MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN INDONESIA

In qualitative interviews conducted during 2009/2010, 86 male interviewees frequently “explained” violence between men in Indonesia as resulting from low socioeconomic status. This paper is not about how violence actually happens, but about how it is explained by Indonesian men. We unpack the discursive assertions of interviewees, and first explore the cultural utility and validity of the “hydraulic pressure” model of male violence found popular in the Indonesian mass media. While some men used this simple model of explosive violence caused by pressure, others acknowledged the active choice of men in marginal economic circumstances to use violence. We then consider this range of explanations for the link between socioeconomic disadvantage and male violence through the lens of Messerschmidt’s “compensatory” thesis on violence and masculinity.

Keywords: Indonesia, masculinity, violence, unemployment, economic pressure

Rather than detailing how violence actually happens in Indonesia, we examine how it is explained by Indonesian men. Such an approach allows us to stand back from debates about the nature of violence and see how the link between masculinity and violence is made in everyday discourse, in a developing country with a troubled past (see Colombijn, 2005). In his account of violence, contemporary social theorist Žižek (2008, p. 1) invites us to stand back from the “fascinating lure” of what he calls “subjective” violence—crime and terror—in order to “perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts.” Low-level violence is ubiquitous in contemporary Indonesian society and continues to have a major impact on community, prosperity, health and wellbeing. It primarily involves men. Unpacking the underpinnings of male violence is a complex process with arguments often situated around notions of traditional male roles, socioeconomic status, and even cultural tolerance models. In this article we explore explanatory accounts of socioeconomic status as one contour of everyday social violence in In-

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donesia. In doing so we pay particular attention to the ways in which men understand violence in relation to masculine honor and respect.

In Indonesia there is a strong cultural understanding of gender as *kodrati*—pre-determined or destined by God, rather than *konstruksi*—socially constructed. Many therefore hold the view that violence is inherently part of male nature (Adian, 2001). Moreover, men from the higher and lower strata of society are often seen as behaving in accordance with the ancient dichotomy of aristocrat and peasant, which presumes a different male essence for each (Brenner, 1995). Since men from lower socioeconomic strata are considered to be in principle much less refined, they can be expected to explode in violence far more readily. While this is a common cultural viewpoint in Indonesia, we find that the agency of men to make choices about their involvement in violence is neglected in such thinking.

We embed our interpretation of interview data in a critical engagement with James Messerschmidt's (1993) thesis of the relationship between masculinity and violence, which does recognize men's agency in making a choice to be involved in violence. Messerschmidt argued that men want to achieve a legitimate masculine status, linked to the demonstration of independence, dominance, toughness, competitiveness and heterosexuality. In situations where the accomplishment of a legitimate masculine status is not available through conventional means, such as occupation, income and material ownership, engaging in violent or criminal behavior may gain marginalized men the respect and material benefits they want. The involvement of such men in a local culture where violence is normalized, consolidates and validates for each man his framing of self as powerful and deserving of honor and respect. Although Messerschmidt's (1993) thesis pertains to the USA, we maintain it is productive for our analysis of accounts by men of violence in Indonesia.

BACKGROUND

The study of Indonesian masculinities is reasonably well developed (for example, Boellstorff, 2004; Clark, 2010; Elmhirst, 2007; Harjito, 2002; Kurniawan, 2009; Nilan, Demartoto & Wibowo, 2011; Oetomo, 2000; Sunardi, 2009; Wilson, 2010; Wulan, 2009) and has covered a range of issues. Many such studies have focused specifically on masculinities in a particular region of the country and have demonstrated the diversity of gender constructions. For example, Nurul Ilmi Idrus has written specifically about traditional Buginese norms of masculinity in Makassar:

A man is expected to be brave [*warani*], so he can be the protector of his family, or family *siri'*; he is clever [*macca*], so he can be the role model; he is wealthy [*sugi'*], so he can maintain his family; and he is a religious leader [*panrita*], so he can guide his family. (Idrus, 2004, p. 37)

Similarly, in the ancient Javanese courtly tradition, the things that pointed to the position of the man who is ascribed honour included the quality of his: *karya*—work; *wanita*—wife/wives; *wisma*—house; *curiga*—*keris*, a ceremonial dagger (connotes battle status and capacity); *turangga*—horse (nowadays the means of transport such as a car); and *kukila*—cockfight bird (or the agent of aggression) (see Moertono, 1968/2009).

On a more contemporary note, Long (2007) found young men from Riau province who participated in beauty pageants were highly competitive in any contests that

gained them *prestasi*—the status of a winner. Winning proved the superiority of their Malay identity in the context of high in-migration by other Indonesian ethnic groups. Elsewhere in Sumatra, Elmhirst (2007) found that young village men left behind when women migrated for work became “tigers and gangsters,” resorting to threats of violence, seeking to “assert themselves as modern masculine subjects in unexpected and sometimes threatening ways. At issue is how young men can challenge the fact that they have been ‘left behind’, culturally, economically and geographically” (p. 236).

