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**Series Editors: Michele Ford and Keith Foulcher**

# The Biggest Cock: Territoriality, Invulnerability and Honour amongst Jakarta's Gangsters<sup>1</sup>

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I followed Bang Cep on his nightly rounds of the food stalls surrounding the bus terminal. This was Bang Cep's territory and he walked with an exaggerated swaggering confidence. Vendors he approached for their daily 'protection' fee greeted him politely, but with their eyes betraying an apprehension bordering on fear. At Pak Dede's fried tofu stall Bang Cep loudly berated him for his lateness in paying his dues, slamming his ring encrusted hand on the flimsy wooden stall to emphasis the point. Eyes downcast, Pak Dede muttered an apology promising to pay in full, with interest, the next day. Perhaps due to my presence, Bang Cep didn't follow up with the beatings and 'bitch slaps' he was infamous for. I returned to Pak Dede's *warung* later that evening for dinner. Asking him about the encounter with Bang Cep, he let out a pained sigh, "Yeah, as you saw that's what we have to deal with. We don't like it, but what can we do? People say he is *kebal* (invulnerable), plus he is close to the police. Either way, if it weren't him it would be someone else. For now at least he is the biggest cock (*yang paling jago*) around here, and unless we want to get bashed we do what he says."<sup>2</sup>

Extortion, intimidation and beatings at the hands of *jago*, literally a 'cock' or 'rooster', but colloquially a descriptor for a type of local strongman, constitute an unsavoury aspect of everyday life in urban and rural centres throughout Indonesia. As a social personage, the *jago* has been a recurring social and political actor in both recent and more distant history. Despite associations with criminality, in Indonesian popular culture the *jago* is also often romanticised as a champion of the people and an embodiment of the virile and virtuous man, a Hobsbawinian 'social bandit', whose acts of violence are motivated by a deep sense of justice, honour and order, one that transcends that of the law and the state. At the same time the *jago*, and their modern ancestor the *preman*, are frequently the object of public revulsion and fear due to their brutality, role as sub-contracted instruments of state control during the New Order regime and more recently as freelance entrepreneurs in violence for political parties, religious groups and business interests. This points to the contradictory nature of *jago* masculinity, as both a sub-cultural identity encapsulating specific notions of honour, territoriality and violence, but also as a reproduction and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been accepted for inclusion in *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia*, edited by Michele Ford and Lenore Lyons, London: Routledge, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter.

extension of the hegemonic institutionalised masculinity of state power, the embodiment of a reactionary and oppressive social and political order.

There is now a growing body of academic work examining the construction of masculine identity within various gangs and criminal sub-cultures (Bourgois 1995, Hagedorn 1998, Messerschmidt 1993). In his groundbreaking work on the relationship between masculinities and crime, Messerschmidt contends that ‘crime’ by men is a form of social practice, a resource for ‘doing’ masculinity when other resources are unavailable (Messerschmidt 1993: 85). Acts of crime and violence, such as street gangs protecting their turf, are grounded in idealised notions of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, what Connell has defined as a normative type of masculinity occurring in specific times and places which demands conformity to certain characteristics (Connell 2002). In the context of male gang culture these characteristics commonly include amongst others, frequent use of violence, volatile notions of honour, group solidarity and ‘toughness’. With other hegemonic masculinities, such as those associated with formal employment or university education, inaccessible to them, socially marginal communities are according to Schwendinger & Schwendinger, more likely to “subscribe to violent macho ideals” (cited in Messerschmidt 1993, pg110). Bourgois for example has argued that the misogynist and violent sub-culture of El Barrio gangs in East Harlem emerged as a response to the de-industrialisation of the urban economy and subsequent inability to reproduce rural based notions of masculinity, an outcome of structural conditions producing social and economic marginalisation resulting in a life “in search of respect” (Bourgois 1995). However unlike the marginal criminal crack-dealer gangs examined by Bourgois, *jago* have occupied a far more central position in national discourses regarding masculinity and power.

Based upon fieldwork in Jakarta, this chapter seeks to make a modest contribution to this body of work through an examination of *jago* masculinity in Jakarta. After examining some of the characteristics and elements constituting *jago* masculinity drawing from fieldwork in Jakarta, the chapter looks at the historical background of the *jago* and their changing relationship with the colonial and post-colonial state. A central contention will be that *jago* masculinity, or *kejagoan*, is enacted out through the securing, control and defence of territory (*lahan*), calculated acts of symbolic violence and the ‘fortifying’ of the body through the acquisition of supernatural power.

As Blok has argued, concepts of male honour are closely related to processes of state formation. With the strengthening of the New Order state the *jago*’s volatile notion of masculine honour, expressed through control over resources and territory through the use of force, became a threat to the state’s monopolisation over violence, resulting in it being emasculated via violent purges before being reconstituted as an obedient auxiliary of state power (Blok 2001: 21). In so far as the ideas and practices of masculinity, violence and territorially bound notions of honour found within the world of *jago* have informed hegemonic notions of masculinity embodied and enforced by the state, in particularly the authoritarian New Order regime, *jago* as social and political actors have been subject to both political incorporation as agents of state authority and social marginalisation via stigmatisation as a manifestation of deviant criminality. As this chapter suggests, the ability of the *jago* in particular periods and spaces to render the state at least temporarily redundant as a source of dispute settlement and the maintenance of social order has made them an embodiment of an ideal-type masculinity.

