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Title: Embodied militarism and the process of disengagement from foreign fighter networks

Abstract: With the collapse of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, international governments are scrambling to understand the process of leaving violent networks as large numbers of former fighters return to their home countries. Studies of foreign fighters have tended to emphasise the importance of ideology or trans-national identity in explaining the desire to travel across borders to participate in war. This paper looks to move beyond these accounts and investigates how embodied attachments to militarism shapes foreign fighters enduring involvement in jihadi networks. Feminist studies of militarism and armed violence have emphasised the importance of gendered forms of attachment and desire in making war possible. While this research has paid increasing attention to attachment and embodiment in shaping military personnel's identities, far less attention has been paid to those involved in foreign fighter networks. Based on life-history research with three generations of former foreign fighters from Java (Afghanistan 1980s, Philippines 2000s, Syria/Iraq 2014-ongoing) this paper explores the complex and contradictory forms of attachment that shape their attempted transition to in civilian life. Focusing on the embodied practices of these former fighters, the article highlights the role of structural factors play in recrafting attachment and belonging.

Keywords: foreign fighters, masculinities, violent extremism, embodiment, Indonesia

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Introduction

With the collapse of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq large numbers of former fighters are now returning to their home countries. In Indonesia, this challenge is particularly acute, with more than 700 having travelled to join the Islamic State (Barrett et al. 2015). As these fighters have now begun to return home, concern over reintegration and

the potential threat they might pose has become a pressing political issue. Due to the large number of former fighters repatriating, the process by which members of jihadi groups leave armed networks is central to much of the current work on countering violent extremism.¹ While there are competing models for understanding this process of leaving a violent political groups, one of the most promising is that of disengagement (Horgan 2009).²

The framework of disengagement emphasises the social process of leaving a group over the deradicalisation of theological or political beliefs. The notion of disengagement was introduced by political psychologist John Horgan's (2009) who argued for two shifts in leaving groups, from profiles to pathways and from root causes to route qualities. Horgan (2009, 3) argues that work on violent groups has relied on analysis of the micro-level psychological profiling or on macro-level analysis of the root causes behind armed groups. While Horgan agrees that there are distinct qualities that one might see in those who become drawn to violent extremist groups, such as psychological disaffection with society at large or membership to a particular class/ethnic background, he makes the case that these cannot be seen as singular causes, as they apply to far more individuals that do not take up violent extremism than those that do.

¹ The terminology of violent extremism is deeply contested in the literature. Common accounts tend to suggest that violent extremism entails a belief set which condones violence through the support of views far outside those accepted in mainstream society (Borum 2011). This account is not sufficient for a feminist perspective on militarism which challenges the mainstream views in society that condone violence. Further, the lack of clarity provided by the term in lumping together disparate groups (such as nationalists, leftists, white supremacists, jihadi organisations and others) means that it can lead to a false sense of connections between different organisations (Antúnez and Tellidis 2013). Despite having reservations about the terminologies use, it will be employed in this paper as it has come to be the most prominent description of Indonesian foreign fighter networks.

² There is a rich scholarship on different approaches to leaving armed networks. This paper focuses directly on disengagement as one of the most prominent, see Bjorgo and Horgan's 2008 edited volume for more detail of these debates.

Instead, Horgan argues that more attention should be paid to the pathways into or out of violence and the qualities that characterise these routes. This shift moves away from trying to diagnose the individual pathologies and hopes to grasp at the more complex constellation of factors that define people's movement into and out of networks. Scholarship on disengagement has also made the valuable observation that individuals are not only involved in formal groups, rather they tend to have links to social networks and are often involved in recognisable sub-cultures (Bjørgero 2008). This approach aligns well with the suggestion of Scott Atran (2010) that recruitment to violent groups is more motivated by social relationships, a desire for glory, or dissatisfaction with life in their home country, than by purely ideological factors. In introducing a 2018 special issue on pathways into terrorism in Asia Julie Chernov Hwang (2018a, 884) explains that although scholars "may disagree somewhat on the factors that play a role" in the process of becoming involved in such groups, there is near consensus that it entails a somewhat amorphous process of becoming. This means that recruitment entails a process of evolution as someone joins a group, and that there are diverse factors which culminate in participation in violence.

Similarly, leaving armed groups is rarely the result of a moment of ideological transformation, but more closely resembles the process of leaving any tight-knit rule-bound community such as gangs, cults or the police force. In these instances, it may be less the relevant if they shift a specific ideological commitment to violence than if they have strong ties to other sources of meaning outside of the group. According to Horgan (2009, 17) the importance of everyday factors "raises questions not only about what constitutes involvement, but what can truly be meant by describing someone as disengaged." The process of disengagement does not necessarily indicate that an individual rejects the political project of their former group or some broader reformation. Instead it focuses on

behavioural change and ceasing to participate in ongoing violence (Horgan 2008; Fink and Hearne 2008; Hwang, Panggabean, and Fauzi 2013). Disengagement research suggests that the process of disengagement entails a myriad of experiences which are best characterised as “a series of idiosyncratic, complex accounts that appear diverse and unconnected.” (Horgan 2009, 17). Considering Horgan’s analysis, the framework emphasises the importance of understanding disengagement as a social process embedded in a particular context and social network.