Although Elmhirst’s work proves the exception, the link between masculinities and socioeconomic status in Indonesia has not been well-documented. Below, we examine the broader scholarly work on: Indonesian masculinities; socioeconomic status, marginality and opportunity, violence and masculinities; and, issues surrounding deprivation and socioeconomic status in Indonesia.

Indonesian Masculinities: Diversity, Difference and Communalities

As indicated above, Indonesian masculinities are diverse and temporal in character, shifting across local communities and regions of the archipelago. Certainly the five cities in our study: Jakarta, Pekanbaru (Riau), Solo, Makassar and Mataram, are each distinctive in terms of ethnicity, economic activity and relative wealth. Each city shapes the particular forms of masculinity for men living there, and also the kinds of violent interactions that might take place even though, over the past 350 years, colonization, authoritarian rule, modernization and urbanization in Indonesia have reshaped the gender order towards greater cultural homogeneity (Peletz, 1995). Moreover, as Peletz’s (2009, p. 2) broad study of gender in Southeast Asia demonstrates, there are “numerous commonalities ... that have long underlain the striking diversity of the region,” including “kinship/gender” and “sexuality.” It is valid then, to speak in general terms of the social construction of gender for men in Indonesia. Speaking broadly of Indonesian masculinities, Kurniawan (2009) points out in a men’s issue of *Jurnal Perempuan* (Women’s Journal) that Indonesian social norms require a man to demonstrate he is *mampu*—capable, able:

Ciri khas jenis maskulinitas ini adalah adanya peran penguasaan terhadap sumber daya ekonomi, seperti lapangan pekerjaan [A typical characteristic of normative Indonesian masculinity is the demonstrated capacity to control economic resources, such as income from paid work]. (Kurniawan, 2009, p. 41)

Since there is such emphasis on the demonstration of *mampu*, the man who appears to be *tidak mampu*—not capable—feels a great sense of *malu*—shame—and fears losing *harga diri*—self respect. In such circumstances, a man may “*melakukan tindakan kompensasi*”—carry out compensatory actions—especially *kekerasan*—violence and dominating others (Kurniawan, 2009, p. 43). The same author draws our attention to the fact that compensatory aggressive behavior by men with few resources is tolerated and even excused in Indonesian society because it has been normalized over the centuries by the “*dogma maskulinitas tradisional*”—traditional dogma of masculinity—that justifies male violence (Kurniawan, 2009, p. 43). As a consequence, male social violence is an everyday, “routine” phenomenon in many communities (Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2008, p. 1). The residual effects of 300 years of Dutch colonization, resistance against the Japanese invasion, the subsequent war

against the Dutch for independence, and the late twentieth-century struggle for democracy, are all further important factors that shape this phenomenon.

The relative position of men in religious and inherited status hierarchies are also important discourses of differentiation in masculine identity across the nation. The status of a man relative to marriage and family relations remains a key signifier of masculine legitimacy. A recent study of masculinities in five Asian countries, including close neighbor Malaysia, demonstrated that the family is still of prime importance in men's lives and "honour and being in control" are important in defining masculinity (Ng, Tan, & Low, 2008, p. 354). These claims also hold true in Indonesia. Indonesian gender scholar Dede Oetomo (2000) has described the hegemonic image of Indonesian masculinity as follows:

Men always acting as heads of families and as breadwinners, operating in the public sphere, and not being responsible for the upbringing of children or the sharing of household work. In the area of sexuality, one would infer a thinly disguised 'legendary' heterosexual promiscuity of men as initiators and dominators in heterosexual intercourse. (p. 57)

Sunardi (2009) points out that prior to the end of the New Order¹ in 1998, men were under pressure to be "strong males" (p. 464) as an expression of national character.

According to Wieringa (2003), the New Order militaristic State until 1998 was "built on an excessively masculine power obsessed with control" (p. 72). Clark (2010) maintains that "the authoritative, masculinist and monolithic discourse of the Suharto [New Order] era was intolerant of any perceived threats to the heteronormative social order" (p. 15). In official New Order discourse, the role of a woman—*kodrat wanita*—was to be a wife and mother; modest, docile, focused on home and hearth (Robinson, 2001; Utomo, 2005). The role of a man—*kodrat pria*—was to be a husband, father and provider (Nilan, Donaldson, & Howson, 2009). The term *kodrat*, like *kodrati*, implies a deterministic discourse of gender (Adian, 2001) in which the nature of men, like women, is a fixed essence.

