

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Hybrid Warriors and the Formation of New War Masculinities: A Case Study of Indonesian Foreign Fighters

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At the heart of new wars are economic structures, patterns of violence and formations of collective meaning, which appear to blend localised and globalised practices of gender. While new wars appear to mirror the kind of warrior masculinity that preceded the modern state, they also draw on new technologies and symbolism to give meaning to acts of war. In the case of foreign fighters, armed groups increasingly draw on globalised cultural products (film, electronic publications and images) to entice volunteers to fight on the battlefields of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The use of masculine models and gendered discourses to recruit men to fight in these conflicts has been well studied. However, the process through which 'local' and 'global' practices of gender are blended by highly mobile fighters to forge the practices of new war has received far less attention.

Drawing on the notion of cultural hybridity, this article asks how interactions between different configurations of gender make new wars possible. To do this, it empirically explores encounters between notions of militarised manhood through the lives of four Indonesian former foreign fighters. By utilising life history interviews, this article makes the case that the masculinity of these 'new warriors' relied on the tensions between, and synthesis of, anti-colonial notions of organised violence that are rooted in Indonesian history and globalised jihadi discourse on war.

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## Introduction

Gender relations are constitutive to the practice of new wars. The shift in social relations of war, as theorised by Mary Kaldor (2012) in *New and Old War*, is predicated on the transformation of norms, structures and practices of gender that give social meaning to the concept of war and set boundaries around the practice it contains. Previous

studies have emphasised that new wars have gendered impacts (Chinkin and Kaldor 2013) and also that shifts in gendered norms are integral to the transformation of war itself (Parpart 2010a; Parpart 2010b; Duriesmith 2014; Duriesmith 2017; Meger 2011; Peterson 2008). At the heart of these efforts is an attempt to account for shifts in gender relations, which precipitate differing forms of collective violence.

Research on gender and the transformation of war builds on previous work suggesting that war is socially constructed

as a masculine domain (Goldstein 2001; Barry 2010; Elshtain 1987). Researchers have argued that the practice of war is so intractably linked to social understandings of what it means to be a man that war itself should be seen as an expression of men's gendered violence (Cockburn 2010). For example, certain tactics are co-constituted with understandings of masculinity, making some forms of violence prohibited as unmanly or cowardly and others promoted as natural and inevitable practices of war by military institutions. Due to this intimate relationship, understanding masculinity is essential to understanding the practice of war.

While existing studies on masculinity have admirably explored the impact of shifts in the gendered meaning of war, far less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which shifts in gender relations occur. My previous work in *Masculinity and New War* (Duriesmith 2017) has interrogated how a breakdown in the gender order can fuel war. This research explored wars in Sierra Leone and South Sudan to make the case that instabilities in the existing gender order produced harmful patterns of masculine practice, which fuelled new wars. This article focuses on one particular dynamic: the formation of masculinities through encounters between different traditions of organised violence.

This paper situates gender within critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM). CSMM scholars call for research to foreground the multiplicity of genders in a given spatial location (masculinities and femininities rather than masculinity and femininity). This work has emphasised that these multiple articulations of gender are organised into a more or less stable hierarchy, termed the gender order. CSMM scholars build on the work of Raewyn Connell (2005) to suggest that accounts of gender cannot simply focus on norms that exist in society. Instead, Connell argues that gendered norms and values are affixed to specific groups and that the interplay between these norms and groups creates social reality. To fully understand new wars, it is necessary to explore the interplay

between different articulations of gender. By looking at the interplay between notions of gender, it is possible to study how they shift through time, and how these shifts result in changes in the practice of violence.

For the purpose of this article, new wars are understood to be the diverse range of intractable conflicts that emerged across the Global South since the end of the Cold War. Building on Kaldor's (2012) understanding of new wars, these forms of conflict are characterised by their reliance on low technology, irregular combatants, connection to global shadow economies and emphasis on controlling civilian populations rather than territorial conquest. In line with this account, new wars are not understood to necessarily be novel, rather the term is employed to draw distinction with state-based forms of war that drew the attention of most security scholars doing the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My previous work on Sierra Leone and South Sudan has drawn on CSMM scholarship to understand how armed groups can be created through unstable gender orders. In these instances, few avenues are available for young men to assert their position as would-be patriarchs, resulting in social understandings of manhood that emphasise collective violence as a path towards status and wealth (Duriesmith 2014, 2015, 2017). While this study was productive, it did not cover conflicts that included large populations of foreign fighters or a high degree of combatant mobility. This meant that they also did not result in rich cultural interplays between combatants and transnational movements. Although both new wars were interlinked with the global political economy and drew on cultural artefacts (the deployment of American cinema and rap music) to reforge notions of masculinity, the role of these international connections was not significant in the emergence of new war (Richards 1996; Nuxoll 2015). While there has been extensive exploration of global economic links in propagating new wars, little attention has previously been paid to transnational cultural links.

