

The Gang, Violence and the Life Course for Indonesian Male Youth

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Abstract

This paper looks at the phenomenon of male youth gangs in Central Java, Indonesia. Gangs range from civil militias using stand-over tactics, to Islamist *jihadi* groups, to battalions of boys who avenge the honour of their schools. A negative social image has been constructed of Indonesian youth gangs since they threaten civil order, yet relatively little is known about the meanings for members. This paper outlines some basic patterns in schoolboy hostility and gang fighting (*tawuran*). It is argued that for some middle class Javanese males, peer fighting and schoolboy gang membership is an episode in the fractured transition to masculine adulthood in late modern Indonesia, rather than a long-term lifestyle commitment.

Introduction

It has been well-established in the youth studies literature all over the world that the transition of young people to adulthood in late modernity not only takes longer, but is more difficult to describe as a linear phenomenon. This has been even more markedly so during the first decade of the new millenium. British youth researchers Furlong and Cartmel maintain that historically there used to be three kinds of straightforward youth transitions: ‘school to work transitions, domestic transitions and housing transitions’ (2006: 9). Previously the pathway to adulthood followed a straightforward chronological sequence. The young person completed his or her education, found a job,

started to live independently, found a marriage partner, and moved into his or her own home. Skelton (2002) maintains that this model of transition does not fit well with the conditions of late modernity. Research by the author with Indonesian youth during the last two decades suggests that Skelton's argument also holds true for youth in 'middle-rank' developing countries like Indonesia.

Indonesia

The population of Indonesia is estimated at almost 250,000,000, making it the fourth-most populous nation in the world and the largest Muslim-majority country. As a secular constitutional democracy currently ranked 107 of 177 countries by the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2008: 239), Indonesia is a 'normal middle-income country' in the 'global bracket' of countries like Russia, the Philippines and Turkey (Anderson, 2007, 6). The Indonesian population is relatively young and increasingly urbanized. Of the 2008 population, around half were urban dwellers, and over 28 per cent were under 15 (UNDP, 2008: 245). The median age was 27.2 years – 26.7 years for males and 27.7 for females. The current generation of Indonesian youth is the most educated in history, although the quality of that education is sometimes questionable. However, competition for university places is intense and nowadays even a tertiary qualification does not guarantee employment. There is considerable anxiety and tension in the current generation of Indonesian youth about what their future will be, and about when and how full adult status will be gained (Nilan et al., 2009). Dependence on family during education and early working life has become

commonplace for middle class urban youth.

Youth Transitions in Indonesia

Earlier work on youth transitions in Indonesia (Nilan, 2008; 2009) has established conditions of uncertainty and risk for young Indonesians that pertain to more abstract matters than the primarily material concerns of previous generations. In urban settings traditional expectations and fixed life roles have been unsettled. Previous research indicates that, firstly, for ‘urban middle-class young people of both sexes in the marriage “market”, the desire for financial security, combined with re-invented ideals of faith and family, represents the achievement of moral and social order - and diminished risk – in successful “domestic” transitions to marriage and adult life’ (Nilan, 2008: 80).

Secondly, data from young men implied that the masculine path of transition transcribes a discursive contest in which some counter-hegemonic masculinities are being explored, but which still favours the hegemonic subject position of powerful and dominating masculinity, a position which young men struggle to achieve symbolically (Nilan, 2009: 341). This paper also explores that theme to some extent, but focuses more on the lived practices of schoolboy gangs in Central Java, acknowledging that toughness, dominance, and the willingness to resort to violence to resolve interpersonal conflicts are central characteristics of a legitimate masculine identity (Messerschmidt, 1993).

The findings of this author on youth transitions in Indonesia support the view of other youth researchers that ‘we are witnessing increasingly prolonged, decoupled transitions between education and work, dating and mating, and childhood and adulthood’ (Côté, 2003: 2). This is certainly no less true in the West than it is in Java.

‘Bad’ Boys

Guinness (2009: 117) noticed over three decades of *kampung* (poor neighbourhood community) life in the city of Yogyakarta great changes, not only in the self-expression of youth, but in the way they were absorbed into *kampung* society; that is, the way they were making the transition towards adulthood. Guinness particularly noted during the mid-1990s how some unemployed male youth ‘became involved in excessive consumption of alcohol and extreme violence’ (2009: 118) on a routine basis. They held long drinking sessions in which drugs and liquor were consumed, dog meat was eaten and amateur tattoos were bestowed. The night-long sessions of talk, gambling and intoxication would often culminate in fights in which injuries and sometimes even deaths occurred.

