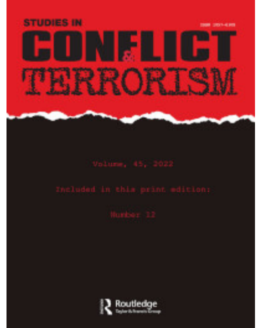

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Masculinities and Disengagement from Jihadi Networks: The Case of Indonesian Militant Islamists

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ABSTRACT
Men who join militant Islamist networks often frame their participation in masculine terms, as protectors, warriors or brothers. While the role of masculinities in recruitment to jihadi groups has received increasing attention, their role in disengaging men from armed groups (and particularly men in the global south) have not. This paper explores the role of masculinities in shaping men's paths out of jihadi networks. Based on life history research with Indonesian former militant Islamist we suggest that men's pathways out of armed groups are defined by negotiating alternate masculinities, which reposition their gendered role in society from those associated with militancy.

Men constitute the majority of those who participate in violent groups.[1] Despite this, studies of these militant Islamists networks have a tendency to ignore their status as men (by ignoring gender) or treating gender to be a synonym for women.[2] While there is a growing body of work showing that masculinities do matter in relation to such violent groups, so far there has been little work clarifying what role masculinities play at different stages of participation.[3] Surveying exiting work on gender and violent extremism (VE), Phelan has noted that the role of masculinities in sustaining involvement remains crucially under-explored.[4] What little work exists on masculinities and VE has emphasized a few key ideas. First, that patriarchal attitudes serve to justify violence.[5] Second, that individual men's experiences of VE are shaped by patriarchal notions of masculinity.[6] Third, that these experiences depend greatly on the context, and the precise ideas around masculinity which shape VE are neither stable nor uniform.[7] This study aims to extend this scholarship, by providing a focused analysis of how three men's pathways out of Indonesian jihadi networks were defined by their capacity to negotiate new masculinities.[8] This article complements our previous work on the diversity of masculinities within Indonesian jihadi networks and the role of embodiment in shaping gendered attachment, by showing the ways that men weigh competing demands that different masculinities place on them while on a trajectory toward disengagement.[9] Further, we argue that contextual differences shape the way men weigh these competing demands substantially and cannot easily be generalized

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internationally. In this piece we also provide detailed analysis of why existing work on masculinities and work on disengagement has been insufficient to understand the role of global South masculinities in shaping men's pathways out of armed groups.

In undertaking this study, we adopt Raewyn Connell's masculinities framework.[10] Connell's masculinities framework suggests that there is no singular model of manhood which is present in any given society. Rather there are always competing practices and ideals which exist as contested, multiple ways to be a man (termed masculinities). Masculinities are not simply the idealized notions of what men should be like, but also include how men's experiences gender identity, the practices through which they demonstrate this and the ways that these practices relate to other articulations of gender.[11] The masculinities approach is distinct from many other frameworks for understanding gender, in that it rejects the idea that gender is a linear scale (less masculine to hyper masculine). Rather it sees gender as always reflecting a dynamic contestation between often contradicting gendered practices in a given social milieu (for example, forms of masculinity that emphasize knowledge compared to those anchored in physical prowess).[12]

Connell's framework has been fruitful in the study of violent groups, as it provides tools to account for divergent performances of masculinity that can be observed in different armed groups.[13] In introducing a recent special issue on Terrorism, Gender and Women Phelan notes: "recent scholarship on the interplay of gender and terrorism has also addressed how 'masculinities' can further enhance understandings of men's radicalization and participation, particularly given the dominance of males amongst terrorists."[14] Aslam's study of Pakistani masculinities suggests that "living under occupations and feeling intimidated, humiliated, etc. while not having avenues to practise masculinity in a culturally ideal manner" is important in creating masculinities that enable VE.[15] She argues that this manifests in gendered practices that respond to emasculation with aggression. Aslam's analysis is indicative of the masculinities approach in that VE masculinities are seen to be constructed in relation to a mainstream ideal of manhood in a given space (around strength, independence, respectability) but end up prioritizing a different set of practices as avenues to asserting manhood (violence, separatism, policing purity, etc.).

To further develop understanding around masculinity and VE, we explore the process by which three men had disengaged from Indonesian jihadi networks. In this article we don't intend to develop generalizable typologies for identifying how masculinities shape disengagement. By drawing on life-histories we further hope to resist the inadequate unified account of 'terrorist masculinity' which is beginning to emerge in some literature and show how context-specific understandings of manhood can influence routes to disengagement.[16] Our previous work has argued that unified accounts of violent masculinities are insufficient and fail to appreciate the relational quality of gender, for example to talk about Indonesian jihadi masculinity as a singular thing.[17] This article extends this argument by showing how men negotiate multiple masculinities in their process of disengagement from groups. To do this, the article will begin by briefly sketching the literatures on VE, disengagement and gender. After this, we will outline our use of the life-history method for understanding Indonesian men involved in violent groups, and some key information about the background of our participants. Then we will present three life-histories, showing that while masculinities

are relevant in each case, their influence on disengagement varies. Finally, the article discusses the implications of this analysis for work on disengagement and future research.