This article looks to rectify this oversight by focusing on the kinds of globalised ideological and cultural encounters that appear to characterise new wars when jihadi groups are central actors.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the article looks at men in Indonesian jihadi groups, who were integral to local conflicts in the archipelago as well as important foreign fighters in the southern Philippines and Syria. This article makes two key claims: 1) these men are of unique importance in their attempts to inculcate notions of manhood that make new war possible; and 2) the forms of manhood propagated by these men represent composite forms that graft pre-existing local patterns of violent resistance with globalised gender norms, cultural practices and forms of war-making.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the Indonesian men – who were trained in Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s – their role in propagating new wars and the use of life histories to study them. The article argues that three pivotal encounters (at home, in Afghanistan and in regional community conflicts) help the understanding of how masculinities are transformed to make new wars possible. Finally, the article concludes with some consideration of the potentially constitutive quality of hybridisation and adaptation (between new and old, local and global, pre- and post-colonial, etc.) for the construction of gender in certain conflicts.

### **Background and Research Method**

The men studied for this research are affiliates of jihadi networks across the Indonesian archipelago. They fought in Afghanistan, the Philippines and a range of 'internal' Indonesian conflicts, which they helped to transform from conventional ethnic tensions to globalised new wars (especially in Ambon, Poso and Aceh). Their participation varied at different stages of their lives, ranging from vital but low-intensity support activities such as collecting money or training prospective fighters in religious practices to more active and violent acts, including committing acts of

violence against civilians and direct fighting against armed opponents. Throughout their lives, they worked in the grey areas between war and criminality, typifying new wars and comfortably shifting between the roles of proselytizer and militant.

The roles that these men have played are integral to what has come to be called new war. Their experience as the first generation of fighters trained by the global jihadi network was significant in the emergence of localised and globalised conflicts in Southeast Asian countries. Their significance is seen not only in the conflicts they themselves directly fought in, but also in the enduring influence their actions have had on subsequent generations of fighters seeking to emulate these mujahedeen.

Within Indonesian jihadi networks, the men in this article are collectively called the 'Afghan alumni.' Around 350 men were sent by local Islamist offshoots from Darul Islam (including Komando Jihad and Negara Islam Indonesia) to Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s to fight and receive training (Atran 2010; Hartman 2013). After returning from Afghanistan, these men agitated for an Islamic state in Indonesian and went on to escalate long-standing ethnoreligious conflicts in Ambon, in the Maluku Islands and in Poso, in Central Sulawesi (Schulze 2017; McRae 2013).

While in Indonesia, they undertook integral generational work, training the next set of cadres and leaders in the struggle. The Afghan alumni were of essential importance to the formation of Jama'ah Islamiyah, and their actions continue to resonate – both in laying the groundwork for recent struggles in the southern Philippines and amongst the Indonesians travelling to Syria as foreign fighters (Zammit 2014; Gross 2007). The Afghan alumni are of significance to the story of new war in Southeast Asia as entrepreneurs of forms of fighting, finance and discourses of violence, which have become increasingly common since the early 2000s. This cohort has a unique value for academic research as a transitional group of fighters

participating in insurgencies, which can be described as 'the harbingers of new forms of warfare' (Kaldor 2012: 31) before adapting and intensifying these techniques in later examples of fully formed new wars.

Fieldwork was conducted with former foreign fighters in Java (Jakarta, Solo, Semarang and Yogyakarta) during 2016 as part of a larger project with Noor Huda Ismail from the Institute for International Peace Building on men's pathways out of armed networks. The main research activity was life history interviews with nine men. This paper focuses on the four Afghan alumni, with supporting commentary from the other five life histories of fighters who were trained by them.<sup>2</sup> The four Afghan alumni are Fauzi, Ali, Syed and Yani.

Fauzi is a Betawi (native people from the Jakarta area) man in his 60s who comes from a family affiliated with Darul Islam. He was a senior leader in the network throughout his life and now administers a mosque in Jakarta. Ali is Betawi man in his 50s from a secular family, who was a senior fighter and now trains younger men to fight. Syed is a Pakistani-Indonesian man in his 50s from an outer island; he has largely disconnected from the broader jihadi network after being imprisoned. Yani, a Betawi man from Jakarta, was a respected fighter and now works in business. The remaining five men are Bakti, Elang, Dillon, Aziz and Joyo.

The interviews involved multiple loosely structured sessions exploring participants' pathways into and out of militancy with a focus on masculinities and their relationship with violence. In addition to the main life history interviews, the research involved supporting interviews with individuals associated with the network and family members as well as extended periods of socialising and spending time together. This method has been chosen both because of its integral role in establishing CSMM through landmark studies in exploring men's lives and because of its capacity to extract deep information about individuals' lives with a relatively modest sample (Messerschmidt 2000; Messner

1992; Connell 2005). Due to the small population of remaining alumni and the even smaller group who can be interviewed safely, this method was of great value for studying former foreign fighters.