Guinness concludes that for *kampung* lads, membership of this tough, hard-drinking, violent male peer group reflected both their resentment of unemployment, marginalisation and disadvantage in an atmosphere of increasing urban wealth, and simultaneously represented a compelling means of constructing a legitimate social

identity. It provided them 'with a way to assert a power that would be recognised, even respected, at least by their peers' (Guinness, 2007: 140). Guinness' claims appear to support Messerschmidt's (1993) thesis that in the late modern era, if a man does not have a steady, reliable job, or other traditional indicators of successful masculinity, violent behavior may establish the legitimising toughness associated with time-honoured models of powerful manhood.

Guinness' ethnographic account (2009) not only concurs with Elmhirst's (2007) research on disaffected young men in Sumatra, but also supports McDowell's (2003) empirical finding in the UK that waged work still constitutes the key route from youth to adulthood for men. In the Yogyakarta *kampung* studied by Guinness, the problem posed by violent youth behaviour was solved primarily by the sudden availability of local employment. Once the offending male youth had jobs they did not behave the same way. This also supports Messerschmidt's thesis that full-time work in the paid labor force represents the most acceptable outlet for accomplishing masculinity (1993:70). In other less fortunate poor neighbourhoods many of the local young toughs Guinness describes might have eventually become members of criminal youth gangs (*gali – gabungan anak liar*) – literally gangs of wild youth. Later again, they might have perhaps graduated to become *preman* (thugs for hire – greatly feared in Indonesia).

The schoolboy gang members described in this paper however, are not *kampung* lads, and it is very unlikely they will ever become *gali* or *preman*. The fact that they are

boys in the final three years of secondary school, indicates that their families have the means to maintain them in the extended schooling now required to obtain a steady job with a reasonable income. At the same time though they are subject to the globally-mediated trend of 'hypermasculinity' (Levy, 2007; Ling, 2001) that places ever increasing pressure on young men to assert their masculinity through displays of power and dominance.

The most curious thing about the schoolboy gang phenomenon in Indonesia is its bounded temporality. The teenage years of heroic gang warfare end abruptly for most youth on the last day of senior high school. This finding seems to support one of the conclusions in Barry's (2010) study of young people offending during the transition to adulthood. She points out that many adolescents have few 'socially recognized means of legitimating their stake in the social world'. During this transition phase, some may see anti-social behaviour 'as their only means of gaining recognition meantime, even if such recognition comes only from the temporary network of friends within the school and wider local community' (Barry, 2010: 134). Later when 'more legitimate opportunities and sources of recognition are offered to them in early adulthood' they desist from such practices (Barry, 2010: 134).

Schoolboy Gangs

Between 2006 and 2010 there appear to have been around five to seven notable schoolboy gangs in Solo, at least one but possibly two from a technical high school, at

least two from Muslim high schools and two from government high schools in disadvantaged areas. The number and notoriety of these gangs changes from year to year as different cohorts of pupils move through, and contradictory accounts were given by informants. Yogyakarta is a larger city than Solo. In 2008 it was established that ‘there are 23 school gangs including secular, Catholic, Christian, and Islamic school gangs’ (Kadir 2009: 1). Graffiti all around Yogyakarta and Solo reveal years of contestation between high school boy gangs.

Kadir’s investigations found that hostility was barely concealed and emotions ran high. Yet for many young men in the Central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, being involved in gang conflict at school is part of the ‘sweetest experience’ they like to remember fondly after they have left school (Kadir, 2009: 1). There was great pleasure in planning strategy and running with the pack. Actual combat was exciting and victory was exhilarating. They were saddened when their comrades were wounded and devastated when they lost a fight. In essence, school was boring but the gang was thrilling. Tellingly, some young male workers and university students even return sometimes to their old school gates in the afternoon to urge on the current teenage gangs and reminisce about battles they fought. Involvement in gang fighting and campaigns while at school appears to give young men a solid sense of purpose, and an ontologically strong masculine identity (see Tilly, 2000). Yet this is confined to a relatively short period of the now extended transition to male adulthood.