In contemporary Indonesia, the relaxing of state control combined with the politicisation of localised ethnic and religious identities has seen a resurgence of *jago* identity as a form of ‘protest masculinity’ by those on the economic and social margins, defined by Poynting as “compensatory claims to imagined powerfulness on the part of marginalised young men experiencing social injury at their lack of real power, expressed through a hypermasculine style” (Poynting 2007: 511). With the post-98 collapse of centralised state power, assertions of place-based distinctiveness became the new grounds for “securing rights to territories and resources” (Elmhirst 2001). Wee and Jayasuriya have argued that in Southeast Asia shifts in centre-periphery relations and the ‘rescaling’ of the state, often brought about by policies of decentralisation, have seen a trend towards localism and the ideology of ‘indigenism’, which they define as the “articulation of rights that come from belonging to a place”, in contestations over resources (Wee and Jayasuriya 2002: 3). Drawing from latent class and ethnic resentments over the perceived institutionalised inequalities of the New Order, and the failure of the post-New Order state to adequately redress them, local cultural idioms of masculinity and power such as the *jago* have been revived and gained increasing currency amongst many disenfranchised young men in Jakarta’s slums and poor neighbourhoods. In the context of decentralised and democratised Jakarta, post-New Order *jago* identity has become an assertion of exclusivist rights over resources in a given place.

### **Turf, honour, potency and the economic use of violence**

In the world of *jago* notions of masculinity, honour and virility are inextricably bound with those of territoriality and the body. A *jago*’s power, like that of the state, is in large part judged by the extent of their monopolisation over *lahan*, or turf. This *lahan* is defined in spatial terms, a street, neighbourhood, market or bus terminal, within which the *jago* gang controls the extraction of *pungli* or *jatah preman*, illegal fees imposed usually on the pretext of offering protection from ‘criminals’ and/or other *jago*. Often *jago* also profit from a range of other illicit activities such as prostitution, gambling and *miras*, illegally produced or distributed alcohol. The territorial power of *jago* and *preman* is established via a combination of symbolic displays of violence and machismo, the cultivation of belief in their magical power and physical skill in fighting, and within the context of a strong state, their relationships and networks of patronage with those holding formal authority such as the police, military and government officials. With these attributes, a *jago* will begin to accumulate followers and expand their territorial power.

Developing a ‘name’ (*punya nama*) is perhaps the single most valuable asset of a *jago*. The defence of one’s honour (*harga diri*) and face (*muka*) from perceived insult is inextricably linked to this name and the ability to exert power over turf. This territorial power is exercised by extracting dues from residents and the imposition of a protection regime in which the *jago* takes on a role as self-appointed enforcer of social order. The importance of *punya nama* has especially become the case in the context of the increasingly competitive private security industry in Jakarta, where a reputation for getting things done and an ability to maintain ‘order’ is crucial to securing contracts in an increasingly competitive market. It is equally crucial

however in other locations such as markets and bus terminals.<sup>3</sup> Without such a reputation a *jago* is no longer a *jago*, simply a wannabe or *sok jago*.

There are a number of volatile and violent traditions linked to the preservation of masculine face in Indonesia. In the island of Madura for example honour killing is institutionalised in the violent tradition of *carok*, a culturally sanctioned death duel or murder in retaliation to a loss of social face or slight upon a man's reputation.<sup>4</sup> *Jago* and *preman* are commonly defined by the alleged tendency to use violence as both a first and last resort. However for those seeking to make a living as a *jago* the use of actual physical violence is highly calculated and measured, even in instances when 'face' is at stake. Violence is a tool of communication, useful in so far as it helps in the establishment and maintenance of a name and territory. Once this name is consolidated, the necessity to rely upon violence as the central means of maintaining territorial dominance diminishes significantly. As one gang leader in South Jakarta explained:

Of course you need to kick arse sometimes, otherwise people might start to think you are too soft. If someone insults you in front of others you need to wack them then-and-there. If someone has an attitude they have to be made an example of. But the difference between a real *jago* like me and some snotty nosed thug (*preman ingusan*) is that I know exactly who, when and how to kick arse. There is an art to it. Petty thugs are too excessive and indiscriminate in their use of violence. People may fear them but they don't respect them. In the end this always results in their undoing (Confidential Interview, Jakarta, 2005).

The 'art' then of the *jago*'s violence, is to find a balance between 'fear and respect', to balance the necessity of ruthlessly suppressing challenges to their territorial domain and upholding honour, while not going so far as to alienate oneself from the immediate community, unnecessarily antagonise rivals or the police. The potential for violence is greater than the actual use of it. The established *jago* no longer has to rely upon constant displays of violence which, especially in the later stages of their career, bring with them increasing risks of physical defeat at the hands of younger stronger opponents. Some informants suggested that in certain circumstances inaction or inscrutableness is deliberately employed as a sign of power, drawing on the martial arts derived maxim that the more one 'knows' the more humble one becomes (*makin berisi makin berunduk*).

Successful *jago* are commonly surrounded by a cultivated mythos, usually revolving around embellished accounts of battles with rivals or daring escapades, similar to what the oral historian Yus Rusyana has referred to as "fight events" (*peristiwa pertarungan*), oral accounts of physical violence that over time and the oral process of dissemination undergo transformation and frequent elaboration, elevating the protagonist to the status of a culture hero (Rusyana 1996). Circulation of these accounts of fighting prowess act to both attract followers and deter competitors, such as in the following account from a Bandung *jago*:

At the time the gang from Cimahi attacked our neighbourhood. They were trying to make a name for themselves and take control of our turf. When the

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1998 there has been an increasing number of instances of street vendors attacking and even killing *preman* considered to be excessive in their use of violence or extraction of protection dues.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed study of the *carok* traditions in Madura see Latief Wiyata (2002).