Socioeconomic Status in Indonesia: Poverty, Marginality and the Rhetoric of Opportunity

Indonesia is the fourth most densely populated country in the world. 45% of the population of almost 240 million now live in urban areas and compete for income opportunities. The GDP growth rate since 2008 has been 5 to 6.5% (Suryadarma & Sumarto, 2011, p. 158), indicating some radical changes in the nature of work. For example, less than 40% of the labor force is still engaged in agriculture, 13% work in industry and almost 50% in services (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2010, pp. 19–25). Men from a poor background, with little education, struggle to find any kind of income in urban slums. Yet significantly, it seems to be not so much poverty *per se* that is linked to male violence in Indonesia, but failure to generate sufficient income—unemployment or underemployment—in the local context of unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity (see Tadjoeddin, Chowdhury, & Murshed, 2010; Urdal, 2006).

In this paper, socioeconomic status is treated as both a *discursive and rhetorical practice* and a *concrete reality* (in relation to education, income, life changes, social capital and so on). That is, we do not seek to measure socioeconomic status here but

rather view it as a perceived location of a person in the socio-economic hierarchy. This status hierarchy is largely articulated around such things as occupation, educational attainment, income, possessions and type of dwelling (see Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Graetz, 1995). In Indonesia, like many rapidly developing countries, there is a sharp contrast between the living conditions of those with high socioeconomic status and those with low socioeconomic status. For example, Indonesia was ranked a lowly 124 of 187 countries in the 2011 Human Development Report (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2011), despite the strength of its rapidly developing economy. While the official unemployment rate is just over 7%, this conceals the fact that there is widespread underemployment and even wider participation in the informal labor sector (BPS, 2010, pp. 19–25) where wages are very low. Consequently, in 2010 13.3% of the population were living below the national poverty line equivalent to around US\$1.50 per day. Poor and near-poor Indonesian households are highly vulnerable to economic stress (Suryadarma & Sumarto, 2011, p. 166).

Yet as Farid (2005) points out, even today it is uncommon to see much acknowledgement that prevailing economic inequalities shape the different life chances and opportunities of rich and poor in Indonesia. The New Order government strongly promoted the idea that Indonesian society was fundamentally egalitarian, where all citizens could prosper if they worked hard enough. So the fact that one man was poor and another rich was likely to be “ascribed” to a “status steeped in history” (Farid, 2005, p. 170). In other words, the feudal past was the touchstone for explaining why one man in Indonesia would struggle to support his family while another lived in extraordinary luxury. Ancient feudal kingdoms of the archipelago drew a sharp distinction between aristocrats and peasants (Maulana & Situngkir, 2009). In Java, for example, aristocratic masculinity was celebrated as *halus*—refined, courtly and highly controlled—while peasant or lower class masculinity was constructed as *kasar*—“impolite, rough, uncivilized” (Geertz, 1960, p. 232)—and likely to react violently. As Wulan (2009) demonstrates, even today members of Javanese aristocratic families, including young boys, are expected to show far more refined behavior than people of peasant origins, who are thought to remain prone to outbursts of rough, uncivilized behavior throughout their lives. So it is assumed that an Indonesian man from a privileged background will behave in an orderly, peaceful manner because such behavior is expressive of high status masculinity, while a man from a background of poverty will exhibit toughness, emotional volatility and physical aggression because of his peasant origins. These ideas came through strongly in our interviews. They echo public rhetoric (Colombijn, 2005). In public accounts of male violence in Indonesia it is difficult to disentangle cultural notions of inherited privilege, gender and status from the facts of socioeconomic status.

Masculinity, Violence and Low Socioeconomic Status: Is There a Link?

As indicated earlier, men who appear *tidak mampu*—not capable—can feel a great sense of *malu*—shame. Within these circumstances men may choose to use aggressive behavior in order to gain income *and* status (see Barker, 2005; Cavender, 1999; Messerschmidt, 1993). This is especially so if the local milieu is one where toughness and physical capacity are valued. A good Indonesian example of such circumstances is provided by Guinness (2009) who observed young men over three

decades of *kampung* (poor neighborhood) life in Yogyakarta. During the mid-1990s, unemployed male youth “became involved in excessive consumption of alcohol and extreme violence” (Guinness, 2009, p. 118). They held drinking sessions at the village patrol post. Any young woman who passed was verbally harassed (see also Elmhirst, 2007). Drinking sessions often culminated in fights. Guinness (2009) concludes the *kampung* lads used drinking and fighting as a “way to assert a power that would be recognized, even respected, at least by their peers” (p. 140). The situation only changed for the better when employment became available nearby.

