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TRANS-REGIONAL CONTINUITIES OF FIGHTING TECHNIQUES IN MARTIAL RITUAL INITIATIONS OF THE MALAY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This article explores continuities in fighting techniques of martial ritual initiations found across the Malay world (*Dunia Melayu*). Comparison with other neighboring Asian and Southeast Asian regions shows that these techniques follow patterns and principles that can be considered as 'properly Malay'. I argue that 'Malayness' is socially and politically consolidated through these initiations, not least because the techniques mobilize local cosmologies and notions of the 'person'. These cosmologies and notions are mainly articulated through conceptions of space and time, an aspect that is underlined by the transmission processes themselves. Transmission steps show parallels with life processes such as maturation, growing and purification. The correspondences between these processes are also expressed through a specific material culture. The structures of the technical fighting systems are oriented towards principles based on religion and morality, cosmology and philosophy. All of this suggests that the efficacy of *techniques* should be analyzed in conjunction with larger questions of the efficacy of *rituals*.

INTRODUCTION¹

The martial practices of Southeast Asia feature a rich diversity of both techniques and frames of transmission. Several studies provide insights on the streams (locally called *aliran*)² found in the mainland area of the region and in some parts of the insular zones, particularly in the Philippines. However, these streams are still understudied. With few exceptions, research generally focuses on the origins, diffusion, social rooting, and organization process of the martial practice groups. Little has been written about the technical aspects of the fighting systems.³ Moreover, in this area almost no research into techniques has been undertaken from a systematic or comparative perspective.

Recent developments regarding the Malay martial systems (e.g., *pencak silat*'s approval by the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) program), their vast heterogeneity, and the strengthening of related research may cause one to question both the relevance of the so-called 'Malay martial arts' as a specific set of practices and the ability of the concept of 'martial arts' to define these highly composite practices. I argue that, for many of the most rooted practices – defined by the number of practitioners and the practices' inclusion into local social activities and systems of representations – the notion of 'martial ritual initiation' would be a better fit. Finally, if contextualization and comparison suggests that a family of 'Malay martial practices' exists, it stands to reason that we should examine what specifically unites these practices.

This theoretical and conceptual project is based on data I collected in over a dozen expeditions (with a total of thirty-seven months spent in the field) that began in 2004. Ethnographic studies were conducted

through immersion in the martial schools of Banten and West Java. My research also employed several types of 'participant observation' and a large number of interviews with practitioners, masters, and officials in Jakarta, the Central part of Java, the Southern area of Sumatra (Lampung), Brunei Darussalam, Sarawak, and Kuala Lumpur. The comparative aspect of this study was also shaped by the extensive specialized literature on Malay martial practices [Maryono 1998; de Grave 2001; Farrer 2009; Wilson 2015; Wilson 2016; Paetzold and Mason 2016; Natawijaya 2016; Facal 2016].

This essay does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of Malay martial arts. Due to the immensity of the field (several hundred streams and thousands of schools), I will discuss only a limited number of groups most relevant to the present study. Moreover, one of the characteristics of Malay martial practices is the importance of the informal dimension. The capacity of practitioners to interpret, combine, hybridize, create, and transmit leads to a 'rhizomic' model of expansion, where orality is still the predominant vector of knowledge's diffusion. Therefore, comparative results will be limited to general observations to better picture the complex pattern of these regional practices in their changing social contexts. One must also remember that the different streams are marked by strong heterogeneity in terms of practices and representations. Indeed, these martial practices are cross-cut by social tensions and are the site of divergent cultural discourses.

HOLISTIC DIMENSIONS OF MALAY MARTIAL PRACTICES

Anthropologists have emphasized that the techniques of Malay martial practices form part of a system that includes gesture, material culture, and cosmological knowledge [de Grave 2001; Farrer 2009; Facal 2016; Paetzold and Mason 2016]. Furthermore, the data collected indicates several interactions between different technical systems in the given area [Gille 1978]. This paper presents several martial practices from the Malay world which exhibit this double aspect: a systemic dimension of the technical sets, and interactions between these sets with other emergent social and martial systems.

Since the pioneering works on cultural technology initiated by André Leroi-Gourhan, it has largely been shown that techniques are embedded in the extended social frame [Digard 1979: 74] and that there is a 'human' dimension to techniques, as when activities are defined and finalized through effects that are socially recognized [Haudricourt 1964]. Moreover, specialists stress that there is a reciprocal determination of the technical systems with other areas, such as social and economic systems [Digard 1979: 83], and that techniques are ways

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2 I refer here to the notion of 'stream' rather than 'style'. Indeed, even if Malay martial practices are labeled under a generic name and share common general patterns (as I will argue), it is necessary to stress that these practices have different sources. From this perspective, the vernacular notion of 'stream' seems particularly appropriate as it underlines the practices' fluidity and multi-sourcing.

3 The notion of a 'system' is understood here in its literal sense, as a set of elements that interact together according to specific principles or rules. Following this perspective, a system is qualified by the analysis, but the people who elaborate the set of practices and representations that we define as a system do not always conceptualize or label it as one. The benefit of using the analytical notion of systems here is that, despite the instability inherent in every form of social and representational organization [Bowman 2016: 15], it underlines the interdependent relationships and forces that govern the interplay between the elements within an organization in reference to the social totality.

of acting upon materials that are culturally defined [Lemonnier 1994: 255]. Therefore, I will consider techniques in their socio-cosmological frames as a way to specify their interactions with other social systems (including religion, ritual and daily activities like agriculture).

Analysis of the set of correspondences between the components of these fighting techniques shows that they provide a pivotal basis for the functioning of larger practice systems. Within various streams fighting techniques are (to different extents) prevalent among the practices that comprise 'martial systems'. These include disciplines like dance and medicine. Indeed, they are designed to provide general protection: which encompasses defense and attack as well as the capacity to heal, kill, or even provide invulnerability. Therefore, fighting techniques constitute the main point by which to position the specificities of the streams in comparison with each other. The centrality of the fighting techniques, underlined by both the practitioners' discourses and analytical, and anthropological examination, indicates that they can provide insights into interregional continuities that exist between the martial practices found across the Malay world.

The integration of the techniques into wider cosmological frames and sets of social values leads us to consider their connection with related aspects, such as initiation, ritual, authority, apprenticeship, and transmission. However, I will mainly approach the martial practices through technical forms and the structures of the fighting systems they encompass. This approach will allow comparison and reveal the points of convergence and distinction that occur between the different regional streams. Due to the complexity of these combat systems, the other related cultural aspects (initiation, ritual, authority, apprenticeship, and transmission) evoked above remain the concern of specific works to be developed in the future. Nevertheless, as we cannot separate the 'style' and the 'function' of the techniques [Latour and Lemonnier 1994: 13], their origins, interactions, systematizations, and evolutions reveal both the representations of action upon material and the ideological dynamics of their societies of development.

THE CONCEPT OF MARTIAL RITUAL INITIATION

The fighting systems discussed here are embedded into a set of practices usually classified as 'martial arts', whether by practitioners, researchers or the public. Nevertheless, previous debates, particularly in this journal, have underlined the challenges of defining 'martial arts'. Sixt Wetzler, for example, has stressed the multidimensional aspects of the meanings of martial arts discourses (with 'meaning' ranging from 'preparation for violent conflict' to 'play and competitive sports',

'performance', 'transcendent goals', and 'health care') [Wetzler 2015: 28]. Paul Bowman, meanwhile, has convincingly argued for the necessity of placing theoretical concerns before definition by attempting 'to assess a context in terms of forces and relations, relative weights and gravities, and the ways in which forces and fields constitute, colour, and condition entities, identities, and practices' [Bowman 2016: 19].

Following these paradigmatic lines, and in accordance with the anthropological method, this study conceptualizes Malay martial practices on the basis of two operations. The first will be *contextualization*, which means that martial practices are considered in their society of inclusion and in relation to its social history and dynamics. Following Wetzler, the second operation will be comparison; specifically comparisons that will enable us to specify the characteristics of these practices among the various kinds of martial categories, including 'martial arts', 'self-defense systems', 'combat sports', 'performance arts', and 'healing systems'. On the basis of these two operations, the current study concludes that, considering the particular importance of rituality and the predominance of the initiation aspect over martial formation, we must mobilize another category: *martial ritual initiation*. The development of this concept is not based on an assumption that initiation is alien to other aspects of martial practice, such as performance, healing, and sport. Rather, it suggests that *initiation is hierarchically predominant over these other dimensions*. Although some cases suggest that Malay martial arts schools have already shifted away from an initiation-based model of organization, I observed in my research a countervailing trend towards an increased use of an initiation model. Of course, by its very nature the initiation model is highly heterogeneous and ceaselessly shifting, as the following discussion will suggest.

During his study of Central Java's *kanuragan* initiation, Jean-Marc de Grave [2001] was the first scholar to suggest that to understand the most fundamental Malay martial practices we must consider the analytical notion of 'ritual initiation'. Such initiations sometimes begin even before the practitioner's birth, when rituals are performed to protect the future newborn. De Grave stresses that the entire life of initiates is sequenced by personal and collective martial rituals. The most widespread rituals concern introduction into the practice group, access to new knowledge that will enable the practitioners to transform their bodies (by strengthening and purification actions), and access to higher levels in the group's social hierarchy that enables initiates to open a new branch of the school.

All such rituals contribute to the transmission of cosmological and religious knowledge, healthcare techniques, martial dances and performances, meditation, concentration and breathing techniques,

and invulnerability magic. These are all seen as complementary to fighting rituals and techniques. The practices are transmitted through spiritual chains of descent (*silsilah*), and individuals who enter a practice group must often take an oath that refers to these ancestral chains. Even when they have contributed to the transformation of a school's practices and values (sometimes significantly), practitioners who have successfully followed the rules of the school and have come to be considered as embodying its values enter this same ancestral chain. In some cases, these ancestors are thought to possess the practitioners who best embody and enact the group's values. Ultimately, these initiations conclude with death, although even the status of the dead is thought to continue its transformation through the larger cycle of ancestry.

All the rituals discussed here follow the three stages discussed by Arnold van Gennep in his work on rites of passage. These are, the setting of the ritual context, marked by the initiated group's separation from the community of the non-initiates; a transition, illustrated by the details of the ceremony; and finally, the reincorporation of ritual acts into daily life. According to van Gennep, these can be qualified as *pre-liminary*, *liminary* and *post-liminary* rites [van Gennep 1909]. Victor Turner later underlined the importance of liminal periods that position the initiates at the margin of an institutional political order and then favor a mode of social participation that is indispensable for the coexistence of the members of the inclusion group (which he calls *communitas* [Turner 1969]).