trouble started Kang Aang came out into the streets, not to attack but to try and stop things getting worse by preventing the Cimahi crew from coming into our street. From Cimahi there were... I couldn't count how many as they mixed in with those shopping at the market. Fights started to break out between the Cimahi *crossboy* and locals.<sup>5</sup> Kang Aang was set upon by a group of the Cimahi gang. At that time I wasn't involved, though I had several machetes with me. I passed them to Kang Aang who proceeded to use them on his attackers. He did it with such ease and beauty...dak dak dak!! Within moments all of them were taken care of. How did he do it, I don't really know. It must have been because he had already been on a journey to seek knowledge (*merantau cari ilmu*) and had become a true master. I was deeply moved. At that moment I knew that I wanted to become his disciple (Confidential Interview, Bandung, 1999).<sup>6</sup>

An interrelated element in the establishment of the *jago*'s name is fostering the belief that they possess an array of magical and supernatural abilities. These can include a number of fantastic skills such as invisibility, the ability to be in two places at once, mind-reading and hypnotism. The most important of these however is *ilmu kebal*, physical invulnerability from weapons such as knives and firearms. The skin of the *jago* is believed to be literally impenetrable, closing and sealing the boundaries between self and others. With *kebal* the body of the *jago* is transformed into an immutable site of power. The accumulations and transmission of *ilmu kebal* is a distinct political currency linked to the political authority derived from the perceived ability to control threats and disruptions to the social order, and to resist corrupting hegemonic forces.

Traditionally the pursuit of *kebal* was achieved after a long period of tutelage and ascetic trials under the direction of a recognised master or *guru*. In Banten for example, a region with a long history of *jago*, known locally as *jawara*, *kebal* aspirants are required to undergo a variety of ascetic exercises such as extended periods of fasting, meditation and retreats to places believed to be infused with supernatural power such as caves or forests. They are also expected to maintain a state of ritual purity, abstaining from activities and relationships believed to sap spiritual and supernatural power such as the consumption of alcohol, gambling and excessive fraternisation with women, including sexual intercourse.<sup>7</sup> Social interaction with women outside of one's immediate family is in this context considered as a temptation, a distraction from the task of accumulating power and a potential drain on reservoirs of supernatural strength. In some *jago* traditions, such as the *warok* strongmen of Ponorogo in East Java, prohibitions on association of women has developed into something resembling a misogynist cult with *warok* taking on a young male assistant in lieu of a wife (known as a *gemblak*) who is chosen due to their effeminate appearance and in some instances identifies as transgendered (Wilson 1999).

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<sup>5</sup> The term *crossboy* originated in the 1950s, referring to fans of James Dean and Elvis Presley. During the 60s and 70s it became synonymous with troublesome youths and petty criminals (Ryter, 1998: 59).

<sup>6</sup> The informant became the first *anak buah* of Kang Aang. Known in the neighbourhood as the "human experiment", he bares with pride numerous scars and twitches caused by damaged nerves resulting from his apprenticeship. Another witness to the attack said that the Cimahi gang were the children of military and that was why they had the nerve to attack an area well known for its tough *jago*.

<sup>7</sup> Amongst practitioners of *kebal* it is almost universally asserted that women are not able to achieve invulnerability. Many notions of *kebal* trace origins back to yogic ideas of *sakti* that were believed to be achieved by the accumulation and storing of semen. See Wilson (1999).



*A demonstration of 'inner power' martial arts at a gathering of the Betawi Brotherhood Forum in Jakarta, 2009.*



The close proximity to rival *jago*, the constant tensions over turf boundaries and general volatility that ensues in crowded urban centres such as Jakarta has resulted in the emergence of ‘fast track’ methods for achieving *kebal* such as is described in the following field notes extract:

I asked Pak Edi, a gang leader in South Jakarta, about his reputation for being *kebal*. He recounted that as a young man he sought tutelage under a number of guru. After extensive periods of fasting, sensory deprivation and prayer he achieved physical invulnerability to sharp weapons and bullets. The downside of this, he explained, was the requirement for a continued state of ‘purity’ that demanded abstinence from alcohol and womanising. Due to his own fondness for both, he set about developing a more ‘scientific’ method which by-passed the need for moral piety. “The benefit of this method,” he stated, “is that you don’t have to be 100% ‘clean’. Even if you have been drinking, gambling or playing with women it still works!” After asking him to explain further, he suggested that I undergo the ‘procedure’: “Who knows what might happen in the streets, especially as a foreigner, you need to be protected. Anyway, all real men (*laki sejati*) must possess *ilmu*.” I agreed, and was immediately alarmed as his assistant produced a strange tangle of electric cords and metal plates. Plugging the cord into an electric socket, I was instructed to place my foot on top of one of the plates. Pak Edi held the other plate under his own foot, and immediately his leg began to quiver from the electric current. Tentatively I placed my other foot down on the tile floor earthing the current, sending my limbs into mild spasms as electricity pulsed through my body. While trying to resist the natural urge to let go, Pak Edi firmly grasped my forearms, closed his eyes and muttered a jumbled mantra, a mixture of Arabic, Indonesian and Javanese. With the soles of my foot feeling as if they were about to combust, Pak Edi finally let go and I jerked back into my chair, my arms quivering uncontrollably for several minutes. “That’s it!” he said with a smile. “Now you don’t have to worry about being stabbed!” (Field notes, Jakarta, August 2007).