### **The Trajectory of Afghan Alumni towards New War**

The Afghan alumni's participation in violent networks was structured by an understanding of their role *as men*. While participants' lives were rich and varied, there are three common encounters that shifted their practice of manhood substantially. These encounters can be delineated as: first, with political Islam in Indonesia; second, with Arab and Afghan masculinities; and, third, by encounters with community conflicts in Ambon and Poso.<sup>3</sup> These three encounters represent punctuating moments in the formation of their relationships with collective violence. These key junctures are framed as 'encounters' because they are moments where the participants were confronted with radically different ways to be men, forcing them to re-evaluate their role in the world. Being exposed to these different forms of manhood enabled the Afghan alumni to forge hybrid modes of masculinity by grafting the different traditions of masculinity to position themselves in the world.

#### **Initial encounters with political Islam**

The first encounter, which placed the participants on a trajectory towards armed violence, was exposure to individuals agitating for political Islam and against Indonesia's national ideology of Pancasila.<sup>4</sup> The participants explained their lives before joining jihadi networks in terms of perceived failures to meet expectations of adult masculinity. They emphasised indolent criminality, as well as failing to achieve material wealth and/or social status. Participants articulated class aspirations and struggles to pursue secular status and wealth to break from the perceived poverty and ignorance of their parents.

Joyo actively sought a jihadi connection, because of his failure to cohere to regular village life. He explained that he was living without control, 'away from the nuances of religion. Even as a child I was quite naughty, but by junior high school, I was accustomed to the negative behaviour of adolescents. In my village, I had been marked as a bad person.'

Exposure to Islamist networks as an opportunity for redemption was not only present in Joyo's narrative, but was also a key component in the lives of five other participants, who had been part of gangs in their youth. In many parts of Indonesia, gangs play an important transitional role as young men navigate the liminal space between boyhood and manhood. While these gangs are often quite violent, Pamela Nilan (2010) explains that they are 'a temporally-bounded phase or episode in the transition to middle-class adult masculinity.'

The network presented a different narrative of adult masculinity that deviated significantly from secular-middle-class wealth and status. Instead of drawing on secular, westernised definitions of success and material attainment, Islamists emphasised continuity with an older tradition of Indonesian warriors, which formed part of a religious anti-colonial struggle. This articulation relied on painting Pancasila as a deviation from Indonesia's path towards an Islamic state (which Darul Islam had worked to establish since 1942). Performances of manhood were centred on practices of traditional cultural sophistication (mainly in poetry, storytelling and religious knowledge) as well as martial prowess (through traditional martial arts and military training). Young men were presented an alternative construction for their social roles offering them the chance to transcend their class, background, ethnicity and professional qualifications through participation in a mythic tradition of Indonesian, and particularly Javanese, heroes fighting oppressors of the faith.

These traditions and myths of violence as resistance to oppressors (of faith, nation,

community or other) are politically salient and popular tropes in Indonesian politics. Some of the most prominent examples of this include the Padri War (1803–1837), Diponegoro's Java War against the Dutch (1825–1830), the Aceh War (1873–1904), the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949) as well as the Darul Islam Rebellion (1949–1962). Not all of these conflicts explicitly drew on religion as a core motivation (such as the War of Independence), and in some cases Islam was inconsistently used as a rallying cry (such as the Java War). Despite this, subsequent retellings of these conflicts have been used by political actors to either emphasise the importance of Islam in Indonesian politics, or to emphasise secular nationalism. Both secular and religious retellings draw on the narrative of heroic resistance to external oppression and colonialism, appealing to similar sets of behaviours around the sophisticated and righteous rebel as a way to frame what it means to be an Indonesian man.

The appeal of the Islamist network was couched in these distinctly gendered terms: the young men were told that Islam was being threatened by secularism and, as Yani explained, 'as a man we have to struggle.' To do this, they were told to leave behind the previous pathway towards manhood (through education, profession or family), and to accept their role as defenders of the Islamic community (*ummah*) from secularism and temptation. Exposure to the Islamist narratives opened a new trajectory in their lives towards the violent defence of the Indonesian Muslim community as a central signifier of masculinity. Initially, their support was not directly violent. For example, Yani began by collecting remittances; Syed started proselytising; and Ali began by hiding senior members from the police. While the network emphasised readiness for violence and trained the young men in some aspects of militarism, their ideology was essentially that of a traditional insurgency. While they remained in Indonesia, direct violence was focused on agents of the state and, even

then, only when there was a high likelihood of substantive success. Encountering the network presented them with an alternative avenue for constructing their masculine identities, but initially provided few opportunities to perform the role of the virtuous warrior. Once they had shown their commitment to the jihadi cause, the men were provided an opportunity to travel overseas and participate in direct fighting. This was the second key encounter that shaped their masculinities in the context of new wars.

### Encounters with international jihad

After receiving initial military training from members of the network in Malaysia, where many senior Darul Islam members hid from the Indonesian police, the men were sent through Pakistan to Afghanistan. Travelling to Afghanistan exposed the men to direct conflict for the first time and brought them into contact with fellow jihadi from across the globe. Their experiences in Afghanistan provided them with training and combat experience, but also shifted their perceptions of what it meant to be a masculine warrior. Up until this point, their model of Islamic masculinity drew heavily on Indonesian (particularly Javanese) narratives that linked their actions to stories of national folk heroes (such as Si Pitung) and notions of Southeast Asian Islamic sophistication. These stories built on existing folklore of the local hero (*jago*) and narratives of colonial resistance to the Dutch and Japanese (Azca 2011).

