This is a repository copy of *Locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/215671/

Version: Published Version

Article:

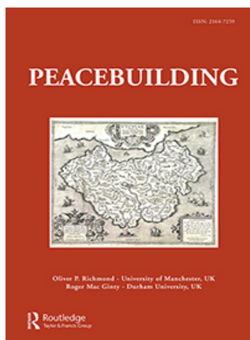
Asmawati, A., Duriesmith, D. orcid.org/0000-0003-4210-6113, Ismail, N.H. et al. (1 more author) (2024) Locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict. Peacebuilding, 12 (4). pp. 557-574. ISSN 2164-7259

https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2024.2384196

Reuse
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND) licence. This licence only allows you to download this work and share it with others as long as you credit the authors, but you can't change the article in any way or use it commercially. More information and the full terms of the licence here: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/



Peacebuilding

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rpcb20

Locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict

Asmawati Asmawati, David Duriesmith, Noor Huda Ismail & Sultan Fariz Syah

To cite this article: Asmawati Asmawati, David Duriesmith, Noor Huda Ismail & Sultan Fariz Syah (01 Aug 2024): Locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict, Peacebuilding, DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2024.2384196

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2024.2384196

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 01 Aug 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 17

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rpcb20

PEACEBUILDING
https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2024.2384196

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict

Asmawati Asmawati[a], David Duriesmith[b], Noor Huda Ismail[c] and Sultan Fariz Syah[b]

[a]Department of Development Economics, Universitas Abulyatama, Aceh Besar, Indonesia; [b]School of Politics and International Relations, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; [c]S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Singapore

ABSTRACT
Scholarship on conflict has been slow to recognise masculinities, often failing to address the impact of gender on men and boys. Even when masculinities are recognised in sites of conflict by feminist scholarship, they tend to be framed exclusively in terms of explicit norms around men's use of violence or treatment of women. This has meant that alternative masculinities, which might be more amenable to peace, are often difficult to locate or fraught. Reflecting on conducting interviews on responding to political violence in Indonesia (Aceh and Central Java), this paper interrogates the methodological challenges of researching the diverse range of masculinities that might create pathways for disrupting violence. Three strategies are suggested for 'locating' violence-resistant masculinities while researching conflict ('reading' gender, strong objectivity and in-depth methods) and considering how researchers might avoid misinterpreting these masculinities in problematic ways.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 17 May 2024
Accepted 22 July 2024

KEYWORDS
Masculinities; conflict; violence prevention; research methods

Introduction: the invisibility of plural masculinities through conflict

Masculinities are invisible in most sites of conflict. While a rich scholarship on women in conflict has emerged, when scholars focus on the actions of men in conflict and peace processes, they rarely engage with gender.[1] This does not mean that the elements that constitute masculinities are invisible in sites of conflict; masculine practices, norms, myths, ideals, structures and aesthetics are often hyper-visible. Male combatants, martial values and military aesthetics often dominate accounts of conflict to the exclusion of the important work of resisting militarism. However, because the things that men commonly do and the values associated with those actions are treated as the gender-neutral standard, they are not readily identifiable as masculinities.[2]

CONTACT David Duriesmith d.duriesmith@sheffield.ac.uk

[1]Brandon Hamber, 'There is a Crack in Everything: Problematising Masculinities, Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice', *Human Rights Review* 17, no. 1 (2016): 9–34.

[2]Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Henri Myrttinen, '"Pack Your Heat and Work the Streets"-Weapons and the Active Construction of Violent Masculinities', *Women and Language* 27, no. 2 (2004): 29; Kimberly Hutchings, 'Making Sense of Masculinity and War', *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 4 (2008): 389–404; and David Duriesmit, *Masculinity and New War: The Gendered Dynamics of Contemporary Armed Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

For those who wish to study gender in conflict, the invisibility of masculinities poses a distinct challenge. While research participants often have cutting insights about the functioning of gender, the notion of 'masculinity' can either be pigeonholed to a small set of issues (related to men's treatment of women or particularly brutal forms of violence) or does not resonate at all.[3] These challenges compound for those who are interested in studying masculinities that do not centre violence, or might facilitate peace, as outlined by Duriesmith and others in the introduction to this special issue.[4]

This can leave research on violence-resistant masculinities at an impasse; working with a rich body of scholarship indicating the importance of masculinities, but with a limited set of tools for locating violence-resistant masculinities in sites where of conflict. As a result, much of the existing work on peace and conflict has replicated the approach, focus, and framework of key texts outside peace and conflict studies. When work looks for masculinities within conflict, they often try to describe the kind of dynamics, values, practices or identities which early studies on masculinities highlighted (such as Raewyn Connell's research on working-class men in Australia) then searching for these as signifiers of masculinity in sites of conflict.[5] While this has provided valuable insights, the attempts to identify patterns present in foundational work on masculinities risk being blinkered to the gender dynamics within sites of conflict, or even misapplying universalised Western models of masculinity to contexts where it may not apply.[6] This means that key aspects of masculinities that shape conflict may remain disguised or misunderstood, especially subtler aspects likely to be fruitful in fostering peace. In practice, this is likely to reproduce stereotypical accounts of masculinity centred on particular acts of violence (as we argue below), while failing to identify opportunities for breaking down these patterns. Responding to these tensions, this article asks: How can studies of peace and conflict better implement feminist research strategies to account for violence-resistant masculinities?

In response to this question, this article makes the case that while current approaches have been grounded in feminist principles and methods, greater engagement with feminist research methods have the potential to make alternative masculinities visible. Building on our experience doing qualitative interviewing to explore violence-resistant masculinities, we consider our own failures of trying to analyse gender in sites of conflict where it is rendered invisible. Based on this experience, we argue that scholarship on masculinities and conflict needs to revisit feminist methodologies to better capture violence-resistant masculinities. Through this, we initially propose three strategies from feminist scholarship on methodologies for locating violence-resistant masculinities

[3]Defining masculinities in an article on the difficulties of identifying and studying masculinities poses a particular challenge. In our own work, we have tended to define masculinities consistent with Raewyn Connell's (2020: 71) account as 'simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture'. This approach is primarily concerned 'the processes and relationships though which men and women conduct gendered lives' rather than aspirational ideals, averaged norms, stereotypes or individual self-conceptions. However, for the sake of this article, we are not concerned with arguing for a singular model of masculinity, as such a rigid account would go against the articles aim of working out how to uncover masculinities, rather than prescribing what they are.

[4]David Duriesmith, Maximilian Kiefer, Jaremey R. McMullin, Maike Messerschmidt, and Hendrik Quest, 'The Challenges and Opportunities of Researching Masculinities during Peace Processes', *Peacebuilding* 12, (2024).