While this framework has been a fruitful and valuable contribution to the scholarship on leaving such groups, those working on disengagement have not explored masculinity and where gender has been considered it has been treated as a synonym for women. This tendency is similar to the scholarship on violent extremism more broadly where work on masculinity has relied on broad argument about the correlations between patriarchal masculinity and violence extremism (Ezekilov 2017; Emig 2018). What work on masculinity and transitions out of violent extremism exists has focused on the broad role of patriarchal masculinity (Kimmel 2018; Johnston and True 2019).

Though emphasising the link between patriarchal masculinity and VE is valuable, it does not provide clarity regarding the gendered factors that contribute to disengagement. In order to bring a gendered perspective on disengagement, in this paper we explore one aspect, that of bodily labour, in the life histories of men from Java in Indonesia. We suggest that for the men we interviewed the process of disengagement entailed a process of recrafting gendered attachment through bodily labour. By undertaking bodily labour these former fighters recrafted their role in the community. Further, we propose that their gendered experience of disengagement was substantially determined by structural factors which make certain kinds of attachment possible while

creating barriers to others. In exploring gendered embodiment, we do not mean to suggest that this is the only relevant factor for disengagement, which is necessarily a messy a non-linear process. Rather, we aim to demonstrate that embodied attachment is an underexplored component of disengagement. Similarly, in drawing on a modest set of life histories from one area in Indonesia we do not intend to indicate that these experiences are broadly generalisable. Gender is necessarily relational and situated in a given context, meaning that any effort to develop broad generalised accounts of how gender shapes involvement in violence is fraught (Duriesmith and Ismail 2019). Despite this limitation, we believe that the experiences of our participants are instructive in highlighting one way in which disengagement is gendered, and how this experience can be shaped by structure.

To explore these factors the paper will begin by outlining the life-history research method which we have employed. Following this, we will introduce the concept of disengagement with a focus on how the concept relates to work from critical military studies on enduring attachment to militarism. Following this, we will present a brief account of four life-histories and provide some comparison with other participants in our research set. In looking at these life-histories we highlight the different roles that former fighters adopt, such as that of an elder, role model, passive recruiter, etc. In doing this we highlight the messy and contradictory ways in which fighters cease to be active in violent networks. Finally, we conclude with some thoughts regarding the role of embodiment and attachment as a component of disengagement.

Method

This paper is based on life-history research with fifteen individuals who were affiliated with a range of violent Islamist networks based in Java.³ The majority of these life-histories (11) were collected from men. While 4 additional life-histories were also gathered with women who had been involved in the network this paper focuses on militarised masculinities and the men's reflections. Unstructured interviews were undertaken over multiple sittings with the intention exploring complex processes and change in individuals' lives (Connell 2010, 54-71). The life history method has a prominent place in the study of masculinities and has been used by some of the most influential works in this field (Connell 2005, Messerschmidt 2000, Messner 1992). The analysis of 15 participants is not intended to be a representative sample or to provide a broad survey of the population. Rather this analysis follows James Messerschmidt's (2000, 15) use of life histories to 'glean considerable and telling information from a modest sample.' This approach has been used by two previous studies of Indonesian jihadi fighters, Julie Chernov Hwang's 2018 book *Why Terrorists Quit*, and Najib Azca's 2011 thesis *After Jihad*. Both of these texts consider the life-course and fighters' pathways into or out of the network. However, neither of these texts address gender or engaged with the literature on militarised masculinities.

To conduct the life history interviews we encouraged participants to provide a narrative of their life which covered their initial encounters with militant groups, their experiences in the network and their eventual disengagement from active involvement in

³ Participants used multiple differing terminologies to describe their involvement in the armed network. Identifications such as foreign fighter, jihadi or mujahedeen were all common. Possibly the most common identification which participants used was activist. The designation of activist seems to capture the multiple roles that the participants understood across their time in the network, ranging from strictly religious performances, charity work, financial support, or passive support for fighters, to active involvement such as traveling as foreign fighters, training militants and conducting terrorist attacks. While the literature on CVE has a tendency to ring-fence terrorist and foreign fighter activity under the category of extremism for the participants we interviewed made no such distinction.

violence. Initial interviews were used to establish a time-line of their lives, charting key junctures against larger events in Indonesia and abroad. Subsequent interviews were paid particular attention to the role of gender in forming participants' attitudes, structuring their experiences and positioning them in relation to other groups. These subsequent interviews were far more open ended than the initial interviews and provided space to explore intimately on key events, themes or narratives.