It can be argued that the intense period of male gang membership while boys are at

secondary school in Indonesia is an example of an 'episode' in the now fragmented life course (Leccardi, 2006: 15; see Bauman, 1995). As Bauman wrote, 'fragmented life tends to be lived in episodes, in a series of unconnected events. Insecurity is a point at which being breaks down into fragments, and life into episodes' (2001: 160). In the 'sweet', temporally-bounded experience of gang membership and violence, young men can be heroes and villains, and the risk of injury or even death is real. For example, Tadié's (2006:48-55) study of schoolboy gangs in Jakarta found that the number of major battles in any one year numbered around 200 and there were 26 deaths from such battles in 2000. Yet at the same time there is a strong symbolic aspect to the rituals, heroism and suffering of schoolboy gangs, to their passionate defence of honour, principles and territory, that is worthy of investigation if we wish to understand the deeper meanings.

In her work on temporality and uncertainty in the life-course, Leccardi (2006: 16) maintains that 'young people are asked by society to delineate the course of their own biographical time, to build a meaningful relationship with social time. This means constructing significant connections between an individual and collective, past, present and future'. Membership in the lower to middle-class school gangs described here implies a significant connection between the young man and a wider collective identity and purpose. It serves as an example of a broad project 'able to unite the individual and collective dimensions' (Leccardi, 2006: 32) through singularity of purpose and agreement about appropriate conduct.

Methodology

Some of the interview and observational data used here was collected in Solo as part of a cross-national study of masculinity and violence in Indonesia and India, funded by the Australian international aid organisation AusAID¹. 25 interviews with men and a focus group were conducted in Solo, and extensive observations of male youth culture were made during periods of fieldwork in Solo and Yogyakarta in 2007, 2008 and 2009. Other data came from an informant and co-researcher in Yogyakarta.

Young Men, Violence and Gangs

Summarising a century of social science research on male youth gangs, Hunt and Laidler (2001) point out that ‘violence is endemic to gang life’. It is well-established that violence takes place between gangs, and in gangs, in rites of initiation and competitive disputes between members of the same gang. This was certainly the case for the schoolboy gangs described in this paper. However, it is noted that most studies of gang violence investigate young adult male gangs engaged in some aspect of organised crime, which is not the case here. Schoolboy gangs in Central Java are also

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quite different to the latino gangs studied by Carles Feixa, in accounts given in Feixa and Nilan (2006), and Feixa et al. (2008), for example, because peer fighting with fists and feet is their chief activity above all. Latin kings and *chavos bande* are much more formally organised and temporally continuous than the relatively short-lived, pugilistic urban gangs of young Indonesian men considered here.

A 2004 report for the United Nations on the causes of civil violence in Indonesia claims that clashes between groups of male youth or drunken brawls constitute the single most important trigger for wider conflict. Notably, in all parts of the world young men dominate in riots and various other forms of group violence (Varshney, Panggabean and Tadjoeeddin, 2004; see also McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). In Indonesia, however, the nature of such clashes needs to be considered in its specificity (Varshney, Panggabean and Tadjoeeddin, 2004: 8). The United Nations report found that, ‘youth clashes have precipitated riots that took nearly 40% of all lives in violence since 1990. As a share of incidents, they also constitute the largest category’ (Varshney, Panggabean and Tadjoeeddin, 2004: 8).

Tadié’s (2006) research in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, establishes a number of basic facts about everyday violence (*la violence quotidienne*) in the cities of Java. The perpetrators are young men. While drug wars, civil militias and crime gangs account for much of this violence, school rivalries also play a part. Gangs from different vocational schools in Jakarta (private and state) fight each other regularly (Tadié, 2009), moving around on foot and in buses. The school gang rivalry in Indonesian

cities is imagined in symbolic and territorial ways by gang members themselves. They speak of heroes and enemies, loyalists and intruders, the faithful and the infidels, inclusion and exclusion (Kadir, 2009). To understand the kinds of masculine symbolism that informs struggles over territory and honour, it is wise to look briefly at the history of youthful heroism in the nation.