[5]R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[6]Henri Myrttinen, Lana Khattab, and Jana Naujoks, 'Re-thinking Hegemonic Masculinities in Conflict-Affected Contexts', *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 103–19.

in conflict; 'reading' gender, strong objectivity and in-depth approaches. Using these methods we argue have the capacity to make diverse masculinities (and particularly forms that resist violence) more visible. We then suggest that even adopting these feminist methods some challenges remain, namely misrepresentation and reproducing colonial stereotypes. We conclude by suggesting that work on masculinities and conflict needs to push further in developing feminist strategies for 'locating' masculinities to comprehend configurations of masculinity that may help reduce violence.

Research method

While we do not set out to entirely resolve this by providing a singular 'right' way for studying masculinities in sites of conflict, we hope through some introspection and joint deliberation, this article will help clarify some feminist opportunities for uncovering masculinities that can facilitate peace. To do this, the article reflects on our experiences researching masculinities in Indonesia on two different projects during the past decade. First, a project conducted by authors 2 and 3, looking at the life histories of 11 men who left foreign fighter networks and now lived in Java. Initial interviews took place in 2016 with follow-ups until 2019. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian and were complimented with long-periods of 'hanging out' during 2016. The interviews focused on men's pathways out of violent networks and to interrogate their attempts to recraft gendered positionalities and identities after 'leaving' violence.[7] The second project conducted by authors 1, 2 and 4 entailed 22 expert interviews with activists, practitioners and policymakers in Aceh (the north-most region in Sumatra) who had been involved in work promoting violence-resistant, or gender equitable masculinities. These interviews took place in 2019, with 17 interviews conducted in Indonesian, and 5 conducted in English. These interviews interrogated the politics of promoting alternative masculinities in a site of long-standing conflict.[8] These two cohorts were very different in their demographics (though there were former combatants in both groups), and participants were different ethnic groups in each (all participants in Aceh being Acehnese, while project 1 being far more varied). Due to the nature of the conflict in Aceh (with the Indonesian state over independence and often centring on distinct cultural identity) and the foreign fighters now in Java (opposition to the Indonesian state on religious and political grounds) there are complex differences between each cohort that we don't have scope to fully unpack here. While we draw on elements of Indonesian scholarship on masculinities to situate our study, and the small body of scholarship on Acehnese masculinities, the authors do not see the framing of 'Indonesian masculinities' as either appropriately capturing the experiences of both groups and risks a methodologically nationalist reading of participants' relationship with gender.[9] For both cohorts, their

[7]Ethics approval for this project was granted by the University of Melbourne, participants granted verbal consent and interviews were recorded before transcription and anonymisation.

[8]Ethics approval for this project was granted by the University of Queensland, participants granted written consent and interviews were recorded before transcription and anonymisation.

[9]Rahel Kunz, Myrttinen Henry, and Udasmoro Wening, 'Preachers, Pirates and Peace-Building: Examining Non-Violent Hegemonic Masculinities in Aceh', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 24, no. 3 (2018): 299–320; Sait Abdulah, 'Masculinity and Local Elite Political Contestation: A Case on Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia', *In Proceedings International Conference on Social Science-ICOSS* 1 should be inserted in the note 9 Sait Abdulah, 2019, 2019, no. 1 (2019); Sait Abdulah, 'Militarised Masculinity and the Rise of a New Local Political Elite in Post Conflict Aceh' (PhD diss., Murdoch University,

characterisation as Indonesian was contested, with the former foreign fighters often identifying more with international imbrications, and for the Acehnese participants having a somewhat conflictual relationship with Indonesian national identity. Accordingly, our core focus is not to uncover an 'Indonesian perspective' on violence-resistant masculinities, but to interrogate some of the challenges of researching violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict that draw on our research within the Indonesian archipelago.

Literature review: the illegibility of masculinities in conflict

From the earliest scholarship on men and gender, a key concern was the invisibility of masculinity in society despite the central role it tends to play. Even when masculinities intimately shape how men engage with the economy, determine key aspects of security policy, colour the nature of governance, and inform almost all other aspects of the gender order, they are *rarely read as masculinities*.[10] Rather, key aspects of masculinities (particularly the most privileged forms) are often rendered socially neutral, as a kind of 'impartial standard' by which all other aspects of life are judged. This is why, for example, the patterns of work are based on the expected trajectory of certain men and do not account for the care of children, why the expected behaviour of politicians is regularly based on stereotypically masculine qualities and elemental components of design and medicine presume an archetypal masculine body.[11] This tension has also been identified within scholarship on Indonesia, as Pamela Nilan noting in 2009 'we know little about the masculine "half" of gender politics in the Asia-Pacific and our understanding of non-western masculinities is incomplete'.[12]

Despite academic scholarship developing a language to analyse masculinities as plural, relationally defined and hierarchically arranged, it is often left invisible in areas of scholarship which focus doggedly on men to the exclusion of women and those facing oppression on the basis of sexuality or gender expression (such as security studies).[13] What is notable in work on conflict is that even in the intensely masculine-coded spaces like formal politics, the military; intelligence and post-conflict governance, the attributes associated with dominant modes of masculinity remain unquestioned.[14] Within Indonesian scholarship, there has been a similar absence of attention to masculinities within domains most dominated by men.

This can be clearly illustrated by Lee's analysis of male-dominated Indonesian street politics suggesting that 'the trope of masculinity acts as an inclusive and hegemonic ideal'

2018); and David Duriesmith, and Noor Huda Ismail, 'Militarized Masculinities Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Charting the Multiple Masculinities of an Indonesian Jihadi', *International Theory* 11, no. 2 (2019): 139–59.

[10]Marysia Zalewski, 'Introduction: From the "Woman" Question to the "Man" Question in international realtions', in *The'man' question in international relations*, Zalewski, Marysia, and Jane Parpart, eds. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). 1–13.

[11]Sapna Cheryan, and Hazel Rose Markus, 'Masculine Defaults: Identifying and Mitigating Hidden Cultural Biases', *Psychological Review* 127, no. 6 (2020): 1022.

[12]Pam Nilan, 'Contemporary Masculinities and Young Men in Indonesia', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 37, no. 109 (2009): 327.

[13]Romaniuk, Nicholas Scott, and Joshua Kenneth Wasylciw, '"Gender" Includes Men Too! Recognizing Masculinity in Security Studies and International Relations', *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2010).

