

# Muslims in Global Societies Series

## Volume 2

### Series Editors

Gabriele Marranci  
University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK

Bryan S. Turner  
National University of Singapore, Singapore

For further volumes:  
<http://www.springer.com/series/7863>

D.S. Farrer

# Shadows of the Prophet

Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism

 Springer

ISBN: 978-1-4020-9355-5

e-ISBN: 978-1-4020-9356-2

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9356-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008938182

© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work.

Printed on acid-free paper

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

springer.com

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

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

## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Acknowledgements

The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at The University of Guam provided a research grant of US\$ 1,785 so that the pictures herein could appear in colour. For the most part, the Department of Sociology at The National University of Singapore supported my doctoral research undertaken between 2001 and 2007. Living in Singapore facilitated many bursts of intensive field work into Malaysia and promoted continuous access to the Singaporean Malay community. Special thanks are due to my principal supervisor, Roxana Waterson, for her patient guidance, amusing anecdotes, and her careful reading of my drafts. My second supervisor, Farid Alatas, provided many valuable insights, especially over *sheesha* smoked in Arab Street. Mutalib Hussin, my third supervisor, alerted me to the literature concerning riots in Malaysia. Ellis Finkelstein, acted as my unofficial guide and mentor throughout, and taught me the ethnographic method. Maribeth Erb gave continual support and encouragement. Todd Ames, Anne Ames, and Paul Rae read through various drafts of the dissertation and extended useful suggestions. Many thanks also go to Lian Kwen Fee, Lee Hin Peng, Lily Kong, Chua Beng Huat, Hing Ai Yun, Pauline Straughn, and Volker Schmidt who each helped in their own way. Jim Fox encouraged me to focus upon the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. Joel Kahn, Tony Reid, Matthew Mathews, Geoffrey Benjamin, and Vivienne Wee provided stimulating discussions on Malay topics. Thanks also go to my former teachers Bernard Burgoyne, John Crutchley, Hamish Watson, and William Outhwaite who encouraged further studies. Michael Roberts persuaded me to write about noble death. Last but not least my thanks go to Bryan Turner who suggested that I “publish furiously.”

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

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

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

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

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

Guam  
May 2009

D.S. Farrer



# Contents

## **PART I: Reflections**

<b>1</b>	<b>Seni Silat Haqq Melayu: A Sufi Martial Art</b> .....	3
	Prologue.....	5
	Deviationist Religious Cults.....	8
	Note on Organization.....	10
	Entry to the Group.....	10
	The Fieldwork.....	12
	The Central Questions.....	24
	The Field of Silat.....	26
	The Haqqani Sufi Tarekat and Seni Silat Haqq Melayu.....	35
	New Age?.....	37
	The Chapters.....	39
<b>2</b>	<b>Silat: Art, Magic and Performance</b> .....	43
	Beyond Rationalism.....	46
	Supernatural Vulnerability.....	49
	Mysticism and the Occult.....	50
	Malay Shamanism.....	54
	Silat Scholarship.....	59
	Magic in War.....	63
	War Magic.....	65
	The Anthropology of Performance.....	68
	Performance and Identity.....	71
	Embodied Magic.....	73
	The Anthropology of Art.....	76
	Becoming Intense—Becoming Animal.....	81

**PART II: Echoes**

<b>3</b>	<b>The Performance of Enchantment</b> .....	87
	The Art and Aesthetics of Seni Silat Melayu .....	88
	Weapons of Silat .....	90
	Martial Dance.....	93
	Hexis as Embodied Aesthetics .....	96
	Silat Kinesthetics .....	98
	Styles of Silat .....	104
	Pre-Systematized Silat .....	118
	Distinctive Features of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu.....	122
<b>4</b>	<b>The Enchantment of Performance</b> .....	133
	Tricks of the Devil .....	133
	The Malaysian Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Tarekat .....	153
	Reading the International Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi Tarekat.....	156
	Secrets of the Prayer .....	160
	The Prayer Buah.....	162
	Shadows of the Prophet .....	163
	Taming the Ego .....	168
	Dhikr .....	168

**PART III: Doubles**

<b>5</b>	<b>The Guru Silat</b> .....	175
	The War Magician.....	176
	The Veneration of Shaykh Nazim .....	189
	Ritual Empowerment: The Creation of Silat.....	192
	The Sundang Ceremony .....	196
<b>6</b>	<b>Social and Aesthetic Drama</b> .....	199
	Silat Training in London .....	200
	Seclusion .....	203
	Religious Orientation .....	212
	Shadows of St. Ann's .....	218
	Back to the Theatre .....	219

**PART IV: Shadows**

<b>7</b>	<b>Divination and Revelation</b> .....	225
	The Lime and Flower Baths.....	227
	Divination: An Implicit Personality Theory .....	230

Revelation: The Ordeal by Boiling Oil..... 232  
Towards an Explanation..... 243

**8 Deathscapes of the Malay Martial Artist..... 251**  
Deathscapes..... 252  
The Four Corner Dance..... 261  
The Urobos..... 264  
The Shadow Soul ..... 266  
The Graveyard Ordeal..... 268  
Death of a Silat Master ..... 269

**Appendixes:**

(A) Basic Motions of Pattern Formation ..... 271  
(B) Naqshbandi Silsilah: The Golden Chain..... 273

