, may take many forms, and does not exclude shamanism, mysticism, and the supernatural, nor creativity, healing and play.

## The War Magician

In Southeast Asia the war magician performed an essential role in protecting the community in times of war, settling internal feuds, and providing medical assistance. Historically, in Southeast Asia, warriors took on specific institutionalized roles such as the *penghulu* (chief), *panglima* (warrior), or *hulubalang* in the status hierarchies that acted as a conduit between the Sultans and the commoners. The relatively open teaching of *silat* to groups of practitioners in the *gelanggang*, as compared to the secretive, revelatory, and individual training of the *bomoh*, may be said to differentiate the *guru silat* from the *bomoh*. Therefore, in ideal terms, the *guru silat* is a responsible, upstanding member of the community, preserving Islam and *adat*. The *bomoh*, on the other hand, is a liminal, marginal figure, existing on the fringes of Islam. The increasing marginalization of the *bomoh*, whose activities are now perceived as socially and religiously illegitimate, may have served to compound the function of the *guru silat*, as the role of *guru silat* provides an air of legitimacy and a cover for the *bomoh*. However, the practices of the *bomoh* exist not only in animist forms of *silat* including *rimau*, *kuntau*, *Jawa asli*, *lintar*, *nasrul-haq*, *sunda*, *monyet* and *kuning* which are marginal to Islamic hegemony (Rashid: 1990: 61), but are also prevalent in mainstream Islamic forms of *silat* such as *silat gayong*. The *bomoh* is not at the periphery of *silat*, but at its core.

The interventionary magic of the *bomoh* could place them in the path of danger and retribution. Being liable to counter-attack may act as a spur for the *bomoh* to acquire knowledge of self-defence. A clear division between the warrior, medical, religious, and magical shaman is an academic construct; in reality the boundaries are fuzzy and porous. Like the *bomoh*, the warrior shamans attempt to learn from nature – they listen to the breeze, speak to the elements, mimic the movements of

animals, whirl in the ecstasy of movement, and commune with the spirits through drugs, dreams, speech, and visions; they play with fire and smoke, sit under the waterfalls, perch alone upon mountains, disappear into caves, beat drums, and converse with the dead. Their search for power may take days, weeks, months, or years of travel away from home (*merantau* in Sumatra, abbreviated to *rantau* in Peninsular Malaysia). It is only through obtaining magic and mystical power that the student becomes a *guru silat*. Becoming a war magician remains possible in an Islamic society that prohibits trance (*menurun*) in the construction of *silat* because there is an alternative ritual procedure to attain spontaneous bodily movement (*gerak*).

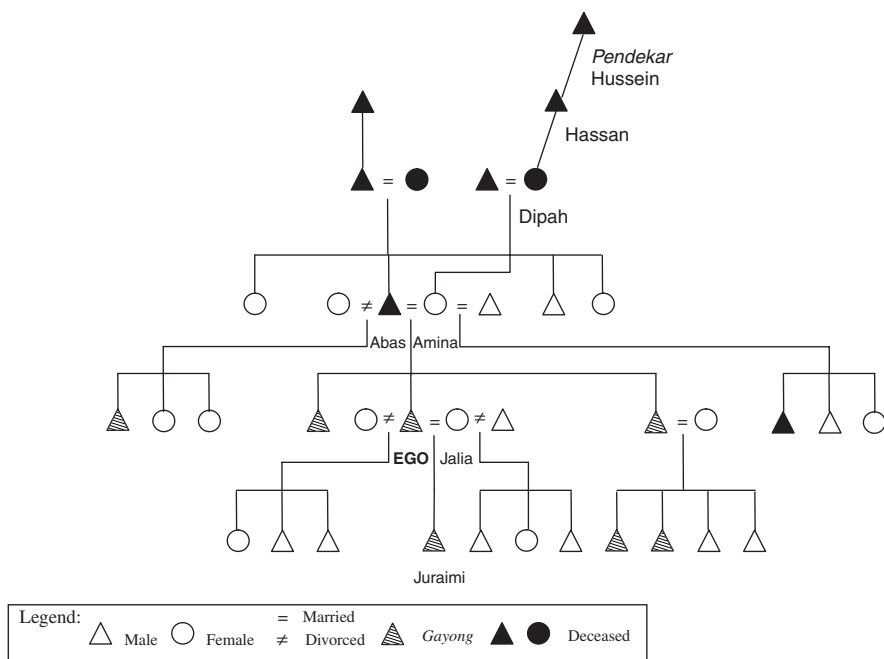
### ***Becoming the Guru Silat: Birth***

Entrusted secrets (*amanah*), skills (*ilmu*), and weapons (*pusaka*) are passed down through the lineage of the *guru silat* to facilitate the creation of the next generation of leaders. Pa' Ariffin's son, Yeop Mahidin, is a likely candidate to inherit of the mantle of *silat*. His mother, though from England, gave birth to Yeop at home naturally in Janda Baik. Subsequently, mother and son underwent a forty-four day confinement. Pa' Ariffin buried the placenta (*uri*) in front of the house behind a tree. The afterbirth is called *adik* (younger sibling), for a boy, and *kakak* (elder sister), for a girl. The "twin" shares a spiritual connection to the newborn baby that is important in childhood and later life when it may be called upon to render assistance by contacting the other spirits.<sup>1</sup>

In Peninsular Malaysia considerable importance is given to royal descent. However, it is important not to essentialise birth or kinship systems, because, as is well-known in Southeast Asian genealogies, what counts is not who you are descended from, but who you can trace yourself back to, a kind of selective "backtracing" (Errington 1989: 216). Selective backtracing proceeds cognatically and unilaterally. Backtracing is an essential component of Pa' Ariffin's claim to possess "royal" Malay *silat* as compared to "peasant" Indonesian *silat*. Selective backtracing to important relatives including sultans, rajas, *penghulus*, and *panglimas* serves several purposes. First, selective backtracing reinforces claims to be a *bone fide* member of the aristocracy, thereby giving access to aristocratic claims to the higher elements of *silat*. Pragmatically these elements concern overall strategy (battle) as opposed to individual tactics (self-defence). Second, having royal ancestors gives access to higher powers within the hierarchical spirit world, where *jinn* have kings and kings have special *jinn*.<sup>2</sup> Backtracing legitimizes the possession of a gift (*amanah*) through

<sup>1</sup> On Malay birth and birth spirits see Laderman (1983: 178–179); Geertz (1976: 46).

<sup>2</sup> Laderman notes that: "State shamans were of royal descent, frequently brothers of the ruling sultan. The ruler himself kept familiar spirits. On important occasions within the last century sultans have officiated as shamans in séances of national importance (Winstedt 1951: 9–11; Endicott 1970: 94). The name and authority of the sultan is still invoked by villagers (without his permission) when confronted by a spirit whose power cannot be challenged by any lesser personage" (Laderman 1983: 60).

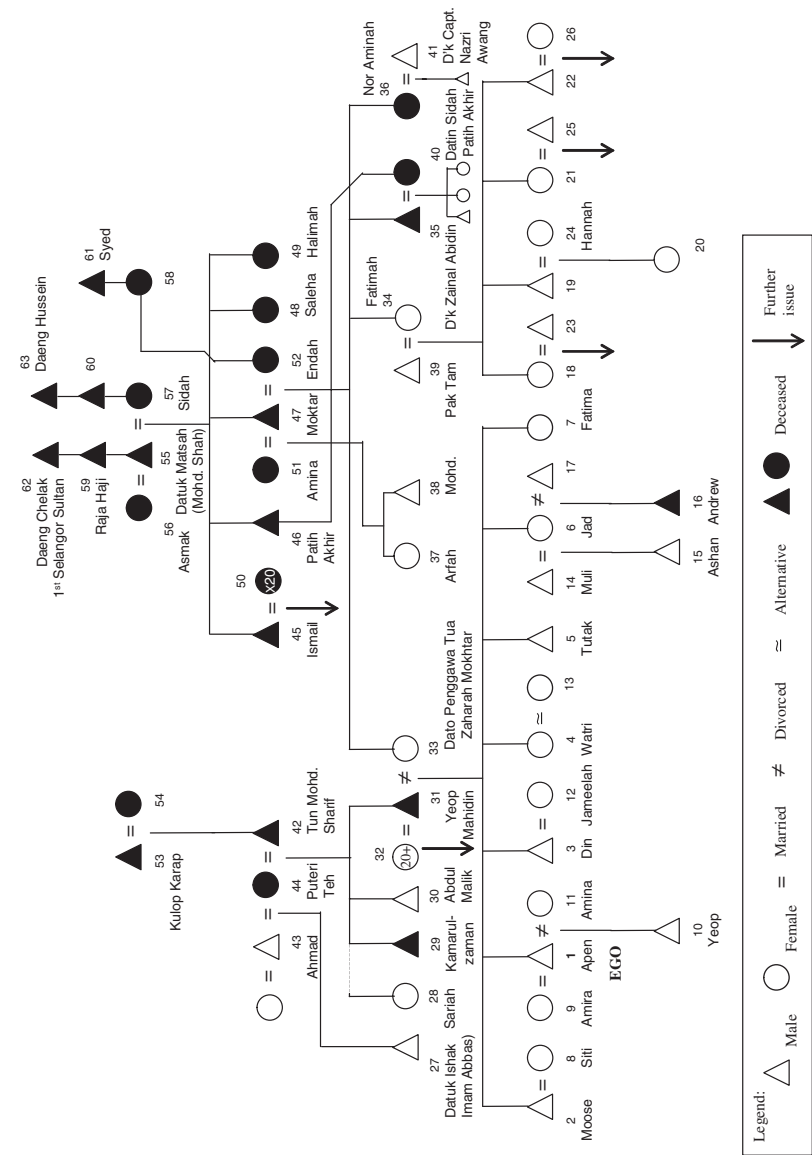


**Genealogy 5.1.** Ezhar

claims that *silat* has been passed down the generations to an individual selected by human or “supernatural” forces as the representative (*warisan*) in this generation of a particular skill, power or weapon. Third, backtracing to powerful relatives indicates “noble” qualities in contests for positions of leadership within organizations or the traditional state apparatus, which may be required for roles such as *hulubalang* or *laksamana*. Here inherited status (lineage capital) alongside standing derived from followers (social capital), and not simply expertise in *silat* (cultural capital) tips the balance in one’s favour (Bourdieu 1977). Fourth, backtracing occurs through the inheritance of symbolic markers including ritual objects, titles, names, and weapons. For example, Ezhar’s genealogy (*silsilah*) traces back to an object of spiritual power, a seventeenth century *keris* from *pendekar* Hussein of Melaka (Kg. Ketua), which was used to kill a pirate (*lanun*) in the sea (genealogy 5.1). *Pendekar* Hussein’s *keris* contains the inherited power of Cikgu Ezhar, and is used by him in initiation rituals (see Chapter 7).

Pa’ Ariffin’s claims to legitimacy come not from an object in his *silsilah*, but from descent traced back to a host of aristocrats.<sup>3</sup> For example, his lineage includes the first Selangor Sultan, Daeng Chelak, and Daeng Hussein (who is a relative shared

<sup>3</sup> According to their mother Pa’ Din inherited his father’s *keris* and not Pa’ Ariffin.



with Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman). However, the single most important figure in Pa' Ariffin's claim is his father, Datuk Yeop Mahidin M.B.E. (genealogy 5.2., Table 5.1). Yeop Mahidin was the leader of *Askar Wataniah*, the Pahang Malay Anti-Japanese Underground Movement that worked with the British military through Force 136 during the Second World War (Short 2000: 24 n7).

**Table 5.1** Details of the Mahidin genealogy<sup>4</sup>

1	Apen – Ariffin	35	Datuk Zainal Abidin (former Singapore High Commissioner)
2	Moose – Tun Mustafa	36	Nor Aminah
3	Din – Zaharudin Rastam	37	Arfah
4	Watri – Azzahratul Raihan	38	Mohd.
5	Tutak – Muhammad Khidir	39	Pa’ Tam – Abu Zakaria (Minang.)
6	Jad – Aznil Sharizad	40	Datin Sidah Patih Akhir, marries parallel cousin (46) Patih Akhir
7	Fatima (name given by Shaykh Raja Ashman) – formerly Roxanna Farah	41	Datuk Capt. Nazri Awang
8	Siti – Fatima Puteri	42	Tun Mohd. Sharif (Customs officer)
9	Amira (U.K.)	43	Ahmad
10	Yeop – Mohammad Yeop Mahidin	44	Puteri Teh (Megat’s daughter?)
11	Amina (U.K.) divorced 2002	45	Ismail. Educated at Malay College
12	Jameelah (Indian Muslim)	46	Patih Akhir. Educated at Malay College
13	No data	47	Moktar bin Matsah (Selangor). Educated at Malay College
14	Muli – Muzli	48	Saleha. Educated at Malay College
15	Ashan – Hassan Alexander	49	Halimah. Educated at Malay College
16	Andrew Rashid	50	20+ wives
17	No data	51	Amina (Perak)
18	No data	52	Endah
19	No data	53	Kulop Karap (possibly descended from Aceh). Perak, Kampong Lambor
20	No data	54	No data
21	No data	55	Datuk Matsah (Mohammed Shah), Bugis. One of the four major chiefs of Selangor (four major, eight minor)
22	No data	56	Asmak. Four of her children died in infancy
23	No data	57	Sidah. She died young so Asmak became stepmother to her children
24	Hannah	58	No data
25	No data	59	Raja Haji (Selangor). Perhaps this was Matsah’s grandfather, his father being Penghulu Mohd. Salleh
26	No data	60	No data
27	Datuk Ishak Imam Abbas (VP of finance, Petronas)	61	Syed
28	Sariah	62	Daeng Chelak. First Selangor Sultan
29	Kamarulzaman	63	Daeng Hussein (Bugis)
30	Abdul Malik		
31	Mohammad Yeop Mahidin		
32	20+ wives		
33	Mrs Mahidin – Dato Penggawa Tua [her hereditary title] Zaharah Mokhtar		
34	Fatimah		

Most of the names in the Mahidin genealogy would be preceded by a title. I have provided Table 5.2. below to set out how Mrs Mahidin’s family defined the terms for ease of reference. Ego’s ancestry is predominantly Bugis although the name “Yeop” derives from Perak rather than from the former Bugis stronghold of Selangor. Pa’ Ariffin’s mother (Table 5.1: 33) informed me that “in our grandfa-

<sup>4</sup>We used nicknames during the elicitation of the genealogy such as Apen, Moose, and Din, which in some cases are followed by their proper names (although the details are incomplete). I am grateful to Jad and to Mrs. Mahidin for providing much of this data.

**Table 5.2** Appellations to Malay names

Appellation	Definition
<i>Daeng</i>	A Bugis term for ruler or sultan (and may be used to mean elder brother)
<i>Datuk</i>	Sir ( <i>Dato'</i> is the old spelling)
<i>Datin</i>	Dame or madam
<i>Megat</i>	The daughter of a royal mother and a commoner father
<i>Meor</i>	A descendant of the Prophet Mohammed from the female line
<i>Puteri</i>	The female offspring of a Sultan, or Raja, and a commoner
<i>Sharif</i>	A male who claims descent from Prophet Mohammed
<i>Sharifa</i>	A female who claims patrilineal descent from Prophet Mohammed through Ali
<i>Syed</i>	A male who claims patrilineal descent from Prophet Mohammed through Ali
<i>Tuan</i>	Sir
<i>Yeop</i>	In Perak this is supposed to signify the eldest son. <i>Yong</i> signified the eldest daughter

ther's day you didn't marry a Minang [as] they were the enemy!" Datuk Matsah (Table 5.1: 55) was one of the four major chiefs of Selangor and was involved in the war between the Bugis and Minangkabau. This is possibly the reason why Pa' Tam (Table 5.1: 39), although an expert in *silat*, does not have "permission" to teach.

An expert in Malay magic and *silat*, Yeop Mahidin was the head of the Pahang branch of the Malayan secret service, and led the personal bodyguard of the Sultan of Pahang, collectively known as the Thirteen Vagabonds. By the end of the Second World War, Yeop Mahidin was the leader of 26,000 *kampung* guards (Barber 1971: 86). Noel Barber provides the following description of Yeop Mahidin:

Yeop was an extraordinary man – one of the most colourful fighters thrown up by the war. A stocky, dark-haired, fearless extrovert with a flashing smile, he had escaped from Malaya to India when the Japanese occupied the country, joined Force 136 and was parachuted back to fight with British officers – so gallantly that he was awarded the MBE (Barber 1971: 86).

During the Malayan Emergency, Yeop Mahidin was assigned to hunt down his cousin, C.D. Abdullah, who was the leader of the Pahang contingent of the communists in charge of an all-Malay regiment and its death squad (Barber 1971: 83–91). The vendetta between these childhood friends is an extraordinary tale that involves Yeop writing to Abdullah to ask him to quit the communists, and Abdullah responding with a letter containing a bullet and a note saying that "we are no longer cousins" and "this is all you shall get from me." Later, when Yeop led the Vagabonds into an ambush against Abdullah he loaded the bullet into his gun as he crept up upon his cousin. There was a brief scuffle, and as Abdullah made his getaway in a boat, Yeop pulled the trigger. Nothing happened: as with so much of the communist arsenal the bullet was a dud.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Chin and Hack (2004: 30 n12) provide an inside account from the communist point of view, indicating the poor state of their arsenal.

Besides Sultan Abu Bakar of Pahang (1904–1974), Yeop Mahidin kept extraordinary company. Yeop Mahidin supplied information to the historians Mubin Sheppard and Noel Barber and worked closely with C.C. Too, the head of Malayan psychological warfare operations (psyops), and David Storrier, the Special Forces police chief.<sup>6</sup> Although “Malays in the special police squads killed more of the enemy than did the entire British army” (Barber 1971: 270), Yeop Mahidin was renowned for his policy of “making bad people into good citizens” (Barber 1971: 215) by trying to draw them away from communism and violent insurrection through persuasion. His philosophy fitted perfectly with the notion that the most important battle was “the battle for the hearts and minds of the people” – a slogan from psyops made famous by General Templer (Barber 1971: 148). Police operations, alongside determined psychological warfare, help to explain how the communists were defeated in Malaya, unlike Vietnam, where the guerrilla army eventually managed to defeat the American military.

Pa’ Ariffin says that he inherited special *amanah* (entrustment) in the art of *silat Melayu* from his father and from Pawang Noh. An *amanah* is a gift that one must keep to oneself, as a trustee or guardian. Pa’ Ariffin says:

The story goes like this. Never mentioned it before. Datuk Yeop Mahidin was exhausted from his work fighting the insurgents (some say he was shot a number of times but because he was *kebal* [invulnerable], the bullets did not harm him). So he went to one of his guru Pawang Noh to recharge. Tok Pawang Noh made him a special *silat melayu* elixir for him to drink. My mother was there at the time and as there were some of the potion left, asked if she could drink the remainder. Carelessly, Tok Pawang Noh said “*minum le. . .*” so my mother drank it. Then Tok Pawang Noh suddenly burst out “why are you drinking that??? . . . Aren’t you pregnant????” Then he said “*la hau la wala quwata illa billah* (no strength or power except with Allah). That baby might die and if not it will take more than iron and stick to discipline him.” He then told my father that he was to bring me back when I am fifteen years old. So I was born three months later premature by two months almost. Pawang Noh died when I was seventeen. My father passed on to me the *amanah* and secret from Pawang Noh (Pa’ Ariffin, via email 5 January 2006, italics added).

Although *silat Melayu* is still propagated as an elite royal art, it was never confined solely to those of “pure” aristocratic lineage.<sup>7</sup> Polygyny combined with liberal adoption served to swell the extended family ranks of the children of aristocrats. Male aristocrats were often polygynists and might leave dozens of progeny from aristocratic and commoner wives, consorts, and girlfriends, all of whom had some claim to title, yet none of the wealth and power that may go with the title, and who would marry commoners in their turn. However, genuine skill in *silat* is not merely inherited. The shadow-class, those semi-aristocrats, lacking wealth and power, cling

<sup>6</sup>Lim, from interviews with C.C. Too, says that prior to the destruction of the Communist Malay 10th Regiment early in 1951, its leader Abdullah C.D. (Pa’ Ariffin’s uncle) was demoted because of his love affair with the wife of another senior comrade, and the leadership was passed on to Abdul Rashid Mydin (also Pa’ Ariffin’s uncle, Mydin is another spelling of Mahidin) who had managed to escape from a detention camp in Melaka (Lim 2001: 178).

<sup>7</sup>Brakel-Papenhuyzen (1995) makes a similar case for classical Javanese dance which is characterised by reciprocal borrowing between court and commoner.



to “tradition” and preserve and sharpen the art of *silat*. Along with acquired skill comes recognition from others, and with this recognition further accomplishment. Those who know the secrets of *silat* will only truly reveal them to the adept, even if that means adopting (*angkat*) them into their family (Yeop Mahidin adopted over fifty children).

### ***Becoming the Guru Silat: Childhood***

According to Malay myths *silat* originates from people observing animals as they hunt or fight, or perhaps from the dance of a flower in the currents beneath a waterfall. However, following Huizinga (1950), I propose that *silat* as a cultural practice may arise from play. For example, two-year-olds can be seen to place their legs in strange positions that are impossible for an adult without abnormal suppleness and flexibility to achieve, yet such postures are perfectly workable for the child. When the child sits she folds her legs in ways the most flexible adults would be unlikely to achieve, such as kneeling on the floor, with the bottom sitting, yet the soles of the feet pointing out at right angles to the hips in line with the knees.

For Bourdieu a series of fixed dispositions enter the body through observation in childhood, and continue to be formed and reformed by the ways in which the body is worked or rested, for example, tension in the neck from bending over a computer leads to a perpetual hunch. This seems to be simply a reformulation of Reich’s (1945) (1990: 52–53) “character armour.”<sup>8</sup> Malay adults observe their children experiment with bodily *hexis*, which helps to reveal the possible range of motion given the human anatomy. Furthermore, some Malay adults, specifically the *silat* exponents, attempt to remain as supple and flexible as possible. They want to keep the body firm, yet soft like an infant, not hard like iron, as if stemming off the creeping tide of death. Hence for Malays rigor mortis is not something that solely occurs in the corpse, but something that slowly creeps into the body during life.<sup>9</sup> Countering stiffness is part of the philosophy of staying “forever young” espoused

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<sup>8</sup> Discussing how the child learns the habitus, Bourdieu states that: “Body *hexis* speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values: in all societies children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult – a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech, and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience (Bourdieu 1977: 87). Whilst I would not dismiss the advances made by Bandura’s (1986) observational learning over conditioning, I would argue that children do a lot more than imitate, they experiment, particularly with movement and posture.

<sup>9</sup> This is a trope of many Asian martial arts, for example in aikido: “The recommendation that you keep your body supple like that of an infant in order to counteract the rigidity and stiffness of the ageing process is a very old one which ancient Japanese masters often stressed to their disciples” (Westbrook and Ratti 1970: 114).

by Pa' Ariffin, who used to perpetually sing the refrain: "Forever young, oh, to be, forever young, do you really want to live forever; forever, forever young."<sup>10</sup>

Pa' Ariffin put his son Yeop into *silat* training from birth (Fig. 5.1). From the age of six weeks he manipulated the baby's arms and legs into punching and kicking movements. Later he encouraged his son to slap (*tampar*).

Father and mother took pride in their little boy's achievements in *silat* and the "baby tiger" could adopt *langkah* (*silat* stances) before he could walk. A dramatic example of this early *silat* training was the way the father would stretch his son, from about three months onwards. At several intervals during the day he would repeatedly pull the baby's legs into splits, and hold them in that posture. Grabbing baby Yeop by both feet, one in each hand, Ariffin would turn him upside down, and then crank his legs wide open to an angle approaching 180 degrees. Also he would pick the child up from the hips, and allow his back and head to hang one side with the legs dangling on the other, and proceed to gently bounce him in a kind of traction.

Later still, children are gently tumbled from their feet, and placed in all kinds of locks. For example, while a toddler stands on the bed, from behind place one hand between the toddler's legs, and hold them gently by their wrist and pull. The toddler



**Fig. 5.1** Pa' Ariffin playing with Yeop

<sup>10</sup> *Forever Young* is a song by the band called Alphaville.

will fold into a lock, or if pulled harder they will flip over. The possibilities and combinations of this play “wrestling” are seemingly limitless.

Yeop was a good-natured baby, and for the most part seemed to enjoy this attention. To have a contented baby is considered ideal in Malay families, and normally they are lavished with attention to ensure that they are kept satisfied. To allow them to cry unnecessarily would summon the evil *jinn*. In contrast, Suleiman’s daughter, Karima, caused Pa’ Ariffin consternation on account of her perpetual crying. According to Pa’ Ariffin, the main problem was that Karima has taken in a lot of “negative energy” – the Prophet says *Shaytan* enters your blood and “gets into your system through the left hand: that’s why it is forbidden for the left hand to enter any part of your body.” Pa’ Ariffin proceeds to make a diagnosis with the following question:

Pa’ Ariffin: “What did you do with the placenta?”

Suleiman: “The hospital kept it: bio-waste.”

Me: “At least you didn’t take it home and eat it!”

Pa’ Ariffin had looked so contemptuously at Suleiman’s mention of bio-waste that I chipped in to offset yet another exhausting onslaught of the “bitch treatment” (see Chapter 6). At this point Pa’ Ariffin looked at me stunned, and said:

Are you serious, what you guys eat the placenta? The Malays believe it has a spirit. The flesh of it nurtures you in the womb and this is buried under a tree. The spirit then becomes like a sister to a girl or a brother to a boy. And you call us barbarians? (Pa’ Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

Pa’ Ariffin regarded eating the placenta as a horrific act of cannibalism, and was utterly incredulous that the English used to fry it up and eat it, notwithstanding that the afterbirth is full of iron which is obviously good for the mother.

Until he divorced Moone, Pa’ Ariffin and Yeop were inseparable, and he appeared to be a good father. Pa’ Ariffin kept his son near him most of the time, and during *silat* training Yeop would doze as we slashed away with *parangs* late into the night. The only time I saw the father ignore his son was when he was engaged in prayer, otherwise Yeop was the recipient of a remarkable amount of time and attention, far more than most western males would bestow on their children, and certainly far more than children dumped with maids in Singapore would ever receive. Nevertheless, a gendered division of labour was apparent with Moone changing Yeop’s nappies, and placating him to sleep.

## ***Sibling Rivalry***

Envy, stinginess, and suppressed anger in Malay families may result from sibling rivalry. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Provencher (1979: 43–53) explains that intense sibling rivalry is the outcome of nursing practices where the mother, and indeed the rest of the household, lavish attention on the first-born infant until the

birth of the second, whereupon the attention is transferred wholesale leaving the elder child feeling abandoned and providing an alternative focus for murderous oedipal rage than onto one of the parents. Lifelong animosity, competition, jealousy, envy, and hatred may result, and this seems to be the case between the two brothers, Pa' Ariffin and Pa' Din. From another perspective, Errington (1989: 140) notes that intense rivalry is a feature of Southeast Asian hierarchical societies, where there are no equals but just status peers.<sup>11</sup> In "house-societies," such as are common in South-east Asia, allegiance and fealty are directed up towards the apex of the hierarchy, whereas those of similar or equal status compete as rivals in a relentless attempt to outdo and overtake the other (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 176; Waterson 1997: 138–66). Status rivalry is palpable in ritual performances, especially weddings, where the cost of wedding feasts serves as a measure of "standing" in the community (Errington 1989: 189; Geertz 1968: 36–42; 1980: 13).

Pa' Ariffin and Pa' Din lived in the same house and yet they seldom spoke to each other. Silence reigns in the eye of the storm. Despite the intense rivalry and bitter hostility displayed between Pa' Ariffin and his brother all of a sudden they would serenely pray together, politely *salaam* one other, and then proceed with the rest of the day as if nothing had happened. This made me aware of the fact that although these two more or less openly hated each other they could abruptly close ranks. Pa' Ariffin and Pa' Din didn't compete through weddings or expensive ritual performances, but through *silat*. For example, when one of Pa' Ariffin's students (Paul) began to learn from Pa' Din, Pa' Ariffin ejected him from his group.

Malay siblings are not necessarily in permanent conflict, as brief or considerable periods of time occur when the old rivalry is buried and cooperation replaces animosity. This makes the re-emergence of rivalry all the more bitter, as the rivalry re-emerges as a kind of double betrayal. The present offence rekindles the old rivalry, and is amplified through the remembered and now emotively re-salient recalled offences. A dialectical oscillating rivalry, the repetitive understated making up adjoining the overstated falling out, leads to fusion and fission within the familial and cultural spheres. *Habitus* is emotionally cathected: during the friendly times, lives, ideas, stories, and skills are amalgamated leading to fusion; during the unfriendly times the same investment is utilized as the basis for competition, rivalry, and antagonism, resulting in fission. Fusion and fission give rise to the creation of new and competing forms of *silat*, a dynamic art form, as well as a "traditional" type of practice and performance. For example, one may summon the *silat* of one's brother and then summon the *silat* of another to defeat it.

Pa' Ariffin's younger brother, Tutak, tells me that when they were kids all of them were made to practice *silat* by their father. Tutak said his father would go

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<sup>11</sup> According to Errington social divisions in Southeast Asia are not a pyramid of nobles, freemen, commoners and slaves. The commonly applied "feudal" analogy is misleading as it shows horizontal breaks between the categories, and shows them as fixed like stone. "In fact the ties were far more vertical: high and low were (and are) allies, while peers in place were and still tend to be rivals" (Errington 1989: 97–98). Rather than a pyramidal analogy Errington (1989: 98) prefers to see these relations as analogous to an umbrella or as a cone of light cast from the ruler.

jogging, slowly, and the children would have to go in front and that “he would kick us if he caught up with us, not like people kick kids today.” Their father would also send them to classes twice a week and expect them to train at home. “But,” Tutak says, “you know what it is like when your heart is not really into it; like playing the piano, it just doesn’t sound right,” and it was easy to bluff and pretend to be training “as we knew what time he would come around.” Finally, Tutak said, “he eased up when I got to fifteen.” When Pa’ Ariffin’s mother and father divorced it seems that most of the family followed their mother rather than their father. Pa’ Ariffin was away from his father during the last years of his life (in England), but says that previously he was the only one staying with his late father “for four years from 1977 to 1980,” and that he served as his “driver, porter, *tukang urut* (masseur), companion, confidante, etc.” (Pa’ Ariffin, via email 6 January 2006).

### *The Exorcism of Demons*

Late one night in Singapore I watched Malays perform an exorcism at a coffee-shop. A man lay rigidly suspended between two chairs; one placed at his feet and the other under his head. Five Malays held him down as his body convulsed with spasms. He was foaming at the mouth, retching and spitting. A sixth man banged him on the chest with his fist and whispered into his ear to draw out the invading spirit from within. I have not observed the exorcism of demons (*jinn*) in Malaysia, but the accounts I collected bear marked similarities to this occurrence in Singapore.

A man become possessed (*rasuk*) during a *silat gayong* initiation ritual in Janda Baik. Pa’ Ariffin could not exorcise him because Moone was pregnant with Yeop. During pregnancy and for forty days afterwards a Malay father must refrain from contact with the unseen realm to avoid attracting the attention of birth demons that would harm or kill the mother and the baby. As the initiation was about to take place:

This guy shook hands with the *silat* master who said there is something on him – he grabbed the guy’s forehead, shouting at him in Malay to get out: the guy was laughing hysterically, and then passed out (Chief, from fieldnotes).