[14]Rebecca Tapscott, 'Policing Men: Militarised Masculinity, Youth Livelihoods, and Security in Conflict-Affected Northern Uganda', *Disasters* 42, no. 1 (2018): S119–S139.

against which mainstream political activism is judged.[15] The invisible dominance of masculinity within the study of Indonesian politics has been such that gender has been 'lost altogether as a mode of inquiry' entirely or 'has come to be understood in lay terms as promoting women's participation in politics and society, rather than a deep exploration of the unequal and constitutive relations between men and women'.[16] Where attention to dominant masculinities has developed, it has been around nationalist attempts to regulate gender, and in particular *bapakism* that advocates for a dominant provider model for men within nuclear families as a reflection of national gender ordering.[17] While the concept of *bapaksim* is clearly relevant to understanding masculinities across Indonesia (especially hegemonic masculinities within politics and business), how the concept translates to conflict dynamics, especially within armed groups that consciously reject nationalist understandings of gender ordering (such as the foreign fighters interviewed for project 1), and for communities who have experienced conflict with the nationalist government over the impositions of nationalist political structures and culture (such as in Aceh) it does not translate unproblematically. Considering this, the other forms of masculinity which are dominant within spaces that may not correlate neatly onto Suharto era *bapakism* remain elusive.

While these dominant masculinities can be rendered invisible, Indonesian scholarship has often produce accounts that reference marginalised, deviant or queer individuals to make gender visible through reference to transgression in order to uncover the 'hegemonic ideal'.[18] For example, Tom Boellstorff's study of masculinity and national belonging begins with analysis of the emergence of political homophobia in Indonesia.[19] To understand how 'national masculinity' came to shift from 'benevolent and paternal' heterosexism, to more explicitly focus on the violent policing of 'homosexual, effeminate, or transvestite men' Boellstorff focused on interviewing and ethnographic 'hanging out' with those subjected to violence.[20] Through this method Boellstorff is able to articulate the shift dominant masculinities by highlighting how these shifts have been experienced by marginalised men. Similar understandings of both dominant masculinities and the range of alternative masculinities can be partly uncovered through the range of studies have emerged on marginalised masculinities in Indonesia (in gangs, youth masculinities, musical sub-cultures, poor men).[21] Though these are informative, very little attention has

[15]Doreen Lee, 'Styling the Revolution: Masculinities, Youth, and Street Politics in Jakarta, Indonesia', *Journal of Urban History* 37, 6 (2011): 933–51.
[16]ibid.
[17]The concept of *bapakism* translating literally to fatherism is a nationalist conception of the patriarchal role for certain men as the heads of families, and family like structures of nation, business. *Bapakism* is particularly associated with Suharto regime, but has roots in Javanese forms of gender ordering. The authors had differing views on the extent to which the concept was applicable across the Indonesian archipelago, and particularly whether it was suitable to the historically matrifocal forms of gender ordering in areas like Aceh where men's roles have been associated with public spaces than the family or household. However, this relationship is complicated and still contains elements of patriarchal authority, see Zaitun Munirah, Elly Malihah, and Yadi Ruyadi, 'The Value of Prestige on the Father Figure in the Family Acehnese people', *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2022): 220–27; and for a discussion on this in Aceh. For more information on *bapakism* see Julia. I. Suryakusuma, *State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in New Order Indonesia* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2011).
[18]Lee, 'Styling the Revolution', 933–51.
[19]Tom Boellstorff, 'The Emergence of Political Homophobia in Indonesia: Masculinity and National Belonging', *ethnos* 69, no. 4 (2004): 465–86.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Rebecca Elmhirst, 'Tigers and Gangsters: Masculinities and Feminised Migration in Indonesia', *Population, Space and Place* 13, no. 3 (2007): 225–38; Pam Nilan, Argyo Demartoto, and Agung Wibowo, 'Youthful Warrior Masculinities in

been paid to violence-resistant masculinities, or to conflict dynamics within this scholarship, which is understandable considering the absence of armed violence in most regions and communities across Indonesia.

The particular focus on marginalised masculinities within the Indonesian scholarship is compounded by the emphasis on particular kinds of *violent masculinities* within scholarship on conflict.[22] On the most basic level, this is understandable, violence (at least mass-public violence), is exceptional and demands explanation, resulting in rich scholarship on the masculinities of young men from conflict-affected spaces who are seen to be 'at risk' or on the masculinities of those conducting external military interventions.[23] The problematic attribution of violence to young men without exploration of how they might contribute to peace efforts represents a powerfully squandered opportunity as shown by McMullin and others in their exploration of motorcycle taxi drivers in this special issue.[24] The attention to violence has also resulted in scholarship overlooking the wider range of masculinities in sites of conflict, for example, those performed by non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, non-combatant men, businessmen, men with administrative or oversight roles within state-armed forces, queer masculinities, men involved in religious practices or peace work.

In recent years, this has begun to be addressed, particularly by new studies on masculinities in peacebuilding processes and transition out of conflict. Early studies like Kimberly Theidon's (2009) work on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration asked how masculinities might create impediments to attempts to diffuse conflict.[25] Similarly, Haque,[26] Porter,[27] Ashe,[28]

Indonesia'. In *Masculinities in a Global Era*, pp. 69–84. (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013); Annet Pauwelussen, 'Leaky Bodies: Masculinity and Risk in the Practice of Cyanide Fishing in Indonesia', *Gender, Place & Culture* 29, no. 12 (2022): 1712–732; Hinhin Agung Daryana, Aquarini Priyatna, and Raden Muhammad Mulyadi, 'The New Metal Men: Exploring Model of Flexible Masculinity in the Bandung Metal Scene', *Masculinities & Social Change* 9, no. 2 (2020): 148–73; A.H. Alvi, and Hendri Yulius Wijaya, 'Tenuous Masculinities: Situated Agency and Value of the Indonesian Transgender Men's Masculinities', in *Patriarchy in Practice: Ethnographies of Everyday Masculinities,* eds. N. Van der Gaag, A. Massoumian and D. Nightingale (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 95–114; Dédé Oetomo, 'Masculinity in Indonesia: Genders, Sexualities, and Identities in a changing society', in *Framing the Sexual Subject: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Power,* eds. R. Parker, R. M. Barbosa and P. Aggleton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 46–59; Hatib A. Kadir, 'School gangs of Yogyakarta: Mass fighting strategies and masculine charisma in the city of students', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (2012): 352–65; Ian. Wilson, 'The Biggest Cock: Territoriality, Invulnerability and Honour Amongst Jakarta's Gangsters', In *Men and masculinities in Southeast Asia*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 121–137; and Muhammad Najib Azca, Rani Dwi Putri, and Pam Nilan, 'Gendered Youth Transitions in Local Jihad in Indonesia: Negotiating Agency in Arranged Marriage', *Journal of Youth Studies*, (2023): 1–16, doi:10.1080/13676261.2023.2248894.

[22]Terminology for what constitutes a 'violent masculinity' is inconsistent across literature, but in this paper the term is being used to refer to masculinities that entail expectations of the use of violence, the valorisation of violent men, or structurally positioned to benefit from violent institutions like the military.