Such methods by-pass the need for lengthy apprenticeship or ritual asceticism, developing a method that sits easily with the conditions of the urban *jago*, as well as severing the link between the maintenance of supernatural power and forms of religious piety and moral prohibitions at odds with the more hedonistic lifestyles. In his early 50s with a portly frame and persistent smokers cough, Pak Edi was respected and feared by younger and more physically fit local men, who commonly referred to him as *sakti* (possessing supernatural power) and *berwibawa* (charismatic/authoritative). Attracted by this unique ‘modern’ method for achieving *ilmu* he began drawing followers from outside of his kampung in Kebayoran Lama, some from as far away as Surabaya. His reputation for *ilmu* helped him to expand his gang’s network with a minimum of conflict, to include branches in other parts of the city. Like most *jago* leaders, Pak Edi rejects any suggestion that his group is criminal insisting that the security and protection they provide to the community from thieves, pickpockets and drug dealers is a valuable service for which they receive modest ‘voluntary contributions’ from local businesses and vendors. Further consolidating his reputation as *kebal* was his close relationship to the local military commander, who has allowed his group to set up a command post on the grounds of his office.

Closeness to the authorities in a sense makes one invulnerable from the law and official sanction and also as a mediator between them and the local community.

Armed with *kebal* the body of the *jago* is fortified against the dangers of external attack, transforming the physical body into a virtual fortress. As one mantra for obtaining invulnerability from Banten intones, “my head is black rock, my forehead is coral” (*hulu aing batu wulung, tarang aing batu karang*) (Interview, Serang, August 1999).<sup>8</sup> According to Onghokham invulnerability constituted a counter notion of power in Java to those of political elites that was in theory accessible to any prepared to undergo the rigours and trials involved in obtaining it (Onghokham 2003: 115). Hence invulnerability cults were treated with suspicion by both the colonial and post-colonial state, in particular the New Order, which saw them as potential sites of informal power challenging that of the state.

In times of social and political upheaval where fears emerge regarding the maintaining of personal and social boundaries, belief in invulnerability practices continue to resurface as a last line of bodily defence against social breakdown. For example during the tumultuous period of social and political upheaval surrounding the resignation of Suharto in 1998, popular tabloids filled with advertisements for “instant *kebal*” through mantra sent via SMS, as well as short course ‘executive packages’ run by *jago* seeking to profit from uncertainty. That *kebal* has frequently proven to be a completely ineffective form of physical protection has not diminished faith in its efficiency.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the enduring power of belief in invulnerability is related less to its practical uses, as it is to its centrality to notions of the empowered, potent and masculine body embodied in the figure of the *jago*.

### **The *Jago* in Indonesian history**

The *jago* of pre-colonial times was said to possess physical prowess in the form of skills in martial arts (usually the indigenous martial art of *pencak silat*), and was believed to have access to a swag of magical and supernatural abilities, such as invulnerability and invisibility which they achieved through tutelage under a *guru* or extended periods of ascetic retreat and deprivations. A mix of personality cult and criminal gang, groups of *jago* came and went in accord with the fortunes of their leader. Their social capital came in their embodiment of cultural ideals regarding physical and spiritual potency and intimate knowledge of local conditions, whilst their political capital was found in their proficiency in the use of violent force and ability to mediate between peasant society and higher authorities. While it was common practice for *jago* to raid and plunder neighbouring villages, they were often fiercely protective of their own community and for this reason commanded loyalty and respect, albeit underpinned by fear of the consequences if this loyalty was betrayed. *Jago* were both protector and exploiter of the local community. According to Schulte Nordholt, this resulted in the general population reaching the pessimistic conclusion that “power and crime were synonymous” (Schulte Nordholt 2002: 40).

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<sup>8</sup>Other mantras are drawn from the Quran, such as *Sura al-Besi* which is believed to make the aspirant's body as hard and impenetrable as iron. The possession of mantra is often a closely guarded secret, a kind of ‘secret weapon’. Like Achilles heel, the revealing of the source of a *jago*'s supernatural power opens the possibility that a rival may find the key for neutralising it.

<sup>9</sup>At several displays of *ilmu kebal* which the author attended practitioners sustained serious injuries after being hit over the head with bottles or cut with machetes. Quickly whisked out of view of those in attendance, the explanation given for the failure of *ilmu* to protect them was that they had ‘not been concentrating’ or that there had been a ‘spiritual disturbance’ caused by a rival group.

The initial arrival and gradual expansion of Dutch colonial rule did little to disturb the *jago*. It was only in 19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of a bureaucratically organised government that their role shifted (Schulte Nordholt 1991: 77). Rather than being the object of repression, *jago* became according to Schulte Nordholt and van Till, “an integral part of the colonial power structure”, resulting from a “stagnating process of state-formation” (Schulte Nordholt and van Till 1999: 68). The colonial administration was based in Batavia, but had little effective reach into the rural heartland of Java. In order to consolidate its rule the Dutch established a parallel indirect government headed by indigenous officials to govern Java (Sutherland 1979). At the village level, monopoly over force was the preserve of the *jago*, hence any effort to establish ‘order’ by necessity had to involve their incorporation. Without an adequate police force to support them and with shallow roots in the area in which they were assigned indigenous officials effectively became clients of the *jago* to gain some degree of control over the countryside. As long as the appearance of ‘order’ was maintained, *jago* could continue with their banditry, theft and extortion unhindered. This incorporation however was not without disruptions. The volatile nature of *jago* bands saw them frequently emerge as sites of rebellion, such as in the Banten peasant uprising in 1888 (Kartodirdjo 1966).