To paraphrase Chief’s rapid speech, when the *guru silat* pulled out his *keris* and some limes the possessed man’s sister came along. She was speaking, but it wasn’t her talking, it was the *jinn* talking in words that were “understandable but a bit foreign.” The *guru silat* “slapped her on the back like an old kung fu movie, pulling it out of her [whilst] the guy was pinned down because he looked a bit dangerous.” According to Chief “the *keris* said it had made friends with some *jinn* in the *jinn* world – these *jinn* were helping to get rid of the bad *jinn*.”

The possession occurred because the siblings had been to visit an Indonesian witch who had cast a spell upon them. The brother had sat up with his sister through the middle of the night and then a *jinn* entered him. After the exorcism:

They woke up: she looked around wondering why she was stark naked in the middle of the *gelanggang*; he woke up and looked like he wasn't on heroin any more and was really thankful (Chief, from fieldnotes).

This story of a woman awakening stark naked in the *gelanggang* is extraordinary, and I am at a loss of what to make of it. Accounts revealing the “possessed” to be heroin addicts suffering withdrawal symptoms are more common than cases of exorcism involving female nudity. A man nicknamed the King of Heroin in Kuala Lumpur told me that Malaysian heroin, known as “grade four,” is four times more powerful than heroin cut for the market in America and Europe. Kuala Lumpur was once an attractive destination for drug tourists, but because many foreigners died from drug overdose, trafficking in Malaysia now carries the death penalty. As he tapped away on his keyboard in the cybercafé, the former King of Heroin chirped that previously he was filthy rich, drove a Mercedes Benz, and lived in a big house. Once he became Naqshbandi he cast aside his evil ways and now he resides in a rented house and drives that diminutive Malaysian peoples' car, the *kancil*. Meanwhile, other Malays continue to be chained to the trade he once profited from.

Returning to *jinn*, *pesilat* must learn how to defend themselves against the evil forces from the unseen realm. Chief, whose stiff hips and back problem were attributed to a *jinn* living in his back, says he once fought the creature with a knife:

One night I saw it – this guy or *jinn* sitting cross legged on top of me laughing. I wrestled with him, and I don't know how, but I pulled out my knife and I cut him, and he didn't bother me again (Chief, from fieldnotes).

Chief and I usually slept on the floor of the spare bedroom when we stayed in Pa' Ariffin's house, and I slept warily after he recounted this story of wildly stabbing demons in the night.

### ***Hang Tuah or Hang Jebat?***

In Peninsular Malaysia, there is an unresolved issue concerning who was right: Hang Tuah or Hang Jebat. Malays who insist that Hang Tuah was right to kill his friend Hang Jebat claim that:

The five of them would have been insignificant if there was no Melaka – they might as well have been pirates. Who are they? They are Melaka's *hulubalang* – not warriors of their own, pirates, vagabonds, or soldiers of fortune. They became big because of the Sultan – they were fighting for one thing – the Empire. So to support Hang Jebat is undermining the whole system (Pa' Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

From Pa' Ariffin's point of view, should the need arise it is necessary to sacrifice the subject's life for that of the Sultan. However, it seems to me that most Malays believe that Hang Tuah was wrong to kill Hang Jebat; instead it is right and proper to

die for your friends. Indeed, the willingness to die for your friend is the very definition of true friendship for Mohammad Din Mohammad. In one view your life is forfeit to the state; in the other, forfeit to the bonds of friendship. Either way, an intense loyalty is inscribed into the *silat* warriors' code of chivalry, involving fearless self-sacrifice in the face of death.<sup>12</sup>

Pa' Ariffin, or more formally, Ketua Khalifah Tuan Haji Ariffin Yeop Mahidin, is *hulubalang* to Shaykh Raja Ashman, an English-educated barrister who is the spiritual head of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Order in Malaysia, and second son of the Sultan of Perak, His Royal Highness Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah. Pa' Ariffin claims that his forefathers have served the Sultans in a kind of symbiotic relationship for the past six hundred years. His father served the Sultan of Pahang; Pa' Ariffin serves the son of the Sultan of Perak.

In Seni Silat Haqq Melayu rumours circulated that Pa' Ariffin is a direct descendent of the immortal warrior, Hang Tuah. In his early forties, Pa' Ariffin was around the same age as Shaykh Raja Ashman, and in England it was erroneously rumoured that he attended the same school as the prince. One evening Pa' Ariffin gave me some tickets to the theatre to accompany Shaykh Raja Ashman and his wife Jane. I had to thrash my suped-up Mitsubishi racer to keep pace with the Shaykh as he gunned his red Porsche 911 towards Bangsar theatre. Once we arrived we queued for some coffee. There was time for only one question, so I asked the prince when he had first met Pa' Ariffin. Jane answered, and said that they had met Pa' Ariffin through the theatre, specifically through his brother Moose, about fifteen years previously.

## The Veneration of Shaykh Nazim

Traditionalist, royalist, and staunch anti-communist, Pa' Ariffin appeared peculiarly aggressive by Malay standards. He was stockily built with several long scars punctured by staple marks across his shaven head. He had a loud voice, ready laugh, and quick intellect mottled by a ferocious temper that could descend with the violence, intensity, and suddenness of a tropical rain storm. Pa' Ariffin once boasted that he had killed communists as a sniper during "the emergency" (although he was born after it ended in 1960). A graduate and former accountant, he exudes the streetwise cunning of the gangster, and counts among his many Haqqani friends the leaders of the legendary Los Angeles gangs, the Bloods and the Crypts. Pa' Ariffin says he was World Silat Champion three times in a row during the 1980s (claims I was not able to independently verify).

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<sup>12</sup> Brown (1970: 203) says that in the *Sejarah Melayu* the term *hulubalang* connotes a "fighting-man" whilst assenting to Skeat (1900) (1984) who translates *hulubalang* as "war-chief." Draeger sketches the Minangkabau *hulubalang*'s role as follows: "The *ulubalang* are military officers who are bodyguards of the sovereign. When dispatched singly they are some of the best assassins in the world, and known (in English translation) as "champions." They fight for the prince-leader called a raja (*maharaja*, *iang de pertuan*) [*yang di pertuan*], or sultan" (1972: 115).



Raja Ashman and Pa' Ariffin both follow Shaykh Nazim as their spiritual guide. Shaykh Nazim, the head of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi order, is believed to be the last Saint, the "Seal of the Saints," just as the Prophet Muhammad is believed to be the last Prophet, the "Seal of the Prophets" in Islam (Fig. 5.2).

For one week in Singapore Pa' Ariffin attended to Shaykh Nazim round the clock from 5.30 a.m. to 1.00 a.m. or later the following morning. Throughout the entire week Pa' Ariffin wore white clothes, an inversion of his usual black attire. The Shaykh enjoys boundless energy belying his eighty plus years of age. His followers describe Shaykh Nazim as a living Saint and as Allah's representative on earth. Pa' Ariffin and Raja Ashman form part of a group, an inner circle, comprised mainly of Malays, who serve the needs of the Shaykh. Only this group are allowed access to the Shaykh's private quarters. In this back region away from the scores of visitors the Shaykh, the Raja and the other members of the core group can relax, exchange stories, and tell mischievous jokes. The Shaykh doesn't always like to be surrounded by "them" says Pa' Ariffin, "they" also being on occasion referred to as the "Sufi goofies" (Fig. 5.3).

Some of the adherents would hand round blessed leftovers of curry puff from Maulana's plate, and parcel out dozens of bottles of holy water from a bottle he had sipped from. I saw one man hold a clear plastic bottle of water up to the light as if examining its hidden depths for some awe-inspiring revelation. In a more revolting variation of the *salaam*, some of the Shaykh's visitors would slobber their mouths all over his hands.

Several of the Shaykh's followers seemed mentally disturbed, a point duly noted by Pa' Ariffin. Initially I could not understand the Shaykh's English, which he spoke



**Fig. 5.2** Shaykh Nazim, Chief, and Raja Ashman in Singapore



Fig. 5.3 Shaykh Nazim, Shaykh Raja Ashman and a Singapore *silat* group

through a thick beard with a heavy Turkish Cypriot accent. Later, his speech became easier to follow, although without the aid of the others I could not always comprehend his cryptic statements. For example, Shaykh Nazim talks about a green cup. The Shaykh would then say it is a red cup: “You don’t stare at it perplexed, you don’t look amazed; you just accept it. A red cup,” says Pa’ Ariffin, laughing and looking away.

According to the Naqshbandi the most important duty for a Muslim is to find and follow their Shaykh. As Pa’ Ariffin says:

If you go to the Shaykh, nothing is private to the Shaykh. If you go to the Shaykh and he says “die” – die. If he says, “cut your hand” – cut your hand. He is not going to ask you to do that, he is not *Shaytan* ... I am here to tell you that I am authorized by Shaykh Nazim, Shaykh Raja Ashman, Shaykh Hisham (Pa’ Ariffin, from fieldnotes).

In part Pa’ Ariffin derives legitimization for his own autocratic behaviour from the Naqshbandi shaykhs. Not surprisingly, however, outside of the liminal events of saint veneration, shadowing the exemplary behaviour of a Saint or Prophet can prove difficult to sustain. From 1992 to 1996 Pa’ Ariffin was *imam* at St. Ann’s Mosque in North London. From “donations” he was paid £50 to £400 per week, based on fifteen percent of the takings. Free accommodation was provided. However, in the U.K. the life of a Sufi *imam* is not easy because, as Pa’ Ariffin puts it, “in the summer

prayers start at 4.00 a.m. and finish so late! And they call all day long with all sorts of problems.” So he “got fed up.” “But,” he continues, “the winter was nice: 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. off.” However, to “dress like the Prophet, act like the Prophet – it’s a heavy responsibility, and that’s why I just couldn’t take it.” Finally, “it’s hard to deal with all these problems when you have so many fucking problems yourself.”

## Ritual Empowerment: The Creation of Silat

Malay *guru silat* are initially shy to admit to the practise of *gerak* (a colloquial term for *ilmu penggerak*). In everyday Malay, *gerak* simply means “movement,” but the term has magico-religious connotations in *silat*, and refers to a form of shadow boxing with movements that epitomize the aesthetics of *silat*. *Gerak* is the practico-mystical craft of producing new styles of *silat*; it is the invention of *silat* through ritual practice.

Authority, control, power, and status are refracted through creativity and authenticity, discussed here through *ijazah* and *gerak*. *Ijazah* in *silat* is the permission to transmit established *silat* styles or techniques. Some *silat* styles are secret or reserved (*amanah*) and may only be transmitted within the bounds of kinship ties, unlike more open styles that can be publicly disseminated to the community from *gelanggang*. *Gerak* as a form of “sympathetic magic” (Frazer [1890] 1994) is a mimetic ability to simply watch a *silat* player or *silat* teacher for a short period of time and then be able to summon forth the movements of the style into one’s own body. Movements, sets of movements, and whole styles of *silat* emerge through *gerak*, and if passed down through the generations these styles become invented traditions, themselves then subject to the “mimesis and alterity” of *gerak*, consequently re-invoking the issue of *ijazah* (Taussig 1993).

The process of *gerak* may last only a few minutes or take several hours, and may continue for weeks on end.<sup>13</sup> To create *silat* the practitioner goes through a lime cutting ritual and then repeats the name of Allah (or other *dhikr*) until they enter a trancelike state where the body moves spontaneously to adopt the positions and steps of *silat*. I think this is what Eshan meant when he said: “Do you teach the eagle to swoop, the tiger to hunt? No. Where do they get their *silat* from? Allah.”

There is some similarity between *gerak* and the *falungung* craze observed by Ots (1994) in Beijing, because the practitioner’s body is released from the strictures of the mind and appears to move spontaneously within a martial aesthetic framework. But *silat* practitioners would not agree that the body takes the lead, because they remain consciously aware of what they are doing. It is a bit like being in a chauffeur-driven

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<sup>13</sup> According to Gell the “false mirror” effect is observable in a myriad of other contexts, and may, according to [Walter] Benjamin (1979: 333) constitute the very secret of mimesis; that is, to perceive (to internalize) is to imitate, and thus we become (and produce) what we perceive (Gell 1998: 31, 99–100).

car: you are not fully in control of the automobile, but you determine the direction, can stop or start as you wish, and can remember the journey. In *gerak* and *nafas batin* one feels the blood coursing through the veins, the breath pumping through the stomach, the muscles tensing and contracting, the skin crackling with energy, the pupils dilating – and then the movement comes. This performance of enchantment is a supercharging of the body where consciousness takes the back seat.

*Gerak* is not a pure invention, as *pesilat* may *gerak* (in *silat* and in Malay generally the term is used as a verb and a noun) the style of any *silat* master they have seen in action. Pa' Ariffin was reluctant to reveal *gerak* to a western audience, as he feared people would misunderstand the process, brand his *silat* as inauthentic, and him as a fake. Later, Pa' Ariffin contradicted his earlier claims regarding *silat sekeibun* by admitting that 90 percent of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu comes solely from him, and is not a configuration of the fragments of *silat sekeibun* (contra Chapter 2). Whatever the case, in *gerak* the issue of authenticity hinges upon the notion of permission (*ijazah*), but this is a strange type of permission, as it is permission not merely to invent but to steal the essence of someone else's *silat* system, and reincarnate it as one's own.<sup>14</sup> Of the result, it is a tricky issue to say what is repetition and what is difference, or how much is mimesis and how much is alterity, but it is not so much the quantitative factors that I seek to address here as the qualitative ones. What is clear is that it is thought that the practitioner, having viewed someone else's *silat* only once, and having conducted the ritual practice of *gerak*, will be fully able to perform their *silat*. The same procedure can be applied to the movements of animals engaged in fighting, hunting and killing. This provides one reason why some *silat* masters forbid their pupils to show their *silat* to those outside the family, and prohibit them from practising wherever they may be observed (*amanah untuk silat*).

Permission to create *silat* may be obtained from the practitioner's *guru silat*, from a Muslim Shaykh, from the Sultan or Raja, or from a visitation from the spirit of a dead hero or warrior. For example, Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman was not given permission to teach *silat gayong* by his grandfather, Zainal Alatas, who told him that he would obtain his permission from a "higher authority" instead. Hang Tuah is later said to have visited Datuk Meor as he stood upon a stone in order to cross a river in Perak. Sultan Idriss, the former Sultan of Perak, offended by the audacity of Datuk Meor when he related this story, commanded him to prove his abilities by lifting a canon, a task that normally required several men. Datuk Meor, however, accomplished the feat single-handed, and thus gained the recognition of the Sultan of Perak.

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<sup>14</sup> I discussed *gerak* and authenticity with Hadi and he said; "Today nothing is authentic. You tell me what is authentic? The computer says it's Fujitsu and therefore Japanese, but it's just a process of branding as the components are made in China, assembled in Indonesia, and distributed worldwide. Nike Air shoes are S\$50 in China where they are made, but as soon as they reach the shops the price triples. Does that mean the ones from China bought direct from the producer are inauthentic?"

For *silat gayong* the senior instructors would bring various techniques to Datuk Meor and demonstrate them so as to gain his seal and signature, whereupon they became part of the established syllabus. *Buah pisau* (knife combat scenarios) provides an example of one such historical inclusion. However, there is no shortage of new innovations, such as Cikgu Ezhar's "super combat" which was constructed to train the Malaysian Special Forces, and "*buah Raja Wali*" which he created to teach in France. Another example is Cikgu Kahar's version of *cindai*. Permission to *gerak* is part of the training for *silat gayong* black belts who are expected to create their own arsenal.

Masters of *silat ghaib* do not necessarily master technique or *buah*, but possess the ability to convince others that they can summon the spirit of a famous legendary warriors including "Hang Tuah, Hang Jebat, Hang Likir, Panglima Hitam, Wali Suci, and Wali Sanggol," this being the most powerful type of *ilmu kebatinan* (Rashid 1990: 76). Furthermore, Rashid (1990: 88) points out that immediately prior to the 13 May 1969 riots individuals would enter the fray after gaining *silat* from a single day's training where they would undergo rituals including the transmission of spirits (*menurun*) to psychologically prepare them for battle. Similarly, Maryono (2002: 230) in his discussion of the mystical, magical, or supernatural qualities of *silat*, claims that "using certain incantations, a lay person can suddenly execute *pencak silat* moves like a master, known as *pencak setrun* or *hadiran* (spirit possession)" (Bola 1998, cited in Maryono 2002: 230).

However, whilst an instant solution to master *silat* is considered by some to be an attractive and viable alternative to long years of arduous practice, in Islam the calling of spirits is *haram*, so a different method has to be utilized. Hence *gerak* substitutes the forbidden Javanese method of *menurun*. Intention (*niat*) affects the ideology of the practice, which structures the way it is perceived by practitioners, and presented to others, and this has ramifications in terms of religion, politics and identity. *Gerak* is not the same as *menurun*, instead *gerak* is a reflection of the Javanese way, an Islamic Malay transformation.

Anybody can call upon the power of God to give them *silat*. For example, Razak, the patron of Nirwana *gelanggang*, used to wander around his house after morning prayers twirling his plump hands. He said that *silat* can dawn on anybody; you just perform *doa* and you have it – it moves by itself. However, amateur *gerak* is ill advised. Apart from making the novice look ridiculous, the summoning of movement through *gerak* may be dangerous, as the body may attempt acrobatic stunts that can rip muscles or pull out the joints. Moreover, *silat* masters guard their techniques with malevolent *jinn* so that unauthorized repetition or transmission results in sickness. Symptoms may include rapid aging, weight gain, sudden hair loss, muscular atrophy, joint or spinal injuries, and premature death. Because of this, before allowing the student to perform *gerak*, some *guru silat* insist upon several weeks of elaborate cleansing rituals through lime cutting and bathing in water blessed with incantations from the Holy Quran.

Permission to create or find *silat* (*gerak*) is a procedure that is fraught with mystical danger unless one is protected against the forces of the unseen through rigorous religious observations, special formulae, and the grace of one's predecessors.



Permission is required from the *guru silat* so as not to offend the spiritual community that is embodied in his or her *silat*, where each and every technique has a guardian (*jinn*) that watches over it (the name of the *buah* often supplies the clue to the name of the guardian). Attaining mystical permission legitimises the more devious methods to acquire *silat*, such as spying on other *guru silat*, or joining a school for brief periods until one has seen enough, or sending one's students to join another's school. As noted earlier, Pa' Hosni left eighteen styles of *silat*, all of which he created by *gerak*.

*Gerak* and *menurun*, despite their differences, retain an essential function shared with experimental theatre, which is that of thinking through the possible. They not only "rehearse the impossible" in the sense that a god or other spirit takes over the performer's movement, but they suppress cognition, and repress self-conscious awareness just enough to propel the practitioner to an embodied state of awareness (Blau 2001: 30). This goes beyond thinking through the possible, not because it enters the realm of the impossible, but because it goes beyond thinking considered as a disembodied activity: it is a working through with the body rather than thinking through with the mind or the head.

*Guru silat* say they only need to see somebody else's *silat* once, in order to perform it, or indeed capture its essence through *gerak*. In *gerak* a connection is ascertained between one *guru silat*'s style and another's, and a material transfer is accomplished. Yet there is nothing tactile about the procedure, instead it is the power of the eye, of vision to capture not just the movement, but also the spirit of the movement. It is not as if the body becomes all eyes, but as if the eye becomes a camera and the body movements a recording that can be played back and edited through the ritual practice of *gerak*.

The astounding ability to observe and repeat upon only one viewing is also found among the masters of other Asian martial arts. Each moment is viewed as the last opportunity to witness something new and retain it, and something is not so much viewed or looked at, but sucked in, consumed and regurgitated. This requires an immediate and complete awareness, as the movements must be observed in their totality and simultaneously in their specificity. This skill, akin to photographic memory, is born of experience, because the master (or those who would be masters) rarely discovers anything completely new; rather a different way of doing things is acquired. For example, a way is found to suddenly accelerate familiar footwork, or a long set of moves are chopped down to their bare fundamentals, or a *wushu* kick normally done through 180 degrees (whirlwind kicks) is simplified and done through 45 degrees instead (Pa' Ariffin's *sepakepak*).

During my observations of Zarrilli training actors to kick, he kept repeating "big toe" as they executed a long series of kicks. Focusing on the big toe to guide the kick was taught in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, but I had forgotten this until I saw Zarrilli. When I asked Zarrilli about the big toe he said he was not aware that he mentioned it, although he must have said it at least twenty-five times. Similarly, *gerak* may operate as a trigger for memory, or as a transducer for knowledge already attained but incompletely digested. This skill is an essential element in the war-magician's arsenal because in Reid's terms: "Military technology is the first to be borrowed,

since the penalty for failing to do so is immediate and fatal” (1993: 122). More recently, with cinema, television, and multimedia the possibilities of *gerak* for the competitive choreographer are virtually endless.

## The Sundang Ceremony

Pa’ Ariffin believed that the Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia organization was in danger of permanently splitting because the important Perak chapter had reneged from the organization as a whole (or from their point of view, Nirwana Gelanggang had reneged from the Perak chapter), and this threatened to cleave the organization down the middle, or worse, divide it into many small fragments. Pa’ Ariffin wanted to unify the entire organization, and he attempted to do this by bringing *silat gayong* back into the fold of the court of the Sultan of Perak, through a ceremony known as *sundang*. Order and hierarchy are the key themes of the Malay nobility and the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*. Only the *mahaguru* or the sultan of a particular province may award the title of *pendekar* (warrior). Hundreds of Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia black belts took part in a ceremony at which the Sultan of Perak was to symbolically reincorporate them back into the *istana* (palace), by awarding them *sundang*, a shoulder sash that comes with a title.

Before the ceremony commenced Pa’ Ariffin led the orchestra, including large and small drums (*ibu gendang*; *anak gendang*), and heavy brass gongs (*gamelan*), and then blew the war horn (*tetuang*) of the Malay warriors in long sonorous tones like a ship sounding out the fog. However, instead of the ceremony being presided over by the Sultan of Perak, his son, Raja Ashman, led the ceremony; furthermore, it was not held in the *istana*, but in a hotel reception room in Kuala Lumpur. Incumbents slowly made their way up to and then knelt before the Shaykh, who was regally adorned in purple and seated on a plump yellow cushion (Fig. 5.4).

With a *keris sundang* duly in hand, Shaykh Raja Ashman sat ready to knight the practitioners by touching both shoulders and the head with the tip of the *keris*, followed by the gift of a sash laid upon eager open arms. The sashes symbolize a plethora of graded ranks within the Silat Seni Gayong organization. Pa’ Ariffin was awarded *sundang* and so too was Razak, the wealthy parton of Nirwana *gelanggang*, who apart from performing a little *gerak* never trained *silat* in his life. Three-hundred-and-sixty people filed up by order of rank to receive the honour from the Raja, first the men and then the women. The Raja, having been persuaded to bestow the honour on a few, ended up in the circumstance of bestowing the honour upon them all.

I learned the meaning of the *sundang* only later, in Penang, from Cikgu Sulaiman, the head of Silat Gayong U.S., who though based in Jersey, sometimes visited Malaysia. He was a squat, bullish, pot-bellied man, greying at the temples, with a penetrating in-your-face stare. He was accompanied by two African-American students, one a tall police instructor called Akeel (pronounced “Ah Kill”), the other a string-bean adolescent. The older men looked tough, more like gangsters than





Fig. 5.4 Raja Ashman awarding *sundang*

police. With a slight American drawl Cikgu Sulaiman told me that he is the “*waris mutlak* [authorized inheritor] for *gayong*” and that “my family were, and still are, the *laksamana* [Lord Admiral]. *Gayong*, therefore, is my responsibility.” Furthermore, he says that:

The Sultan refuses to recognize the *sundang* as *gayong* is divided. Only once they resolve their differences he will accept the *sundang* again, and restore the original roles of *temenggong* [minister], *hulubalang* and *laksamana*. That will have to be sorted out after *gayong* returns to the *istana* (Cikgu Sulaiman, from fieldnotes).

I was with Pa’ Ariffin the day before the ceremony when he bought the *keris sundang* for 1,800 *ringit*. It was not the *keris* of Datuk Meor, which he earlier claimed to have in his jeep, nor the Taming Sari, supposedly kept by the Sultan of Perak’s wife in a handbag beside her bed, nor the *keris* of Raja Ashman. As such it had none of the sacred powers associated with the historic article. In other words the *sundang* in Kuala Lumpur was an enactment, a theatrical performance.

Cikgu Sulaiman calls Pa’ Ariffin “Apen” and says “we go back a long way to when we were kids.” He says Pa’ Ariffin “has always been wild” and “no one can tame him.” He too, is Haqqani, and follows Shaykh Nazim. He was still on good terms with Pa’ Ariffin, and would not be drawn on his difficulties, beyond that it is “typical – he goes to the States, messes it all up with his usual stuff, then wants to do it again.” I ask what he means by the “usual stuff,” but he won’t be drawn

out. Finally, he tells me that he has formed an alternative organization with Pa' Ariffin called Gayong International, and they will go it alone if the rest of *gayong* refuse to follow. This shows that *silat gayong* is a tightly knit international organization whose senior members may act in secret concord, despite their factions and differences. Pa' Ariffin and Cikgu Sulaiman knew I would be at the World Silat Championships, and they had decided to share this much with me, at this particular time.

Cikgu Sulaiman's testimony shows that the historical, economic, political, and military roles of the aristocrats are still strong in the minds of the leaders of *silat gayong*. Nowadays these aristocratic roles are denuded of political authority, and will remain so unless the sultans were to attempt to intervene and re-establish direct rule in Malaysia (an unlikely but not impossible prospect). Given the "democratic" political machinery of modern Malaysia, staging a real *sundang* ceremony would be highly problematic as it would signify the reconstitution of the traditional war-machine, and re-activate the shadow state waiting in the wings of democracy.

In sum this chapter has taken a case study approach to the role of the *guru silat*. I have sketched the career of Pa' Ariffin and regarded his relations to his son, father, siblings, peers, colleagues, and to his liege Shaykh Raja Ashman, and to his lord, Shaykh Nazim. I have traced how Pa' Ariffin's permission to create *silat* derives from his trusteeship of mystical gifts, the sanction of the late founder of *silat gayong*, his royal connection to Raja Ashman, and his divine connection to the Prophet Mohammad through Shaykh Nazim. Such permission gives free rein to a form of war sorcery called *gerak* that involves a mimetic ability to watch any *silat* player for a period of time and be able to summon forth the movements of the style into one's own body. The permission to create *silat* is promoted at a high level of training in *silat gayong*. Finally, I showed how Pa' Ariffin attempted to draw Seni Silat Gayong Malaysia closer to the auspices of the Haqqani through a ceremony that would otherwise rehearse the steps necessary to activate the Malay shadow-state.

## Chapter 6

# Social and Aesthetic Drama

*Apa guna kepuk di ladang  
Kalau tidak berisi padi  
Apa guna berambut panjang  
Kalau tidak berani mati.<sup>1</sup>*

In this chapter I originally wanted to examine *silat* students as people who are between social states, as liminal personae, or threshold people (Turner 1969: 95; Van Gennep [1909] 1960). I wondered if *silat* students in England were more liminoid than their liminal Malaysian counterparts, and I proceeded to compare the training regimes in the two countries with an eye on how training was conducted in the past (Turner 1985: 291–301). I also wanted to know how *silat* becomes re-enchanted through the students' ascription of charisma to the *guru silat* in a process of institutionalized liminality. Eventually, I found the separation between the liminal and liminoid and between ritual and theatre to be unhelpful as these forms are compounded in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu.

However, along the way, another topic emerged from the ethnography. It will be remembered that the *guru silat* are warriors, healers, artists, religious virtuosos, sorcerers, and shamans and aim to transform their students through the tools that resemble shamanic or theatrical performance. Turner (1985: 300) and Schechner (1988a: 190; 1994: 630 Fig. 5) suggest that social drama feeds back into aesthetic drama which feeds back into social drama in a kind of infinity loop. This model provides an interesting hypothesis for the following chapter: in what ways do the social dramas experienced by the group find their way into theatrical productions, whilst theatre finds its own route into the training of the martial artists? Can the social dramas of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu help to make sense of Pa' Ariffin's theatrical production *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*? And to what extent does theatre enter into the training of martial arts?

I proceed to outline some of the social dramas experienced by the members of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu and give an account of the millennium camp in Janda Baik, forty day seclusions, taming the ego, Islamic conversion, and marriage by accident undergone by *silat* students visiting Malaysia. Changing tack, I regard the *Silat*:

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<sup>1</sup> What is the use of a container in the field, if it is not filled with grains of rice? What is the use of having long hair, if you fear death?" (Tuan Ismail 1991: 8).

*Dance of the Warriors*, a *silat* aesthetic drama staged in London with Malay *pesilat* who came to England under the direction of Pa' Ariffin, to stage a performance of violent schism followed by noble reconciliation.

## Silat Training in London

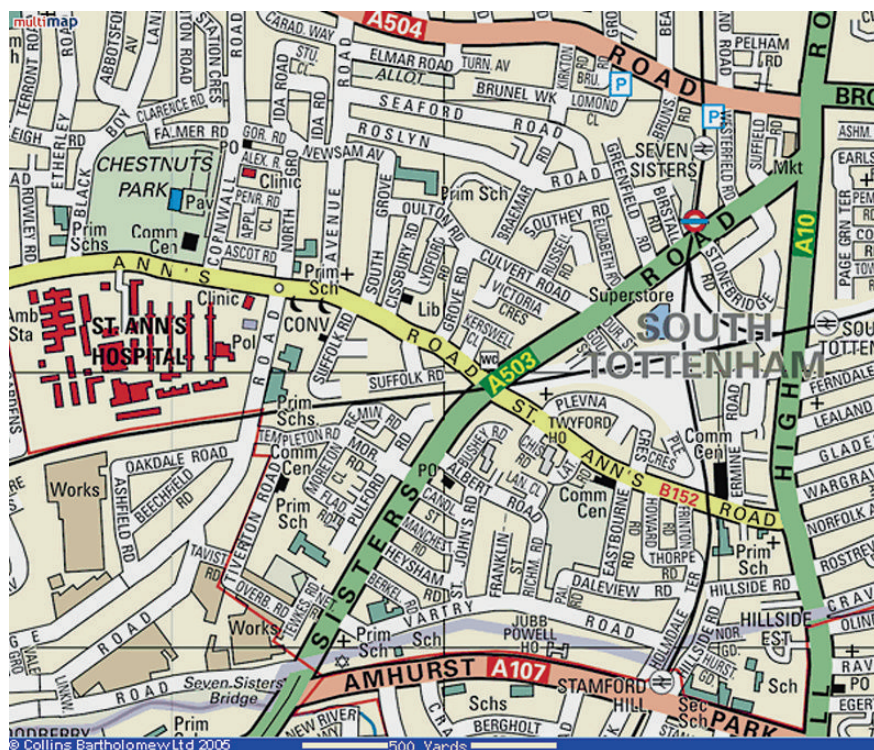
Seni Silat Haqq Melayu training took place in four North London venues: St. Ann's Mosque, Tottenham Green Sports Centre, Palmers Green Park, and Pa' Ariffin's house. Senior students met at Pa' Ariffin's house on Thursday nights where an introduction to clove cigarettes, mint tea, and to Sufi ideas would occur. Members of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu travelled to Malaysia to train *silat* for forty day periods. Students visiting Malaysia were strongly encouraged to attend the weekly *dhikr* sessions at the Naqshbandi *zawiya* in Kuala Lumpur.