[23]Lesley Pruitt, Helen Berents, and Gayle Munro, 'Gender and Age in the Construction of Male Youth in the European Migration "Crisis"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 3 (2018): 687–709; Henri Myrttinen, Lana Khattab, and Jana Naujoks, 'Re-thinking hegemonic masculinities in conflict-affected contexts', 19; and Sandra Whitworth, *Men Militarism and UN Peacekeeping: A gendered analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

[24]See in this special issue Jaremey R. McMullin, Deimah Kpar-Kyne McCrownsey, and James Suah Shilue, 'Good Ones and Bad Ones: Gendered Distortions and Aspirations in Research with Conflict-Affected Youth in Liberia', *Peacebuilding* 12 (2024).

[25]Kimberly Theidon, 'Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia', *Hum. Rts. Q.* 31, no. 1 (2009): 1.

[26]Md Mozammel Haque, 'Hope for Gender Equality? A Pattern of Post-Conflict Transition in Masculinity', *Gender, Technology and Development* 17, no. 1 (2013): 55–77.

[27]Antonia Porter, '"What is Constructed Can be Transformed": Masculinities in Post-Conflict Societies in Africa', *International Peacekeeping* 20, no. 4 (2013): 486–506.

[28]Fidelma Ashe, 'Gendering War and Peace: Militarized Masculinities in Northern Ireland', *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 3 (2012): 230–48.

Wright & Welsh,[29] and Oosterom,[30] have all explored the possibility of change in masculinities after conflict. Some of this work has focused directly on the question of change in the use of violence, such as Quest's discussion of the need for masculinities sensitive peacebuilding initiatives or Duncanson's interrogation of dismantling hegemonic masculinities in Global North militaries.[31] Quest and Messerschmidt's work here is conceptually promising, exploring 'not only of masculinities in post-conflict contexts, but also – and more importantly – of how they change', focusing on shifts from 'violence-centred' masculinities to that oppose them.[32] Their approach identifies the alternative as peace-conductive masculinities that 'are ideally marked by opposing or questioning (military) violence, as well as by peaceful co-existence, and conflict resolution'.[33] While we were interested in this approach, we found the framing of 'peace-conductive masculinities' possibly too expansive for many of our participants did fit Quest and Messerschmidt's criteria of men who engaged in practices that did not 'facilitate direct interpersonal military violence', and it was likely stretching to describe their resistance to violence as cohering to 'peaceful co-existence, and conflict resolution'.[34] A small handful of studies have interrogated the efficacy interventions aimed at transforming masculinities in sites of conflict, such as Harland & McCready's analysis of curriculum-based approaches.[35] However, such studies still overwhelmingly focus on the possibility of change among the most violent actors (such as combatants) and far more rarely on alternative forms of everyday resistance as has grown in other aspects of peace and conflict scholarship.[36] Changing the attitudes and practices of the most violent men is an admirable and important topic to focus on but ends up ignoring the majority of men who don't directly participate in armed violence but may either facilitate or resist the structures which enable it during conflict.

For both of our studies this gap was apparent. While a relatively small number of men associated with the foreign fighter network eventually became directly involved in the perpetration of violence, a far larger cohort either facilitated it as financers, recruiters, educators, or less activated supporters in the broader social milieu that foreign fighters operated. Conversely, in Aceh, while a wider group of men (and significant number of women) directly participated in violence significant groups supported the peace process, men whose practices of masculinity resisted dominant violent narratives of resistance to

[29]Hannah Wright, and Patrick Welsh, *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens* (London: Saferworld, 2014).

[30]Marjoke Oosterom, 'Gendered (in) Security in South Sudan: Masculinities and Hybrid Governance in Imatong State', *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 2 (2017): 186–202.

[31]Hendrik Quest, *Tracing Gender Practices After Armed Conflicts: At Peace With masculinities?* (Springer Nature, 2022); and Claire Duncanson, 'Hegemonic Masculinity and the Possibility of Change in Gender Relations', *Men and masculinities* 18, no. 2 (2015): 231–48.

[32]Maike Messerschmidt, and Hendrik Quest, 'Change in Practice: A Framework for Analysing the Transformation of Post-Conflict Masculinities', *Critical Military Studies* 10, no. 1 (2024): 40–60.

[33]ibid.

[34]ibid.

[35]Ken Harland, and Sam McCready, 'Rough Justice: Considerations on the Role of Violence, Masculinity, and the Alienation of Young Men in Communities and Peacebuilding Processes in Northern Ireland', *Youth Justice* 14, no. 3 (2014): 269–83.

[36]Helen Berents, and Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, 'Theorising Youth and Everyday Peace (building)', *Peacebuilding* 3, no. 2 (2015): 115–125; and Mac Ginty Roger, 'Everyday Peace: Bottom-Up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies', *Security dialogue* 45, no. 6 (2014): 548–64.

occupation were often written out of official narratives from both the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement who has dominated local politics since the peace agreement. In both cases, having a field which overwhelmingly highlights the experiences and trajectories of men directly involved in violence leaves a paucity of evidence regarding those who don't directly engage in armed violence, but may make it possible, as well as those who resist it.

Outside of academia, organisations working to promote violence-resistant masculinities in sites of conflict have often become 'trapped in discourses that either revolve around essentialist arguments highlighting men's "innate" propensity to violence or focus on simplistic uses of frameworks such as hegemonic, military/militarised, or "hyper"-masculinities'.[37] The focus on masculinities by studies on conflict to a limited range of topics (such as sexual violence or direct armed violence), for a limited range of constituents (primarily young, marginalised men), and using a limited range of conceptual frameworks (most commonly hegemonic masculinity, often not well applied) has blinkered the focus of research on masculinities and conflict compounding the limitations posed by participants insensibility to masculinities. A notable exception to this is Kunz, Myrttinen, and Udasmoro's exploration of what they call non-violent hegemonic masculinities in Aceh, which argues for attention to non-violent men who help 'build popular consent for particular forms of rule that promoted conflict de-escalation and peace-building'.[38] This approach is particularly promising as it seeks to highlight the forms of masculinities, such as religious leaders, which can defuse violent responses to conflict by drawing on gendered expectations placed on men. We also see some resonance with other contributions in this collection which make more varied accounts of masculinities visible. For example, Baines account of ex-combatants who fathered children during war in Uganda highlights the productive peacebuilding potential of recognising men's complicated relationships with violence and care.[39] Similarly, Abels and others this special issue propose practices-based approaches to interviewing as a way to avoid essentialising masculinities through co-production.[40] In our research, the importance of more diverse and less violent masculinities has appeared to be highly relevant but is something we have found challenging to effectively document in practice.