In their Makassar study, Nasir and Rosenthal (2009) found similar high alcohol use and violent quarrels among marginalized young men. With little hope of work they chose notoriety rather than shame and invisibility. Elmhirst (2007) found a similar kind of choice in a Sumatran village. Economically marginalized young men forcibly established their manliness in circumstances where they could not find “the kind of work that completes the trajectory into full manhood” (Elmhirst, 2007, p. 234).

Barron, Kaiser and Pradhan’s (2009) study of relatively stable areas of Indonesia confirm that economic factors are important in accounting for local violence. In such situations, men compare their own status unfavorably and take action to redress their perceived position of inferiority. The choice to pursue violence may express “an implicit admission of impotence” (Žižek, 2008, p. 69) when men feel themselves to be devalued. Žižek claims such incidents in the West often seemingly come from nowhere and may have no ultimate political meaning. However, in Indonesia such incidents are almost always about a political demand of some kind, usually economic, religious or cultural. And they represent choice. But choice is not often a part of how male civil violence is routinely explained.

Interpreting Violence? From Structural Determinism to Agency/Resistance

The definition of violence used in the project from which data are taken was as follows:

Any act—physical, verbal or emotional—that is intended to, or results in, harm to another person or group. For example, verbal abuse, harassment, bullying, intimidation, extortion, fighting, rioting, assault, rape, torture, manslaughter, murder.

Broadly speaking, explanations of violence in Indonesia can be categorized into those focusing on structural pressures/constraint—the explosive “hydraulic model,” and those focusing on expression/resistance (choice). Explosive pressure (corporeal and emotional) is frequently inferred in Indonesian public discourse about violence (Colombijn, 2005). For example, the common Indonesian term *amok* refers to a mob in a murderous frenzy (Colombijn), as if their bodies were possessed by a demonic force. Boellstorff (2004, p. 469) describes *amok* as a “masculine and often collective enraged violence” triggered by shame or threat. Men running *amok* are perceived to be overwhelmed by their powerful emotions, imagined as a “chthonic force” moving up through the body of the man (Nilan, Demartoto & Wibowo, 2011, p. 474). Economic privation and constraint builds up pressure that explodes into *amok* behavior (Colombijn). In such a model structure is emphasized over agency. The Indonesian media often depict male offenders as inexorably com-

pelled to violence—individual and collective, against men and against women—by economic pressure, which implicitly absolves them of responsibility for their actions (Kurniawan, 2009). Describing how economic stress causes male violence, our informants often linked the terms *tekanan/menekan* (pressure), *stres* (stress) and *emosi* (emotions). Economic stress is thought to cause powerful emotions to move up through the lower class male body, weakened by privation, to explode in violence.

In contrast, Indonesian masculinity scholars such as Kurniawan (2009) who follow Messerschmidt's (1993) argument favor a "compensatory" model of masculinity and violence, implying that men exercise agency in choosing the conduct of violence when they are constrained and inhibited by economic structures. If we see masculinity not as an interior identity, but as something men do and enact, then masculinity as a presentation of self must be performed and presented recurrently in any interaction in which a man is involved (Messerschmidt). Violence can then be seen as a resource—or "cultural repertoire" (Wilson, 2011)—when other resources are not available for accomplishing a legitimate masculinity in Indonesia. Men benchmark their own accomplishment of masculinity against that of other men (Connell, 1995), including achievement within the economic system. In economically marginal areas where masculinity is implicitly validated by public demonstrations of toughness and physical prowess, the exercise of violence can shore up a legitimate masculine identity in the local context (Messerschmidt). In Indonesian communities where there is a daily struggle for economic survival, gangs and criminal extortion networks offer choices to men (see Wilson, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The data presented below comes from a mixed-method [name deleted for peer review]-funded project on [title deleted for peer review]². In Indonesia, 86 qualitative interviews with men from a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds were conducted in five cities. In each city, interviews with men were arranged using a "snowballing" research strategy (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Berg, 2006). The advantage of the snowballing approach for this qualitative study lies in accessing possible interviewees who are linked to the first-approached informant through social links, and therefore might give a useful complementary account of the phenomenon in question. For our purposes such an approach was ideal since not all men we approached in the five cities might have been prepared to talk openly about violence. Some of the men interviewed were police and government officials, and a few were engaged in illegal activities, or ex-prisoners. Most though, were 'ordinary' Indonesian male city-dwellers, from prosperous to very poor. The youngest was 17 and the oldest was 67. The majority were married. The men were interviewed by male Indonesian postgraduate research assistants who had been coached in effective interviewing on sensitive topics. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded in Indonesian. Quotes were excerpted and assembled under the coding categories, then translated into English by the first two authors. The anonymity of interviewees has been preserved. The informant code comprises letters to designate the city (J=Jakarta, R=Pekanbaru [Riau], S=Solo, MK=Makassar, MT=Mataram), and a number indicating the sequence of interview. For example S2 means the interviewee was the second person interviewed in Solo.