After Saint Ann's Priory was purchased by the Haqqani Foundation it was renamed "Saint Ann's Mosque." This name puzzled me, because there is no Saint Ann in Islam, a mystery I will return to later.<sup>2</sup> Saint Ann's Mosque superseded Peckham Mosque in South London as the main Naqshbandi headquarters in the United Kingdom (Kabbani 1995: 35). Peckham was considered to be a "black" area of London, although its population reflects a great diversity of ethnic identities and includes first wave immigrants as well as those who are long established in the area. South Tottenham's population was more diverse than Peckham's and included people of Jamaican, African, Asian (mainly Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Sikh) descent, and a small community of Hasidic Jews. Peckham was one of the roughest parts of London with a high degree of street crime; South Tottenham was not as rough, but the road leading up to St. Ann's Mosque was a notorious red light district of curb-crawlers and streetwalking sex workers (Map 6.1). It was not surprising that people living in or around these areas would want to learn self-defence.

Formerly a convent, St. Ann's Mosque became a Sufi traveller's lodge (*zawiya*). It was a large Victorian building with dirty red brick walls, a grey slate roof, and a private tarmac courtyard. Inside, the building was a maze of cold stone and hard wood, with multiple stairways and dozens of corridors giving access to halls, offices, apartments, and classrooms which squat over the cellar kitchen and dining area. A peaked roof topped with a crucifix stretches toward the heavens. On the outside the building looks like a church, but ascending to the top of the staircase I found the robed and bearded conclave of the Shaykh. There is a breach between appearance and reality, convent and Sufi centre. Perhaps leaving "Saint Ann's" in the name signified a certain tolerance and respect, where foreign Sufi powers behaved like cautious strangers who accepted and accommodated cultural difference. Or perhaps it meant something else.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Ann is the mother of the Virgin Mary, and basically an apocryphal figure designed to fill a logical gap rather than a known historical figure. Saint Ann's Mosque has subsequently been renamed the Haqqani Islamic Priory.



**Map 6.1** South Tottenham. (St. Ann's Mosque is marked conv, next to St. Ann's Hospital)<sup>3</sup>

*Silat* training took place in the convent main hall, as well as outdoors in Palmers Green Park. Students would train between three and five times per week, whatever the weather, even in the pounding rain. Lessons were charged at a flat rate of £10 or £12, a single lesson costing the same as training three or sometimes five times per week. Initially Pa' Ariffin hand-picked the students, and the club grew through word of mouth and personal introduction. Advertising was condemned as a ploy used by those who commoditised martial arts as a means to make money. There was an implicit critique of capitalism in the creation of a boundary between the alienated realms of commercial activity and the sacred realm of *silat* training. The club was exclusive; many attempted to join, but only those invited were welcome. The policy of membership through invitation helped to sponsor a mood of *communitas* among the members (Turner 1969: 113, 1982: 45, 48). In 1996 the membership of the club stood at about sixty individuals, with approximately fifteen females to forty-five males. Mostly born or brought up in London, the students came from a wide range

<sup>3</sup> Source: "Multimap" at 1:10000 Scale. See <<http://www.multimap.com>>.



of backgrounds and reflected the cosmopolitan makeup of the area. They bridged a wide range of socio-economic strata including taxi-drivers, college students, the unemployed, and teachers, clerical and professional workers. Some of the students were experienced kung fu practitioners; there was also a *taijiquan* master, a karate black belt, several professional bodyguards, an estate agent, a builder, a musician and a professional dancer.

Training usually lasted for about 3 h. The martial arts practice required that students suspend their fear and their concept of the impossible. The stances were held extremely low with the knees hyperextended and back kept straight. The lessons were arduous, painful and sometimes dangerous. Students (*pesilat*) were taught dramatic gymnastic and acrobatic manoeuvres such as running and diving headfirst over seven or more men and women, somersaults, flips, spinning and jumping kicks, alongside intricate circling stepping patterns with their hands twisting and turning like serpents. Although the movements were dance-like and graceful, the *silat* practitioners would punctuate them with uniform savage yells of “zaaaaaat” (*zat*). We were informed that we were learning the royal Malay *silat*, an ancient indigenous martial art hitherto reserved exclusively for the Malay nobility. Footwork, ground fighting, kicks, locks, punches, slaps, sweeps, takedowns and throws were standard fare. Typically the first hour of a class would be spent warming up, stretching, diving, falling and rolling. The second hour involved repetition of a lengthy series of movements (*juros*) done slowly in low stances, accompanied by Malay drumming (*gendang*). For the last hour of training students would practise *buah*. During the class time Pa’ Ariffin would either grunt commands to tell the students to change position, or beat the drums as they performed sets of movements. To teach the takedowns and kicks he would demonstrate techniques, but he seldom participated in the actual training.<sup>4</sup>

Except for Saturday afternoons in the sports centre, lessons were conducted at night in the dark. The dress code was baggy black pants and long sleeved V-necked black tops. One had to peer hard to observe the nearest student dressed in black whirring around in silence, suddenly punctuated by guttural screams into the darkness. Poor visibility was compounded in winter when we trained outside in the biting cold wind and the pouring rain, steaming or freezing, and sliding around in the mud whilst vainly trying to avoid the ubiquitous dog-shit of London’s parks. Unquestioning silence reigned except for the obligatory shout released on the performance of most of the strikes. The smell of sweat was masked by musty herbal liniment (*minyak gamat*), or by the sharper lemongrass scent of Bee Brand Oil (a mosquito repellent). Once a week, clad in heavy black Michelin-man impact jackets, students would engage in the semi-controlled violence of sparring. Sword training was conducted with rolled up newspapers that would go soggy and limp in the rain. The weapons training was far different from that in Malaysia where Brazilian

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<sup>4</sup> *Guru silat* will often sit in the doorway of the *gelanggang* smoking cigarettes and chatting to their friends, leaving their senior students to conduct the drills. They do not compete with the students in the exercises, nor hogg the time primarily for their own martial development.

*parangs* are routinely used for practice, and where the idea of training with sticks for safety, let alone soggy newspapers, would be met with derisive laughter.

## Seclusion

Seni Silat Haqq Melayu practitioners underwent self mortification as part of their *silat* training (Goffman 1961). The forty day retreats of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu were a version of the forty day retreats of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*. Naqshbandi ideas fused with Malay *silat* to provide a cultural field in which and through which selves are crafted (Kondo 1990). In Seni Silat Haqq Melayu each step of the journey through the stages of the *silat* system corresponded to stages of attainment in the Sufi quest. An important aspect of Sufi practice is to shut a disciple away on the order of the Shaykh for a period of seclusion intended to free the heart from connection to this world of material pleasures and to bring it to a state of remembrance of God, Almighty and Exalted. During seclusion countless visions occur. Seclusion elevates a disciple to a state of knowing the self, and from there to a state of knowing God (Kabbani 1995: 43).

The traditional solitary Sufi retreat (*khalwa*) usually takes place over a minimum period of forty days and forty nights.<sup>5</sup> It is through seclusion that the *murid* is lifted up towards the presence of God, and through which the Sufi acquires the legendary mystical powers of communing with the dead, of simultaneously appearing in several places miles apart, and of walking on water. The draft edition of *The Naqshbandi Handbook of Daily Practices* circulated among the Naqshbandi *murids* commences with the following exhortation:

I intend to perform the forty days of retreat,  
I intend to retreat in isolation,  
I intend to retreat in solitude,  
I intend to perform the retreat,  
I intend to follow the path,  
I intend to perform the spiritual practices,  
for Allah the highest in this place of worship.<sup>6</sup>

The retreat requires isolation and solitude and so the *murid* is locked away in a windowless room for forty days and forty nights. *Murids* are supposed to pray and

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<sup>5</sup> For an example of a forty day seclusion see Özelsel (1996), who kept a diary of her retreat. The notion of forty days appears all across Southeast Asia. For example, forty days is the time required to elapse before the transplanting of *padi* (rice) (Tsubouchi 2001: 39), and Javanese newly-weds must decently wait forty days before consummating their marriage (Keeler 1987). Of course, the notion of forty days also has Biblical referents, for example, Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the desert confronting Satan (Matthew 4: 1).

<sup>6</sup> Kabbani (n.d.), parenthesis removed. The book has since been edited and published under the same title by Kabbani (2004).



perform *dhikr* given to them by their master and read the Holy Quran, if provided. Each day somebody brings a daily minimum of plain victuals, such as a bowl of cooked rice or lentils. Shaykh Nazim is said to have retreated into a cave for an entire year, surviving on only a handful of olives per day.

In one of Shaykh Raja Ashman's residences out in the jungle there is a room in a tower reserved for the purpose of the forty day retreat. At a dinner party the Prince once quipped that the room in the tower is called "the screaming room." At first, I thought this was a wry reference to the altered states of consciousness that prolonged isolation combined with meditation, fasting and prayer tend to produce. Visions are induced that may involve communication with the souls of the shaykhs, who though long dead may appear in the present. Or the initiate may travel back in time to communicate with the shaykh in the flesh (Kabbani 1995: 399–401; Shah 1956: 61). Later it became apparent that the screaming room is also where the evil spirits that have entered the possessed are exorcised, a procedure that may take several days.

In an adaptation of the individual Sufi practise of the *khalwa*, Seni Silat Haqq Melayu students progressed by following collective retreats, which they called "the forty days."<sup>7</sup> Shaykh Raja Ashman must authorize each retreat, and individuals could participate by invitation only. Although individual and collective retreats both involve ascetic experiences, where people are placed in a strange environment, and denied creature comforts, there are several differences between them. It is immediately apparent that the collective retreat does not engender the same degree of loneliness as the isolated *khalwa*. The collective retreat affords little independence from the monitoring of the *guru silat*, which meant that sleep deprivation was encouraged via external sources rather than being left to the conscience of the *murid*. Provided the acolyte was successful, the collective forty day *silat* retreat was supposed to culminate in ritual ordeals, including the ordeal by boiling oil, firewalking, jumping off a pyramid of ten men barefoot onto broken glass, or catching a spear thrown down a waterfall.<sup>8</sup>

For the forty days students must refrain from alcohol, smoking and sex. Male students shaved their heads signifying separation from their previous status. They slept for not more than 1 or 2 h in any 24 h period. Through these methods Haqqani *silat* attempts to change the students' attitudes, including their goals, desires, fears, likes and dislikes, and their behavior, including how they speak, dress, eat, sit and sleep. The consumption of food or drink must not occur whilst the *murid* is standing, and males should sit or squat to urinate. This corporeal conditioning is reinforced in the emotional and cognitive domain with myths, legends, tales, stories and Hadith.

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<sup>7</sup> Collective retreats are endorsed by Shaykh Nazim who was "many times told to go into seclusions which varied in length from forty days to one year. The seclusions also varied in the degree of isolation from outside contact: sometimes there was no contact; sometimes there was the small amount necessitated by performing the daily prayers in congregation; and sometimes more contact was permitted for attendance at circles gathering for lectures or *dhikr*" (Kabbani 1995: 399).

<sup>8</sup> These ordeals (though not the Haqqani retreats) form part of the progression through the grades of *silat gayong* (see Chapter 7).

## *Breaking the Ego*

“Torture” and “abuse” are the terms Pa’ Ariffin used to describe his training to become a Naqshbandi *imam* at the Sufi Centre in Los Angeles in the late 1980s. Insomnia ruled: *murids* were kicked awake in the middle of the night and had cold water poured over them if they slept. The collective retreat shares the boot-camp theme, and may last months rather than forty days. The collective retreat involves shaving the head, sleep deprivation, opprobrious shouted instructions and correctives, and holding painful stances for lengthy time periods including kneeling every morning for one-and-a-half hours of prayers.

The rationale given for the forty days is that the Naqshbandi Sufi, and hence the Sufi *silat* practitioner, must discipline the self and conquer the ego. According to Pa’ Ariffin, it is not about destroying the ego, but about taking control of it, and in order to do that one must first be aware of it. As Shaykh Nazim says:

Our soul ... is imprisoned. It is held in captivity by our ego. When our ego controls us and our bodies, we fall into the hands of the devil. This is because the ego, the *nafs*, is of the same kind as the devil. When they [pleasure and ego] come together like man and woman come together, a new being is born. Its name is ‘Evil’. Thus, crimes and sins are born. [...] If you do not control your ego, you fall into the hands of the most dangerous enemy of mankind, the devil. From then on you will never be happy (1997: 26–27).

Pa’ Ariffin used a story from the Hadith to make the point that the ego is like a donkey—you should ride it, rather than let it ride you. The Prophet Muhammad said: “Did you ever see a man carrying a donkey? Surely he should be riding it instead.” Furthermore, “one man could conquer a nation easier than he could conquer his own ego” (Pa’ Ariffin). Quashing the ego involves conquering the animal within in order to strengthen the angelic side of the self and is known as the greater *jihad* as compared to Holy War which is the lesser *jihad*.

For the Naqshbandi, the self is composed of two elements: the good, higher, angelic side (*akal*) versus the animal or shaytanic part of self. Breaking the ego is done to enable the higher side of the self, *akal* (reason) to subordinate the lower. In this way a person learns to ride their ego. The higher side of the self is comprised of two elements, one secular, the other profane, namely the human and angelic parts of the self. The human part of the self suffers from internal enemies, the lower spirit, which manifests itself through addiction and bad habits, aggression, anger, envy, excessive lust, greed, jealousy, laziness, pride, selfishness and vanity. A central idea behind the camp was to tame the ego by bringing the animal out during forty days of sleep deprivation, so that the human and angelic side of the self can bring it under control.

The Naqshbandi martial artist underwent ego taming in order to learn to control fear and anger in combat situations. In Seni Silat Haqq Melayu attacks must be analysed and evaluated, and counter-strikes and defensive manoeuvres should be thought through in the sense that the mind should be present.<sup>9</sup> Counters should

<sup>9</sup> A similar perspective is found in *baguazhang* (Frantzis 1998: 227, 231).

not occur via trained reflexes or blind rage. Pa' Ariffin emphasized that there is a tendency for people to "come out of their head" during combat, a temporary form of madness where they lose control of their actions and of the situation (similar to *amok*). Coming out of the head applies particularly to reflex styles of martial arts that encourage an animal to take over, for example, an eagle, praying mantis, snake or tiger. The anti-reflex notion contrasts with other martial arts which respond to attack through conditioned reflexes claiming there is no time to think during a fight. However, for Pa' Ariffin reflex martial arts are merely a product of a street fighting mentality, and are inadequate for battle because the moves are not thought through. It is better to step with deliberate intent as if making a move in a game of chess. Moreover, for a martial art to be truly effective it has to be fully human, and not based upon the reflexive fighting movements of animals.

Gaining control of the animal is supposed to make one impervious to pain and give superhuman martial arts abilities. From the perspective of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu it is argued that this method contrasts with other forms of *silat*, especially Javanese *silat*, and the *kuda kepang* performance, where performers enter a state of trance (*menurun*) prior to performing *silat* techniques or performing stunts such as walking on broken glass or eating it. In a neat transformation, in Pa' Ariffin's style, performers take control of the animal, rather than allow the animal spirit to control them, which is one way to interpret the Sufi saying "ride your ego." Overcoming the ego is part of a lifelong endeavour for individuals to constantly battle against the lower self and the legions of *Shaytan* that would influence, invade and possess them through it.

The actions, ideas, symbols, interpretations, and adaptations of the *murids* were to a lesser or greater degree subject to surveillance by the Naqshbandi hierarchy. Nothing was supposed to be done without permission.<sup>10</sup> Permission had to be obtained for the simplest of independent actions such as smoking a cigarette, choosing which books to read, or deciding what to eat for dinner. The students said that the worst aspect of the forty days was not the sleep deprivation, but what they called—out of earshot of the *guru silat*—"the bitch treatment." This is where the *guru silat* deliberately attempted to break the student's ego through vituperation, shouting, accusation, recrimination and the malicious manipulation of meaning. The *pesilat* or *murid* was supposed to surrender to this treatment as if he or she were a corpse being washed in the hands of their master. Day in, day out, it slowly wore them all down.

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<sup>10</sup> Nielson makes the following point: "At all normal times, i.e. when Shaykh Nazim is not visiting, it is the autonomy of the local group which is most characteristic of the order. At the level of ideal construction, therefore, the order is transnational, while at the level of existence in society it is local. 'Translocal' might be a more appropriate term" (Nielson 1998). This muddled formula loses sight of the patrimonial chain of command: the most characteristic feature of the order is that it is aristocratic, and there are many times that are far from normal even when Shaykh Nazim is on another continent.

## *The Collective Forty Day Retreat*

*Silat* students were keen to go on “camps” to increase their skills under the supervision of the *guru silat*. I attended two *silat* camps in Malaysia with Pa’ Ariffin, one out in the forest reserve of Janda Baik 36 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur, the other at his house in Bangsar. In this section I focus mainly upon the camp in Janda Baik in 1999. Visitors from England arrived at the camp a month before Ramadan, with the intention to train *silat*. They brought two container loads of possessions with them including sleeping bags, clothes, tinned food, nappies, and bows and arrows. Pa’ Ariffin and Moone brought Abu, their cat. Some practitioners quit their jobs in readiness for a prolonged trip.

Just over half of Pa’ Ariffin’s forty or so regular British students attended the camp, and were joined in the immediate run up to the millennium by about the same number of Malays. Students expected forty days of training that would test or break their egos (*nafs*). Some broke more than their egos, for example, SAS John fell off a scooter and broke his collar bone. Pa’ Ariffin sent him to a bone setting masseur to fix it, but John could not stand the pain and left the camp soon thereafter, without the blessing of Pa’ Ariffin. The forty days involves a kind of social death, as Kabbani points out:

The seeker must do as the Prophet [pbuh] said, “Die before you die.” He must leave his natural will, which causes him to move according to his mind, and leave all his affairs to the will of the shaykh. The shaykh will lift him up through a path filled with difficulties, train him through worship, and guide him to a state of complete self-effacement. Only this will elevate him to the Divine Presence (Kabbani 2004: 33, italics removed).

The notion of Ramadan as a “torture test” for westerners is appropriate here, as instead of reversing night for day the students were awake for most of the day *and* for most of the night. During Ramadan *silat* training in Malaysia comes to a halt as students are encouraged to fast instead. Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, smoke, or engage in sexual activities during the daylight hours. At the end of Ramadan things livened up and some of the converts performed the *korban* (sacrifice) to experience the thrill of cutting the throat of a sheep, goat or buffalo. If a person is not prepared to kill an animal then they should not eat meat: *korban* reminds one of the sacrifices necessary to put meat on the table.

## *Daily Schedule*

*Pesilat* arose before dawn and commenced the day with an hour and a half of *solat* and *dhikr*. Subsequently, they trained martial arts sporadically throughout the day, interspersed with prayers until the last call to prayer was completed around 8 p.m., whereupon they sometimes trained *silat* until midnight. Some of the students continued to train during Ramadan although the *guru silat* did not participate. *Silat* training was often followed by several hours of sitting about drinking coffee with sleep

from 5 a.m. until 6.00 a.m., whereupon the regime commenced for another day. Constant sleep deprivation is a feature of the quotidian existence of Sufi shaykhs and *murids*: here religion is more like cocaine than opium.<sup>11</sup>

Pa' Ariffin's favourite phrase upon waking for a one-and-a-half-hour marathon of pre-dawn prayers was that "coffee is good in the morning," which was a hint for someone to go and make it. This would be the first of around eight to ten cups of coffee per day and per night. It would either be regular instant coffee laced with spoonfuls of delicious wild honey, or coffee *tongkat ali*, an indigenous herbal aphrodisiac that Malay men joke will lift the male's *sarung* after about a month of daily consumption. Women are reluctant to be seen drinking *tongkat ali*, apparently because it immediately sensitizes the vagina. To regular coffee we sometimes added a small dose of *majun*, an oily herbal medicine with the colour and consistency of hashish. The *majun* packet had a picture of the company founder on the box—none other than Pa' Hosni himself (see Chapter 3).

After prayers breakfast consisted of Malay coconut rice (*nasi lemak*) or flaky Indian pancakes (*roti canai*) eaten with curry.<sup>12</sup> Another meal would follow in the late afternoon or early evening, such as curry and rice, or noodles, or Kentucky Fried Chicken which tastes much better in Malaysia than in England. Mutton soup is considered a good supper. For special occasions roast mutton is served. Certain foods were strictly prohibited by Pa' Ariffin who sensibly declared that margarine is an unhealthy, unnatural, dyed yellow fat directly responsible for the western epidemic of clogged arteries and heart disease. Conversely, he said, butter is natural and healthy. In Malaysia hot water is given to the *pesilat* to drink after training *silat*. However, some western students preferred ice cold drinks, but these led to serious problems. The following morning students would awake so stiff that they could barely stand up, let alone kneel to pray in the morning. During periods of intense martial arts training ice is best avoided as stiff joints and sore muscles are hard to warm up and easy to strain or tear.

Things are different in England where students must spend a long time warming up in the winter months. In London, prior to training, students would sometimes down a can of coke, or a can of Red Bull, the Malaysian energy drink that consists of a massive dose of sugar, caffeine and taurine. Some students took pain killers prior to Pa' Ariffin's class to help them to endure hours of low stance training, and before he arrived some would occasionally "get blunted" on a little marijuana to help them get through the session. As far as I know *ganja* was not indulged in the Malaysian training camps, which is just as well considering the dangers of *parang* training.

Among the Haqqani the disposal of waste food is a problem because a single grain of rice is worth a whole *surah* (chapter) of the Holy Quran. If anybody left food uneaten on their plate Pa' Ariffin would either insist that they finish it, pack

<sup>11</sup> Pnina Werber (2003: 40) also notes the practice of sleep deprivation among Sufi "regional cults."

<sup>12</sup> A Malay TV chef pointed out that *roti canai* may contain 50 grams of fat per piece.

it for home, or eat it himself. Leftover food in the fridge would be long green with mould before being thrown away, and even then only binned with considerable reluctance followed by a strong verbal reprimand. The fridge became so stuffed with leftovers that there was not enough space for the shopping, so sooner or later a clear-out would be necessary, and somebody was sure to get a ferocious telling off.

### ***Verbal Mortification***

Just outside Janda Baik one evening, Siddique, a towering Pakistani student from London surveyed the restaurant dinner menu and proceeded to order. Pa' Ariffin flatly contradicted his choice, and when Siddique asked what was alright for him to eat, he ordered him to eat mutton soup. When the food arrived Siddique ate voraciously. Pa' Ariffin looked ready to explode; one student rolled his eyes, the other five looked down and kept quiet. For the next 10 min or so Pa' Ariffin barked a continuous barrage of invective punctuated by uncomfortable silences:

"Eat slowly." (Said loudly)

"Eat slowly!" (Shouting)

"Chew your food!" (Angry, repeated once more)

"There: why did you drop it down yourself?" (Gentle; condescending)

"Don't touch the food until you have swallowed what is in your mouth."  
(Irritated)

Pa' Ariffin then demonstrated how his father had taught him to eat, and put the spoon into his mouth with no head movement, chewing slowly with the mouth shut; eyes riveted on Siddique. Meanwhile the spoon was placed by the side of the plate, and only picked up again to select another morsel after the previous one had been swallowed. Siddique, with head bowed, continued to eat; slower now, but not slow enough for Pa' Ariffin, who said, glaring:

"Leave it alone."

"Don't move your head forward."

"Eat the fat. Leaving the fat causes health problems."

Siddique sat quietly and obeyed. Toward the end of the meal Pa' Ariffin said, in a conciliatory tone: "You must learn how to eat before I take you to see the Sultan. There you must eat as he eats, when and what he eats." Siddique then had the honour of paying for dinner for all of us. "It cost about thirty-six *ringit*, or about six quid," spat the *guru's* wife—the bitch treatment was a bandwagon that others would jump on. However, the strange question now arises as to whether Pa' Ariffin was actually telling off Siddique or somebody else in the group, through a *modus operandi* of "misdirection."

## *Misdirection*

*Misdirection* here refers to a speech-act that is not meant for the person to whom it is directed, but meant for somebody else. Appearance and reality are divorced, and significance is established not in the correspondence of the sign to the signifier, but within and through social relationships. For example, whilst Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Raja Ashman were visiting Singapore, Shaykh Nazim lectured almost a hundred followers from his seat as they crowded in front of him on the floor of a large Housing Development Board flat.<sup>13</sup> Later Pa' Ariffin said to Suleiman that:

I am certain that when Shaykh Nazim said to Julie: 'If he brings home a morsel of bread, don't complain, thank Allah', he really means you [Suleiman]. When Shaykh is speaking to this man, he is speaking to this [that] man. [He does so] Because of his mercy (from fieldnotes, Pa' Ariffin quoting Shaykh Nazim).

This was Pa' Ariffin's way of telling Suleiman that his wife should not complain to him about the money they were spending in Malaysia to pay for him to learn *silat*. In the same way verbal opprobrium was understood by members of the *silat* troupe to be aimed at another member of the group and not at the individual to whom it was addressed. The victim was criticized *in lieu* of the real target, who is not singled out because "their ego cannot take it" (Khalid). This indirect opprobrium created havoc because the *silat* students became uncertain whether they were being shouted at directly, or if someone else had done something wrong and was being set about through them. Furthermore, rather than gang up together against the *guru silat*, the students fell out with one another.

Ultimately, the students became inured to Pa' Ariffin's shouting and failed to take responsibility for their actions. Paradoxically, instead of recognizing their faults and doing something about them, the students congratulated themselves on their strength in carrying the burden of opprobrium for the other, therefore feeding their egos rather than squashing them. In the long run ego busting is a good way to lose your followers and your friends. In response to my question concerning the loss of so many of his best pupils including Cecily, Colin, Khalid, Paul, Chief, and SAS John between 2000 and 2003, Pa' Ariffin said that teaching *silat* is like selecting *padi* (rice) to plant: one selects the best four plants from an entire field, sows them in the four corners to produce a new crop, and discards the rest.

## *Averting Doomsday*

In the run up to the new millennium the Haqqani prepared for Doomsday (*Qiamat*), and gathered together in remote communities with stockpiles of food "just in case anything should happen."<sup>14</sup> Several retreats took place worldwide. Having received

<sup>13</sup> Eighty five percent of Singaporeans live in government flats.

<sup>14</sup> See also Geaves (2001); Kabbani (2003).





**Fig. 6.1** The Millennium Camp. From left, Moone, Siddique, Pa' Ariffin, Khalid and John

an invitation via email, I attended the one in Janda Baik (Fig. 6.1). Another retreat took place in Lebanon:

It was via the Internet that in 1999 preparations for the end of the world and the coming of the Mahdi were called for. Followers who obeyed the call to assemble in a village in Lebanon caused local consternation. When nothing happened, followers were confused, many finally accepting that Shaykh Nazim's prayers had averted the disaster (Nielson 1998: n.p.).

This explanation is similar to Festinger's et al. (1964) covert field experiment where a small army of researchers descended on a small-town American cult preparing for doomsday. Festinger et al. (1964) predicted that when the end of the world failed to occur it would contradict the belief of the cult, and make them re-remember, or re-categorize the meaning of the events due to the discomfort of simultaneously holding contradictory beliefs (cognitive dissonance). Festinger et al. (1964) also accurately predicted that despite the failure of its original aims the group would cohere around a new set of beliefs, and become stronger, a phenomenon backed up by a little known cult in Jerusalem which grew to be the world's largest religion upon the founder's crucifixion.

During and after the millennium camp the Seni Silat Haqq Melayu group more or less disbanded: several of the senior *silat* students including Khalid, Paul, Chief, and SAS John left the *guru silat* in acrimonious circumstances, having fallen out with each other and the *guru silat*. However, a few of the converts maintained their belief in Shaykh Nazim, and the Haqqani Malays' strong faith appeared unruffled.

Several *pesilat* re-categorized their perception of the *guru silat*. People were divided as to why they attended the camp: Naqshbandi *murids* and some *silat* practitioners such as Khalid's wife believed it was set up for doomsday; other *silat* students were only told it was for the purposes of training *silat*.

Prior to the millennium Khalid, the camp leader, fell out with Paul, who had responsibility for the vehicle, and said, "from now on, I'm on holiday." In the morning of the first day of the new millennium Khalid's wife spoke to me, "you were right," she said, "people are all here for different reasons." Then she went on to apologize for giving me "false information" about doomsday. The camp had failed: neither the Haqqani, nor the *pesilat*, nor those that were both had achieved their goal. However, having multiple competing reasons for the camp, rather than a singular "end of the world" notion, provided a cognitive escape route once the end of the world failed to occur: the camp could now claim to have been about *silat*, although very little *silat* had been taught, in part because of Ramadan, but also because Pa' Ariffin had his own ego-breaking orders, which were no longer to teach *silat*.

## Religious Orientation

Until recent times only Malay Muslims could undergo *silat* training in Malaysia and Singapore. The prerequisite of being born into Islam or conversion was typical of *silat* systems and fulfilled an ethnocentric gatekeeper function limiting access to Malays. This was sometimes justified with the claim that it is necessary to be a Muslim to understand the spiritual aspects (*ilmu batin*) of *silat*. Therefore only Malay Muslims can be given the keys (*kunci*) to unlock the secrets (*rahsia*) of the art. Social exclusion related to group security by ensuring that the local strategies of defence remained unknown to outsiders.

To become Malay (*masuk Melayu*) it is said that one merely needs to be a Muslim and follow the Malay *adat*. *Masuk Melayu* is a phrase that in itself suggests the porosity of the ethnic boundary. Nowadays, some *silat* teachers openly dispense with the religious requirement and are prepared to disclose their arts to individuals regardless of age, class, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation. Pa' Ariffin says: "My effort is to make *silat* appeal to all races and all cultures." However, when *silat* is transplanted from Malaysia into a secular environment, a moral loosening occurs that frees it from Malay norms. Sheik Alau'ddin in Singapore bluntly said that he will teach anyone who wants to learn, even prostitutes off the street.

In the U.K. *silat* classes there was less Islamic religious ritual than in Malaysia. London classes started and finished with a simple line up, *hormat*, and *sembah* compared to *silat gayong* classes in Kuala Lumpur where students sat in a circle and said *surah al-ikhlas* (purity of faith) before and after the training sessions. One might expect *silat* in England to be more disenchanted than in Malaysia, and for the students to enchant or re-enchant their art by visiting Malaysia. In Malaysia, the English fascination with the arcane and traditional is no doubt a mystery to locals intent on redefining and marketing the art for the purposes of cinema or sport.

Perhaps *silat* is more enchanted in England anyway, where New Age, shamanic, animist, Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu influences can emerge in an atmosphere free from religious censorship.

### ***Religious Conversion and Marriage***

Nielson (1998) says that to numerically ascertain the “membership” of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* is extremely difficult as it is a porous and amorphous organization. Indeed, one just needs to hang around them in order to “join” (Nielson 1998). My data sheds light on the processes of conversion to the Haqqani *tarekat*. I have argued that “members” may be identified through the *tawis* (see Chapter 4) although on the outer fringe parents and friends of initiates display or wear them for luck. Below, I discuss examples of conversion to Islam by accident or surprise. This makes marriage by accident seem less preposterous, a subject I tackle after conversion. Because both of these forms share the same internal logic, it is appropriate to discuss them together.