In colonial Batavia *jago* also emerged as powerful figures constituting what Cribb has described as “a network standing outside of the hierarchy of government authority, antagonistic to it yet not overtly hostile” (Cribb 1991: 15). As a society based almost entirely upon trade where most of the indigenous population worked as labourers, labour bosses and their entourage of overseers and *jago* enforcers were central to the economic life of the city. As Cribb has stated, the world of labour control blended with the criminal-underworld but was also a necessary component of social control (Cribb 1991). It was in this context that the Dutch derived term *vrijman* (free man), later to become *preman*, entered common parlance to describe a new breed of urban *jago*, a freelance entrepreneur in force who “is not in the service of the Dutch East India Company, but has permission to be in the Indies, and carries out trade for the sake of the VOC” (Ryter 1998: 50-51).<sup>10</sup> In a society bound by law, the *vrijman* existed in a legal and conceptual grey zone, operating both inside and outside of the law. For this reason they were admired as one of few groups with autonomy from colonial power, but also feared due to their intimate connections with it. Despite, or perhaps due to their central role in the colonial power structure, the banditry of *jago* figures such as Si Pitung, Sakam and Si Gantang saw them exulted as heroes of the people (Schulte Nordholt and van Till 1999). With little organised opposition to colonial rule, even the self-serving criminal predation of *jago* was quickly mythologised as Robin Hood-like social banditry, conducted by ‘men of honour’ on behalf of the poor.<sup>11</sup> As Blok has argued the social bandit myth is an expression of a dormant protest element, “the myth of the bandit represents a craving for a different society, a more human world in which people are justly dealt with and in which there is no suffering” (Blok 2001: 21-22).

Due to their skill in coercion and localised territorial power, violent entrepreneurs such as the *jago* have been essential allies for the consolidation of political power, while embodying the contradictions that come with their informal

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<sup>10</sup> A similar meaning is attached to *warok* the strongmen from Ponorogo, East Java which is said to originate from the Javanese words *uwal* and *rokan* meaning to be free from forced labour (Wilson 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Van Tillen (1999) in her study of Si Pitung discovered the little evidence to suggest that Pitung was ‘pro-peasant’ and in fact his gang often targeted the weakest and poorest.

status. In times of crisis of hegemony where political and social institutions are in flux such as during the revolution for Indonesian independence, *jago* sought to benefit from break-downs in social order, and aligned themselves ideologically with dominant or emergent social and political forces in order to facilitate integration within them and to consolidate and legitimate rackets. Inversely, colonial and post-colonial elites and aspirants for power have sought to harness the localised territorial power of *jago* in the establishment and maintenance of particular configurations of social order and the suppression of forces that threaten to disrupt them. *Jago* bands and militias were at the forefront of resistance to Dutch attempts to reinstate colonial rule after World War II and many later formed parts of the embryonic Indonesian armed forces.

In post-independence Jakarta, in lieu of a functioning police force, *jago* operated as an informal source of authority and enforcer of a particular kind of personalised social order that revolved around the maintenance of a local territorial protection regime. This order was inextricably bound to notions of ‘honour’ and face rather than any normative notion of the rule of law. If a ‘crime’ was committed in the territory of *jago*’s gang without their consent, or someone else began demanding protection dues (*jatah*) it was considered an insult to their territorially defined sense of honour, a challenge to their authority. In such instances the *jago* would seek out the perpetrator and regain face by fighting or publicly humiliating them. According to one former Jakarta *jago* from the 1950s they were *palang dede*, ‘pillars of the community’ (Interview with Irawan, Jakarta 2005). So long as one *jago* gang remained dominant and the presence of the state remained minimal, this ‘order’ was maintained. In instances where there was a contestation between *jago* over territory, this was often resolved via rule bound ‘duels’ such as described in the following account from a Bandung *jago* from the 1960s:

There was no ganging up or hitting from behind (*main keroyok*) like nowadays but it was a duel till the matter was resolved. The duelists would take an oath, sealed with blood, that whatever the outcome there would be no *dendam* (revenge) on the part of their family or followers. The fights were one-on-one until one party either conceded defeat or didn’t get up. *Ilmu* played a big part, and we all carried *jimat* (talismans) that had been ‘filled’ with magical power. If the police showed up we would say that we were just doing silat training, and usually that’s all they wanted to know. If they asked more questions we answered them with packets of cigarettes and some cash. We may have been rough around the edges, but we had a strict code of ethics, and that’s why we got respect (Confidential interview, July 1999, Bandung).

### **From *kriminal* to regime assistant**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s many of the gangs and youth organisations that had been mobilised by the military as part of the bloody anti-communist purges that led to General Suharto’s appointment as president in 1967 had now returned to their neighbourhoods and a combination of a lack of work, opportunities and boredom meant that many continued with the criminal activities that had sustained them. Like the *jago* and of the revolution, they had profited handsomely from the disorder by extracting stealing and appropriating property from putative communists. In times of upheaval the law of the *jago* prevailed, however a new ‘order’ had now come into effect and different laws applied.

In response to a perceived increase in gang-related violence, in 1972 General Soemitro, the Commander of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Public Order (*Kopkamtib*) ordered that “groups and gangs of teenagers” be disbanded.<sup>12</sup> As Ryter has argued, the disbandment of gangs was intended not to eliminate crime per se, but to lay the way for reconstituting and regularising them in manner that was conducive to strengthening state power (Ryter 1998). During the 1970s a host of youth organisations and state sanctioned martial arts groups emerged throughout the country that provided a new institutionalised framework for *jago* and gangs. Many however continued to operate outside of these institutionalised spaces.



Members of the laskar militia division of Front Pembela Islam

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<sup>12</sup> Established by Suharto in 1965, Kopkamtib was granted almost limitless extra-judicial powers to maintain ‘security’, unburdened by the constraints of law or accountability.