In addition to this ritual aspect, several initiation groups consider their martial practice as ultimately oriented towards religion. The historian and Islamologist Martin van Bruinessen [1999] illustrated this phenomenon in the socio-religious contexts marked by Sufism by showing that invulnerability practices (locally called *debus* in the West of Java and *dabuih* in the South of Sumatra) are central in regional religious practice. Locally, initiates believed that these practices contributed to the first diffusion of Islam in the Archipelago. Moreover, as noted by de Grave [2003: 16], the holistic aspects of these initiations enable the maintenance of activities that are exterior to orthodox Islam, like the cult of high-ranking persons (kings, saints, or local authority figures) or the cult of local ancestors. Locally, Muslim conceptions are not exclusive to other practices of a more animistic orientation. In these practices, some animal and mythical figures are mobilized and natural elements are referred to (for instance the bamboo and its flexibility; water and its fluidity) as a way for the practitioners to obtain their qualities as combatants. These points are further developed below.

For the reasons given above, and given the holistic nature of Malay martial practices, the notion of martial ritual initiation is a useful analytical tool. It enables us to grasp the predominance of initiation and

religious dimensions over martial training as well as the preeminence of collective action upon the socio-cosmic system over the supposed 'artistic performance' of the practitioners. This perspective supports the notion of the transmission of diverse practices and knowledge that surrounds the fighting techniques. They are ritually transmitted through the initiation of the persons over the course of their lives and across generations. We can then theorize why this model predominates in the Malay world and through what modalities it operates.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF 'MALAYNESS' THROUGH MARTIAL RITUAL INITIATIONS

Even if it is well established that Malays constitute an ethnic group [Coedes 1964; Lombard 1990: vol. 1-2; Tuan Soh 1991: 3], the notions of Malay identity and 'Malayness' still inspires debate among specialists. Territorially, the Malay world includes, according to these authors, the Isthmus of Kra, Singapore, the Riau Archipelago, Sumatra (including Aceh), the coastal regions of Borneo, the Sulu Archipelago, and the island of Java [Benjamin 1993; Farrer 2009]. More generally, de Grave [2013] suggests the inclusion of Indonesia (without Irian Jaya), Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Timor Leste. We could probably also consider the linguistic and socio-cultural continuities that exist in the Malay parts of southern Thailand and the southern Philippines.

Given the difficulties of territorial demarcation, the nature of the 'Malay world' as a socio-cultural entity requires reflection. Anthony Reid [2000] reviewed the historical evolution of the terms 'Melayu' and 'Malayness' in this context. He found that these terms were used initially as *referential* categories among people of the Archipelago and later were adopted as *social labels* by outsiders. Among specialists, some support arguments for the pre-colonial origins of the notions of Malay and Malayness, while others contest them [Barnard 2004]. However, most scholars agree that, while in everyday usage the term Melayu is readily understood, in truth its meaning is fluid and elusive [Yaapar 2004].

Similar conclusions can be reached regarding the fighting systems included within the ritual initiations. These systems resulted from the combination of multiple foreign and interregional influences and this aspect poses difficulties when trying to trace the borders of the areas of these practices and their development. Exogenous influences that can also be noted include Indian or Middle Eastern breathing practices: several Bantenese schools refer to the local Islamic mystic, *elmu hikmat*, as a source of power and invulnerability [Facal 2016]. There are also

healing techniques, which were conveyed through various forms of Hinduism and Islam, introduced by merchant networks and religious preachers. The practices linked to Indian *kalaripayat* (itself bound to *pranayama*, the practice of controlling breath and vital energy, *prana*) can lead to comparisons of the regions that were influenced by Hinduism. The numerous schools of *kanuragan* and *kebatinan* from Central Java indicate such an influence [see de Grave 2001].

Chinese influences deeply inflected these streams, an aspect of which is stressed by the extension of the term '*kuntao*'. This designates systems including Chinese elements at varying degrees [Davies 2000]. *Kuntao* is spread in peninsular and insular Malaysia [Davies 2010: 312-317], in the South of the Philippines [Jocano Jr. 2010: 335], and Indonesia [Wiley 1997], particularly in the Betawi streams from the extended Jakarta region [Natawijaya 2016]. More recently, the sportive and self-defense techniques integrated from Japan and western countries also impacted the fighting systems [de Grave 2013].

Interregional influences within Southeast Asia are apparent according to the geographical proximity of these areas. Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Taiwan, and China have in common a link between their fighting systems and dance (sometimes of royal origin), theatre, healing, spiritual protection, and invulnerability practices, as well as the use of protection amulets and weapons, like the dagger *keris*, the knife *kujang*, and the spear *tombak* [Wiley 1997]. Some streams encompass different regional influences, like *tomoi* and *silat spelek*, which are practiced in the Malaysian northern states of Kedah, Perlis, Terengganu, and Kelantan. They are closely related to other Indochinese boxing styles such as *muay thai* from Thailand, *pradal serey* from Cambodia, *vo thuat* from Vietnam, *muay lai lao* from Laos, and *bama lethwei* from Myanmar. Finally, influences also radiate from Malay areas to neighboring regions, as is the case for *silat* in the southern Philippines [de Grave 2003; for Filipino martial arts, see Wiley 1997].

These influences between Malay and other areas have an impact on how Malay systems distinguish themselves from other regional forms. Neighboring systems (especially *arnis* and *muay thai*) have been well documented, and they can serve as solid points of comparison to determine what constitutes Malayness in the field of martial ritual initiations. As we can define what links different systems and in what way(s) they differ from other regional streams, it can also be stressed that they build Malay identity and Malayness both at the internal level by distinguishing areas' cultural specificities as well as on an international scale by forging interregional cohesion. Thus, through both contextualization and comparison, it can be established that there is a Malay 'family' of fighting systems which transcends the varieties of local culture and significantly shapes bodily practice.

Observations made during previous research on Malay martial initiations suggests that the area has long been the scene of exchanges, particularly in the field of martial systems and ritual initiations [cf. Draeger and Smith 1980: 179; Notosoejitno 1984: 9; Mitchell 1989: 183; Maryono 1998; de Grave 2013]. Douglas Farrer and Jean-Marc de Grave note that most Indonesian and Malaysian specialists assert a Sumatran origin for Malay martial arts [Farrer and de Grave 2010: 363]. Even if there are insufficient written sources to confirm the Sumatran origin hypothesis, studies of the social anchorage of the art, including its ties to ritual activity, theater, performance, and regional linguistic media, all point toward Sumatran origin.

The number of schools and practice groups that have developed in the Malay world is impossible to calculate, as these fighting systems are often integrated into wider structures of transmission. Moreover, it is very difficult to distinguish between a school (*perguruan*) and a branch (*cabang*), or an extension, as these structures are created through diverse processes according to descent and kinship networks, as well as reflecting divisions or alliances between persons and groups. On the other hand, it seems more established that a limited number of regional families (about ten, according to de Grave [2013]) – identified through specific streams (*aliran*) (around 600-800 only for Indonesia, according to Natawijaya [2016: 7]) – form the basis of these structures. The streams are regionally designated through different vernacular names. Jean-Marc de Grave [2001] deals with *pencak* in Central Java; O'ong Maryono [2002] describes *pencak* and *silat* in Indonesia; Douglas Farrer [2012] considers *silat* in Malaysia; Lee Wilson [2015] and Ian Wilson [2016] analyze *penca* in West Java; and Gabriel Facal [2016] focuses on *penceu/pencé* in Banten. Other families are *silek* in West Sumatra; *mancak* in Bawean; *bemancek* in East Borneo; *mamencak* or *akmencak* in South Sulawesi; *encak* in Bali; *bakuntau* in Banjarmasin; *elaq*, *djilat*, or *ilat* in Madura; *gayong* in some parts of Malaysia; *silat* in Aceh, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam; and *pasilat*, *akmencak*, or *basilat* in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (South Philippines) [Gong 2007]. Other ritual war practices whose techniques do not necessarily form systems can be found across the Indonesian archipelago, as is the case for *carok* in Madura or *sirri* in Sulawesi.

Correspondences between regional streams appear at diverse levels. They are marked in accompaniment by musical orchestras, dance gestures, and valorization of movement aesthetics, which Douglas Farrer has characterized as 'a performance of enchantment and an enchantment of performance' [2012]. The recent edited volume by Uwe Paetzold and Paul Mason [2016] stresses these correspondences, from southern Thailand to Bali, passing by Kelantan, Sabah, West Sumatra, Riau islands, and West and Central Java. An observation that can be raised concerning the link between aesthetics and efficiency in combat

is the function sometimes played by aesthetics. In many schools where I conducted research, aesthetic gestures were believed to attract or to capture protective invisible entities. These entities would possess the practitioners and provide them with force and knowledge about martial applications. As such, the performances and their aesthetic characteristics are not only oriented towards the public, but also concern the domain of such invisible entities. Using this example, we can add to the analysis of Farrer [2015: 43], for whom entertainment and efficacy (similar to my notion of 'combat efficiency' below) permeate porous definitional boundaries.

Correspondences also vary according to the proximity of local forms of theatre, for example *randai* in West Sumatra, *wayang golek* in West Java, and *wayang kulit* in Central Java, East Java, and Bali. Theatrical forms are particularly elevated and enhanced during the martial displays of the wedding ritual in Banten (*buka tolak panto*) and Jakarta (*palang pintu*). Mimicry, imitation, and exaggeration are also constitutive of the Madurese performances of silat and rattan stick fighting *ohjung*, described by Hélène Bouvier [1994: 146-157, 182-183]. In every case, it seems that the link between theatrical forms and possession remains an aspect warranting further research [Farrer 2015: 36].

General parallels between streams can be identified around the important status of women in the foundation stories of schools, the social organization of the practice group, and links with tutelary spirits (for instance, the possession *latah* in Malaysia and the possession by ancestors who took the form of female tiger-ancestors in many parts of West Java). Female warriors are certainly an important subject of research, even in the contemporary period, as illustrated by the head of the West Javanese panglipur school, Enny Rukmini Sekarningrat (1915-2011). Because she was the daughter of the school's founder, Abah Aleh, she exerted influence upon every other panglipur master, and her charisma was reinforced by her military experience during the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949).