Historical Antecedents for Gang Violence

The phenomenon of gangs has a long and unusually heroic history in the archipelago (Brown and Wilson 2007; Anderson 2001). The historic heroism of youth – *pemuda* – fighting for independence and democracy has remained a proud symbol of Indonesian nationhood into the twenty-first century (Robinson and Utomo, 2003: 5). The revolutionary period in the late 1940s was a time of martyrdom and swashbuckling heroism for the young freedom fighters, for example, ‘the cowboys stood in the middle of the road with revolvers on their hips and knives in their belts’ (Idrus et al., 1968: 1). Vickers maintains that in accounts like these the youthful revolutionary hero of Indonesia was born. He had long hair held back by a bandana, was dressed in coolie trousers made of sacking and brandished a samurai sword (Vickers, 2005: 98). Later in the history of the nation, politically-motivated gangs of youth took a prominent role in the heroic struggle that brought down the corrupt Suharto regime in 1998. In the years that followed, radical Islamic *jihadi* gangs and groups figured largely not only on the national stage, but in international security concerns, following a series of terrorist attacks, the most recent in July 2009. It is claimed there are gangs of professed Islamist

thugs in all parts of Muslim Indonesia (Brown and Wilson, 2007). Schoolboy gangs operating out of Muslim schools are often apparently networked into one or more of these larger Muslim gangs (Kadir, 2009). However there is rarely much unity between Muslim youth groups. They claim different theological, political and ideological ground, and frequently fight each other. There is a history of Muslim in-fighting in Solo that prevails to this day.

Brown and Wilson (2007: 8) conclude that after democracy took hold in 1998, localised 'ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious identities' were reinvigorated and politicised, providing significant symbolic capital for those seeking status advancement through membership of gangs, militias and *jihadi* movements. Furthermore, powerful interest groups co-opted or paid gangs and youth groups to carry out criminal or subversive activities for their political and/or business ends. Van Klinken (2007) notes the change in civil conflict after 1998 from a top-down state-driven pattern of violence, to a pattern of lateral power struggles between different groups. Gangs of all kinds played the dominant role in this 'everyday' violence. Yet, 'contrary to popular conceptions, collective violence in Indonesia is not widespread. Group violence has high local concentrations' (Varshney, Panggabean and Tadjoeuddin, 2004: 37, see also Collins, 2002). This is certainly the case in Central Java.

Central Java itself has a very long history of war, conflict and oppression. The Javanese aristocracy held hierarchical power over the local peasantry in two ways: 'simple military terror and religious enthusiasm. They used both' (Geertz, 1960: 231).

After the Japanese left in 1945 the local civil conflict was particularly violent (Colombijn, 2002). During the struggle against the Dutch for independence, ‘a variety of different laskar organizations sprang up in the towns and in the villages. Each laskar organization had its own particular form and style ... they were composed of village youths, political leaders and religious notables ... frequently more than one laskar organization could be found in a single village’ (Soejatno, 1974: 102). Although they fought together on occasions for the revolution they also fought each other. This history of fragmented civil violence is still reflected today in the plethora of youth gangs, militias and *jihadi* groups found in Central Java. Heroic accounts reinforce a local culture of masculine violence rooted in ancient and recent factionalism. So gang membership expresses both a status based on tradition and a powerful identity in the present. Thus a strong connection is made between individual and collective, past, present and future (Leccardi, 2006: 16).

Honour and Territory

For some boys the unifying point of collective and individual identity at this point in the life course is religion, while others achieve a sense of holistic belonging through unity of purpose in the simple defence of territory and honour,

I’ll give you an example [of when fighting happens]. If it’s a matter of principle between one gang and another gang, when they meet, they’ll clash. Or it will be the issue of territorial control between this gang and that gang (Bachtiar, 20, Solo, July 2009).

Bachtiar implies that the urban space of Solo is divided into territories ostensibly 'owned' by various levels of gangs. When the boundaries of these territories are breached, defence of the homeland must take place. At the same time though, as Tadié (2006) points out, it is the actualisation of inter-gang violence that defines these very same boundaries.

In a similar vein, Herry below implies the strong obligation to physically defend his masculine honour,

As far as fighting goes, I never fought with a friend from my own class, but I fought with boys from my own school because I felt insulted by those boys because of how they looked at me. I could never bear it when they treated me that way, I felt my self-respect was crushed (Herry, 21, Solo, December 2009).

Herry was adamant that insult to the honour of tech school boys in Solo could only be answered with violence. When asked whether the problem of schoolboy gang conflict could be addressed by non-violent means, he quickly dismissed the idea, providing a rich description of the emotionally-charged landscape of honour conventions that prevails between the boys,

You've got lads aged 14-19. They think that, especially tech school boys, they think whatever it is, it must be settled by violence. It is not settled by talking with each other, by sharing how they feel. They don't like that way of doing things. They think that what's important is to fight. Striking, fighting. The boy doesn't think of settling the problem by bringing in the family or any kind of sharing. So I mean it can't be resolved mutually except by fighting (...) they just snarl, 'I'll rip your head off!' They growl like that. They only want to offer that face because they are so worked up. The mentality of those tech school boys is that they really mean it when they say 'I'm coming looking for you later'. Later he will come looking for you (Herry, 21, Solo, December 2009).