The increasing territorial power of *jago* and gangster networks that emerged in the late 1970s, mainly in the context of their role as private security providers, created anxiety within the regime, who feared they could evolve into a structural threat, such as the Yakuza in Japan or the Sicilian mafia. The response from the New Order state was unequivocal. Starting in 1982 a wave of terror swept the *jago* world with the appearance of thousands of mutilated bodies in streets throughout the country. Known as the ‘Mysterious Shootings’ (*Penembakan Misterius*, or Petrus), according to the media the victims were so called *gali*, an acronym of ‘gangs of wild kids’, many of whom were identified and targeted due to their tattoos, a sign that the state argued was an indelible mark of abject criminality. A new term entered state rhetoric and the popular media replacing that of *jago*, namely *kriminal* (Bertrand 2004). In contrast to the troublesome but honour-bound identity of the *jago*, the *kriminal* was defined as amoral, brutal and beyond redemption or use. *Jago* masculinity, in so far as it involved the assertion of territorial power outside of state control, was recast as ‘evil’ even though it was the state itself, in the arbitrary brutality of Petrus that went beyond the bounds of conventional morality. Barker argues that a central purpose of the Petrus killings and *kriminal* discourse was the deterritorialisation of the power of the *jago* and its re-territorialisation within the organs of the state (Barker 1998) The New Order sought to recuperate the local authority of the *jago*, Suharto reasserting his authority as the ‘king of the *jago*’, literally Indonesia’s biggest cock.

In the wake of Petrus, *jago* were increasingly institutionalised within state created bodies such as the youth organisation Pemuda Pancasila or as uniform wearing *Satpam* security guards. In this way the territorially based masculinity of the *jago* was first criminalised via its recasting as *kriminalitas* and then reintegrated in the hegemonic masculinity of the state, reframed as obedient and loyal youth (*pemuda*) within a nationalistic and militaristic patriarchy. The rationale of groups such as Pemuda Pancasila was almost uniformly the same, to provide ‘guidance’ (*pembinaan*) and help direct the ‘aspirations’ of members towards the twin state goals of ‘unity’ (read ‘security’) and development. This fundamentally affected the performance of *jago* masculinity. The *jago* was one who was in part defined by their freedom from social obligation, including that of adhering to the law. However they were now bound by the necessity to make themselves useful to those in formal power and appear publicly obedient to state ideology. This undermined their own autonomy as well as changed their relationship to the local community, the territory over which they ruled. The new relationship has been characterised as one of *bekking* or backing, whereby *jago* could operate their localised protection regimes so long as the spoils were divided with state officials and they agreed to act as state agents, conducting surveillance and intimidation on its behalf. Without state backing a *jago* could not expect to last long. Duels over turf and honour were a threat to ‘stability’, with territorial divisions determined by patronage from bureaucrats and the military. A reputation for *kebal* also ran the risk of claims of subversion. Invulnerability for the *jago* now meant obedience to the state.

The increasing confluence post-Petrus between state power and that of the *jago* was reflected in the shift in the popular meaning of the word *preman*. Up until the mid-1980’s ‘berpakaian *preman*’ referred to a policeman or soldier out of uniform, an officer wearing their civvies. Gradually, reflection the corrupt and repressive nature of the regime, it took on connotations of criminality and violence. By the 1990s *preman* was synonymous with street thugs, gangsters and an extensive network of rackets run by criminals but coordinated by the state. Unlike the *jago*, the

preman was a figure of public revile, embodying the intersection between criminal violence and state power that increasingly came to characterise public perceptions of the New Order. As Ryter has said, “if politicians and soldiers were revealed as essentially *preman*, so *preman* were revealed as politicians and soldiers” (Ryter 2005: 1) Towards the end of the New Order this situation reached the extent that “the thin line between criminals and soldiers (and politicians) seemed to vanish” (Ryter 2005: 1).

### **Democratisation, *jago* identity and ‘protest masculinity’**

During the New Order the power of the *jago*, while in part determined by the cultivation of a local reputation, was ultimately dependent upon favourable relationships with the official embodiments of masculine power: the police, military and political elites. In the post-New Order environment however the fragmentation of previous patronage networks, the unravelling of the New Order criminal state together with the new dynamics of decentralised, democratised Indonesia has created numerous spaces in which *jago* and *preman* masculinities can thrive. Freed from dependence upon backing or sanction by state elites many groups have grown substantially, with branches, franchises and networks of supporters spread throughout the city. The model of the territorial *jago* gang, which protects its constituents while preying upon its neighbours or those labelled ‘outsiders’, has translated well in the context of intensified local political struggles for control over turf and resources that have characterised post-98 Jakarta. As Kusno has argued, the “loosening” of political power at the centre has resulted in a proliferation of non-state groups in Jakarta formed around identities that “are all linked by a sense that the nation-state no longer commands any power to protect and rule, or, at best, the political elites only safeguard their own interests” (Kusno 2004: 2384). The state is in this sense perceived as weak and emasculated, no longer able to perform its protective function, provide for the welfare of its citizens nor suppress challenges to its authority. In this context the localised territorial monopoly over violence of the *jago* gang, freed from the constraints of acquiescence to state authorities imposed during the New Order, can and has evolved into more pervasive and alternate forms of social organisation and identity.