Background: Disengagement and Gender

The disengagement approach, closely linked to the work of John Horgan has come to be influential in understanding desistance from VE. The emphasis in the disengagement approach on mapping the pathways toward and away from violence (as opposed to profiles of suspected terrorists) and on the qualities of the routes that they take (rather than abstracted root causes) has led to significant rethinking of previous work on deradicalization.[18] The disengagement approach emphasizes that "individuals often develop radicalized views after joining a violent organization, not before" and due to this it is important to view the paths to participation.[19] Disengagement looks at the diverse factors which create attachments to violent groups, and the strategies that might facilitate dissolving these attachments. For the purposes of this study we take the disengagement framework to mean "the cessation of terrorist activity and note that it connotes a behavioural change and, thus, is distinct from the process of de-radicalization."[20]

More recent research on disengagement emphasizes that the process is "not necessarily linear or always forward moving," often containing contradictory pressures.[21] Further, research has suggested that disengagement is not path dependent, the presence of common factors in those who disengage does not mean all who share those will eventually do so. Similarly, disengagement is not a fixed or neccearily permanent state. We found that most of our participants maintained relationships with those in the network after disengaging and often had to contend with demands to reengage long after formal participation had ceased. Those who had spent years of their lives in these networks were bound by marital ties, friendships, shared experience or identity, this meant that even when individuals did cease active participation in violence the extent to which they redirected their lives to a new sense of meaning varied. For some this meant no longer participating directly in violence, while still working hard to promote militant theology for the movement or mentor younger men, while others invested considerable energy in opposing the use of violence.[22] This makes the category of a 'disengaged' former member somewhat murky one, leading Jensen, James and Yates to conclude that we currently "know comparatively little about what distinguishes those who leave extremism from those who do not."[23]

Despite the ambiguities of the scholarship on disengagement some common factors have emerged more broadly and in Indonesia. Tore Bjørgo's work has emphasized that the presence of both push factors (i.e. disillusionment with the existing movement's tactics, in-fighting, etc.) and pull factors (i.e. attachment to family, a sense of meaning in the community, etc.) seem to be important in creating lasting engagement.[24] Similarly, work subsequent to Horgan's original theorizing has emphasized the importance of understanding the conditions which create obstacles to disengagement alongside those that facilitate it.[25] These might include pressure from romantic partners to remain engaged, limited opportunities for employment due to incarceration or mental illness. The diversity of these factors and their relation to structural or social conditions (the

nature of family ties, the conditions of the economy, etc.) means that they need to be studied within local contexts. Despite this, and the fact that the disengagement approach has played a prominent role in Indonesia's strategy on terrorism, Hwang has argued that the country has "been largely neglected in the literature on disengagement."[26] The existing literature has explored some particular local dynamic shape disengagement, such as men's ability to gain respect by joining competing more moderate religious movements (such as local articulations of Sufism), while other patterns hinder fuller forms of disengagement (such as taking on a dakwah-centric roles within the network).[27] This work has also made valuable contributions to the broader scholarship on disengagement, showing how push factors have emerged in the Indonesian context (such as the crackdown on Jemaah Islamiyah during the 2000s) and how the structural conditions in the state shape pull factors that have been highlighted in other sites (such as marriage an having children) may not always be applicable in this context.[28]

Building on these contributions Azca's study of jihadi fighters argues that a singular model of desistance is insufficient and that a more nuanced account of how identities are shaped after participation is needed. In his work, Azca argues that those who *exit* the network shift their identities to new forms, those who *neglect* the network but do not fully move on, show identity confusion (being draw between different attachments) and those who *sustain* engagement have their identities enhanced. While we will speak to these arguments in this paper such a coherent account of identity runs contrary to the multiple forms of gendered identity that individuals have to navigate, and risks missing ongoing work that is required to sustain the veneer of gendered coherence (as we have argued elsewhere).[29] Despite the quality of the existing work on Indonesian VE networks, it does not engage with the notion of masculinities and has tended to frame the process of disengagement as gender neutral.[30] Najib Azca's significant dissertation on the topic doesn't mention gender once, and Julie Chernov Hwang book *Why Terrorists Quit: The Disengagement of Indonesian Jihadists* makes passing reference to women, but does not engage with the concept of gender as a relevant factor to disengagement. This absence is not particular to the scholarship on Indonesia, but reflects a broader tendency in disengagement scholarship to disregard gender, a tendency that is only recently begun to be addressed. A small but growing body of work looks at women's disengagement from a gendered perspective.[31] This research shows the promises of integrating gendered approach to address how stereotypes shape disengagement programing and how a more gender-sensitive approach might improve efficacy.[32] This work aligns the larger growth of research interrogating how gendered norms shape women's participation in violent groups over the past decade.[33] Very little of this work explores masculinities, and Eggert suggests "studies that focus on gender – rather than women – remain rare."[34] Though we see this focus as an important effort to redress the marginalization of women's experiences in the literature on violent groups, it risks reinforcing the notion that men are the gender-neutral norm while others are 'special' cases.

Research on masculinities suggests that ideas of manhood shape men's support for, participation in and pathways out of violent groups. Key texts in the space include Aslam's 2012 book *Gender-Based Explosions* which looks at support for VE in Pakistan and Kimmel's 2018 *Healing from Hate* which looks at pathways into and out of VE, but a larger body of work has explored particular facets.[35] Kimmel

explicitly explores the role of masculinities in shaping disengagement, arguing that existing work has ignored the "experiential glue that both attracts young men to these groups and binds them when they join."[36] Drawing on the masculinities perspective, Kimmel argues that a structural approach is needed, which can identify the ways in which broader social norms around masculinity place importance on homosocial relationships.[37] In particular, pressure for young men "prove their masculinity to other men" within homosocial spaces makes groups so appealing. This means that when men leave they lose important sites where their status as 'real men' is "credited, validated, affirmed by their peers."[38] Kimmel's work, which focuses on the global North (Germany, Sweden, United States and Britain) emphasizes the particular privileges and dynamics of oppression in these sites which produce "aggrieved entitlement."[39] We agree with Kimmel that "joining up is a form of masculine compensation, an alternate route to proving manhood." But, for those outside of the global North the forms of masculinity which enhance the appeal of "guns, money and fame" are likely to be meaningfully different to those he identifies.[40] Within existing scholarship on VE in Southeast Asia, gender has rarely been used as an analytical framework, and inclusion of masculinities are even rarer.[41] This combined with the fact that research on masculinities being centered on the global North might distort findings on gender and disengagement. Due to these factors there is a risk that research gives a false sense of universality to contextually specific findings about masculinities, and uses this analysis to shape programing globally.[42] To address this, we have endeavored to study the role of masculinities in one context to tease out the nuances which shape disengagement.