Fieldwork Sites

Interviews were conducted in the cities of Jakarta, Pekanbaru (Riau), Solo, Makassar and Mataram, providing coverage of some very different ethnic traditions.

Jakarta. One of the largest cities in the world, Jakarta is the economic powerhouse of the country but suffers from lack of housing, extraordinary traffic congestion and frequent flooding. There are striking extremes of rich and poor (Wilson, 2010). There is frequent civil violence, ranging from minor to major incidents (Tadié, 2006). It is a mixed ethnic context.

Pekanbaru (Riau). A clean, prosperous industrial city. The local economy of Pekanbaru depends on oil revenues, and most of Indonesia's petroleum is produced here (Chou, 2007). Malays are the dominant ethnic group but oil wealth attract economic migrants from all over the archipelago.

Solo (Surakarta). Often depicted as the heartland of Javanese courtly culture, Solo is witnessing growth in textiles and clothing manufacture. A high percentage of people live below the poverty line. The city has long had a reputation for civil and religious violence (see Nilan, Demartoto, & Wibowo, 2011). All but a tiny minority are Javanese.

Makassar. A thriving port city. For the numerically dominant Buginese and Makassarese ethnic groups family honor is vitally important and it is the traditional responsibility of men to defend it (Idrus, 2004). The city has a reputation for civil and religious violence, and brawling (Nasir & Rosenthal, 2009).

Mataram. The smallest and poorest city in the study. Economic activity is still based in agriculture, with tourism, local industry and services slow to develop. One-third of the city's population is estimated to live in poverty (Bennett, Andajani-Sutjahjo, & Idrus, 2011). The majority of inhabitants are indigenous Sasak people (Muslim), with a minority of Balinese (Hindu). Minor ethno-religious clashes often occur.

Interpreting the Interview Data

As indicated previously, the emphasis here is on the explanations provided by interviewees, rather than on the actuality of everyday male violence. Each man who spoke to us spoke from his own standpoint, whether from poverty or from a comfortable middle class existence. However, we have not searched for correlation between the type of account offered and the position of the man speaking about lower class and marginal men. Our initial appraisal of the 86 interviews indicated that such a search would not be productive, because there was no observable link between the background of the man speaking and the kind of discourse he produced. For instance, some men employed in the most menial jobs saw violence as a choice to be condemned, while some employed in middle class occupations implied it was understandable given the circumstances. We chose not to speculate about whether there was any relationship between the speaker and the men spoken about. Rather we chose to focus on the two main discourses that were produced, and beyond

that, on the detail of how violence as a choice for marginalized men might be understood.

RESULTS: DISCOURSES OF POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The Causal Link in Men's Accounts

In designing the interview questions we encouraged participants to reflect on violence, and to talk about men who might or might not commit violence, rather than asking them directly about their own personal engagement in violence. The interviews began by inviting the men to talk about any male violence they had personally witnessed or experienced, in any way. We then asked why they thought male violence occurred and what kinds of men were most likely to get involved. These questions elicited accounts which almost always linked economic problems to violence, for example,

- Lack of work is the major reason that violence occurs (J6, 32, Bank Clerk, married, Muslim, Jakarta, August 3, 2010);
- Violence around where I live is done by men from the poorest level of society, unemployed (R3, 25, Petty Trader and motorbike racer, Muslim, single, Pekanbaru, August 8, 2010);
- Unemployment is the main reason for local violence. They don't have a job (MK6, 23, Motorbike Transport Driver, single, Muslim, Makassar, June 19, 2010).

Poverty, financial stress, and lack of work were named as drivers of male violence. In many interviews violence was implied to arise from frustration at being *tidak mampu*—not able to demonstrate the expected productive economic role of a man.

Economic Impotence and the Potential for Violence

A large number of the men thought the daily struggle for existence renders poor men emotional and easily roused to anger, for example:

Poverty and unemployment clearly play a role in violence. Economic problems contribute to a high emotional state. It is the same for men who are hungry, they are more susceptible. (S2, 63, Local Government Member, married, Muslim, Solo, July 28, 2009)

When S2 mentions "susceptibility," he implies the weakened corporeality of the lower socioeconomic man which cannot readily resist the passage of violent emotions built up under the pressure of under-achievement. A similar implication was made in Jakarta:

There are fights and clashes among rival groups of men from the lower social class.... Such men find it so hard, their emotions tend to overwhelm them quickly and they tend to get into fights. (J13, 32, Soldier, married, Muslim, Jakarta, August 10, 2010)

Both explanations imply a force of emotion rising up in the body of the man weakened by economic privation and stress such that the surge cannot be denied.