Experiencing failure to locate violence-resistant masculinities

In each of our experiences researching masculinities that do not fuel and sustain violent conflict (with men existing foreign fighter networks in Java, and on promoting violence-resistant masculinities in Aceh), we have struggled to evidence the kinds of peaceful masculinities Kunz, Myrttinen, and Udasmoro discuss.[41] This section highlights three categories of failure to capture masculinities adequately in our interviews: gender as womenandchildren, gender as 'LGBT', and gender as other people. These failures did not represent uninteresting or theoretically irrelevant findings but represented the difficulty

[37]See note 23 above.
[38]Rahel Kunz, Henri Myrttinen, and Wening Udasmoro, 'Preachers, Pirates and Peace-Building', 303.
[39]See in this special issue Erin Baines, 'Unspeakable: Reflections on Relational Approaches to Research in Post-Conflict Settings', *Peacebuilding* 12 (2024).
[40]See in this special issue Gabriele Abels, Andreas Hasenclever, Maximilian Kiefer, Maike Messerschmidt, and Hendrik Quest, 'Interviews on Masculinities in Post-Conflict Contexts as a Process of Three Translations', *Peacebuilding* 12 (2024).
[41]ibid.

of uncovering the kind of 'mundane' violence-resistant masculinities that might facilitate peace, or centre non-violent resolution of conflict. By highlighting these examples, we hope to show the ways that even conscious efforts to study masculinities in conflict may end up failing to capture those masculinities which could facilitate peace.

The first failure we have faced is the most predictable that when asked, participants often interpret questions about gender to be asking about women. An example of this occurred when interviewing former foreign fighters in Java, when asking participants to describe what masculinity demands of male participants would often frame responses in terms of men's obligations or treatment of women. This did help to illuminate how relationships of care were bound up with expectations of protection, but they also effectively narrowed masculinity down to a single dynamic. While we do not wish to downplay the importance of men's relation to women as a key issue and central component to the construction of masculinity. In both projects, the obligations and tensions around the relationship between masculinities and femininities were key. However, we found that there was a risk here that in sites of conflict our interviewees will end up framing masculinity *as* men's treatment of women. This builds into the well-established pattern identified by Cynthia Enloe (1990) of treating gender as an issue for women or children, in her terminology womenandchildren.[42] Men in this articulation do not have a gender in themselves, and their actions only become gendered when they relate to women directly. We consider this a 'failure' not in so much as men's perceived obligations or treatment of women were irrelevant, but because it risked overwhelming other elements (like men's approach to conflict resolution among other men, or obligations to male peers who were being impacted by conflict). Particularly in sites of conflict, where men's obligations to do violence are so regularly enforced by other men, often target other men and work in male-dominated spaces, such an approach would likely fail to apprehend masculinities adequately.

The second failure was one faced specifically in the Indonesian context, where talking about gender with men was interpreted as a discussion of sexual or gender diversity. Mirroring dynamics elsewhere, in Indonesia, the backlash against gender and sexual diversity has meant that discourse around gender has become closely associated with the politics of 'LGBT'.[43] When there is a rigid view that men's behaviour should fit a singular model, questioning around difference, questioning which aims to look for inconsistencies, complexities, or slippages (as Connell suggests) was sometimes read as asking about gender or sexual diversity. This was particularly an issue for participants who had been involved in socially conservative politics, with one participant (a military leader involved in the peace process and women's rights initiatives in Aceh) exclaiming after being asked questions about violence-resistant masculinities 'if you just want to ask me about LGBT, then ask me about LGBT, its ok, we can talk about it'. This created particular barriers to

[42]C. Enloe, 'Womenandchildren: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf crisis', *The Village Voice* 25, no. 9 (1990): p.1990.

[43]Although in Indonesia the framing has not been around anti-"gender ideology' as is present elsewhere which doesn't have the same resonance than the term 'LGBT'. Hendri Yulius, Shawna Tang, and Baden Offord, 'The Globalization of LGBT Identity and Same-Sex Marriage as a Catalyst of Neo-Institutional Values: Singapore and Indonesia in Focus', in *Global Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage: A Neo-Institutional Approach,* eds. Elaine Jeffreys, Pan Wang, Bronwyn Winter, Maxime Forest and Réjane Sénac (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 171–96; Rinaldi Ridwan, and Joyce Wu, '"Being Young and LGBT, What Could be Worse?"Analysis of Youth LGBT Activism in Indonesia: Challenges and Ways Forward', *Gender & Development* 26, no. 1 (2018): 121–138; and David Paternotte, and Roman Kuhar, 'Disentangling and Locating the "Global Right": Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe', *Politics and Governance* 6, no. 3 (2018): 6–19.

interviewing some groups about diverse masculinities associated with straight cisgender men. When questioning which looks for diverse experiences within those groups can be quick, especially within the context of political anxieties around diverse sexualities and gender performances. However, this was not a pattern for all participants. Those exposed to feminist politics, those involved with international organisations, those who provided services to sexually or gender-diverse communities, and participants who were themselves gender or sexually diverse did not fit into this pattern. Nevertheless, for studying conflict, the conflation of explicit discussion of masculinities with gender and sexual diversity created barriers to uncovering straight cis masculinities which might facilitate peace or create space for non-violent responses to conflict.

Finally, when interviewing participants about masculinities, we struggled to interrogate participants' relationship with masculinity due to a tendency for them to treat gender as something for ‘other’ people failed to do properly. When asking questions about gendered expectations placed on men (‘why should men join and fight?’ ‘how can men work to create reconciliation?’) we found men often mirrored the tendency which Halberstam identified of talking about those who failed to live up to these expectations.[44] For example, when interviewing a foreign fighter about violence against civilians in a conflict he had participated in:

> I: Some have observed, there are men who do things like that (war crimes against civilians). What do you think about these acts?
>
> P: War is a game that has rules. The rules of the game that exist. Some boys do not know the rules or cannot keep them.

In this interaction, the participant identified that there were parameters around violence to which men must adhere. However, in discussing those parameters it was only through identification of those who failed to adhere (boys) that they could be charted. This was a failure we faced numerous times, where it was much easier to get participants to speak about those who they saw as failing to be sufficiently masculine, than the masculinities of those who cohered with dominant expectations. This does have value; it gave real clarity about perceived transgression, and what might be punished or devalued. However, it did not give great clarity about the contours of the kind of ‘mundane’ masculinities that shaped men’s participation in conflict or peace work. Rather, they highlighted examples of deviance, failure and curiosity (highlighting men who were too ‘cowardly’ to fight, men who indulged in devalued leisure activities, men who were perceived to be barbarically violent, or those individuals who they expected to behave in masculine coded ways but refused). These all help give something of a shadow outline of mainstream masculinities, illuminating its boundaries that when crossed appear but occluded the contours of the various masculinities within the accepted boundaries. As with the first failure, it is to a degree unsurprising that participants identified instances of transgression when asked about mundane masculinities, however this does make it far more likely for scholarship to reproduce accounts of masculine violence, while failing to chart the presences of violence-resistant masculinities.