The use of the *jago* (which literally means fighting cock) trope is common within Indonesian politics as a justification for men's collective violence, particularly within Jakarta. Schulte Nordholt (1991: 75) notes that the concept of the *jago* derived from pre-colonial patterns of private violence that largely manifested as a range of actors living in 'hostile co-existence' before the invasion of the Dutch. Wilson (2015: 11–15) argued that the concept of the *jago* evolved to entail a degree of mysticism obtained through periods of training under a *guru*. Wilson (2015: 11) explained that the *jago*'s 'social capital

came in their embodiment of cultural ideals regarding physical and spiritual potency and intimate knowledge of local conditions, whilst their political capital was found in their proficiency in the use of violent force.' As with many practices of the alumni, they transformed the existing tradition around a *jago* leader, by replacing connection to localised mysticism with their link to the mujahideen of Afghanistan, and the miracles they had witnessed overseas.

The Afghan encounter brought the Indonesian fighters into direct contact with a range of mujahideen from South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere. These men carried with them their notions of manhood and traditions of war-making. The Arab and Afghan men viewed the Indonesian recruits with a degree of suspicion and treated them paternalistically as younger brothers in need of training in the correct practices of Islam. This meant that their initial activities were constrained to religious training and Arabic lessons, which gradually transitioned into military training. The process was centred around the notion of remaking the Indonesian men in the image of Arabised mujahideen, in clothing, speech, identity and practices of war.

Though they were given few opportunities to fight, they described their religious training as part of their war efforts. Fauzi explained that when they arrived, they were unable to be real fighters (mujahideen), because they had zero knowledge of true Islam. He explained that the first step for men 'to remain in readiness for jihad' was by learning how to pray and read the Quran or Hadith properly. After adopting more fundamentalist religious customs and undergoing religious education to purify them from their perceived syncretic Indonesian roots, they were ready to see combat.

Participants who had succeeded in their studies were given the opportunity to travel to the front lines and participate in fighting. Syed explained that the chance to fight in actual battles was like a school field trip for the Indonesian men: they were there to



learn, and fighting was part of their training. These practical exercises elevated them above their subordinate status as Indonesian men in an Arab- and Afghan-dominated space. When asked to explain his experience in Afghanistan, Fauzi explained:

In Afghanistan, we were not just proven as men, we felt noble. In Indonesia we were confined. It was like we wanted to shout; it was the time of the Suharto regime and very militant, very authoritarian. In Afghanistan, we could speak freely about Islam and accuse the unbelievers freely. We could shoot the real infidels there. There we felt our glory... You become more than *just* a man. (Fauzi)

This sense of transcendence through violence was a product of their exposure to the training camps and conflict in Afghanistan and became essential to their later entrepreneurial role in propagating conflict. In explaining the sense of accomplishment that they gained through violence, the participants were clear that it was not just the achievement of strategic victories on the ground, it was the creation of a social space where exceptional things were possible and an atmosphere where men could be remade. When asked about his participation in the Battle of Jaji alongside Osama bin Laden, Syed emphasised its rapturous qualities: 'it was the atmosphere of jihad, the atmosphere of war.' Participants expressed that they had witnessed miracles on the battlefield: Allah had made them immune to bombs dropped directly on them; the bodies of martyrs were clean and perfumed while in the battlespace; and that angels intervened on their behalf. For all, war transformed them. Miracles were proof that they had taken the right course by emulating mujahedeen warrior masculinity and that when they returned to Indonesia, they were to bring the glory they had witnessed back home.

### Encounters with regional jihad

The third set of encounters shaping their masculinities was in the conflicts in Ambon and Poso. When they arrived back in Indonesia, the Afghan alumni returned as mujahid and encountered Indonesian men as 'others' in need of their guidance or violence. The alumni brought the global jihad with them, and when ethnic conflict broke out in Ambon in 1999 and in Poso a year later, they seized the opportunity to show their fellow Indonesians how to wage war with the spirit of jihad.

Both conflicts were initially community-level clashes between Christian and Muslim groups in Poso in Central Sulawesi and Ambon in the Maluku Islands. These clashes began with long-standing tensions between local communities and small-scale violence. They were portrayed in Indonesia as religious conflicts resulting in the intervention of jihadi networks who intervened with the intention of 'protecting' the local Muslim population. These interventions rapidly escalated the conflicts, resulting in the use of brutal tactics against civilian populations and the use of increasingly deadly weaponry in clashes that had previously had low levels of mortality.

Returning from Afghanistan in the early and mid-1990s, jihadis found tensions in the local Islamist network that had resulted in numerous splinter groups forming, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The main groups, dominated by an old guard of Darul Islam members, opposed intervening in Ambon and Poso. The old guard viewed these conflicts as local problems, disconnected from the national struggle for an Islamic state in Indonesia (Azca 2011). The Afghan alumni rejected this interpretation and explained that they had to intervene as mujahid. As Fauzi explained, 'if my neighbour's house was on fire, it would be my responsibility to put out the fire. We went to Ambon because we saw that there was a fire to be extinguished.'