Interviews were conducted either in secluded public spaces, such as in quiet areas of restaurants, in mosques, and parks, or they were undertaken in private quarters. When interviews were in public spaces, they were done so that only the two authors and the participant were directly present with breaks being taken if there was any interruption. For publication the names and some key facts have been changed to protect against re-identification. Surrounding the formal interviews, there were long periods of 'hanging out', sometimes outside the mosque with groups of men involved in the network, or in more intimate settings longer periods. In addition to the main life history interviews a battery of supporting interviews with individuals involved in the network, their wives and family were conducted by Noor Huda Ismail.

Conceptual framework

Central to the argument presented in this article is the notion that pathways out of jihadi networks are produced by recrafting attachments to particular social roles. To recraft their attachment to these roles, we suggest that individuals undertake a process of bodily labour. By shifting their embodied practices, former fighters are able to be recognised as a different kind of man and to potentially even leave their association with the network behind. While bodily labour is undertaken individually, attachments to certain

masculinities are made possible by social structures which mediate an individuals' access to certain social signifiers.

In developing this understanding, we draw on Raewyn Connell's understanding of cathexis in her 1987 book *Gender and Power*. Connell's refers to the structure of cathexis to describe to social patterning of gendered desire. This entails the structural arrangement which produce attachment to certain trappings of gender, which may or may not be sexual. In Connell's use cathexis entails the structural organisation of attachment and emotional investment in particular objects, roles and actions. She argues that attachments rely on bodily labour to produce and reproduce certain meaning on certain objects or actions. While attachments and desire are experienced individually, they are produced into the structure of cathexis collectively and often coalesce around particular objects of desire through political and economic structures. Cathexis entails the practices that shape patterns of desire and attachment (Connell 1987, 113). Connell suggests that objects of desire are generally defined by opposition between feminine and masculine and under patriarchy tend to eroticise male dominance and female subordination. Additionally, the structure of cathexis has racial and class dimensions, the objects of psychological investment (clothing, beauty practices, mannerisms, etc.) shift within a society significant depending on group. Taken together Connell's approach to cathexis aimed to move beyond individualised or universalised accounts of attachment, by showing how gender and power constructed different landscapes of desire and revulsion.

While Connell's use of cathexis has largely been neglected by other scholars (this is particularly true for work in politics), in her original theorisation of masculinities it was framed as an essential lens for analysing how social relations of gender produce complicity (Wedgwood 2009, 336). Connell (2005, 231) shows that 'the social relations of gender are experienced in the body (as sexual arousals and turn-offs, as muscular tensions and posture,

as comfort and discomfort) and are themselves constituted in bodily action (in sexuality, in sport, in labour, etc.).’ This is true for aspects of sexuality, for example comfort with a partner who is taller or shorter than you, but is also present in everyday aspects of gender performance, such as wearing masculine or feminine clothing. Much of the subsequent masculinities research has overlooked this aspect of Connell’s theorisation, focusing instead on the policing of masculine norms, the role of hegemonic masculinities or contestation. Despite this, we believe the notion of cathexis is valuable to an understanding of disengagement because it links the experiences of comfort and desire with the structures of gender relations.

Connell notes that the social relations which produce cathexis can be (and often are) resisted. Signifiers of militarism (clothing, tattoos, grooming, mannerisms) may be rejected by groups of men in the gender order who seek to valorise different objects of desire (for example the sartorial choices of high fashion) that correspond more with their position in the gender order. These efforts of resistance often work to shape the meaning of objects of cathexis, for example the fetishisation of particular clothing or types of bodies in sub-cultures. Even when groups reject dominant aspects of gender (norms of behaviour, aesthetics, forms of relationship) the range of possibilities still reflects dominant social relations, subversive groups might play with gender, but they can’t escape it. This means that to Connell (2005, 160) gender rebels, such as gay men, “are no freer to invent new objects of desire” than men who participate in dominant masculinities.

Connell’s work on cathexis is primarily interested in how individuals come to invest so much emotional energy and labour into exaggerated sex differences. This work was underpinning an attempt to explain how hegemonic patterns of desire were constructed across gendered differences. In explaining her use of cathexis Connell explores sexual fetishes: ‘where the symbolic markers of social categories (lace handkerchiefs, high-heeled

shoes, leather jackets) or structured principles (for example, dominance) get detached from their context and themselves become primary objects of arousal.’ Cathexis is felt in the body, it is not simply an abstract ascent. Some clothes, some compartments, some tones, some relations, *feel* right, exciting or unsettling. Gendered relations of power do not reside as abstract ideas about what men or women should be (as many of the accounts of Connell’s work have suggested). They are inhabited.

Just like the fetishisation of individual signifiers of sexual practice, in this research we found that participants came to attach significant amounts of emotional energy in certain signifiers associated with being a fighter, over necessarily the practical activities they undertook. This meant that things like how one wore their beard, the kind of clothing that was adorned, practicing of certain martial arts, patterns of speech, chanting *nasheed* all were used to symbolise the social role of being a fighter. These embodied actions marked shifts from their previous identities in ways which cannot be simplistically conflated with changes in ideology. Embodied actions recrafted civilians and made new attachments possible. In trying to understand the trajectories into foreign fighter networks it was often more important to understand the way in which attachment to these exaggerated signifiers were produced, than to appreciate their adoption of ideology.