[44]J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

Locating violence-resistant masculinities in conflict

Considering our failure to locate violence-resistant masculinities in conflict adequately, it is worth entertaining some alternative strategies for 'locating' such forms of gender in conflict. As identified by earlier scholars of masculinity, the invisibility of masculinity to those who perform it requires active strategies to make it palpable. Based on our experiences we consider three. First, we consider in-depth approaches to qualitative research, which involve combining more laborious approaches to feminist qualitative data collection than have often been used to study masculinities in peace and conflict studies. Second, we suggest the strategy of 'reading' gender without naming it. Finally, we propose learning through what Sandra Harding calls 'strong objectivity' by speaking to those for who masculinities are more legible.

The most common technique to try and overcome masculinity's invisibility has been through more granular and focused qualitative methods such as life-history interviewing.[45] This approach relies on multiple long-form interviews with participants where they recount their life focused on particular themes. This in turn has been used to highlight the complex areas where gendered expectations, practices and experiences clashed to try and chart masculinities by gradually teasing out particular themes. This approach can be useful in that it entails a temporal dimension, seeking to chart some degree of change through a person's life and to document the key junctures where they were set on different trajectories, shifting their relationship with masculinity.

We have used this approach for work previously to try and capture change in masculinities through and after conflict.[46] It is useful because researchers can gradually tease out themes or experiences that appear to shape masculinities through the interview process, drawing on multiple rounds of follow-up questions. For example, one of our participants for the project on foreign fighters had discussed in an early interview the importance of mentoring by an older boy when he was being recruited into the network. This early mention discussed the importance of physical appearance that the older boy modelling a kind of respectable, well-groomed and sophisticated manhood in comparison (in his view) to those around him.

A second interview and having had a chance to review the recording of the first session provided a chance to ask more detailed questions about respectability, embodiment and perceived sophistication of those involved in militancy. This produced answers about the importance of militarised clothing (mountain sandals, vests which were associated with militants, etc.) as well as religiously how the participant interpreted the role of physical presentation and bodily labour.[47] The level of follow-up, granular detail and attention to change make in-depth approaches particularly valuable in uncovering the central role of personal transformation in creating paths away from violence. This approach was able to explore otherwise easily overlooked elements, like the role of a romantic partner in entrenching attachment to civilian masculinities, gendered pleasure he gained from

[45] James Messerschmidt, *Nine lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body and Violence* (Routledge, 2019); and R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[46] David Duriesmith, and Noor Huda Ismail, 'Militarized Masculinities Beyond Methodological Nationalism', 139–59.

[47] David Duriesmith, and Noor Huda Ismail, 'Masculinities and Disengagement from Jihadi Networks: The Case of Indonesian Militant Islamists', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2022): 1–21, doi:10.1080/1057610X.2022.2034220.

education (enabling him to position himself as the learned elder to younger men) and ways that older men's expectations for younger men to use violence on their behalf led to disenchantment. With a more cursory approach, it is likely that these elements would not have come up in an interview, hidden by the more obvious aspects of violence or grievance, and that the intimate appeal of masculinities which propel men into violence would have remained unspoken. This approach has also been put to productive use by Syahbuddin et al. to analyse violence-resistant masculinities (termed there as egalitarian and non-violent masculinities) role in violence against women.[48] Here, the authors found that the life-history approach to uncover spaces for men to resist pressure to engage gender in patriarchal ways, and the tensions that they experienced around gendered expectations placed on them. The productive use of more in-depth approaches can also be seen in Westendorf's contribution to this special issue, using relational interviewing to hear discordant views on masculinity.[49] In addition to in-depth interview approaches, we also see considerable space for future work that uses more creative methods such as participatory action research, photo-voice, body mapping, or other artistic methods which can draw out the dynamics of violence-resistant masculinity in rigorous ways.

The approach we have taken did allow us to draw out an aspect of masculinity that we otherwise would have been unlikely to document in a shorter interview form but also contained some significant limitations. Using life history research meant drawing on a small set of participants, and as an approach to studying conflict it is a particularly introspective and granular approach that provided a lot of detail about how particular individuals experienced conflict. This provides less space for interrogating structural factors, less scope for a wide range of voices on conflict and can result in the kind of work that is purely focused on what Macleod calls a 'taxonomic (or even descriptive) exercise' that can become preoccupied with 'further and further refinements to an infinite regress' without sufficient attention on the possibility of change or deconstruction.[50] Considering these risks, one way we suggest avoiding an entirely introspective taxonomic approach is instead to undertake broader interviewing with those impacted by conflict and to 'read' gender even when it isn't mentioned explicitly.

The second strategy we suggest draws on lessons from queer theorists, whereby gender is 'read' even when it isn't explicitly named through an interpretation of proximate factors. In his introduction to queer methodologies in *Female Masculinity* Jack Halberstam explains the approach as a 'scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour'.[51] While men and their actions are far from excluded from studies of human behaviour, in the contexts we are working, men as a gendered group certainly are. We think we can learn from Halberstam's approach of not beginning with direct blunt enquiry about hegemonic men, but by looking for other sites of gender, other dynamics and other bodies that can shed light on masculinity itself.

[48]Khairiah Syahabuddin, Nashriyah, Rasyidah, & Khairani, *Masculinities Within Post-Conflict Aceh And Its Impacts On Violence Against Women* (Banda Aceh: Ibnunourhas Publishing, 2015).
[49]See in this special issue Jasmine Westendorf, 'Troubling Masculinities: A Feminist, Relational Approach to Researching Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Peacekeepers', *Peacebuilding* 12 (2024).
[50]Catriona Macleod, 'The Risk of Phallocentrism in Masculinities Studies: How a Revision of the Concept of Patriarchy may Help', *Psychology in Society* 35, no. 1 (2007): 9.
[51]J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

While Halberstam's approach to masculinity is grounded in studying masculine women and trans-men, we think masculinities can be studied in sites of conflict by exploring the dynamics of conflict and trying to read gender into this. In interviewing men who had played key roles in conflict within Indonesia, we found it productive to ask about who has authority in contexts of violence, what practices are rewarded when men conduct them, or indicative question about those who opt for non-violence over violence. We have found this approach useful in interviewing a former insurgent commander in Aceh about their involvement in peace processes, where gender was closely associated with debates on women's access to public space or gender and sexual diversity. Asking why young men have not chosen to take up arms again allowed the participant to talk about the competing pressures on young Acehnese men due to the withdrawal of internal aid money, diminishing revenue from natural resources and capture of the state by older former combatants. It also allowed for reflections on the tensions between patriotic (and highly gendered) participation in state politics by young people, and the diminishing avenues for gendered recognition since the Memorandum of Understanding between the Free Aceh Movement and the government of Indonesia. This created space for a more frank discussion on the links between economic marginalisation, young men's disillusionment with previous iterations of martial masculinity and the emergence of new counter-cultural masculinities than had been possible by asking direct questions about masculinity itself. In this interview, when we tried to ask direct questions about masculinity itself, the participation inevitably steered towards a discussion of how conflict has affected women or LGBT policy, but by asking less direct questions about conflict we were able to read masculinity. Reading gender has some resonances with work in feminist scholarship on silence and conflict, with a shared interest in trying to study gender in spaces when it is unspoken.[52] However, work on silence has been (for good reason), much more attentive to situations when these silences are agentic strategies adopted by groups either navigating space where patriarchal speech is required, or where their speech is weaponised against them. In contrast, the approach to reading gender outlined (which draws more on queer work on reading sexuality where it remains unspoken) is less not a context where silence is adopted as an agentic choice, but where it is present due to the invisibility to dynamics to participants themselves. Reading gender presents a viable opportunity for highlighting diverse, and particularly violence-resistant, masculinities in spaces where discussion of masculinity itself is foreclosed by its hegemonic status. This approach is not however without risk, particularly due to the weight this approach places on researcher interpretation and the possibilities for misreading what participants are saying, Eurocentric understandings of gender and overemphasis on the views of elite participants (all of which will be discussed in the next section).