It should be noted that the Naqshbandi *tarekat* exact three explicit rules upon their followers, that is “permission” must be granted for marriage, divorce, and relocation. Although a few of Pa’ Ariffin’s students resisted conversion, most of them eventually converted to Islam in the Haqqani way. Some who had previously converted to Islam with other *guru silat* in England, alongside several Muslim students who were born into Islam also came under the spell of the *tarekat*. Non-Muslims would recite the formula to convert to Islam (the *shahadah*), and Muslims would take *bay’ah* (an oath of allegiance). A few who took the *shahadah* and who had proved themselves through the prayer sessions went on to take *bay’ah* and several students have accompanied Pa’ Ariffin on the *Hajj*. In this way Pa’ Ariffin combined the role of *silat* instructor, religious councillor, and tourist guide for Malaysia, Damascus and Mecca.

### ***Haqqani-Naqshbandi Conversion***

When students travelled to Malaysia they sometimes joined in the prayers, partly because they knew learning about Islam was required to learn the higher stages of *silat*, and partly because they wanted to keep their friends company and otherwise felt left out. At the cusp of the *fin de siècle* Shaykh Raja Ashman and his followers left for the *zawiya* from the millennium camp. The *zawiya* is a three hundred year old house built in a large T-shaped design on stilts of ironwood that the Shaykh had moved from Perak to Janda Baik (Fig. 1.1). The students walked down a long dark road to the house. During the trip from the camp to the jeep, and again along the path, Pa’ Ariffin asked one of the students (name withheld): “Are you ready?” Mystified, the *pesilat* replied: “Ready for what? But Pa’ Ariffin merely laughed the first time and ignored him completely the second.

Inside the richly carved house about five hundred people prayed in the main congregation with patches of latecomers praying separately in various corners. They chanted *dhikr* for a while, before lining up to *salaam* the Shaykh. Pa' Ariffin came over to the crowded corner where the same student stood with his back against the wall, and again asked if he was ready. The *pesilat* asked for some details, like was boiling oil or broken glass involved? It may seem bizarre, but the martial artists were all prepared to undergo the ordeal by boiling oil, or jump off a pyramid of ten men barefoot onto a bed of broken glass. But what came next took him by surprise.

The *pesilat* was ushered up in front of the Shaykh who seized his hand in a vice-like grip. Seven men surrounded them as total silence descended upon the hall. Hand after hand was clamped on top of and below their grip, with Faizal providing the seal by placing his right hand on top of all the hands and his left underneath. Enormous physical pressure was applied. Pa' Ariffin held his student's shoulders from behind, and everyone in the *zawiya* stretched out their right hand to rest it upon the right shoulder of the person immediately in front of them. The whole hall surged towards them as the gigantic spider's web contracted. The Shaykh quickly asked if the *pesilat* was taking *bay'ah* or the *shahadah* and Pa' Ariffin indicated the latter. Then the Prince commanded: "Repeat after me," and following his cue, the *pesilat* uttered the sacred phrase of Islam: "*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa-llah, wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhu rasulu-llah,*" at first in a quiet voice and then louder due to a sharp glance from the Shaykh.<sup>15</sup> He was then named after one of the Prophets. The conversion bestowed a spiritual connection to Shaykh Raja, Shaykh Nazim, the Prophet Muhammad, and to Allah.

At least ten of the twenty or so non-Muslim students of Pa' Ariffin converted to Islam. One day, whilst they were seated in the camp dorm, someone tossed a book called *The Essence of Islam* to a *silat* student. At first he did not pick up the book, but then he picked it up and put it straight down again, saying "I'm not into that yet" (name withheld). Nevertheless, he converted by the end of January in the Kuala Lumpur *zawiya*, and said the experience was overwhelming. Other students who had converted to Islam in 1998 went on *Hajj* with Pa' Ariffin. Yet when I met some of them again in 2003, virtually all traces of Islamic identity were gone. They had reverted (*murtad*) and were practicing *pencak silat* in London under a devout Christian teacher, who was teaching them *silat harimau*, and getting them to stare into a mirror for forty days until they could see their souls (see Chapter 4). It should be noted that unlike William James (1907), for whom conversion to Christianity was a simple matter that cost little, excepting the occasional attendance at a boring church sermon, conversion for the purposes of learning *silat* is a more risky strategy, especially since leaving Islam to enter another religion, or becoming apostate carries the penalty of death under Islamic law.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The sacred words of power in Islam, called the *shahadah* are: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His servant and Messenger."

<sup>16</sup> Historically, as Reid (1993:183) notes: "When a Eurasian bondservant of a rich Malay in Makassar was executed by kris in 1644 for having reverted to Christianity after converting to

Western *silat* students are clearly willing to undertake a pragmatic conversion for the sake of learning *silat*. By “pragmatic conversion” I mean conversion to a religion with motives that are other than devotional, whether for the purposes of marriage, or the acquisition of knowledge or property. Pragmatic, or “calculated conversion,” to employ Chou’s (2003: 38) term, is one way to conceptualize what is going on with the *silat* students, who believed that they needed to convert before they could navigate the depths of *silat*.<sup>17</sup>

Many anthropologists of Southeast Asia have noted the tendency of their Malay informants to adopt them (*angkat*), and expect them to dress like Malays in a *sarung* (Raybeck 1996) and *songkok* (Peletz 2002), even when the result clearly looks misleading or ridiculous, and to use convert names such as Siti or Abdullah. All this is part of the project of persuading outsiders to act and look like Malays, and even to become Malays (*masuk Melayu*), as the Irish historian Mubin Sheppard did *par excellence*. The Malay evangelical tendency may be regarded as a kind of open invitation, or more darkly as a form of cultural imperialism, but either way it raises issues concerning Malay anxiety, ethnocentrism and identity.

Sir Richard Burton [1893] (1964) who was perhaps the first Englishman to make the expedition to *Haji*, pretended he was an Egyptian as opposed to converting to Islam, saying that in all Islam no one trusts a convert and that they are universally despised. However, this does not seem to be the case in Malaysia. For example, the late Mubin Sheppard, the historian, Malaysianist, civil servant, and founder of the Muzeum Negara in Kuala Lumpur, who was called Mervin Sheppard before he converted, is still held in great esteem. Sheppard married a Malay princess, Tunku Kamariah of Kedah. Moose told me proudly that “he [Sheppard] became not just Muslim, he became Malay,” and that a “lot of Malay practices contradict Islam; don’t forget the Malays used to be Hindus—he was a Malay first.” Sheppard is remembered for his books, for visiting forty different mosques every Friday once he returned from *Haji*, and for sharing the occasional bottle of whisky with Yeop Mahidin.

Haqqani converts are not necessarily expected or desired to exhibit exemplary behaviour. They are expected to follow, not lead. In fact, the converts who received

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Islam, this was explained as not by order of the king but in consequence of Islamic law having to take its course (Santo Ignacio 1644: 59).”

<sup>17</sup> In the early 1990s Cynthia Chou performed field research with the *Orang Laut* of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, formerly referred to as the “sea-gypsies” or “sea-pirates.” Chou leans heavily on Vivienne Wee’s (1985) thesis on the Riau Archipelago, asserting that historically the *Orang Laut* are Malays, but only marginally so, and of the lowest rank. Chou contends that the *Orang Laut* are what the Malays could be minus Islam, and that they offer an alternative historical trajectory as they have no religion, unless they have recently converted to one. In this regard Chou mentions their “calculated conversion,” making use of the notion of “resistance efforts” where, to paraphrase Chou (2003: 38) the *Orang Laut* are shown to resist the idea of centralized Malay power and purity flowing from the top to the bottom of the status pyramid. Following Scott (1985: 29–34), Chou shows how they resist the “evil” and “smelly” Malay domination through “dissimulation, calculated conformity, false compliance, feigned ignorance and slander” (Farrer 2004).

the most scathing “bitch treatment” from Pa’ Ariffin were precisely the fanatical variety he called “sufi-goofies,” who were roundly condemned for donning veils and cheap Pakistani clothes, changing their identity, abandoning their employment, and for not being themselves. The ambivalent and contradictory attitude of the convert, alongside issues of pragmatic conversion, de-conversion, and re-conversion, neatly demonstrates the ambiguity of the conversion phenomenon.

The ambiguity is further heightened in modern Malaysia, because Islam has undergone a degree of state rationalization, and to officially convert, say for the purposes of marriage, requires taking a course followed by a test. Under *shariah* law Islamic conversion is legally compulsory in order for a non-Muslim male to marry a Muslim female.<sup>18</sup> Experiencing dramatic religious performances of conversion, but without government tests and certificates, the pragmatic *silat* converts did not convert in quite such a disenchanted way as do calculated converts who do so for the purposes of marriage alone. After all, Pa’ Ariffin’s students possessed a genuine desire to learn *silat*, albeit combined with a holistic yet pragmatic New Age view of the underlying mystical phenomena that they desired to engage with.

### *Becoming Naqshbandi*

For some *silat* students, and for many of the Malays in this study, becoming Naqshbandi is a genuine affair of the heart, an emotional issue that comes to dominate their conscious awareness and to regulate their daily behaviour. The Haqqani included individuals managing or reconfiguring spoiled identities (Goffman 1986), such as gangsters, heroin addicts, drug dealers, alcoholics, sex-workers, wife-beaters, politicians, members of the Afghan *mujahideen*, Croatian militia, a Scottish Lord, a Welsh Prince, several long term unemployed from the U.K., and others suffering from some form of mental illness.

The Naqshbandi *tarekat* also included some Malays whose identity was perceived to be or felt to be somehow spoilt. Many young Malays drifted from the fold of Islam during the 1970s, experiencing the pleasures of western entertainment, rock-music and the drug scene. Listening to the radio in Malaysia I finally figured out the meaning of the Deep Purple song, *Smoke on the Water*.

Pa’ Ariffin related his predicament and subsequent conversion saying that he was born into it [Islam], but that he turned away from it for girls, drugs and drink at an early age. Who is going to want a religion that forbids you from taking girls, especially when girls are just dying to be with you? (laughs). Then he says that he almost turned Christian, but he couldn’t accept the whole three in one thing, and the idea that Jesus died on the cross. He got into Transcendental Meditation in the early 1980s, under the influence of European friends, and converted to [the] Naqshbandi in 1986 (from fieldnotes).

Formally taking *bay’ah* and becoming accepted as a *murid* by a Shaykh is a sign that the Muslim has embarked upon a path towards redemption. Therefore, rather

<sup>18</sup> On state rationalisation in Malaysia see Peletz (2002).



than merely rationalizing death, Sufism fulfils the function of the salvation of the damned, but in this world, prior to the hereafter.

Following Shaykh Raja Ashman virtually the entire Mahidin family embraced the Haqqani-Naqshbandi *tarekat* in 1986. This is in line with historical research that suggests conversion to Islam in Southeast Asia occurred first with the Sultan embracing the faith, then his retinue, proceeding inexorably to the rest of the Malay population.

### *Marriage by Accident*

Pa' Ariffin was married to Moone by surprise. One morning the Prince turned up at his house and told him this was the day for his *nikah* (exchange of vows). Sumptuous Malay clothes and a feast (*kenduri*) were provided for the occasion, attended by Naqshbandi *murids*, family members and guests. This contrasts to the expensive and elaborate ceremonies usually embarked upon by Malays when they marry, which take six months or more to prepare, involve large numbers of both families, and cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Such surprises normally occur at those liminal moments of heightened religiosity when Shaykh Nazim, Shaykh Kabbani, or Shaykh Hisham are in town. At one of the gatherings of the group the individuals to be wed will be asked if they would like to be married by the Shaykh. To demur would appear churlish and curry disfavour with one's partner, other members of the order, and the higher echelons, and cause the couple to lose face. To dissent may cause the couple to split, especially if one remains within the *tarekat* and the other exits. If both parties remain within the *tarekat*, another attempt to marry them may be made at a later date, although a different partner may be chosen from within the ranks, possibly somebody they barely know or have never met.

Chief's back problem was believed to have been caused by his ex-girlfriend's witchcraft. She had accepted her lover's proposal of marriage, but as a Filipino Catholic she refused to convert to Islam. Chief was informed by Pa' Ariffin that he had a *jinn* in his back which had permission to be there from Shaykh Nazim—everything in existence must have his permission simply in order to be—but which had originally entered due to the black magic performed upon him by his ex-girlfriend, a Filipino witch (see also Chapter 4). Chief was told to leave his girlfriend, and that his cure was to stop womanising and find someone to take as his wife. Chief dropped his girlfriend and subsequently married Sabah, another member of the *tarekat*.

Given ethnography, experience, and hindsight the "surprise" is revealed to be carefully planned and orchestrated. Information is sought and gathered on potential candidates, a plan is hatched, and the performance carried off. As they occur accidental marriage and conversion appear as a harmless Naqshbandi joke, but this obscures the meticulous gathering of intelligence that permeates sympathetic social networks which is followed up by well-timed decisions. In this sense accidental



conversion and marriage may come as a surprise for the individual; whilst for the *tarekat* such surprises are standard operating procedure.

## Shadows of St. Ann's

Rashid (1990: 77) notes that the *guru silat* is the director of a séance of “dead” heroes, where the procedure of summoning the dead is part of *ilmu ghaib*. However, he goes on to say that

The fact that *silat* performers can only summon their skills in self-defence and combat in an altered state prompts mainline *silat* groups which emphasize the *bunga* and *buah* techniques to dismiss *silat ghaib* as improper and deviant (Rashid 1990: 77).

In these terms Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is not deviationist, as it emphasizes *bunga* and *buah* as opposed to relying on trance. However, I found the picture to be less clear cut than Rashid suggests, because there exists a strong resonance between the concept of *ghaib* and the practice of *silat* even in mainstream supposedly non-deviationist styles backed by the Malaysian government.

Malay warriors are only one set of the servants or shadows of the Prophet Mohammad available to be summoned. Why stop at warriors? Why not call caliphs, immortals, shaykhs and even prophets? In other styles of *silat* I have learned *jampi* that call upon Mohammad and the four righteous caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman and Ali. For the Haqqani the invocation need not be complex; it could be as easy as *bismillah* or *laillahaillala*. It is not the words that count. Although sacred, the words of the Holy Quran are empty shells until they are invigorated by the Shaykh. What is important is who says these words and whether they have authority, permission, and the *baraka* of the Shaykh needed to render them effective. For example, Pa' Ariffin said he cured someone in London with just a touch whilst saying *bismillah*. Incredible, someone present asked how the cure could be so simple, to which Pa' Ariffin replied that to effect a cure what was needed was not merely a holy word or touch, but the authority of Shaykh Nazim.

Whereas in *silat ghaib* a collection of warriors battle it out in the *gelanggang*, in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu there are an assortment of ancestors, caliphs, prophets, shaykhs and warriors, each of which is accompanied by or may be summoned through a shadow. Chief became Abdul-Rahman, Simon became Suleiman, and John became Nazim. Each is a piece on the chessboard of the king, selected and named by the prince or the bishop; and each is somehow connected to the shadow or the essence of the name; a shadow of him or herself. If Malay *guru silat* can call warriors then what, in the end of days, is to stop the Haqqani from calling prophets? The end of the world approaches, not just singly, for each of us must inevitably die, but collectively, as the last days accelerate toward the Day of Judgement.

The shadows called in England are local ones available to the believer, such as the Prophet Isa (Jesus), along with Khidr (St. George). In London, with the final

downward elbow strike to close the class they all yell *Isa*—"EEESAAAAHRR." The Haqqani regard Jesus and St. George as potent in the west, which is otherwise considered a notorious spiritual vacuum. Calling or maintaining long established local saints, warriors, or prophets is a mark of respect, of recognition, and supplies the logic of maintaining "St. Ann" in St. Ann's Mosque.

## Back to the Theatre

It will be remembered that the play *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* featured an hour and a half of warring factions slashing at one another with *parangs*. During the rehearsals one *pesilat* had his finger chopped off and had to be rushed to hospital with it in a plastic bag on ice. Another girl had her face and eye cut open. In the closing scenes of the actual performance the violent factions are united and the schism was healed by the benevolent Sultan, played by Pa' Ariffin. The play was staged in London with an all-Malay cast and a full musical accompaniment (Fig. 6.2).<sup>19</sup>

Pa' Ariffin had appeared in a previous production in Kuala Lumpur with some performers from Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia, including Jas, who is Cikgu Kahar's son. When I went to Malaysia to perform the forty days with Pa' Ariffin, Moone, Suleiman, Yasmin, and Chief in 2001, the forty days never commenced. Pa' Ariffin suggested instead we shift it to twenty days, and then suddenly, without explanation, enrolled us all on an instructor's course in *silat gayong*. This led up to the *mandi minyak*, followed by the show. Once we were well under way with the training he said of *silat gayong* that "it's only theatre!" The martial arts training was a form of prolonged rehearsal, and a means to find and recruit actors.

Pa' Ariffin directed the production, took the lead role, and appeared on the posters advertising the show wearing his best *silat Melayu* attire holding a *keris* whilst adopting a dragon posture. Although Pa' Ariffin's former star pupil, Cecily, a professional dancer, actress, and herself now a *silat* instructor had requested a part in the play, he refused. The show was to go on with a Malay only cast. One day an elderly Malay professor was standing outside the theatre and Pa' Ariffin offered him a part in the show. He performed a little skit of his own at the beginning of the show, and gave a mini-lecture on *silat* at the end of each night's performance. Cikgu Kahar, the black belt instructor, insisted on accompanying his students to London for the production, which Pa' Ariffin considered an additional and unnecessary expenditure. Cikgu Kahar and his students stayed together in the former Haqqani headquarters, Peckham mosque, for almost two weeks.

When I visited the Malay performers they complained of the freezing November cold weather and grumbled that they did not have enough money to buy warm clothes

<sup>19</sup> The musical accompaniment was provided by Sanggar Theatre Fauziah Nawi Productions and Ahimsa Productions in Conjunction with Silat Melayu U.K.



**Fig. 6.2** *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*

or go visiting. Pa' Ariffin was nowhere to be seen and had fallen out with the producers, Chief and another student, who had raised the £40,000 needed to stage the show. A dispute occurred with Chief and Pa' Ariffin over the price of the drums when Chief, after checking the correct price with the musicians, accused Pa' Ariffin of charging him double what the drums had cost. Their hitherto close relationship detonated with the promise of violent retribution from Pa' Ariffin, who strenuously denied the allegations. Significantly, Cikgu Kahar took sides with the students, but the instructors had fallen out earlier in Malaysia when Cikgu Kahar announced that he would have to accompany his students to England or else the show would not go on.

The show went ahead despite the battle between the director and producer and the tension between the teachers. But the current rifts were only the fresh wounds, as old sores festered in the audience. With the exception of Cecily nearly all of the students who had once been part of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu attended, as did several prominent figures from the London martial arts community. This atmosphere provided ideal terrain for the circulation of malicious gossip and rumours, the most prominent being that Pa' Ariffin was a fraud who had learned his *silat* from videos and books, and then served up the results to his students. Later several of Pa' Ariffin's embittered ex-students claimed that he regularly forgot the moves he taught, and had to make his students perform the moves so that he could remember them.

Although playing the lead role, Pa' Ariffin was upstaged by a young man who performed a set of moves from *silat harimau* immediately following Pa' Ariffin's

*sembah*. Pa' Ariffin seemed bemused by his moves in contrast to the sure-footed tiger that followed. This energetic youth had intense focus, superb coordination, and the ability to project from the stage to the audience the larger-than-life persona of the tiger. He appeared to go into a trance as the animal within was unleashed. Watching his sublime performance was to see the spirits of the tiger and of the eagle emerge through human flesh.

In conclusion, the infinity loop model, where social drama mirrors aesthetic drama and vice versa, provides a powerful tool with which to organize and understand the diverse array of ethnographic material I have presented here. The theatre is not peripheral to Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, but provides its *raison d'être*. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, video, theatre, and television all feed into the construction of *silat* in the modern era, and Seni Silat Haqq Melayu is best understood as the design of a choreographer, actor and director. Indeed for Pa' Ariffin the martial art of *silat* really is a form of theatre, where *buah* is a rehearsal for combat. The social dramas I have outlined are not all reflected in the play *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*, but certainly the most agonistic elements have found their reflection.<sup>20</sup> However, the aesthetic drama, although it represents in some way the schisms in Pa' Ariffin's group, did little to repair the damage incurred by attempting to break their egos.

Far from any rifts being healed, the show deepened the divide between Pa' Ariffin and nearly all of his former students who had been cast off like excess *padi*. Meanwhile, he dipped once again into a new pool of eager followers who gladly replaced their forgotten seniors in the struggle to become one of the four corners. These new followers were encouraged by the apparent success of *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*, and by Pa' Ariffin's subsequent move onto the big screen with the film *Puteri Gunung Ledang*. However, no doubt many of the neophytes will be cast off in their turn. The resolution of conflict played by the benevolent Sultan is the wish fulfilment of an end to the violence of continually ruptured relationships.

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<sup>20</sup> As Victor Turner pointed out: "Neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life, is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but a metrical mirror; at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost and discarded" (1985: 301).

## Chapter 7

# Divination and Revelation

*Man cannot tolerate darkness; he must have light, whether it be the sunlight of revelation or the flaring torch of divination (Turner 1975: 29).*

Because of their work in the unseen realm (*alam ghaib*) I have argued that the Malay *guru silat* must be rethought as a kind of war magician. In this section I thicken the description and examine the work of the *guru silat* in the unseen realm; first with a chapter regarding their initiation rituals, and second, with a chapter tackling their beliefs and practices in relation to death. In this chapter I outline the initiation rituals of *silat gayong*, the main organization from which Seni Silat Haqq Melayu emerges, in relation to divination and revelation. Cikgu Ezhar defines *gayong* as “to dip into the well of the unseen” and it is through divinatory and revelatory rituals that *silat gayong* practitioners’ access and influence the hidden reality of the spiritual realm. In the *silat gayong* divination rites the shadows of deceased heroes are called upon to define the personality and potential of the initiate. The members of *silat gayong* perform three ritual baths of initiation, specifically, the *mandi limau* (lime bath), the *mandi bunga* (flower bath), and the *mandi minyak* (oil bath). The spirit lays claim to the initiate when the lime is cut, and from this point on the initiate belongs to *silat gayong*. The lime-cutting rite is followed by an ordeal whereby the initiate places his or her hands into boiling oil. Practitioners claim their prayers prevent the oil from burning them.<sup>1</sup>

I have dipped my hands into the boiling oil on three occasions.<sup>2</sup> Below, I describe the rituals as I observed them in 2001 and again in 2002 in Kuala Lumpur. There are a myriad of such baths found across Southeast Asia; however, the term “bath” is somewhat misleading as *mandi* concerns infusing powerful speech into a material or liquid which is then ingested into or applied onto the body of the participant.<sup>3</sup>

In anthropological theory an implicit shift in terminology from the “oracle” to the “diviner” has occurred. Turner makes a useful distinction between “divinatory”

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<sup>1</sup> I presented the argument for the following chapter in a conference paper (Farrer 2003).

<sup>2</sup> My third experience of the *mandi minyak* was in Melaka 2008, when I acted as a consultant for National Geographic’s Taboo series for an episode entitled “Tests of Faith.”

<sup>3</sup> See also Beatty (1999: 45), Errington (1989: 45, 47), and Telle (2003: 87).

rites and “revelatory” rites. Divination involves “making visible ... what has previously been concealed,” whilst revelation refers to “the manifestation of what resists conceptualization in the linguistic terms available to the Ndembu” (Turner 1975: 15).<sup>4</sup> Using this frame as a guide the *mandi limau* may be viewed as a divinatory rite that reveals the hidden personality of the initiate, whereas the *mandi minyak* is a revelatory rite to reveal Allah’s munificence in an embodied way that goes beyond language.

Werbner says that divination “through extraordinary powers of communication” concerns making hidden “occult” realities seen (1989: 19). Werbner interrogates and examines the interplay between two concepts he introduces to the study of divination, first, “microdramatics,” which is where divination

exhibits ... a series of encounters between significantly opposed agents, such as friends and foes, prey and predators, the humane and the inhumane, the social and the anti-social, creatures of the day or night, of the domestic or the wild (Werbner 1989: 20).

Next Werbner introduces the “poetics of divination” meaning “the interpretation of the use of cryptic, condensed, and highly ambiguous language, such as in archaic, authoritative verse” (1989: 21). Microdramatics and the poetics of divination are tools to attempt to understand how people interpret themselves and each other through the interrogation of the hidden realities around them. The “poetics of divination” for *silat gayong* appears through a conceptual schema that may be referred to as “Islamic humoralism,” which is enacted through the microdramatics of the ritual process or séance (Laderman 1983: 35–72; 1992a: 272–289). The microdramatics and the poetics of divination of *silat gayong* reveal the strong similarities between the practices and beliefs of the *guru silat* and those of the Malay shaman or *bomoh*.

Beyond my personal experience I found it insightful to combine an ethnographic analysis with a summary exploration of the historical data, because this revealed that the meaning attributed to the ritual has shifted over time although its form has remained the same. Persistent enquiries as to how it is possible to place one’s hands into boiling oil and yet not get burnt encouraged me to consider several types of explanation for this kind of “supernatural” phenomenon. Earlier explanations of ritual heat and war magic address the ritual form, but do not address the historical flux of meaning in events such as the boiling oil bath. Scientific accounts for shamanic performance, whether influenced by physics or

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<sup>4</sup>The Ndembu in Zambia and Angola practiced the judicial ordeal by boiling water to adjudicate accusations of sorcery (Turner 1961, 1975). Turner, in his earlier work under the category of *chiswa* roughly notes “several methods of divination, most of which involve the use of *mwaji* poison” (1961: 79). Furthermore, “*mwaji* poison may be administered to fowls or human beings, or human beings may be forced to plunge their arms in boiling water” (Turner 1961: 79). Turner says that: “If the arm is not scalded the person is innocent” (Turner 1961: 71–72; 1975: 320). For the judicial ordeal by boiling oil among the Togo see the National Geographic documentary film *Taboo II: Justice*.



psychoanalysis (abreaction), attempt to debunk the supernatural power of prayer, but I found this type of explanation wanting since it does not address the meanings or functions of the performance for the performers. In my view what needs to be taken into account is the way that the ritual event is framed by the performers and how this changes over time. Attending to the framing of performance led me to examine the way in which occult powers are attributed to the esoteric and secret skills of the war magician, through a process I call *occulturation*. It appears that although the meaning of the ritual changes over time the process of occulturation remains constant.

## The Lime and Flower Baths

The *mandi limau* and the *mandi bunga* are collectively referred to as the *mandi tapak*, where *tapak* (step) refers to the steps of the initiate along the martial path of *silat gayong*. The *mandi limau* initiates the student into the Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia organization (Fig. 7.1).



**Fig. 7.1** Cikgu Kahar accepting a student into *silat gayong* with the *sahabat* handclasp



The *mandi bunga* subsequently permits the initiate to proceed via a course in weapons, first learning *parang*, knife, spear, stick, *keris*, to culminate with *cindai*.<sup>5</sup> Usually the two rites are combined for female initiates, and performed consecutively for males with an intervening period of six months to a year.<sup>6</sup> Each weapon corresponds to a rank symbolized by a belt, title and ritual test (*khatam*). The student proceeds from plain black, to white, green, red (one to three), and yellow belts (one to seven), before attaining black belt status (with further sub-divisions). To attain the coveted black belt normally takes about fifteen years. The *mandi limau* is sometimes performed the morning before the *mandi minyak*. The *mandi limau* is a rite of initiation and divination; the *mandi bunga* is a rite of protection and purification; and the *mandi minyak* is a rite of revelation by ordeal.

Suleiman and I were accorded the honour of accelerated progress normally reserved for women. To the derisive laughter of the local male students, Pa' Ariffin, his ex-wife Moone, Suleiman, Chief, and I were first introduced to *silat gayong* through a series of *buah* reserved especially for females. Known as *buah wanita* (women's *buah*) they teach the vital points (*nadi*) of the human body that are vulnerable to attack. Vital points taught in *buah wanita* include the base of the skull (*tengkuk kepala*), the big toes (*ibu jari*), the chin (*dagu*), eyes (*mata*), groin (*buah zakar*), kidneys (*buah pinggang*), knees (*lutut*), neck (*leher*), temples (*pelipis*), throat (*kerongkong*), solar plexus (*ulu hati*), stomach (*perut*), and the tail bone. For the combined lime and flower bath Suleiman and I dressed in "traditional" formal Malay attire including *songkok*, black *baju Melayu*, and *kain* (kilt), and sat on the ground in a circle with Pa' Ariffin and Chief as we faced Cikgu Ezhar. The *guru silat* and initiands chanted prayers from the Holy Quran, specifically *fātiha*, *al-ikhlaṣ* (three times), *al-falaq*, and *an-nas* finishing with *asalaamualaikum* to which the *guru silat* replies *walaikum salaam*.<sup>7</sup> The greeting was addressed to the spirits, and not just to Cikgu Ezhar. A candle was lit and blown out. Plates with several types of flowers, limes, three types of rice (*beras*, *nasi*, and *padi*), and other herbs I did not identify, occupied a central position beside some large plastic bottles of water. With both hands gripping a *keris* immersed in a bottle of water Cikgu Ezhar muttered an incantation for five or six minutes. The atmosphere was tense and we sat with bowed heads. Eventually, with palms pressed together at the forehead—the *hormat* required to greet aristocrats—the *guru silat* saluted the *keris* and through it

<sup>5</sup> Shaw (1976: 26, 28–29) mentions the *mandi limau* or *berlimau* of Mahaguru Arshad, but this is different from what I have experienced. Shaw's *berlimau* is not a rite of divination, but one of invulnerability. Washing in the juice of the fruit which has been charmed or blessed by the *guru silat* is a cleansing preamble to the gift of a "magical incantation" for invulnerability from the Holy Quran (for daily recitation, and for recitation in times of need). According to Shaw (1976: 28) to try out the spell the neophyte is violently slammed against the wall and tested with weapons including slashing with a sword, chopping with an axe, or by attempting to drive a six inch nail into the top of his head.

<sup>6</sup> On the shifting terrain of gender relations in Peninsular Malaysia, see Khoo (2000), Ong (1987), Ong and Peletz (1995), and Peletz (1996).

<sup>7</sup> The Muslim greeting is "Peace be upon you" (*asalaamualaikum*), replied to by "And peace be upon you too" (*walaikum salaam*).

the spirits of the late *guru silat*. The *keris* acted as an intermediary through which to invoke the spirits (*arwah*) of Hang Tuah and Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman, in order to supplicate them to protect the neophytes about to embark on a course of training in *silat gayong*.

Next Cikgu Ezhar cut a lime for Suleiman and me in turn. I was asked to clearly state my name and the name of my mother, and then he cut the lime. Half of the lime remained in his hand as the other half fell from the sharp blade to land face up into a small circle woven from coconut fibres (*sabut kelapa*). This magic circle is like a *gelanggang* for the spirit, a portal through which the spirit determines the way the lime falls (Fig. 7.2).