For example, one recruit, Agus, described an encounter he had with a senior fighter who taught at a local Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) before he was involved in the network. At this time Agus was a young man in his late teens and living in a rural village. When he saw the fighter, Agus was fascinated by him. He described his feelings to us in the interview as such:

Q: So you were fascinated with him?

A: Yes because the way he presented himself was so polite and sophisticated. This is what attracted me to him.

Q: Did you also adopt such clothes, for example wearing a robe or a cap?

A: Not at first. I felt that I did not deserved to wear such clothes. Although their school (the *pesantren* that the fighter was affiliated with) was really very simple, they were extraordinary. They woke at 3am every morning to pray, then again at dawn. But despite their poverty and their difficult life they were full of the desire to learn. Whenever they had free time they used it to memorise the Qur'an. That is why I didn't adopt the clothes yet.

Q: This was before you went there though, what did you imagine it was going to be like?

A: I imagine there would be a simple boarding school with a group of ordinary houses, but the inhabitants will be wearing clean white robes, have long beards, and smell fragrantly.

In this example, the key moment for Agus's recruitment was exposure to embodied signifiers which he then nurtured and reproduced over his time in the network. Far more than any ideological message, it was the reproduction of these physical factors which made his attachment to the group so robust. For Agus, the adoption of certain bodily practices and appearances were central to becoming a pious member of the network. Despite this, he did not have the necessary experiences to legitimise his adoption of these components at first. He was required to first demonstrate the discipline and commitment that he associated with these trappings before he could legitimately adopt them for himself. Attachment is made possible through social structures and institutions which individuals

must gain admittance to. In the case of our participants, admittance required fulfilling certain experiential requirements and undertaking a range of bodily labour to reshape their physical appearance.

The concept of bodily labour (or body work) has increasingly been used in gender studies to understand identity. Coffey (2013) defines body work as the ‘range of practices to maintain or modify the body's appearance.’ These vary from mundane grooming practices, to physical exercise, or more intensive beauty practices that define an individual's position in society. This labour plays an important role in constructing an individuals' identity in a given social space and creates many of the demarcations of group membership. The concept of bodily labour has been most widely employed by those exploring the beauty practices of social groups in the Global North.

The concept has been employed to suggest that individual presentation or aesthetics are not prefigured truths that define a person, but are ongoing projects individuals engage in to become socially intelligible within a social space. The concept has also recently been used by Presterudstuen and Schieder (2016) to understand the role of rugby and boxing in crafting warrior identities in Fiji. In this context they argue that participation in contact sport becomes a form of bodily labour through which men are able to perform the traditional indigenous Fijian warrior identity, without partaking in armed conflict. Much like Presterudstuen and Schieder study, our work with former fighters suggests that a wide range of practices foster attachment and grant authenticity to jihadi identity. Furthermore, the practices which are initially most salient are not necessarily violent. While our participants reject many aspects of dominant masculinities in their communities, they are still bound by associations that structure their forms of cathexis (white clothing with prayer, martial arts with independence, certain facial grooming with piety, etc.).

While the concept of cathexis has not been employed in feminist international relations and critical military studies so far, there are some important parallels to draw with existing work on the body. Recent work on militarism has turned to the body, attachment and desire as a way to understand men's relationship with militarised masculinity. Scholarship from critical military studies have emphasises that soldiering bodies are not natural occurrences and must be made (Dyvik and Greenwood 2016; McSorley 2016; Welland 2017; Dyvik and Welland 2018). In their joint analysis of US veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan Dyvik and Welland argue that tattooing is used by soldiers to make sense of their experiences and to signal group membership. In a similar vein, Crane-Seeber (2016) emphasises the pleasure that comes from submitting to a military organisation. Crane-Seeber (2016, 49) shows that it is not just coercive structure which "dupes" military personnel into fighting, but that through submission to militarisation they are granted a degree of "sexiness" and experiences of pleasure in wearing the uniform, using guns and gaining symbolic power. We believe that the concept of cathexis can be complimentary to this analysis, not showing structure as simply a process of duping men, but in producing the schema of desire within social relations that men must negotiate. The men we interviewed took pleasure in adopting physical signifiers of membership, such as bruising their forehead to indicate their commitment to praying five times a day.⁴ This bodily labour was a source of pride and comfort..

Just as these embodied signifiers must be made through action, once our participants decided to leave, they needed to be unmade. Bulmer and Eichler's (2017) study of military-to-civilian transition has shown that process of leaving requires a process of unmaking. The process of unmaking, they suggest, is "long and contradictory", often

⁴ Praying and *being seen to pray* is very important for networks members who recounted the doctrine of 'praying like a monk at night and fighting like a lion during the day.'

requiring veterans to embody the space between military and civilian life (Bulmer and Eichler 2017, 162). Further, Bulmer and Eichler show that the effects of militarised masculinity endure across a lifetime and requires ongoing labour. While the men we interviewed did not engage in the same practices explored by other critical military studies scholarship, in some ways their attempts to unmake and recraft militarised masculinity can be understood in a similar light.