The discourse of causal pressure takes as its starting premise that men from the “lower social class” have little to do because they have little or no work. Furthermore, they have little money and few life prospects because of lack of work. Men want to be respected, but economically marginal men have no legitimate place in the local masculine hierarchy, where men advertise their income and social status through material assets such as a house, a motorbike and a cell phone, for example. Pressure builds up in economically marginal men and violence is the outcome.

Men With Nothing to Do and Nothing to Lose

One university student we interviewed stated that “the man is without fear because he sees no future for himself” (SI, 24, University Student, unmarried, Muslim, Solo, July 24, 2009). A member of the security forces made a similar point, “if you’ve got nothing, if you’re a guy with nothing, then you just start punching right away” (MT16, 35, Security Police, male, Muslim, married, Mataram, June 18, 2010). Such comments expand our understanding of the way male violence is perceived. Like many others, these two interviewees imply there is nothing to hold back the violent conduct of a man with nothing to lose, and at least if he has a reputation for violence it is better than having no status at all. Choice does not figure much in these accounts.

Some interviewees mentioned alcohol as a catalyst for galvanizing the explosive flow of emotions:

Unemployment makes them stressed because they can’t get work. So they just sit around in a group drinking, with nothing to do. They become very emotional. A man can see his neighbor working and he asks how come you aren’t unemployed? (S12, 21, Factory Worker, unmarried, Muslim, Solo, July 27, 2009)

Groups of poor men in Indonesia drink cheap, locally distilled alcoholic spirit. In Solo for example, they drink *ciu*—30–40% proof alcohol—obtained from illegal street stalls. Once the men are *mabuk*—drunk—interactions can turn violent (see Guinness, 2009).

In S12’s comments above we do not know what happens to the imagined neighbor from that point. Beating him in an excess of rage (the explosive model) is one thing. Extracting money or resources from him with threats, or by force, is another thing altogether because this implies choice. Another interviewee asserted that men who have little to lose will sell their capacity to create violence—their cultural repertoire—for a price,

You can pay them to create violence instead. They can make a living out of mass riots. It’s a matter of people who are truly in need and can be readily influenced. (R1, 40, Private Sector Clerk, Muslim, married, Pekanbaru, August 3, 2010)

This comment illustrates conscious choice to carry out calculated violence as a means of gaining income. This is not the outpouring of explosive violence but a

chosen strategy that echoes Messerschmidt's (1993) thesis. That is, where the accomplishment of valid masculine status is not available through conventional economic means, engaging in violent or criminal behavior may gain marginalized men the material benefits they want. Explanations that recognized choice of violence were relatively rare though, compared to those that referred to the explosive "hydraulic" model.

Unemployment and Cost of Living

Unemployment is a relative concept in Indonesia. There is no regular government income support scheme despite economic growth and the cost of living steadily rising. Millions work in the informal sector, undertaking any activity to gain income. Death from starvation in Indonesia is rare. However, many people living at or below the poverty line do not get sufficient food or sufficient nutritious food, as pointed out in the interviews. The causal link with violence may seem straightforward, for example, "people who are hungry are highly temperamental. So when you have people who need food often you have a high level of violence" (R1, 40, Private Sector Clerk, Muslim, married, Pekanbaru, 3 August 2010). A politician from Makassar explained this:

If a man is poor then life becomes increasingly more difficult in the search for a better existence. He has to struggle to fulfil even just his own needs such as filling his stomach. Such a struggle is desperate and that's why poverty has the potential to lead to violence. (MK10, 34, Local Politician, unmarried, Muslim, Makassar, June 18, 2010)

This returns us to the logic of *nothing to lose* but this time choice is more strongly implied. An informant in Makassar also implied violence as a choice, "poverty is closely related to unemployment. Poverty drives a man to fulfil his daily needs by any method possible, including violent actions" (MK11, 40, University Lecturer, married, Muslim, Makassar, June 19, 2010). Similarly, "where the income is very low, or something like that, they conduct violence" (MT1, 24, NTB Takrow Champion, Muslim, unmarried, Mataram, June 24, 2010). The underlying assumption is that the option of violence is available to them:

If a community is poor, then it will be susceptible to disturbances of public order, susceptible to anarchy. People try to make their livelihoods! It is normal for a man to be determined to survive. (MT15, 37, Tourism Singer and Dancer, Muslim, unmarried, Mataram, 18 June 2010)

Here we glimpse the logic of poor communities where violence is not only a choice but the currency of coercion.