Finally, we suggest what Sandra Harding terms 'strong objectivity' which is produced when we 'start from marginalized lives' and 'take everyday life as problematic'.[53] Because

[52]Jane L. Parpart, and Swati Parashar, eds. *Rethinking silence, voice and agency in contested gendered terrains* (London: Routledge, 2019); Jane Parpart, 'Rethinking Silence, Gender, and Power in Insecure Sites: Implications for Feminist Security Studies in a Postcolonial World', *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 3 (2020): 315–24; and Aliya Khalid, Georgina Holmes, and Jane L. Parpart, eds. *The Politics of Silence, Voice and the In-between: Exploring Gender, Race and Insecurity from the Margins* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2023).

[53]Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is "Strong Objectivity"?', in *Feminist epistemologies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

academic scholarship has tended to start from the perspectives of men (usually a small set of men), Harding argues that 'women's worlds, men's worlds, and the causal relations between them' are often rendered invisible and that even in men's lives, gender is not discernible. To counter this, Harding argues we can adopt a rigorous '"logic of discovery" intended to maximize the objectivity of the results of research and thereby produce knowledge that can be for marginalized people (and those who would know what the marginalized can know) rather than for the use only of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people'.[54] This draws both on the legacy of feminist authors on learning from women's lived experiences, and insights from those working on race such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Gilroy on the concept of double consciousness.[55] Both these traditions argue that those oppressed by violent systems understand their functioning of them uniquely, as they need to navigate them to survive or flourish. Due to this, the oppressed can provide special insight into society and working with them may help illuminate the functioning of systems of power that have been rendered invisible.

Using this logic, we have found it productive to interview those who live through conflict but do not embody the privileges masculinities can produce. By interviewing women, marginalised men, queer activists and others within sites of conflict, we have been able to draw hidden dynamics regarding how masculinities shaped conflict and peace processes in ways that were not always visible to dominant men. By interviewing feminist peace activists in Aceh, we were able to gain a better understanding of the trauma men faced from participation in armed groups and seeing combat. Due to their unique position, they were able to reflect on how men's participation in violence shaped their subsequent experiences of home life, and how militarisation had negatively impacted their mental health and created anxieties regarding gendered expectations of stoicism and strength. This dynamic was far more difficult to explore by interviewing men, for whom the expectations of stoicism and strength impede discussion of cracks in that façade. Drawing on other epistemic standpoints allowed us to access a fuller picture of how men are impacted by conflict and how gender shapes their participation. Through this, we believe that a more robust account of masculinities might be developed, one which allows gender to be 'located' in conflict even when men might be unwilling to discuss or apprehend gender.

Avoiding misinterpretation

The above strategies for interrogating masculinity do provide some ways forward in sites of conflict where it is difficult to locate, but they do pose additional challenges. On a basic level, there is a significant likelihood of misattributing aspects or misinterpreting aspects of masculinity due to the role of interpretation, and use of proxies for masculinity. We also felt there was a risk of research on masculinities overemphasised points of difference or distinction to configurations of gender within Global North gender orders.

[54]ibid.
[55]W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of black folk* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Paul Gilroy, *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

The risk of misunderstanding or misattributing masculinity comes from the potential to not understand the significance of practices, norms or experiences and incorrectly analysing it or overemphasising the centrality of gender. The strategies we have suggested either rely on the researcher's interpretation of experiences that might be quite distant from their own (even as in our case some of the researchers in each project were members of the communities being studied), or in the case of strong objectivity the interpretations of others about what masculinities are. Due to this, we see this risk as related to the issues of overemphasising violent masculinities due to their external visibility. This, in turn, might result in accounts of masculinity emphasising exceptional, violent or public aspects over the everyday components that may be more salient.[56] As gender permeates most aspects of social life and is difficult to disentangle the extent to which something is primarily shaped by masculinities or simply a less significant constituent component. For example, when looking for masculinities which were supportive of equitable peace in Aceh, we felt there was a risk of creating a conceptual 'bucket' for masculinities and then filling it with positive things participants described as being done by men. This was a concern when exploring the actions of religious figures who had been working with young people to encourage more equitable approaches to conflict transformation. How should we understand the overlapping relationship between their religious roles, their gendered practices, and the actions to transform conflict that they took? While masculinities are clearly co-constituted by other elements of the participants' positionality, we are left with some discomfort about instances where our analysis would highlight gender in ways that participants may not fully recognise. The dilemma behind this us of Laura Shepherd's reflection on analysing interviews in ways that participants might reject, feeling: "as though I were trying to catch them out, trip them up, or twist their words. As I made notes, I could hear them in my head: "That's not what I meant!"[57] This requires a delicate balance of remaining reflexive to participants, deploying checks on findings to ensure they aren't misread, or the centrality of gender overstated to match researchers' expectations, while not becoming inattentive to the way that structures of power render masculinities invisible and the functioning of patriarchy occluded. In our case, the research was facilitated by entailing cooperation between two Acehnese researchers and one external, which allowed for productive conversations on how to interpret participants' reflections.