Just like soldiers in state militaries our participants engaged in bodily labour that was easily intelligible to fellow members of the network, and importantly, to members of society at large. The practices which were engaged in signalled authenticity and were not accessible to everyone. Certain kinds of dress and bodily grooming were so associated with the mujahideen who had fought in Afghanistan that a civilian could not simply adopt them to gain social recognition, their physical comportment was only read as authentic if it came along with the right kind of life-history. For example, some veterans continue to wear a vest associated with the mujahedeen, mountain sandals or a military style watch to signify their experience. Just like buying a suit doesn't make one a banker, one could not simply buy martial apparel to adopt the position of mujahedeen. Participants spoke at length about 'earning' the right to these sources of pleasure and pride. The structural component of attachment and bodily labour is a component that the notion of cathexis enriches the work on embodied militarism which has emerged in recent years. For this reason, the paper looks to draw both on more recent work on embodiment, pleasure and attachment, as well as Connell's prior work on cathexis.

The bodily labour of leaving a jihadi network

When charting the life histories of fighters and exploring how our participants left the network one of the most striking things was how little their attitudes towards violence

appeared to change initially. For most participants the recruitment process began with shifts that were not centred on violence. These included being encouraged to collect alms for charity, joining a study group, or enrolling in a *pesantren*. The participants who very quickly became involved in violence had already been engaged in violent groups, such as youth gangs common in part of Java, prior to becoming religious activists. Militant groups channelled these men's existing attachments to violence and recrafted them with a religious narrative. During disengagement some participants did undergo shifts in ideology, theological commitments and perceptions of violence. But these shifts were often preceded by shifts in the everyday components of their lives.

When leaving the network our interviewees emphasised the sense of detachment from the patterns of their everyday life far more than any ideational shift. They described their discomfort at no longer being able to engage in the practices that had given their lives meaning and rhythm. In particular they commented on the loss of brotherhood, intimacy and pleasure which they gained from collective action. The pleasure participants described from involvement was less centred on any direct violent activity than it was to bonding activities like group training, studying the Quran, practicing martial arts and performing *nasheed* chants.

The emphasis that participants placed on these pleasurable aspects of everyday life in the network mirror's Julia Welland's (2018) findings regarding the pleasure soldiers gained from wartime experiences. Welland has challenged the overwhelming focus on moments of violence and trauma in understanding soldiers' involvement in war, instead exploring soldiers' experiences of intimacy, joy and bodily pleasure. Physical affection was also important for our research participants who would hold hands, hug, and express other forms of intimacy when in group settings. Their emotional investment in these activities was shaped by broader structures in their communities, which permitted intimacy

between men in group settings. Their cathexis towards these interactions reflect broader gendered structures that gave meaning to activities like martial arts, which are not present in other communities.

The emphasis on pleasure disrupts the dominant narrative regarding war as intrinsically a site of violence and shows how more mundane interactions shape fighters involved in conflict. The interviews with our participants emphasised that moments of actual violence were sparse even when they were in sites of conflict. For example, the men who had travelled to fight in Afghanistan during the 1980s were largely kept away from the front-line fighting and spent most of their time training for later conflicts (Duriesmith 2018).

Overlooking these pleasurable aspects of group membership has the capacity to miss the crucial links that produce violence. One potentially overlooked aspect of bodily labour in Indonesia appears to be the role of massage between network members. Key figures in the network, such as Abu Tholut, were well known in the network for their skill at massage. Similarly, the first IS-related terrorist attack in Jakarta was committed by Afif Sunakim, the personal masseuse to a senior fighter (Aman Abdurrahman). The role of massage in prison recruitment and bonding has been recognised in a report from Carl Ungerer (2011) who demonstrates the important bonds that these activities create among prison populations. By overlooking pleasure, embodiment and attachment, the role of massage in producing bonds and in recruitment could easily be missed. This kind of physical contact and care cemented relationships between members and is indicative of the overlooked role pleasure plays in building attachment. Like the experiences of war which Welland (2018) has explored, our participants also described traumatic experience, moments of violent rupture and despair, but what made their attachment to the group so 'sticky' were embodied experiences of pleasure and joy. While work on disengagement

has emphasised the social process of leaving, it has not tended to engage with questions of embodiment or pleasure (Horgan and Braddock 2010).

Writing moments of joy out of world affairs is not unique to the study of militants (Penttinen 2013), but we believe is of particular importance to this case due to the overwhelming focus on ideology within studies of countering violent extremism. For the men we interviewed, those who re-joined the network after leaving emphasised that it was the joyous collective action that they missed as much or more than the actual violent activities. Without the opportunity to engage in joint militant action, they described experiencing a sense of dislocation and listlessness living as civilians. For those who successfully disengaged they explained the process in terms of replacing previous practices that gave them pleasure and meaning with new actions that positioned them as men in the world. The sources of pleasure and meaning which were available to them depended on structural factors, their age, their ethnicity, their class, etc. These factors structure cathexis, former members could not forge attachment or experience pleasure in roles which were inaccessible to them. In a basic way their own experience in combat closed doors to them, they could not, for example, join the military or police. But in a more expansive way there were diverse factors which shaped the alternatives. Due to this, to understand the process of disengagement it is necessary to first appreciate the ways in which ‘war lingers in and on the bodies and lifeworlds of those who have practiced it’ (Dyvik and Welland 2018, 358).