The *guru silat* utilizes a secret formula to detect the loyalty and the potential of the student from the way the lime lands. If the cut lime half lands within the circle this indicates a loyal student, and if face up then it indicates a student who can become a great master. If the lime tumbles outside the circle it indicates someone who will leave or become an outsider, and if outside face down then it indicates a closed student with little potential (Pa' Ariffin groaned and covered his forehead and eyes with one hand when Suleiman's lime fell this way). After Cikgu Ezhar finished what looked like counting the segments of the lime, we had to recite the *selawat nabi* three times and then drink some of the water (*air doa*). At the end of the ritual we shook the *guru's* hand (*salaam*), repeated an oath of allegiance to the Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia organization, and paid double the usual fee of R\$21. Finally we



Fig. 7.2 A lime sits in the *sabut kelapa* on top of my fieldnotes

packed the offering of flowers, cut lime, salt, and grains of rice into small plastic tubs with the warning that we were not to mix up our ingredients or confuse our tubs.

Around midnight back at Pa' Ariffin's house we mixed the bottled holy water (*air doa*) with the lime, flowers, and the other ingredients into a bucket of water and poured this over our heads in the front garden. The whole body and the head had to be scrubbed clean with the lime whilst we recited the *selawat nabi*. Then we collected and disposed of the remnants in running water—preferably in the sea, a river, or a stream—but a storm drain sufficed for our case. This part of the ritual (*mandi bunga*) provides spiritual protection so that the neophyte may train weapons and not sustain injury, with the proviso that if the student is injured then it is not too severely.

When the *mandi limau* and the *mandi bunga* are combined the ritual is called the *mandi seni*. *Seni* here refers to the art of using weapons in *silat*. The rapid advancement offered to females through the combination of the rituals separated across time for males is an incentive to encourage females to join *silat gayong*. In practice, this means that males and females of the same colour belt start with different sets of knowledge, with the males in advance. However, due to the extra attention the females receive from the more knowledgeable male cohort, they rapidly catch up with their male counterparts. *Cikgu* justify the automatic promotion of females on the basis that the original founder of *silat* was a woman. Encouraging females to easily advance into the *silat gayong* society provides a pool of young women available to date, and potentially marry eligible bachelors (*bujang*), and this helps to create solidarity, as well as to promote the transmission of the organization through the generations.

After the *mandi seni* the next major ritual event in *silat gayong* is the *mandi minyak*, which occurs when a batch of novices move from white to green belt, or from green to red belt. Throughout these rites of passage the student is assessed and graded. First, the *guru silat* gauges the student's character with an implicit personality theory obtained through divination; subsequently the student's obedience and reaction to fear is ascertained through the ordeal by boiling oil.

## Divination: An Implicit Personality Theory

The result of the lime divination is secret: it is not given to the novice, and nor is the formula whereby it is attained.<sup>8</sup> The *cikgu* infers a set of traits from the element indicated by the lime corresponding to an implicit personality theory. The formula used to read the initiate's lime is *tanah, air, api, angin*, (earth, water, fire, and air). Each element corresponds to a series of traits (Table 7.1).

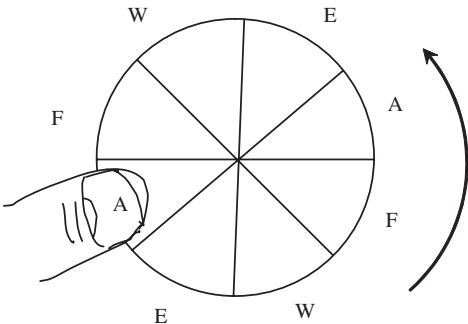
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<sup>8</sup> *Cikgu* Ezhar provided this formula when I mistakenly said "I saw you in the film [mine] counting the lime with your thumb on a segment: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5." He interrupted me, saying: "No, not like that," and revealed the correct method. *Cikgu* Ezhar said he learnt his *bomoh* knowledge from Datuk Meor and *Cikgu* Razali.

Table 7.1 The four elements

Element		Properties	
1. tanah	Earth	langkah	Stride; step
2. air	Water	rezeki	Livelihood; income; subsistence; sustenance; nourishment; food; good fortune
3. api	Fire	maut	Lethal; causing death
4. angin	Air	bala	Anger; liability or exposure to harm or death; disaster; catastrophe; sudden great misfortune; unfortunate event; mishap; unlucky accident

Fig. 7.3 Lime divination



To divine the student’s personality, the *cikgu* cuts the lime and then takes up half of it, places the thumb over a segment, and from the next segment proceeds to circumnavigate the lime with the formula *tanah, air, api, angin*. Where the series ends under the thumb is the position that gives the student’s personality type (Fig. 7.3).<sup>9</sup> The *cikgu* should count anti-clockwise, although this appears to make no difference to the outcome. Because the correspondence to *langkah, rezeki, maut, and bala* was indicated by Cikgu Ezhar, but not explained, I have not elaborated further than by providing the dictionary definitions (Hawkins 2001). Similarly, the cosmological significance of the elements was not elaborated although this would also be interesting to explore further (Koestler 1977; Skeat [1900] 1984).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Laderman mentions several humoral forms of divination used in the diagnosis of illness. One involves the *bomoh* counting out grains of rice popped with dry heat, a treatment she says that attracts the *hantu*, whereas plain rice repels them. The grains are counted in pairs, two for water, two for fire, and so forth. In this way the *bomoh* can ascertain the spirits that caused the illness (Laderman 1983: 87).

<sup>10</sup> Peletz (1996: 205) states that “Each of the elements of the body is symbolically associated with a particular sensory organ (earth is linked with the mouth, wind with the ears, fire with eyes, and water with nose [*sic*]). Each sensory organ is associated, in turn, with one of the four archangels (Mikail, Jabrail [*sic*], Israfil, Azrail), one of the four spirits that watches over us after we die (Chadi, Wadi, Mani, Manikam), and one of the four Caliphs (Omar, Ali, Osman, Abubakar). Each of these archangels, spirits, and Caliphs is also symbolically keyed to one of the four corners of the world” (see also Endicott 1970: 40–45; Laderman 1983).

Each element corresponds to a series of traits. Earth is the most important because it is all around us and everything rests upon it or sprouts from it: earth is steady. Fire signifies somebody who is hot tempered, easily angered and volatile. Fire's weakness is that it is easy to manipulate. Water is good to put fire out. Water goes with the flow, and signifies someone who is easygoing, but who can be dangerous when the pressure builds up. Air is like the wind, cooling, but it can be fierce and violent, knocking down even the largest trees. Each element has positive and negative attributes, and corresponds to a personality type. Earth people are considered steady and reliable, fire people are regarded as hot-tempered and easily aroused, water people are considered cool and relaxed, and air people are deemed to be talkative.<sup>11</sup>

Sometime later I asked Cikgu Kahar about the *mandi limau* and he said the same formula as Cikgu Ezhar. Although he did not cut my lime he tells me that I am "*tanah angin*, cool and relaxed, not hot." Pa' Ariffin, on the other hand, he considered *api angin* which roughly translates as bad tempered or as "full of hot air." Since the show *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* Pa' Ariffin and Cikgu Kahar openly hold each other in contempt. Cikgu Kahar considered Chief and Suleiman as *air* (water), and Pa' Ariffin's ex-wife as *angin* (wind). Cikgu Kahar confesses that he himself is *api*, hot tempered. Pointing, he says: "You can see the people—study the students." I detect a contradiction here, as there seems little necessity to cut limes if you can see what personality people are anyway.<sup>12</sup> One can only speculate how much the clash of personalities between Pa' Ariffin and Cikgu Kahar was due to them sharing the same fiery temperament. Nevertheless, what is revealed in the *gayong* poetics of divination is an implicit personality theory, a cognitive frame that is employed by the *guru silat* to define and understand their students, each other, and the social world.

## Revelation: The Ordeal by Boiling Oil

The *mandi minyak* is a dramatic ritual spectacle where *pesilat* dip their hands into cauldrons of boiling oil. At dawn the area where the cauldrons will be placed is carefully hoed to ensure that it is free from sorcery, and then it is cordoned off with yellow string pulled taut between corner posts. Ritual activity proceeds from dawn until after dusk. Once the senior *cikgu* has cleaned the area for the cauldrons, the training ground is opened (*buka gelanggang*). Forty men kneel in a circle

<sup>11</sup> Laderman makes similar observations in her study of wives and midwives, and notes that in Islamic Humoralism: "People are composed of earth, air, fire, and water, but all the elements are not necessarily present in equal amounts. Those with more fire are quicker to anger than those with a predominance of earth or water. People with more air are more susceptible to *sakit berangin* [the sickness of frustration]" (Laderman 1983: 59, italics added). Laderman (1983: 59) glosses *main peteri* as a "shamanistic curing ceremony," stating that: "*Angin* ... is similar to temperament in medieval Europe." Furthermore, an excess of *angin* will disrupt the correct functioning of the other elements. The cure is to go into trance and act out "ones desires in an approved setting so that the air can escape and balance, and thus health be restored" (Laderman 1983: 60).

<sup>12</sup> I had to keep logical contradictions to myself in the field so as not to interrupt the flow of information which is liable to rapidly dry up if you throw logical spanners into the works.

surrounding their machetes, whilst they subvocalise lines from the Holy Quran and the Hadith. The incantations are *al-fāṭiḥa* (1: 1) “the opening chapter” of the Quran, said three times, followed by *al-ikhlās* (30: 112) the “purity (of faith)” repeated thirty-three times, and, the *selawat nabi* (from the Hadith) “the invocation to God” said three times. Each verse is preceded by *bismillaahir-rahmaanir-rahim*, which means “in the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful.”

***Al-Fāṭiḥa:***

*Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim.*

*'Al-Hamdu lillaahi Rabbil-Aalamiin;*

*'Ar-Rahmaanir-Rahiim;*

*Maaliki Yawmid-Diin!*

*'Iyyaaka na'-budu wa*

*'iyyaaka nasta-'iin.*

*'Ihdinas-Siraatal-Musta-qiim—*

*Siraatal-lazina 'an*

*'amta 'alay-him—Gayril-*

*magzuubi 'alay-him wa*

*laz-zaaalliin.*

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful  
Praise be to Allah; the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;  
Most Gracious, Most Merciful;  
Master of the Day of Judgment.  
Thee we do worship, and Thine aid we seek.  
Show us the straight way,  
The way of those on whom Thou has bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion)  
is not wrath. And who go not astray.

***Al-Ikhlās:***

*Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim.*

*Qul Hu-wallaahu 'Ahad;*

*'Alaahus-Samad;*

*Lam yalid, wa lam yuulad*

*Walam yukul-la-Huu kufuwan 'ahad.*

Say: He is Allah the One;  
Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;  
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;  
And there is none like unto Him.

***Selawat Nabi:***

*Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim*

*Allahumma salli ala Muhammadin wa 'ala ali Muhammadin wa sallim.*

O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad and grant them peace.



Before and after every *silat gayong* class the *pesilat* kneel together in a circle and wipe their prayers over their bodies to give magical protection, starting at the back of the head behind the ears, going over the head, then down the face, crossing behind the neck, then crossing the arms in front to wipe the shoulders, arms, wrists, and hands, down the chest to the stomach, then wiping the kidneys, lower back, thighs, knees, and all the way down to the toes. Men and women kneel together in a circle (which alongside cut limes, *kenduri*, and *sabut kelapa* provides another example of the sacred or magic circle in Malay ceremony and ritual). To complete the spell of protection the fists are placed upon the soil in front of the *pesilat*, in the position they started from, with a resounding *aum*—the onomatopoetic Malay word for the roar of the tiger uttered from deep within the chest of the *pesilat*. They stand, form a belt-ranked status line, and spiral around each other to shake hands one by one, greeting the *guru silat* first, and working their way down to the most junior male, and then the women in order of rank. At the end of the class each person leaves after completing the round of salutations until only the *guru silat* remains. This is the same procedure as used in the Naqshbandi parting ceremony after *dhikr* night, only for *silat gayong* the handshake is not performed in the hand-sniffing style (*salaam*), but with a status flattening ridge style handclasp (*sahabat*).<sup>13</sup> The *sahabat* (friendship) handclasp proclaims that the students and teachers have made friends. A *hormat* gesture is proffered to members of the opposite sex, who are not touched in parting. The gender segregation evident during the parting ceremony is at odds with the previous non-gendered participation in prayer and signifies a return from a liminal state where the normal Muslim rules of gender segregation apply less stringently.

Protection is required from wayward *jinn*, ghosts, vampires and to counter the black magic (*ilmu hitam*) of rival *gelanggang*. Ritual protection provides the only insurance for *silat gayong* students, and functions to prevent injury and counter the evil ones who are inevitably attracted to any performance of *silat*. Apparently ritual insurance will not be effective if the Islamic taboos and practises are not scrupulously observed, or if the person is not continuously in a state of ritual cleanliness (*wuduk*). Evidence of the power of rival sorcery is apparent when things go wrong. For example, people have been known to “fry” during the *mandi minyak*, and to sustain injuries in the accompanying *silat* performances.

I have attended two oil baths with Pa’ Ariffin, one held officially for the purpose of grading the students (2001) and the other as a send-off for students who were travelling to England to appear in Pa’ Ariffin’s play *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* (2002). For both events forty men prepared fires using kindling and small pieces of innertube from old tires. Next they hacked open a thousand or so coconuts with their machetes (Fig. 7.4). The coconuts become wet and slippery when they began to split, and it took several blows to crack them open to expose the milk and “fats” within. Somebody was cut during the second event, and this was regarded as the consequence of “spiritual warfare” (sorcery). After the liquid is drained off, the white flesh within the coconut is removed with a noisy coconut-shaving machine (*mesin parut kelapa*) that tears it into a pulp. Five or more of the younger men crowd around red plastic

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Alan Canfield, an expert in non-verbal communication, supplied the English name for this handclasp: personal communication via email 28 May 2005.





Fig. 7.4 Preparing the coconut milk

bowls to mash and massage the pulp with their hands, and squeeze out the remaining juice, whilst they impart the prayer through their hands.

The resulting liquid is poured into a white cotton cloth suspended between five men standing astride the cauldrons to sieve out any remaining pulp from the milk. Wielding large paddles (*senduk palang*), normally used to stir curries (*rendang*) at wedding banquets, the forty men stir the liquid in black iron cauldrons set over hot flames for several hours, whilst each one silently repeats *surah al-ikhhlās* a thousand times (Fig. 7.5).<sup>14</sup> The original *jampi* for the purposes of becoming *kebal* has

<sup>14</sup> The substitution of prayer (*dao*, *baca*) for spells (*jampi*) has been occurring for a long time. For example, Laderman states in relation to the decline in local rice production in the mid-1970s Trengganu that: “Some people, responding to a general increase in Islamic orthodoxy in Malaysia, have substituted Arabic prayers for the *bomoh*’s spells” (Laderman 1983: 26–27, *italics added*). Werner adds that: “The influence of Arab (Islamic) medicine in Malay traditional medicine led to a number of variations in basic curative concepts and procedures, whereby the majority of former spirits helping in fighting diseases have been substituted by the powers of the Holy Quran” (Werner 1986: 10). However, it is possible to question the idea of “substitution,” and the western demarcation between spells and prayer, because in the *mandi minyak* the prayer is employed not simply in lieu of a spell, but as a spell in its own right. Chou notes that for the Orang Laut the Holy Quran is a book full of black magic spells, viz, “the Orang Laut regard the Malays as evil [*orang jahat*] because, they maintain, the Quran contains instructions on how to cast spells and practise black magic” (2003: 53, *italics added*). Shaw clarifies the situation with the following statement “The greater part of modern Malay magic is based upon the belief that every letter, word and verse in the Holy Quran has two



Fig. 7.5 Cooking the oil

possibly been displaced by the more powerful *surah al-ikhhlās*.<sup>15</sup> Students are told that complete faith in Allah is required or the oil will burn them. Dressed in black, the men work silently with grim determination, and communicate only through sign language.<sup>16</sup> By sunset the milk coagulates into a dense coconut pulp at the bottom of the cauldron (*kuali*) leaving a thin layer of brown oil bubbling on the surface.

During the day of the grading oil bath, *pesilat* performed set routines appropriate to their stage of martial attainment. Outside in the rain two teenage girls wearing *hijabs* (veils) slammed each other into the concrete. The heavy attacker grunted with exertion as she hauled up the slender defender who gasped as the breath was knocked out of her. Spray flew as her soaked back and thighs repeatedly smacked the wet concrete floor. The girls received the wry encouragement of the amused male conducting their grading. This continued for about half-an-hour. Although they are young now these girls are destined to become seniors, and they must show that they are at least as tough as the men. That night after the grading the women slept on bare concrete, jammed together in one airless, foul, hot, overcrowded and

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meanings: the one generally taught by religious instructors and an esoteric one, hidden from most eyes, but revealed to certain adepts who have passed it on to their followers" (Shaw 1976: 3).

<sup>15</sup> Although 40 men say 1,000 prayers each into the liquid the total is consistently given at 70,000. This is a mystery. I can only speculate by dividing 70,000 by 40 which results in 1,750. Opening the Holy Quran to "The Cow," *surah* 175 we find "They are the ones who buy Error in place of Guidance and Torment in Place of Forgiveness. Ah! what boldness (they show) for the Fire!"

<sup>16</sup> The sign language used included the left palm being placed horizontally upon the extended vertical right fingers, indicating "T" for "time out" as used in American sports.

mosquito-infested room. Meanwhile, the men lounged under fans in the main hall and slept on comfortable gym-mats.<sup>17</sup> Female practitioners of *silat gayong* are encouraged by automatic promotion to immediately train with weapons, but this gendered gift extracts a heavy cost.

Later in the evening, to the accompaniment of Malay drums (*gendang*) and heavy brass gongs (*gamelan*) blasted through a taped broadcast over loud speakers, groups of *pesilat* demonstrated their skills. The audience was comprised of *silat* teachers, students, parents, friends, and VIP guests of honour, including senior instructors, UNMO politicians and royalty. During the formal demonstrations the oil was cooked in silent prayer. After, or during these demonstrations, and following lengthy speeches on the healthy nature of the bath—immediately contradicted by the explicit proviso that it must be done seven times in succession to give invulnerability—male students stripped to the waist. The females bathed separately in a separate tent on the first occasion I observed, but bathed out in the open in a veiled-off section the second time (which to my surprise they allowed me to film).

To begin the ritual bath a senior *cikgu* first blew *selawat nabi* into the bubbling oil, then spat onto his hands and rubbed them together. Then his palms touched the surface of the oil in what appeared to be an amazing “supernatural” feat.<sup>18</sup> The students followed suit and dipped their hands into the oil tremulously with a kind of fascinated dread. Some of the participants seemed devoid of agency and presented a blank demeanour like those at Malay funerals.<sup>19</sup> Once the deed was accomplished they proceeded to enthusiastically wipe the oil over their hands, face, arms and feet. Some recited the *fātiha* prayer while they rubbed their bodies with the movements of *wuduk*.

The run up to my first attempt at the *mandi minyak* was daunting. A few weeks prior to the occasion I was frying chips and some of the oil spat onto my hand and burned a small pea-sized hole into the base of my thumb. Furthermore, Pa’ Ariffin often warned that the ordeal by boiling oil would burn those not protected by prayers; and the recitation of prayers, Islamic or otherwise, was never really my forte. So it was with some caution that I first placed my hands into the bubbling oil

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<sup>17</sup> Pa’ Ariffin gave around forty gym mats to Nirwana Gelanggang. These were from his U.K. club, and were brought over by container as part of the Janda Baik Millennium Camp (see Chapter 6).

<sup>18</sup> *Kebatinan Mystique* (Volume 1), a documentary film that recounts a *mandi minyak* in Perak, provides a sensationalist narrative voiceover: “The final challenge is now at hand for the new recruits. They must brace themselves to undergo the fiery and possibly fatal encounter to realize their dream of becoming a true Silat Gayong Pusaka disciple.” Why dipping the hands into boiling oil is potentially fatal is not explained. Silat Gayong Pusaka is a relative of Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia. Credits are not listed and no date is given for this film, but it looks as if it was made in the 1970s or early 1980s.

<sup>19</sup> This demeanour reminds me of the altered attitude or “agentic state” Milgram identifies in his obedience experiments. Milgram says that a phenomenological shift takes place in terms of a profound alteration of attitude that “places the individual into a different state from the one he was in prior to integration into the hierarchy. I shall term this the agentic state, by which I mean the condition a person is in when he sees himself as an agent for carrying out another person’s wishes” (Milgram 1974: 133).

**Fig. 7.6** Nazim and I share a cauldron



with the heels of the palms in the recommended style of “a tiger testing the water” (Fig. 7.6). Surprisingly, the oil felt no hotter than tepid bath water.

On the first occasion Shaykh Raja Ashman attended as the guest of honour. Upon arrival he was greeted by two long lines of *silat gayong* practitioners who formed a cordon for him to walk between as he passed through the gate into the *gelanggang*. He placed his hands into the oil in a private tent. Raja Ashman’s presence conferred an air of legitimacy upon the whole event, and elevated the status of Pa’ Ariffin who had arranged for the prince to attend. Unlike the *sundang* ceremony (see Chapter 6) Raja Ashman did not confer belts to those who had passed their grading. Honorary red belts were awarded to some of the British students by Cikgu Razak, himself not a practitioner of *silat gayong*, but the financial backer of Nirwana Gelanggang.

The late Cikgu Khalsom, Datuk Meor’s daughter, who is based in Perak, declined to participate in the *mandi minyak*. Instead she convened a “*gayong* court” to try the errant Cikgu Kahar for various offences, including admitting foreigners into the ranks, conducting an accelerated training programme, giving honorary belts, and holding an invalid oil bath. It was feared that because of “spiritual warfare” many people would be burned. However, no-one appeared to suffer burns from dipping their hands into the oil. Only the cooks suffered burns as the fires spat hot shards when the damp logs erupted.



In 2002 the occasion was for black belts only, and as I have previously mentioned was intended as a send-off for the *pesilat* travelling to England. This time I was more cavalier with the oil bath; partly because I had accomplished it with no problem before, but also because I saw Cikgu Kahar place his right fore-finger deep into the middle of a cauldron of boiling oil and twist it around and up like a hook. Then I was asked to try the oil first at another bowl, and I did so, to the astonished gasp of the Malays who were to go after me at the bowl, by first blowing on my hands and then smacking the front, back, and front again of my hands into the oil. For three days afterwards I experienced the stiffness of burnt flesh, but no pain. Accompanying me was my Javanese uncle, affectionately known as Crazy Wak, who when stripped to the waist revealed a tight muscle-bound physique criss-crossed with old scars from knife fights—a far cry from the bloated bellies of most of the *silat gayong* instructors.

During the day a newly divorced Pa' Ariffin sat poised with his teenage blonde girlfriend from England bouncing on his lap, surrounded by a gaggle of Silat Seni Gayong U.K. students who snapped their cameras, asked the Malays loud questions, and exchanged furtive whispers under sidelong glances. Pa' Ariffin said that on this night he showed Cikgu Kahar the “real” *mandi minyak*, which I later saw on film. In a separate tent a few of the *cikgu* stood silently over a cauldron of boiling oil. The fire was blazing, as Pa' Ariffin with glaring red eyes blew audibly upon his hands, and then with both hands he scooped the oil up into the air, like a veritable demon enjoying the mastery of fires of hell. It may seem strange that he allowed Chief to film this hidden and secret event and then post it on his website, but it is from the revelation of occult skills that Pa' Ariffin draws his charismatic power. This principle applies to *silat gayong* more widely as the performances were staged in an urban environment where the houses surrounding the *gelanggang* were largely owned by Chinese people, for whom the *mandi minyak* was an occult rital from which they are separated by ethnic and religious barriers.

On both occasions after the dip the male students collectively paraded around the *gelanggang* in a kind of line-dance whilst they massaged the shoulders and back of the person in front of them. This continued for about an hour as the appraising females looked on. The spectacle of half-naked greasy males, rubbing each other and posing for dozens of photographs, reminded me of the semi-naked, waxed, hyper-muscular American wrestlers who parade the repressed homosexuality of American life (Barthes 1972: 21). However, perhaps the line-massage in the Malay context is demonstrative of a more relaxed attitude towards the other's body, alongside less prohibitive boundaries concerning touching those of the same gender. Malay male youth and men did not seem as acutely self-conscious as their western counterparts. The Malay males seemed quite comfortable being touched and touching each other, however skinny or flabby they were, although they seemed less comfortable with the Caucasians (*mat salleh*).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Mat salleh* was translated for me in the field as “mad sailors,” and is said to be a wry reference to early Malay encounters with Europeans, who must have stank horribly because they did not bathe.

Following the massage parade, on both occasions, a spectacular ludic martial arts demonstration occurred, where exuberant *pesilat* took turns in small groups to demonstrate acrobatic manoeuvres. They flipped, somersaulted, dove high into the air and rolled out, and had aggressive mock fights with *parang*, sticks, spears and chains. Most students, even the youngest, continued to train enthusiastically late into the night. The *gelanggang* emptied shortly before dawn with the diehard gathered together for a closing round of *surah al-ikhhlās*.

### ***Becoming Invulnerable***

After the oil bath *silat* students in contemporary Kuala Lumpur are not kicked, punched, or struck by the *guru silat* with machetes to demonstrate their invulnerability. Instead they smash bricks with their hands, bend long iron bars across their necks, and husk coconuts with their bare teeth. Pa' Ariffin's students applied the oil to the whole body. Slightly bending forward to incline the pelvis they placed their greasy hands down their trousers between their legs. The female students applied the oil to their breasts and pudenda in the privacy of their tent. The coconut pulp was eaten to line the oesophagus and seal the lining of the stomach to give invulnerability to poison. The total application of the oil reveals not only the *kebal* nature of the oil bath, but also its health-giving properties. The "healthy oil" was regarded as both a curative and a preventative medicine. Invulnerability is not achieved solely from the denizens of the seen world, but more importantly from the evil beings of the unseen realm.

However, the magical features of the rite render it taboo (*haram*) to the religiously orthodox. Friday speeches given in mosques in Singapore denounce the oil bath as backward, deviationist and *haram*. Likewise, the *mandi limau* and *mandi bunga* are considered to be relics of a bygone Hindu age. To counter this sort of view *silat gayong* claim that the *mandi minyak* is merely a ceremonial bath in healthy oil, and emphasize that it does not give powers of invulnerability unlike the *mandi kebal*. Nevertheless, they maintain that the production of the oil must carefully follow the ritual prescriptions to prevent it from burning the initiate. Although Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia officials represent the *mandi minyak* as a bath in healthy oil and as a symbolic ritual marker of a student's progress through an organizational syllabus, informants say that it could still be classified as *kebal* depending on the intention (*niat*) of the person who does the ritual, provided that they complete the ritual seven times, and maintain their daily prayers and additional *dhikr*. The oil is not washed off until midday the following day, and additional prayers along with *dhikr* are added onto the morning and evening prayers to ensure the continued potency of the charm.

The *mandi minyak* packaged as merely a bath in healthy oil demonstrates the Islamic rationalization and disenchantment of the *mandi kebal*. It may be thought that the healthy bath is merely a simulacrum of the *kebal* ritual process, an inauthentic

substitution, and this is implied by Pa' Ariffin showing Cikgu Kahar “the real thing.” However, whether conducted for invulnerability or health, the ritual convinces the believer of the power of Allah to suspend and reverse the natural order of things in order to answer the ritual and prayers sanctified by the *guru silat*.

### ***Further Historical Antecedents and Cross-Cultural Comparisons***

Cikgu Kahar said that he first performed the *mandi minyak* more than thirty years ago and that it remains the same today. He continued that Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman originally conducted the *mandi minyak* in the 1940s at Pulau Sudong “to make the women feel strong” as they were afraid of the Japanese. As Chew partially confirms:

The Japanese occupation of Singapore (1942–1945) brought great hardship to the Sudong islanders. Atrocities were committed against the island population by the crew of the first Japanese patrol boat to land on the island, and before the fear of their reoccurrence had subsided, the villagers were faced with the prospect of a severe food shortage [due to expropriation] (Chew 1982: 40).

According to Vivienne Wee the Pulau Sudong case above was exceptional as the Japanese forces were initially positively welcomed in the Riau Archipelago (Wee, private communication, April 2003). Cheah (2003: 70, 104–105, 123) gives many examples of Malay collaboration with the Japanese forces in Malaya, including that of the Malay Sultans and Datuk Onn of Johore, who was the founder of UMNO and father of the later Prime Minister of Malaysia, and the co-founder of *silat gayong* together with Datuk Meor Abdul Rahman. After the war, accusations of Malay collaboration with the Japanese fuelled serious reprisals and executions which were carried out by the largely Chinese MPAJA (Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army). Atrocities were committed on both sides, and the post-war impulse to develop *silat gayong* was not to fight the Japanese, but to keep the peace between the Malays and Malayan Chinese.<sup>21</sup>

The boiling oil ritual for the purposes of invulnerability is geographically and historically widespread. In addition to fire walking Chinese mediums and martial artists also put their arms into boiling oil (Heinze 1988: 22). In a tribute to the Nine Emperor Gods in Malaysia a Chinese medium annually performs the “miraculous” feat of sitting for half an hour “cross-legged on a wooden board in a huge wok of steaming dumplings and corn as a fire blazed below.”<sup>22</sup> Later the cooked food is distributed and eaten by the devotees. Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe the ordeal by boiling oil was used as a judicial method. Boiling oil, boiling water, and red-hot irons were used in trials by ordeal to ascertain via “religious” methods the

<sup>21</sup> Fundamentally, *silat gayong* was a police and not a paramilitary organization.

<sup>22</sup> Reported in *The Straits Times*, 22 October 2004.



innocence or guilt of accused parties. Equivalent practices could be observed in India until the nineteenth century (Scott 1940: 229–230).

In the remarkable Melaka Museum of Ethnography there are a series of grisly paintings which recount the fifteenth century Melaka Code (*Undang-undang Melaka*). One shows a thief strapped to a mechanical device that locks his right arm straight as the blood spurts from his forearm upon amputation. Another picture shows a man and a woman buried to the chest in the ground as villagers stone them to death for adultery. There is a third picture of two men dipping their hands into a cauldron of boiling oil. They appear to be prisoners and are guarded by men carrying spears—guards who look remarkably similar to their modern *silat gayong* counterparts. The accompanying caption says: “He who emerges with his hands un-burnt is innocent.”

The legal remedy of an oath inviting divine retribution was backed up by the system of ordeals throughout the Malay world, and appeared in Burma, Cambodia, the Philippines, Maluku and Siam (Keesing and Strathern 1998: 298–299; Reid 1993: 139). As Reid points out:

The most widespread forms of ordeal were total immersion in water, with the first person having to come up for air being declared the guilty one, and plunging a hand in boiling water or molten tin (Reid 1993: 139).

The boiling oil ordeal appears in the fifteenth century Melaka code and can be traced back to the time of Sultan Muhammad Syah (1424–1444) and Sultan Muzaffar Syah (1445–1458) (Liaw 1976: 38). In cases of accusation and denial the Melaka code says that:

According to *kanun* law, they will be ordered to prove their case by (an ordeal of) immersing their hands in (boiling) water, oil or tin. A verse of the Quran will be written on a potsherd “And Allah has created you and that which you made. O my God, with the blessing of Jabra’il and Israfil and Izra’il, show us who is right and who is wrong (in this case) of so and so.” The potsherd is then thrown into a (boiling) cauldron or a pot. The two contesting parties are then ordered to ... take the potsherd out in one attempt. He who fails shall be punished according to the (prevailing) law of the country and the villages. If his offence is serious and the fitting punishment is death, he shall be executed (Liaw 1976: 89).