Other parallels between the Malay streams concern the role of the masters as physical, spiritual, or mystic healers and intermediaries with tutelary entities, often considered as spirits of ancestors. The interrelations between martial practice and healthcare is illustrated by the fact that moderate aggression is considered a way to strengthen both the body and the whole person. This principle appears not only in physical training but also in several privations (fasting, sexual abstinence, wakefulness), particularly in the streams influenced by *kebatinan* or the Sufi brotherhoods (among others, Naqsbandiyah in Malaysia, Shatariyah in West Sumatra, and Qadiriyyah wa Naqsbandiyah in Banten and West Java). Moderate and controlled aggression is also enacted through the strengthening massages (*urut*) of the body, that

consist of specific strikes and techniques of 'bruise crushing', or the more prosaic ingestion of chili which is thought to strengthen the inner organs [personal investigations on the Bantenese school of Mande Macan Guling and Terumbu stream].

Correspondences also touch on the link to local animals, as expressed in the stories of foundation (among many others, see Cimande and Syahbandar from West Java and Haji Salam from Banten), the identity of the tutelary spirits of the schools, the correspondences between animals (particularly tigers, but see also the surprising reference to turtles in silat penyu from Terengganu as well as the other animal forms described below) and ancestry, ritual sacrifices, and the attributes (blood, hair, teeth, nails) sought after by the practitioners through practice to strengthen their own body, to forge weapons, to make amulets, or to compose ritual offerings. In several streams, such as Cimande, links with agricultural production are visible in the field of the fighting techniques, ritual offerings, and parallels concerning the life cycle of plants and the process of apprenticeship. This is illustrated in many regions by the widespread conception of aesthetic movements, which are considered as flowers, and martial applications, which are referred to as fruits.

Another set of correspondences encompasses the relation to ecological elements like water (the Java Sea for Bandrong stream from Banten, the seven sources of Gombel Bunga Lari stream from Jakarta, the Cimande river and the basin of Terumbu Bantenese stream) and earth (comprising natural elements like mountains, but also cultivated spaces, such as the rice field invoked in Jakartanese Bekasi and the lime garden of Bantenese Tjimande Tarikolot), as they are invoked in many myths of foundation. These elements are also extensively used for ritual offerings. Earth from ancestors' graves and other products of the earth are used; many offerings are made from rice (like the cake kue onde found in the Sibunder, Ki Atu, and Troktok streams from Jakarta as documented by Natawijaya [2016]). Water from sacred sources is also used for ritual offerings; many kinds of beverages (tea and coffee) and juices (lime or coconut) are also found in the majority of martial initiation rituals of Java and Sumatra [Farrer and De Grave 2010].

When exploring the relationship between streams, we can also cite the structure of the rituals related to apprenticeship and to the cohesion of the practice group, oral traditions of transmission, the linguistic regional supports, and some more central notions, such as *rasa* [Stange 1984]. *Rasa* includes sensations, emotions, and feelings, as well as a faculty of empathy with a set of mundane and invisible forces. The strong valorization of this feeling is present in the whole Malay world under various regional modalities. It is influenced by cosmological and religious concepts, whether they derive from local forms of animism

or different tendencies of Islam, Catholicism, Javanism, Confucianism, or Hindu-Buddhism. Some streams develop specifically the capacity of *rasa*, like West Javanese Cikalong, Gerak Rasa, and Gerak Gulung. Other practitioners give an extended definition to this notion, as illustrated by several schools from the Syahbandar stream, that conceive of *rasa* as a way to communicate with invisible impersonal forces and, in some cases, to be possessed by them. Finally, correspondences between the streams are also obvious regarding the local principle of authority (discussed below) [Facal 2012]. Interesting parallels have been noted regarding the recent phenomena of sportive state federations and local informal political networks [Sidel 2004; Wilson 2016].

Such correspondences between regional streams show that it is essential to consider their social inclusion. It leads researchers to consider disruption and ruptures in the systems as well as the ways that practitioners reassemble the systems' elements to maintain their coherence or to provide new forms of meaning.



Figure 1: First movement of *golempangan* dance, inspired by the first prostration (*rokaat*) of the Muslim prayer (TTKKDH stream, Serang, *keceran* ritual 2).

UNDERSTANDING FIGHTING TECHNIQUES IN THEIR ORIGINAL SOCIAL CONTEXT

Continuities and distinctions between the techniques of the regional streams remain an open field of study. However, it is well established that there is an interaction between the techniques and their frame of inclusion [Leroi-Gourhan 1945]. This fact is significant as martial techniques influence numerous other practices. For example, Minangkabau theatre (*randai*) uses speech, music, and dance training, which are all derived from *silek*. This section examines several specific factors explaining these regional continuities, such as physical environment, social structure, political frame, and religious context. Moreover, André Leroi-Gourhan has shown that to be accepted in a specific socio-cultural frame, a technique needs a 'favorable milieu' which encompasses the actors' representations [Leroi-Gourhan 1973: 374]. To grasp these representations I will consider both cosmology and other central notions, such as that of the 'person'.

The physical environment in some ways orientates the conditions of practice (see below for a discussion of the social factors that prevent a geographically determinist argument). Through the analysis of the practitioners' discourses and practices, I have observed that urban or rural landscapes, hills, mountains and plains play a role in the daily movements and gestures that people choose to develop. This environmental influence is expressed in the numerous analogies made by the practitioners themselves linking techniques and environmental references like waves, mountains, earth, and sky [Facal 2016; Natawijaya 2016]. These elements are also central in martial rituals, which employ water, earth, fire, and breathing techniques (the breathing methods are sometimes understood as a way of mastering the air element).

Some activities, such as agriculture, cattle farming, steel forging, maritime work, and trade influence both techniques and the shaping of the bodies. For example, practitioners of the Cimande stream (West Java) suggest that the shaping of their bodies by the demands of rice agriculture facilitates the fighting techniques they practice. In West Java, the Syahbandar stream's founder, Mohammad Kosim Ama Syahbandar, was known as a blacksmith farrier. It is said that he developed his strength, as well as the grappling and locking techniques of his style, based on this work. Bandrong stream practitioners from West Banten inherited techniques designed for fighting aboard ships against pirate attacks. In the urban areas of Jakarta, several groups claim to have developed systems adapted to close combat in narrow and crowded urban spaces. In the harbor area of Tanjung Priok (North Jakarta), the martial streams stress technical specificities that differentiate one from another. On the other hand, in Bandung's city, considered to be West Java's cultural center, one observes robust sharing and exchange. This

hybridity gives birth to an immense variety of syncretistic forms that exist among the local streams.

These examples suggest that techniques are designed by practitioners to match their ecological specificities, physical environments, and daily activities. It also shows how the link between society and the environment is culturally constructed [Sahlins 1976]. In this respect, it squares with the observations of Maurice Godelier [1984], who concluded that reality is both ideal and material and that we cannot disconnect human action from the environment or the representations that underlie these actions. Of course, the use of the physical environment may vary according to the strategies and the cultural and technical specificities of the practice groups. The environment's use may also depend on political context (as described below). Another point linked to the environment is technique circulation and the types of exchanges favored, which is an important aspect of social organization.

Social structure and organization impacts the technical aspects of fighting systems. Regionally, combat methods demarcate social hierarchy. For instance, in West Sumatra, initiation of the Minangkabau's local rulers (*datuk*) still requires their ritual performance of *silek* combat dances. In the whole Malay area, for centuries, several systems were the monopoly of the rulers and the court [Bertrand 2011: 31]. During colonization, or periods of political reforms, these streams spread to popular classes, sometimes through religious networks (as part of the teaching curriculum in Islamic boarding schools, *pesantren* and *surau*) or specialized groups, including army officers, defense supervisors in the harbors, or security experts in mining areas [Maryono 1998]. Class stratification has always been linked to technical differentiation.

This was evident in the foundation of the Cikalong stream in the Cianjur region (West Java) by members of the noble class (*menak*) during the 19th century. That stream limited high kicks and the use of strength to differentiate itself from the Cimande peasants' (*semah*) stream from Bogor [Sastrahadiprawira 1978]. Cikalong practitioners therefore stressed a refined (*lemes*) ethos and technical training that emphasized sensitivity and feeling (*ngarasa*), whereas Cimande focused on force and resistance; a characteristic that was frequently noted by the practitioners with whom I conversed.

In both rural and urban areas the social contexts that influence the martial practices can be very diverse, according to the relations between local streams, migration tradition, geographical mobility, pilgrimage and peregrination, and uxor-, viri- or neo-local modes of residence. In the matrilineal Minangkabau society of West Sumatra, the migration called *merantau* that is done during men's initiation contributed to

intensive exchanges. Over the course of fieldwork in Lampung in South Sumatra in 2011, I observed that work migration permitted complex combinations of the systems. De Grave [2001] studied how pilgrimages practiced in Central Java favored and extended combinations between different systems. Likewise, I found that the uxorilocal marriage practices in West Java had the same consequence. In turn, in mid-20th century Brunei Darussalam society, the technical systems were increasingly formalized and homogeneous [Facal 2014]. These different cases lead us to consider political dynamics which may have an impact on both the circulation of the fighting techniques and their meaning.

Concerning the link between political frames and the development of fighting methods, the provinces of Banten and Lampung show that external political pressures can favor the development of local streams and push these to assert their specificities. For example, combat dances (*ibing penca*) have been encouraged by the West Javanese federation and the Indonesian pencak silat union (Persatuan Pencak Silat Indonesia, PPSI) as a way to oppose the national spread of more sportive forms of the art such as those promoted by the national federation and the Union of pencak silat (Ikatan Pencak Seluruh Indonesia, IPSI) [de Grave 2013]. In Banten, the invulnerability practices (called *debus*) have played the same role by differentiating regional *penceu* from the process of national homogenization. However, these local characteristics were also used by entrepreneurs and local government officials for commercial and political goals, in turn pushing some masters to develop hybrid forms. PPSI's combat dances have been formalized so their local characteristics can be easily identified during national pencak silat events and meetings. I have shown in previous work that the Bantenese have also created contemporary forms of *debus*, designed to spread the invulnerability image of its strongmen, the *jawara* [Facal 2016].