There are a number of points to note in Herry's account. The first is that violent reaction to an offense against honour between tech school boys is expected and obligatory. This implicit claim supports the finding of Cavender (1999) on 'compensatory' masculinity. During the extended transition to adulthood, young men who remain dependent on their families during schooling, and are in the subordinate position of being controlled by the school, struggle to define their masculinity. Violence may become an attractive means to achieve legitimate masculine status, or 'earn respect'. In less affluent areas, where status cannot be readily achieved through conspicuous consumption, allegations of disrespect signify as greater personal insults and are dealt with much more often through violence. Herry had stated earlier that it was not the wealthier senior high school boys in the city who routinely fought each other, but tech school boys from poorer backgrounds. The wealthier boys, he said, were pre-occupied with customising their expensive motorbikes and going out with the most desirable girls, so they didn't get involved much in fighting.

Secondly, in giving the explanation above Herry used a word that means 'face', and verbs that translate as 'snarl' and 'growl'. It seems he is referring to significant understandings of Javanese personhood. As far as men are concerned, *halus* masculinity is refined, governed by control and reason, in contrast to *kasar* masculinity which is unrefined, and governed by emotion and lust. *Halus* masculinity is associated with maturity, wisdom and restraint, while *kasar* masculinity is associated with

immaturity, lack of reflection and excess (Clark, 2004; Peletz, 1995). In short, whereas *halus* humanity is inflected in the direction of God, *kasar* humanity is inflected in the direction of the animal kingdom (Peletz, 1995: 88). Hence the angry young men ‘snarl’ and ‘growl’. They cannot show a mature *halus* face to an enemy because they are young and overwhelmed by emotion. Connell (1995) argues that explanations of men’s violence vary according to different cultural conceptions of a man’s body. The concept of Javanese personhood strongly distinguishes between young and older men and their bodies. It is not neither a biological nor a social model of the body, but a physical body of a certain age through which either a primal chthonic power or a refined higher power is perceived to move more readily.

Gang Rituals and Strategies

Understanding the physically challenging initiation that boys must undergo to join a gang constitutes a useful point of entry for analysing the symbolic content that makes gang identity so strong and thrilling for boys in their teenage years. It is worth pointing out that, as Herry argued above with regard to wealthier senior high school boys, it is mainly boys from lower middle class or working class families who attend Muslim high schools rather than the expensive, better-quality state senior high schools, so perhaps they are more keen to prove themselves as strong fighters. Moreover, Muslim schools are single sex schools, which in the case of boys tends to intensify male peer relations of provocation and competitiveness.

It seems there is a regular initiation into the GNB gang at Muhammadiyah SMA (Muslim Senior High School) in Yogyakarta. At the beginning of semester, new boys can show they are interested in becoming gang members. In the school there is an open-air canteen and lunch area that is dominated and controlled by senior GNB members. The seniors sit here during their breaks and meal times. This is where new boys come to indicate their interest in joining. If they impress the group leaders with their bravado they can be selected to undergo the initiation ritual (Fieldnotes taken while talking to researcher Hatib Kadir in Yogyakarta November 2009).

This account of early semester recruitment confirms Tadié's (2006) finding that during the school year, months of particular intensity for school gang conflict are August and March-April, ceasing as examinations start in late April and May, followed by the holiday months of June and July. It appears that in August each year new boys at the Muslim high school show off their courage and toughness to the senior boys in the public arena of the lunch area. If they succeed in their attempts to impress the seniors, the initiation phase of recruitment takes place,

To become a new member, a boy has to fight for three minutes against seven to ten older gang members all at once. The purpose is for the potential gang member to show his strength and toughness. Obviously the main physical tactic of the new boy is defensive. A senior gang member is the timekeeper. It should be only three minutes. Injuries are received mainly on the face and upper body, like bruises. The point of attack is the face using *pukul dan tendang* (fists and kicks). The initiation is like a small ritual. The three minute test of toughness and strength is rarely failed because the gang needs new members (Fieldnotes taken while talking to researcher Hatib Kadir in Yogyakarta November 2009).