Method: life History and the Context of Jihadi Networks in Indonesia

For this project we undertook life-history interview with 11 men who had been affiliated with a range of Indonesian militant groups in Java. These men were from different cohorts including those who had fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s early 1990s to recent returnees. Access to the participants was gained through coauthor Noor Huda Ismail's own work in the civil society with these communities, and preexisting links due to his advocacy work. Participation was negotiated individually and full-informed consent was obtained. In order to protect anonymity, names, dates, and key identifying facts have been altered. To collect these life-histories unstructured interviews were undertaken over multiple sittings. In order to ensure for accuracy, we have conducted background research on the participants to corroborate key facts. The life history method focuses on first establishing a time-line for the participants lives, then using their reflections to explore focused themes, in this case the relationship between masculinity and violence.[43]

The life history method has been significant both in studies of masculinities and in research on disengagement.[44] The disengagement approach has been noted as highlighting the "potential insights autobiographies and in-depth interviews offer into the experiences and decision-making processes of terrorists."[45] Similarly, key texts on masculinities have adopted the approach as a basis for exploring the often overlooked role gender plays in men's lives.[46] Despite the advantages the approach offers by providing in-depth detail about individuals' lives it suffers from the potential for hindsight

bias, and selection bias in terms of who may be willing to participate. For our study this means that the findings are limited by those who were willing to share intimate details about their experiences. Similarly, while we did do fact-checking wherever this was possible, much of our analysis relies on recollections about individual experience rather than factual analysis which means our data is heavily reliant on the recollection of participants.

We have chosen to focus on Indonesian jihadi networks due to the significance in the region, and growing impact globally.[47] Indonesian networks have fostered other violent movement across Southeast Asia (particularly in Malaysia, Singapore and The Philippines), and have well-established networks originating from the Darul Islam rebellion in the mid-twentieth century.[48] Furthermore, Indonesian fighters have participated in conflicts across the globe ranging from conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s to recent struggles in Syria. Many of the almost 700 Indonesian traveled to Syria have now taken up new roles within violent networks in the region.[49] These include serving as military trainers, financiers, recruiters, advisors and even participating in ongoing violence or attacks. Additionally, their previous experience often enhances capacity to commit acts of violence and can provide a focal point for organizing those who failed to do 'hijrah' to Syria.[50]

Within Indonesia, there are a range of active groups. These include Al-Qaeda's inspired groups like Jamaah Islamiya (JI), and those who support the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) like Jamaah Anshorut Daulah. Those inspired by ISIS have been particularly influenced by recent returned foreign fighters. For example, at least one member of Indonesia's homegrown ISIS supporter group, the Jamaah Anshoru Khilafah (JAK) cell in Bekasi, Jakarta, sent two of its members to Marawi in 2016 to escalate that conflict. JAK has begun rebuilding contact online with Indonesian foreign fighters there as with the intention of joining them. Due to the historical significance of these groups we believe this case is an important one which warrants its use to explore how masculinity might shape disengagement in more broadly, and in Southeast Asia specifically.

For this study, we narrow focus on three biographies, that of Hamdan, Abu Faiz and Samsul to provide sufficient space for exploration and to highlight particular factors. These cases were chosen because their experiences highlighted tensions we saw in other interviews and tendencies observed in related practical work with former fighters. These include the importance of homosocial bonds, negotiation of new gender identity and competition between men for gendered status. While we believe the three life-histories chosen provide sound basis for exploring masculinities, they aren't meant to be generalizable (particularly as the intent of the study is to demonstrate diversity). This means that even across the Indonesian cohorts of jihadi fighters, these life histories should not be taken to represent all experiences, but to highlight how contextual particulars shape masculinities. The first life history (that of Hamdan) is explored to analyze failure to disengage and the challenges that masculinities present to a fighter who might otherwise disengage. The second life history, that of Abu Faiz has been used to highlight the role of adopting alternate performances of masculinity to facilitate disengagement. Finally, we look at Samsul to explore the contradictory way that masculinities can enable disengagement from violence without fundamentally rejecting the position of being a former.

Failure to Disengage: Hamdan

Hamdan (42), is a former fighter, having traveled to the Southern Philippines in the early 2000s to participate in the Moro independence struggle. Hamdan's story indicates three main themes related to local masculinities and disengagement. First, that homosocial affirmation promotes, encourages and valorizes a specific gender norm of being a mujahid – an Islamic fighter. Second, that having achieved this position, their gendered valorization by junior members of the network hinders their path to disengagement from the jihadi community in Indonesia. Finally, that the enduring strength of the mujahid identity is structured by preexisting gender order in society which places emphasis on men's piety and respectability.

Hamdan has a long history of involvement in Indonesian jihadi networks, originating from Central Java, the birthplace of JI and a center for extremist activity in the region. Hamdan was initially brought into contact with members of JI after some friends from high school encouraged him to join a local Islamic discussion group. Reflecting on this time Hamdan noted that he was "very young when I joined the group for the first time." When he was pressed about why it was appealing, he explained that "joining the group was a way for me to have friends who share the same *aqidah* (faith). I really looked up to many of JI's *ustad*." Here *ustad* (a term for respected male religious teacher) carries particular gendered implications, it is a respected role afforded to men who have demonstrated religious knowledge and piety. When conflict broke out in the island of Ambon in the late 1990s, Hamdan and a small group of men from his home town were sent to Ambon by the *ustad* to provide humanitarian support for the local Muslim community. This included two close friends Aziz and Susilo. After being attacked by a local Christian militia Hamdan became convinced that he should join the fighting. As he recalled: "being in the field to actually helping our oppressed Muslims was an eye opener to me. We can't uphold Islam without knowing military skills." Despite being sent on an initially humanitarian mission, when a number of JI's foreign fighters returned from Afghanistan and Moro Hamdan, Aziz and Susilo were selected for military training.