National unification and local marginalization have also operated for the Malays of Singapore, for whom the silat ritual practiced during wedding ceremonies is a method of socio-cultural identity affirmation in a disintegrating urban context [Farrer 2012]. Unified territorial areas, as is the case in Malaysia, exhibit a strong differentiation between the regional streams; each one linked to the larger cultural system of its home State (*negeri*). In contrast, the centralizing policies of the Indonesian State since independence led to the simplification of the martial initiation techniques, as well as their modification for military or sportive purposes [de Grave 2011]. Also, in Brunei Darussalam sultanate, silat groups have been almost entirely eradicated, expelled from the country or marginalized during the political conflicts of the 1960s. Now, every school must register under the supervision of the national federation and practice one of the two national streams: Silat Cakak Asli or Silat Kuntau. As any form of violence and political contestation is banished, the schools are tightly supervised. Several

masters transmit their ultimate and axial techniques only to close initiates [Facal 2014].

Religious context determines the transmission of martial methods and their content, as religion and rituality are the main markers of hierarchical authority structure and social organization. Cosmological depictions (which can be captured through the analysis of the discourses and practices) stress that the fighting techniques are embedded in a coherent system that combines methods for representing values with practices designed to reach material objectives. This double articulation is underlined by the several parallels seen between the fighting techniques and the daily techniques of work on material (agriculture, horse taming, steel forging) and nonmaterial (prayer and devotion) objects. Thus, we must consider both cosmological systems and notions of personhood when seeking to understand the evolution of specific fighting techniques.

COSMOLOGIES AND NOTIONS OF PERSONHOOD IN THE MALAY WORLD

Even if we sometimes observe deep influences from the past Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms [Lombard 1990], the Malays themselves link their practices to Islamic and Chinese religious doctrines or, in the case of some minorities, Christianity [de Grave 1996]. According to Islam, which is the reference religion for most of the streams, the world is divided in two realities that coexist and interact: the world of human beings (*alam manusia*) and the invisible world (*alam ghaib*). Those coextensive universes hold six classes of beings created by God. The world apprehended by humans encompasses beings and inanimate objects. The invisible world is populated by subtle creatures (*makhluq halus*) like malevolent entities (*jin*) and angels.

As animals, human beings have two dimensions, the terms for which are Arabic in origin: one realm is exoteric/physical (*lahir* or *zahir*) and the other is esoteric/spiritual (*batin*). The exoteric dimension of humanity concerns the physical body (*badan*), whereas the esoteric aspect is composed of different elements. Esoteric components include intelligence (*akal*), soul (*jiwa*), and a centre of emotions (*ati*). They are associated with the liver or heart, which relate to the sense of 'feeling' (*rasa*).

However, the local discourses on the Islamic notions of *lahir* and *batin* do not totally encompass and represent the actual martial practices and their representations, as categories like physical and spiritual, inner and external, are not straightforward and easily separated. Indeed, one can

exert an influence over the upper world through mundane and physical acts, and can experience physical modifications by spiritual practice, as is the case with breathing exercises or the recitation of sacred words. As a result, there is no strict duality between body and spirit; there are different degrees of interiority and exteriority, with a possible reversal of the relations between elements considered internal and external.

Here, and as Meyer Fortes [1987] has shown concerning the Tallensi from Ghana, the conception of 'the person' cannot be dissociated from the status of a person. Personhood is progressively constructed throughout a life by social moments (circumcision, marriage, childbirth) and ritual actions, as is the case for martial initiation. This conception is fully realized when the person reaches the ancestors' community although transformations can still occur while a person's spirit continues to be honored and called upon.

We can note the cosmological influence of Sufi brotherhoods, such as the Qadiriyyah and Naqshabandiyah, in several areas. According to their initiates there is an isomorphism between body and universe, in which both are led by the same rules. They are constituted by the five elements: earth (from which the human body was created and where it is buried after death), water (which irrigates human flesh), fire (often compared to blood), air (perceived in breathing), and ether (considered as a fluid and pure element in which evolve superior entities). These five elements are put in correspondence with the five cardinal directions and together construct a classification system.⁴ The body is also considered to be constituted according to Islamic categories, particularly numerical ones.

These Sufi conceptions are embedded together with Malay notions. Other points of convergence appear in the mystical practice *kebatinan*, which is composed of elements from local religions, Hindu-Buddhism and Islam. *Kebatinan* includes possession practices by the spirits of ancestors, legendary figures and animals (tiger, cat, monkey, turtle, bat, goat, pig, and snake), and *ulin handap* gesture techniques, (used by the initiates to initiate possession by tiger-ancestors). These two categories are sometimes combined: ancestor spirits can manifest themselves in the form of animal spirits, and humans can be possessed by animal spirits.

The Sufi doctrine of the Unity of God (*tauhid*) suggests certain pantheist notions and admits the possibility of sacral forces (*kesaktian*). These concepts form the basis for a set of practices that enables the initiate to perform effective actions in different fields of reality. *Kebatinan*

⁴ Concerning these correspondences between cardinal directions and elements in Central Java, cf. de Grave [2001: 131-135]; concerning these correspondences in Malaysia, cf. Farrer [2009: 261-264].



Figure 2: Posture of 'ground playing'
(Haji Salam stream, Banten, Indonesia 2015).

encompasses breathing and concentration exercises [Farrer 2009: 145, 148], ritual purification, religious devotion, fasting and retreat, relation to spirits, and peregrinations at cult places (*kramat*). In these practices of protection and the obtaining of sacral force, combat practices are central. The techniques they embed are therefore the key to activating relationships between persons, between persons and spirits, and indirectly with God [de Grave 2001].

The many parallels between Malay fighting systems are linked through at least three larger fields of social life and cosmology. These are time (both in linear form, as in generational descent, and a cycle process, seen in rituality), space (with the dimensions of close/far; up/down; inside/outside), and perceived ontology (including aspects of visible-heard/hidden-silent). These three fields form a system and are linked by many correspondences, expressed by numerical classifications. Since the time and space dimensions cannot be separated, I will try to underline the inter-relations between them.

SPATIAL DIMENSION AND FIGHTING TECHNIQUES

The fighting systems spread throughout the Malay world emphasize different distances between opponents. Each distance favors a type of strength and a category of techniques. There are basically three types of distances and categories of techniques: long distance and percussion techniques (for example in Silat Kuntau or in the Sundanese stream Kari), middle distance and trapping (or 'sticky hands') techniques (for example Silat Cekak or Sundanese stream Cikalong), and short distance with several styles of wrestling and grappling (like Silat Jatuh

in Kelantan [Malaysia], Gedou-gedou in Tapanuli [Aceh], Marsurangut in North Sumatra, Atol in Rembang [Central Java], Patol in East Java, Bahempas in Banjarmasin, Benjang in Sunda [West Java] and Sirroto in South Sulawesi). Many streams combine these fighting strategies with inner techniques derived from practices such as mystic *kebatinan* and the local Muslim mystic *hikmat*. They sometimes constitute proper fields of practice, as is the case with *ilmu contact* ('knowledge of the contact') and *silat jarak jauh* ('silat of long distance'). In both *ilmu contact* and *silat jarak jauh*, the opponents are hit without any physical contact and these practices are often conceptualized as designed to cause internal injuries to the opponent from a long distance [Farrer [ed.] 2016].

These different ranges lead the systems to emphasize specific postural techniques. For example, the streams Madi, Syahbandar, and Cimande, which develop close and middle-distance fighting techniques as well as using full power during the attacks, require a very strong posture and a block-shaped stance. When hitting, the extension of body parts is not maximal and the stance remains deeply anchored. In contrast, a stream like Kari that is centered on speediness and multiple attacks develops mobility and the capacity to change postures quickly. Other streams, such as Sera, combine these different characteristics. The mixing of different postural types in Sera enables practitioners to develop a progressive approach to the opponent where one can alternate between hitting, trapping, and locking.

Besides the distance between opponents, during combat the practitioners must take into account two dimensions of spatiality to create effective combinations. In this case, spatiality encompasses various parts of the practitioner's body as well as its location in space. The main dimensions mobilized are right/left, up/down,

inside/outside. During my investigations, I have observed that the combination of these different dimensions leads to a multiplicity of possible techniques and the mobilization of various parts of the body. Upper parts of the body used may include palms, fingers, the backs of hands, fists, forearms, elbows, shoulders, and heads. Lower parts of the body employed may be feet, calves, shinbones, thighs, and knees. These areas can be used to hit, block, grab, or lock. Such actions can be combined into a single movement in a variety of ways that differ from one style to the next.

In all the streams that I have observed, the salutation stance is the base of the fighting movements. Through the centered position of the arms and the balanced position of the body, salutation can easily become a guard or a blocking/attacking technique, and it facilitates footwork in any direction. The salutation stance is then a way of centering oneself, both spatially and in terms of one's state of mind. As a result, it is often considered as a prayer in movement (*lailah sembah*) which aims to make a bond between earth and upper world forces, between tutelary ancestors (whose graves are underground and spirits are in the upper world) and God or divine forces. Thus, many fighting techniques and postures (*sikap*) are directly inspired by the prayer movements. On the horizontal plain, during a performance, salutation is directed to the assembly, beginning on the right, with the representatives of the various authorities including the initiation master, political guests, musicians, and spectators. It may also happen that it is designed to ward off approaching evil [Binson 2016: 134], as in the *wai kru* ceremony (also present in muay thai) found in Southern Thailand. It features a movement sequence that is repeated while facing each of the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, West).

Various streams treat these spatial dimensions differently in their creation of fighting techniques. Some systems (for instance Bandrong from Banten, Bekasi from Jakarta) prefer to begin from long distance move to close combat and other systems (particularly in the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra) seek to move in the opposite direction. In some schools, such as Tjimande Tarikolot from Banten, close combat is not taught before the highest levels of apprenticeship. There, close distance is conceived as a type of abolition of social distances and is reserved for initiates who are deeply involved in the practice group. That is to say, it is only taught to those who are rooted in the locality and have endured the initiation rituals that previously enabled them to receive the genealogy of the past masters. Progressive physical proximity between the practitioners and between them and the elders is expressed through the progressive steps of physical approach. Long distance movements follow aesthetic gestures that combine large and soft movements of the arms with wide steps. The movements and steps then tighten while the distance is abolished and physical contact

occurs. This progression is obvious in the choreographed fights called *ganda* (literally 'duo' or 'double') used in the majority of the pencak silat performances.