To conduct war in Ambon and Poso, they used a local charity organisation, Kompak

(Committee for Overcoming Crises), as a front to smuggle weapons, money and other resources (Azca 2011). While there, the alumni trained a new generation of fighters in the techniques they learned in Afghanistan, including the targeted bombings of churches, the assassination of priests and massacres against civilians (Jones 2005). In Ambon and Poso, they shifted the existing pattern of fighting from limited skirmishes between the competing community defence forces to globally connected, funded and armed attacks on Christian civilian populations. As the Afghan alumni had been trained in the ideology of defensive jihad, it was not permissible to fight in a region where Muslims were not already under attack; this meant that encountering the conflicts in Ambon and Poso provided them with an opportunity to fight and experiences the 'atmosphere of jihad' again.

Though men that they trained in Ambon and Poso (including Bakti, Dillon, Elang and Aziz) went through the process only around ten years after the alumni did, the global context had shifted rapidly. The September 11 attacks occurred during the conflicts and the invasion of Afghanistan took place as they ended. The men trained by the Afghan alumni took the interpretation of justified holy war further. Some took the position that al-Qaeda-style attacks were justified and that it was time to take the jihad truly global (rather than the prior 'defensive' position). Some interviewees continued to pursue violence in the conflict in the southern Philippines and as supporters of the 2002 Bali bombings and 2004 Jakarta Embassy attacks. However, the ramifications of the Islamist violence in Ambon and Poso is ongoing, as can be seen in the continuing violent episodes across the archipelago as well as in the numbers of Indonesians who fight in the Philippines and alongside the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (Topsfield 2017; Hawley 2017).

Taken together, these encounters represent pivotal junctures in the lives of the Afghan alumni that contributed to the trajectory towards new war in the region. The three

junctures were coloured and structured by gender, while notions of masculinity shaped their response to each encounter and informed their use of violence in the years after. The encounters also represented moments when they were forced to confront different forms of masculinity, resulting in the adaptation of their performance.

### **New War Masculinities as Hybrid Performances**

The theory of new war is rooted in change and adaptation in the way that collective violence is performed (Kaldor 2012: 31). For the Afghan alumni, changes in their use of violence were not purely responses to shifts in the geopolitical climate, the emergence of virulent identity politics or technological developments. Though all these things were present in their lives, the pivotal shifts, which resulted in their adoption of new war tactics, came through encounters with different performances of manhood.

The tradition of violent resistance to secularism is long-standing in the Indonesian archipelago. The men who were trained by the Afghan alumni were taught to see themselves as the inheritors of the previous rebellion. In his final testimony, Iqbal, one of the main bombers in the 2002 Sari Club bombings in Bali, recorded this connection: 'I am a child of DI/Nil [Darul Islam/Negara Islam Indonesia] who is ready to sacrifice myself for Islam...If you are serious about seeing the glory of the buried Islamic State of Indonesia rise again, shed your blood so that you won't be ashamed to face Allah, you who acknowledge yourselves to be children of DI/NIL' (Temby 2010: 1). Iqbal was trained by Mukhlas, an Afghan alumnus. Like Iqbal, the younger participants in this project were trained by alumni, who stressed the connection to Darul Islam, or as Fauzi framed it, they were 'flying the flag of Darul Islam.'

In contrast to this narrative connection, the form of war that was carried out by Kompak in Ambon and Poso was radically different from that of Darul Islam. At its heart, Darul Islam was a traditional insurgency group, premised



on territorial succession and the creation of an Islamic State. Darul Islam originated from the actions of guerrilla groups under the leadership of Kartosoewirjo, who fought against Dutch colonialism in the 1940s and then organised against the Indonesian state when it instituted the ideology of Pancasila. Its ambitions were the establishment of a territorially bounded religious state and its tactics were those of conventional insurgency, including direct conflict with Indonesian state forces, territorial control and guerrilla warfare. At its height, Darul Islam controlled most of Java, Aceh and significant sections of Sulawesi. Its mode of war was similar to other anti-colonial insurgencies, albeit with an Islamist veneer.

In contrast, the organisations founded by the Afghan alumni, such as Kompak, JI and Laskar Jihad, were prototypical new warrior organisations in the region. The targets of their main activities were civilians, who were perceived to be non-group members, particularly Christian minority groups. They were externally funded through an elaborate international shadow economy. They drew on small arms and improvised weaponry to wreak damage on soft targets. They did not make serious attempts at territorial conquest or try to directly combat the Indonesian armed forces. Their ambitions were global, and war was treated as an intrinsic, rather than instrumental, good. These shifts in ideology, tactics and economics represent the transformation of protean forms of community conflict into globalised new wars.

The role of encounters between Indonesian jihadis and the global network of militants is most noticeable in changes in ideology from defensive jihadism to that of globalised neojihadism. Jihadi movements in Indonesia up until the 1990s were primarily motivated by a defensive ideology that called on Muslim men to protect the local ummah from the localised threat posed by other religious groups in the archipelago (Hasan 2006). By the mid-2000s, this ideology had shifted to what Peter Lentini (2013) called 'neojihadism,' framing the struggle in global

and civilizational terms. In the Indonesian context, the shift in ideology is one which Najib Azca (2011: 3–48) describes as a transition from a 'local brawl' to 'global jihad.' The ideological transition from local to global was made possible by the three encounters outlined above, which shifted personal grievances to collective obligations, made collective obligations transnational and then made local grievances global.

