Sovereign Bodies and the Practicalities of Power

Introduction

So far I have considered the historical development of different modalities of Pencak Silat from the first stirrings of nationalist consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century. I looked at the aggregation of the art as an aspect of pluralistic conceptions of national culture in the nascent Indonesian republic, and argued that there is a fundamental pedagogical transformation in modern modes of practice that is a consequence of the homogenization and politicization of culture under Suharto’s New Order. The gist of my argument has been that, in subjectivities cultivated in IPSI and modern Pencak Silat schools, interpersonal relations and diffuse agency are circumscribed by a bounded individualism in which the state assumes prominence as the guarantor of spiritual well-being. There is no doubting the effects of modern forms of organization on the practice of Pencak Silat. Yet, as I have argued in previous chapters, I do not think that we can see this process simply in terms of new forms of political rationality at work. Rather, there are continuities in these new modes of practice with extant forms of power centred upon the body.

Through comparison of the practice and administration of Pencak Silat at national and regional levels I showed that the reach of the state is limited and centred upon Jakarta as the seat of government. Within IPSI under the New Order, the development of Pencak Silat took an international turn with the formation of the International Pencak Silat Federation and the staging of the first world championships in the eighties. The drive for uniformity within IPSI was further motivated by an outward focus on developing Pencak Silat as an international sport. Now, with forty countries competing in the world championships, Eddie Nalapraya’s wish that the art ‘go international’ has been fulfilled.1 All the same, the conception of an Indonesian martial art, while framed by participation in the international order, was from the outset of the Indonesian republic a project pursued by successive members of the political and military elite. This endeavour reached its apotheosis under Eddie Nalapraya, as loyal a servant to the New Order as ever there was.

Within IPSI, divergent, although not exclusive modes of Pencak Silat representative of the Indonesian nation state have displaced modes of practice that

1 Interview with Eddie Nalapraya 7 March 2011, Bogor.
are potentially destabilizing to this modern ideal. More traditional modalities of Pencak Silat have in effect been denied coevality with the modern practice of the art. However, I have maintained that this temporal dislocation should not be seen as a break with the past signalled by the rise of new techniques of corporeal subordination, but rather as a strategic response to the formative effects of inner knowledge and technologies of spiritual warfare. Technologies through which spiritual agency might be actualized, and which IPSI abjures because of their revolutionary nature. These technologies, I will show, are revealing of assumptions about the nature and character of power conceived as a relational and evanescent phenomenon in need of display lest it wane.

In this chapter I argue that these presuppositions about power are more widely discernible at other levels of political scale in Indonesia, and underpinned significant elements of the social construction and representation of legitimate authority under the New Order. In this respect, ideas about power and the way that it works in the world, as an aspect of cultural production, cannot be simply attributed to the state. Rather, they grant insight into the ‘idea of the state’ (Abrams 1988: 79), and importantly the discursive configuration and contestation of this idea. However, in spite of its chimerical nature, the ‘state’ is experienced through lived relations. Its existence is not just ideational, and this is clear in modern modalities of Pencak Silat. There is an ontic dimension to the projection of national unity that is expressed in the performance of juris wajib, the cultivation of inner power, and the practice of an art that is the proud heritage of the Nusantara warrior tradition.

Similarly concerned with the pitfalls of taking the authority of the state at face value, Joel Migdal draws on Bourdieu to suggest that the state is better thought of both ideationally, and in terms of the practical execution of the myriad activities that are framed by this idea. That is, as a ‘field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts’ (2001: 15–16). Migdal’s analytical focus on the state as a ‘field of power’ prompts the conceptualization of the state as a more emergent entity coming

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2 Here I draw on R.G. Collingwood’s thinking on presuppositions – assumptions underlying how people think and reflect critically in the world – as part of the study of metaphysics (Collingwood 2002: 34–48). Thus, a ‘metaphysical question either is simply the question what absolute presuppositions were made on a certain occasion, or is capable of being resolved into a number of such questions together with a further question or further questions arising out of these’ (Collingwood 2002: 49).