Footwork (*balabeh* in West Sumatra, *langkah* in Central Java, *lengkah* in West Java, *pacak* in Malaysia) is an essential part of this process and it is often strongly systematized according to physical fighting techniques. The main patterns are the line, diagonal, square, triangle, and circular displacement. The displacement can refer to numbers: triangle would be called the 'step of three' (*langkah tiga*) and the square the 'step of four' (*langkah empat*). It can also lead to strategies, like with the 'robber step' (*langkah curi*) and the 'liar step' (*langkah bohong*). Each pattern can be employed in diverse ways if they are used against one or several opponents, with empty hands or with weapons.

Footwork also varies according to techniques employed in the so-called 'inside' and 'outside' spheres of the opponent's guard. This is defined as the area located between their arms or outside their arms. For example, some streams emphasize that the foot and arm must be opposite while inside the opponent's guard, as to enable quick retreat from grappling. This combination has specific names. In West Java, standing with the opposite leg and arm is called *suliwa*, whereas a same leg and arm stance is called *ngarodon*.

Finally, movement does not always require steps, as it is shown by the techniques *geser* or *seser* found in West Java. The *Geser* technique enables the practitioners to shift progressively from their position by displacing their heel. *Seser* is even more progressive and consists of a closing and opening of the toes, as a means to create a slight traction of the whole body. These moves are useful to the practitioner when he is already in contact with the opponent and must change his guard's angle without modifying his/her body balance.

STEP PATTERNS COMMONLY PRACTICED

When practiced as approach movements, footwork begins from long distance between the partners. In the Tjimande Tarikolot stream, the partners face opposite directions, then both turn right at the same moment so they still are in opposite directions, then they both turn left, and finally they turn face to face. This progressive orientation to face the adversary is accompanied by a movement towards the inside and center point. At the same time, the partners progressively get away from their own center to be in contact with each other. Thus, confrontation is a movement towards the interpersonal contact, a displacement from the spatial center of the person to the spatial center of the relationship.

Identically, the process of apprenticeship in the West Javanese Cimande stream begins with low stances and finishes with high ones, whereas it is the opposite in the Bantenese version of Cimande. The body's going down is done progressively to control the different phases of the fight. Stances include squatting, kneeling, and sitting positions. A large variety of sitting postures can be found in the streams, including crossed legs position (*sila*), sitting with one leg under the back (*sempok*), and sitting on the knees (*simpuh*). This progressive apprenticeship for ground fighting techniques stresses that it is related to the proximity between the initiates and the practice group (considering their level of advancement).

We can also notice the link between the ground fighting techniques, generally taught to the highest-level initiates, and the invocation of tutelary spirits of the soil, which are often considered by the practitioners as their ancestors. The fact that some techniques, particularly ground ones, enable one to obtain – at least for a while – invulnerability shows that there is a link between the control of the up/down dimensions and the internal/external ones. This is expressed in the widespread Muslim concepts of *lahir* and *batin*, described previously, which are integrated into the conception of the body in the Malay world. *Lahir* is the physical part of the body and is mainly built through horizontal and mundane relationships, whereas *batin* is considered to be its spiritual component and nurtures itself through relation with divine and invisible forces.

These conceptions of spatiality emphasize the role of penetration and expulsion in the practices of fighting, invulnerability, and therapeutics. Some techniques enable the practitioners to abolish the space limitations and to harm an adversary at a distance through internal injuries. Invulnerability practices mainly consist of control of the body's penetration by picks, daggers, and glass. Therapeutic practices, such as energetic massages, herbal medicine, magnetism, and healing prayers,

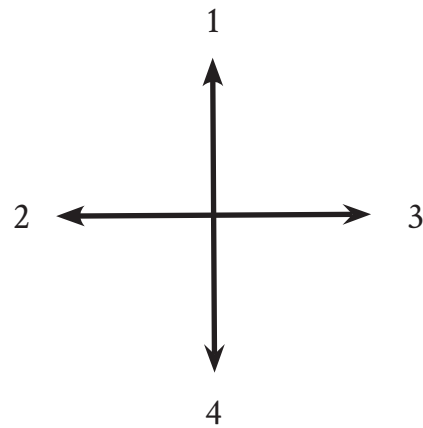


Figure 3: Pancer ('the pillar', or 'the fifth and central point').

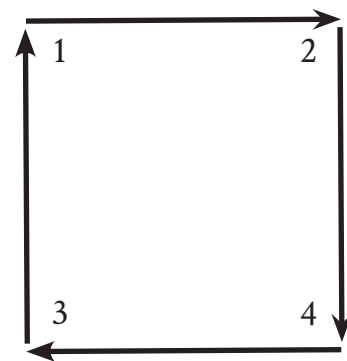


Figure 4: Bendung ('the square').

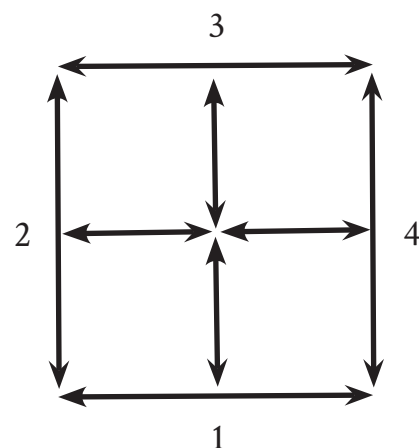


Figure 5: Opat kalima pancer (Sunda)/Papat kelima pancer (Central Java) ('the four and the fifth in the center').

are designed to expel the wind/air that penetrated and misbalanced the physical condition of the person: in particular the balance between cold and warm. They embrace an ensemble of factors, ranging from physical trauma and biology (parasites, germs, and microbes), humeral elements (the role of climate and nutrition), 'wind' (*angin*), and magic (sorcery, spirit attacks).

Other kinds of therapy stem from the invisible order and are designed to exorcise a harmful spirit or force. 'Inner power' (*tenaga dalam*) practice also includes healing practices and emphasizes therapeutic breathing exercises and meditation [Farrer and de Grave 2010: 367]. There is a link between *tenaga dalam* and *ilmu batin*; terms that are roughly translated as 'inner knowledge'. They refer to ritual techniques including breathing exercises, meditation, mantras, fasting, retreats, the use of religious talismans, magical amulets, and methods to summon spirits. Again, practices vary regionally and from one stream to another.

The spatial dimensions of the person find correspondence with the sites of social life: the village and the house. Jean-Marc de Grave underlines that, 'if we admit that the human body and the house are basic elements of the socially marked locality, it then appears that the orientations horizontal and vertical and the relation interior-exterior that accompany them are structurally representative of the place' [de Grave 2001: 135]. He also provides a parallel with the Javanese royal palace (*kraton*). The house is also a place for alliance, for example through weddings. In West Java's and Batavia's (Jakarta area) societies weddings are often the place of marriage martial rituals (respectively *buka tolak panto* and *palang pintu*). During the wedding ceremonies, ritual fighting aims to demonstrate the practitioner's internal values. Afterwards, when the fiancé enters the spouse's house, it enables alliances. Sometimes, these alliances correspond to a closer relation between two villages and therefore carry a political dimension.

Inside the house, particularly the home of the master, different spaces mark ritual localities. The center is a locality of ritual initiation and unification, for instance unification between offerings. This aspect is also indicated by the importance of foreign elements, which are often integrated and even looked after to nurture the socio-political system of the community. This is also indicated by the propensity of the schools to develop branches and initiate people considered foreigners. There is a link between penetration-initiation and alliance-development as these acts enable unifications and also lead to the processes of maturation (described below).

Meanwhile, we can note a link between internal/external dimensions and hidden/visible ones. This is clear in breathing techniques, like those which are practiced for religious Islamic word recitation (*zikir*). There,

breathing and words are combined to increase the person's vitality. The spelling of sacred words is also practiced facilitating divine illumination. These words are used as signs for revelation in a therapeutic setting. In the *urut janur* massage that I observed in a Haji Salam stream's family (Banten), the healers analyze the formation of leaves given to them as an offering to interpret the symptoms of disease and illness. Finally, words can be pronounced to invoke protective spirits or to harm an opponent. Other protective spells can be used to fill an object or a person with a force or a spirit through 'adorcism' (intentional possession) [Rouch 1953].

During initiation rituals, the master places initiates under the tutelary of the ancestors and, if they follow the rules of the school and practice with faith and devotion (*iman dan taqwa*), schools can reveal to them the secrets of the techniques. During the ritual performances messages can also be revealed from the ancestors through the mediation of the practitioner. Some initiation rituals enable the master to predict the success of transmission as a new initiate develops over the years. These are designed to expose the internal aspects of the person and indicate a strong relationship between elements linked to space and time.

THE TIME DIMENSION AND FIGHTING TECHNIQUES

One of the main factors differentiating streams are the lists of descent (*silsilah*) that their masters transmit. These lists describe a spiritual chain going back to the founder of the stream and link them to the current masters, whose advanced age is valorized as proof of their mastery of protection and preservation techniques. The method of descent can be either genealogical or by initiation. This link determines the transmission of techniques: some faculties can be transmitted hereditarily while initiates can learn and receive knowledge from past masters through ritual possession or invocation. Techniques also evolve according to the initiate's dedication to practice, as they reveal their secret aspects through time. This temporal element is linked to rituals that mark the steps of apprenticeship.

A central aspect of the initiation rituals is the interpretation of signs by the masters. These signs are perceived through various kinds of ritual. In the Malaysian stream Silat Sprint 12, the cutting of a chicken by the master and the random selection of pieces by initiates give information on their future apprenticeship and behavior according to the oath rules. In West Java, the movements of the sacrificed chicken after beheading and the way in which the blood spreads are read as oracles. In Minangkabau, interpretation can relate to the directions taken by two needles placed in a cup of water; the needles symbolize

the initiate and the master and the directions taken represent their future relationship. In the Malaysian stream Silat Lian, also called Buah Pukul Lian, the initiate brings limes and the master interprets the form and configuration of limes on the ground after cutting. During the entire process of apprenticeship, other interpretations can be made; for example by observing the state and form of degradation of a piece of fabric given by the initiate to the master, or through the evolution of ritual oil carried by the initiate to the master and filled with the master's ritual blessings.