After the Malino II accord was signed in 2002, Aziz and Hamdan returned home, while Susilo traveled to the Southern Philippines to continue fighting. To strengthen their bond, Aziz proposed a marriage between Hamdan and his sister. Asking Hamdan why he agreed he explained that "it was an honour to become Aziz's his brother in law. He was such a loyal and dedicated JI member." Shortly after the marriage, Aziz was involved in a terror attack and began being pursued by the police. He asked Hamdan to join him on the run, and they escaped to the Southern Philippines. Joining Susilo, Hamdan and Aziz further enhanced their reputation by engaging in direct fire fights with the Philippines army. After a few months they returned to Indonesia, hoping that police attention had died down. This hope proved to be false and Hamdan was quickly arrested for possessing firearms and prosecuted for his connection to other terrorists. While serving his sentence at Nusakambangan prison in Central Java, Hamdan became a personal assistant to JI's spiritual leader, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir.

In interviewing Hamdan, it is clear that his transition from supporter, to active participant, to leader, is one that was made possible by the participation in homosocial spaces. These male-only spaces are significant for creating masculine identities in many

contexts, and has been a factor explored by Kimmel in understanding the appeal of neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia.[51] Hamdan's recognition as authentic (a real mujahid) in these homosocial groups was important and reflects a particular kind of gendered social currency that can be seen in Kimmel's work on aggrieved entitlement and the desire to prove one's masculinity and attract a partner.[52] However the particular gendered role preformed by Hamdan is different, and so are the overarching conflicts that give that role meaning. The history of colonialism in the region (both Indonesia and the Philippines) lends legitimacy to the particular kind of resistance politics Hamdan embodies. Similarly, the tradition of local organizing and resistance in Indonesia gives credence to the male-dominated networks that initially attracted Hamdan. This process was greatly enhanced by his kinship ties to the network through marriage. These made him more trustworthy enabling his participation in certain circles, and affirmed his mujahid status through his relations. Masculinity in these contexts (as in many others) is not an individual project, it requires joint action and mutual recognition. In seeking gendered status, it is not enough that Hamdan acted in a manly way, it was essential that his actions were recognized by others who had already achieved this illusive status. For Hamdan, prison wasn't an opportunity to disengage, rather it was another homosocial context where masculine bonds in the network could be reinforced. Prison increased his prominence in the network and provided him new connections to extend his participation in the 'real' jihad, not only in Indonesia but around the globe.

Imprisonment also did not dampen his sense of obligation as a man to fight, as he explained: "being in prison does not reduce commitment to perform 'real' jihad. My jihad is not only limited in Indonesia but also in any global armed conflicts between Muslims and its adversaries." Shortly before his release from prison Hamdan was contacted via telegram by Susilo, his fellow Moro veteran. By 2016 Susilo had left the Philippines and joined fighting in Syria with ISIS. He asked Hamdan to move to Syria after being released from prison. Shortly after his release in March 2016, Hamdan tried to obtain a passport so he could travel abroad, but these efforts were frustrated due to his criminal history. While he could not travel, Hamdan began participating in Jamaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD), a pro-ISIS group in Yogyakarta. In November 2017, Hamdan was asked by JAD Yogyakarta to help motivate less experienced recruits to migrate to Syria or Marawi (a city in the Southern Philippines which had previously been taken over by pro-ISIS force in 2017).

Hamdan agreed to preach and lead an Islamic studies session – *pengajian* – for the pro-ISIS brothers in Yogyakarta. The *pengajian* encouraged those who supported militant groups to support ISIS and to motivate them to travel to either Syria or the Philippines as fighters. Here Hamdan began to serve as a role model, demonstrating idealized mujahid masculinity to the other brothers. As a veteran of conflict in the Philippines, who had fought alongside the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and JI members, Hamdan modeled what they could become by traveling to the Philippines or Syria. In gendered terms this role also served to buttress his own masculine status as a leader, created a new site for his gendered status to be recognized and to create a barrier to participation. Engaging in these recruitment activities reinforced the idea that Hamdan was respected as a man who had military skills and the connections to prove it. This construction of militarized masculinity reflects many of the ideals present

in mainstream Indonesian society (such as discipline, strength, loyalty, bravado and commitment), but are repurposed to justify the actions of a militant group rather than the militaries who work to supress them. Having shown his worth through preaching, Hamdan was soon introduced to a new circle of senior leaders that supported ISIS.

The recognition that Hamdan received, both by having fought and by forging new networks further entrenched his gendered status as a mujahid. This status, like many other gendered roles in the region, is afforded through ties with other recognized men and through familial relations. But his capacity to serve as a preacher, and the recognition that came with it further entrenched his role after prison. This recognition reinforced his gendered status as a fighter and leader, something he confirms in interviews. His capacity to continue performing militant masculinity, through oration (replicating preexisting local understandings of the masculine *ustad*), contributed to his ongoing participation. If gender is excluded, one might simply view this as situation where Hamdan's previous investment in the group, or limited alternatives prohibited disengagement. This sort of argument has been pursued by Altier et al. in relation the roles terrorists play, arguing that "certain roles may incur greater sunk costs and/ or possess fewer alternatives as a result of involvement making disengagement more difficult."[53] But if one were to apply such a gender-unaware analysis to Hamdan's case, this would be to miss the point that in many contexts men's adoption of risk-taking masculinity and involvement in perilous endeavors come with the promise of the kind of recognition Hamdan received upon leaving prison.[54] The potential rewards offered for sunk costs are profoundly gendered and reflect social pressures placed on men to perform masculinity publicly, even in cases where this does not lead to maximal financial reward or other material recompense.