### Initial encounter

The first encounter is exposure to the Islamist network, which transformed men's pre-existing gendered grievances into collective ones. A prime example of how transformative this encounter was can be seen in the life of Yani. Through his early teenage years, Yani was an unexceptional youth from a secular family. He struggled with formal education and he started to fail out of school when he was around 15 years old. At this time, he began associating with a number of petty criminal gangs but struggled to belong. He described searching for belonging among groups of young men: 'in high school I was a petty cash criminal, sometimes I would take other people's cars, sometimes I would drink as well.' He felt that he didn't really fit in and couldn't 'stick to one group.' He applied to the police and army and was rejected by both.

When Yani failed the military entrance test, he felt dejected and went to a local mosque in Jakarta. The mosque was hosting a jihadi preacher, who played a video of the mujahdeen in Afghanistan. The video and accompanying sermon inspired Yani to join the Islamist group, with the hope that he might go and fight with the warriors he had seen in the video. Having failed in his attempts to join other professions, Yani devoted himself to Islamist activities, studying religious texts, fundraising and travelling to Malaysia to receive military training.

In retrospect, Yani explains this period as one of working out how to fulfil the expectations placed on him as a young man. With limited education opportunities and struggling to find social belonging, Yani tried to

join the police and military as a means to gain group acceptance, social status and economic independence. The initial motivation to join the Islamist movement was not primarily tied to identity politics, profound religious commitment or the promise of wealth (in fact, the network did not pay him until he arrived in Afghanistan). What the encounter with the network did provide was a new way to be a man, which tied his social role to the defence, sometimes through violence, of the Indonesian Islamic community.

This transformation of norms around manhood, from focusing on economic enrichment to violent assertion, is in many ways similar to the case of Sierra Leone, where the economic system's failure to provide young men with employment meant that they were primed for recruitment (Duriesmith 2017). In contrast to Sierra Leone, however, the recruitment pitch in Indonesia was not predicated on the wealth that the fighter might accrue, but on the brotherhood that becoming a fighter provided. This was very strong for Syed, who came from a Hindu majority area where he was part of an ethnic minority. When he joined the Islamists, he was a successful university student with a rewarding career as an engineer ahead of him. However, the appeal of brotherhood and meaning led him to radical student groups, and eventually into the kinetic wing of the network. For each of the interviewees, exposure to the Islamist network provided a juncture where their existing notions of manhood could be recalibrated and aspects of collective belonging and collective defence were emphasised over economic independence and status in a market economy.

### Exposure in Afghanistan

The ideology of the men was recalibrated further through the Afghan encounter. Training with the mujahedeen shifted their sense of obligation from that of collective localised defence, to the transnational brotherhood. The men who went to Afghanistan were sent with the promise that they would receive training from the mujahedeen before

returning to Indonesia to continue Darul Islam's struggle for a religious state in the archipelago. The men received training in weaponry, guerrilla warfare, theology and Arabic language. But the more transformative interaction was how the encounter had an impact on their perception of their role as protectors of the *ummah*.

Exposure to fellow fighters led the men to fundamentally rethink their practice of violence at home. Fauzi explained this shift through the exposure to Arab men, who practised a more pure version of Islam, which was guided by 'the spirit of war' and not 'the spirit of defence.' In practice, these men came from diverse backgrounds and practised religion in somewhat diverse ways depending on their national background and the religious doctrines they adhered to (the presence of diverse Sufi practices is an interesting complexity in this regard). However, for the Indonesian men we spoke with, Arab masculinity was characterised as a monolithic model of idealised manhood, aligned with textual purity, discipline and key facets of Saudi culture. The portrayal of our participants did not entail the complexity of these men, but more an idealised imagination of the 'Arab man' who had not been corrupted by Indonesian culture. Fauzi explained, these men better understood their role as warriors because local customs had not corrupted them. He explained that men from Java were 'mentally ready for war' but were not disciplined and had not gained proper training in true Islam, which was interpreted by participants as hard-line Wahhabism. Instead, he explained that Indonesian men were preoccupied with local concerns and local struggles. Witnessing performances of masculinity from Arab and Afghan fighters gave them a model of purity that placed new demands on the alumni to return home and teach what they had learned. As Fauzi expounded:

Because Indonesia can be changed, and because we are men, it must be remade as Islamic. [In Afghanistan] we were taught to be a missionary

mujahid, not a fighting mujahid like the Arabs....Indonesia must be Muslim. Because of this, Arabs recreate my brothers as servants of jihad... [The Arabs said] you must go back, but still you have to hold the mandate of jihad...Jihad in the sense of real war [and not just internal struggle with sin]. (Fauzi)

The demand to return home and initiate war was strong because of a perceived debt to the transnational *ummah*. Fauzi repeatedly emphasised this debt: their training had been made possible through 'blood of the martyrs of the mujahedeen.' This meant that the men who were sent back to Indonesia had to continue the fight. If they did not fight, Fauzi explained, 'even eating becomes unclean. You will be prosecuted in the hereafter.' It was not enough for them to continue to fight, they had to transform local struggles and teach local men 'the spirit of war' and not just 'the spirit of defence.'