Neighbourhoods and streets throughout Jakarta are peppered with an array of flags and banners from these various groups that are used to colourfully demarcate the complex divisions of territory, mini-*jago* regimes in the midst of urban sprawl. This informal bureaucratisation of territorial control, which in part reproduces elements of the territorial command system employed by the military during the New Order, has had the effect of diminishing the importance placed upon rites of initiation, individual displays of potency and personal mythologies of prowess. In what amounts to a kind of *jago* franchise system, local gangs or groups of individual youths affiliate with a larger group that already has an established name, allowing them as it were to ride on the tails of other *jagos*’ success. As one member of the Jakarta ethnic gang the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (*Forum Betawi Rempug*, or FBR), explained, “That’s life in Jakarta, if you don’t step on someone you will get stepped on. On my own I’ll just end up a victim, but together we are a force to be reckoned with” (Interview with FBR member, Jakarta 2008). Group identity and violent solidarity is believed to compensate for perceived powerlessness in a city where social standing is determined by wealth and connections to political and social elites. After making an oath of loyalty to the group and its leaders the member has



access to a network of solidarity and back-up when faced with rivals, competitors or resistance from locals to the imposition of protection.<sup>13</sup> Like the methods for instant *kebal*, this has become a relatively easy way of establishing and monopolising a local territorial domain, a space in which *jago* ‘honour’ and masculinity can be performed. The group name also acts as a deterrent to sanction from local police, who are generally reluctant to confront those groups with a large membership (Interview with police officer, Jakarta 2007).



*A protest by the Front Pembela Islam demanding the outlawing of the Ahmadiyah sect, Jakarta 2008.*

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<sup>13</sup> Groups such as the FBR conduct fortnightly mass *bai'at* oath taking ceremonies, where as many as 200-300 are inducted as new members at once.



In the interests of protecting the name and honour of the group and expanding its territory, members will deploy to fight, and frequently die, alongside fellow member whom they have never met.<sup>14</sup> One senior member described the importance of preparedness to “sacrifice at all costs” in the interests of upholding the group name:

If someone tries to take over an area under our control, insults us, or harasses our members then we have to retaliate with full force. If we lose a few in the process, well that’s the price you pay in war. If we don’t we lose face by looking weak, especially if the group is smaller than us or doesn’t have much of a name (Interview with senior FBR member, Jakarta August 2008).

Refusal or reluctance to participate in honour related violence results in immediate expulsion from the group. One member who declined to take part in a reprisal attack on a smaller rival, after they had killed two FBR members who were part of a failed turf takeover bid, was not only expelled as a “traitor” but was also subject to constant verbal and physical harassment in his neighbourhood from other FBR members, ultimately forcing him to move.<sup>15</sup> Despite his reputation as a seasoned fighter, according to those meting out the abuse his decision revealed him as “a coward”, “weak” and “not one of us”. His argument, that the FBR had unnecessarily provoked the incident and that it was best to avoid further unnecessary loss of life, was considered irrelevant. Adherence to group solidarity overrides rational considerations.

These groups also provide a ready-made *jago* identity that has a strong appeal to the thousands of socially and economically marginal young males occupying Jakarta slums and poor neighbourhoods. This identity has emerged as a protest at the weakness of the post-New Order state and its failure to improve social conditions, but has also intersected with broader discourses regarding decentralisation and demands for greater autonomy at the local level. Some such as the FBR invoke the imagery of the legendary Si Pitung, the ‘Robin Hood’ bandit of colonial Batavia popularised in a series of movie adaptations screened in the 1970s. Drawing also upon beliefs in *ilmu kebal*, FBR’s former leader Fadloli el Muhir fostered an image of himself as a modern day Si Pitung, who had come to restore the dignity of the Betawi, Jakarta’s socially and economically marginal indigenous population and, in the words of one senior member, “take back the land, rights and dignity that had been stolen by the New Order” (Interviews with FBR members, Jakarta 2005).<sup>16</sup> As if to confirm the New Order states suspicions towards *kebal* as a potential site of informal power challenging its own, after reports circulated in East Jakarta in 2002 that Fadloli had remained unscathed after being attacked by a machete wielding mob of

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<sup>14</sup> The FBR has ‘hotline’ numbers for a fast response team made up of seasoned fighters who will deploy when called. For example, after a FBR banner was torn down by locals in a neighbourhood in Cilandak, several hundred FBR members from throughout Jakarta descended on the area to restore this apparent slight on the honour of the group, beating up those involved. In another instance, when a member had his car repossessed due to late loan repayments, the manager of the credit company administering the loan was forcibly abducted and only released after agreeing to give a repayment extension.

<sup>15</sup> Those dishing out the abuse believed that the recipients humiliation was further compounded by the fact that he was forced to move to the home of his wife’s parents, something they claimed a real *jago* “would never do”. (Interviews with FBR members, Jakarta 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Within the space of six months after the incident the membership of the FBR increased from several hundred to over 15,000. The FBR currently has around 300,000 members spread throughout the greater Jakarta region.

Madurese gangsters, arch rivals of the FBR, hundreds of men flocked from surrounding kampung to join the group.

No longer petty crooks, the urban poor, delinquents or what popular media often describes as ‘society’s trash’, FBR members are now, according to the groups leadership, part of a lineage of ‘noble bandits’ and ‘warriors’ fighting injustice, providing disempowered men in the words of Standing, with “a sense of extreme masculinity and even order” (Standing 2006: 122). The carrying of machetes in public by FBR members, a criminal offence in Jakarta, is not perceived by members as a deliberate provocation or threat but the fulfilment of ideal-type Betawi masculinity, an attempt to re-establish an imagined order in which the kampung is protected and ruled by an honourable *jago*. This is embodied in the group’s slogan of “let’s become *jawara* in our own neighbourhood”.<sup>17</sup> The group’s stronghold areas are in some of the poorest parts of Jakarta, where police presence and government services are minimal, membership made up overwhelmingly from the unemployed or informal sector workers. Lacking social status or regular income *jago* masculinity is a means by which to not only command respect, fear and to make a living, but an assertion of autonomy and sovereignty from the state.