The judicial ordeal by boiling oil, water, or molten tin follows an accusation which is judged according to traditional *kanun* law, and not according to Islamic law, where it was deemed sufficient for both parties to take an oath while touching the pulpit in the mosque (Liaw 1976: 38). Liaw (1976) does not specify what kind of accusation was made and denied, but Reid (1988: 140) provides a striking historical example from an accusation of theft:

A Frenchman, from whom a Siamese had stole some tin, was persuaded, for lack of proof, to put his hand into the melted tin; and he drew it out almost consumed. The Siamese being more cunning extricated himself, I know not how, without burning; and was sent away absolved (La Loubère 1691: 87; cited in Reid 1988: 140).

Apart from placing their hands into boiling oil practitioners of *silat gayong* hold their breath underwater as part of their training. They sit together in a pool in the river, and compete to see who can remain submerged the longest. They sit cross-legged on the riverbed, which is impossible when the chest is full of air. Those that can accomplish this feat are not holding their breath in, but holding it out. Today, the historical juridical aspect of this training seems to have been forgotten, but it is clear that in former times *silat* practitioners were prepared to face accusation and overcome trials by ordeal. Reid (1988: 140) notes that the choice of ordeal appears to have been in the hands of the defendant, who could choose whether divine judgement was to be obtained through a duel, by walking upon hot coals, or by dipping the hands into boiling liquid. Hence, it would appear that *silat gayong* practitioners trained to prevail in the trials by ordeal they were responsible for administering.

## Towards an Explanation

The previous account has indicated a series of shifts in the meaning of the oil bath, which has appeared in many guises across the ages. Historically, the oil bath appears as a trial by ordeal, later it predominates as an invulnerability rite, and most recently it is presented as a bath in healthy oil, like some kind of spa treatment. Nevertheless, in all three cases the *mandi minyak* remains a revelatory rite. The ritual form is maintained, even when the context is radically altered.<sup>23</sup>

At this point I have presented enough data to have made my point that the *guru silat* is a war magician involved in rituals of war as well as healing. Nevertheless, because so many people have asked me how I could put my hands into boiling oil and not get burnt I was encouraged to venture beyond description and to look for some kind of explanation. Hence I continue here by considering some of the theoretical explanations for dramatic ritual ordeals, and tackle abreaction, film boiling, ritual heat and war-magic, before presenting my own idea of occulturation.

## Debunking Supernatural Phenomena

According to Lévi-Strauss (1963: 167–185) a shaman who withdraws a bloody worm, a stone, or a piece of concealed down from the torso of the patient through a kind of surgery via sucking and spitting up of a foreign object, is involved in a kind of self-deception.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the performance the object is concealed in the

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<sup>23</sup> Here I am indebted to Bloch (1986).

<sup>24</sup> According to Levi Strauss “The shaman hides a little tuft of down in the corner of his mouth, and he throws it up, covered with blood—after having bitten his tongue or made his gums bleed—and solemnly presents it to his patient and the onlookers as the pathological foreign body extracted as a result of his sucking and manipulations” (1963: 175).

mouth of the shaman, and only after lengthy sucking is supposedly withdrawn from the patient. Thus the shaman fakes the surgical withdrawal. A discussion concerning the duplicity of the shaman emerged in anthropology, with some taking the side of the “debunkers” and others, presumably the “bunkers,” looking for explanations that would leave the integrity of the shaman intact. For Lévi-Strauss (1963: 175–178) the continuous deception of the shaman eventually led the shamans to dupe themselves. And even if the shaman is not duped and not intentionally deceiving the patient, onlookers may perceive the foreign object as having emerged from the patient’s body. For Lévi-Strauss a type of “abreaction” takes place “when the patient intensively relives the initial situation from which his disturbance stems, before he ultimately overcomes it” (1963: 181). As a “professional abreactor” the sorcerer takes the place of the psychoanalyst, with the difference that the abreaction occurs simultaneously for the sick individual, the sorcerer, and the audience observing the performance, rather than solely for the patient (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 181).<sup>25</sup>

A counter explanation is that there is “something,” perhaps a spirit, inside the patient’s body which the shaman draws out by spells and sucking into his or her mouth, whereupon it is magically entombed within a stone or some other object by the shaman. Thus the object acts as an alternative body for the offending spiritual entity (Taussig 2003: 288–289).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, frame confusion, whether deliberate or accidental, occurs when the literal frame is mistaken with the ritual frame, when the stone or tuft of down is identified as the cause of the illness, rather than the offending spirit entrapped within it. Sucking the stone or tuft of down from the body is a theatrical device that operates on the spiritual realm, and is not a literal surgery.

The problem of the literal is intriguing because it indicates the boundaries of perception and truth. The literal is culturally conditioned but inevitably corresponds to metaphor, so the question becomes: what is literal and metaphorical to the Malays? And is this the same as or different from the literal and metaphorical of outsiders? The confusion of the literal and the metaphorical is a common type of frame confusion that becomes apparent when a joke falls flat, but also operates when mysticism (or mystification) is engaged to cover up esoteric skill.

The dominant anthropological paradigm of cultural relativism demands that ethnographers should regard a “culture” from its own point of view. The postmodern turn in anthropology fuelled the rejection of anthropology as a “scientific” project and instigated a reflexive, literary, narrative mode in the presentation of experiential

<sup>25</sup> Abreaction may be defined as the “emotional discharge whereby the subject liberates himself from the affect attached to the memory of a traumatic event in such a way as this affect is not able to become (or remain) pathogenic. Abreaction may be provoked in the course of psychotherapy, especially under hypnosis, and produce a cathartic effect. It may also come about spontaneously, either a short or long interval after the original trauma” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 1).

<sup>26</sup> That stones may contain spirits is an enduring theme of Malay folklore and cultural practice (Sheppard 1983: 85–99). Magical stones are worn as jewellery, encrusted onto the hilt of *keris*, sewn into *sarung*, and inserted under the skin (*susuk*). Magic stones, rings, *badik* and *keris* may be placed under the pillow to facilitate dreamlike communication with the spirit world.

data, which has led to some interesting accounts of experiences with supernatural phenomena in sorcery and healing (Turner et al. 1992). For example, Paul Stoller believed that he attained the powers of the Niger sorcerer when he cast a spell that led to a European woman's facial paralysis. The woman woke up one morning and found that her nose and mouth had shifted right across her face near the ear, only to recover when she returned to France (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 123).

Stoller's account instantly reminded me of the symptoms of Bell's palsy, which is a lower motor neurone palsy (nerve paralysis) thought to be caused by viruses unknown. The shifting of the nose could be explained by unopposed action of the opposite active muscle thereby pulling the nose and mouth.<sup>27</sup> Maybe this is not some bizarre supernatural illness, but the symptoms of a fairly common disease. I think that different cultures lean towards the literal and sceptical in different ways and to differing degrees. In my view naïve cultural relativism may result in a literal framing of so-called "supernatural" phenomena when a more sceptical frame may be more appropriate. What is required is not an either/or approach, but an approach that is sensitive to the different boundaries of the rational, and one that is prepared to account for alternative explanations.

Debunking means offering rational, logical, scientific explanations for magical, supernatural, religious, or miraculous phenomena, and goes against the tendency of naïve cultural relativism to take "culture" at face value. Debunking presents thorny epistemological and ontological questions for cultural anthropology because it raises a dilemma that arises when the anthropologist's interpretation of events clashes with that of the informants. When observing and experiencing "occult," "supernatural," or "paranormal" performances this dilemma may become pronounced, and if not ignored or bypassed, can prove highly informative.

As I did not pray before taking the plunge into the oil I was sceptical of the power of prayer to explain why the "boiling" oil did not burn my hands. From my first experience of placing my hands into the oil I suspected that although the oil was hot, it was not boiling. The oil *appeared* to be boiling because it was bubbling over red coals. Perhaps a thick layer of fibrous coconut pulp in the cauldron insulated the thin layer of oil floating upon it from the low fire. The oil cooled rapidly due to its comparatively large surface area, and the bubbles on the surface were formed by steam escaping from the hot coconut pulp below. Nevertheless, during the second oil bath that I attended, Cikgu Kahar twisted his forefinger deep into the pulp in the centre of the cauldron, and Pa' Ariffin, Cikgu Kahar, and others placed their hands into a cauldron suspended over a blazing fire. Recently, in 2008 at an oil bath in Melacca, Dato' Ismail Jantan cooked two bowls of oil, discarded the pulp and then combined the oil in a single cauldron. Just before we dipped our hands into the oil he wiped the sides of the cauldron with a wet cloth. The water burst into steam with a great fizzing and crackling.

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<sup>27</sup> I sent the symptoms listed by Stoller to Dr. Saiful Nazim and Professor Matthew Farrer who both said the likely cause was Bell's Palsy.

To explain “supernatural” phenomena and to challenge accounts based upon mind over matter, the physicist Jearl Walker conducted controlled laboratory and field experiments. Walker walked upon fire, poured liquid nitrogen into his mouth, and dipped his wet fingers into 400 °C molten lead (Walker 1997: 535–536). Leidenfrost (1756) conducted early experiments which showed that drops of water lasted longer when on a skillet when it was slightly hotter than 200 °C. Walker (1997: 535) explains the Leidenfrost effect through “film-boiling,” where at a certain temperature the water vaporizes, and produces a protective cushion of gas pressure between the hot plate and the droplet, which protects the droplet and allows it to last much longer than when it is placed on a cooler (though still very hot) surface. In other words the fingers must be wet to safely dip them into molten lead, and the feet must be wet to walk on fire and not get burned.<sup>28</sup> Film-boiling therefore could provide a scientific explanation for why the Malays’ hands usually don’t get burned in the *mandi minyak*. The successful performer’s hands are wet due to several factors including taking *wuduk* immediately before the bath, spitting on the hands before placing them into the oil, and from the perspiration which occurs in the hot and humid Malaysian climate and from the fear of being burned.

However, an ethnobotanist has attempted to debunk the debunkers. Davis (1997) reports how a female *vodoun* dancer in Haiti grasped burning faggots with each hand. She dropped one and licked the other “with broad lascivious strokes of her tongue, and then she ate the fire taking a red-hot coal the size of a small apple between her lips” (1997: 50). Davis notes his amazement that “in an apparent state of trance [she] had carried a burning coal in her mouth for three minutes with impunity. Perhaps even more impressive, she did it every night on schedule” (1997: 50). Davis uses his experience to criticize the type of theories put forward by Walker:

To my mind it [the Leidenfrost effect] begged the question entirely. After all, a water droplet on a skillet is not a foot on a red hot-coal, nor lips wrapped about an ember . . . . Now after what I had seen . . . . any explanation that did not take into account the play of mind and consciousness, belief and faith, seemed hollow. The woman had clearly entered some kind of spirit realm (Davis 1997: 51).

Spirit realms aside, the bodymind harbours the potential to perform incredible feats that people would normally regard as impossible, and some martial arts experts possess the keys to unlock or to develop these esoteric skills. Part of the ability to perform “real” magic occurs when an individual manages to venture beyond the quotidian rationality of what people, often including the performer, generally regard as possible. My view of the potential reality of “magical” abilities makes me wary of any atheist debunking perspective that would *a priori* delimit the possible.

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<sup>28</sup> Walker (1997) discovered that water must be present the hard way when he tried the boiling lead experiment with a dry finger and got burned. Walker has also cracked his front-teeth through accidental contact with liquid nitrogen, and once got severely burned when fire walking with dry feet.

Nevertheless, the genuine “magical” abilities of the *guru silat*, the legacy of secret esoteric skills, are tightly interwoven into a swathe of pseudo-magical performances and fake abilities: to find an ounce of gold one has to sift through a river full of sand. One must remain alert to the idea that the literal and metaphorical meanings of things are organized according to different registers in different cultures. According to *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad, who incidentally firmly believed in dragons, were-tigers, and faeries, there are fifty tricks that are known to the *guru silat*. One such trick is hair that cannot be cut, a phenomenon that is attributed to the powerful *ilmu* of the possessor. Quicksilver is applied to the hair making it hard to cut. Another trick concerns eating glass. For example, Dr. Lewis was imprisoned by the Japanese at Singapore Race Course POW Camp where the POW’s were made to put on a performance for the entertainment of the Japanese officers.<sup>29</sup> Lewis (1991: 82) ate glass that he only pretended to swallow: he explains that provided the glass is thin it can be broken up with the teeth and placed under the tongue. Eating glass or stubbing out cigarettes on the tongue are not acts that people become capable of purely through holding certain beliefs or because they enter some “spirit realm.” Drunks in pubs, believers or non-believers alike may perform such antics.

## ***Ritual Heat***

Anthropologists have observed rituals similar to the *mandi minyak* in many parts of the world and the theory of ritual heat has developed to account for this type of “supernatural” or shamanic performance (Eliade 1974: 474–476; Errington 1989; Telle 2003: 87; Waterson 1995). For example, Waterson discusses several ritual contests which form part of certain rituals of the Sa’dan Toraja, including ritual duels, cockfighting, stone-throwing battles, kick-fighting at funerals, and people in trance performing dramatic feats such as “climbing ladders of knives, stabbing and cutting themselves, pulling sharp swords against their own stomachs, standing on sharpened bamboo stakes, and dancing on hot coals” (1995: 94).

Waterson (1995: 94) says that is “hard not to see these entertainments as means of generating ritual heat” which must then be cooled through various means. Similarly, in the *mandi minyak* heat could be said to be generated in the separation of the initiate from the regular community as he or she enters the liminal stage of *silat* training. Reincorporation into the community with enhanced social status is similarly a heat filled process that is symbolized through the blazing fires of the *mandi minyak*. The student must literally overcome this heat to be cooled by the soothing properties of the oil which is rinsed off the following day.

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<sup>29</sup> G.E.D. Lewis was headmaster of the Victoria Institution, the school attended by the children of Sultans and the aristocracy, including Mrs. Mahidin and several of her brothers and sisters.



The raising of ritual heat helps to explain the potential of the *mandi minyak* to act as a precursor to explosions of violence.

Ritual heat works well where the symbols fit, for example, linking hot coals, knives, and boiling oil to explosions of violence. Ritual heat serves to explain agonistic data, but what about when the symbols don't fit? For example, could ritual heat be said to explain a child's baptism; the ritual heat of singing hymns extinguished by the water in the font? More to the point, the *mandi minyak* is a judicial ordeal, an invulnerability rite, and a bath in healthy oil. Ritual heat does not account for the *mandi minyak*'s transmutation over time. From Hollan's (1995) question as to why so many rituals take the agonistic form of war magic in Southeast Asia, the question now becomes what are the processes that underlie how such rituals are framed and reframed across time.

### ***War Magic, Volcanic Ritual and Riots***

According to Shaw (1976: 11–14) the lime, flower, and oil baths are examples of war magic, the main purpose of which is an attempt to secure invulnerability and immortality. The oil bath prepares Malay warriors to go into battle. For example, middle-aged *silat gayong* informants remember that on the eve of the 13 May 1969 riots hundreds of martial arts groups performed the *mandi minyak* in Kuala Lumpur. They said that the mosques resounded to the fierce chants of *Allah, Allah, Allah* throughout the night. This was part of the preparation of the Malays, as Pa' Ariffin put it, "to go to war with the Chinese" after a perceived insult to the Sultan. Clutterbuck (1984: 289) estimates that a thousand or more people were killed during the riots, which occurred due to an election result that would have swung the balance of power away from the Malays.

No doubt the *mandi minyak* increases in-group solidarity and is part of a war magic ritual process that produces and enhances a warrior identity or ethos. Whilst the *mandi minyak* can function as a volcanic ritual preceding an eruption of violence, *silat* rituals alone do not suffice to explain the unleashing of collective *amok*. According to Wazir (1990: 16–17) *amok* is outside culture, it is an indiscriminate outbreak of rage and violence, which is the opposite of the discipline *silat* teaches—whether *silat* operates passively to reinforce *adat* or is actively employed in defending the group or nation (*bangsa*). Furthermore, as I have shown, the meaning of the *mandi minyak* has shifted over time although the ritual form has remained intact, as though the mystical kernel were more important than the rational shell. The *mandi minyak* may be performed as a prelude to violence, or to bolster courage in the event of an invasion, but it more usually accompanies an annual *silat* grading, and can act as a send-off for *pesilat* traveling abroad as was the case for the cast of *Silat: Dance of the Warriors* (travel in past times was considered dangerous). Therefore, to reduce the *mandi minyak* solely to war-magic would involve the same sort of reductivist error as reducing Islam to a warrior religion.

## Occulturation

The attribution of sacred or mystical power to secret esoteric skills involves a process where esoteric skills are framed as magic. Occult attribution especially occurs through ritual and performance. A theatrical performance for some may be framed as ritual by others and *vice versa*, depending on the individual and their belief systems in relation to the group. Therefore what one individual or group sees as black magic (*ilmu hitam*), another individual or group may regard as *bone fide* religiosity.

Secrecy is an integral part of *silat*. Some of the secrets of *silat* pertain to the ability of the art to transform an individual into a lethal fighter. Genuine martial skill is often deliberately hidden in the martial arts through codes, symbols, gestures, postures, rituals and rites. Basic moves may turn out to contain the essence of the entire martial system, yet unless they are correctly learned and properly unpacked in relation to the system as a whole the result is a poor understanding and a set of vain applications. Secrecy therefore ensures the dominance of the master, just as soft movements combined with flowery aesthetics may serve to disguise a razor sharp knife from the enemy. Secrecy, mystery, and deliberate mystification conceal the hidden knowledge of the master from even the most willing and determined of students who have not fully attained the master's confidence. Of course, to some extent this level of secrecy has led to the misinterpretation of technique and encouraged the appearance of those attracting misplaced confidence, together with charlatans who would abuse *silat* towards ends that are neither martial nor spiritual.

Occulturation refers to a process whereby occult meanings are attributed to secular practices, events, people, places or things, and occurs beyond of the realm of martial arts. For example:

In practice, a *pawang* who is credited with the uncanny ability to draw fish to his boat produced the same effect when he could position his boat in the path of an advancing shoal of fish. A technical skill is implied, but one which is integral to the social context of a *kampung* within which the slowly acquired working knowledge of the surrounding sea attains the quality of magic (Chew 1982: 38, italics added).

Chew shows that a technical skill attains the quality of magic through the performance of bountiful fishing. The *mandi minyak* is the repository for a set of technical skills, including the production of oil, which of course is used for secular as well as a mystical purposes. In terms of pragmatic martial training, the hot oil is a superb way to condition the hands to make them tough enough for striking.<sup>30</sup> The *mandi minyak* also operates on the level of psychological conditioning, specifically in relation to obeying diabolical orders and conquering fear. The oil bath conditions the

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<sup>30</sup> Some western boxers crack their fore-knuckles to make them grow larger, and soak their hands in vinegar to toughen their fists. Similarly, Chinese boxers of the Hung Gar kung fu style routinely immerse their hands in near boiling water after training before they apply an alcohol based herbal liniment. *Silat cimande* practitioners bash their wrists against each other before applying a specially prepared oil to toughen the flesh, bone and sinew.

martial artist to carry out the orders of their leader with absolute determination. This is borne out by the example of Nazim, an English convert to Naqshbandi Sufism, who when I asked him why he had just placed his hands into boiling oil, said “I was just obeying orders.” *Silat* is a technology to transform the bodymind so as to attain psychophysical power. Performing the *mandi minyak* requires more than doctrinaire belief: it demands faith and fealty which are aspects of an inter-group loyalty that leads to faith in the self, and faith in the ability of the self to transcend itself in order to accomplish apparently amazing or heroic feats.

In sum, to explain the ordeal by boiling oil I have taken an ethnographic and historical approach. The boiling oil ordeal can be regarded in several ways: (a) historically, as a judicial trial of innocence, (b) as an invulnerability rite, and (c) as a healing bath in oil to alleviate the aches and pains acquired during a course of *silat* training. Today the oil bath may be done for the purposes of health, and if repeated seven times, to gain invulnerability. The participants’ production of meaning at these events is contingent upon their *niat* (intention). The *mandi minyak* is performed in the heart of the capital city, and this shows that urban Malays are clearly not antithetical to displays of magic.

The relative enchantment or disenchantment of the event seems to be a matter of how the principle actors define the situation in relation to the wider social structure, their *niat*, and the immediate and more distant audience. I have argued that the lime bath is a rite of divination, whereas the oil bath is a rite of revelation. In the lime bath the *guru silat* summons the shadow of a long dead ancestor to make visible the personality type of the neophyte who is typified by humoural dispositions according to a four-element taxonomy read through a lime-cutting ritual. The oil bath reveals the power of Allah to suspend natural law in order to answer the prayers of the supplicants in an embodied ritual proof that goes beyond language, and beyond what people would normally consider possible. The oil bath reveals how leadership by example culminates in enough courage, faith, and obedience to plunge the hands into boiling oil.

In the lime-cutting rite of *silat gayong* the spirit (*arwah*) of a noble ancestor is called into the lime. The spirit controls the way the lime falls and through this communicates the loyalty and potential of the student. In the run-up to the ordeal by boiling oil neophytes were introduced to what I have earlier called the “epistemology of the shadow,” which is basically the idea that just as we cast shadows, so too are human individuals merely shadows cast by the higher reality of Allah (see Chapter 4). The epistemology of the shadow provides an alternative rationality to the practitioners of *silat gayong*. Placing the hands into boiling oil is not an act of insanity, or of pure conformity and obedience, but a means of demonstrating the initiate’s acceptance of that higher reality, a reality that goes beyond all human rationality. These rituals of *silat gayong* indicate that it is important to develop an understanding of the Malay war magician’s ideas concerning the spirits of their ancestors, to which I turn in the next chapter.

## Chapter 8

# Deathscapes of the Malay Martial Artist

*Human souls are rays of the divine sun imprisoned in the senses*  
(Evans-Pritchard 1949: 2).

If death is considered as a stage between this life and eternity, then the spirits of the noble dead may appear to watch over the living. I have argued that *silat* masters are the gatekeepers of Malay war magic and warrior religion. They are concerned with how to die, heal, kill and live. Their ability to call shades from the nether world places them on a par with the shaman, albeit that Islamic *silat* masters are prohibited from entering trance.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I examine *silat* through its notion of death and the shadow soul (*bayang*), and attempt to relate this to the urobos, the snake eating its own tail, which is a symbol of transformative regeneration. I sketch the deathscapes of several different types of *silat*, which although dissimilar in some respects share essential characteristics in their ideas of noble death, and then I consider the actual death of a *silat* master.<sup>2</sup> Prior to commencing these sketches I turn to some conceptual and theoretical issues.

I use the term “noble” in the broad sense to refer to a worthy or illustrious person and not in the restricted sense to those of royal or aristocratic birth; “noble” as (potentially) an achieved, and not necessarily an ascribed status. Historically the Malay societies of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, and the Riau Archipelago were stratified into three classes: the royal family (sultans and rajas), the aristocracy (*bangsawan*), and the commoners (*rakyat*).<sup>3</sup> One way to achieve status in Malay society was to become a renowned *guru silat* – a kind of headman. In *Bahasa Melayu* the language used for the ruler is different from that used for ordinary folk. The ruler never eats (*makan*), he regales himself (*bersantap*); disdaining sleep (*tidur*), he reposes (*beradu*); he does not die (*mati*), he is wafted aloft (*mangkat*) (Laderman

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<sup>1</sup> Here I have added some more ethnographic data and omitted some of the more speculative material that appears in previous versions of this chapter (Farrer 2006a).

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, aside from Seni Silat Haqq Melayu, the *silat* styles discussed are here are Silat Seni Hulubalang Melaka, Seni Silat Gayong Malaysia, and Silat Siluman Harimau. I also mention *silat Melayu*, *silat harimau*, and *silek bayang*.

<sup>3</sup> This three tiered stratification provides a neat though simplified formula for a complex series of power relations and interactions (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 46–51; Gullick 1958: 21–22).

1983: 61). Formerly, the ruler provided the exemplary model for being or becoming Malay (*Melayu*), and this includes the adoption of Islam, sometimes in specifically Sufi varieties.

Sufi Malays view death as a transformation, an opening to go through, rather than as the ultimate culmination of life: one moves not from life to death, but from life to Eternal Life, through death.<sup>4</sup> However, heroes, martyrs, sultans, and saints, can avoid death altogether, an idea well known to Islam, if controversial:

We believe that Malaysia is protected by these people. In [the Holy] Quran it says that people who fight in the service of Allah never die ... though you see them die they actually don't die (Khalid, from fieldnotes).

Hence the reality of death is separate from the appearance of death. Christ is an example of this, as orthodox Muslims, Malays included, deny the death and resurrection of Christ, saying that he only appeared to die on the cross.<sup>5</sup> At certain key moments in history powerful immortals will be present on earth to do battle with the forces of evil. The present era is the beginning of the end of time, when all the power of Evil is to be unleashed upon the world: demons, *jinn*, *Shaytan*, and the Antichrist (*Dajal*) are amassing, ready for the final battle.<sup>6</sup> The Prophet Isa (Jesus) will return, and the world must unite under the last Caliph. Then Judgement Day will finally be upon us. As the legions prepare for battle the immortal warriors, saints (Shaykhs or *wali*), Caliphs, Prophets, and other friends of God such as Khidr are already among us. It is only because of the tireless struggle of the Forces of Good that the Forces of Evil are momentarily held in abeyance.

## Deathscapes

By “death” I do not mean simply the cessation of “animal life,” but death as conceived by the living.<sup>7</sup> For conceptions of death, I coin the term “deathscapes,” by which I mean an orientation towards death that posits such “virtualities” (Deleuze

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<sup>4</sup> Once the deceased has been interviewed by the Angels of Death in the grave, some informants say the torment of hellfire begins immediately, however, for Malays, the period in the ground is a liminal time between this life and the next, which will only be announced at the Day of Resurrection, when everyone comes back to life in the appropriate animal form of their character (dogs, pigs, tigers, snakes and so forth).

<sup>5</sup> Orthodox Muslims do not believe that Christ was crucified, as (according to the Holy Quran: ii. 149) he was one of the “*exceptionally faithful* ... exempted from death altogether” (Bowker 1991: 121, his emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> This view is held by members of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat* and is commonly espoused more generally in “Sufi” conversation.

<sup>7</sup> Death is regarded with a series of emotions including horror, revulsion, and dread, but also fascination and humour. In the Malay language death (*mati*) can also be termed *meninggal*. Royal death is referred to by the term *mangkat*.

and Guattari 2002) as an ideal death, a good death, or a bad death, and the time of death, along with a set of shared understandings concerning ancestors, those who Chambert-Loir and Reid (2002) call “the potent dead.”<sup>8</sup> My use of the term “deathscapes” stretches it beyond its use in cultural geography where it refers to cemeteries, memorials, and monuments (Hartig and Dunn 1998), and “avoid[s] the narrow strictures of examining deathscapes as a space-utilizing phenomenon” as recommended by Kong (1999: 9). Whilst I acknowledge the term’s applicability to landscape, I want to use it more generally to discuss objects alongside ritual, practice and performance.

Like ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas, and ideoscapas, discussed by Appadurai (1996: 33), death flows all around us, giving rise to all manner of interpretations, rituals, and practices, including Parry’s (1982: 74–110) bizarre Aghori aesthetic, who lives in the cemetery in a mud hut walled with human skulls, devours human flesh, faeces, and dog’s urine, and consorts with menstruating prostitutes; Metcalf and Huntington’s (1991: 209) Americans, where “self-made men are reduced to puppets” pumped with formaldehyde, and put on display; and Geertz’s (1976: 72) sober Javanese, who bury their dead quickly, before the sun sets.

Metcalf and Huntington, in a paragraph on Geertz (1960), say that “for the Javanese, mortality does not seem to hold any great terror and they discuss it with little show of anxiety. In part, this calmness is due to a pervasive fatalism about dying; it is all in the hands of God” (1991: 60). In Geertz’s terms, at Javanese funerals there is an “almost languid letting go” (1976: 72). This holds fast for Malays who also consider death to be “all in the hands of God” (Mdm. Watri). Citing Geertz (1960: 69–74) Metcalf and Huntington say “the proper emotional state to be achieved” at a funeral is not one of crying, but “is called *iklas*, a “willed affectlessness”, an evenness of feelings from which the peaks of elation and the troughs of despair have been eliminated” (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 60).

Compare this to Peletz who says “women in Negri Sembilan are more centrally involved in the ritual washing of corpses (even though the *imam* oversees the washing of male corpses); and it is generally expected that women, but not men, will wail uncontrollably during funerals (even though all such outpourings of emotion are frowned upon)” (1996: 250). However, women do not wail uncontrollably at Malay funerals, nor are they expected to do so, as wailing makes it more difficult for the

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<sup>8</sup> The term “deathscapes” has been used in archeology (Rainville 1999), geography (Hartig and Dunn 1998; Kong 1999; Teather 2001), science fiction, and in “death metal” music (*Inner Deathscapes* by VII Arcano). In an interview, Achille Mbembe says that “by ‘necropower’, I have in mind the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, sovereign power imagines itself and is deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of deathscapes, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead. Let me hasten to say that this is far from being a typically African phenomenon. Deathscapes have emerged in such faraway places as Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine, Colombia, Sri-Lanka, or Kashmir. Recent U.S.-led wars in Iraq or in the Balkans can be characterized as such” (Mbembe 2001, 2002).



deceased to pass on. The deceased, though dead, remains sentient, and can still feel pain and, presumably, sorrow. The demonstration of grief depends on who dies, and how close the family were to the deceased. In the event of the death of a child, or a newlywed, an emotive demonstration of grief is to be expected upon death and whilst the corpse is being prepared for burial.

Although westerners, according to sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, may live in denial of death (Becker 1973; Hayslip 2003: 34–42; Littlewood 1993: 69–84; Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 110), highly publicized “megadeaths” (Rosenberg and Peck 2003: 223–236), such as the slaughter in Iraq, prevent death from taking much of a holiday, at least not a very long one (contra Goldberg 1998). After the Second World War and during the years since Hertz’s (1905–1906) essay *Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort* was translated into English, there has been a tremendous resurgence in the literature on death. There is so much death literature that Bryant et al. (2003) have produced a two volume encyclopedic handbook to try to organize it. I am not going to attempt to summarize the anthropological literature on death here, but instead signal my work in relation to some of the classic and recent contributions. Those familiar with the literature may immediately perceive “deathscapes” as a challenge to the “ideology” of Bloch and Parry (1982), the *mentalités* of Ariès (1978), and the “collective representations” of Hertz (1905–1906), and Metcalf and Huntington (1991).

First, I find the concept of “deathscapes” preferable to “ideology,” because the term ideology still conjures up the Marxist avatar of “false beliefs,” one of the seventeen varieties noted by Eagleton (1991: 1–2), whereas I am not concerned with stipulating the truth or falsity of indigenous beliefs. It may be objected that this is a crude reading of “ideology,” but even a more sophisticated version, say “particular ideas represented as universal,” sets the social scientist in a Olympian position vis-à-vis the notions of death of the other, and situates the “Other’s” position as somehow not real.

Second, as Metcalf and Huntington point out, Ariès’s (1978) *mentalités* – the European reactions to death surveyed over several centuries, “the attitudes characteristic of the epoch,” can be subjected to the same criticism as the culture and personality school in anthropology, i.e., it is too subjective (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 20). Here I would hasten to add that by “deathscapes” I do refer to a configuration of ideas that are historically situated and generated, but this does not make them a “mindset,” a vulgar term of pop psychology that I would regard as akin to a crude employment of *mentalités*. More fundamentally, I use deathscapes to refer to an embodied set of practices, rather than to refer to something subjective, mental, or imaginary.