In practice, this meant transforming local grievances between Muslim and non-Muslim groups into transnational struggles for the *ummah*. Yani explained their role as that of teachers: 'because local men don't know anything about Islam, they fight only because of revenge, and not because of Islam.' These 'missionary mujahid' transformed the actions of the Islamist networks in Indonesia. Before their return, Darul Islam and its successors had largely avoided embroilment in localised conflicts between ethnoreligious groups on the basis that they were 'local issues' and risked distracting from the larger mission of turning Indonesia into a theocracy.

The Afghan encounter meant that the alumni felt compelled and even obliged to intervene in localised conflicts, and to explain to those communities that they should be fighting not for 'revenge' but for 'jihad.' The Afghan encounter shifted the ideology of Indonesian jihadis towards new war thinking and provided them with the military and economic resources to bring the fight home. The encounter with Afghan

and Arab mujahedeen transformed collective local obligations towards an Islamic state in Indonesia into a transnational obligation to make local conflicts Islamic. Having been welcomed, trained and supported by the mujahedeen, the Afghan alumni were now compelled to escalate conflicts, which they had previously considered to be distractions from the 'main event' of fighting the Indonesian state.

### Hybrid new warrior masculinity

This new obligation represents a form of hybridization of existing models of Indonesian jihadi masculinities and forms, which had developed through the Afghan conflict. When the participants were asked about their perceptions of the Arab men, they often brought up the idea that they were bellicose or potentially even ill-disciplined. Yani recounted a story where a group of self-funded Arab fighters arrived in Afghanistan. As soon as they arrived, 'they behaved wildly, they had no discipline. They didn't want to learn how to use weapons, but just wanted to dive straight into battle without training.' When the local Afghan commander told them to go to training with the Indonesians, they responded 'we came here with our own money, why should I listen to you?' and travelled to the front line.

The alumni stressed that Indonesian men had a different understanding of proper Islamic manhood than their Arab peers. When pressed on these differences, they would mention their cultural sophistication and Javanese history, emphasising their skills in art, calligraphy and poetry. Participants appeared torn between their existing Indonesian traditions, histories and customs, and the ideology of Arab cultural supremacy, which permeated the jihadi network. This tension resulted in contradictory statements on manhood, where participants would emphasise the 'improper' or 'impure' gender norms in Indonesia, while at the same time expressing discomfort with the aggressive attitude towards war that they interpreted in the actions of Arab foreign

fighters. In longer discussions outside of formal interviews, it became clear that this was partially discomfort in the cultural differences between themselves and particularly Saudi fighters, who some felt were haughty and aggressive. However, for this research, that dynamic was difficult to explore as the ideology of a universal *ummah* meant that participants were often uncomfortable and unwilling to discuss the particulars of differences between groups beyond broad statements about differences between Arab and Indonesian men. The resulting gender positioning of the Afghan alumni should, therefore, be rightly understood as a hybrid formation. The men explained that they felt they had learned proper Islamic practice, such as reading while wearing the *jubah* (a long robe that is sometimes called a *thawb*), speaking Arabic fluently and adopting the modes of warfare, which they were taught in the Afghan camps. Despite this, they continued to emphasise their continuity to Indonesian independence struggles and the central example of folk heroes.

This positioning of the Afghan alumni combined aspects of manhood from pre-existing traditions in Indonesia, and perceived pure practices of Arabic manhood to form new ways of being a man in the world. These new ways directly structured their practices of violence in Ambon, Poso and beyond. Exposure to the conflict in Afghanistan reframed their violent actions and made attacks against civilian populations permissible. The shift also placed a demand on them for training the next generation of fighters in the techniques and norms of manhood that had been inculcated during the Afghan conflict.

For the next generation of fighters, the frictions between Arab and Indonesian understandings of militarised manhood were far less clear and, instead, they positioned themselves more as actors within the global jihadi movement than in a continuous Indonesian tradition. In contrast to the Afghan alumni, whose militarism came to maturity at the end of the Cold War, the next generation of fighters was radicalised during

a period when the 9/11 attacks occurred, Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded again, information technology was rapidly rising and deeper connections with the global network were possible. This shift fundamentally reframed their understanding of war. In contrast to previous generations, the boundaries of righteous war were vastly expanded. It was no longer only permissible to fight in locations where the *ummah* was being directly attacked by a non-Muslim group, instead the territory of war (*dar al-harb*) and the non-Muslims, who it was right to fight (*kafir harbi*), was expanded almost globally to any location where Muslims might be oppressed, or locations where those who might oppress Muslims reside.