Apart from these rituals of enthronization, several other rituals provide for the purification of the initiates and determine their capacity to integrate the fighting techniques. Among these rituals are the *urut* strengthening massage of the forearms' bones that is found in the West Javanese stream Cimande – and other streams across the Malay world – and the shinbone strengthening massage found in the Bantenese stream, Terumbu. Other purification rituals concern the flower bath of ritual soul purification (*mandi bungah/kembang*), or the *keceran* ritual, designed to purify the eyes and the heart (*hati* or *ati*). The flower bath and *keceran* are spread through various forms in Malaysia (both continental and insular), Brunei Darussalam, Sumatra and Java. The flower bath can be partial or concern the whole body. The purification of the eyes is done by either having water dispensed with a knife enrolled in betel leaf or through pressing lime on the eyes. This ritual is sometimes, as is the case in West Java, called the 'time of pain' (*waktos peureuh*), where the initiates seek to strengthen themselves and overcome their physical resistance limitations. The ritual leads to more confidence in the master and faith in the efficacy of the transmission's content. Therefore, *waktos peureuh* relates to a main aspect of the transmission process, which is the necessity for the initiate to be opened to receiving the transmission's content. These different rituals enable the initiates to begin the apprenticeship of upper level techniques. They also enhance their mastery of techniques by modifying their being and by inflecting their relationship with the ancestors of the streams, which ancestors are said to possess the techniques and to supervise the apprenticeship process.

Besides the rituals that link techniques to time, the principles of fighting methods also refer to time. Some principles are moral, like the obligation of respect to elders and those who are younger, which is stated in almost every stream's oath. Patience is also a moral value promoted by the streams and it is complementary to efficiency in fighting as it encompasses the ability to hit at the right moment. Managing the tempo of a fight is a central ability that practitioners develop, particularly through the correlation of movements with breathing and the accompaniment of gestures to music. Several kinds of musical accompaniment are found in the Malay world, such as *kendang penca* in West Java [Facal 2016], *kecapi* in Bandung (for *maenpo* styles)

[personal observations], *rampak bedug* in Central Banten (recently integrated in Ulin Makao school) [personal observations], *gendang silat* in Malaysia [Farrer 2009], *pee silat* in South Thailand [Binson 2016], or *gulingtangan* in Brunei Darussalam [personal observations]. The musical rhythms underline the precision seen in a series of fighting techniques. Some rhythms emphasize the footwork of approach and entry, others penetrating movements, softness and absorption of the rival's movements or, on the contrary, explosiveness in aggressive phases of attack.

The practice of musical instruments is complementary to the formation to fighting techniques: drumming develops short distance hitting strength as well as synchronicity between feet and hands from the sitting stance. This stance is linked to ground fighting. The quadruple-reed shawm (*tarompet/tarumpet*) is an instrument that develops disciplined breathing and the control of blood flowing to the brain; these abilities are essential in combat situations. For example, guard (*jaga, pasang, nanti*) stances must emphasize the capacity of the practitioner to react to an attack with rapidity and full power. Finally, gong playing teaches students to strike at the right moment, in this case it marks the end of a combat movement phase. In each phase, the practitioner must find the correct tempo.

Time is linked to fighting techniques through the concept of process. For example, performances, which sometimes involve the calling upon of ancestor spirits, are structured in three sequences: opening, intermediation and closure. Apprenticeship itself is conceived as a process involving several phases. The 'process aspect' of a fighting method can be observed in the spatial dimension through progressive approaches with the opponent, while in the temporal dimension it is marked by the different phases of the fight. Movements accelerate or slow down according to these phases. Finally, this process-based aspect is verbally expressed through several analogies concerning life cycles.

PARALLELS BETWEEN TRANSMISSION OF THE TECHNIQUES AND LIFE CYCLE PROCESSES GROWING, MATURATION, AND PURIFICATION

The stages of martial apprenticeship are often seen as corresponding with the life cycle of plants. Prior to the social and agricultural changes of the late 19th century (including the development of extensive plantations, seasonal agriculture and work migration), the communitarian ceremonies of martial initiation happened during the rice harvest. Some researchers also argue that local martial practices, like West Javanese *penca* descend from animistic fertility rituals, rooted in belief systems that valued the power of gender differences [Spiller 2010]. Agricultural techniques (including digging, raking, lifting, carrying, cutting, harvesting) have clearly been influential in the development of some regional fighting methods. Livestock herding (shoeing horses, leading and manipulating cattle) is also important. They shape the body of the practitioner and are complementary with techniques found in peasant streams such as Cimande. Similar relationships have also been observed in very different geographical contexts, including the development of African stick and machete fighting systems that were influenced by local cattle herding practices [see Obi 2008: 30-36]⁵.

Generally, the aesthetic movements of approach between two partners during a performance are referred to through an analogy with 'flowers' (*bunga* in Java, *kembang* in Malaysia). Their application in fighting techniques is referred to as the 'fruit' (*buah*). The process of apprenticeship itself is associated with the vegetative cycle. As the knowledge is transmitted to the initiate he is called a 'fruit child' (*anak buah*) in hopes that it will fructify. Moreover, this process aims at the development of the feeling sense *rasa*. In old Javanese, this Sanskrit origin term designates 'plant sap', or 'the juice contained in the fruits' [Zoetmulder 1982, II: 926]. In this process, maturation is an essential step that leads to the ancestors' revelation of the techniques and its comprehension by the initiate.

The life cycle of the plants, like that of the martial ritual initiation, is composed of distinct phases: there is germination, growing/maturation, decreasing/rotting, and regeneration/transmission. Firstly, the initiation is seen as the transmission of 'content' (*isi*). This content is linked to the list of past masters, the pronunciation of an oath and the transmission of a sacred force to the initiate under the supervision of the ancestors. The link to the ancestors itself is sometimes considered to be the object of transmission. Like seeds, which must be put under the soil to germinate, the initiates should be sheltered from direct external influences in the first stages of apprenticeship. Hence some masters do not allow them to learn with other teachers before they reach a certain

level of skill. It is also why initiation rituals take the form of a face-to-face meeting between the master and the initiate. These are often held at night and in an enclosed space, hidden from view.

All of the conditions that enable preservation can also be related to some techniques' secrecy. Exposure presents a risk of vulnerability and that is why several taboos (both oral and practical) surround the techniques. It is also why direct transmission is valorized. Transmission is essentially oral and there is little writing.

One advantage of orality is that it avoids the exposure of knowledge to non-initiates. The mastering of secrecy is also linked to efficiency in the practice of the fighting techniques. It is particularly relevant to techniques which refer to cheating (*jurus bohong*), tricking (*pancingan*), disappearance and invisibility (*ghaib*). This emphasis on invisibility also provides a link with inner energy and powers provided through connections with tutelary spirits who inhabit the invisible world (*alam ghaib*).

After initiation complementary actions enable the practitioner's knowledge to mature. These actions follow the cycle of days and nights, alternating periods of strong activity with deep rest. The processes of maturation must take place in isolated and dark places, as is demonstrated by practitioner's retreats and meditations in caves. Dark places, silence and immobility enable the maturation of the initiates' inner qualities. In the same way, some rituals aim for the maturation of ritual oils. These can be found in many streams of Sundanese *penca*, including Cimande. The phials of oil are placed under the earth or in dark places, where they are protected from alteration by air and light.

Exposure plays a complementary role by favoring nurturing and growing actions. Initiates who reach a sufficient level of mastery take part in public performances. They might open branches outside the village in which they were initiated or participate in public or political activities to develop the school. During communitarian rituals, the masters can publicly expose their knowledge, mainly by designating, showing, and spelling the names of evil spirits in the aim of exorcising them. They can also invoke protective spirits by spelling their names and by reciting sacred formulas. In some streams, the masters enrich the 'internal energy' (*tenaga dalam*) of the initiates, provide divine protection (*berkah*) and guide their followers towards spiritual illumination. According to the practitioners of several streams, such as Tjimande Tarikolot, this mastering of visible and invisible dimensions enables some masters to disappear or appear with ubiquity.

Following the vegetative metaphor, rotting can occur if the initiation rules are not respected or the proper rituals not enacted. This rotting

5 I am grateful to Benjamin Judkins for directing me to this reference.

can lead to disease and possession, misfortune and curse. The rotting can be revealed by the physical decline of the initiates and their relatives, the fading away of the ritual oils, and the wearing-down of ritual fabric. Several acts and rituals of regeneration can be invoked to sort out these deteriorations. Some are done through a visit to the ancestors' graves. This enhances the importance of cosmological elements in these processes of apprenticeship.

Earth appears as a main element, considering that the basic techniques are practiced in a sitting position and the ultimate ones are designed for ground fighting. Earth enables generation and regeneration, and it appears at the beginning and at the end of the apprenticeship process. It is also present in different ritual solutions strengthening the link between the initiates and protective spirits.

Water enables fertility and purification. It is stressed by religious Muslim in the ablutions (*wuduk*) which some martial streams recommend before practicing, the ritual showers held during the initiation and the distribution of ritual oils to initiated individuals. Periodic sexual abstinence – that is to say, control of the seminal liquid's expulsion – is one of the requirements for invulnerability, together with fasting, breathing and spelling practices. The capacity of controlling the actions of physical and spiritual penetration and expulsion enables the non-penetration by glass, needle, dagger, pick and fire.

This last element is a central aspect of initiation rituals. For example, incense is burnt to call protective spirits, and sacrificed chickens are cooked for edibility. There is a conjunction between fire and breath. Like fire, which is used to forge the weapon, the control of breathing – and thus inner energy – enables practitioners to build physical resistance and to forge their bodies as organic weapons. As such, fire enables transformation and fixation through sublimation. These analogies also show that, to a certain extent, there is identification between the practitioners and their weapon, as is indicated by the importance given to sacred weapons, called *pusaka* [on *pusaka*, cf. Rassers 1940; Kartiwa 1992; Guerreiro 2011]. These objects can constitute valuable heirlooms or regalia and they signal social status and hierarchy. As such they can be put in parallel with ritual liquids.

These aspects of material culture – weapons and ritual liquids – require the use of all the elements provided by the cosmos: air, water, earth, fire, and ether. They also mobilize different actions during both daily activities and rituals events. As such they are positioned at a crossroads between the structural dimensions of the cosmos (horizontal and vertical dimensions of space; linear-cumulative and cyclic-non-cumulative dimensions of time) and the initiates' necessities for preservation, survival, regeneration and transmission.