For the foreign fighters we spoke with, leaving the network required a wide range of changes to their everyday bodily labour in order to find a meaningful new position in society. These roles varied from individual to individual, but here we would like to sketch three distinct pathways. These pathways are not definitive, universally generalisable and certainly not exhaustive. But we hope that they will be illustrative of the different ways

that structure shapes capacity to forge meaningful attachment to other masculinities after fighting. That of the Akbar the elder statesman, Syed the depoliticised everyday Indonesian, and Agus the reformed liberal subject. In addition to these three ‘successful’ cases of disengagement we briefly explore Rasyid a disillusioned former fighter who is struggling to reintegrate. Just like tropes of heterosexuality exaggerate stereotyped sex difference the new embodied subjectivities of former fighters exaggerate stereotypes of certain political figuration, the senior statesman, the everyday Indonesian, or the reformed liberal. These political subjectivities provide the basis for political and social action within particular defined spaces and make former fights intelligible as something other than a former.

For participants like Akbar their ‘disengagement’ took the form of adopting the role of elder statesman or radical preacher. This role entailed exaggerating their religious trappings, form of dress and speech. This pathway out of the network was made possible by their ability to pass as a legitimate cleric or mujhadeen. For Akbar, a veteran of the Afghan-Soviet war, he undertook this role by advising younger members of the network on whether to fight, with which group and how. While Akbar had limited religious education, he and other senior fighters set themselves up in an inner-city mosque as leaders in the network. While Akbar does not have access to significant wealth or broader status in society, his current position is venerated one the network. To adopt this role, he adopted white religious clothing, drew on his knowledge of Arabic and his age to assert his status as a senior statesman. These associations are not unique to gender relations in jihadi communities, they reflect power relations in Javanese society at large which privileges access to certain language, age and ethnicity as sources of status.

For other former fighters the pathway to disengagement was through adopting the role of an everyday Indonesian, trying to downplay their previous role as a jihadi and

adopting mainstream civilian trappings. One participant named Syed had a traumatic time while in prison and after leaving the network undertook an effort to move leave his former life behind. This involved adopting mundane secular clothing, taking a job in urban Jakarta and hiding his previous involvement from his neighbours. When we spoke with Syed, he expressed significant disquiet over the idea that he might be recognised for his previous involvement and that he was trying to blend into mainstream society as a regular man. For a man who had been involved in the network for more than twenty years this entailed changing almost every aspect of his bodily labour, from the clothing he wore, to the way he spoke and interacted with other people. A key component for Syed's transition also appears to be his role as a father. By positioning himself as a tradition bapak (father figure) Syed was able to gain social recognition in his community in a way that was entirely detached from his previous actions as a militant.

Finally, participants like Agus we spoke with adopted the role of the reformed liberal subject, neither trying to hide their involvement nor opting the role of a senior statesmen. These participants framed their current role in terms of their adoption of liberal values and rejection of the jihadi way of life. In this context recrafting saw them adopt western clothing, modes of speech (particularly use of English) and framing themselves as citizens of the world. The bodily labour for these participants required a similar shift to those who sort to assert themselves as everyday Indonesians, but directed towards a different set of tropes and meanings. For this group in particular the adoption of fashionable western dress, and participation in liberal modes of consumption all served the purpose of proving their reformation and admitting them to a new, more urbane set of Indonesian society.

To construct these new roles, former fighters underwent intense body-work so that they might 'pass'. Men's access to these roles are not, however, a simple reflection of

agentic choice. In understanding the process of disengagement participants spoke about gradual changes in their presentation and behaviour as being important for producing new authentic identities.

When Agus first began to leave the network, he continued to wear stereotypical Islamic dress while in public (white robes, pants and maintaining a beard), but gradually began to try wearing other items when at home (such as jeans, shorts or a t-shirt). Though this shift initially felt uncomfortable, he eventually found the shift empowering, allowing him access to new spaces. This eventually resulted in Agus shaving his beard, a move that provoked backlash from his former peers, with one senior fighter rebuking him publicly saying: "Agus is our brother who knows the law. It should be obeyed". Despite facing some difficulties and even contemplating killing a member of the network for insulting his new westernised appearance, Agus describes the many enjoyable aspects that his new role provides. This includes being able to socialise with a wider group of people, he now has a girlfriend in Jakarta and reads widely (even commenting that he has been reading 'transgressive' texts like *The Da Vinci Code*).