The most striking aspect of this initiation test is that it poses one small boy against up to ten much older boys. However, given the obvious capacity for serious injury, which does not seem to eventuate, we must assume that the blows and kicks of the older boys must be restrained to some extent. It is probably a test of the young boy's courage in

the face of fear as much as anything. In principal the neophyte must stay and defend himself rather than flee. Bruises and swelling might well be worn as badges of honour after the event.

It is also striking that this ritual for a school boy Muslim gang in Central Java precisely matches the chicano gang initiations in America described by Vigil (1996) and Husted (2008) among many others. It entails ‘several gang members attacking the prospective member at the same time; the initiate is expected to fight back, but cannot show any fear or weakness’. The similarity between this ‘street baptism’ (or ‘jumping-in’) and ‘male initiation rites in pre-industrial tribal societies’ is noted (Vigil 1996: 149).

Husted takes the interpretive point further, maintaining that this form of gang initiation ‘can be viewed as a form of rebirth: the pre-initiation individual is ritually murdered and a new gang member is born’ (Husted 2008: 6).

After three painful minutes there is a significant rebirth/reward,

After the initiation ritual has been successfully completed, a new member is taken on a motorbike by a senior gang member to be shown the schools where the gangs are that he will fight. The answer must be given correctly to the question – ‘who is the enemy?’ (Fieldnotes taken while talking to researcher Hatib Kadir in Yogyakarta November 2009).

We can see here the symbolic nature of membership. The new boy initially displays his bravado to the assembled seniors. He must then demonstrate his warrior skills to the senior members of the tribe by fighting very much against the odds and perhaps even shedding blood. The boy is then rewarded by being literally taken up to sit physically

close to the senior, on his motorbike. The inspection of enemy territory and the oral examination of correctly naming the enemy constitute further rites of passage.

This account indicates the level of physical violence that must be endured to even enter the gang, thus preparing novitiates mentally for the kind of violence they will experience in battles with boys from other schools. An account from an informant in Solo indicates how personally terrifying schoolboy gang violence can be,

You know, once I was truly involved in violence with other boys. It started because of some graffiti aimed at us which was done by some guys that we knew were gang members. Yeah, so I was involved in that fight but I didn't get hurt because me and my friends ran away. I was keen to get away because I was scared that later, friends of the guys I had been fighting would bring the gang to really get me. Well, the police didn't get involved, there was no official report or anything. But I can tell you, my heart was really going like a hammer. I could hear it beating loud and fast. I was so scared that later when I got home I had an attack of the terrors (Donny, 24, Solo, July 2009).

An 'attack of the terrors' means uncontrollable shaking and crying. Yet even though Donny had been terrified of vengeful violence at the hands of gang members, he told the story with some pride. This is the kind of 'sweet experience' Kadir alludes to: 'participating in a gang is seen as a requirement for having fun and not missing out on the kinds of events which have become legendary within the oral tradition of youth culture' (Kadir, 2009: 10). Kadir also stresses the status value of the network for gang members,

Boys who are doing *tawuran* (mass fighting and *nglitih* (skirmishing), if they are caught by the local police, are assigned high status within the network of the

gang. Their notoriety and prowess are admired, and often emulated by younger teenagers. By joining gangs, individuals can obtain higher status and power within their network and enjoy the ethic of loyalty from members, which includes giving, receiving and supporting. Friends help each other out when they are going through difficult times, are short of funds or when they are punched (Kadir, 2009: 10).

To sum up what the data is telling us so far, apparent or real affront to individual boys is followed by defence of honour, status and territory through fighting peers (*tawuran*) with fists and feet, and this often takes the form of gang battles between different schools in a city. The symbolism and heroism of gang members is represented in rituals of initiation, and in stories of battle. It is evident that the social organization of masculine prestige (Ortner, 1981; see also Tomsen, 1997) is crucial for understanding gang membership, activities and symbolism.

Schoolboy Gangs and Religious Conflict

As Kadir (2010) shows, much gang violence in Yogyakarta occurs between supporters of different religious groups, whether the gangs are composed of schoolboys or older youths. There was also evidence of this in Solo, as the following comments from one informant demonstrate,

B Where I live, I get involved in violence. It usually happens because of other guys around where I live. Those guys are so intolerant and often abuse me. Or else it's guys of a different

religion. They're always giving me grief and attacking me.
Int: So it's all about your self-esteem, eh.
B That's right. It's about my self-esteem, my beliefs and my principles (Bachtiar, 20, Solo, July 2009).