When the Afghan alumni recruited new fighters, they were able to use new video technology to create their materials, as well as drawing on films from the Caucasus, South Asia and the Middle East to inspire recruits. The first historical study of jihadi videos, by Anne Stenersen (2017), records a rapid explosion of films during the early 2000s, which recorded clips of fighters in battle, and wildly popular 'martyr videos' recording the deaths of jihads. These films are interspersed with the recitation of scripture, speeches and religious chants (*nashid*) and were shown to recruits with the explicit message that as men they were required to protect the oppressed. Kompak made films of the Ambon conflict as part of its recruitment and fundraising activities, mirroring the spirit of other jihadi films (using *nashid*, recitation of scripture and visual messages) to convince men to fight. The structure of these videos directly mirrored films from the Second Chechen War, which was occurring at the same time. Bakti was directly recruited after seeing a video produced by Kompak focusing on the Ambon conflict. He explained that the message was clear: Muslims are brothers and as a man he was required to fight against his brothers' oppressor.

These forms of hybrid cultural product draw on pre-existing cultural obligations for men to protect their community and

expand the borders of community and the forms of acceptable 'protection.' Hybridity, a concept pioneered in cultural studies, refers to the process of 'making of something new through the combination of existing things and patterns' (Nilan and Feixa 2006). The concept is valuable for understanding the formation of new war tactics in South East Asia because it emphasises the liminal membership to multiple groups that mobility creates. For the Afghan alumni, their hybrid gender performance, as both mujahedeen and Indonesian, allowed them to facilitate new wars in a way that someone who was purely foreign or local could not. Their participation in 'foreign' jihadi culture allowed them to break the existing rules of conflict that prohibited participation in 'community' conflicts. Their position as Indonesians allowed them to lead their fellow nationals, to promote the ideology of jihad in locally salient ways and to draw on existing narratives of anti-colonial struggle and Indonesian heroism to justify their position within the local gender order. In this case, it was the encounters with different forms of masculinity and the subsequent hybridisation of masculine performances of war that resulted in the importation of the new war archipelago and continues to influence young men to fight in the region and across the globe.

### **Conclusions: Gender Transformation and the Emergence of New War**

As previously argued, it is not sufficient to study the negative gendered outcomes that new war produces; scholarship needs to explain the transformation of the structure of gender norms, which makes new war possible (Duriesmith 2017). This article has sought to explore a particular dynamic of gender transformation in the form of gender hybridisation through the exposure to different ways to perform masculinity. The central claim of this argument is that the emergence of new war tactics in Poso, Ambon and elsewhere in Southeast Asia was made possible through encounters between Indonesian foreign fighters and the mujahedeen in

Afghanistan. This encounter fundamentally shifted how the Afghan alumni understood their obligations as men and placed new demands for violence on them to the moniker of a mujahid. In making sense of this violence, the fighters would blend stories, metaphors and tales from pre-colonial Indonesia with stories of the Prophet and experiences in Afghanistan. These composite narratives manifested in videos, which replicated the style of international propaganda films, including narratives of the followers of the Prophet, but taking place in Indonesia.

This dynamic of hybridisation was both a material and a discursive shift. It involved transforming narratives around men's violence to permit the kind of tactics that characterise new war, as well as transforming the economic model of jihad to link with a global network of finance and supply. The global forces that were at play in the Afghan alumni's lives were unlikely to have salience and effect were it not for the long-standing pre-existing traditions of Islamic anti-colonial resistance. However, it was the transformation of these traditions that directed the alumni towards new war, rather than a conventional insurgency against the Indonesian state. This shift is one that has had long-standing implications as the network continues to funnel fighters and resources into virulent community conflicts across the globe and to conduct actions that straddle the borderlands between war and criminality. These examples of new war occur along the fault lines between the global and the local, as well as the new and the old, and appear to reshape the gendered performances of combatants in 'hybridised' ways.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> This article will use three main terms: jihadi, mujahedeen and mujahid. Jihadi is used as a broad term to refer to individuals who support militant Islamic action. Mujahedeen and mujahid, in contrast, are used to refer to actual fighters who have engaged in armed conflict. Mujahid, meaning one who struggles/strives,



is the singular while mujahedein is plural. Both terms are linked to jihad (struggling/striving), but in this context are understood as meaning specifically participation in armed struggle rather than more general religious striving.

<sup>2</sup> Names and some details have been changed in order to protect the identity of participants.

<sup>3</sup> A note about the use of the terms Arab and Arabized throughout the article: The participants regularly employed the idea of Arab culture, masculinity, religious practice and identity as core reference points for comparison in their interviews. When pressed, they would sometimes delineate an individual's specific nationality (Saudi, Yemeni, Emeriti, etc.), but generally made broad appeals to the idea of 'Arabness' in an essentialist fashion. Participants tended to conflate strict religious observance with Arabic identity, and rarely made distinctions between the complexities of those in camps. A few participants did, contrary to this, illuminate the diversity of Arab fighters in the Afghan camps, and distinctions between Arabs and Afghans. However, this was only provided after intense probing around spirituality and Sufi practices (which are outside the scope of this article).

<sup>4</sup> Pancasila refers to the state ideology of five principles that enshrines the formal approval of five public religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism) as well as justice, national unity, democracy and civilization (Intan, 2006).

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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