**Glossary ..... 275**

**References ..... 285**

**Index ..... 303**

# Maps, Tables and Genealogies

Map 1.1. Malaysia and the Malay world .....	27
Map 6.1. South Tottenham.....	201
Table 5.1. Details of the Mahidin genealogy .....	180
Table 5.2. Appellations to Malay names .....	181
Table 7.1. The four elements.....	231
Genealogy 5.1. Ezhar .....	178
Genealogy 5.2. Mahidin.....	179

# Figures

Fig. 1.1	Janda Baik <i>zawiya</i> (Sufi lodge) .....	6
Fig. 1.2	Pa' Ariffin and his son Yeop .....	21
Fig. 1.3	Wedding <i>silat</i> .....	31
Fig. 2.1	Pa' Ariffin, a specialist in blood-letting .....	57
Fig. 2.2	A <i>bomoh-silat</i> attempting to remove Chief's <i>jinn</i> .....	58
Fig. 3.1	Pa' Din releases an arrow .....	91
Fig. 3.2	<i>Keris</i> detail, <i>wayang kulit</i> character.....	93
Fig. 3.3	Wedding <i>silat</i> ( <i>rimau santai</i> ).....	95
Fig. 3.4	Jas and Solleh perform <i>buah wanita</i> .....	103
Fig. 3.5	A Malay girl learning <i>silat seni gayong keris</i> at night.....	112
Fig. 3.6	Cikgu Kahar, London .....	113
Fig. 3.7	Pa' Zaini, Singapore.....	119
Fig. 3.8	Lok 9 <i>buah</i> .....	122
Fig. 3.9	Chief performing <i>prana</i> .....	128
Fig. 4.1	“Confused Lovers” by Mohammad Din Mohammad.....	139
Fig. 4.2	<i>Kuda kepang</i> trance dancing.....	140
Fig. 4.3	Husking coconuts with the bare teeth.....	146
Fig. 4.4	<i>Gerak 1</i> .....	147
Fig. 4.5	<i>Gerak 2</i> .....	147
Fig. 4.6	“Haqq” by Mohammad Din Mohammad .....	159
Fig. 4.7	Shaykh Raja Ashman and Pa' Ariffin, .....	166
Fig. 4.8	Hymns to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet .....	166
Fig. 4.9	Haqqani talisman .....	167
Fig. 5.1	Pa' Ariffin playing with Yeop .....	184
Fig. 5.2	Shaykh Nazim, Chief, and Raja Ashman in Singapore .....	190
Fig. 5.3	Shaykh Nazim, Shaykh Raja Ashman and a Singapore <i>silat</i> group ..	191
Fig. 5.4	Raja Ashman awarding <i>sundang</i> .....	197
Fig. 6.1	The Millennium Camp.....	211
Fig. 6.2	<i>Silat: Dance of the Warriors</i> .....	220
Fig. 7.1	Cikgu Kahar accepting a student into <i>silat gayong</i> .....	227
Fig. 7.2	A lime sits in the <i>sabut kepala</i> on top of my fieldnotes.....	229
Fig. 7.3	Lime divination.....	231
Fig. 7.4	Preparing the coconut milk.....	235

Fig. 7.5 Cooking the oil ..... 236

Fig. 7.6 Nazim and I share a cauldron ..... 238

Fig. 8.1 The grave of Hang Tuah at Melaka ..... 258

Fig. 8.2 The *belebat* footwork pattern..... 262

Fig. 8.3 The Seni Silat Gayong Malaysia badge..... 265

Fig. 8.4 The *kayu baha*..... 266

Fig. 8.5 “Silat” by Mohammad Din Mohammad..... 269

# *Dramatis Personæ*

## **“Bandits”**

Shaykh Nazim	Head of the Haqqani-Naqshbandi Sufi <i>tarekat</i>
Shaykh Raja Ashman	Caliph for Southeast Asia
Pa’ Ariffin Yeop Mahidin	Leader of Seni Silat Haqq Melayu & Silat Gayong UK
Nazim	<i>Zawiya</i> secretary, Kuala Lumpur
Mut Nor	<i>Tarekat</i> member
Eshan	<i>Tarekat</i> member
Faizal	<i>Tarekat</i> member
Pa’ Din	Royal bodyguard/ <i>silat</i> teacher
Moose	Malay actor
Tutak	<i>Zawiya</i> caretaker, Janda Baik
Moone	Pa’ Ariffin’s wife
Yeop	Pa’ Ariffin and Moone’s son
Mrs. Mahidin	Pa’ Ariffin’s mother
The late Datok Yeop Mahidin M.B.E.	Leader of 26,000 <i>kampung</i> guards

## **Seni Silat Haqq Melayu**

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

## **Silat Seni Gayong UK**

Suleiman	Pa’ Ariffin’s <i>silat gayong</i> student
Yasmin	Suleiman’s wife

**Others**

Cikgu Ezhar

Cikgu Kahar

Mohammad Din Mohammad

Syed Hussain Alatas

Masri

Wak Sarin

Razak

Pa' Zaini

Special forces trainer (*silat gayong*)

Black belt instructor (*silat gayong*)

*Guru silat (silat kuntau Melaka)*

Sufi mystic and political writer

*Silat siluman harimau*

*Guru silat (silat siluman harimau)*

Patron on Nirwana Gelanggann

*Guru silat (silat lima beradik)*