Third, “collective representations” was ever the substitute for the abandoned *conscience collective*, and my problem is that in the rituals and practice of the Malay martial artist, and in the artefacts of their material culture, what is important is not what is being “represented,” where one thing stands for another, symbolizing something else; instead something is happening, something that may be constituting the social order, rebelling against it, ignoring it completely, or satirizing it, as the case

may be, in other words, something part of an active constitution of self and identity, both as transformed and maintained, and not merely a passive reflection.

My rejection of an approach based primarily upon collective representations is influenced by Gell's *Art and Agency* in which he eschews Saussurian semiotic interpretations of art, in favour of reading the art object in terms of what it does, rather than what it represents (Gell 1998: 6). In order to accomplish this Gell adopts Peirce's (1991) tripartite scheme of "index," "icon" and "symbol." To briefly explain, and here I simplify Gell (1998: 13), the "index" points to something else (smoke points to fire) and does not "represent" it; an "icon," say a religious fetish in the form of a goddess statue *is* an avatar of the vigilant goddess, and is not merely her representative; and lastly, a "symbol" represents, or stands in for, something else.

Kapferer, independently of Gell (as far as I am aware), develops a strong criticism of collective representations, and pushes the question of ritual beyond the problem of order to the transformation of meaning and identity through ritual interaction. According to Kapferer:

The dynamics of rite in the context of embodiment involve not only the playing out of structure but its creation – the point that Turner stressed in his work, thus countering a static Durkheimian representational orientation that has clogged much anthropological discussion of rite (Kapferer 2004: 41).

For Kapferer, ritual goes beyond representation, symbol is beyond sign, and he argues that an approach needs to be adopted toward ritual that concentrates on ritual as a "virtuality;" that understands it from its own internal point of view, and not in relation to external parameters (Deleuze and Guattari 2002; Kapferer 2004: 46). Therefore, there is no need to continue to tie the symbols of the living and the mourners, to the corpse and the burial, to the soul and the dead (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 83) to find out what they "mean," or for Hertz (1905–1906: 58) with his talk of survivals, what they "meant." Instead we should attempt to envisage how the virtual space and time opened up by ritual leads to the creation of meaning through the change in the participants. Seen like this, ritual is a dynamic virtual process that can "transform the existential circumstances of persons in nonritual realities" (Kapferer 2004: 47).

A question arises here: what if the virtual transformative properties of rituals, once enacted, are misunderstood by, or unknown to, or ignored by others, who despite the best of possible intentions may "betray" the patient? (Goffman 1961: 139–143). I frame this question in terms of "discrepant deathscapes," or the same thing, but put another way, a "disjuncture" of deathscapes, which are simultaneously real and virtual.

To more fully understand the Malay art of *silat*, and its view of "noble death," I have had to reach beyond Seni Silat Haqq Melayu and draw from the other styles of *silat* I learned as part of my performance ethnography. In any case the performance ethnography was set against the background of my day to day life in Singapore and Malaysia, where, for example, I attended the deathbed of *guru silat* Wak Sarin, who died in 2002. Sarin's son, Masri, related the training in *silat* given to him by his late father, which involved an ordeal of lying in an open grave for eight consecutive

nights.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Sarin's father, Mokri, who I knew as *Yayi* (grandfather) was formerly *dalang* of a *kuda kepang* troupe and *dalang* of the Javanese *wayang kulit* shadow theatre. Then in his nineties, he called the family together to witness his death. *Yayi* sat in the kitchen surrounded by his family whilst muttering a death dirge of *dhikr*. *Yayi* survived this night, but has since passed away.

The deathscapes discussed here are those of the masters of the Malay martial art. Their "thanatology," their "virtual world" of death, what I refer to as a "deathscape," is comprised of several elements, including the principles of how to kill, and how to survive, as well as of how to die a "good death," and cause a "bad death," alongside rituals and performances meant to entertain, respect, and summon the ancestors. For the *guru silat* the idea of a "good death" is part of their aesthetics of death, and "noble death" refers to a dignified death within these parameters. I inquire whether there is a disjunction between overcoming the fear of death, which is encountered and inculcated as part of the *silat* "rehearsals of death," and the actual experience of death, as it occurs predominantly in the modern hospital setting where medical staff and significant others (next-of-kin) exercise overwhelming control over the treatment of the patient. I then question the possibility of having a noble death under these circumstances, and ask to what extent modernity precludes a noble death.

### *The Aesthetics of Death*

Pa' Ariffin says the functions of *silat* are "to teach people to defend themselves, to attack others in a controlled way, to teach the community defence, and to teach people to die happy. You must be happy in life to die happy." Similarly, *guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad says that "*silat* must teach you how to live properly, with Islam or other religion, in order to prepare you for death." To learn more about "the unseen realm" (*alam ghaib*) of spirits (*jinn*), the *guru silat* advise their pupils to sit with those who are dying, and carefully watch their last moments, listen to their last words, and observe their breath. Was the last breath in or out? Controlled, or gasping? Look into their eyes, are they staring far away, or darting around the room, perhaps seeing what we do not? This eye behaviour, and the slipping in and out of consciousness, is considered proof of the reality of the spirit realm, a realm that is also entered through sleep, and experienced in dreams. A "good death" is considered a willing, timely, and voluntary entry into this other dimension.

Mohammad Din Mohammad once told me of a *guru silat* in Singapore who "died a beautiful death, with exact time, and exact style." This provides an example of the "aesthetics of death," where deaths are divided into "good deaths" and "bad

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<sup>9</sup> I have no reason to doubt the veracity of Masri's account of the graveyard ordeal, but it is an account, and not something I have personally experienced.

deaths.”<sup>10</sup> The idea of “exact time” and “style” means that death is peaceful, its time foreseen, and the time of death may be accepted or delayed temporarily. For Mohammad Din Mohammad death was not seen as annihilation, but as transformation. Transformation occurs on spiritual and social levels. Thus, a great warrior (*pendekar*) may attain the noble status of a Saint (*wali*), providing an example of status mobility in what was previously a stratified patrimonial society. To die in battle (*mati jihad*) for your country, cause and belief, provides another example (with *mangkat*) of noble death, but one that is specifically Islamic. In *mati jihad* the usual burial rituals of cleansing and redressing the corpse are shelved, and the soul is said to directly enter paradise.

Gradual signs of impending death include the hair turning white, balding, aging, wrinkling, and losing teeth, fitness and strength. All these changes show that “there is a clock ticking away the moments of your life” (Mohammad Din Mohammad). However, some Sufi and *silat* masters (often one and the same) seem relatively immune to these gradual symptoms of impending death, and live to a ripe old age looking relatively fit, slim and youthful. *Wali* are said to mysteriously disappear rather than die, and directly enter the company of the immortals (*arwah*), returning to the mortal realm in times of need, or to teach *silat*.<sup>11</sup> Other noble souls travel to the same place, but take the route of death. By either route the principle is established that immortality is possible for the noble soul, who may chose between death and disappearance.

It comes as no surprise then, that the grave (*kramat*) of the legendary Malay hero Hang Tuah, which supposedly grows longer every year, is believed to be empty. The grave of Hang Tuah (Fig. 8.1) is now a tourist site, with colourful storyboards surrounding the twenty foot long grave (*makam*). Malays still visit Hang Tuah’s grave (near Melaka) and his well (Kampung Dayung) to take *wuduk* (ritual cleansing) and ask for his blessings. That *silat* elders were reputed to be able to predict the day of their death, and to be able to postpone it, is a particular example of a wider practice. One method to postpone death is to wear earrings made from petrified dew. Another method is to insert the rare stone of petrified dew (*geliga embun*) under the skin (see Chapter IV).<sup>12</sup>

The art of inserting precious magical things into the body is known as *susuk*, a favourite of Malay love magic, where men and women enhance their beauty through enchanted supplements.<sup>13</sup> *Susuk* is employed in war-magic to grant invulnerability.

<sup>10</sup> Parry (1982: 92), in regard to a good death in India says “having previously predicted the time of his going and set all of his affairs in order, he gathers his sons about him and – by an effort of concentrated will – abandons life. He is not said to die, but to relinquish his body.” Similarly, Bradbury (1999) uses the terms “good” and “bad” death in the context of contemporary England. (See also Bloch and Parry 1982: 15–18; Bradbury 1999: 142–146, 159–160; Parry 1982: 82–83; Tong 2004: 151–152).

<sup>11</sup> *Silat lima beradik* was imparted to the five brother’s by a *wali* who sat in a tree.

<sup>12</sup> The *geliga embun* looks like a pearl though it may be considerably larger.

<sup>13</sup> In seventeenth century Javanese men were known to insert small bells into their penis to give their sexual partners enhanced pleasure. Apparently, the bell could be heard as they walked along, thus announcing their potential (Brown et al. 1988).

**Fig. 8.1** The grave of Hang Tuah at Melaka



For example, the famed *pendekar* (warrior) and nationalist fighter, Mat Kilau, is believed to have died and returned to life five times due to a *geliga embun*, a stone found in the heart of the Ladies Mantis Tree, inserted behind his ankle (Mohammad Din Mohammad).<sup>14</sup>

It is necessary to turn to the negative example, to the “bad death,” or the “ignoble death.” They are not identical, though the difference may be subtle. Suicide provides an obvious example of a bad and ignoble death, as suicide is taboo in Islam, and deemed a passport to Hell. “Bad death” would include any sudden or unanticipated death, such as the loss of life by accident, or murder, or death during childbirth. During birth, the death of a mother, or child, or both, may result in a female vampire (*pontianak*), and for the failed issue, an evil spirit (*toyol*). In this case it is only the souls of those who have died a calamitous death, shrouded in misfortune, which are reanimated as evil beings.<sup>15</sup> The down side of *susuk* is that when death eventually does occur, it is slow and agonizing, leaving one begging for release. Mohammad Din Mohammad said “when you accept death it becomes your friend, it gives you all the signs and an opening to go through. If you don’t accept [death] then you have to bang your way through.” Once death has occurred, Malays tend to accept it quietly, and later, after the burial, may seem perplexed if you ask them if they feel sad, saying “why should I feel sad? He has gone to some place better” (Pa’ Ariffin, referring to his late father).

Although there are a myriad of ways to end a life in *silat*, including snapping the neck, or spine, strangulation, and striking vital points (*nadi*), decapitation is a prime example of an “ignoble death.” One technique resulting in decapitation

<sup>14</sup> Mat Kilau was a nationalist fighter involved in the Pahang disturbances of 1892–1894 (Andaya and Andaya 2001: 172; Shaw 1976: 12).

<sup>15</sup> Similarly the souls of the murdered are said to remain as graveyard ghosts (*jimbalang orang*) (Endicott 1970: 74).

(there are dozens) is *cinabuta*.<sup>16</sup> This is technique using the traditional attire for men, a sewn cloth skirt (*sarung*), which when rolled tightly into a *cindai* can be used like a heavy whip, or when held in both hands may be used to block and catch weapons or limbs. The *cindai* is rehearsed against an attacker armed with a *parang*, where after blocking the downward chop of the *parang* under the elbow, a turning movement is used to trap the attacker's arm. The cloth is simultaneously wrapped around the attacker's head, covering the eyes. From behind, they are tripped to the floor, and whilst they lie prone the *parang* is removed from their grip. The *coup de grâce* is one of rehearsed decapitation, whilst the victim is pinned to the floor with their head held, and their eyes covered. Pa' Ariffin hinted to me that this technique is called "the blind Chinese" in reference to the 13 May 1969 ethnic riots in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>17</sup> More recently, in Kampong Medan, in 2002, a dispute between a Malay wedding party and an Indian funeral procession escalated into an ethnic riot lasting several days, and was ended, so I am told, by a *guru silat* who decapitated the headman of the Indian village. This suffices to make the point as to what is an ignoble death, one that has relevance for contemporary conflict zones.<sup>18</sup>

*Silat* masters have practical and mystical means at their disposal to cause death. They have been documented to kill their foes with a single slap (*penampar*) (Rashid 1990: 74). This may provide a nonaesthetic reason for the prodigious size of the stone and metal rings many Malay men wear upon their fingers. Instead of turning their hands into rocks, as was the way of kung fu masters, they wear rocks upon their hands. Elders of a Sumatran style of *silat* called *silek bayang* (shadow *silat*) are said to be able to kill from a great distance, sending "supernatural" force to targets of the head, neck, stomach, or the navel of the opponent (Maryono 2002: 229). More dramatically, Pa' Zaini claimed to be able to kill with a single glance. *Silat* practitioners eschew notions of purely unarmed combat, and are experts with all kinds of blades. The most famous Malay weapon is the sinuous *keris*, said to have a soul of its own, and the power to harvest the soul of the enemy at the moment of death, storing it in the blade. Hence, the more people the *keris* has slaughtered, the more potent and valuable the weapon, which is said to enhance the ability of the fighter using it.

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<sup>16</sup> Laderman (1983: 17) employs the term *cinabuta* in relation to Malay marriage practices, and following Winstedt (1972: 73) says that it derives from the Sanskrit word meaning "the divider." Under Islamic law a man may not divorce and then remarry the same woman, unless the woman has been remarried and divorced again in the meantime. To expedite this process a *cinabuta* (blind Chinese) could be hired to marry the divorced woman, and consummate the marriage, only to immediately divorce her so the former husband may legally remarry her.

<sup>17</sup> For Malay ethnic riots see Clutterbuck (1984); Comber (1983); Gagliano (1970); Horowitz (2001: 98); Parker (1979); and Slimming (1969).

<sup>18</sup> However, the head is not considered the seat of the soul, a familiar theme in anthropology where taking the head prevents the soul from entering the realm of the dead (Parry 1982; Rosaldo 1980).



## *The Malay Deathscape*

My informants are Muslims of the Sunni, or “orthodox” school of Islam. They believe that there are three stages upon death. These are the interrogation in the coffin, the Day of Resurrection, and Eternal Life, either in the Garden of Heaven, or the Fires of Hell. What happens to the soul upon death is less than clear cut. The soul fragments upon death; the parts that coalesced in life to form the self (*diri*) including the *roh* (the individual identity from the spiritual breath of God), the *nyâwa* (the part that goes to heaven or hell), the *nafs* (the essence that binds the soul to the body), and the body (clay), are now distributed in different realms. This is complicated by the Malay belief in the sevenfold soul, which includes the shadow soul and the reflection soul, which are together known as *bayang*.

Upon death (*kematian*) Malays believe the corpse is questioned by the Angels of Death (*Malaikat Al Maut*). As the last coffin bearer takes his seventh step away from the grave, the angel will ask the corpse inside the coffin “*Mara buka*,” or “who is your God?” The different parts of the corpse will each be animated, presumably by their *nafs* (the *roh* has departed), and each will tell its story. The mouth will confess to lies or tasting tabooed food or drink, the eyes will own-up to forbidden sights, the feet will testify to stepping in unholy places, the hands will confess unwholesome deeds. The Angels that perch upon our shoulders throughout life, changing shift at dawn and dusk, will from their records meticulously account for the deceased’s good deeds and practices (*amalan*). If the good deeds are found to outweigh the bad, then some say the soul returns to its earthly home, and then gradually ascends to *syurga* (heaven); others say that before entering Paradise all souls must be cleansed in the fires of hell (*neraka*). The more wicked one has been in life, the heavier the sins, and the longer the cleansing will take. Until the Angels interview the body, the flesh of the corpse feels pain, and thus burial must take place before sunset.<sup>19</sup> Given the agony of the corpse, autopsy is an especially difficult and contentious issue for Malay families, who will call a doctor to the house in the advent of a death at home, and not send the corpse to the hospital.

As the *roh* ascends it will attend to its previous home to be feasted by a gathering of family and friends (*kenduri*). This presence may be keenly felt and possibly seen (perceived) by the family members, who do not mourn by weeping and wailing, but hold a steady and dignified overnight vigil, offering *doa* (prayers), specifically the Quranic verse *Ya Sin*. The *kenduri* takes place three days after the death, then consecutively, at seven days, forty days, one-hundred days, one year, and finally at three years after the death. At each stage the *roh* ascends a little higher: shortly after death it hovers about a foot above the ground, by one-hundred days it hovers

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<sup>19</sup> In the Muslim world burial should take place in daylight and preferably within eight hours of death. For Hertz (1905–1906) this would indicate fear of the corpse. At Malay funerals the family kiss the corpse upon the forehead before the face is shrouded; fear of the corpse would occur later, particularly if the body remained unburied come nightfall.

far away from the family in the distant sky. Each subsequent year the *roh* will return to watch over their family members throughout the fasting month, only to depart again the night before the *kenduri* that marks the end of Ramadan known as *Hari Raya*.<sup>20</sup> This is a bad time to visit the cemetery, as there are thousands of *roh* everywhere, and one can become possessed by the souls of the unfortunate (*badi*). The omnipresence of the dead ancestors is keenly felt at other times of the year, especially during weddings, births, and circumcisions, where the ancestors attend as unseen guests.

Given the omnipresence of the dead, it is not surprising that their spirits may be called through ritual. In *silat*, a ritual technology for this purpose is known as *seru*. According to Rashid:

In a *silat* group, a *guru silat* may summon different warrior spirits for different students, eventually bestowing different personality forms and characteristics and skills of combat on each one of his students. The *gelanggang* (training ground) becomes a platform for the symbolic reincarnation of the former warriors and heroes, re-enacting their exploits in a modern world. [...] The *guru* is the director of this séance of dead heroes (Rashid 1990: 77).

However, this practice is fraught with danger as “if with skill man can control spirits and make them his allies, with carelessness he may well find himself controlled by the spirits in turn” (Benjamin, G. 1979: 16).

In the next part of this chapter I sketch three ways through which the potent dead may be summoned: through a dance called the *belebat*, through the opening of a new *gelanggang*, and through a ritual where the *pesilat* lies in an open grave.

## The Four Corner Dance

Encouraged by Gell (1999: 29–75) to make diagrams of *silat*, I found a pattern in the footwork performed for the Four Corner dance (*belebat*).<sup>21</sup> The steps in the *belebat* conform to the outline of the symbol given below (Fig. 8.2). The symbol is shaped like a square with spirals at the four corners, and in the centre of each its four sides. In Malay magic, the shape of the rectangle, circle, or square acts as a barrier to contain or fence-off the forces of good or evil. The diagram below comes from Hong Kong, and is drawn from my handwritten translated copy of

<sup>20</sup> The souls depart when they hear the *takbir* “calling” them to go back. The call (*Alla hu akbar*) is repeated in melody, and begins after *ishak* prayer (about 8.00 p.m.), and continues through the night preceding *Hari Raya*. The appearance and disappearance of souls also occurs during the second yearly Muslim celebration to mark the Muslim pilgrimage, known as *Hari Raya Haji*.

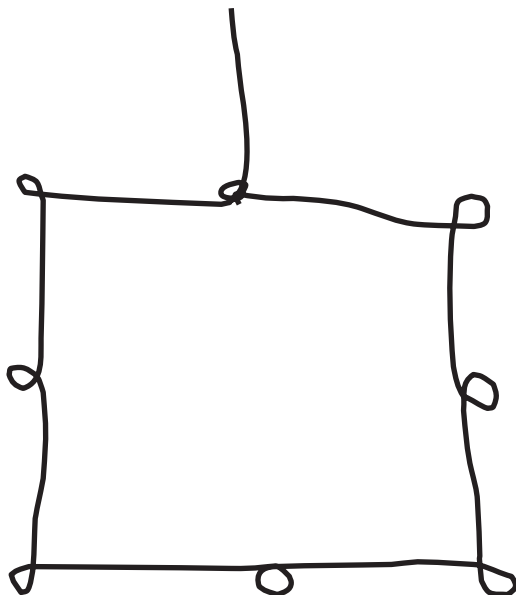
<sup>21</sup> Gell (1999) advises anthropologists to make diagrams of data that are challenging to assemble and digest, calling this method “strathernograms” which he developed in order to understand Strathern’s (1988) book *The Gender of the Gift*.

Grandmaster Yip Shui's unpublished manuscript.<sup>22</sup> Similar symbols are also to be found in books on Chinese magic. For example, de Groot [1910] (1969: 1040) says the tip at the end of the curls signifies a bolt of lightning, and each roll signifies a peal of thunder.

Providing the drawn example, I asked Pa' Ariffin about this design (Fig. 8.2). Previously, during fieldwork he said that the *belebat* is the set that differentiates those who know *silat Melayu*, which he considers the original and only real *silat*, from those that don't. His reply to my questions was:

As far as I am concerned the Chinese took it from us ... if you think it is from Shaolin, then know that Bodhidharma came from Sumatra or *Nusantara*. It was taught to me by two teachers, one of them my late father (may Allah bless his soul). THE LAM-JALALA. So powerful that if done properly its consequences are on the cosmic level. COSMIC MAN!! LAM-JALALA 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9. The footwork pattern as you call it is LAM-JALALA 8 ... maybe we'll speak about it someday, speaking won't do any good, YOU HAVE TO EXPERIENCE IT!!!! (Pa' Ariffin, via email 23 July 2004).

This design is remarkably similar to that documented and photographed by Waterson (1990: 95, 120), called the *bindu matoga*, and found among the Toba Batak of Lake Toba, Sumatra. Waterson points out that:



**Fig. 8.2** The *belebat* footwork pattern

<sup>22</sup> This symbol is part of the secret knowledge of Chow's Family Praying Mantis Kung Fu.

An eight-pointed design derived from Indian mandalas, which occurs with great frequency as a house-carving motif, represents the eight cardinal points and is called *bindu matoga* or “powerful power-point” (Fig. 97). This figure was also drawn on the ground at annual rites of renewal, with an egg placed at the centre, and the *datu* or priests would dance around it with their magic staffs. At the conclusion of the dance, one of the dancers would plunge his staff into the egg. The diagram itself served as a microcosm which could be used in ritual symbolically to destroy the cosmos in order to create it again, with the “planting” of the *datu*’s staff, which symbolized the “tree of life” of Toba mythology (Waterson 1997: 95, citing Tobing 1956: 173).

In Waterson’s photograph of the powerful power-point motif “the whole design is ringed by a *naga* or snake; both are associated with the underworld” (1997: 95 Fig. 97). Furthermore,

An essential feature of this design are the unbroken lines, maintained by loops at the corners, so that the whole is said to be without beginning or end (Waterson 1997: 120 Fig. 115).

Waterson suggests that these types of designs “are sometimes regarded as inherently powerful and may serve a protective function for the occupants” (1997: 120).

In a personal communication, Waterson told me that the design is also known to the Karo Batak as *Tapak Suleiman* (Solomon’s Footprint), but why it should be called that among non-Muslims remains a mystery. There are several differences between the *bindu matoga* and the *lam jalala*, such as the egg placed in the centre of the former, and the way the four central cardinal points are also connected by another diamond shaped square, giving two squares rather than the one. However, Pa’ Ariffin considered the Prophet Solomon (*Suleiman*) to be the king of the *jinn*, and Malaysia to be the land of the *jinn*, as the *jinn* are said to have settled there *en masse* after the conquests of Alexander the Great (*Iskander*). Similar symbols, such as the “Character from the Seal of Solomon” are known in the occult, and may be found in the seals of Sultans (Shah 1956: 7).

### *Description of the Dance*

Entry to the dance is through a short series of movements straight ahead, and then the *pesilat* steps to the right. At each corner the *pesilat* spins on the ball of one foot, with the other knee raised, one hand low, and one hand extended above the head. The circles in the centre of the lines are performed with the body twisting through 360 degree turns, using the dragon stance (*naga berlaboh*), where the legs are bent and crossed low, moving into an uncrossed position, and then back into the *naga* stance facing the other way. The four corners correspond to the four elements *tanah* (earth), *api* (fire), *angin* (wind), and air (water). It is performed for royal Malay garden parties by two pairs of players making up a quatrain, with each player exactly mirroring or shadowing his or her counterpart. Up to fourteen people perform the dance, with one in the middle. Mirroring, or shadowing the other is tricky, because with the twists and turns in the movements the opponent regularly disappears from view.

In the *belebat* students are taught to look out of the corner of their eyes, and develop their peripheral vision. They gaze towards the floor, and never stare directly at the opponent. This is a distinctive hallmark of *silat Melayu* (see Chapter III). One idea behind this downward gaze is to be able to see simultaneously in front, to the side, and behind, a skill developed to fight multiple opponents. Gazing down also allows the *silat* exponent to see the shadow of the opponent, which is necessary as the shadow is believed to be able to deliver blows, to cause serious injury, even death.

### *From the Belebat to Haqq*

Pa' Ariffin mentioned that the *lam jalala* exists in several varieties, specifically 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9. Each one of these exists as a separate entity that can be related to a pattern of movements (*juros*). The footwork pattern and the movements of the arms and hands are all associated to the *lam alif*; *alif* being a straight line, and *lam* the curve that traverses it in Arabic. Together this forms the Arabic word ل (haqq), which is the badge logo for Seni Silat Haqq Melayu. There are great mysteries attached to *Haqq*, one of the 99 names of Allah. One meaning is "infinity." Mohammad Din Mohammad provided the example that if the two ends of a twisted ribbon are joined together, one has the symbol for infinity, where two sides can be shown to be one. The Arabic word *haqq* also means "truth." But *haqq* is part of a formula repeated "to find the truth" (*ya haqq*), and hence the badge is indexical of Pa' Ariffin's quest to piece together the fragments of *silat Melayu* scattered across the Nusantara.

The quest to find the truth, and reconfigure *silat Melayu*, goes beyond the material realm, and into the realm of ghosts and shadows, to enter an altogether different magical world (*alam ghaib*). Hence each corner, and each centre spiral, mirrors the other, and as the set of movements is performed, the whole is set in circular motion. This *danse macabre* summons the spirits of the noble dead, or perhaps the *jinn* through the power of the Prophet Suleiman, and forms an embodied aspect of the practice of *seru*.

### **The Urobos**

The next step in my analysis is to trace the link between this complex of ideas, and the urobos, or the snake eating its own tail, which is an important theme in Malay folklore, and appears as a symbol on the Silat Seni Gayong Malaysia badge (Fig. 8.3).

The Gayong badge shows a serpent or dragon devouring its own tail, which surrounds a globe, above a tigers head, set above a pair of keris. According to Skeat in his *Malay Magic*, which he also dubs the Malay "folk-religion," "the universe is girt round by an immense serpent or *ular Naga*, which feeds upon its own tail" [1900] (1984: 6).

**Fig. 8.3** The Seni Silat  
Gayong Malaysia badge



Another clue to this Southeast Asian ideational complex is the snake bracelet known as the *kayu baha*, fashioned like a snake eating its own tail (Fig. 8.4). I was told that:

You put it in a pot outside your house, set in concrete, to ward off evil spirits, especially those from the sea. When someone does magic on you, and they throw the remains into the sea, they say you will never recover. Also people wear it on their wrist for health: to take away sickness (Julie, from fieldnotes).

The bracelet or *kayu baha* is made from a sea fan, which is a kind of coral common in deep-sea water. The snake is a symbol of the *jinn*, the earliest creation beside human beings, which exists from the time before earth. According to Mohammad Din the bracelet works by raising your inner strength (*tanaga batin* or *tanaga dalam*) “depending upon the wood that you are using, so that you and the wood will reach God in the prayer.”

The urobos is a familiar theme in Gnostic religion, and alchemy, the “science” of turning base metal into gold (Herzog 1983; Jung 1953). Whan (2003) says the urobos is mentioned by Heidegger and Hegel in regard to hermeneutics, and the circular nature of knowledge, and claims:

The Urobos is an archetypal symbolic image of a serpent coiled in a circle and eating its own tail. It served as an emblem of alchemy, representing Mercurius and the process of transmutation. Feeding upon itself, the uroboric serpent symbolized unity. Jung understood it psychologically as a symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite – that is, of the Shadow (Whan 2003: 115 n22).



**Fig. 8.4** The *kayu baha*  
(author's personal collection)



This outline of the uroboric serpent fits the data I have acquired nicely in connection to *silat*, and can be clearly seen to have affinities with the *kayu baha*. To understand more clearly how these three themes interconnect, I must return to the Malay notion of the shadow soul.

## The Shadow Soul

In classical Malay ethnography, Malay animism has a sevenfold conception of the soul, but the elements of this have never been entirely clear (Endicott 1970: 78; Skeat [1900] 1984: 50n). However, the shadow soul forms an important aspect of the belief systems of *silat* practitioners and Sufi mystics. As we have seen *silat* practitioners wear black uniforms, and train at night to remind themselves that they are but shadows. According to Mohammad Din only Allah is “Reality,” Adam is the “Shadow of Reality,” and the Prophet Mohammed is the “Life of Reality.” Furthermore, “in the mystical world most fighters learn how to develop their shadow,” to bring it to life so as to come to their “fighting aid” (Mohammad Din Mohammad).<sup>23</sup> A ritual is conducted using a coconut without its shell, which has been cut from the tree with a wooden knife, and a beeswax candle, made from a hive the bees have

<sup>23</sup> Mohammad Din Mohammad’s teacher, Pa’ Hanafi Harimau, lived to 103. On the day of the *tamat* (completion) Din had to stay in a swamp until a tiger arrived. This is considered to be an introduction to the spirit of the style.

abandoned on a Friday. Given these two instruments, Mohammad Din can tell you “how to make your shadow [come] alive – you – speak like you, look like you. But not you.” The shadow may be used to assist you when fighting, so that there are two of you. It is said that if the shadow gets a punch in, the injury is incurable. The shadow follows orders:

When you are not around you can let him sleep in your bed but not touch your wife. He does not need sleep, or sex, or food. When you die he will also die (Mohammad Din Mohammad, from fieldnotes).

The belief is that when God created this world, and the sun, he also created shadows. The shadow is there with or without light, and is there to help you in this world. Because of this, one can “produce it or make it your friend” (Mohammad Din Mohammad). Furthermore, as Mohammad Din said, “when you strike off the light it doesn’t mean the shadow is not there.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Calling the Shadow*

*Seru*, or calling the shadow, may be accomplished by several means, both traditional and modern, including the dances of *silat*, lying in a grave, and through appeals directed towards paintings. In the Malay world there are three types of people who raise spirits (and thus practise sorcery): the shaman, the warrior (and disciples), and the black magic practitioner. In this context “spirits” may refer to the souls of dead people, or to the spirit of animals, or material objects, such as “stone, air, jungle, and earth” (Mohammad Din Mohammad). Earth, fire, air, and water are configured in terms of a four element theory. Each element is attended to, or guarded by a *jinn*, an angel, and a blessing (*shafa’at*). What a person summons, through their intention (*niat*), makes all the difference. A person may summon an historic warrior to guide them in martial arts, or a legendary medicine man to guide them in medicine. In medicine this is known as *ilmu Batara Guru*.<sup>25</sup> In this way people begin learning from someone they cannot see. For *silat* they call it the *sheikh* – getting in touch with the master who can create movement within you (*gerak*). Among other things the *sheikh* can take the form of an animal, or of a bygone warrior.

*Silat* masters who have schools *seru* Panglima Hitam (the shadow of a warrior), to make sure the training ground is protected against intruders. Panglima Hitam will emerge

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<sup>24</sup> One may become aware of the shadow soul by staring in the mirror for a period of three to forty days (see Chapter 4).