Financial Stress Breeds a Hard or Criminal Character

Some interviewees said the character of men changed under financial stress. They became harder and more inclined to use violence, "they are looking for money everywhere so as a result they become hard and violent men" (S12, 21, Factory Worker, unmarried, Muslim, Solo, July 27, 2009). Similarly, "the guys around here

have a hard character” (MT14, 34, Security Guard and Gang Member, Hindu, married, Mataram, June 17, 2010). This is not so much about lower socioeconomic resentment boiling over but violence as a means to an end:

A guy like that is accustomed to behaving that way. The first cause is hard difficulty in his life, such as no money, little education. That forms a hard character early on. So he always feels like he has nothing, and violence is the main way of getting satisfaction. Secondly, he is after material gain through extortion. (J2, 40, Ex-prisoner, married, Muslim, Jakarta, August 12, 2010)

Some suggested extortion is a job for such hard men: “the men have no work and they need money. They extort money with violence” (J5, 25, Bank Clerk, unmarried, Muslim, Jakarta, August 3, 2010). One member of a motorbike gang in Makassar emphasized that men in those gangs must prove their toughness:

The kind of guy that habitually gets involved in violence, well they are usually in a gang and there they form up a tough persona. Even just to get into a group like that they have to be hard men. (MK5, 19, Motorbike Gang Member, unmarried, Muslim, Makassar, June 21, 2010)

In these perceptions it is not just a matter of poor men becoming hard and tough as an instrumental reinvention of self. The underlying logic remains close to the theme of Messerschmidt’s original thesis (1993): violence or criminal behavior may gain marginalized men the material benefits and the status they want.

Compensatory Violence Boosts Masculine Self-Esteem

In agreement with Messerschmidt, Cavender (1999) described how the conduct of violence can provide a compensatory boost to the self-esteem of socioeconomically or ethnically disadvantaged men who feel locked out of rewards that accrue to other men from more privileged or high status backgrounds. Cavender’s claim resonates with some of the sentiments expressed by men in our interviews, for example, “their social status is unemployed. They feel really proud and satisfied when they commit violence” (R5, 26, Teacher, Muslim, single, Pekanbaru, August 6, 2010). As discussed earlier, a man gains honor and respect for being *mampu*. If he cannot achieve *mampu* then at least he can make others terrified of him. A man in Jakarta emphasized how the socioeconomic gap leads to feelings of shame and restriction which need to be redressed:

Those who do not have work have nothing to do and they become very sensitive about that, about the social gap between themselves and others. So in my opinion, if such men carry out violence then they are pushing the boundaries—maintaining their self-esteem. (J4, 45, Public Servant, married, Muslim, Jakarta, August 7, 2010)

An account from Makassar gives quite a detailed description of the difficulties faced by Indonesian men on the margins of the labor market, their possible reactions and compensatory behaviors:

Poverty and lack of work are primary reasons for violence. This causes men to experience disorientation. There is no clearcut activity for them to do so they seek out deviant activities and alternative ways of being and feeling. Any positive life ambitions become misdirected and finally become deviant. I can give you an example of this. I knew a man who was struggling to support himself because he was only a casual building worker. He was just on a contract and from week to week he did not know whether there would be work on any given day. However, on the other hand, he was off socialising with the local lads every other day, hanging about, drinking alcohol every night. (MK9, 32, Political Party Activist, married, Muslim, Makassar, June 23, 2010)

MK9's account implies that men's identity as men comes in great part from the meaningful work they engage in. The labor status of the man in MK9's example is insecure. He rarely works on the same site, with the same workmates. Instead he depends socially for his masculine status on a regular group of similarly marginal men with whom he socializes, drinks, and sometimes gets involved in violence.

Some of the men we interviewed had a history of violence and incarceration. J2 gave an informative account of the cycle of violent reprisals that is characteristic of gang activity:

I was sentenced under Article 170 (Group Violence against a Person or Property). It was the same gang I was involved with. We beat up a member of the security forces. The reason we were forced to attack him was because he treated me so cruelly. Yeah sure he was a member of the security forces, and I had done wrong. Fine. OK. Slap me around a bit. But no. He crept up without warning and kicked me furiously. Slowly, after a few days, I felt I could not put up with it, I mean the arrogance of that policeman! (J2, 40, Ex-prisoner, married, Muslim, Jakarta, August 12, 2010)

As the example shows, Indonesian men who are gang members often fight other men over matters of honor (see Wilson, 2010).