During the time where Hamdan continued to take on more responsibility, he was gradually pressured to participate more directly in violence and supervising military training. Despite this, he recalls asking other leaders against staging an attack as it "would endanger the brothers as well as make plans for the JAD Yogyakarta brothers to fight in Syria and the Philippines fail." Shortly after this, almost all of his close associates in Yogyakarta network were arrested for planning to attack a police station. Seeing this, Hamdan fled, moving between other cities in the region, before successfully purchasing a fake ID card under a pseudonym. His ability to evade the police was made possible by his status as a proven man in the network: "It was easy to move around because I have a unique reputation as a person committed to jihad. Helping me was kind of a religious obligation. In fact, we felt a stronger brotherhood when we are on the run." Armed with his new fake credentials, he contacted Susilo who helped him forge a fake passport secure a travel route into Afghanistan. However, when Hamdan attempted to board his flight, he was detained by Counterterrorism Special Detachment 88 (Indonesia's national anti-terrorism unit), leading to his imprisonment.

Considering the role that masculinity played in forming Hamdan as a jihadi, how should we understand his failure to disengage from the group? A gender-insensitive approach, like Azca's account of sustaining engagement with the network, might read this process purely in terms of identity (in the abstract).[55] Like many of the foreign fighters he served time in prison, similarly he had a family and a university education (in mechanical engineer) which could offer potential alternative paths to masculine

status. However, his capacity to establish himself as a respectable family man, financial prospects and significant negative experiences were not sufficient to dissuade him from active participation. The factors which made Hamdan's participation so 'sticky' are grounded in masculinity, but they are also distinct from those present in the global North which are explored by studies like Kimmel's. The performances of masculinity through oration and mentorship gave him a role in the network at a time when he might have otherwise disengaged. Further, the practices of piety which were so central to Haman's experiences do not have direct correlations with Kimmel's participants. These performances also come from a particular localized historical context that places distinct value on such presentations. Similarly, the positioning of one as an anti-colonial fighter which Hamdan aspired to are not specific to jihadi networks, but run through ideas of manhood in the region. These forms of gendered performances because they are understood as local signifiers of sophistication and manliness in parts of Indonesia, their gendered nature reflects these histories and is distinct to forms of manhood elsewhere (though there may be resonances).[56] Hamdan's failure to disengage should be understood through the lens of masculinities, but understanding the role of masculinity in general is insufficient. The particular values associated with anti-colonial struggle and leadership in homosocial spaces reflect gender values that are embedded to the Indonesian context. It is particular masculinities, that are tied to the context in Southeast Asia and more locally that made shaped Hamdan's trajectory and contributed to his enduring participation in the network at the expense of his prosperity, family and freedom (all signifiers of masculinity which are otherwise important).

Respect through Reformation: Abu Faiz

Disengagement of a violence is an incremental process – it does not occur in one particular event such as the arrest by the authorities or even imprisonment. But it rather takes place in multiple intimate social relations within a critical juncture of fighter's life history in a specific context. In other words, it is an everyday negotiation. Just as the pressure to perform socially accepted forms of masculinity shape men's pathways into violent groups, for those who leave shaping a new form of masculine status is key. The particular process of crafting this masculinity can be seen in the life history of Abu Faiz (49).

Today, Abu Faiz is a peace activist who works to help former jihadis leave a life of violence and to stop the next wave of recruits from joining the same militant groups in Southeast Asia that once he was part of. Abu Faiz was once a key member of JI, and like Hamdan had close relationships (both family and friends) that placed him in the epicenter of radicalism in the country. In a series of the interview in his sleepy village in East Java, he explained how his masculinity was defined by his deep admiration to his elder brother, and the steps he took to rebuild his gendered sense of purpose once he began to leave. While Abu Faiz was still in high school in the late 1980s, his older brother traveled to Afghanistan and fought against the Soviet Union. Abu Faiz admired brother's piety, intelligence, experience across the globe and status as a recognized mujahid: "As the youngest son in the family, I looked up my brother. To me, he was a cool brother. He memorized many verses in the Qur'an and can speak Arabic and English. When he spoke to me privately, he often spoke about his

experience fighting in Afghanistan. As a young man who was searching for an idol, he was the one."

While Abu Faiz always admired his brother, this was further amplified by the widespread videos of foreign wars – in Afghanistan, Bosnia and the Palestinian Territories: "I was a young and restless man. My blood boiled to see the brutality of the enemy of Islam attacking our women and children. I believed I must defend the weak against those bullies." These videos, are significant the jihadi groups across the Globe, often appeal to ideas of manhood, strength, protection of the weak.[57] In Indonesia they are recut to resonate with local stories of anti-colonial resistance and to emphasize locally salient ideas of militant masculinity. In another interview with a recruiter in Solo, they spoke about how they would show video to young men that appealed to their desire to protect women, and to be the strong hero. This masculine logic of protection (as termed by Iris Marion Young) is not only fostered within jihadi communities, but is a preexisting mainstream value in many societies, one which requires men to protect 'their' women or have their status as real men undermined.[58] Abu Faiz grew up in a social milieu where men who fight against oppression were venerated. The valorization of mujahid masculinity often occurred in homosocial spaces, where men would talk about the exploits of previous warriors (both foreign fighters and local heroes who fought colonialism or secularism), and the virtuous nature of their actions. The sacred value this community placed on defending religion also resonated with other narratives of resistance against foreign oppression, a spirit that can be traced back into the periods of colonial occupation in Indonesia's history. While Abu Faiz was initially limited to supporting the network by running a school, he eventually persuaded his bother to let him travel to the Philippines because "wanted to taste the action."