Despite trying to present his disengagement as a clear break from the network, Agus also continued to engage in activities for years after he left. These included being a member of a 'morality police' who would beat up people behaving in ways that they saw as improper (such as dating, drinking alcohol or gambling), and attending ISIS affiliated talks and discussion groups. While these activities entailed quite serious engagement in network activities, they occurred at the same time as Agus was himself dating, reading prohibited texts and ceasing to identify with the network in his regular life. Though a casual conversation with Agus will suggest he one-day decided to leave the network after becoming disillusioned, the life-history interviews uncover a far messier trajectory. What seems clear is that leaving the network entailed an extended process of 'trying out' aspects

of civilian life and seeing if they stuck, often during the same period as he was engaged in activism against these kinds of behaviour.

For Agus to articulate his new liberal urbanised identity he required access to education, a modest amount of material wealth and the physical comportment with which he could 'pass' in this space. To do this he drew on his youth, physical fitness, moderate background and education to forge this identity. His use of weightlifting and martial arts is also recrafted, from the tools of war and vocation which he used to train fighters in rural Ambon, to the hobbies of an urban image conscious youth. While he speaks freely about his former experiences in the network, he incorporates these into his narrative of reformation and liberal subjecthood. In describing his current values, he often draws comparisons between cosmopolitan worldly practices and the practices in the network which he now sees as backwards. In interviews he regularly complained about the lack of cleanliness he perceived in his peers. Similarly, he describes wanting to get an education in the West because "the countries are very clean, certainly different to countries in the Middle East." This new set of attachments relies on well-established ethnic and class distinctions in the region which associate cleanliness, intelligence and cultivation with urban centres in Java. His physical transformation has enabled Agus to craft himself a life in Jakarta that does not deny his previous experience, but contains its messiness within an easily understandable narrative of the 'deradicalised' and reformed jihadi.

Akbar's account of disengagement is clearer and contains fewer direct contradictions than Agus. Unlike Agus, Akbar's imprisonment meant that his involvement in the network was severely curtailed by police attention. Despite currently living in a relatively secular suburb he continues to wear the outfit of a mujahedeen, maintains a beard and regularly peppers conversation with verses from the Quran or Hadith. Akbar's current presentation does not attempt to create a break with his militant history, rather it explicitly

emphasises it. In crafting his current position Akbar continues to shape his social life around the network of former fighters in the capital. While they are not formally involved in fighting, they continue many of the embodied practices of militarism with other Afghan alumni.

For Akbar the performing the role of the radical preacher drew on his ethnic background and experience in Afghanistan to facilitate this role. Despite very meagre theological training he is able to position himself in a way that is intelligible as the fiery radical preacher primarily due to his previous life as a mujahedeen and his successful image crafting through adoption of Arabic dress, development of a properly pious beard and grooming habits that mark him as the reserved elder statesman. Unlike Agus, it is difficult to get Akbar to talk about himself and his own embodiment in interviews. When asked specific questions about his life, such as “do you find it hard now that you can’t be involved in fighting”, he would answer in broad terms about the role men in general fight play in supporting the struggle. This mode of speech also positions Akbar into the role of cleric. While Agus’ transformation is about a narrative of redemption, Akbar’s relies more on asserting authority. His ability to authentically undertake the bodily labour required him to first fulfil a range of pre-requisites which were determined by broader structures which existed in his social milieu.

For Syed neither of these paths was not open. Because Syed comes from an ethnic minority background his capacity to ‘pass’ as the refined preacher is significantly impeded (for which Javanese or Arab descent is a significant benefit). Similarly his lack of wealth, his age and the fact that he had gained some public notoriety due to his previous actions make it impossible for him to fully perform the role of a liberal reformed subject. What is left is an attempt to pass as the ‘everyday’ Indonesian man. This has required learning a new trade (he had a background in engineering which is no long accessible to him due to

prison time), changing his clothing to fit in, trimming his beard and adopt the quiet mannerisms of an older working-class Indonesian bapak (father).

Unlike many other interviewees, Syed was uncomfortable discussing his involvement in violent actions. His participation in a large terror attack resulted in a traumatic ten-year stint in prison which he still finds difficult to talk about. While he describes the experience of being among fellow fighters in ecstatic terms (even joking that any Christian would convert immediately if he had seen the glory of life in Afghanistan), he is far more tentative when describing actual moments of violence. This is particularly striking as Syed had very significant experience in conflict, participating in famous battles, leading armed groups within local conflicts and playing an important role in notorious local attacks. Reflecting on the changes in his life it seems that he misses the sense of comradery he found in war-zones (possibly in part due to his minority ethnic status). Despite the struggles that Syed faced during transition he emphasises the pleasure he gets from his new role as a father and an unremarkable member of his community. Since leaving prison Syed describes the joy of spending time with his family and blending in.