As a university student Bachtiar was at the time a member of a fundamentalist Muslim student organisation regarded as extreme, but not dangerous. Above he refers to being provoked by other Muslim youth who do not share his extreme views. He also makes reference to fighting with Christian youth. Central Java has an international reputation for violent Islamic radicalism (Ricklefs, 2008: 129; see also Yahya, 2003), and well-muscled male *jihadi* gang members clad in a mixture of military and Arab garments are often visible today on training runs through the streets of Solo and Yogyakarta,

Today *Laskar Jundullah* [local jihadi gang] were *berkonvoi* – motorbikes, trucks, banners going along the road. The young men were wearing the black and white Arab headcloth and black Arabic clothing. They were very loud and threatening. Ordinary locals seemed cowed by them and people were leaving the street and ducking off into side streets and lanes. People were saying, 'Don't look at them, don't make contact' (Fieldnotes, Solo, 31 August 2007).

Echoing the fearsome reputation of older Islamist gangs, gangs in Muslim secondary schools in Yogyakarta were found to have names like: Oestad [always here], RANGER, GriXer, Warrior, Respect and Dr PAY: *Daerah Pemuda Anti-Yahudi* – Anti-Jewish Youth Zone (Kadir, 2009: 8). It seems such gangs blur the Christian and Jewish faiths in their construction of symbolic boundaries.

Data collected in Solo throws some doubt however, over whether there are always tight

links between gangs composed of older males and schoolboy gangs. For example, speaking of how conflict between individual tech school boys escalates into gang skirmishes, Herry stated that,

Friends of the two boys get something out of it too. They get all worked up as well, bringing in the names of gangs they know. Although the boy may be not a gang member, he gives the name of a gang anyway, to protect himself (Herry, 21, Solo, December 2009).

That is, the boys are not really connected to the older gangs (usually Islamist gangs in Solo). They might just know someone in the gang, but they use the name of the established gang to inspire fear in their tech schoolboy opponents.

Muslim Gangs and the Global Islamist Struggle

Nevertheless Kadir (2010) maintains that in Yogyakarta, schoolboy Muslim gangs really are nested within networks of larger gangs and groups, arranged hierarchically under the banners of particular preachers and Islamist political parties. In the period 2000-2002, there were fifty-seven Muslim youth activist groups – *laskar* – recorded in Yogyakarta, each with between 50-700 members (Kristiansen, 2003: 129), of which GPK (Ka'bah Youth Squad) was the largest. Many *laskar* members were also co-members of *Joxin*, the leading Islamist schoolboy gang in Yogyakarta at that time (Kadir, 2010: 3). In the same period the Oestad gang from SMA Muhammadiyah 1 (a Muslim senior high school) formed. The first generation of Oestad members was closely affiliated with the GPK (Kadir, 2009: 9). The hierarchical nature of the network

meant that leaders at the top of GPK for example, could mobilise civil violence for political purposes right down to schoolboy gangs, whose members were especially keen to prove themselves with fists and weapons such as sharpened metal school rulers. Allying themselves with the global Islamist struggle the Oestad gang used the term *jalur Gaza* (Gaza Strip) to refer to their geographical area of authority, the site of their most famous battles with rival Christian schoolboy gangs (Kadir, 2009: 11).

Further evidence mirroring the global Islamist struggle was found in the battle strategies of the Oestad schoolboy gang. *Shaf* is an attacking strategy where the first line of troops is the bravest, the second line is for defence, and the third for control and back-up. The gang leader is in the third line, controlling the attacking line, and defending against an attack from behind. The term *shaf* refers to the orderly rows of Muslim men engaged in *sholat* (prayer) in the mosque. It is believed the strength of *shaf* determines victory in *tawuran* (fighting), just as the orderliness of prayer lines is believed to bring greater blessing (Kadir, 2009: 12).

Another strategy, *kloter*, refers symbolically to groups of Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca by plane. A *kloter* is a group of fighters that forms a garrison or attack/defence position. Attack takes place in waves rather than lines. For defence, each position acts like a garrison, from outer defence to inner defence so that the garrison nearest the school has the strongest *kloter*. Another strategy - *ishlah* (reconciliation), is a temporary tactic of ceasing hostilities between gangs for some larger strategic purpose, like combining with another gang to attack a third gang for

example. These military strategies are taught to new junior members of the gang every year in September (Kadir, 2009: 12).