MATERIALIZING OPPOSITE DIMENSIONS WEAPONS TECHNIQUES AND THE USE OF RITUAL LIQUIDS

The transmission's linked processes of maturation, growing and purification require complementarity between opposite dimensions, particularly those of space and time. This is mediated by the initiates themselves through the relationship between elder/younger and male/female. Material culture holds a central position bridging these fundamental concepts. This mainly concerns weapons, as they accompany the initiates both during daily activities and ritual events. The form and the aesthetic of the weapons materialize this continuity between various levels of temporality. This expression of temporal continuity through weapons corresponds to the observation of researchers such as Pierre Lemonnier [1991], for whom the material is a field of 'social production'. In this sense, people give meaning to their relations with other persons, with the visible and invisible worlds; and people in society give meaning to their material productions. The object is then a privileged witness of exchanges, borrowings, and innovations concerning both artifacts and social practices to which they are associated [Appadurai 1985].

Concerning weapons techniques, even if they are related to empty hand methods, their mastery requires the acquisition of specific principles. In most of the Malay streams, apprenticeship begins with empty hands while the use of weapons is taught at the final levels; whereas the Philippines' *arnis* streams generally propose an opposite progression. It is also interesting to note that in the *silat* and *kuntao* streams of the Muslim areas of the Southern Philippines (mostly in Mindanao), methods for empty-hands combat are the foundation of skill while weapons techniques are taught at a later stage [Jocano Jr. 2010: 335]. Progression in the use of weapons (like rattan stick, dagger and knife, and flexible weapons like *sarung*) is also distinct. Dozens of different weapons are used, often with local variations. The most distinctive is the wavy-blade dagger (*keris*), but others include machetes (*parang* and *golok*), swords (*pedang*), knives (*pisau*), bill hooks (*celurit*), curving knives (*karambit*), pruning knives (*sabit*), spears (*tombak*), tridents (*cabang* or *trisula*), staffs (*tongkat* or *toya*), and a tightly rolled sarung (*cindai*).

As objects weapons are understood as non-human agents [Warnier 1999]; but in the Malay context they are often anthropomorphized. Their features invite analogies with human character and their use inflects the technical style of the practitioner. Mastering the dagger requires sharpness, quick and compact movements; the *sarung* needs softness and absorption to be effective; the whip requires elasticity; and the stick needs power, a strong stance and a firm anchorage of the legs. Moreover, both humans and weapons are protected by a sheath

(*sarung*), and they can shelter 'content' (*isi*), as is the case with the *pusaka* weapons. Indeed, these objects are 'filled', which is to say, they contain a force. This non-physical element stems from their natural origin or is provided through rituals.

It is also believed that *pusaka* can hold an ancestor spirit or ancestral properties. These weapons are often transmitted through descent, mark the status of the practitioner and can provide extraordinary capacities. They possess their own character and must be nurtured ritually as living entities, mainly with incense and oils [Farrer 2009: 89]. In the Malay tradition, a dagger *keris pusaka* can only be taken out from its sheath if to kill, and it is said that once it has tasted blood, it will be eager for more. This anthropomorphic logic is accompanied by a parallel with gender representations. When a couple of machetes are held, the machete in the right hand is 'male' whereas the left-hand machete is 'female'. In Ciomas (Banten), a regional center of *pusaka* machetes fabrication, the forging hammer is considered female.

Besides *pusaka* weapons, various liquids play the role of union between opposite elements of the cosmos that are mobilized by the practitioners. I have described in the sections dedicated to the dimensions of space and time the role of rituals, like *urut* strengthening massage of the forearms' bones, the flower bath (*mandi bungah*) purification ritual, and the *keceran* eyes purification ritual. These rituals are all centered around several kinds of sacred, or force filled, waters and oils.

To illustrate the centrality of these oils in initiation rituals we can mention the case of *minyak biang* ('maternal oil' or 'essential oil'). During the collective ritual *keceran* of the Cimande Pusaka Medal school in Rancalame (Banten, West Java), each initiate brings to the master a small phial of perfume. During the ritual the master and his sons fill the phial with a solution – the *biang*, which gives its name to the oil – designed to enable the call of the tiger-ancestors. The phials are then distributed to the initiates so they can bring it back to their homes. Each year, the initiates may bring back the phials to the master so he can add to the solution. This process strengthens the relationship between the master's school and the branches. On the other hand, the transformation of the oil's color through the years signals the evolution of the initiate's apprenticeship and link to the tiger-ancestors. As the reconfiguration of the relations in space enables the renewal of the substances in temporality, fixation of the substances in time enables the perpetuation of relations in space [Facal 2012].

Eventually, there is complementarity between sacred/ritual weapons and ritual oils. Sacred weapons are nourished with ritual oils and these liquids, as is the case for the *keceran* ritual, are applied into the eyes of the initiates with a ceremonial knife (the oil flows along the edge of



Figure 6: The machete *pusaka* are stored to be 'filled in' (Sundanese *dieusi*) during the cleansing ritual *pemandian golok* (Ciomas, Banten, January 2015).



Figure 7: The spreading of the purification water during *keceran* ritual (Rancalame, Banten, January 2015).

the knife and falls into the eyes). Other kinds of complementarity exist based on the dual relationship male/female mobilized through these materials.

The process of martial apprenticeship corresponds to life stages and is punctuated by several steps: generation/seeding; growing/flowering; maturation/fructification; decrease/rotting; regeneration/childbirth. Martial initiation rituals follow similar steps, which is obvious in long-term process rituals transcending many phases. Before the rituals, abstinence and fasting are used to concentrate people's 'forces'. The rituals are opened by community prayers and the pronunciation of words designed to invoke ancestral and divine forces (vertical relations) as well as consumption/distribution of goods (horizontal relations). Finally, after the rituals the proceedings are interpreted by the elders. These processes are then marked by different steps which alternate between phases of growing and decreasing, production and consumption, and secrecy and exposure. The alternating phases are enacted through the relationship between male and female principles and elements.

A discussion of all these aspects would exceed the limits of this study; but, as an example, we can note that the male-female dyad impacts the techniques and their process of transmission in many respects. For example, it is central to social status structures (the authority of women, political power of men in West Java), territoriality and relation to locality (matrilocal and initiation peregrinations of men, as in Minangkabau society) and the links of the initiates to superior forces (apical spirits are female, tutelary spirits are male, both in Sundanese and Minangkabau societies). At the level of the techniques, it is often accepted that blocks constitute feminine principles and strikes are masculine. Likewise, some weapons, including fans (*kipas*), are used exclusively by women. This duality is also present with ritual oils, which are composed of elements combining male and female components. Lastly, invulnerability is gained mainly by sexual abstinence. This implies a link between the interactions of men and women and other penetration/integration-exclusion/expulsion dyads.

These fighting systems and the transmission frames are structured according to several principles to assure the realization of the apprenticeship process. They follow lines found in religion, morality, cosmology and philosophy.

PRINCIPLES OF THE TECHNIQUES RELIGIOUS, MORAL, COSMOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL

The continuity that characterizes all Malay martial techniques derives from the cultural principles that have been the basis of this analysis. Indeed, techniques are valorized as they contain principles, and these principles refer to social values. There is hierarchy between values, principles and techniques. This organization implies that one value gives birth to different principles, and that a principle can be expressed through a multiplicity of techniques. This hierarchy is critical because it suggests that when comparing martial techniques, we must reference the wider context of practices and representations. Thus, techniques cannot only be compared 'movement by movement', but only as parts of a wider ensemble of actions and ideas. These principles refer to the relationships between the practitioner and himself, with other humans, the material world, invisible entities and God.

In the streams influenced by Islam, techniques often correspond with the movements of Muslim prayer and the religious and relational principles of Islam. For example, in Cimande Pusaka Medal School of Banten, the five daily prayers correspond to five martial principles, the 17 prostrations of the prayer correspond to 17 series of martial movements and the 244 gestures of the prayer correspond with 244 secret martial applications which must be discovered by practicing *penca* with faith and devotion. Horizontal relations between the initiates and the other persons are also a source of inspiration for the martial principles. They mainly encompass relations between the initiates and the master, younger students and elders, and men and women.

Most of the schools stipulate that it is forbidden to criticize the members of one's own practice group or of other practice groups. Some rules appear as morals, but they are also oriented towards efficiency. For example, one rule states that the practitioner may 'not hit first but neither be touched first' (*Miheulaan ulah, kapiheulaan ulah*). It emphasizes the necessity to be patient and peaceful while at the same time stressing speediness and aggression in attack. In the West Javanese TTKKDH school it is recommended to 'give first before receiving' (*mere heula karek narima*). This means that one must first block his/her opponent and give him/her the opportunity to not hit before being hit.

Another rule in the same spirit is that the practitioner must know the pain provoked by a technique before using it. This rule is designed to develop empathy in the initiates, but also to provide them the capacity to hit on specific points with the right strength for maximum efficiency. It strengthens the characteristic of specific points on the body as transitional between the person's internal and external dimensions. As such, these points assume a critical function in the representations

linked to interiority and exteriority and, like the corporal orifices, they are connected with penetration and thus purity [akin to the analysis of Douglas 1966].

The parallels between the control of diverse kinds of circulations and purification processes appear in the rituals surrounding weddings in the villages as well as alliances between martial ritual practice groups. Purity can be observed by the masters through signs and marks. For example, in many streams the initiate brings to the master a piece of fabric during the ritual of enthronization. During the ritual, the master touches different points on the initiate's body with hands and pronounces sacred formulas that combine Islamic and vernacular language (for example old Sundanese in West Java or old Javanese in Central Java). The initiates consider that these actions open these specific points, namely in the center of the palms, the wrists, the crooks of the elbows, and the point between the two eyebrows, to enable further contact between the initiate and protective spirits. Through the years, the alteration of the piece of fabric reveals to the master the evolution of the initiate. Finally, when the initiate passes away he is wrapped in this fabric to be buried.

Aside from the religious and ritual dimensions in the structuring of the technical principles, relations with the physical environment play a strong role. I commented earlier the influence of daily work techniques such as fishing, livestock herding and agriculture, which often influence the naming of fighting techniques. Some activities of this nature contribute to martial training, and the technical capacities acquired are correlated to behavior rules: diligence in work, humility, and control of the emotions. They imply the mastery of movement, balance, precision, management of interpersonal distances and one's relation to the physical environment. The main philosophical and moral value promoted is that of the 'rice sprout knowledge' (*ilmu padi*). It stipulates that the practitioners must humbly bend under their knowledge as the rice sprout does under the weight of its seeds. It then designates a practical and esoteric body of knowledge as well as an ethical behavior. Another analogy – seen in the Cimande stream for instance – is that of the bamboo, which must be flexible to not break in the wind. Yet flexibility also enables bamboo to hit even harder when it is subjected to pressure.

