

Martial Arts, Mediation and Mediatization. Pencak Silat and (dis-)embodied Media Practices in Indonesia.

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The process of media increasingly determining culture and society, peoples' values, identities and everyday lives, has been conceptualized as "mediatization" (Krotz 2007; Couldry 2008; Hjarvard 2008; Hepp 2012). From an anthropological standpoint, it is seen as a simultaneous process of mediatization of culture and culturalization of media. The fundamental question 'What is a medium?' that has produced numerous theoretical concepts in scholarly literature, represents the starting point of this study, and is addressed from an anthropological perspective on mediation.

Following the "media turn" in religious studies, martial arts are understood as mediation, i.e. as a set of practices and ideas that cannot be grasped without considering the middle grounds that substantiate them; this sets the focus on materiality and practice (Engelke 2010). Even more substantial, the body is defined as most radical medium, as the sensory instrument for mediation in the original (ontological) sense. A phenomenological approach to embodiment is adopted, to shed light on cultural patterning of bodily experience and intersubjective meaning-making through bodily experience (Csordas 1990; 1999).

On this basis, the PhD thesis presents an anthropological approach to mediation and mediatization, investigating Indonesian martial arts and/as media practices. The study covers the roles of both body techniques and new media technologies in imparting knowledge, values, and identity. Tracing affective bodily practices and collective embodiment in *Pencak Silat* subsequently allows a portrayal of the impacts and implications of media representations and engagements on this established social educational system.

The Indonesian martial arts *Pencak Silat* are essentially linked with esoteric knowledge and extraordinary powers, with "war magic and warrior religion" (Farrer 2014). Performances of extraordinary abilities are closely related to social participation and advancement, and provide a shared sense of belonging and collective identity. *Pencak Silat* schools represent institutions of religious, cultural and social knowledge communication for a large part of the Indonesian population. School headmasters often occupy key positions in ritual, religious, political, and economic domains; they must be recognized as cultural mediators and national leading figures, imparting knowledge and values to the people (De Grave 2014). In the context of Indonesian nation-building, the implementation of the idea of *Pencak Silat* as national, standardized sport involved a disregard of mystical practices and beliefs within martial arts education. Cultural nationalism implied changes in dealing with esoteric elements of *Pencak Silat*, in education and knowledge transfer. As a standardized and rationalized national sport, *Pencak Silat* provides the Indonesian state with disciplinary mechanisms in which the body (as medium) and related cultural formations frame configurations of power (cp. Wilson 2015).

However, popular myths, folklore and oral history referring to the extraordinary characteristics and abilities of *Pencak Silat* masters are deeply rooted in public consciousness. In Indonesia, these so-called "silat-stories" form an integral part of popular culture. Current cinema and television productions in the martial arts genre take up silat-stories, and reconnect martial arts

with magic, the supernatural, and the spirit world; they reflect or contradict dynamics in the *Pencak Silat* world. This medial trend runs counter to both religious doctrinal purification processes in general, and to the ‘sportization’ of the martial arts in particular, both advanced by governmental and non-governmental actors. Exploring impacts and implications of this trend adds a fresh contribution to the study of Indonesia’s contested screen culture (Heryanto 2014). Such contestations are also transferred to social media, and related online discourses and practices are developed. Efforts to strengthen collective, national or religious identity, and to reinforce or redefine the role of the *Pencak Silat* master as respected authority are supported by social media applications. Adding new dimensions to self-formation in *Pencak Silat* education, they represent (social) media technologies of the self (Sauter 2014; Hall 2015). In this context, established hierarchies and authority do not remain unchanged. In some cases, new forms of mentorship and participation gain importance over genealogical and immediate relations based on personhood and locality. In other cases, genealogical relations, the immediate social fabric, and a sense of place are reinforced. Either way, mediatization clearly affects religious, cultural and social knowledge communication, and the everyday lives of Indonesian *Pencak Silat* practitioners.

Approaching martial arts ‘and/as’ media (Berg and Prohl 2014), processes of mediatization and media practices are recognized as the constitutive condition as well as visible performance of martial arts practices. Yet, what emerges is not a *Pencak Silat* ‘hyperreal’ in Baudrillard’s sense, but techno-social hybrid realities in which supposed online-offline dichotomies, utopian and dystopian visions of new technologies, old and new media collide (Jenkins 2006). A notion of martial arts as embodied knowledge (Farrer and Whalenbridge 2011) sets embodiment as the “existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience” (Csordas 1999: 143). The human body as radical medium intersects with all communication media. Content and capacity of this medium are developed and change in *Pencak Silat*, especially in connection to the development and use of new information and communication technologies. This enables an empirical investigation of the extent to which modern communication media disembodiment through reducing or negating the body as a medium (Killmeier 2009). The emic perspective of *Pencak Silat* practitioners, their perception of media effects and media practices as (dis-)embodied, is the focal point of this study. Building on this, a balanced approach to mediatization also covers the system level, both content and symbolic form, nature and structure of media technology: the ways in which media structure narratives and sense making. In conclusion, this study explores the ways in which images and discourses in new media spheres provide additional or alternative references to embodied learning and intersubjective bodily experience.

Based on extensive fieldwork (between 2006 and 2016), this PhD thesis presents an ethnography of mediation and mediatization, analyzing martial arts and/as media practices in Indonesia. The thesis contributes to martial arts studies, religious studies, and media studies, demonstrating (sensory) potentials and limitations of new media technologies and their (dis-)embodiment – their extension or reduction of the body as medium.

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