In one sense perhaps this does not amount to much more than schoolboys ‘playing’ at war games, as they have always done. Yet in terms of youth studies, it is the temporally-bounded and class-specific nature of this schoolboy gang engagement that should take our attention. In contrast to almost all members of Muslim schoolboy gangs who will ‘grow out’ of peer fighting, adult Islamist militia members tend to come from the ranks of the unemployed and under-educated, men who did not complete secondary school,

Hisbollah is a local para-military Islamist group. Informant Hari sees them going on training runs around Solo in their big black army boots. And they go off on training camps. Maybe he says, they think they will need to go and fight in Ambon soon. *Hisbollah* is not banned. Hari says the boys look like *buruh* (blue-collar workers), or like *orang kampong* (rural lads), because that’s exactly who they are. He says many are unemployed or under-employed (Fieldnotes, Solo, 29 October 2007).

The schoolboy gang members studied by Kadir in Yogyakarta, by Tadié in Jakarta, and by this author in Solo do not automatically proceed into adult gangs, either Islamist or otherwise. As schoolboys they might admire the heroes of such threatening gangs, but they rarely seem to emulate them in adult life. Once they have completed senior high school, paid for by parental sacrifice, almost all will enter the lower middle class or skilled working class labour market, or pursue higher education. Once in the workplace or the university campus, a completely different set of social and cultural conditions prevail that do not favour continued gang activity or peer fighting. Neither employers

nor university authorities are tolerant of gang violence and there is relatively little free time. This sequence of events reminds us of Messerschmidt's (1993) point that a masculine behaviour such as street violence is a response to the particular conditions and situations in which men participate. 'In other words, men do masculinity according to the social situation in which they find themselves' (1993: 84). So it is not surprising that as the structural situation changes abruptly from the school to public life, so does the behaviour of these young Javanese men.

Gang and fighting behaviour that continues beyond school days in Indonesia is generally associated with immaturity and lower class masculinity. It is certainly not associated with the key Indonesian middle class values of prosperity and family life. Yet nostalgia lingers in accounts of young men occasionally re-visiting the sites of their schoolboy gang battles, even while they must engage daily with the middle class male labour market or a higher educational institution which does not require physical prowess, courage or daring. They clearly feel that something satisfying and pleasurable has been lost.

Conclusion

Indonesian schoolboy gang membership and peer fighting in the accounts above can be understood as both a rite of passage and a temporally-bounded phase or episode in the transition to middle-class adult masculinity. In that sense, the local phenomenon of juvenile male gang violence described here is tied to both the global discourse of

warrior hypermasculinity (exemplified in the 2009 blockbuster movie *Avatar* for example), and the restructuring of male labour markets. As members of the heroic, symbolic world of the schoolboy gang, boys can 'build a meaningful relationship with social time' (Leccardi, 2006: 16) through connecting themselves to the mythical past on one hand and the political present on the other. However, there is little connection to the future. For most, there will be no future as a gang member, or as a hero fighting for territory and honour, and much less risk of injury or arrest. This finding concurs with Barry's point that youth crime declines 'rapidly' around the age of 20 (2010: 134).

Whereas, in the past, there were persuasive political and ideological reasons why some middle class Indonesian young men might continue to be involved in activist groups or gangs well into adulthood, those reasons have faded as Indonesia has moved into full democracy and the middle class has grown exponentially. Ideological zeal still remains a rationale for violence for male members of Islamist groups, but even here the demands of middle class work, marriage and respectability tend to pull better-educated men away from involvement in radical activism (for example Nilan, 2008). In summary, there is now little connection (Bauman, 2001) between the intense warrior world of physical combat, battle strategies and heroic defence in the schoolboy gang; and the restrained, repetitive, bureaucratic world of contemporary middle class male occupations in Indonesia.

However, the taste for violent engagement with male peers acquired during schooldays may find its expression in the continued consumption of violent games played on

computers and hand-held consoles, especially those that use avatars. Online games are a significant phenomenon for young men in Indonesia and usage is increasing all the time (Wahid, Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2006). As Boellstorff (2006: 29) reminds us, ‘gaming and its associated notion of play may become a master metaphor for a range of human social relations’, including in this case the ‘sweet’ experiences of violent schoolboy gangs.

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