A final source of principles is found in the personal faculties that practitioners develop and in their capacity for social interaction. The importance of these competencies is underlined when the fighting techniques training phase is envisioned as a game (*maenan* in Jakarta, *ulinan* and *amengan* in West Java) and the practitioners as players. The qualities valorized include intelligence. Some masters suggest that the words *pandekar* or *pendekar*, which are used to designate experts of martial arts, may come from '*pandai akar*', which means 'smart'.

Martial games also require dexterity (with a notable use of the notion of *silat* being for oratory joust ((*silat lidah*)) and craftiness (*tipuhan*). Craftiness is also one of the goals of the eyes purification ritual *keceran*, as *keceran* aims at reinforcing the eyes: organs used to mislead the opponent. Different strategies are used that emphasize the use of craftiness, including the 'fishing principle' (*pancingan*) and the 'cheating principle' (*jurus bohong*). They consist of the 'fisher' giving false offensive signals to the opponents to create openings in their guard or to force them to respond to attacks signaled by the 'fisher'. These principles can be expressed through several techniques.

In a limited number of cases, the words associated with principles maintain their consistency across longer time processes rather than varying with technical terms, which fluctuate according to time and regions. That distinction is linked to the previously described characteristics of the principles, which crystallize the relationship between techniques and values. This correlation between techniques and values leads to social efficacy in the widest sense of the term. Efficacy here surpasses the mere combat effectiveness.

INCLUSION OF TECHNIQUE EFFICIENCY INTO RITUAL INITIATION EFFICACY

Efficacy has been a central theme for the study of fighting techniques in the Malay world. As I have shown, the efficacy of the martial ritual initiations is commonly equaled with purification, particularly in the schools of Muslim obedience. The first finding underlined by the preceding description is that the fighting efficiency of the techniques is linked to their capacity for forming a social system. This systematization is favored by the preeminence of principles over techniques. The principles assure practitioners that the system's external technical influences are integrated according to the logic of dynamic and reciprocal action instead of through the compilation of separated or artificially bounded techniques. They guarantee that the fighting system will follow a unified 'spirit', one which is often based on the notion of possession by the initiation group's ancestors and tutelary spirits.

Another point is the wide range of meanings that efficacy can take in the various contexts of practice. Firstly, efficacy is often defined as a personal matter. As Jean-Pierre Warnier underlines, there is no method that is not at the same time a technique altering the self [1999]. In these initiations, it is the case that through training and the mediation of a partner, all techniques are enacted upon the self.

We must also remember that efficacy is not always visible and immediate. A technique can be thought to harm an opponent in the long-term and at distance, as is the case with those linked to extraordinary skills. Fighting efficiency alone is not always proof of other types of efficacy. In schools where Muslim war (*jihad*) is promoted, death in combat, if it follows sociocultural and religious values, is more enviable than success in a war that is linked to a sinful life. The former opens the gates of paradise, but the latter does not. This perspective implies that God and invisible forces govern the cosmos according to rules that are not always understandable for humans. Some fighting techniques can have an invisible impact yet act efficiently in fields which remain unknown to humans. As such, in many systems the mastering of both secrecy and exposure is a key for the development of efficacy in the practice of the fighting techniques.

The mastery of secrecy and exposure is firstly linked to values, such as force. Force is not only physical, but also moral and mental. It is mainly acquired through fasting and abstinence. It is a quality usually shaped by experience and expressed in the community through social status and holding positions of authority. This status is linked to the capacity to embody social values, like fidelity and trust. These values are expressed through the initiation oath as well as different ritual controls of the initiate's behavior enacted by the master. There is a link between self-confidence and courage acquired through the gaining of technical mastery, trust in social relations induced by the transmission system, and faith supported by religious practice. All these aspects contribute to an individual's martial efficacy understood in terms of protection. Force, courage and devotion are tempered by opposite behavioral values such as humbleness and empathy. I have explored this aspect through the philosophy of the rice sprout (*ilmu padi*).

In the Cimande stream of West Java, mastery of opposite values and their control enables the capacity of protection, which implies faculties of both destroying and healing. Therefore, martial efficacy is fundamentally linked to the regulation of relationships. Ritual words and acts are effective because through enunciation and hearing, as well as through performance and seeing, the practitioner creates relationships: with the audience and assistants during ritual performances, with tutelary spirits through possession and exorcism, and with God through prayer. Fighting efficiency is subordinated to this set of more fundamental relationships.

Winning at war and combat in the margins of this integrative social system would mean a loss of efficacy, even though this loss may express itself in more or less visible ways. In other words, the system is effective because the techniques are structured according to the dynamics of a preexisting set of social relationships. If these relations are damaged or subordinated to the formalization of the system, there is a loss of efficacy. Even if a phase of formalization seems necessary so the practices can be maintained [de Grave 2012: 8], representation and practice of the techniques still take on meaning because of their integration into a cultural system. Thus, researchers can speculate as to what degree of continued formalization might inhibit these practices from forming a holistic system.

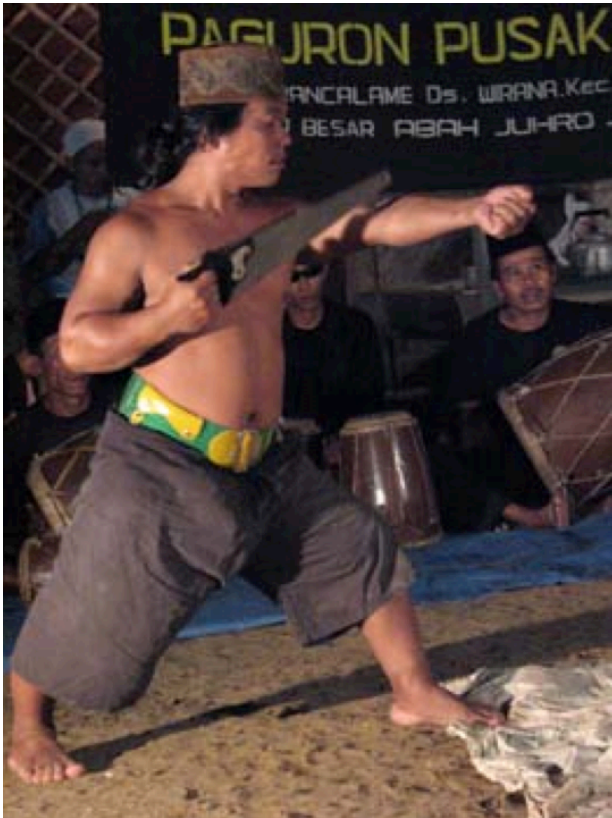


Figure 8: A Performance of Invulnerability (*debus*) to the Saw (Rancalame 2010).

CONCLUSION DEGREES OF MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE OF THE TECHNIQUES

In this article, I have argued that there are trans-regional continuities in the martial initiation rituals and fighting techniques found in the Malay world. We can identify regional continuities and specificities in comparison with the other practices found elsewhere in Asia and in peninsular Southeast Asia. These aspects are shown through the techniques, terminology, training methods, combat tactics, and in associated practices, like therapeutics, theater and dance. I have also emphasized the degree to which these fighting techniques derive not just from a physical, but also an invisible, order. As such, they form part of a larger cosmology which mobilizes spatial and temporal dimensions according to sets of systematic correspondences. In linking martial practices to this cosmology, several values from religious, philosophical and moral sources were seen to form the basis of various technical principles. As I have argued, these principles are transversal to diverse fields of social life, including: agriculture, interpersonal relations and religion. They are all oriented toward purity as an ultimate value.

This article concludes that drawing an analytical distinction between ritual activity and developments in the technical sphere is not legitimate for every society [Bonte 1986: 47; Warnier 1999: 28-30]. This is particularly the case in Malay martial initiations. In the Malay world, ritual principles generally determine fighting techniques. The valorization of principles over pure utility enables the technical system to have great flexibility when it comes to the integration of exogenous techniques. This capacity for integration makes resonance with a wider realm of socio-cosmic and religious systems possible. Throughout history, the latter contributed much to these practices and their conceptualized efficacy, instead of simply emphasizing abstract doctrines.

Nevertheless, even if flexibility within the technical systems enables diachronic adaptation to socio-political variation, the contemporary era is marked by a tendency towards the formalization of these practices. It is a fact that since the launch of the various national independence movements, federations aiming to unify the different transmission structures and homogenize practices have flourished. By employing discourses based on 'reinvented traditions', national understandings of the practices' local diversity and trans-regional continuities were marginalized. Moreover, the process of 'euphemization of violence' that accompanied the formation of these nations [Elias and Dunning 1994] deeply impacted the fighting techniques and their modes of transmission.

The pressures exerted during both national identity construction exercises and the spread to global audiences can lead to very quick changes in practices. For examples, Filipino *arnis* and Malay *pencak silat* benefit from abundant media coverage and a prominent Internet following. Many masters have adapted their techniques to the demands of the public and gained increased combat efficiency by being positioned against exogenous systems. These tendencies provide dynamism to the practices, but also risk a collapse in cultural diversity as homogeneity spreads across the different streams. Monetary and political factors can contribute to the maintenance of the vitality of traditional practices, but they can also bring economic interests that weaken the concern of the masters for local practitioners who can no longer afford their teachings. I frequently observed this phenomenon when visiting schools (of both *silek* from Minangkabau and *penca* from West Java) that spread to Europe and the United States. I have also noticed this bias from the perspective of a practitioner as the Mande Macan Guling school and Tjimanje Tarikolot stream from Banten diffused to France.

Despite these schools' diffusion processes, the transformation of the techniques should not be overestimated. They are a single aspect of a wider cultural transmission, and that also evolves through long-term processes. As a result, studying this course of transmission, understood as the interface between physical techniques and cultural values, could enable scholars to better grasp what these broader social changes are [de Grave 2008: 16]. For example, I have discussed how the linked processes of maturation, growing and purification are mediated by the initiates via the relationship between elder/younger and male/female dyads. Finally, it should be stressed that the practices found in the Malay world (as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Africa, India, the Caucasus and the Middle East) have endured very long-term codification [Gaudin 2009]. While changes might occur according to various temporalities and geographic factors, a socio-historical approach may yet reveal the degree to which these martial ritual initiations have been both transformed and maintained.

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