In order to experience direct fighting by the mid-1990s Abu Fazi joined Islamic militants fighting for a Muslim homeland in the Southern Philippines. During interviews he makes it clear that he expected to die there and through that death be recognized as a mujahid on the same level as his brothers who had fought in Afghanistan: "I believed that if I was killed in battle I would go straight to heaven and be met by angels there. That's what our mentors told us every day." The valorization of highly risky activity, particularly in combat is also a common thread that runs through highly masculine armed groups. In state militaries roles which entail the most risk (like fighter pilots and special operations) tend to be idealized as most masculine, and the gendered status being a key part of their organizational clout.[59] Abu Fazi did not die in battle like he anticipated, but his involvement transformed the way he saw himself: no longer an ordinary civilian man but a transcendent mujahid.

Despite his new status and clout, Abu Faiz's dedication in the network was shaken by shortly after. In October 2002, prominent Afghan veterans connected to Abu Faiz were among a group that detonated two bombs targeting nightclubs in the Kuta area of Bali, killing 202. Abu Faiz asserts that he was not involved in the Bali bombing, but due to his role in the network had to hide to avoid the arrest and escaped to the Southern Philippines once more. While the constraints of being on the run took a physical toll on him, his inability to fulfill obligations to the women and children in his life had the most effect. For a man animated by a desire to protect, he found himself unable to support his critically ill mother, or raise his young children. The

gendered obligations placed on him as a son and father prompted him to question the very legitimacy of his group's violent activities: "there was a deep feeling of guilt and sorrow toward my mother who was sick then. I also missed my children while I was on the run. What kind of a man was I?" This questioning shows the competing demands placed on Abu Faiz as a man. His gendered role as mujahid demanded sacrifice and loyalty to the network, but his obligations as a father and son showed that Abu Faiz's masculinity was not defined by a single cohesive gender norm, but multiple competing demands he had to negotiate.

Abu Faiz's mujahid identity was further shaken when he was finally arrested by the police in the Philippines who handed him to the Indonesian police. He was unprepared to confront the police's humane treatment of him: "The very doctrine of the group is to hate the secular apparatuses especially the police. For us, they are the defender of the corrupt system that we want to change. However, when the police treated me and also my family humanely, I gradually revisited my old beliefs." Articulations of masculinity in Connell's framework are necessarily relational.[60] They are defined as much by an understanding of what they are not, as they are by the characteristic they hope to embody. For Abu Faiz, his self-definition as a mujahid was defined against other men, perceived oppressors against whom his masculine struggle was given meaning. The experience of police kindness, alongside his failure to protect and care for his family began to shake the integrity of his conviction. Without the presence of an oppressor he perceived to be inhumane and brutal, Abu Faiz's masculine identity needed to be renegotiated. In the late 2000s, Abu Faiz was introduced to one of the victims of bombings his group had carried out by a local NGO who had supported him after leaving prison. This intimate encounter shattered his tough self-image as mujahid who refuses to show emotion and empathy to the enemies of Islam: "Seeing the horrific effect our bombs had. All my religious argumentations for jihad were gone right away. This encounter with the victim of terrorism as a real person melted my heart. I cried. I said to myself that I don't want to see the wrong interpretation of jihad continue to mushroom in Indonesia."

JI, like many armed groups, foster forms of emotional detachment as a sign of manliness through enduring brutalizing training, dehumanizing the enemy and demanding demonstrations of callousness.[61] In state militaries, this is encouraged through racist depictions of the enemy soldiers, as brutish insatiable beasts, but are also deployed by violent insurgencies to justify violence. These articulations are distinctly gendered, showing remorse, empathy or compassion are often taken as signs of femininity and weakness for men in many armed groups and norms around emotional detachment are often policed.[62] While this does differ somewhat in Indonesian militant networks, who also valorize men who as so pious they cry at night during prayer due to their devotion to Allah, but can fight during the day with ruthlessness, the emphasis on ruthlessness to enemies is still present. Unlike Hamdan who never met in person with the victims of terrorism this encounter served as a critical junction for further challenging the coherence of Abu Faiz's attachment to militant masculinity. These experiences led Abu Faiz to believe he needed further his formal Islamic education. To do this, he forged new connections and participated in other homosocial spaces (religious study groups) that exposed him to people with different world views.

Recently, with the help from Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme, the National Counter Terrorism Agency, he established a peace foundation, which connects former fighters with those who have disengage from violence. By working with this foundation, he has become a community leader. While he still has the legitimacy of a proven man who has fought, he can channel this status to challenge other extremists, many of who don't have the same experience of conflict to legitimise their role. Though this change has put him into conflict with his old friends, he is able to explain this in masculine terms: "many of my old friends say that I am even more of a kafir [unbeliever] than the police or jail guards. I regularly face online abuse and threatening phone calls. But it"s okay. I can handle it." He frames the cost of disengagement as something he can stoically endure, locating gendered recognition through his advocacy and family. This renegotiation does not deny his previous history of violence, but draws on it to shape a new gendered position as a reformer. This positions him in gendered terms, but quite different ones to Hamdan. By leveraging his age, education and experiments, Abu Faiz is able to negotiate a new gender role, one that is locally recognized as a community leader a guide for the kind of "hot blooded" young man he used to be. This process of disengagement occurred both through aspects of his previous articulation of masculinity being threatened (exposure to an enemy which wasn't cruel, failure to care for family, forced empathy for victims) and by drawing on factors which society already recognized as manly (fatherhood, leadership, education, age).