In addition to the challenge of misinterpretation, efforts to research masculinities risks reproducing colonial tropes while trying to 'locate' masculinities in sites of conflict. Masculinities in sites of conflict have often been shaped by colonial logic, which places some masculinities as valorous, civilised, sophisticated or invisible while rendering others as barbarous, suspiciously effeminate, shiftless or hyper-visible.[58] The process of colonialism is intimately gendered, with the colonisation being shaped by gendered goals (civilising non-European patterns of kinship and intimacy) and mobilising gender (using masculinities to facilitate martial recruitment or structure

[56]See note 23 above; and Amanda Chisholm, and Joanna Tidy, 'Beyond the Hegemonic in the Study of Militaries, Masculinities, and War', *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 99–102.
[57]Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, UN peacebuilding, and the politics of space: locating legitimacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 29.
[58]Julia Welland, 'Liberal Warriors and the Violent Colonial Logics of "Partnering and Advising"', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 2 (2015): 289–307.

labour) to enable conquest and domination.[59] The emphasis placed on gendered difference means that qualitative research on masculinities can become a voyeuristic enterprise not as much locating masculinities in themselves but locating difference and fetishising it. Due to the role of interpretation in reading gender, or the granular focus on specific practices for in-depth approaches, a risk remains of highlighting aspects which are perceived to be 'other' as defining masculinities in a neo-colonial way. Alternatively, this can lead to another colonial imaginary, a kind of pure unadulterated precolonial 'traditional masculinity' that falls into 'the fantasy of a precolonial, non-conflictual and homogenous' masculinity.[60] This can result in either a directly harmful account of 'traditional masculinity' as violent and oppressive, or a less obvious but still harmful romanticised account of 'traditional masculinity' as a domain of unfettered liberation unadulterated by colonial modernity.[61] In either case, the process of locating masculinity is highly likely to result in a kind of misstep whereby an overly coherent account of masculinity is constructed by colouring in an image of conflict-affected manhood that colonial logic has sketched.

Addressing this presents distinct challenges. A few principles might assist here, though they are far from foolproof. Practising feminist reflexivity, collaboration and attention to context may help in some ways address the most egregious examples. Through collaboration and reflexivity, it might be possible to interrogate whether the accounts being produced unduly emphasise points of difference or falling into colonial tropes of racialised men (such as barbarism, perceived femininity or hypersexuality). However, collaboration and reflexivity do not necessarily avoid such practices, as shown by existing research on masculinities that has fallen into the trap of reproducing colonial tropes so far despite articulating a commitment to reflexivity.[62] Explicitly placing the relations of colonialism as a key component of work might help uncover further mechanisms for addressing this tendency, especially as colonial legacies have been so key to many sites of conflict and the masculinities that emerge within them. By doing this future scholarship might be more able to uncover how patterns which create enduring barriers to opposing violence are rooted in colonial legacies. A conscious attentiveness to colonial legacies has been productive in some key recent studies on masculinities and conflict, such as Sara De Jong's recent study of how colonial tropes shaped the military masculinities of Afghan interpreters, producing gendered aspirations for development and offering militarism as a pathway for this to be achieved.[63] Attentiveness to colonial legacies in studying conflict not only provides possibilities of avoiding misunderstanding but hopefully can help to further contextualise the masculinities which shape conflict.

[59]Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); and Maria Lugones, 'The coloniality of gender', in *Feminisms in Movement: Theories and Practices from the Americas*, eds. L. De Souza Lima, E. Otero Quezada and J. Roth (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2024), 35–58.

[60]Kopano Ratele, 'Masculinities Without Tradition', *Politikon* 40, no. 1 (2013): 133–56.

[61]ibid.

[62]Paul Amar, 'Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out? Charging the Police with Sexual Harassment in Egypt', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 3 (2011): 299–328; H. Hudson, 'Decolonising Gender and Peacebuilding: Feminist Frontiers and Border Thinking in Africa', *Peacebuilding* 4, no. 2 (2016): 194–209; and Mrinalini Sinha, '"Colonial masculinity: The 'manly Englishman'and the 'effeminate Bengali'in the late nineteenth century"', in *Colonial masculinity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

[63]Sara De Jong, 'Resettling Afghan and Iraqi Interpreters Employed by Western Armies: The Contradictions of the Migration – Security Nexus', *Security Dialogue* 53, no. 3 (2022): 220–237.

Highlighting these risks associated with locating masculinities in sites of conflict doesn't intend to portray them as issues which have been resolved. We do however suggest further exploration of feminist methodologies in the field of peace and conflict studies is necessary if the scholarship is to move beyond diagnosing the most extreme excesses of masculine violence.

Conclusion: feminist curiosity in sites of conflict

The invisibility of masculinities in sites of conflict remains a perplexing challenge for those who want to uncover how gender might facilitate resistance to violence. It would be easy for those working on conflict to continue to either ignore masculinities entirely, as has often been the norm, or to conceptually relegate them to the most obviously gendered domains (such as men's violence towards women, or violent practices within armed groups). As scholars who study masculinities and argue they are integral to conflict, neither of these approaches is acceptable. While this article has proposed several strategies to help move beyond this impasse for those undertaking qualitative interview work ('reading' gender, strong objectivity and in-depth approaches), we feel the work to help uncover how masculinities function remains urgent. Some of these strategies are likely to be well-worn, particularly for feminist scholarship that comes from other disciplinary spaces such as area studies and anthropology, as shown by other contributions in this special issue. However, for work on masculinities in peace and conflict studies, the methodological approaches have remained remarkably constrained, and struggled to go beyond establishing that masculinities do matter and highlighting the most violent iterations. Considering the risks and challenges we have observed in our work so far, we believe there is a particular need for more creative methods, especially those which draw on art, participant action research, decolonial approaches, and historical inquiry. By doing this, we believe scholars of conflict will be able to practice feminist curiosity in the sense that Cynthia Enloe describes.[64] This is precisely because so much work done until this point has remained resolutely *un*curious about masculinities we must go beyond the 'need to be genuinely curious about other's lack of curiosity' and ask more challenging questions about where masculinities function, how they might exhibit contradictions, and importantly how they might change to shift rather than just establishing that they do in fact matter in sites of conflict.[65] To do this, the techniques that were used to show that masculinities matter in conflict may not suffice to illuminate the masculinities that can serve to undermine violence in sites of conflict.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

[64]Cynthia Enloe, *The curious feminist: Searching for women in a New Age of Empire* (Univ of California Press, 2004), 3–5.
[65]Ibid., 3.

Notes on contributors

Asmawati Asmawati is an associate professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Abulyatama University, Indonesia. She conducted research on various issues such as education, governmental institutions, economics, women empowerment, community development, economic micro, social enterprise and small and medium enterprise. Furthermore, She worked as one of the management team at the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA) focused on issues of reintegration, peacebuilding, gender and post-conflict development.

David Duriesmith is Lecturer: Gender & Politics at the University of Sheffield. David's research explores the relationship between patriarchy, masculinities and violence from a pro-feminist perspective. He has published on preventing violence after war, men's support for gender equality, foreign fighter networks, the transformation of war, and feminist international relations theory.

Noor Huda Ismail is a visiting fellow at RSIS NTU Singapore and the founder of the Institute for International Peace Building Indonesia.

Sultan Fariz Syah is an independent scholar, researcher and activist with diverse experience in education, environment, gender and social inclusion, post-conflict, community development, sexual and reproductive health, resource mobilisation and corporate management. He has experience working in the charity sector and undertaking research on behalf of a variety of international agencies. His current interests focus on conflict, gender, LGBT, environmental justice, and corporate governance.

ORCID

David Duriesmith http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4210-6113