Similar constructions of idealised hypermasculinity as a response to social and economic marginalisation can be seen in Islamist vigilante groups such as the Defenders of Islam Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, or FPI), whose uniform of white robes and turbans is adapted from popular representations of Javanese Islamic warrior saints such as Sunan Kalijaga as well as informed by globalised images and of the jihadi. The FPI’s frequent violent attacks on bars, clubs and other places of ‘sin’ are fuelled by this desire for ‘respect’, an aggressive reassertion of an idealised gendered identity by men and youths occupying Jakarta’s social and economic margins.<sup>18</sup> Vigilantism, which as Abrahams has argued flourishes on the frontiers of the state, is an alternate form of social ordering whose existence is driven not just by a functional or regulatory vacuum of state power, but also by anomie and negative attitudes towards the state (Abrahams 1998). When gaps emerge between institutional and moral orders, as is common in times of rapid social and political change, violent vigilantism often emerges. In Jakarta vigilantism has emerged as a reaction to the perceived failure of the post-New Order state to provide physical safety and economic security, hence the need for citizens to fight crime and establish ‘order’ themselves. The result has been what Barker describes as “a patchwork of jurisdictions, each with its own ‘morality’” (Barker 2007: 93). Rejecting the states label of their own violence as criminal, the FPI vigilante represent themselves as a virtuous vanguard protecting society from moral and social decay. As one FPI member explained, “If they [the state] won’t uphold decency and order then we will”

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<sup>17</sup> The slogan plays upon the dual meaning of *jawara* (*juara*) as ‘champion’ and also as a common name in Jakarta and West Java for a *jago* strongman. These imaginings recall Lombard’s description of the narrative of *certia silat*, a popular form of martial arts literature dating back to the 1920s: “In silat stories there is no center of power, no state, no police, and no uniform justice. People busy with everyday activities in their village or neighborhood are constantly made fools of by bandits from surrounding areas that control the mountains and forest, and who also, from time to time, loot and extort. In this pessimistic world fortunately there appear a number of chosen people – the *pendekar* – who live a nomadic and solitary lifestyle, are blessed by the ascetic practices they perform, and possess supernatural powers. Endowed with silat techniques, they are able to temporarily break the grip of evil power and provide security to the oppressed.” (Lombard 1996 pp.332-333).

<sup>18</sup> In interviews with FPI members, a constant reason cited for involvement in the group was a desire to be respected within their community as ‘holy warriors’. Many came from backgrounds as petty criminals or the long term unemployed and joined the group as a form of redemption for past ‘sins’.

(Interview with FPI member, Jakarta 2007). On a more fundamental level however the attraction of vigilante groups like the FPI for many young men is their focus upon 'action'. Through acts of violence orchestrated for maximum media exposure, what Al-Zastrouw has described as "symbolic radicalism", FPI members very publicly perform their idealised notion of a violent masculine order (Al-Zastrouw 2006: 81). Through these invented traditions of urban social order, that are largely authoritarian and anti-democratic in character, *jago* have reified themselves as a pillar of a territorially defined community, an honourable and masculine protector rather than a predator. As one gang member explained:

We are from the street, so we know who the trouble-makers are. Most of them we know personally. We say to them, ok if you want to make trouble here you will have to deal with us. Respect us or else! Usually that's enough as they are scared of us. But if they still go and make trouble we wipe them out. Like this one pickpocket, we went round to his house and bashed him good!

## Conclusion

*Jago* masculinity as product of structural conditions, most significantly degrees of state formation and penetration, and cultural ideals regarding masculine power has persisted throughout Indonesian colonial and post-colonial history. The authoritarian New Order regime sought to appropriate the local territorial power and potency of the *jago*, institutionalising them as loyal and obedient youth within the hegemonic patriarchal masculinity of the state. At the local level however notions of spiritual power, face and violence integral to *jago* identity continued to inform men regarding the construction of honour and face. While the state could not completely co-opt *jago* it did create the conditions whereby a *jago*'s strength was ultimately dependent upon their networks of political patronage; a metaphorical 'leash' that could be pulled when necessary. With the breaking of this leash post-98 *jago* masculinity has aggressively reasserted itself in forms moulded by the dynamics of a decentralised social and political environment; a contradictory identity that is at once reactionary and hegemonic, reproducing a kind of local level authoritarianism not dissimilar to that of the New Order state. In their reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity Connell and Messerschmidt recognise the importance of geographic location in constructions of hegemonic masculinity, that are embedded in specific social environments (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 pp.849-851). In the local face-to-face arenas of the urban kampung and streets of Jakarta *jago* masculinity frequently remains hegemonic. The *jago* is king of their domain, even if that domain is limited to a neighbourhood, bus terminal or street corner. Outside of this domain however the position of *jago* can quickly shift from being hegemonic to socially marginal. In middle-class neighbourhoods, housing estates or up-market malls for example *jago* are considered a criminal menace, 'trash' to be removed and excluded via police raids and private security patrols. With economic disparity making the hegemonic masculinities of these spaces, of affluence, consumerism and global mobility, more inaccessible than ever to working class men (a reality constantly emphasised via billboard advertising, the shadow of which kampung dwellers literally live under), *jago* masculinity is a means for demanding respect and achieving social status with a minimum of resources. It is in this respect also a protest masculinity, an assertion of autonomy and claim to power for those

marginalised and disenfranchised by Indonesia's democratic transition and the opening up of markets.

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