DISCUSSION

We have assembled above a representation of discourses about the relationship between masculinity, material deprivation and violence in Indonesia, using male interviewees' explanations of violence. They readily provided examples and rationalizations that linked men, violence and socio-economic disadvantage, mapping out a "contour" of local male violence in Indonesia at the level of perception and explanation. Although the majority offered causal accounts of explosive violence resulting from pent-up economic frustration and resentment, some offered more nuanced accounts that acknowledged agency and choice. These more nuanced sets of understandings can be summarized as follows: First, men with "nothing to do" —unemployed—easily become emotional and volatile. Second, such men have "nothing to lose" in their desperate financial struggle and resort to a cultural repertoire of violence. Third, such men become "hardened;" masters in the art of violence and coercion. Finally, the conduct of violence boosts the self-esteem of men who have very little, but may lock such men into negative cycles of collective reprisal and attack.

We note that unemployment was mentioned far more often than poverty *per se*, possibly because poverty may include a job and some income. This returns us to the hegemonic ideal of Indonesian masculinity where a man is by definition the breadwinner and thereby the head of the family (Oetomo, 2000). If he has no work then he has no honor. His status position in the eyes of other men is questionable (Kurniawan, 2009).

Discourse produced by the interviewees on the link between masculinity, material deprivation and violence was voluminous enough to suggest this is the major way low-level violence between men is rationalized and understood, even where other sources of conflict—ethnic tensions, religious differences, land disputes—might also be present. This finding echoes the nature of public rhetoric about violence produced by politicians and the media in Indonesia. Such rhetoric plays upon community fears of a future outbreak of mass civil violence. The impression is that due to widespread economic inequality, Indonesia is a “pressure cooker” of violence just waiting to explode.

Yet, despite the strength of informant convictions on the matter, evidence of a simple relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and violence is not definitive. For example, a World Bank-funded study by Cramer (2010) of the link between unemployment and violence in developing countries found that “where it is possible to draw on estimates of unemployment, leaving aside their reliability, there are no obvious patterns linking unemployment and violent conflict.” Moreover, in the case of Indonesia after 1998, unemployment appeared to rise as participation in public violence fell (Cramer, 2010, p. 15). Similarly, a study of the link between horizontal inequality and violence at the district level in Indonesia (Mancini, 2005) found that local unemployment rates of male youth had no significant impact upon the likelihood of violent conflict. Ethnic diversity alone was not significant either. Rather, a number of factors combined to create local conditions for unrest and conflict. Notably, violence was more likely to occur in areas with relatively low levels of economic development and greater religious and/or ethnic polarization. Actions or lack of actions by government security forces are also instrumental. There is much evidence of continuing corrupt police brutality in Indonesia, especially directed at “criminal suspects living in poor and marginalized communities” (Amnesty International, 2009, p. 11). It seems that still, some kinds of violence between men are permitted to flourish while others are condemned and prosecuted (Colombijn, 2005).

To return to the arguments of this paper then, the popularity of the “socio-economic” explanation for male violence elides a whole host of other important contributing factors. It demonstrates the powerful influence of public rhetoric and predominant ways of thinking about violence in Indonesian society. More deeply, our interviewee accounts also imply the significance of honor and respect in matters of male violence. The concept of honor is important for our understanding because, as indicated earlier, honor is linked traditionally to a man’s wealth and what he possesses, either materially or symbolically. In the absence of income then, a man has no honor. We conclude that participant comments suggest men who conduct violence may feel disenfranchised and resentful because they are not gaining the much-vaunted benefits of Indonesia’s rapid economic growth. The struggle of men for respect and honor in their local cultural contexts can take the form of violence, especially in circumstances of unemployment and unequal distribution of income opportunity at the local level. Through violence the poor man may be freed

from the sense of shame and restriction that comes from his low social standing — *tidak mampu* (Kurniawan, 2009). We argue that this affirms Messerschmidt's (1993) thesis, indicating the applicability of that interpretive framework to the phenomenon of masculinity, violence and socio-economic status in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This article has used interview data from 86 men in five Indonesian cities to critically examine a frequent causal explanation for everyday social violence between men in Indonesia: low socioeconomic status. The point has not been to argue either way on this. Rather, analysis of explanatory accounts has yielded insight into the ways that ordinary Indonesian men think about violence conducted by men on the margins of the labor market. In that sense we have transcribed one of the "contours of the background" (Žižek, 2008, p. 1) to violence between men in Indonesia. There was ample evidence in the data of the "hydraulic pressure" model of male violence where conflict and brutality are explained by the inexorable pressure built up in men by economic stress.

Yet there are also some deeper understandings of masculinity, socioeconomic status and violence revealed here. It was implied by a number of interviewees that men with very little in the way of material assets or workplace capacities — *tidak mampu* — make strategic use of two important resources they do have: close social relations with male peers in the same structural position, and a cultural repertoire of violence. This understanding is productive because it identifies socioeconomically disadvantaged men not as the victims of determining social structure, but as agents who make strategic choices. As agents, they can then be imagined as people with legitimate needs who might also choose a strategic path away from the conduct of violence were one to be offered.

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