A gender-insensitive approach might read this process as a relatively neutral one of trying to find ontological security, or a sense of meaning after ceasing active participation in violence. While we don't dispute that a sense of meaning is important in this case, for Abu Faiz the sense of meaning required a distinctly gendered process of asserting his new masculine identity. The participation in new homosocial spaces where his anti-militant activities are affirmed as masculine (emphasising his actions as temperate, rational and showing leadership) are profoundly gendered. As is Abu Faiz's own narrative of shifting from being a "hot blooded" young man, to a stoic elder trying to lead the youth on a more righteous path. This renegotiation made possible due to the presence of locally salient ideas about masculinity, and particularly about masculinities which are possible for elder men to inhabit. Such a renegotiation would not be possible for a woman in a similar position, who is unlikely to be rewarded for adopting a leading role, or to have the transition from youthful impetuousness to elder temperance to be celebrated.

Rationality and Success: Samsul

Unlike Hamdan and Abu Faiz, Samsul (37) doesn't come from a community with a large JI presence. Instead he was a member of the largest moderate Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in East Java. As a young man he was actively involved in NU, but he felt he always being constantly confronted by 'a glass ceiling' because he didn't come from 'blue blood' NU family: "NU is very hierarchical organization. If you don't have any familial links to religious institutions like pesantrens – Islamic boarding school, don't ever expect that you can have leadership role in the organization." After graduating from the high school, he went to a local university study law.

To channel his passion on Islamic activism, while studying between 2000 until 2004, he joined an Islamic University Student Association. Through the organization, Samsul was quickly raised as the leader of the Association. This activism gave him a sense of meaning explaining: "I felt useful and respected in this organization because I can channel my passion in political Islam."

After graduating from the university, in 2004 a friend asked him attend an Islamic sermon at a local mosque by *ustad* who was then the senior leader in Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (a jihadi organization led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir). This sermon effected Samsul tremendously: "In that sermon, *ustad* explained about the need for Muslims to embrace the teaching of Tauhid, the Oneness of God and the Laws of Allah; Iman – faith – and the meaning of Jihad which is to fight in the defence of Islam. I was familiar with those religious terms but he came up with a very different interpretation that inspired me." When there was a split within MMI and Ba'asyir left the organization and later established a new jihadi group called Jamaat Ansharut Tauhid (JAT), Samsul followed.

In the new organization Samsul began arguing with other members of JAT on the use of violence. Samsul argued that the enforcement of Islamic law must be carried out with the support from the public through healthy discussion and dialogue: "But every time I proposed my concept they disagreed because they only wanted to use force." In JAT, he was excluded from leadership. During this time, he sympathized with JAT's goals and regularly participated in religious study but was judged by other members for his choice of clothing (jeans and shirts) which closer resembled a campus activist than the untarnished whites of a committed jihadi. His failure to adopt appropriate gendered behavior (clothing, admiration for violence, etc.) led to him being branded a 'half-hearted' brother by other JAT sympathizers and cadres. Finally, he left JAT because he did not see any 'concreate action' by JAT to respond the Muslim issues.

After leaving JAT, he met with Ali, another former member in Malang. Ali informed him that he had already left JAT and attended an Islamic study run by an ISIS recruiter. After listening to Ali's talk about helping the oppressed Muslims in Syria, Samsul became interested in joining his group. At the end of January 2014, Ali came to Samsul's house asked for funding to leave for Syria. Samsul provided the money and they headed to the house of an ISIS recruiter. When he arrived at the home of the recruiter, he asked Samsul, "Why don't you come as well. This is humanitarian mission. We must help our oppressed brothers and sisters. Moreover, you will get paid and always can come back home once the mission has been accomplished." Though Samsul didn't expect to get the offer he was: "very intrigued to go especially when the recruiter said that this is humanitarian mission and I can always come back." This appealed to Samsul and he agreed to join them. Within two months Samsul left for Syria (via Malaysia, then Turkey) together with Ali, the recruiters and a group of others. Once Samsul arrived inside ISIS' camp in Tal Abyad, Syria, he quickly realized that the recruiter had lied to him about the nature of their 'humanitarian mission': "I did not know that I had to join a military training in the camp. I had to learn how to use AK 47 and throw grenades by those ISIS' Arab military trainers. I also did not feel comfortable to see the brutality of the group. They killed anyone who opposed them."

Although he agrees with the idea of defending the oppressed, he was disillusioned by their lies and their un-Islamic behaviors such as beheadings. More importantly, he also felt guilty for lying to his parents and wife regarding his departure to Syria. He had deceived them by saying he would not be part of the conflict (something which brought him to tears during the interview). After six months, Samsul decided to travel back to Indonesia: "It wasn't easy to get my passport back. I told them that I will bring my family to Syria to support the caliphate project by saying that the caliphate needed more citizens to sustain its longevity. Finally, they let me go home. I was very fortunate." A few months after returning to Indonesia he was shocked by the circulation of the video of the man who recruited him challenging the Indonesian Army and Police. This worried him and he became concerned that security forces might begin hunting for anyone who had returned from Syria. His prediction came true in when several of his friends who had been to Syria were arrested by the police. After a short period of hiding, he returned home and was arrested in June 2017. Samsul's experience in Syria seriously challenged his utopian vision of the network. While Samsul has never planned to be a foreign fighter, his experiences in military training and the violence that followed shocked him.