<sup>25</sup> Errington states: “The extreme example of formlessness at the centre, which to my mind clinches the thought that social geography is shaped under duress from the challenging Other, is the example of Batara Guru [said to be the first ruler of Luwu]” (1989: 282). Furthermore, “Batara Guru is the name for what is most formless and most potent, most invisible and unlocatable. Batara Guru is everywhere, and therefore nowhere; Batara Guru’s place is so high he is placeless, unlocated and unlocatable; he is perfectly one, but perfectly without form” (1989: 283).

as a shadow when no-one is practising in the *gelanggang*, to prevent outsiders from practising there. The same spirit can also be asked to look after the area around the house. It must be fed eggs and benzoic stone (*kemenyan*) as if laying bait for a fish. Alongside these offerings a spell (*jampi*) or “mantra” must be said, such as the following:<sup>26</sup>

Hai Datok Panglima Hitam:  
Duduk mengadap bumi,  
Mendonga mengada langit.  
Barang siapa, niat jahat kepada ku,

Itu engkau punya bahagian.  
Hanya kemenyan dan telur ini,  
Makanan engkau, sekali seaja.

Hey Black Genie of the Ground:  
Sit facing the earth,  
Look to the sky.

Should anybody have bad intentions towards me,  
That is your part [He is yours].  
Only this benzoic smoke and eggs,  
Is your food for this time.

*Guru silat* Mohammad Din Mohammad is an accomplished artist, and has produced paintings and sketches of Panglima Hitam, in black, so as to represent the shadow (Fig. 8.5). He says that the paintings are specifically designed to help the owner to “enter the black, to enter the shadow,” and to bring forth the shadow of the warrior, when they call him. Mohammad Din says the shadow of the warrior “can be many things to many people,” and that he is not necessarily an historical reality, just someone they have heard of, or an ancient warrior from myth or history.

Mohammad Din Mohammad’s paintings provide a new and innovative “technology of enchantment” appropriate for people who don’t have the time, knowledge, or inclination to perform the old ways (Gell [1992] 1999). The old ways are now considered *haram* (taboo) in an increasingly self-conscious Islamic society, but many Malays like to know that the power is available to them “as a backup, in times of emergency” (Mohammad Din Mohammad).

## The Graveyard Ordeal

Wak Sarin’s graveyard ordeal derives from Silat Siluman Harimau (evil tiger style) originally from East Java. Here summoning the souls of the dead is accomplished in a much more frightening way than the methods discussed so far. After learning eleven of twelve *juros*, Wak Sarin’s son, Masri, elected to undergo the graveyard ordeal

<sup>26</sup> Although the code switching from *jampi* to *mantra* may initially seem to indicate the heightened Malay awareness of Islam (which has caused many linguistic transpositions) it should be noted that both *mantra* and *jampi* are terms of pre-Islamic origin.

**Fig. 8.5** “Silat” by Mohammad Din Mohammad (acrylic on canvas)



(*patigeni*), which meant he must lie in a grave for eight nights in a row. The ordeal is arduous as all the while the black corpse ants (*semut mayat*) and mosquitoes are biting. On the last night Masri began to see things. First, a ghost of terrifying appearance, the face half smashed in and mottled with canker, the eye missing: a veritable zombie. Then, as he lay in the grave, a spirit appeared. Long and broad in the face, with pointed ears, and long though not sharp teeth, it hovered above him, and then walked along his body. He recited *jampi* to keep the evil genie away. Next, Masri says, came the most difficult test in the appearance of a beautiful naked woman: you must not touch her though she will attempt to seduce you, or you will fail the test (Masri, from fieldnotes).

Once this ordeal is complete, a named ancestor appears, in animal guise – a tiger or a crocodile are most common – to act as the *pesilat*'s familiar. Then, in times of need, they may call this spirit into them in order to fight. Masri recounts how he called the spirit in Tanjong Pinang (Riau) when he was attacked by two muggers, and says that all of a sudden they were “kicked into the ground” by a large group of taxi drivers and others wielding sticks. Hence the ancestor exists beyond the body, given an identity that transcends death.

## Death of a Silat Master

Death does not always, or these days even usually, occur with “exact time and style,” even for great *silat* masters, and this reveals the aesthetic deathscape in disjunction with the experience of death in the hospital. Consider *guru silat* Wak Sarin,

master of five *silat* styles and the graveyard ritual, a man with a mane of thick hair almost down to his waist. Proud and strong, he owned a fleet of fishing boats anchored off one of the nearby Indonesian Islands of the Riau Archipelago. He smoked several packets of cigarettes a day, and according to the surgeon died of lung cancer brought on by his earlier career as a deep-sea diver.

Shortly before Wak Sarin's death I was with him in the hospital, massaging his cold blue feet, and I am sad to relate how much he suffered. The surgeons shaved and then lopped off the top of his head like the crown of a boiled egg, to remove a tumour from his brain. When Wak Sarin awoke from the craniotomy, bald and with staple stitches that would make Frankenstein wince, he said to his wife: "Why didn't you let me die? I am a Muslim after all." Wak Sarin was a brave man who suffered quietly; he was prepared to die, but not in this way, like a puppet in the hospital. His acceptance of death was thwarted by medical intervention, albeit well-intentioned.

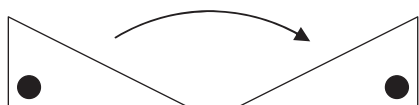
I have shown how *silat* practice and performance indexically embody religious and magical symbols concerning life and death, reality and the shadow, and the four elements. The same symbols are embodied in artefacts from Malay material culture that may be highly symbolic such as badges, or more iconic such as the snake bracelet. These findings compel the evaluation of the *guru silat* in terms of war magic, enchantment, theatre, and performance and suggest some common Gnostic roots to the occult debris stretching across the continents. The ontology of *silat* where people are considered to embody of shadows and reflections implies that people really are just shadows cast in the theatre of life in preparation for the divine reality, a reality they can only attain upon death. The transformation effected through *silat* training is not literally gold from lead, but of the polished heart from the unclean, the clean whole self replacing the dirty partial self. Once this transition is accomplished there is no need to fear death.

## Appendix A

### Basic Motions of Pattern Formation

(Source: Gell 1998: 78 Fig. 6.4/I.)

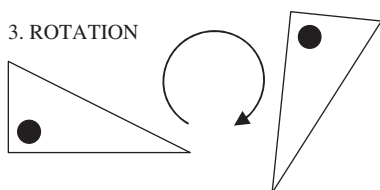
#### 1. REFLECTION



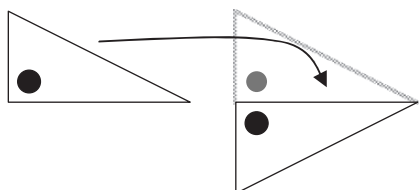
#### 2. TRANSLATION



#### 3. ROTATION



#### 4. GLIDE REFLECTION





## **Appendix B**

### **Naqshbandi Silsilah: The Golden Chain**

- (1) Sayyidina Muhammad, salla-lahu'alayhi wa salam
- (2) Abu Bakr Siddiqi Khalifat-Rasuli-lah
- (3) Salman al Farsi
- (4) Qasim Bin Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr as Siddiq
- (5) Imam Abu Muhammad Ja'far as Sadiq
- (6) Sultan-ul 'Arifin Abu Yazid Al Bistami
- (7) Abu-l Hassan al Kharazmi
- (8) Abu 'Ali Ahmad Bin Muhammad al Farmadi ar Rudhabari
- (9) Khwaja Abu Yaqoub Yusuf al Hamadani
- (10) Abu-l 'Abbas, Sayyidina Khidr 'Alayhi-salam
- (11) Khwaja 'Ala'u-d Dawlah 'Abdu-l Khaliq al Ghujdawani
- (12) Khwaja 'Arif ar Riwarawi
- (13) Khwaja Mahmoud al Faghnavi
- (14) Khwaja 'Azizan 'Ali ar Rarnitani
- (15) Khwaja Muhammad Baba as Sammasi
- (16) Khwaja Sayyid Amir al Kulali
- (17) Imamu-Tariqati Baha'd Din an Naqshbandi
- (18) Khwaja 'Ala'u-Din Attar al Bukhari
- (19) Khwaja Ya'qoub al Charkhi
- (20) Hadrat Ishan Khwaja-i Ahrar 'Baydu-llah
- (21) Muhammad az Zahid al Bukhari
- (22) Darvish Muhammad
- (23) Maulana Alanad Kil Amkanaki as Samarkandi
- (24) Muhammad al Baqil'i-lah Berang as Simaqi
- (25) Ahmad al Farouqi Sirhindi Mujaddidu-l Alfi Thani
- (26) Muhammad Ma'soum Bin Ahmad al Farouqi Sirhindi
- (27) Sayfu-d Din' Arif
- (28) Sayyid Nour Muhammad al Bada'uru
- (29) Shamsu-d Din Habibu-lah Jan-i Janan
- (30) Abdu-lah ad Dihlawi
- (31) Shaykh Khalid Diya'u-Din al Baghdadi
- (32) Shaykh Isma'il
- (33) Khas Muhammad

- (34) Shaykh Muhammad Effendi Yaraqhi
- (35) Sayyid Jamalu-din al Ghumuqi al Husayi
- (36) Abu Ahmad as Sughuri
- (37) Abu Ahmad al Madani
- (38) Sayyid Sharafu-din Daghistani
- (39) Sultanu-l Auliya Abdu-lah al Fa'izi ad Daghistani
- (40) Shaykh Muhammad Nazim adil al Haqqani an Naqshbandia

# Glossary\*

<i>Adat:</i>	Custom, manner, tradition, habitual practice
<i>Adab:</i>	Haqqani term for <i>adat</i>
<i>Adat pengantin:</i>	Rules for etiquette at weddings
<i>Adik:</i>	Younger sibling
<i>Akad nikah:</i>	Ismamic exchange of marriage vows
<i>Akal:</i>	Reason; the higher, angelic side of the self
<i>Alam ghaib:</i>	The unseen realm
<i>Allah hu akbar:</i>	God is great
<i>Allhamdulillah:</i>	Praise be to God
<i>Amalan:</i>	Good deeds and embodied practises
<i>Amanah:</i>	Gift; special, secret or reserved entrustment
<i>Angkat:</i>	Adoption into the family
<i>Amok:</i>	Fanatical force; to run berserk
<i>Anak gendang:</i>	Small drum
<i>Anfus:</i>	Souls
<i>Arwah:</i>	Spirits of the deceased
<i>Ayat:</i>	A set of words making up a complete sentence of the Holy Quran
<i>Baca:</i>	To read (words from the Holy Quran)
<i>Badik:</i>	Bugis dagger
<i>Baguazhang:</i>	Eight trigrams; a style of Chinese kung fu
<i>Bahasa Melayu:</i>	The Malay language
<i>Baju:</i>	Malay shirt; scabbard for a <i>keris</i>
<i>Baju kurong:</i>	Malay woman's dress
<i>Bangsawan:</i>	Aristocrats
<i>Batin:</i>	Inner essence; spiritual, esoteric dimension
<i>Baris gede:</i>	Balinese dance

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\**Bahasa Melayu* is an Austronesian language that contains many loan words derived from Arabic, Chinese, Indian and other languages. This glossary is oriented towards *silat* and mysticism and does not provide a comprehensive lexicon.

<i>Bay'ah:</i>	An oath of allegiance to a Sufi shaykh
<i>Bayang:</i>	Shadow, reflection; shadow or reflection soul
<i>Beladiri:</i>	Self-defence
<i>Belebat:</i>	The four corners set of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu
<i>Bendahara:</i>	Chief Minister in the Sultanate of Melaka (1402–1511)
<i>Berlian:</i>	Diamond; codename for <i>silat harimau</i>
<i>Bersanding:</i>	Wedding ceremonies of pre-Islamic origin
<i>Bersilat:</i>	Verb, to play <i>silat</i> ; abbr. of <i>bermain silat</i> , to play <i>silat</i>
<i>Bertapa:</i>	Period of seclusion and meditation; ritual ascetic retreat
<i>Bertinju:</i>	Challenge matches
<i>Bidan:</i>	Birth-attendant/midwife
<i>Bomoh:</i>	Malay shaman or magician; traditional healer, faith healer
<i>Bomoh akar-kayu:</i>	Herbalist
<i>Bomoh jampi:</i>	Herbalist and medical specialist
<i>Bomoh patah:</i>	Bone setter
<i>Bomoh silat:</i>	<i>Guru silat</i> or war magician
<i>Buah:</i>	Fruit; testicles; combat strategies
<i>Buah pisau:</i>	Knife fighting
<i>Buaya:</i>	Crocodile
<i>Bunga:</i>	Flower; a type of <i>silat</i> practice
<i>Capal:</i>	Sandals worn by men
<i>Cekak Serantau:</i>	Pa' Hosni's version of <i>silat cekak</i>
<i>Celak:</i>	Black eyeliner
<i>Cheongsam:</i>	Chinese woman's dress
<i>Chow Gar:</i>	Chows Family Praying Mantis Kung Fu
<i>Chou kou:</i>	Running dog; traitor
<i>Cikgu:</i>	Teacher
<i>Cindai:</i>	<i>Silat</i> weapon made from a tightly rolled <i>sarong</i>
<i>Dabus:</i>	Ceremonial self-piercing with a <i>keris</i>
<i>Daeng:</i>	Ruler or sultan; elder brother
<i>Dajal:</i>	The Antichrist
<i>Dakwah:</i>	The call to the Islam; Islamic fundamentalism
<i>Dalang:</i>	Puppeteer, master of <i>wayang kulit</i> ; master of a <i>kuda kepang</i> troupe
<i>Dampingan:</i>	Linking, merging with a spiritual being; keeping a familiar; black magic
<i>Datin:</i>	Dame or Madam
<i>Datuk:</i>	Sir; <i>Dato'</i> is the old spelling; commonly abbr. to <i>Tok</i> , spiritual grandfather

<i>Dhikr:</i>	Sufi chanting in remembrance of the Prophet Mohammad
<i>Diri:</i>	Self
<i>Doa:</i>	Prayer; the repetition of words from the Holy Quran
<i>Duduk laksamana:</i>	Archer or bow stance
<i>Elak:</i>	Turn and step; dodge
<i>Fanah:</i>	Oneness of Allah
<i>Fardhu Jumaat:</i>	Compulsory Friday prayers
<i>Gamelan:</i>	Heavy brass gongs
<i>Garuda:</i>	Mythical Javanese bird; Hindu god. See <i>Raja wali</i>
<i>Gayong:</i>	Bucket; orig. Sumatran term for <i>silat</i> ; to dip into the well of the unseen
<i>Gelanggang:</i>	Silat training ground
<i>Geliga embun:</i>	Rare stone of petrified dew
<i>Gerak:</i>	Spontaneous bodily movement in Malay <i>silat</i> ; see <i>menurun</i>
<i>Ghaib:</i>	Vanish, disappear; invisible, unseen
<i>Golok:</i>	Long heavy knife with a pointed blade
<i>Guru-bomoh:</i>	Former term for <i>guru silat</i>
<i>Guru silat:</i>	<i>Silat</i> master
<i>Hadith:</i>	Oral traditions of the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad collected after his death
<i>Hajj:</i>	Pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Hakikat:</i>	The plane of truth; third stage on the Sufi mystical path
<i>Halal:</i>	Food or produce prepared according to Islamic proscriptions
<i>Hantu:</i>	Ghosts
<i>Hapkido:</i>	Korean martial art
<i>Haqq:</i>	Truth; one of the 99 Names of Allah
<i>Haram:</i>	Taboo; forbidden, illicit
<i>Harimau:</i>	Tiger
<i>Helang berlegar:</i>	Circling eagle stance
<i>Hijab:</i>	Islamic veil
<i>Hormat:</i>	Salute with the palms pressed together; obeisance, respect, honour
<i>Hulubalang:</i>	Bodyguard to a prince or sultan; commander; a person who leads an army. Orig. Sultanate of Melaka (1402–1511)
<i>Hwarangdo:</i>	Korean martial art

<i>Ibu gayong:</i>	The “mother” or root of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Ibu gendang:</i>	Large drums
<i>Ijazah:</i>	Permission
<i>Ilmu:</i>	Knowledge; skills
<i>Ilmu batin:</i>	Occultism; study involving supernatural or magical powers; mysticism; belief that knowledge of God may be attained through contemplation and prayer
<i>Ilmu hitam:</i>	Black magic
<i>Ilmu kebatinan:</i>	Spiritual knowledge
<i>Ilmu putih:</i>	White magic
<i>Ilmu sihir:</i>	Black magic
<i>Ilmu silat:</i>	<i>Silat</i> knowledge, magic, skill
<i>Isa:</i>	Jesus
<i>Istana:</i>	Royal palace
<i>Insya-Allah:</i>	God willing
<i>Jampi:</i>	Magic spell; incantation
<i>Jawa asli:</i>	Abbr. <i>silat Jawa asli</i>
<i>Jembia:</i>	Arab dagger
<i>Jihad:</i>	The greater jihad is quashing the ego; the lesser <i>jihad</i> is Holy war
<i>Jinn:</i>	Spirits made from fire
<i>Jinn Islam:</i>	Good Muslim spirits
<i>Jinn Jembalang Bumi:</i>	The shadow of <i>Jinn Tanah</i>
<i>Jinn Kafir:</i>	Evil non-Muslim spirits
<i>Jinn Tanah:</i>	The <i>jinn</i> of the ground
<i>Juros:</i>	Sets of <i>silat</i> movements
<i>Kakak:</i>	Elder sister
<i>Kalarippayattu:</i>	Indian martial art
<i>Kampung:</i>	Village
<i>Kapak kecil:</i>	A small throwing axe from Kelantan
<i>Kebatinan:</i>	Folk-religious practices; pre-Islamic “animist” Malay mysticism
<i>Kemenyan:</i>	Benzoic stone
<i>Kenduri:</i>	Ritual feast
<i>Keramat:</i>	Grave; a sacred site
<i>Keramat hidup:</i>	A living saint
<i>Kerambit:</i>	A small curved blade shaped like a tiger’s claw. See <i>lawi ayam</i>
<i>Keris:</i>	Malay dagger
<i>Keris pekaka:</i>	<i>Keris</i> with a long handle shaped like a bird’s beak



<i>Keris sepuke pekaka:</i>	<i>Keris pekaka</i> with a straight blade
<i>Khalil:</i>	The other soul, the shadow soul
<i>Khalwa:</i>	A solitary Sufi retreat
<i>Khatam:</i>	<i>Silat gayong</i> grading; test upon completing a study of the Holy Quran
<i>Khatam lembing:</i>	Spear test of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Khidr:</i>	The wandering Green Man; St. George
<i>Kompang:</i>	Flat skinned drums
<i>Korban:</i>	Sacrifice
<i>Krabbi krabong:</i>	Thai martial art
<i>Kuali:</i>	Cauldron
<i>Kuda:</i>	Horse
<i>Kuda duduk lipat:</i>	Cross-legged seated stance
<i>Kuda kepong:</i>	Javanese hobby horse dance
<i>Kuda kuda:</i>	<i>Silat</i> stances
<i>Kuda segi:</i>	Slightly twisted horse stance
<i>Kufristan:</i>	Land of the infidels
<i>Kunci:</i>	Key; lock; to lock an opponent in a hold
<i>Kunci mati:</i>	Death hold; lethal lock
<i>Kuning:</i>	Yellow; abbr. <i>silat kuning</i>
<i>Kuntao:</i>	<i>Silat</i> combined with kung fu; black magic
<i>Laksamana:</i>	Title for Lord Admiral in the Sultanate of Melaka (1402–1511)
<i>Langkah:</i>	Steps; footwork
<i>Latah:</i>	Malay hyperstartle pattern; cultural syndrome
<i>Layi ayam:</i>	Hooked blade with a finger hole grip. See <i>kerambit</i>
<i>Layu:</i>	Listlessness
<i>Lelembut:</i>	Malay birth demon
<i>Leming:</i>	Spear
<i>Lok 9:</i>	Malay <i>silat</i> style specializing in <i>keris</i>
<i>Main puteri:</i>	Healing séance
<i>Majun:</i>	A herbal medicine
<i>Mak:</i>	Abbr. <i>mak cik</i> , aunt; honorific prefix for a female <i>guru silat</i>
<i>Makam:</i>	Mausoleum; tomb; sepulchre
<i>Mak yong:</i>	Malay theatre genre
<i>Malaikat:</i>	The Angels of Death
<i>Mandi bunga:</i>	Ritual flower bath of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Mandi kebal:</i>	Invulnerability ritual of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Mandi limau:</i>	Ritual lime bath of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Mandi mayat:</i>	Washing a corpse prior to burial

<i>Mandi minyak:</i>	Ritual oil bath of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Mandi seni:</i>	Combined <i>mandi limau</i> and <i>mandi bunga</i> ritual
<i>Mandi tapak:</i>	Ritual steps along the path of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Marifat:</i>	The plane of perfect gnosis; fourth and final stage on the Sufi mystical path
<i>Masuk Melayu:</i>	To become Malay
<i>Mat salleh:</i>	Caucasians; lit. mad sailors
<i>Mati jihad:</i>	To die in battle for your country, cause or belief
<i>Menurun:</i>	Trance; animal spirit possession; the transmission of spirits
<i>Meor:</i>	Descendant of the Prophet Mohammed from the female line
<i>Merantau:</i>	Travel in search of mystical power; see <i>rantau</i>
<i>Mimpi-mimpi:</i>	Dreams
<i>Minyak:</i>	Oil
<i>MPAJA:</i>	Malaysian People's Anti-Japanese Army
<i>Murid:</i>	Disciple; student
<i>Murtad:</i>	Become apostate; to desert Islam
<i>Mystik:</i>	Malay mystic; mysticism
<i>Nadi:</i>	Vital points
<i>Nafas batin:</i>	Spiritual breath; internal power; see <i>tenaga dalam</i> ; <i>prana</i>
<i>Nafs:</i>	Ego; the essence that binds the soul to the body
<i>Naga:</i>	Serpent; dragon
<i>Naga berlaboh:</i>	Docking dragon stance; low crossed legs stance
<i>Nasi:</i>	Cooked rice
<i>Nasrul haq:</i>	A banned style of <i>silat</i>
<i>Nenek kabayan:</i>	Witch
<i>Neraka:</i>	Hell
<i>Niat:</i>	Intention
<i>Nikah:</i>	See <i>Akad nikah</i>
<i>Nyâwa:</i>	The part of the soul that goes to heaven or hell
<i>Olahbatin:</i>	Spiritual exercise
<i>Olahraga:</i>	Sport silat
<i>Pa':</i>	See <i>Pak</i>
<i>Padi:</i>	Rice in the field
<i>Pak:</i>	Abbr. <i>pak cik</i> , uncle; or <i>pak</i> , father, from <i>bapak</i> ; honorific prefix for a <i>guru silat</i>

<i>Panglima:</i>	Warrior
<i>Panglima Hitam:</i>	The shadow of a once living warrior
<i>Pantun:</i>	Poems
<i>Parang:</i>	Machete
<i>Pari pari</i>	Faeries
<i>Pasang:</i>	Ready stance
<i>Patigeni:</i>	Spiritual ordeal in the dark
<i>Pawang:</i>	Spiritual protector of the fields and crops
<i>Pedang:</i>	Rapier; a slightly curved sword
<i>Peguruan:</i>	Style or school; teachings
<i>Pelesit:</i>	A cricket familiar
<i>Pencak silat:</i>	Javanese silat; fighting <i>silat</i>
<i>Penghulu:</i>	Chief
<i>Pesilat:</i>	The <i>silat</i> player or practitioner
<i>Pisau:</i>	Knife
<i>Pontianak:</i>	Female vampire; birth demon
<i>Prana:</i>	Spiritual breath, internal power; see <i>nafas batin</i> ; <i>tenaga dalam</i>
<i>Pukul:</i>	Strike; punch
<i>Pusaka:</i>	Heirloom; family possession handed down through the generations
<i>Puteri:</i>	Princess; daughter of a Sultan
<i>Qiamat:</i>	Doomsday
<i>Rahsia:</i>	Secrets
<i>Raja sehari:</i>	King for the day; Malay groom
<i>Raja wali:</i>	Mythical Javanese bird; Hindu god. See <i>garuda</i>
<i>Rakyat:</i>	Folk, commoners, peasants; the people
<i>Ramadan:</i>	The Islamic fasting month
<i>Randai silek:</i>	<i>Silat</i> based theatre and dance form of the Minangkabau
<i>Rantau:</i>	Travel abroad in search of mystical power; abbr. <i>merantau</i>
<i>Rimau:</i>	Tiger; abbr. <i>silat harimau</i>
<i>Rimau menanti:</i>	A low half-squatting tiger stance
<i>Roh:</i>	Individual identity from the spiritual breath of God; soul; immortal element
<i>Rukn:</i>	The five pillars of Islam
<i>Sabut kelapa:</i>	Magical portal woven from coconut fibres
<i>Sahabat:</i>	Status flattening ridge style handclasp
<i>Sandang:</i>	A shoulder sash that comes with a title

<i>Sanggul:</i>	Hair pin
<i>Sarung:</i>	Male one-piece cloth skirt
<i>Selegi:</i>	Leopard
<i>Selendang merah:</i>	Red waistband or scarf
<i>Semangat:</i>	Vital force; spirit
<i>Sembah:</i>	<i>Silat</i> opening salutation; pay homage, obeisance
<i>Sembahyang:</i>	Prayer, pre-Islamic or Hindu worship
<i>Sendeng:</i>	Askew; crooked; awry; twisted to one side; amiss
<i>Seni:</i>	Art, aesthetics
<i>Seni beladiri:</i>	Self defence
<i>Seni silat:</i>	The art of <i>silat</i>
<i>Seni Silat Al-Haq:</i>	A version of the banned <i>Nasrul Haq</i>
<i>Sepak:</i>	Kick
<i>Sepak sepak:</i>	Whirling kick
<i>Sepak takraw:</i>	Malay football
<i>Seru:</i>	Call, summon
<i>Shafa'at:</i>	Blessing
<i>Shahada:</i>	The Islamic litany of faith
<i>Sharia:</i>	Islamic way, Islamic law; first stage on the mystical Sufi path
<i>Sharif:</i>	Male who claims descent from Prophet Mohammed
<i>Sharifa:</i>	Female who claims patrilineal descent from Prophet Mohammed
<i>Shaytan:</i>	Satan; devil
<i>Sifat:</i>	Appearance
<i>Sifat duapuluh:</i>	The twenty hidden dimensions of the self
<i>Sifu:</i>	Chinese kung fu master
<i>Sihir:</i>	Magic; the manipulation of supernatural forces
<i>Sila:</i>	Abbr. <i>silsilah</i> , chain; lineage
<i>Silap:</i>	To make a mistake
<i>Silat:</i>	The Malay martial art
<i>Silat cekak:</i>	<i>Silat</i> of the Kedah Court.
<i>Silat cimande:</i>	Javanese style of <i>silat</i> ; buffalo style
<i>Silat gayong:</i>	The predominant style of <i>silat</i> in Malaysia; see <i>gayong</i>
<i>Silat ghaib:</i>	<i>Silat</i> involving the manipulation of the <i>jinn</i> and the souls of the dead; become invisible; see <i>ghaib</i>
<i>Silat harimau:</i>	Tiger <i>silat</i> ; Minangkabau <i>silat</i> style
<i>Silat hulubalang Melaka:</i>	Melaka <i>silat</i> ; based on the legendary Hang Tuah
<i>Silat Jawa:</i>	A component of <i>silat Melayu</i> from Java
<i>Silat Kedah:</i>	A component of <i>silat Melayu</i> from Kedah

<i>Silat Kelantan:</i>	A component of <i>silat Melayu</i> from Kelantan
<i>Silat lima beradik:</i>	Five brothers <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat lintau:</i>	Derivative of <i>silat gayong</i>
<i>Silat macan:</i>	Sundanese style of <i>silat harimau</i>
<i>Silat Medan:</i>	Garden party <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat Melayu:</i>	Malay <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat Minangkabau:</i>	Minangkabau <i>silat</i> ; a component of <i>silat Melayu</i>
<i>Silat Patani:</i>	A component of <i>silat Melayu</i> from Pattani
<i>Silat pengantin:</i>	Wedding <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat pulut:</i>	Rice cake <i>silat</i> ; wedding <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat sekebun:</i>	Garden of <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat sendeng:</i>	A component of <i>silat Melayu</i>
<i>Silat seni pedang:</i>	Art of the straight sword
<i>Silat setia hati:</i>	True heart <i>silat</i> (Javanese)
<i>Silat siluman harimau:</i>	Evil tiger <i>silat</i>
<i>Silat sterlak:</i>	Minangkabau style of <i>silek</i>
<i>Silek:</i>	Sumatran term for <i>silat</i>
<i>Silek bayang:</i>	Sumatran shadow style <i>silat</i>
<i>Silsilah:</i>	Chain; lineage
<i>Solat:</i>	Prayer; the exercise of prayer
<i>Songkok:</i>	Fez hat
<i>Subhanallah:</i>	Glory be to God
<i>Sufism:</i>	The mystical kernel of Islam
<i>Sujud:</i>	Prostrate prayer position
<i>Sunna:</i>	The ways of the Prophet Mohammad; Islamic tradition
<i>Susuk:</i>	Magic charms inserted under the skin
<i>Surah al-ikhhlās:</i>	Purity of Faith; a verse from the Holy Quran
<i>Syed:</i>	Male who claims patrilineal descent from Prophet Mohammed through Ali
<i>Syrik:</i>	Deviation from Islamic teaching
<i>Syurga:</i>	Heaven
<i>Tabib:</i>	Sufi physician
<i>Tahyiat akhir:</i>	Kneeling prayer position
<i>Taijiquan:</i>	Tai chi, supreme ultimate fist; a style of Chinese kung fu
<i>Taming Sari:</i>	The legendary <i>keris</i> of Hang Tuah
<i>Tanjat:</i>	<i>Silat gayong</i> hat
<i>Tarekat:</i>	Sufi Order; the second stage on the Sufi mystical path
<i>Tawis:</i>	Haqqani talisman
<i>Temenggong:</i>	Title for government minister in the Sultanate of Melaka (1402–1511)

<i>Tenaga dalam:</i>	Internal energy; see <i>prana</i> ; <i>nafas batin</i>
<i>Tetuang:</i>	War horn
<i>Tomoi:</i>	Thai martial art
<i>Tongkat ali:</i>	A herbal aphrodisiac
<i>Toyol:</i>	An evil spirit arising from stillbirth
<i>Tuan:</i>	Sir
<i>Tudung:</i>	Headscarf
<i>Tukang bekam:</i>	Specialist in blood-letting
<i>Tukang urut:</i>	Masseur
<i>Ummah:</i>	The Islamic community
<i>UNMO:</i>	United Malay National Organization
<i>Uri:</i>	Placenta
<i>Wak:</i>	Javanese uncle
<i>Wali:</i>	Islamic saint
<i>Waris mutlak:</i>	Authorized inheritor
<i>Wayang golek:</i>	Three-dimensional wooden puppets
<i>Wayang kulit:</i>	Shadow puppet theatre
<i>Wayang wong:</i>	Shadow theatre with human actors
<i>Wuduk:</i>	Performance of ritual ablutions
<i>Xingyiquan:</i>	Mind/body fist; a style of Chinese kung fu
<i>Zakat:</i>	Almsgiving; a religious tax
<i>Zahir:</i>	Outer appearance, manifest, bodily, exoteric dimension
<i>Zawiya:</i>	Sufi lodge



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