These roles were forged by the individuals through bodily labour. But their access to certain roles was shaped directly by the resources they had available. These resources included their ethnic background, age, wealth, education level and other experiences which the men had little control over. Different generations of foreign fighters had access to different identities. The unique position of fighters who had fought in Afghanistan to the mythology of Indonesian jihadi's allowed them to adopt the position of senior statesmen much more easily than the men who followed them. For example, none of the Afghan alumni we met wore Western clothing such as jeans or baseball caps, while both subsequent generations did. The adoption of certain kinds of dress after leaving the network depended greatly on age. Similarly, the location of fighters impacted the roles

available to them, it was much easier for fighters to position themselves as reformed liberal subjects in Jakarta than in rural Java. This reflects the structuring of cathexis that Connell identified as being essential to the construction of masculinities in *Gender and Power* (1987). For the men who came to change their ideological commitments, such as Agus and Syed, shifts in embodied practice and social role preceded shifts changes in their belief. Additionally for the participants who failed to disengage from the network the main barrier they expressed was not to do with ideological commitments. Rather they expressed the continued allure of the social networks they had while they were members and the pleasure they got from engaging in group activities.

In addition to the participants who successfully disengaged, there were also participants who continue to struggle with their new position. Participants like Rasyid found themselves disillusioned with violent organisations without being able to build a new position for themselves in society. Rasyid had joined ISIS in Syria with the hope of building a new life, living in a devout paradise and the promise of a wife. Rasyid quickly became disillusioned when he arrived in Syria. Soon after he left with the hope of returning family life. He describes his current life as difficult, Rasyid's ex-wife won't allow him to see his son, he is very worried that people will judge him for having joined ISIS and he has few financial prospects. Unlike Syed, he was not able to fulfil the material conditions to blend in as an 'everyday' *bapak*. While he has tried to transition back as an everyday Indonesian, his lack of financial resources and the stigma he faces makes this difficult. As does his alienation from his ex-wife and child. Similarly, because he voluntarily left ISIS he does not have access to the role of a senior statesman like Akbar. Rasyid is a man struggling to re-invent himself and negotiate his masculine identity, without the support of friends of former group members. While he dreams of setting up a new business, the

bleakness of his circumstances mean that he is considering whether to return to the violence again.

Rasyid's desire to return to the network is not simply a reflection of a weaker will or psychological pathology. He has undertaken and failed to rebuilding his gendered position in his community through bodily labour. Other participants who have returned to the network told us similar stories. One participant who has since been reimprisoned (Ibrahim) spoke constantly and at length about the pleasure he got from training with arms and the ongoing appeal of returning so he could continue using firearms, which he felt was the 'one thing that I am skilled at.' His eventual reimprisonment was a direct result of his continuing emotional investment in guns and reflected the joy he got from being a firearms expert in the network. Examples such as Rasyid and Ibrahim challenge the preoccupation with ideology and psychology that have been so prevalent within the literature on countering violent extremism. Their return was shaped intimately by gender and social structures. Both men tried, and failed, to recraft their masculine position in socially recognisable ways. Their inability to build meaningful attachments to a new social role was both structured by their own gendered perceptions about how a man should behave, and by social structures that limited their ability to adopt new roles.

By highlighting the bodily labour involved in disengagement we do not aim to discount other aspects as being relevant. Access to wealth, social links outside of the network and other factors which existing disengagement scholarship has identified all clearly mattered. However, these factors were mediated through gendered notions of masculinity and were ultimately made sticky through bodily labour. The additional focus on gender and bodily labour expands the scope of existing work on disengagement, showing new avenues for understanding the processes of disengaging without discounting these existing issues.

Conclusion

For each of our participants the pathway out of the network entailed significant bodily labour to recraft their attachments. While it is easy to treat the process as a purely individual transformation, recognising how structure shapes fighters individual bodily labour greatly enriches understanding of disengagement. Attachments where possible though the prevailing material and discursive structures that opened pathways to some and not for others. The option of adopting the role of a cleric relies on certain ethnic, religious and class signifiers which some individuals have access to. Similarly, these attempts to recraft gender identity are simply not authentically available to others based on their position within the gender order. These shifts were fundamentally gendered and relied on the creation of new attachments through bodily labour. The transformations which our participants undertook are not universalisable. They reflect the particular configurations of gender, age, race, class, and other structural factors in their communities. Similarly our attempt to categorise three pathways is not to indicate that these paths are the most salient, or even that they will necessarily be present for all. Rather, we have tried to show how in this significant, but very particular, context the process of disengagement was an embodied one, and that their embodied experiences reflected the structuring of cathexis.

The shift from member of a militant network to civilian life was an embodied one, but those embodied choices were not unshackled reflections of agency. Undertaking the bodily labour to transition to civilian life required the prior material conditions that marked their labour as authentic and the subsequent performances intelligible. Like all individuals in society, men involved in violent extremism are shaped by gendered structures in profound and varied ways. As with regular military personnel our participants attempts to leave the network were messy ongoing projects which engaged with these structures in varied ways. By paying close attention to these more mundane components of everyday

life (such as clothing, massage or forms of speech), we hope that future accounts of disengagement can be expanded to more fully account for the ways that “war lives with them long after it ends” (Parashar 2013, 618).

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