Unlike Hamdan or Abu Faiz, Samsul's preexisting ideas about masculinity did not emphasis active violence or the mujahid identity to the same degree. Coming out of the student movement he makes it clear that although he held hard-line religious ideals, he valorized men who could forward an intellectual argument persuasively rather than those who used violence. These differences in how masculinities are constructed have been essential in understanding the diversity of gendered performances of masculinity in the global North. Connell's own work on masculinities began by looking at class differences, noting that middle-class masculinities often placed greater value on intellectual prowess and economic success than on physicality and capacity to do violence.[63] The key points in Samsul's recruitment, emphasize a particular Indonesian genealogy of this, the role of respected *ustad* in convincing him follows local norms around rhetoric and religious expertise. Similarly his own discomfort with the violence that other men flock to, came from a preexisting gendered commitment to persuasion.[64] This was a theme which came up in other life-histories with men who had disengaged, they would often talk about other men who were excited about violence as being "like children", "not knowing the rules" or "needing education." Resisting violence for these men was justified by an appeal to other masculine norms, that of self-control and wisdom, while violence was portrayed as shamefully hyper-masculine, a sign of chaotic immaturity.

During the three years he was in detention Samsul began to challenge the claims that the ISIS was a glorious legitimate caliphate and told prisoners about what he had experienced. He spent three years in prison for his travel to Syria to join ISIS. Out of prison, Samsul again needed time for adaptation back to normal life, work, his family household, local community, and Indonesian society. It was at this crucial time that he met Fadhlan – a reformed convicted terrorist who worked with a national non-governmental organization. Fadhlan invited Samsul to participate in other activities such as involving him in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) discussions with various university campuses, local civil society engaged in P/CVE,

and village organizations. He encouraged and provided an opportunity for Samsul to become a guest speaker in various prevention activities, including with the national counter-terrorism agency. Fadhlan also helped Samsul to restore his reputation in the community by introducing him to local police and involving him in joint assistance activities.

This opened up opportunities for Samsul to become acquainted with community leaders and to have new social networks and a platform to channel his aspirations and interest in public speaking. In an important step, Fadhlan also encouraged Samsul to develop his business aspirations through making and selling candy. Due to this relationship, Samsul has been actively invited to tell his story through the media. Samsul also strengthened his business by launching of his candy assisted by local officials. The launch event was attended by government employees as well as local business leaders. Samsul now has the social networks, practical skills and social recognition as a father, husband, community member and businessman.

Samsul's disengagement was facilitated by the opportunity to assert his masculinity through business success and public demonstrations of his reformed rationality. Unlike Hamdan and Abu Faiz, Samsul never attached his masculinity to the violent folk heroes of Indonesian colonial history, or to the valorous mujahdeen that were celebrated in early 1990s Indonesia. Rather, his commitment to the jihadi network came through a desire to public recognition (which he didn't find in NU) and the desire to do good (through humanitarian work). His circuitous path to becoming an unwitting foreign fighter shows how diverse gender norms can aid recruitment. Similarly, his current successful disengagement did not come from a change in his radical ideology. Certainly one could read this process of disengagement in terms of Azca's notion of *neglect* in that he did not have a clear repudiation of his previous ideology or reformation.[65] However, his neglect was fostered by his gendered attachments to a different set of attributes than those which animated Hamdan or Abu Faiz. He was given opportunities through business and public engagement to claim status as a respected man. His current opposition to violence reflects fairly gendered tensions: is wealth knowledge and expertise most masculine? Or is strength, action and risk-taking? These norms often co-exist, but they (alongside many other contested ideas of manhood) can all be leveraged and should properly be understood as gendered. Here disengagement is not facilitated by simply the adoption of a new sense of meaning in the abstract. It relied on Samsul's preexisting gender commitment to a model of masculinity that fit awkwardly with the norms present in the jihadi networks. The aspects of masculinity that made his involvement in the network so sticky (to use Kimmel's term) originally were profoundly gendered, but they were different to those widely prevalent in the global North. The masculine attachment to argumentation, oration and theological rigor have a particular provenance that can only be understood in context.

Conclusion: Bringing Gender into the Study of Men and Disengagement

This study has indicated the ways in which disengaging from a VE network is a highly gendered one. Without including a focus on masculinities, men's struggles with social status, employment, and family might appear to be neutral, natural and inevitable. By highlighting these gendered desires as a resulting from particular gendered norms it

shows both how mainstream ideas of manhood can create barriers to disengagement, and the potential for ideas around masculinity to be recrafted in ways that facilitate the disengagement process. It shows that what might otherwise be read simply as a search for meaning or attachments is a profoundly gendered one. It is a search that relies on preexisting masculinities that facilitate certain forms of attachment or meaning and prohibit others. Further this study has suggested that the reshaping of men's gendered attachments is not a passive one. It required active negotiation, experience and the presence of necessary conditions that enabled men to adopt certain masculinities and not others. The process of negotiating these masculinities is also a contextually dependent one, the forms of masculinity which our participants had to negotiate are simply not present in the global North in the same way. While other masculinities that facilitate disengagement will exist in other contexts, *precisely how they will shape it* cannot be generalized across different gendered contexts.

This study also has a number of limitations which constrain the findings. First the set of participants is small, ungeneralisable and insufficient for systematic comparison across a range of indicators (such as ethnicity, cohort, life-stage, etc.). By undertaking wider research, with a larger cohort and more focused groups would allow for more robust findings and rigorous comparison. Additionally, the research highlights the potential of practical research exploring the efficacy of targeted gender-sensitive interventions. An attentiveness to how gender-shapes other programing on men and violence might allow existing VE work to avoid common pitfalls and previous failings (such as programs which reinforce patriarchal stereotypes, or entrench intergenerational tensions). Including a masculinities perspective may not fundamentally reorient all aspects of this work (for example programing on fatherhood, schooling, work-place integration, etc.); rather, it adds another lens through which to look at the process. In spite of these limitations, we hope the study has shown what might be gained by adding a masculinities perspective to existing work on disengagement, and the importance of considering contextual factors in doing so.

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